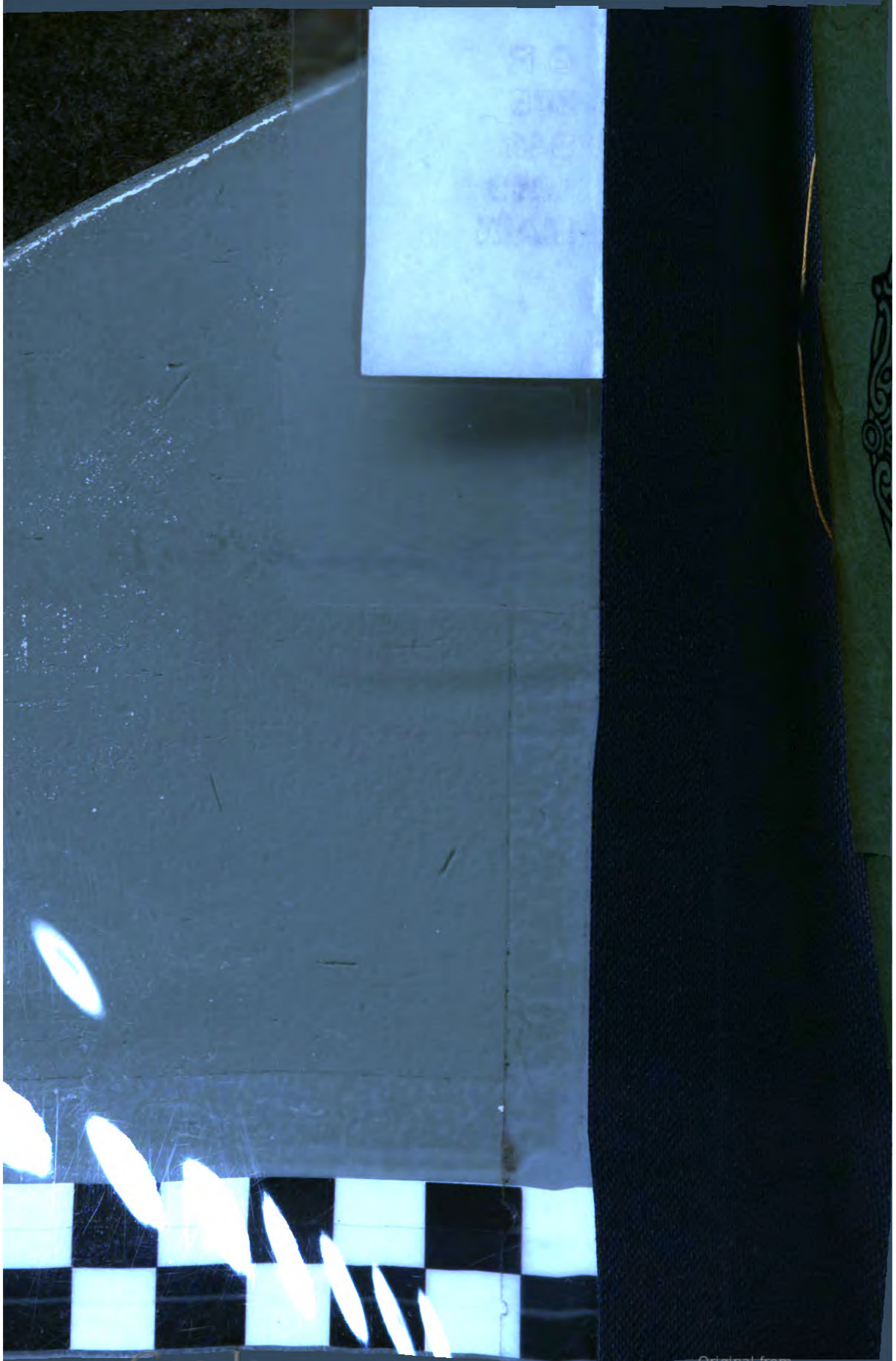


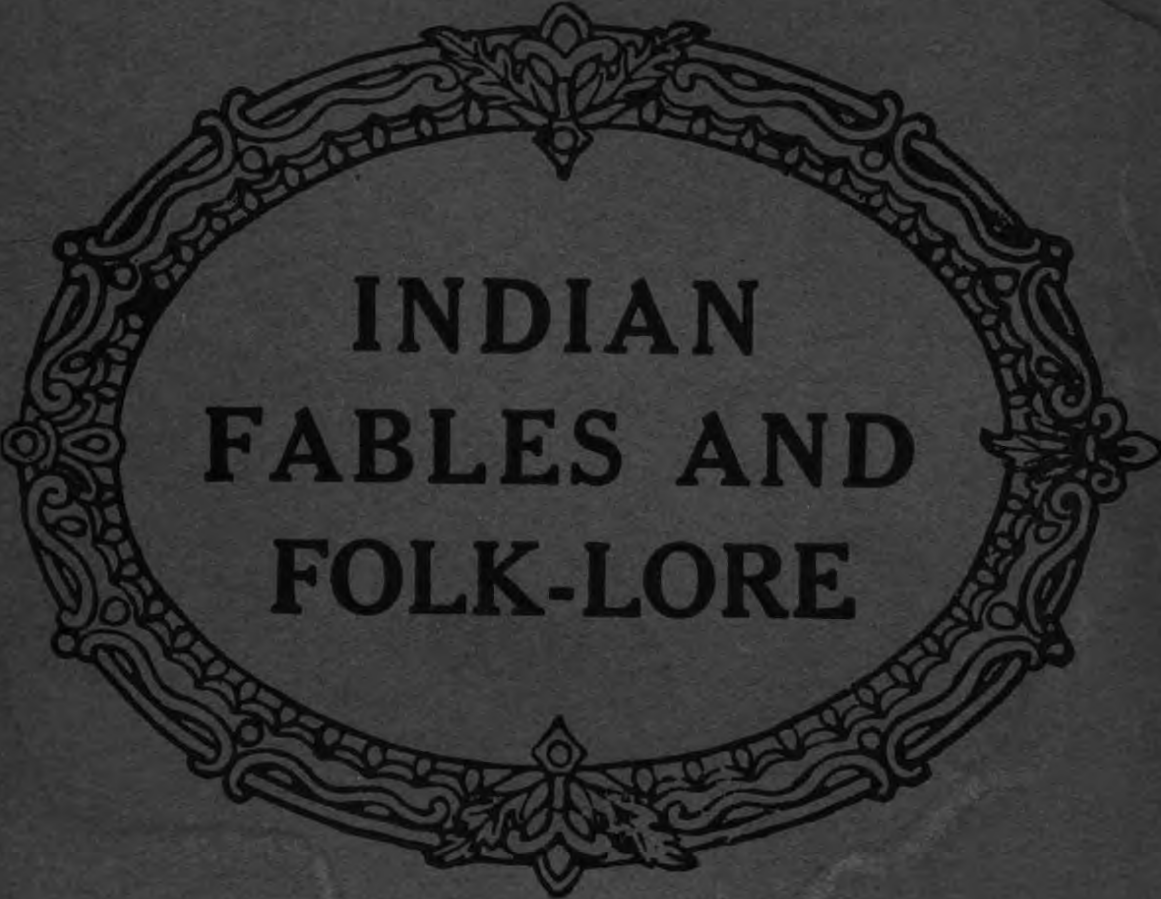
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INDIAN FABLES AND FOLK-LORE



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TORONTO

INDIAN FABLES AND FOLK-LORE

BY
SHOVONA DEVI

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1919

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE tales contained in this little volume are taken for the most part from the Indian Epics and the "Purânas," which are an inexhaustible store-house of legends. Here and there I have added interesting bits of folklore, and some fables adapted from the "Kathâ-Sarit-Sâgara" and "Pancha-Tantra" to add variety to the collection. Most of the tales will have a special appeal for children.

SHOVONA DEVI.

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INDIAN FABLES AND FOLK-LORE.

I. THE MAN IN THE EYE.

[*“ Death looking forth ” probably refers to the old Indo-Aryan notion of the soul, which is said to be no bigger than the thumb.*]

HAVE you ever seen the Man in the Eye ? I dare say you have.

The Man in the Moon may be a fiction for aught we know ; but of the Man in the Eye there cannot be the least doubt. Look in the mirror, and you will see in the pupil of your eye a tiny little man, smaller than the most diminutive fairy you have ever read of. I know you will say, “ Oh, it is only my own reflection.” Yet there are simple folks who imagine it to be Death looking forth. His feet, they say, are entangled in the life-string of the heart, and as he tugs them free, lo ! the string snaps, and the man dies !¹

Thus superstition oft distils
From things familiar fancied ills,
And even in its own face descries
Death gazing ominous from the eyes.

¹ “ Shatapatha Brâhmana.”

II. THE HARE IN THE MOON.

*[The Hindus find a hare in the moon where Europeans find
"a man, his dog, and his bush."]*

YOU must have noticed in the round of the full moon something like a little animal with two long ears erect. That is what the Hindus call the Hare in the Moon.

A herd of elephants once took up their quarters by a lake near which dwelt a colony of hares, and many of these little creatures were crushed to death under their feet. The survivors, loath to depart from their ancient home, were in great despair.

One saucy little hare, however, volunteered to drive the intruders away. He waited for an opportunity, and when he saw the leader of the herd, a fine big four-tusker, disporting himself in the lake, he coolly walked up and thus addressed him : " O Chatur-danta (" the Four-tusked One "), " how dare you stir up and muddy the waters of this sacred Lake of the Moon ? I am Lamba-karna (" the Long-eared One "), the Hare in the Moon, come down to warn you of the consequences of this impiety."

The full Moon had just disclosed itself, and its image was seen quivering in the agitated waters.

" Do you not see the Moon herself, down by your wicked feet ? " continued Lamba-karna, nothing daunted. " Beware of her resentment ! "

Chatur-danta, the four-tusked rogue, scarce troubled even to glance at the hare, and went on gambolling in the water.

“What! Still bent on troubling her sacred waters?” said the hare again. “Tarry no more, for if once your leg is in her grip she will give you cause to rue it!”

The elephant at last grew alarmed. He looked down at his feet, and indeed the Moon was there already, not one alone, but multiplied a hundred-fold! He jumped back in fright half-a-dozen yards, but the Moon still followed him as if to catch him by the leg.

“Alas for my folly! There’s the Moon!” cried the elephant, then turned up his trunk and stampeded, followed by the whole herd.

The hares were no longer molested and lived in peace ever after.

Before the hare the tusker quails:
No need for Strength when Wit prevails.¹

III. THE ELEPHANT-FIGHTING HARE.

ONCE upon a time a little hare saw a herd of elephants in a wood, and challenged their leader to a fight; but the latter went on breaking off branches and putting these into his capacious mouth, only now and then winking at the hare out of the corner of one eye.

The hare thought the elephant was unwilling to fight, so he called him a coward.

The elephant then lost his temper and went straight at the saucy little thing with trunk up, bellowing; but

¹ The “Pancha-tantra,” or “The Five Discourses” of Vishnu Sharmâ, the Hindu Aesop. “The subjects of the five treatises were: the severing of friends; the advantage of unanimity; amity and dissension; acquisition and losses; mature deliberation in all matters.” This story is also found in the “Kathâ-Sarit-Sâgara” or “Ocean of the Streams of Story.”

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the hare, with the characteristic nimbleness of its race, kept dodging him about, slipping in and out, round and under him, among his legs.

Of a sudden the mighty animal flung himself down, as if to crush his puny enemy under his Juggernaut weight ; but the hare slipped out by his tail, and, clambering on to his back, lay down there quietly.

The elephant, no more conscious of its presence than the wheel was of the fly sitting on it, still kept pressing himself to the ground, as if to crush to pulp the impudent hare supposed to be beneath him. The other elephants, seeing the hare lying on the back of their leader, fancied it must be keeping him down by superior physical force, so they became frightened and bolted.

