

**RICHARD
FRANCIS
BURTON**

VIKRAM AND THE
VAMPIRE

Richard Burton

Vikram and the Vampire

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Содержание

PREFACE	5
INTRODUCTION	9
IN WHICH A MAN DECEIVES A WOMAN	26
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	34

Sir Richard Francis Burton Vikram and the Vampire / or Tales of Hindu Devilry

PREFACE

‘The genius of Eastern nations,’ says an established and respectable authority, ‘was, from the earliest times, much turned towards invention and the love of fiction. The Indians, the Persians, and the Arabians, were all famous for their fables. Amongst the ancient Greeks we hear of the Ionian and Milesian tales, but they have now perished, and, from every account that we hear of them, appear to have been loose and indelicate.’ Similarly, the classical dictionaries define ‘Milesiæ fabulæ’ to be ‘licentious themes,’ ‘stories of an amatory or mirthful nature,’ or ‘ludicrous and indecent plays.’ M. Deriége seems indeed to confound them with the ‘Mœurs du Temps’ illustrated with artistic *gouaches*, when he says, ‘une de ces fables milésiennes, rehaussées de peintures, que la corruption romaine recherchait alors avec une folle ardeur.’

My friend, Mr. Richard Charnock, F.A.S.L., more correctly defines Milesian fables to have been originally ‘certain tales or novels, composed by Aristides of Miletus;’ gay in matter and graceful in manner. ‘They were translated into Latin by the historian Sisenna, the friend of Atticus, and they had a great success at Rome. Plutarch, in his life of Crassus, tells us that after the defeat of Carhes (Carrhæ?) some Milesiacs were found in the baggage of the Roman prisoners. The Greek text and the Latin translation have long been lost. The only surviving fable is the tale of Cupid and Psyche,¹ which Apuleius calls “Milesius sermo,” and it makes us deeply regret the disappearance of the others.’ Besides this there are the remains of Apollodorus and Conon, and a few traces to be found in Pausanias, Athenæus, and the scholiasts.

I do not, therefore, agree with Blair, with the dictionaries, or with M. Deriége. Miletus, the great maritime city of Asiatic Ionia, was of old the meeting place of the East and the West. Here the Phœnician trader from the Baltic would meet the Hindu wandering to Intra, from Extra, Gangem; and the Hyperborean would step on shore side by side with the Nubian and the Æthiop. Here was produced and published for the use of the then civilised world, the genuine Oriental apologue, myth and tale combined, which, by amusing narrative and romantic adventure, insinuates a lesson in morals or in humanity, of which we often in our days must fail to perceive the drift. The book of Apuleius, before quoted, is subject to as many discoveries of recondite meaning as Rabelais. As regards the licentiousness of the Milesian fables, this sign of semi-civilisation is still inherent in most Eastern books of the description which we call ‘light literature,’ and the ancestral tale-teller never collects a larger purse of coppers than when he relates the worst of his ‘aurei.’ But this looseness, resulting from the separation of the sexes, is accidental, not necessary. The following collection will show that it can be dispensed with, and that there is such a thing as comparative purity in Hindu literature. The author, indeed, almost always takes the trouble to marry his hero and his heroine, and if he cannot find a priest, he generally adopts an exceedingly left-hand and Caledonian but legal rite called ‘gandharbavivaha.’²

The work of Apuleius, as ample internal evidence shows, is borrowed from the East. The groundwork of the tale is the metamorphosis of Lucius of Corinth into an ass, and the strange accidents which precede his recovering the human form.

¹ *Metamorphoseon, seu de Asino Aureo, libri XI*. The well known and beautiful episode is in the fourth, the fifth, and the sixth books.

² This ceremony will be explained in a future page.

Another old Hindu story-book relates, in the popular fairy-book style, the wondrous adventures of the hero and demigod, the great Gandharba-Sena. That son of Indra, who was also the father of Vikramajit, the subject of this and another collection, offended the ruler of the firmament by his fondness for a certain nymph, and was doomed to wander over earth under the form of a donkey. Through the interposition of the gods, however, he was permitted to become a man during the hours of darkness, thus comparing with the English legend —

Amundeville is lord by day,
But the monk is lord by night.