The leader of the herd, finding himself thus deserted by his companions, and tormented by an army of ants his gusty breathing had drawn into his nostrils, then rose and dashed away.

Thus were the elephants vanquished by the hare.

IV. THE HUNGRY ELEPHANT.

THE elephant is not always so foolish as the above tales would make him out. On the contrary he is a sagacious beast, cautiously feeling his ground before putting his feet forward.

There is reason enough for representing Ganéscha, the Hindu God of Wisdom, with an elephant's head. Here is a story from an old novel to show how an elephant can use both sense and strength.

Once a crafty old elephant named Futtehurrh, the Fort-winner, felt extremely hungry and, breaking loose from his shackles, wandered into a bazar stocked with

grain. As soon as the grain-sellers saw him coming they shut up their shops and ran away. One had only time enough to put up the shutters before the elephant came and stood in front of his shop.

“Ho, there! I want some rice,” cried out the elephant.

“No rice,” said a voice from within.

“Flour, then,” said the elephant.

“No flour,” was the reply.

“Ghee (molten butter) then,” said the elephant, again.

“No ghee,” responded the shopkeeper.

“Very well, molasses,” cried the elephant, angrily.

“No molasses,” answered the shopkeeper with a hearty laugh, as if it were a good joke.

“I’ll find out the truth for myself then,” said the elephant, with a snort.

The angry animal butted at the shutters with its full force, and crash! they went to pieces in an instant, and the shopkeeper was discovered in the midst of plenty, tumbling affrighted over his baskets of grain, “Oh mercy! mercy!” he cried; “here is rice, flour, ghee, and molasses, O good Futtehghurrh!—take what you will,” and Futtehghurrh had such a feast off them as he had never had before in his life.

V. THE MOON IN THE WELL.

ONCE upon a time a troop of monkeys had been raiding the fruit trees in an orchard by moonlight. All of a sudden the Moon disappeared behind a bank of clouds, and the monkeys began to search about them for her as if she had dropped down from her place in heaven.

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Beside them was a well, and lo ! in its water they beheld the reflection of the Moon as the clouds drifted away.

“The Moon has fallen down the well ! Let us rescue her,” cried the monkeys, setting to work to raise her by forming themselves into a sort of ladder, each hanging on to the tail of the other, and thus letting themselves down the well. Suddenly the branch supporting them broke, and all the monkeys were hurled into the well.

The monkey is proverbially a fool. Another story of monkey folly is told in the “Kathâ-Sarit-Sâgara” (C. H. Tawney’s Translation), as follows : “In a certain town a merchant had begun to build a temple to a divinity, and had accumulated much timber. The workmen there, after sawing through the upper half of a plank, placed a wedge in it, and leaving it thus suspended went home. In the meanwhile a monkey came there and bounded up out of mischief and sat on the plank, the parts of which were separated by the wedge. And he sat in the gap between the two parts, as if in the mouth of death, and in purposeless mischief pulled out the wedge. Then he fell with the plank, the wedge of which had been pulled out, and was killed, having his limbs crushed by the flying together of the separated parts.”

Another story is met with in the same collection : “Once on a time,” so goes the tale, “there were some monkeys wandering in a troop in a wood during the cold weather. They saw a fire-fly and thought it was real fire, so they placed grass and leaves upon it, and one of them kept fanning it with his breath, while the others sat round the fire-fly, trying to warm themselves at it.”

VI. A RAT'S SVYAMVARĀ.

[*"A maiden's own choice of a husband." A reference to the ancient custom of choosing a husband by throwing a garland on the neck of the favoured suitor.*]

A MIGHTY Sage was Yâgna-valkya. He would stand in water even in the coldest winter, worshipping the Sun with hands uplifted.

One day, as he stood in the Ganges chanting his hymn to the Sun, a baby-rat dropped into his hands from the talons of a hawk flying overhead.

The Sage gave the wee creature to his wife and asked her to rear it.

"Rear a rat!" exclaimed his wife, laughing. "What a queer idea!"

To please her the Sage turned the rat into a beautiful little girl, for such superhuman powers he had acquired by his austerities.

They had no child of their own, so the woman took great delight in rearing the child. The girl grew up little by little till she bloomed to womanhood, and then the Sage thought of her marriage.

"Let the girl marry the golden Sun," said the Sage to his wife. "There is none mightier than he."

So the Sun was summoned, but the girl asked him, "Is there no one mightier than thou, O Sun?"

The Sun was puzzled by the question. However, he said, "The Cloud seems mightier than I, O maiden, for he can obscure my brightness."

So the Sun was dismissed, and the Cloud summoned; but the girl said to it, "Is there no one mightier than thou, O Cloud?"

The Cloud was astounded, but after a pause it made answer, "The Wind seems mightier than I, O maiden, for he drives me whither he listeth."

So the Cloud was dismissed, and the Wind summoned; and the girl repeated the same question to it, "Is there no one mightier than thou, O Wind?"

The Wind, too, was taken aback, but said, "The Mountain seems mightier than I, O maiden, for he can stay my blast as none else can."

So the Wind was dismissed, and Mount Himâlaya summoned; and the maiden put the same query to it, "Is there no one mightier than thou, O Mountain?"

The Mountain frowned, and thus replied: "The Rat seems mightier than I, O maiden, for he bores holes through me with his teeth."

So the Mountain was dismissed, and a jungle Rat summoned. "Marry the Rat and be happy," said the Sage to the girl, "for he is of thine own race," and he turned her back into the rat she was at first.

So ended the Rat's Svyamvarâ.¹

In the Mahâbhârata a rat is turned successively into a cat, a dog, and a tiger, and back again into a rat. The rat came rushing by and tumbled, almost exhausted, right in the lap of a Sage as he was engaged in prayer. "O save me, O save me from the cat," cried the rat, and at his request the Sage turned him into a cat. Another time the rat-cat (if so we may call it), was chased by a dog, and at his request, the Sage turned him into a dog. The third time the transformed rat-dog was attacked by a tiger. He fled to the Sage and asked him to turn him into a tiger; and the thoughtless Sage did so,

¹The "Pancha-tantra" and "Kathâ-Sarit-Sâgara" or "Ocean of the Streams of Story," Bk. II.

whereupon the beast sprang upon his benefactor with a roar.

“Back to the rat I change thee!” cried his victim, thrusting him aside with both hands, but not before the Sage was scratched and mauled all over did the tiger once more become the helpless rat of old.

VII. THE FROG-KING'S FOLLY.

ONCE upon a time a snake had grown too old to catch prey, so it went and took up its quarters beside a pool where there were many frogs.

The King of the Frogs, named Yâl-pâda, the Web-Footed One, was apprised of the coming of this dangerous stranger. He went to the snake, attended by all the frogs, to enquire why, of all places on earth, it had chosen the vicinity of this particular pool for its home.

“I am named Manda-Vish, Slow Poison, O King Yâl-pâda,” said the snake, lowering its hood. “I am under a curse and forbidden to harm frogs without the leave of their king. Once I pursued a frog and by accident bit a Brâhmin. He died, pronouncing this curse on me: ‘Mayst thou die if thou eatest a frog again unless with the leave of the King of the Frogs.’”

“O King Yâl-pâda, I mean to do penance for my sin in slaying the Brâhmin,” said the snake. “Let it be my penance to bear your majesty on my head wherever it shall please you to ride.”

Without more ado Yâl-pâda leaped on to the hood of the snake, which crawled away, swaying its body gracefully to and fro.

The other frogs looked on amazed, but some bolder spirits amongst them followed their King at a distance.

After a time the snake stopped, gasping. "Why do you stay, O Manda-Vish?" asked Yâl-pâda.

"O King of the Frogs, I am famished and faint," replied the wily serpent. "I cannot bear you back to the pool unless you grant me something to eat. To eat a frog without your leave, I have told you, would mean my death."

King Yâl-pâda had enjoyed his ride immensely, and did not like the idea of losing his dignity by hopping back to the pool, so he offered one of his attendant frogs to the snake.

Having thus appeased its hunger, Manda-Vish took the King of the Frogs up on its hood again and crawled away back to the pool.

In this way the snake was provided with a frog every day, and in return for its meals it took Yâl-pâda out on its hood for a ride. Thus one by one all the frogs were eaten up. When there were no more frogs left for it, Manda-Vish made its last meal off King Yâl-pâda, and then departed to find fresh folly to be the victim of its guile.¹

The frog is proverbially as great a fool as the monkey. One folk-tale is about a frog that came hopping up to a farrier engaged in shoeing a horse, and thrusting out one of his feet with a consequential air cried: "Ho, farrier! shoe me, too! shoe me, too!"

"Ah!" said another frog, climbing to the top of a clod of earth and casting one eye on some cattle grazing near, "What splendid sight I have! I see Kashmir! I see Kashmir!"

¹ The "Pancha-tantra" and "Kathâ-Sarit-Sâgara."

VIII. GAUTAMA THE UNGRATEFUL.

GAUTAMA was a Brâhmin reduced to such straits that he used to beg for his meals.

One day he met with a stranger and said to him, holding out his right hand with the sacred thread wound round the thumb, "O give me alms in exchange for a Brâhmin's blessing."

The stranger thus accosted was a robber, on his way to steal and murder; so for good luck he offered the Brâhmin a coin, instead of robbing him as he had half a mind to do.

"Are you not ashamed to beg, O Brâhmin?" said the robber to Gautama, without revealing who he was. "Come with me, and I will see to it that you lack for nothing."

Gautama followed him to his village and lived with him, and in time became a robber himself. For his meals he used to snare birds and kill animals and indulge in all manner of cruelty, hateful to the creed of the true Brâhmin.

It so fell out that one day, while he was returning home with a number of bleeding birds tied together by the legs and flung over his shoulder, he met with a Brâhmin acquaintance of his.

"Can it be Gautama?" cried the Brâhmin, surprised and shocked at his appearance. "What a fall for a Brâhmin!"

The friends talked together for some time, and Gautama told him the whole story before they parted.

The sight of a fellow-Brâhmin filled Gautama with a yearning to revisit his own home and people, so he left

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the village of the robbers secretly by night. On and on he walked until, wearied out, he lay down under a tree and fell asleep. In the tree there lived a Crane. Seeing a stranger trusting the hospitality of its tree, it lit fires to frighten off the wild beasts, and itself stood by him, guarding him against harm.

Gautama got up early next morning, and was about to resume his journey when the bird thus said to him : " O Brâhmin, I must not let you go empty-handed. You must call on my friend Viru-pâksha. He will give you as much gold as you can carry."

Gladly the Brâhmin visited Viru-pâksha, and received, even as the bird had told him, a bag full of gold coins. Flinging the bag over his shoulder he trudged along, almost bent down by the weight of the gold. He reached the same tree and lay down beneath it to rest for the night. The bird again came down from the tree, lit fires around and stood guard over its guest. Gautama was awake, but pretended to be asleep, and thus thought to himself : " I have still a long distance to go, but have no food with me to eat on the way. It would be wise to kill and roast the bird over the fire, and carry it with me."

Following this wicked resolve, the ungrateful Brâhmin wrenched off the head of the Crane, plucked out its feathers, and roasted it over the fire, and then went on his way.

Next morning Viru-pâksha waited long for his friend the Crane, but he did not appear, so he sent a messenger to enquire the cause of the delay. When the messenger reached the tree, what should he see but strewn feathers and stains of blood upon the ground beneath. Alas ! the poor bird had been murdered. There, plain enough on the ground, were the footmarks of its murderer.

These he followed up, step by step, until at last he came upon Gautama, whom he seized by the arm, saying, "It was you who slew the pious Crane." For further proof the body of the Crane was found on the Brâhmin's person.

Gautama was taken before Viru-pâksha with the evidence of his crime still fresh upon him.

Viru-pâksha ordered the wicked murderer of his friend to be cut to pieces and cast to the dogs and vultures.

Thus died Gautama the Ungrateful, and pieces of his flesh were thrown to the vultures. "O Vultures! O Vultures!" cried the Executioner, "here is the flesh of an ungrateful wretch for ye to eat."

"We eat not the flesh of the Ungrateful, O Executioner!" replied the vultures.

Next he threw the flesh to the dogs and jackals. "O Dogs and Jackals! O Dogs and Jackals!" cried the Executioner, "here is the flesh of an ungrateful wretch for ye to eat."

"We eat not the flesh of the Ungrateful, O Executioner!" replied the dogs and jackals.

Thus the vultures, dogs, and jackals refused to touch the meat, and, last of all, it was offered to the worms.

"O Worms! O Worms!" cried the Executioner. "Here is the flesh of an ungrateful wretch for ye to eat."

"We eat not the flesh of the Ungrateful, O Executioner!" replied the worms.

So heinous is Ingratitude that not even the vile worms would eat the flesh of the treacherous Gautama.¹

The vilest creatures, with abhorrence viewed,
Loathe the corruption of Ingratitude.

¹ The "Purânas."

IX. RATNÂKAR, THE ROBBER-CHIEF.

A MIGHTY robber-chief was Ratnâkar (lit. "The Mine of Treasures"), the Brâhmin, but of a character far different from Gautama's. He loved to live under the greenwood tree, whence he would often sally out with his devoted band to rifle and plunder. Kâli, the Demon-killer, was the patron Goddess they invoked ere setting out on their nocturnal rounds, and her altar reeked with the blood of human victims.

Of Kâli, the Deity of Destruction, they were, indeed, the most devout worshippers : in her name they practised their nefarious art, and the victims were held to be immolated in her honour. In distant ages a demon infested the earth and devoured mankind as soon as created. The water did not reach his waist even in the most unfathomable parts of the ocean, so terrific a monster was he. He strode over the world unrestrained, rioting in the destruction of the human race, until the Goddess came to the rescue.

She attacked the demon and cut him down, but from every drop of his blood another demon arose ; and though the Goddess continued to cut down these new-created demons with wonderful adroitness, fresh broods of demons sprang from their blood, as from that of their progenitors. But the Goddess is furnished with a tongue of extraordinary dimensions, and when she found the drops of blood thus rapidly changing into demons, she promptly licked them away after every blow, and thus put an end to the demoniac race.

Such was the patron Goddess of these robbers.¹

¹ "The History and Practices of the Thugs" (1837).

On one occasion Ratnâkar had made preparations for extensive raids ; but the day began unfavourably for him : it rained in torrents, with flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder, the fireworks of the Gods. He wished, therefore, to sacrifice a human victim to his patron Goddess, as a sort of propitiatory offering, and he and his band went out in different directions to look out for one.

Ratnâkar soon came upon a man and seized him, saying : " The Gods have thrown you in my way. I claim you as a sacrifice to Kâli, the Goddess of Destruction."

" Alas ! " cried out his victim, " what crimes are committed in the name of your Goddess ! Can your wife and children, if such you have, approve of these evil deeds ? "

" Of a surety they must," answered the Robber-Chief, somewhat taken aback by the question.

" Then go and ask them if they do," said the man. " I will await your return, on my word of honour."

Ratnâkar did not trust the word of his victim, so he bound him to a tree before going straight to his wife.

" Tell me, my beloved wife, if you approve of what men call mine evil deeds," he said.

" Approve of your evil deeds ! " exclaimed the wife. " Why, a wife cannot answer to God for the sins of her husband."

Needless to say, Ratnâkar had not expected such a reply, and his conscience began to prick him. " But," he urged, " you live on what I earn by robbery and plunder."

" True," replied the wife, " but it is the duty of a husband to maintain his wife."

Ratnâkar then repeated the same questions to his children, one by one, and received from them much the same answers. Thus disheartened, he went back to his victim and set him free.

In the meantime his band had not been idle. A little girl had by accident strayed into the wood and lost her way. One of his band had found her, brought her to the temple of the Goddess, and bound her to the stake for sacrifice.

The woods were filled with her cries and lamentations. "Gods of the woodland," cried the little victim, "have pity on a hapless girl."

Ratnâkar heard her cries. He hastened to the temple, murmuring to himself, "Why does the cry of a girl melt my stony heart to pity, and make tears veil my eyes?" Astonishment smote him dumb at first when he entered the temple and found a little golden-haired girl bound to the sacrificial stake, and his followers dancing frenziedly before the Goddess with uplifted swords. As their leader walked in they were crying out in chorus: "Hail! Goddess, hail! and crown this night's adventure with success."

"Stay your hands! stay your hands!" shouted Ratnâkar above the shouts of his followers and the prayers of their victim. "Release the girl at once."

At first they showed signs of rebellion, and refused to release the girl, but in the end they yielded, such was the awe in which they held their chief. Resentment, however, was not allayed.

"Madness has seized our chief," cried his followers. "He is no longer fit to lead us as of old." So saying, they deserted him and dispersed.

“ Back to the Mountains, thou daughter of the Mountains,”¹ said Ratnâkar to the Goddess Kâli, when he was alone. “ Never more shall thy altar reek with victims of mine, for my heart hankers after blood no more.”

Then he went into the depths of the wood and began to practise austerities to redeem his sins. A hollow in an ant-hill formed his cell, while the tendrils of many a creeper crept in and out through his matted hair, and birds built their nests in his grizzled beard ; into such a trance had he cast himself, this whilom robber, as to be conscious of naught else but Brâhman, the God behind the Sun and Moon and Stars, yea, and the shows of the whole Universe.

One day, how long after none can say, Ratnâkar awoke from his spiritual trance, *enlightened*, his face radiant with inward gladness. The Truth had at last flashed on him :

Boundless space and vault of azure,
 Sky and Earth and Ocean broad,
 Sun and Moon and Soul immortal,—
 All is Brahmâ, all is God !
 All this Universe is Brahmâ,—
 All that live and move and die —
 Born in Him, in Him subsisting,
 Ending in that Being High.²

Because Ratnâkar had lived in a “ Valmik,” or ant-hill, he came to be called Vâlmiki, the name by which he is immortalized as the author of the Râmâyana, the Hindu Iliad.

¹ Kâli, otherwise called Umâ or Pârvati (lit. “ Mountain-born ”), was the daughter of Mount Himâlaya by his wife Ménakâ. She married Mahâdeva, the god of Destruction and Regeneration.

² “ Chhandogya Upanishad,” iii. 14 and iv. 4, abridged in verse by R. C. Dutt.

One day, while Vâlmiki (to call Ratnâkar by his new name), was bathing in the river Tamosâ, one of a loving pair of Krounchas or herons was shot by a fowler, and fell fluttering almost into the Sage's arms ; and, as it lay in its dying agonies, its sorrowing mate wheeled round and round its bleeding body with piteous cries. So great was Vâlmiki's emotion that suddenly there broke from his throat, as though the Muse herself had uttered it, this immortal verse, the first of its kind to come from mortal tongue :

“Mâ nishâda pratishthân tvamagamah shâshvatîh
samâh,
Yat Krounchamithunâdékâmavadhîh kâmamohitan.”

O Fowler, may oblivion be thy fate
Since thou hast slain this heron's loving mate.

Such was the inspired outburst, the origin of divine poetry !

Hardly had Vâlmiki uttered this verse, the first gift of the Muses, when Lakshmi, Goddess of Plenty and Prosperity, appeared before him in all her divine array, flaming up the woodland.

“ Why dost thou roam in the woods, O Vâlmiki, thus homeless, thine eyes wet with the tears of Poverty ? ” said the Goddess, addressing the first Poet of the world. “ Behold in me Lakshmi, Goddess of Plenty, come down on Earth to end thy misery with my gifts of gems and gold.” Thus she sought to tempt him, displaying a glittering mass of gems and gold to his dazzled eyes.

Vâlmiki veiled his eyes with both hands and cried out :
“ Tempt me not, O Goddess, tempt me not again with

thy gems and gold ! Already have I committed sins innumerable for their sake, but—

Lo ! I have broken through Fate's own decree.
A new Ratnākar shall arise in me !

“ O Lakshmi, return to Heaven ! not all the wealth of Alakâ¹ would lure my heart back to sin.”

Thus discomfited, Lakshmi went away, and lo ! the gems and gold, her glittering lures, vanished as if by enchantment.

No sooner was Lakshmi gone, however, than Saraswati, Goddess of Wisdom, appeared before him, charming all Nature with the dulcet music of her magic lute. The birds stopped warbling, the streams ceased flowing, and the wild beasts of the wood came flocking round to listen.

Vālmiki fell down at her feet. “ What Goddess do I behold before me, illumining the woodland as with the light of the reddening Dawn ? What celestial strains from the strings of invisible harps delight mine ears ? ”

“ I am Saraswati, Goddess of Learning, come to teach thee heroic songs,” said the Goddess to Vālmiki, raising him by the hand and placing in his grasp her own entrancing lute. “ Go, sing of that divine pair Râma and Sitâ, and thy songs shall melt to pity countless generations of mankind.

Vālmiki, this lute shall make
The trees bow, the mountains shake,
The waves grow hushed to hear thee sing,
The stars halt in their wandering,
And endless ages yet to be
Shall thrill with music born of thee.”

¹ The Paradise of Kuvéra, the God of Wealth.

INDIAN FABLES AND FOLK-LORE

Thus, by the grace of Saraswati, Vālmiki became the first and foremost Poet of the world, and justified his former name—"the Mine of Treasures"—for such in truth he has been to succeeding Poets in all ages ever since he composed the epic of the Rāmâyana.¹

X. THE RING OF RENUNCIATION.

[*The Vivika-Chudamani, a Sanscrit philosophical work, thus describes "The Tree of Mâyâ"—"Of the tree of Samsara (or mundane existence) ignorance is the seed, the identification with the body is the sprout, attachment its tender leaves, work its water, the body its trunk, the vital forces its branches, the organs its twigs, the sense-objects its flowers, various miseries due to diverse works are its fruits, and the individual soul is the bird perched on it."*]

In olden time there lived a King of the name of Rita-dhwaja. He took to wife Princess Madâlasâ, the virtuous daughter of the King of the Gandharvas. The son and heir who was born to them brought a ray of sunshine into their lives, and they named him Vikrânta.

Vikrânta grew up to boyhood and had no lack of playmates. One day he thought himself roughly handled by one of them during a game, and he ran home weeping and said to his mother, "O mother! I have been badly treated by a common boy. The son of a *peasant* has dared to behave rudely to me, a *Prince*."

"What?" said his mother, reprovingly. "Could the words 'Prince' and 'peasant' ever be applied

¹ In writing this tale I have drawn partly upon the Mahâbhârata, and partly upon the drama entitled "Vālmiki Prativâ," or "The Awakening of the Genius of Vālmiki," by my uncle, Rabindranath Tagore.

to the *soul* ? So far as the soul is concerned these expressions have no meaning. All souls are, so to speak, rays of the same light—the World-Soul or Brâhman. Boast not, my son, of your royal blood. The body is subject to change and decay ; it may be weak or strong, robed in splendour or meanly clad ; but the soul is above the degrees of the body's health or fortune. It is encased within the body as the pearl within the shell. Let not yours be flawed by resentment or pride of earthly place." Her words sank deep into Vikrânta's heart, and ere long he renounced the world and turned a hermit.

Two more sons, Sûvâhû and Shatrû-mardana, were born to Rita-dhwaja, and both of them followed in the footsteps of their elder brother, Vikrânta.

Rita-dhwaja had no other heir for a long while, but in course of time the Gods blessed him with another son, whom he named Alarka.

" O Madâlasâ ! " said Rita-dhwaja to his Queen when their youngest son was born, " do not instil into the mind of Alarka the idea of renunciation, but rather teach him *Raj-niti*, or state-craft. Alas ! your teaching has turned three of our sons into hermits ! Should Alarka follow their example, none will be left to inherit my throne and pass our name on from son to son so as to ensure us that kind of immortality given by an unbroken chain of descendants on earth."