Whilst labouring under this curse, Gandharba-Sena persuaded the King of Dhara to give him a daughter in marriage, but it unfortunately so happened that at the wedding hour he was unable to show himself in any but asinine shape. After bathing, however, he proceeded to the assembly, and, hearing songs and music, he resolved to give them a specimen of his voice.

The guests were filled with sorrow that so beautiful a virgin should be married to a donkey. They were afraid to express their feelings to the king, but they could not refrain from smiling, covering their mouths with their garments. At length some one interrupted the general silence and said:

‘O king, is this the son of Indra? You have found a fine bridegroom; you are indeed happy; don’t delay the marriage; delay is improper in doing good; we never saw so glorious a wedding! It is true that we once heard of a camel being married to a jenny-ass; when the ass, looking up to the camel, said, “Bless me, what a bridegroom!” and the camel, hearing the voice of the ass, exclaimed, “Bless me, what a musical voice!” In that wedding, however, the bride and the bridegroom were equal; but in this marriage, that such a bride should have such a bridegroom is truly wonderful.’

Other Brahmans then present said:

‘O king, at the marriage hour, in sign of joy the sacred shell is blown, but thou hast no need of that’ (alluding to the donkey’s braying).

The women all cried out:

‘O my mother!³ what is this? at the time of marriage to have an ass! What a miserable thing! What! will he give that angelic girl in wedlock to a donkey?’

At length Gandharba-Sena, addressing the king in Sanskrit, urged him to perform his promise. He reminded his future father-in-law that there is no act more meritorious than speaking truth; that the mortal frame is a mere dress, and that wise men never estimate the value of a person by his clothes. He added that he was in that shape from the curse of his sire, and that during the night he had the body of a man. Of his being the son of Indra there could be no doubt.

Hearing the donkey thus speak Sanskrit, for it was never known that an ass could discourse in that classical tongue, the minds of the people were changed, and they confessed that, although he had an asinine form, he was unquestionably the son of Indra. The king, therefore, gave him his daughter in marriage.⁴ The metamorphosis brings with it many misfortunes and strange occurrences, and it lasts till Fate in the author’s hand restores the hero to his former shape and honours.

Gandharba-Sena is a quasi-historical personage, who lived in the century preceding the Christian era. The story had, therefore, ample time to reach the ears of the learned African Apuleius, who was born A.D. 130.

The *Baital-Pachisi*, or *Twenty-five* (tales of a) *Baital*⁵— a Vampire or evil spirit which animates dead bodies — is an old and thoroughly Hindu repertory. It is the rude beginning of that fictitious history which ripened to the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, and which, fostered by the genius of

³ A common exclamation of sorrow, surprise, fear, and other emotions. It is especially used by women.

⁴ Quoted from *View of the Hindoos*, by William Ward, of Serampore (vol. i. p. 25).

⁵ In Sanskrit, *Vétála-pancha-Vinshatí*. ‘Baital’ is the modern form of ‘Vétála.’

Boccaccio, produced the romance of the chivalrous days, and its last development, the novel – that prose-epic of modern Europe.

Composed in Sanskrit, ‘the language of the gods,’ alias the Latin of India, it has been translated into all the Prakrit or vernacular and modern dialects of the great peninsula. The reason why it has not found favour with the Moslems is doubtless the highly polytheistic spirit which pervades it; moreover, the Faithful had already a specimen of that style of composition. This was the *Hitopadesa*, or *Advice of a Friend*, which, as a line in its introduction informs us, was borrowed from an older book, the *Panchatantra*, or *Five Chapters*. It is a collection of apologues recited by a learned Brahman, Vishnu Sharma by name, for the edification of his pupils, the sons of an Indian Raja. They have been adapted to or translated into a number of languages, notably into Pehlvi and Persian, Syriac and Turkish, Greek and Latin, Hebrew and Arabic. And as the *Fables of Pilpay*,⁶ they are generally known, by name at least, to European litterateurs. Voltaire remarks,⁷ ‘Quand on fait réflexion que presque toute la terre a été infatuée de pareils contes, et qu’ils ont fait l’éducation du genre humain, on trouve les fables de Pilpay, Lokman, d’Ésope bien raisonnables.’