Madâlasâ did as her husband asked. She trained the boy in all the niceties of state-craft. " Learn, my son," said she to Alarka, " industry from the ants, secrecy in counsel from the crows, the art of discriminate choosing from the bees, and alertness and agility from the deer. As the tree rots, the worms attack it ; and in like manner

a State or Nation unsound at the core is an easy conquest. Be ever wary of the cankers that beset a kingdom. As the Sun draws to itself the waters of the ocean in the form of vapours, only to give them back in the form of rain, so must a ruler draw taxes from his subjects, not to appropriate to himself but to give them back in the shape of the blessings of general prosperity and good government."

Thus was Alarka trained to state-craft by Madâlasâ, his mother. He married a beauteous Princess, and when a child was born to them Rita-dhwaja set Alarka on his throne and himself retired into the wood with his wife for quiet meditation. For in ancient times the life of a Dvija, or one of a "twice-born" caste, was divided into the four stages of Student, House-holder, Mendicant, and Hermit.

Before going away, however, Madâlasâ blessed her son, and took a golden ring off her finger and put it on his, saying: "O my son, if ever weary of the world, read the inscription on the gem of this ring."

Rita-dhwaja next took his son by the hand and gave him a piece of counsel: "Beware, O my son, of the King of the Kâshis. He has ever been our inveterate foe. Remember the parable of the wood and the tiger. The wood protects the tiger, and the tiger protects the wood. The wood-cutter dares not go into the wood to fell trees for fear of the tiger, and the tiger can hide itself in the wood when attacked by the hunter. But for the tiger the wood might be cut down, and but for the wood the tiger might be killed. So it is with treaties of offence and defence between all neighbouring States. In respect for the treaties lies the safety of both."

Alarka bade farewell to his parents and began his rule well, but the King of the Kâshis took advantage of his youth and inexperience and set him quarrelling with the neighbouring Princes. Not content with that alone, he set to work to corrupt and win over Alarka's Ministers to his own side with a lavish use of gold and, at last, attacked and conquered the kingdom. Alarka, thus disgusted with treachery within and treachery without, went into a wood and, sitting down on the bank of a river, read for the first time the inscription on the ring, his mother's parting gift. "*Leave the World and Love the Lord,*" ran the words engraved on the gem.

"Ah! this is my mother's injunction," exclaimed Alarka to himself as he read the motto, "and the ring may well be called the Ring of Renunciation. 'Leave the World and Love the Lord!' Alas! what barriers of ignorance and egotism we set up between the Lord and ourselves! Yet the Lord is ever within each of us, the Soul of our souls and the Breath of our breaths! *Om Tat Sat*, 'All that is, is God,' and *Om Tadasmi*, 'I am part and parcel of All that is, yea, and of God Himself'—so did the Sages of old declare from the Himâlayan mountain tops.

All are but parts of one stupendous whole
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.

A doctrine so sublime links up the Universe. Never was a time when the soul was not; nor ever shall it cease to be. Indeed each individual soul shares its being with, and is therefore co-eternal with, the World-Soul. Heaven is within and around us all our lives; and if we fail to see the divinity that is in ourselves it is because the outward shows delude us, and our little

egotistic selves stand in the way, never troubling to ask themselves 'Is it *You* or *I*, or is it *the God in either of us?*' Through ignorance we fail to see our true identity with the World-Soul and thence arise a multitude of ills.

"Well might this Ignorance be called the Tree of *Mâyâ* or Illusion. Its roots are the child's growing consciousness of self-hood or 'It is *I*' (*Ahan*, something separate from the World-Soul). Its trunk is the adult's stronger sense of *Ahankâra*, 'I do' (think, feel, and will, that is). For its branches it has *Mama*, the feeling that this, that, or the other is *mine*. Love of wife and child and all earthly affections, *Mâyâ* or *Mamatâ*, form its leaves. Its flowers are deeds of good and ill, *Karma*, resulting in a sum of merit and demerit. Lastly, its fruit is the happiness or misery, in this life or another, our world or some farther sphere, consequent on such merit or demerit—*Karma-phala*. Such is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the fruit whereof is fatal to *Moksha* or Salvation, the *final* absorption of the individual into the World-Soul and the consequent cessation of the Wheel of Birth and Death."

After having strengthened himself with such reflections Alarka went back to his enemy, the King of the Kâshis, and thus said to him: "O King of the Kâshis, I see in you no longer my enemy, but the best of all my friends. I have learnt from my defeat to leave the World and follow the Lord. I have lost one kingdom and gained another." The King of the Kâshis was overcome with emotion and could utter no word in reply. After the first shock of surprise was over he said to Alarka: "O Alarka, humbly I ask forgiveness. Let our families

be united by eternal bonds of friendship. Lo ! this kingdom shall be the dower on the day that my daughter weds your son.”¹

Alarka saw his son married and installed on the throne, and then followed his parents and brothers into the wood with his wife, and found solace in the quiet study and contemplation of what is called Forest Philosophy, the “Aranyak Upanishads.” Nature became his instructor, teaching him how to find

Lessons in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones and good in everything.

XI. THE GIFTS OF THE SUN.

ONCE upon a time there was a mighty Sage of the name of Yâmadagni, dreaded alike of Gods and mortals.

“Let us take the bow and spend an hour in archery, O Rénûkâ,” said Yâmadagni to his wife one morning. The Brâhmani gladly consented, for it always gave her pleasure to fall in with the wishes of her husband.

Yâmadagni tucked up the sleeves of his garment of bark (the material worn by all Sages before the art of weaving was invented), and fetched a bow and an arrow. “Get ready, my dear wife,” said the Sage, fixing the arrow to the bow. “Yonder tree shall be our target. Let us shoot the arrow at the tree by turns.”

Yâmadagni shot at the tree, and Rénûkâ ran to the tree, picked up the arrow, and brought it back to her husband. This she went on doing for a time, while the Sun rose higher and the heat increased.

¹ The “Mârkanḍya Purâna.”



“O my dear husband,” cried Rénûkâ, “the sand is burning my feet, and the Sun is burning my head, and I have not the strength to bring back the arrow again.”

Yâmadagni had by this time grown interested in the game, and did not relish the idea of having to give it up so soon.

He went up to the tree himself, picked up the arrow, and then, fixing it to the bow, pointed it skywards, crying aloud, “How darest thou, O Sun, molest my wife in her pastime? Moderate thy rays so as to make them bearable to her, or this arrow flies at thee and brings thee down.”

The Sun was frightened, but he mustered up sufficient courage to say to the irate Sage, “O Yâmadagni! restrain thy wrath. I cannot control my fiery horses before eventide; but I have that which will protect the head and feet of thy spouse. Here is a parasol and a dainty pair of slippers for her.”

Rénûkâ put on the slippers, and the sand no longer burnt her feet. She spread out the parasol over her head, and the Sun no longer burnt her head; and merrily she went on with her sport.

Such is the myth of the origin of parasols and shoes, the gifts of the Sun.¹

XII. ÂTRÉYA'S HEAVEN.

ONCE upon a time there was a renowned Sage, Âtréya by name, so called because he was the son of the Sage Atri. He had acquired the power of transferring himself anywhere and everywhere at will. One day he took

¹ The “Purânas.”

it into his head to visit the Heaven of Indra, and the King of the Gods welcomed him with all fitting honours. He was entertained with the dances of the Apsarâs (nymphs) and the songs of the Gandharvas (elf musicians), and had a dainty repast in place of his usual fare of herbs and roots. He enjoyed his sojourn in Heaven, as you might well expect.

He then returned to his poor cottage, disgusted with his proper belongings and surroundings.

"Give me something to eat," said the Sage to his wife, for his appetite had grown with the delicate fare of Heaven. The poor Brâhmani brought him a dish of boiled herbs and roots, all she could find in the wood.

"Ah!" said Âtréya, with a grunt, turning up his nose at the dish before him. "What! shall I have no more of the dainty sweets I had yester-night?"

"My lord forgets," replied the wife, meekly, "he was in Heaven yester-night; but this is his humble cottage, and not Heaven."

"Then I must turn this cottage into a Heaven," exclaimed Âtréya. "This very instant will I summon Vishva-Karmâ, the Artisan of the Gods."

Vishva-Karmâ was summoned, and presented himself at once before the Sage.

"May I know thy desire, O great Sage?" said the Artisan-God, in fear and trembling.

"O Vishva-Karmâ," said the Sage, "build me a Heaven like unto that of Indra, furnished with all celestial delights—Apsarâs, Gandharvas and all—and parks beautifully laid out with sparkling fountains and trees of silver and gold."

Vishva-Karmâ dared not refuse, for Sages were known to be master-cursers. And lo! there arose before

Âtréya's eyes a new Swarga or Heaven, in no way distinguishable from Indra's.

Âtréya was delighted with the Heaven thus built for him, and dismissed the Smith-God with a Brâhmin's blessing for reward. Now was his cup of happiness full to the brim.

But there had been an age-long feud between the Gods and Giants, and the latter had made many attempts to invade and ruin Heaven. One day the Giants discovered by chance the Heaven of Âtréya. "What!" said they to each other, "has Indra built a new Heaven on earth? Let us glut our ancient grudge against him and level it to the ground."

Thus saying, they attacked Âtréya's Heaven with loud yells. The Sage was then lying on his couch of gold, listening to the enchanting songs of his Apsarâs. He jumped up from his seat and went out to see what was happening, and was terrified almost out of his wits to find an army of Giants hurling boulders and trees against his Heaven. Bruised and stunned by the hurtling rocks, Âtréya cried out to the Giants, raising his right hand with the sacred thread wound round the thumb: "Stop, stop, O ye Giants! I am not Indra, your ancient enemy, but a poor harmless Brâhmin, as this sacred thread, the badge of my caste, betokens. Stay your hands and receive a Brâhmin's blessing as reward for your forbearance."

His Heaven was by this time in ruin on the ground.

"What is a Brâhmin doing playing at Indra?" exclaimed the Giants. "Put away the dress of our enemy and put on a hermit's bark. And learn to keep within your own degree, lest evil again befall your presumption."

“ I have acted foolishly,” said the Brâhmin, “ and it has come near costing me death at your hands. Never more will I court disaster thus.”

The Giants then went away, and no sooner were they gone than Âtréya again summoned Vishva-Karmâ.

“ What is thy will, O Sage ? ” said the Artisan-God, presenting himself before him. “ Alas ! what destruction has o'erwhelmed the beauteous Heaven I created thee ? ”

Âtréya told him how the Giants, mistaking it for Indra's Heaven, had demolished it by hurling rocks and trees against it.

“ Shall I then build thee another Heaven ? ” asked Vishva-Karmâ, laughing.

“ Nay,” cried the Sage, “ give me the home that tempts no enemies. Be pleased to replace the wreckage of my Heaven with mine old humble cottage.”

Vishva-Karmâ did as he was bid, and then re-ascended to Heaven, much amused.

And back to his cottage and his dish of boiled herbs and roots went the Sage Âtréya, never to grumble again.¹

Though Heaven's joys be his, the fable shows
A mortal cannot combat Heaven's foes.

XIII. YUDHISHTIR'S DOG.

IN olden time there was fought on the plain of Kurukshétra a great battle between two branches of the famous Kuru family, the Kauravas and the Pândavas. The Kauravas were the sons of Dhrita-râsthra, the uncle

¹ The “ Purânas.”

of Yudhishtir, and the Pândavas were the sons of Pându, his younger brother. The Pândavas, of whom Yudhishtir was the eldest, won the battle with the help of Krishna, and became the rulers of Indra-prastha. Long and well did they rule, and at last, after the death of their greatest friend Krishna, called by Greek writers the Indian Hercules, Yudhishtir abdicated the throne and, accompanied by his brothers and Queen Draupadi, set out for Mount Sûmérû, the Indian Olympus. A faithful dog also accompanied the party.

One by one the Pândava brothers and Queen Draupadi fell by the road, and Yudhishtir and his dog alone survived and were at last able to reach Sûmérû.

As soon as Yudhishtir arrived at the gate of Heaven, Indra, King of the Gods, came forth to receive him, saying: "Enter in, O resolute Prince."

"I cannot leave my faithful dog behind," replied Yudhishtir. "Without him I care not to enter Heaven."

"Heaven is no place for such mean creatures as dogs," said Indra.

"Thou dost wrong to call the dog a mean creature," Yudhishtir answered. "He has been the friend of man ever since he appeared on earth. This faithful hound alone of all my party has not deserted me, and I cannot desert him."

"Thy brethren and thy Queen Draupadi thou didst leave behind," said Indra to Yudhishtir. "Does this beast count for more than they that thou canst not enter Heaven without it?"

"Alas!" replied Yudhishtir, with tears in his eyes, "my kinsfolk have fallen one by one on the way, and I know no magic to bring them back to life. If the dead

could accompany the living, then thou couldst truly say I had deserted them."

"O Yudhishtir," exclaimed Yama, the God of Death and Justice, stepping forth in front of Indra, "thou wouldst not desert the dog that was true to thee. Thy like cannot be found even in Heaven, search as thou wilt. Thyself art thine own parallel."

At the God's decree Yudhishtir was allowed the privilege of taking his dog into Heaven with him, so nobly had he pleaded for him, and the faithful hound bore him company ever after.¹

The proudest of the Gods commend
Devotion to the humblest friend.

XIV. THE DOGS OF HELL.

[Dogs are curiously associated with Heaven and Hell. Sometimes mortals took their dogs along with them into either region. The reason is obvious. The dogs were men's earliest companions in the chase. Possibly they were utilized for the purpose of disposing of the dead, whence it would appear arose the custom among the Parsees of having their dead devoured by dogs.]

YAMA was the first man to discover the land from whose bourne no traveller returns. He was perhaps accompanied by a pair of hounds as faithful as the one that followed Yudhishtir to Heaven. Be that as it may, Yama, the God of the infernal regions, the Hindu Hades, is said to have two brindled dogs, grey mingled with black, each with four blood-shot eyes and a lolling tongue.

¹ The "Mahâbhârata"

The virtuous are advised to hurry past them on their way to the Hall of Yama. These words are said to them :

Fear not to pass the guards,
The four-eyed brindled dogs,
Return unto thy home, O soul.

These brindled dogs of Hell have their four eyes directed to the four cardinal points of the compass, watching day and night for departed spirits, and conducting them unto their fathers in the abode of Yama, just as a shepherd's dogs conduct the straggling sheep to the fold at eventide.¹

XV. THE MAGIC FOOD-BOWL OF THE SUN.

YUDHISHTIR, the eldest of the Pândava brothers, was once tempted by his cousins, the wicked Kauravas, to spend the night in gambling.

Yudhishtir had a weakness for the dice, and so easily yielded to the temptation. In the frenzy of the play he lost stake after stake till nothing was left for him to gamble with.

Then, his kingdom staked and lost, Yudhishtir, accompanied by his brothers, went quietly away and took shelter in the woods, that No-Man's-Land of outlaws and robbers, and lived on fruits and roots, with whatever their skill in hunting could bring them.

Yudhishtir bemoaned his lot, and in his despair prayed to the Sun : " O radiant Deity, behold how miserable is our life in the woods, with no sustenance beyond what chance throws in our way. We are

¹ The " Vedas."

famished and faint, and like to starve at length unless we can move the bounty of the Gods to relieve our distress." The Sun was moved to pity, and gave Yudhishtir a magic Food-Bowl, ready-filled with food for the brethren. The Bowl had the power of producing whatever food was asked of it, and thus it was that the Pândavas were enabled to endure their long exile in the woods until they regained their throne.

XVI. SHIBI AND THE HAWK.

SHIBI was a king of olden days, renowned for his unselfishness and love of God's creatures, great and small.

As Shibi was walking in his park one day a pigeon fell into his arms, exhausted by its efforts to escape a hawk which had long pursued it. Shibi revived it, but the hawk demanded it of him. "O Shibi," said the hawk, "by what right do you defraud me of my prey? Yield it up to me that I may devour it."

"Nay, nay!" replied Shibi. "I cannot let the life of this poor bird be taken thus."

"But it is my food," cried the hawk. "Birds are my allotted prey; it is no wanton cruelty for me to kill and eat this pigeon, unless you would have me starve."

For a moment Shibi was at a loss, for the logic of the hawk was unassailable.

"O hawk," said Shibi at last, "that cannot be gainsaid; yet be pleased to accept this pigeon's weight, feathers and all, in the flesh of my own body, and let the poor bird go."

The hawk agreed, and Shibi let him take his due from his body, and by his own sacrifice saved both the birds from suffering.¹

XVII. EKALAVYA AND DRONA.

THE venerable Sage Drona, son of the Patriarch Varadvâja, taught archery to some of the heroes of the Mahâbhârata War, among them the Kaurava and Pândava Princes.

One day, while these Princes were practising archery under the supervision of Drona, a dark youth presented himself before the latter, and thus said to him with joined palms : “ O venerable Brâhmin, deign to teach me archery.”

“ Who art thou that darest to come, unbidden and unannounced, into the presence of these Princes ? ” cried Drona, with indignation.

“ I am Ekalavya, son of the King of the Mountaineers,”² said the lad meekly, hanging down his head.

“ This is no place for a son of that robber-chief,” cried the Princes, “ Begone, begone ! ”

The Bhil youth bowed to Drona and the Princes, and went back to his mountain home. The sun was setting, and the western horizon was a blaze of colours ; but alas ! this glow of sunset brought to him no glow of happiness. He stood leaning against an ancient tree, musing on the inhumanity of man to man, while his friends, the wild antelopes and peacocks, with a tameness incredible to any one not forest-bred, gathered round him as if in sympathy.

¹ The “ Purânas.”

² The Bhils.

Ekalavya embraced the antelopes and stroked the peacocks, saying : “ O fleet antelopes and blue-throated peacocks ! you are my real friends, while man hates his own kind.”

A tear struggled into his eye, but he wiped it away, and rose and moulded an image of Drona and set it up against a tree, and before this target began to practise archery.

Time passed, and one day Drona went forth with his royal pupils to hunt on the Mountain of the Bhils, and Drona's hound accompanied his master. The dog ran ahead of the party and came to the foot of the tree where Ekalavya was practising archery in solitude. No sooner had it beheld the Bhil youth than it started barking at him, and lo ! Ekalavya stopped the barking by shooting seven arrows in quick succession into the dog's mouth so ingeniously as to close it without hurting it. The hound ran back to its master with its mouth full of arrows, whining.

Drona and his pupils wondered who could have done this, for it was clear that it was not the feat of any ordinary archer. Still in perplexity they arrived at the foot of the tree where Ekalavya was standing with bent bow before the image of Drona.

Drona, stepping forth, asked the youth : “ Who art thou, O skilful archer ? ”

“ I am Ekalavya, the son of the King of the Mountaineers,” he replied, “ and a pupil of the venerable Drona.”

The Princes cried out in protest, “ O reverend Sage, can it be that thou hast taught this dark youth secrets of the bow still hidden from us ? Such skill in a mountaineer threatens the security of the realm, for his people are thieves, footpads, and raiders all.”

“ Art thou, indeed, a pupil of Drona ? ” asked Drona himself, whom Ekalavya had apparently not recognized.

“ There he is,” said the youth, pointing to the rough clay-image of the Brâhmin. “ Before that image of him I have been practising archery ever since he spurned and scorned me in the presence of his royal pupils. For that reason I call myself a pupil of Drona.”

“ If that is so,” exclaimed Drona, amazed beyond measure, “ thanks and reward are my due, for I myself am Drona ! ”

As soon as Ekalavya learned who the venerable figure before him was, he fell down at his feet and kissed them. Drona raised him by the hand, saying, “ Genius such as thine transcends birth and degree ; no slights, no sufferings, can quench its sacred fire. And now, O Ekalavya, honour thy teacher with his reward.”

“ Ask of me anything, even my life, and I give it freely,” replied the youth, without hesitation.

“ Then let me have the thumb of thy right hand,” said Drona ; and lo ! with a smile on his face, Ekalavya cut off the thumb which knew so well the trick of the bow-string, and gave it bleeding to the Sage.¹

XVIII. THE FIGHTING BLADES OF GRASS.

ONCE upon a time Brahmâ was seized with a violent fit of sneezing, and lo ! from it was born a mighty demi-God by name Kshûpa (lit. “ born of the Kshûta,” or sneezing). Thus brought into existence, he asked Brahmâ, with joined palms, what service he could perform.

It happened that the Giants were making war upon

¹ The “ Mahâbhârata.”

the Gods, so Kshûpa was asked to fight them. He drove the Giants out of Heaven, and for reward he was made King of the Earth.

One day he boasted of his superiority over the mighty Sage, Dadhichi, in his presence. The Sage lost his temper and, just to teach him a lesson in politeness, boxed his ears, whereupon King Kshûpa fell upon him and tore him to pieces, limb from limb.

There was great indignation among the Sages, and Shukrâchârya, as mighty a Sage as Dadhichi himself, put together the splintered bones and pronounced magic incantations over them ; and lo ! Dadhichi sat up, revived and whole.

After this he devoted himself to the worship of Mahâdeva, and the God, pleased with his allegiance, appeared before him and asked him what boon he might desire.

“ O dread God of Destruction,” said Dadhichi, bending and kissing his feet, “ if it be thy will, make my body as hard as the diamond.”

“ So be it,” said Mahâdeva, and departed.

No sooner was he gone than Dadhichi went to Kshûpa and kicked him on the head, knocking him down and almost stunning him. Kshûpa got up and tried to plunge his knife into the heart of his assailant, but the blade broke to splinters on his breast. He next hurled a large stone at him, but it flew into fragments and did no more injury than the knife.

Having paid the enemy in his own coin, Dadhichi went back to his hermitage, and Kshûpa, smarting under the insult, betook himself to a wood to worship Vishnu, the God of Preservation. Pleased with his devotion, Vishnu presented himself before him and asked him to choose a boon.

“If it be thy will,” said Kshûpa to the God, “give me power to overthrow all mortals. I seek revenge on Dadhichi for the affront offered me.”

“Ah!” cried Vishnu, “there is no power to harm Dadhichi, for he is a devotee of Mahâdeva. Choose some other boon.”

“That, or naught!” said Kshûpa, and Vishnu was at last prevailed upon to give him his Sudarshana, or discus.

Thus armed, Kshûpa sought out Dadhichi and hurled the divine weapon at him, but it shrank back and rebounded as if in fear, without hurting him.

Wrathful to see his mighty discus foiled, Vishnu now gave Kshûpa other weapons, and these he hurled at Dadhichi, while the Gods watched the fighting, ready to help Kshûpa if need were. But before the weapons could strike Dadhichi, he had plucked up a handful of blades of Kusha grass, uttered an incantation over these and let them go forth to guard him; and behold! the blades of grass turned themselves into tridents, the dread weapon of Mahâdeva. No sooner did the weapons of the Gods see the tridents than they lowered themselves and did homage, and the Gods fled away in fear.

At this stage Brahmâ, the God of Creation, intervened, and the strange battle of the weapons came to an end.

King Kshûpa then fell at the feet of Dadhichi and said to him: “O holy Sage, I bragged of the superiority of the Kshatrya over the Brâhmin. I ask thy pardon, for now I have seen that the Brâhmin is superior even to the Gods, let alone the Kshatryas. Let us again be friends.” And Kshûpa and Dadhichi lived in amity and peace ever after.¹

¹ The “Linga Purâna.”

XIX. MIRÂ'S BRIDEGROOM.

IN times long past there lived a King named Râthérvatiâ in Rajputânâ, "the Land of Princes." He was a devout Vaishnava, or believer in Shree Krishna, "humanity's first Apostle." He had a beauteous little girl, Mirâ by name, who learnt to chant with her parents melodious hymns to the Shepherd-God Krishna.

One evening she chanced to witness a marriage procession passing by the palace gate. She asked her father what it was about.

"Oh, that's the *Dulâh* (bridegroom) going to get married," said her father.

Thinking *Dulâh* must be the name of a toy, the little girl said, "O Father, do get me a *Dulâh*."

Râthérvatiâ fetched a marble baby-Krishna and gave it to her, saying: "Here is a *Dulâh* for Mirâ," and the child was delighted with her present. She used to dress the toy Krishna up, and offer garlands and sweets to it as if it were a real live *Dulâh*.

As Mirâ grew up she became as devout a worshipper of Krishna as her parents, and used to sing hymns composed by herself to her toy Krishna. In time she developed her "faculty divine," and became an unrivalled composer of sacred hymns. When she had come to womanhood her father Râthérvatiâ proposed to wed her to Prince Kumbha, son of Mukuldéva, Rânâ of Méwar. The royal astrologer was sent for to divine what fortune would attend the union. The astrologer came, bowed to the King, and looked at Mirâ. There was a frown upon his brow. He joined his palms and

said to the King, "I dread to tell what I have found by divination."

"Withhold no syllable of the truth, or well mayst thou dread my wrath," replied the King.

"O King," the astrologer made answer in fear and trembling, "thy daughter is already married."

The King was amazed. His first thought was that his daughter might have made a secret marriage. He turned round to Mirâ and said to her, "Tell me, O Mirâ, hast thou indeed a *Dulâh*?"

With a smile on her face Mirâ produced the toy Krishna her father himself had given her when she was a mere baby, saying, "Yes, O my father, and this is he." Then she sang in the sweetest of tones :

"Méré Giridhar-Gopâl, dusrâ nâ koi
Yâké Shir mour—mukut méré Dulâh soi."

My bridegroom has celestial renown,
The peacock's rainbow plumage is his crown,
The Shepherd, Krishna—pledged to him above,
I have, and I desire, no mortal love.¹

XX. THE COUNTERFEIT KRISHNA.

ONCE upon a time there was a Prince of the Poudra race who loved to live surrounded by fawning courtiers. They used to regale his ears with fulsome flattery. "O King," they would often say to him, "thou art the only Krishna on earth. The other Krishna, the so-called Shepherd-God of Gokul, is a pretender." At last the foolish King believed in the words of his courtiers and assumed to himself all the distinctive

¹ The "Bhaktamâl," or Book of Faith (Vaishnava literature).

insignia and armour of the real Krishna—the war-shell, the discus, the bludgeon, and the lotus.

After having put on the trappings of his rival, he challenged Krishna either to give up wearing the same symbols and armour or meet him in combat. Krishna sent back the messenger to say to his master—“Krishna will come to thy kingdom and give up his chief symbol, the *chakra*, or discus.”

The God then mounted on the Gorur, or Eagle, on which he journeys, and soon presented himself before the arrogant King.

“Give up thy discus or prepare to fight with me,” said the King, stepping forth clad in the trappings of Krishna.

Krishna laughed. “And must my discus then leave my grasp?” he said. “Mark well, O King, at thy bidding I let it go.” With that the discus sped towards the foolish monarch, smote off his head, and returned to Krishna.

On seeing his friend fall, the King of Kâshi¹ attacked Krishna and met with the same fate. The discus removed the head of the King of Kâshi with such force that it was hurled through the air right into the heart of Kâshi itself. There was consternation and wailing among the populace, and when the author of the deed was known, the son of the dead King of Kâshi determined to be avenged on Krishna. So he began worshipping Mahâdeva, and soon succeeded in pleasing him with his devotion.

“I am pleased with thee, my son,” said Mahâdeva, appearing before him. “What boon may I grant thee?”

¹ Modern Benares.

“The wicked Krishna,” said the son of the murdered King of Kâshi, addressing Mahâdeva with joined palms, “has killed my father; let a fiery demon be sent to aid me to avenge him.”

“So be it,” said Mahâdeva, with a smile, and then vanished. Alas! little did the new king dream what Mahâdeva’s smile implied as he granted him the fatal boon.

No sooner had Mahâdeva granted the boon than a dreadful Fire-Demon appeared, with flames issuing out of his mouth and his hair ablaze. He cried out, “Where is Krishna? where is Krishna?” and for answer Krishna released his *chakra*.

As soon as the Fire-Demon saw the discus approaching he took fright and fled for protection to his master, the new King of Kâshi. On and on he ran, with the discus in full pursuit after him, until he reached Kâshi itself, and as he entered the city the flames issuing out of his mouth and hair set it on fire and soon consumed it to ashes. Then the discus at last overtook him and severed his fiery head.

The God had kept strictly to the terms of his promise, and had not hindered the issue he foresaw. Verily to ask dangerous gifts of the Gods is oft to receive a treacherous weapon, wounding the hand that wields it.¹

XXI. VAISHÂLINI’S VOW.

VAISHÂLINI was the beauteous daughter of the King of Vishâla. Many were the Princes who sought for her

¹ The “Vishnu-Purâna.”

hand, and her father resolved to hold the Svyamvarâ customary with high-born dames.

On the eve of the Svyamvarâ, while Vaishâlini was walking in her park, Avikshitâ, son of King Karandham, then by far the bravest youth in Hindusthân, entered the park and presented himself before the maiden.

Boldly walking up to her, he said, "O beauteous maiden, I seek thy promise to choose me for thine husband at to-morrow's Svyamvarâ."

The Princess gazed at him in astonishment for a moment, then asked indignantly, "Who is it that dares thus speak to me in a way unbecoming a Kshatrya?"

"I am Avikshitâ, son of King Karandham," said the youth. "I have come to win thy pledge to choose me in preference to any other Prince at the Svyamvarâ."

"I will choose whom I please publicly," said the maiden. "I refuse to make a secret promise to thee. Begone, and await the ceremony."

"If I am not the chosen," said the haughty youth, "I will carry thee off by force, from the Svyamvarâ hall, in the presence of the assembled Princes."

"Do that if thou canst," replied the Princess, proudly, "but I am determined to choose any but thee. Now withdraw and leave me in peace."

On the morrow a grand Svyamvarâ was held, and Princes from far and near were assembled to court beauteous Vaishâlini. Clad in rustling silks and flashing with jewels, Vaishâlini stepped into the Svyamvarâ hall with a garland in her hand. The eyes of all the Princes were riveted on her, and for a moment profound silence prevailed in the hall, delusive as the calm before the storm.

Vaishâlini cast her eyes around the hall and saw that the proud youth who had courted her in such cavalier fashion the day before was not among the Princes. But suddenly Avikshitâ dashed into the hall and, true to his vow, carried off Vaishâlini from amongst the assembled Princes. There was much rushing to and fro of warriors on horseback, as the Svyamvarâ broke up and the Princes pursued the runaways. At last they overtook Avikshitâ, and a great fight ensued.

Avikshitâ held out long against this assemblage of Princes, keeping them at bay; but he was one opposed to many, and was in the end overpowered in the unequal battle. He fell wounded and senseless into their hands.

The Princes carried the unconscious Avikshitâ and Vaishâlini, his bride by capture, to the palace of her father, the King of Vishâla. Vaishâlini refused to hold another Svyamvarâ, for she had seen with her own eyes how unfairly the suitors had overcome her brave captor, and all the Princes returned to their homes disappointed.

Now Vaishâlini applied herself to nursing her wounded captor. In the meantime the news of the defeat and capture of Prince Avikshitâ by the united forces of the suitors of the daughter of the King of Vishâla reached the ears of King Karandham. He at once set out with a large army to rescue his son. A great battle was fought between the forces of King Vishâla and King Karandham, and the former was defeated and sued for peace.

“Let our two kingdoms,” said the father of Vaishâlini to the father of Avikshitâ, “be knit together by eternal bonds of friendship. Let thy brave son marry

my beauteous daughter, Vaishâlini." "So be it," replied King Karandham, and Avikshitâ was nursed back to life by Vaishâlini.

"Didst thou hear what the King of Vishâla said?" asked King Karandham of his son. "Thou lovest Vaishâlini, and her father proposes to give her in marriage to thee in preference to any other Prince. Now say thy say."

"I cannot marry Princess Vaishâlini," said Prince Avikshitâ. "I was defeated and made captive by her father. I do not *deserve* her hand."

"I am thy bride by capture," said the Princess Vaishâlini, hanging down her head and blushing. "Bravely didst thou fight for me, and if thou wert overpowered it was no fault of thine. Thou wert but one opposed to many."

"I cannot marry thee, O Princess," Avikshitâ made answer. "A warrior cannot beg for a wife; he must win her by his valour. I thank thee, but I could not accept thee."

His hopes defeated, King Karandham returned to his kingdom with Avikshitâ, while Vaishâlini left the palace and renounced the world.

Time passed, and one day Avikshitâ was hunting in a wood, when of a sudden he heard the screams of a woman in distress, crying for help against a demon. Avikshitâ rode up in the direction of the sound and soon overtook the demon, dragging an emaciated maiden along by the hair. The demon released her and fell upon Avikshitâ. A fight ensued, and the demon was out down. Meanwhile the maiden had fainted away. Avikshitâ raised her in his arms, and she opened her dazed eyes. "Who art thou, O stranger maiden?" he

asked. "How didst thou fall into the hands of the demon?"

"The demon! the demon!" cried out the maiden, starting up, "O deliver a hapless maiden from his hand."

"The demon has been slain," replied the Prince, "and thou art now safe in the arms of thy deliverer, Prince Avikshitâ."

"Prince Avikshitâ! Prince Avikshitâ! my husband!" exclaimed the maiden, with joy and amazement.

"Art thou indeed Princess Vaishâlini?" asked the Prince, rubbing his eyes and gazing at her.

"The same, thy bride by capture," she made answer. "Since the day when thou didst refuse to acknowledge me thy bride I have lived here in solitude and peace until the demon came but now, and seized me by the hair——"

"Alone and undefended thou shalt be no more," said the Prince, with a smile. "Since I have won thee back in combat I can at last justly claim my bride by capture." And Avikshitâ returned to his kingdom with his bride, rejoicing.¹

XXII. THE MONKEY BANKER.

ONCE upon a time a merchant said to himself, "Industry is necessary for the acquisition of wealth; wealth is necessary for the acquisition of religious merit by almsgiving and sacrifice; and religious merit is necessary for the attainment of *Moksha*, or Salvation. Therefore all who seek salvation should strive after wealth."

¹ The "Mârkandeya Purâna."

Thus musing, Ratnâvarman (for that was the name of the merchant) sent his son Ishvarvarman abroad to trade, entrusting him with a large amount of money.

Ishvarvarman, after many days' journeying by land and water, at last found himself in Svarna-dvipa, or the Isle of Gold, where no sooner was he arrived than he fell into the hands of a clever female cheat of the name of Sundari, the keeper of an inn. This cunning woman drained him of his father's money as easily as a leech would take his blood. But when his store was spent Ishvarvarman bethought him of a ruse to regain what his folly had lost. He got hold of a monkey called Âlo, and borrowed a few hundred gold coins of a friend. He taught the monkey to swallow these and bring back out of his mouth any number of them required.

When its education was complete he took the monkey back with him to the Isle of Gold, and went to visit the trickster. She invited him to her inn, hoping to fleece him again, and after he had stopped a day or two she asked him to settle up her dues.

"Go and bring Âlo, the monkey," said Ishvarvarman to his hostess. She went and brought the monkey, which had just previously been made to swallow a thousand gold coins.

"Âlo, my son," said Ishvarvarman to the monkey, "give us to-day three hundred gold coins for our entertainments, three hundred for sundry other expenses, three hundred to be given away in charity, and a hundred for our hostess Sundari, as a reward for her kindness."

As Ishvarvarman said this, the monkey brought from his mouth the gold coins exactly to the amount ordered.

"This is indeed a wonderful monkey," said the woman to her guest. "The noblest payment for my hospitality would be this gold-giving monkey. Yea, let me but have him and I will return all the wealth you squandered here before."

Thereupon Ishvarvarman answered laughingly: "I would not part with this monkey in exchange for that and all your other gains to boot."

The woman flung herself on her knees with tears of covetousness. "Take all I possess in return for *Âlo*," she said, clinging to Ishvarvarman's feet.

He struck the bargain, added to his former wealth the woman's ill-gotten riches, and set off upon his journey again, leaving her to discover that she had herself been befooled.¹

Ill-gotten gains will often be
Lost to another's roguery.

XXIII. THE LOGICAL PUPIL.

ONCE upon a time there was a teacher who could not sleep for the noise the mice made about his room at night. So he called his pupil and said to him, "O my dear son, I have a task for you. Go forth and find me a cat to rid me of these troublesome mice."

"What sort of creature is a cat?" asked the pupil. "I have never come across one. Be pleased to describe it to me."

"Very well," said the teacher. "A cat's eyes are like glass, its colour is a brownish-grey, it has a hairy

¹ The "Kathâ-Sarit-Sâgara."

skin on its back, and it wanders about the roads. These are the distinguishing marks of a cat. Look about for one such, and bring it to me."

Accordingly the pupil went and searched hither and thither for a cat, but nowhere did he find anything answering to the description of his master. At last, after much fruitless searching, he came upon a creature wandering about on the road, exactly fitting the description the teacher had given him. He returned with it in triumph to his teacher. "O my revered teacher," he said, "here is an animal answering to your description."

The teacher roared with laughter. "What, is this a cat?" he cried, amused beyond measure. "This is a Brâhmin boy. Release him at once."

"But," replied the youth, protesting, "he answers to your description of a cat, for his eyes are like glass, his colour is brownish-grey, and he has on his back a hairy animal skin, and he was found wandering about on the road. He bears all the signs of a cat, and that is why I brought him. How can he be a boy?"¹

XXIV. THE WISHING PITCHER.

ONCE upon a time there lived a poor man in Pâtali-putra. He earned a precarious living by gathering dry twigs or faggots in the woods and selling them in the market.

One day, as he was collecting fuel in the woods, he felt thirsty and went to drink water at a pool near by. Overhead on a bough was perched a golden-crested

¹ The "Kathâ-Sarit-Sâgara."

bird, and as he stooped to drink the poor man saw a reflection of the golden crest, and took it to be real gold. He entered the pool to grasp it, but he could not lay hold of it, as it kept appearing and disappearing in the moving water.

While he was thus trying to catch the shadow a Yaksha or Fairy chanced to pass by. "What does the mortal seek, groping in the water?" asked the Yaksha.

"I see gold in it," replied the poor man, "but it is continually eluding my grasp."

"O Fool! that is not gold," cried the Yaksha. "It is but the reflection of the golden-crested bird up in the tree on the bank."

The poor man looked up and discovered his mistake, greatly to his mortification.

"Follow me!" said the Yaksha, kindly. "I will not see you go hungry."

The poor man gladly followed the fairy to his house, and was given the post of waiter at the table.

"Fetch me my food," said the Yaksha, taking his seat at the table.

"I see no food in the house," replied the poor man.

"Well," the Yaksha answered, "there is plenty of it and to spare. Look in the pitcher over there."

The poor man took up the pitcher in his hand and looked in it many a time, but it was quite empty. "The pitcher is quite empty," cried the poor man, "and there is not a morsel of food in it."

"Well! well!" said his new master, smiling. "Only tell the pitcher what food is needed, and out it will come." The waiter did so, and immediately the best of food and drink came out of the pitcher. In the

same way the poor man supplied himself with a hearty meal.

For a long time he waited devotedly upon the generous Yaksha, but at length he was filled with a yearning to revisit his home. "If my service has been well performed," he said at last, "I ask to be permitted to go back to my family."

"You have served me well and faithfully," the Yaksha answered, "and I cannot let you go unrewarded. Tell me what the reward shall be."

"Let it be the magic pitcher," was the reply. "Possessing that, I am assured of plenty, and need dread hunger no more."

The Yaksha consented, and the poor man returned home bearing the inexhaustible pitcher.

He now had no more need to wander about the forest gathering dry sticks, for the pitcher satisfied all his needs. For long he lived contented, until one day he must needs entertain his friends to a feast, get drunk with them, and begin to dance, poising the pitcher on his shoulder. He chanced to stumble, and lo! the pitcher fell to the ground and was shattered, and his life of ease and plenty with it.¹

Thus, through security too careless grown,
We trip on nothings and are overthrown.

XXV. THE BATTLE OF THE BIRDS AND THE SEA.

ONCE upon a time a pair of Tittiva birds were living by the sea, and the hen-bird laid her eggs in the cleft of a rock jutting out into the waves.

¹ The "Kathâ-Sarit-Sâgara."

One day the hen said to her mate, "I live in fear of the Sea, lest its waves should come and carry off our eggs."

"What?" cried the cock, in a tone of bravado, "would the Sea dare contend with my might? Have no fear, I will remain at hand and fight the Sea if it dares come near our nest."

The Sea overheard the Tittiva's boastful words and carried off the eggs at once, saying, "Now come and fight me if thou canst."

"Now see what comes of boasting," said the hen-bird to her mate, weeping.

"Have patience. I will bring terror to this wicked Sea," the cock made answer. So saying, he flew away to collect his feathered friends, and soon came back accompanied by all the birds of the world to fight with the Sea. On they came, uttering hideous war cries, darkening the sun with their myriads, raising a whirlwind with their wings, and the waves leaped up to attack them.

Never was witnessed such an assemblage of birds before! There were long-necked vultures, parrots and parakeets green as leaves, red-eyed koéls (cuckoos), pigeons of all species; there were kingfishers, goldfinches, red-breasted bulbuls, peacocks and woodpeckers—who could name all the birds of the world? They came flying with all sorts of weapons in their claws and beaks, and hurled them against the Sea. They swooped down on the beach, scratched up the sand and threw it into the Sea, determined in this wise to silt it up; and fiercely raged the battle between the birds and the Sea for days and days together. Yet the birds could not make the Sea restore the stolen

eggs, and at last there was nothing for them but to appeal to their king, Gorura, for help.

Gorura came, bearing the flaming *chakra* or discus of his master Vishnu the Preserver, to dry up the waters of the Sea!

“O mercy! mercy!” cried the Sea, terror-stricken at the sight of the weapon of fire. “Withhold the *chakra*. Here are the eggs of the Tittiva birds.”

Thus the battle ended in favour of the birds. The Tittiva pair had their eggs restored to them, and the Sea vowed never to harm them again.

XXVI. THE FEUD OF THE CROWS AND THE OWLS.

ONCE upon a time the birds were without a king, so they met and took counsel together as to who should be their monarch. The general choice fell upon the owl, and the birds fetched an umbrella and a chowrie (the bushy tail of a yak) and were going to anoint him king. Suddenly a crow came flying through the air and said to the assembled birds: “What is all this folly? Bulbuls and finches, all you of the feathered race, would you make a king of that ugly, unlucky, misshapen owl, who cannot bear the light of day, but hides in a foul cavern from the sun?”

The birds were impressed by this protest. They shrank back from the owl, and broke off the ceremony, and flew away in all directions. The owl vowed to be revenged on the crow, and said: “Remember that from this day forth there shall be no peace between the owl and the crow.” Thus their feud began.

After this quarrel the owls, led by their leader Avamarda, searched everywhere for the dwelling-place of the crows, and one night they came unexpectedly upon them resting in the boughs of a sacred fig-tree. They fell upon the crows with beak and claw and killed large numbers of them, the remainder escaping death by hiding themselves wherever they could in the dark. In this way the owls under Avamarda inflicted a crushing defeat on the crows.

Next morning the surviving crows met and took counsel with each other as to how they should be revenged on the owls. One of them, by name Chirajivin, the Long-Lived One, said: "The owls are too powerful to be conquered in battle. We can only defeat them by stratagem. Pluck out some of my feathers and leave me under this tree with them scattered beside me."

They did as they were bid, and Chirajivin lay flat under the tree as if he were dead.

The owls under Avamarda again invaded the fig-tree on the following night, but the crows had anticipated the attack, and so had kept away from the tree. Suddenly Chirajivin uttered a plaintive croak to draw the attention of the owls. Avamarda heard it and flew down to the foot of the tree to attack him.

"Restrain thy beak and claws," said Chirajivin in a voice scarcely audible. "Know me to be Chirajivin, a friend of the race of owls. I advised our leader Méghvaran (lit. "Dusky-hued as a Cloud") to make peace with them if he cared for his life. 'Traitor,' he cried, 'thou hast turned spy of the owls and deservest death.' Saying which, he plucked out my feathers to prevent my escape by flight, and flung me down under this

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tree to be torn to pieces by the owls. Here I lie at their mercy."

"What ought we to do with this crow?" said the leader of the owls, seeking a general decision on the point. The owls were not unanimous in their answers, some saying, "He nearly lost his life by trying to benefit us, and so his life ought to be spared," while the others cried out, "An enemy is an enemy and must on no account be given quarter." The first party had it, and the life of the captive crow was spared. Ava-marda took Chirajivin with him to his castle, a cave in a rock, and fed him with pieces of meat and other delicacies. He grew new feathers and became strong.

One day he said to the leader of the owls, "Make it my mission to go back to Mégh-varan, the leader of the crows, and induce him to come and sue for peace. Once here, he is in the power of the owls and can soon be disposed of."

"Well said!" replied Ava-marda. "I warrant such a plot will bring us victory. Go, Chirajivin, and may success attend thee."

"Stay, O Ava-marda!" said the wily crow, as he took his leave. "Lest aught should go amiss, and the crows attack this stronghold here by surprise, let me close up the entrance with grass and leaves until my return. When I come back with Mégh-varan, we can remove the barricade."

The unsuspecting Ava-marda consented. Chirajivin collected masses of grass and leaves, and then took a burning twig in his beak and set the pile on fire. Flames surged up the cave, the owls were burnt to cinders within their fortress, and the crows, thus revenged,

took up their old quarters in the fig-tree without fear of further molestation.¹

XXVII. THE FELON DEMON.

A MIGHTY king of old, named Viduratha, was one day on a boar-hunt in a wood. He wounded a boar, but it dashed away through the trees, its body bristling with arrows.

Viduratha rode after the fugitive, and had nearly caught up with it when it suddenly dashed down into a cavern and was lost to sight.

The king was about to dismount and follow when a hermit appeared, crying, "Stop! stop! do not enter the cavern! It leads down to the Under-World, where dwells a terrible demon named Ku-jrimva, the Earth-Borer. He is nicknamed the 'Felon Demon' because he stole a dread shovel forged by Vishva-Karmâ, the artisan of the Gods. With this wonderful shovel he dug this passage into the Underworld, and thus has become invincible by Gods and mortals."

King Viduratha returned from the chase disappointed, but determined to beard the demon in his own den.

Whether or no the wounded boar was Ku-jrimva self-transformed (for demons are said to assume any form or shape at will) soon after this incident he carried off Viduratha's only daughter, Princess Mudâ-vati, while she was gathering flowers.

As soon as Viduratha heard of this he ordered his two sons, Suniti and Sumati, to go down into the Underworld with a large army and rescue the Princess.

¹ The "Kathâ-Sarit-Sâgara."

They reached the Underworld through the subterranean passage and fought with the demon, but in the end they were themselves made captive. Not knowing how to recover the Princess from the hands of the demon, Viduratha then had it proclaimed to all and sundry that whosoever should rescue Princess Mudâ-vati would have her to wife, and Prince Vatsapri, son of a friendly king, offered to rescue the Princess.

Armed to the teeth, he went down the passage into the Underworld, and twanged the string of his huge bow so loudly as to make its denizens quail with fear. As soon as the demon heard the twanging of his bow, he strode along to do battle, and a terrific combat ensued. For three days and nights they fought on without rest, and at last the demon, driven to desperation, went back home for his death-dealing shovel. He saw Princess Mudâ-vati worshipping the missile, for it was a weapon of the Gods.

“What!” exclaimed the demon, looking in terror at the Princess, “hast thou touched the shovel? The touch of a woman’s hand, it was predicted, would destroy its magic qualities.”

“I did not know,” sobbed the Princess, rejoicing in her secret heart, for without his magic missile the demon’s prowess was but small.

Without further parley he seized the shovel and hurried back and hurled it at the youth with all his might; but the charm was broken, and his adversary struck it asunder. The demon seized other missiles, which the Prince shattered with equal ease in mid-course, and at last Vatsapri hurled a fiery weapon and slew Ku-jrimva. He fell heavily to the ground, making the Underworld re-echo with his fall.

Thus Vatsapri rescued Princess Mudâ-vati and won her for his wife. The Gods showered flowers upon the hero, and Earth and Heaven were glad at the death of the common foe.¹

XXVIII. THE COW OF PLENTY.

IN the far-away past there lived hard by the Sone in Upper India a warrior-Prince and hero of ancient story of the name of Vishvâ-mitra, son of King Gâdhi. He went about the world at the head of a chosen band of valiant men, after the fashion of the knights-errant of old.

In the course of his wanderings he once chanced to come to the hermitage of Vashishtha, high-priest to the powerful Vedic king, Sudâsa.

“Vashishtha is a great Sage,” said Vishvâ-mitra to himself. “Let me see how he can entertain this large army of mine.”

Chuckling to himself at the perplexity he hoped to create, he went before Vashishtha and did him obeisance.

“Thou art welcome to my humble hermitage with all thy retinue,” said Vashishtha to the Prince, guessing his thought.

“Nay,” replied Vishvâ-mitra, with feigned humility, “let me kiss thy holy feet, and depart with thy blessing. I dare not put thee to the trouble of entertaining such a large body of men.”

¹ The “Mârkanḍaya Purâna.”

“Set thy mind at ease about that,” said the great Vashishtha, with a smile.

He turned to his Cow of Plenty, called Sabalâ or Kâma-dhénu, which, as its name implies, had the miraculous power of furnishing its owner with whatever he desired, and said, “O Kâma-dhénu, entertain right royally this mighty Prince and his followers.”

No sooner said than done. The Prince with all his army was treated to delicacy after delicacy such as had never before delighted mortal tongue. Carried away by his covetousness, Vishvâ-mitra fell before Vashishtha and, clinging at his feet, besought him to give him the Cow of Plenty.

“Aught else but that, O Prince,” replied Vashishtha. “Without her I should be unable to entertain my guests and perform my sacrifices, duties indispensable to a Brâhmin. She is worth more than all the kine of the world put together. There is nothing that could recompense me for parting with her.”

Still the Prince prayed and cajoled, and cajoled and prayed by turns, but all in vain.

At last he lost his temper and said to Vashishtha, “The son of the King of the World begs on his knees for thy Cow, yet thou, proud Brâhmin, refusest to make him a gift of it. A Kshatrya never *begs* for a thing he has set his heart upon—he takes it by the strength of his right hand. Yet have I humbled myself on my knees for thy Cow, but without avail. Now I seize her by force, by right of conquest as becomes a Kshatrya.”

Without more ado he ordered his followers to carry away the Cow of Plenty; but before they could lay violent hands upon her she cried “Hâmbâ,” and lo!

a herd of horned cattle sprang suddenly into existence from the ground beneath her feet and, bellowing fiercely, attacked the warriors and gored every one of them to death.

The news of the humiliation of Vishvâ-mitra flew apace, and his hundred sons came to the rescue of their father. Vashishtha but looked upon them, and they all turned to ashes on the spot !

Thus baffled and humiliated by a mere Brâhmin, Vishvâ-mitra went into a wood and paid his devotions to Mahâdeva, until the God appeared before him and asked him to choose a boon. "If it be thy will, O God," said Vishvâ-mitra to the Deity of Destruction, "equip me with divine weapons against my enemy."

"So be it. Behold them," said Mahâdeva, and forthwith a number of weapons were placed in Vishvâ-mitra's grasp. Armed with these he quickly made his way to the hermitage of Vashishtha to wreak his vengeance on him. Arriving there he twanged his bow and discharged a shower of arrows of fire. The denizens of the wood were panic-stricken, and rushed hither and thither for shelter against the flames. The hermits fled to Vashishtha for protection, crying aloud, "The sacred wood is on fire ! Save us, save us from destruction, O mighty Sage."

"Fear not ! I will protect you," said the Sage to the panic-stricken hermits, and then, seizing his sacred staff, he exclaimed in a voice of thunder, "O wicked Vishvâ-mitra, thou hast set our grove of penance on fire. Thy sacrilege has earned thee punishment, and soon shalt thou meet with thy deserts."

"Let us see on whom the punishment falls," cried Vishvâ-mitra, at the same time loosing his arrow of

fire at Vashishtha, who caught it on his staff, where it broke into pieces. Vishvâ-mitra again discharged fresh arrows of fire and raised a conflagration, but Vashishtha put it out with a touch of his staff. Then the Sage hurled his staff at Vishvâ-mitra, his eyes darting forth living fire, while from his every pore issued a stream of flames.

Vishvâ-mitra cried out: "Call back thy weapon! Call back thy weapon! I confess myself vanquished. Virtue is mightier than Valour."

Having learnt his lesson, Vishvâ-mitra wished to win for himself the rank of a Brâhmin; so to this end he began to practise great austerities, hanging himself bat-like, head downwards.

The Gods were frightened lest he might aspire to the throne of Indra, so they brought Vashishtha to him and said: "Arise Vishvâ-mitra, for now thou art a Brahmarshi."

"If I am a Brahmarshi," replied Vishvâ-mitra, "let the mighty Sage Vashishtha, the head of the Brâhmins, acknowledge me so."

"Thou art indeed a Brahmarshi, as the Gods would have me say," declared Vashishtha, and Vishvâ-mitra became as great a Sage as Vashishtha himself. He is called "Vashishtha vâchâ Brahmarshi," that is a Brahmarshi by the acknowledgment of Vashistha.¹

¹ The "Râmâyana."

XXIX. THE INDIAN ST. GEORGE.

[*The mortal Demons often sought to be immortal, but in vain. In the Golden Age the famous Giant Hiranya-Kashipu asked Brahmâ for the boon of immortality, but he refused to grant it. Thereupon the Giant asked to be made invulnerable except to the weapons of Vishnu, seeking to gain immortality by this device. However, in the end he met his death at the hands of Vishnu himself. He had a son named Prahlâdh, a votary of Vishnu, and, enraged at the worship of his enemy, he asked Prahlâdh where Vishnu was. The son replied, "Vishnu is all-pervading, as his very name implies" (from "Vri," to pervade). "Is he in yonder pillar?" inquired his father. "Yes," said Prahlâdh, whereat his father struck at the pillar, and out of it sprang Vishnu, part lion and part man, and tore the Giant's body asunder.*

Râvana similarly tried to win from Brahmâ a qualified gift of immortality. "Make me, O Lord," said he, "invulnerable to the weapons of Gods, Yakshas, Rakshasas and Kinnaras." In his pride he disdained to include in the category of his possible enemies puny mortals. Yet it was by one of them, Râma, that he came to be slain.]

IN the days of long ago there dwelt in India a five-headed Giant of terrible aspect, ever at war with the Gods. On one occasion he challenged even Yama, God of Death, to combat, and swallowed him up, weapons and all, so capacious was his mouth; but Yama cleft open his body with his sword and leaped forth, unhurt.

The Giant fell groaning to the ground, and gave up the ghost, but was soon brought back to life by mighty Shukra, the Guru or high-priest of the Giants, by means of a magical incantation.

Having thus returned to life, he took to worshipping Mahâdeva, the God of Destruction; but nothing came of his devotion and austerity. In the end he lit

a huge fire in front of him, cut off one of his heads and flung it into the flames as a sacrifice. Still the God did not appear before him to offer him a boon. He cut off another head, and yet another, and even offered the fourth to the flames, and only one head now remained on his shoulders. This, too, the Giant raised his sword to cut off; when lo! the God suddenly appeared and caught hold of his uplifted hand, saying, "Refrain from this rash act, my votary. I am well pleased with thy devotion, and come to offer thee a boon."

"If it be thy will, O Lord, to offer me a boon," pleaded the Giant, with clasped hands, "then make me immortal."

"The Gods alone are immortal," said Mahâdeva, "how can I make thee like unto them?"

"If thou canst not make me immortal," returned the Giant, "then make me invulnerable to all missiles save a flaming lock of thine."

"So be it," said Mahâdeva, with a smile, and vanished.

Conscious of his new power, the Giant rose with a terrific roar and attacked the Gods. They fled in various directions, but not before he had caught some of them and put them into each of his five crater-like mouths, for his heads had been restored to him.

There was consternation among both Gods and mortals, and all eyes were now turned towards Bir-Vadra as the destined slayer of the Giant; for he had stepped forth into the world full-panoplied, like Minerva, from a lock of Mahâdeva's hair, resplendent as a flame of gold, what time the God was publicly reviled by the Patriarch Dakshya at a sacrifice. He it was, who, issuing forth as the material personification of divine wrath, avenged the affront to the

God by cutting off the head of his slanderer and replacing it with that of a bearded goat. To him, therefore, as symbolizing the flame-like lock of Mahâdeva, all looked for the destruction of the Giant, and an accident threw the latter in the way of the hero.

One day Bir-Vadra had gone to a sacred wood to visit some holy men, when he was horrified to behold the monster seizing monkeys with all his long arms and swallowing them whole, as before he had swallowed the Gods. As soon as the Giant saw Bir-Vadra and the holy men he rushed forward to seize them, for apparently the monkeys had not been sufficient to glut his enormous appetite. He stretched forth his ten hands, drew the fleeing holy men to him and put them one by one into his mouth.

Bir-Vadra stood still in consternation for a moment, then, realizing his danger, he seized a rock, many a league wide, and with it dashed in one of the heads of the Giant. But a new head sprang up in its place, and the Giant dashed up and seized Bir-Vadra with all his ten hands with the clutch of an octopus.

He did not pursue his advantage, however. "Nay!" he exclaimed, "I will not kill unarmed one who came to contend with me. Take a sword and face me in fight."

The chivalrous Giant lent Bir-Vadra a sword, and the duel began. With one sweep of his blade Bir-Vadra cut off two of the Giant's heads, but new ones sprang up instantly, and thus for three long years the fight went on.

At last Bir-Vadra succeeded in cutting off all the heads at one stroke, and the Giant fell lifeless to the ground. The shock of his fall well-nigh brought about an earthquake.

Bir-Vadra rushed up and ripped open his body, and lo! all the Gods and holy men he had swallowed issued forth unhurt.

Heaven and Earth rejoiced at the death of the Giant. "Thou hast rescued us, O Bir-Vadra," exclaimed the Gods and holy men as they emerged out of the body of the slain Giant. "We do not know how to reward thee."

"Wait yet a little. Haply we are not yet at the end of our perils," replied Bir-Vadra, offering to escort them safe to their homes.

No sooner had he spoken thus than a huge dragon came up, swiftly thrusting his forked tongue to and fro and hissing fiercely. The Gods and holy men were petrified with fear, and the dragon swallowed them up before Bir-Vadra could realize what had happened. Turning round, he saw the dragon's baleful eyes glaring upon him, and at that moment it rushed forward with mouth agape to swallow him also. But Bir-Vadra was too quick for it, and, evading the onrush, he grappled with the dragon. A fierce struggle ensued between the two, neither giving the other any chance for a mortal blow. However, at the end of the second year of the fight, Bir-Vadra writhed from within the monster's coils, put his foot upon its body and tore it asunder, by forcing apart with either hand its hideous jaws, and the Gods and holy men once more regained their liberty.

Such was the prowess of Bir-Vadra when, like St. George, he overthrew the dragon.¹

¹ The "Padma Purâna."

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