These tales, detached, but strung together by artificial means – pearls with a thread drawn through them – are manifest precursors of the *Decamerone*, or *Ten Days*. A modern Italian critic describes the now classical fiction as a collection of one hundred of those novels which Boccaccio is believed to have read out at the court of Queen Joanna of Naples, and which later in life were by him assorted together by a most simple and ingenious contrivance. But the great Florentine invented neither his stories nor his ‘plot,’ if we may so call it. He wrote in the middle of the fourteenth century (1344-8) when the West had borrowed many things from the East, rhymes⁸ and romance, lutes and drums, alchemy and knight-errantry. Many of the ‘Novelle’ are, as Orientalists well know, to this day sung and recited almost textually by the wandering tale-tellers, bards, and rhapsodists of Persia and Central Asia.

The great kshatriya (soldier) king Vikramaditya,⁹ or Vikramarka, meaning the ‘Sun of Heroism,’ plays in India the part of King Arthur, and of Harun El Rashid further West. He is a semi-historical personage. The son of Gandharba-Sena the donkey and the daughter of the King of Dhara, he was promised by his father the strength of a thousand male elephants. When his sire died, his grandfather, the deity Indra, resolved that the babe should not be born, upon which his mother stabbed herself. But the tragic event duly happening during the ninth month, Vikram came into the world by himself, and was carried to Indra, who pitied and adopted him, and gave him a good education.

The circumstances of his accession to the throne, as will presently appear, are differently told. Once, however, made King of Malaya, the modern Malwa, a province of Western Upper India, he so distinguished himself that the Hindu fabulists, with their usual brave kind of speaking, have made him ‘bring the whole earth under the shadow of one umbrella.’

The last ruler of the race of Mayúra, which reigned 318 years, was Rája-pál. He reigned 25 years, but giving himself up to effeminacy, his country was invaded by Shakáditya, a king from the highlands of Kumaon. Vikramaditya, in the fourteenth year of his reign, pretended to espouse the cause of Rája-pál, attacked and destroyed Shakáditya, and ascended the throne of Delhi. His capital was Avanti, or Ujjayani, the modern Ujjain. It was 13 kos (26 miles) long by 18 miles wide, an area of 468 square miles, but a trifle in Indian history. He obtained the title of Shakári, ‘foe of the Shakas,’ the Sacæ or Scythians, by his victories over that redoubtable race. In the Kali Yuga, or Iron Age, he stands highest amongst the Hindu kings as the patron of learning. Nine persons under his patronage,

⁶ In Arabic, *Bidpai el Hakim*.

⁷ *Dictionnaire philosophique*, sub v. ‘Apocryphes.’

⁸ I do not mean that rhymes were not known before the days of El Islam, but that the Arabs popularised assonance and consonance in Southern Europe.

⁹ ‘Vikrama’ means ‘valour’ or ‘prowess.’

popularly known as the 'Nine Gems of Science,' hold in India the honourable position of the Seven Wise Men of Greece.

These learned persons wrote works in the eighteen original dialects from which, say the Hindus, all the languages of the earth have been derived.¹⁰ Dhanwantari enlightened the world upon the subjects of medicine and incantations. Kshapanaka treated the primary elements. Amara-Singha compiled a Sanskrit dictionary and a philosophical treatise. Shankubetálabhatta composed comments and Ghatakarpara, a poetical work of no great merit. The books of Mihira are not mentioned. Varáha produced two works on astrology and one on arithmetic. And Bararúchí introduced certain improvements in grammar, commented upon the incantations, and wrote a poem in praise of King Mádhava.

But the most celebrated of all the patronised ones was Kalidása. His two dramas, Sakuntala,¹¹ and Vikram and Urvasi,¹² have descended to our day; besides which he produced a poem on the seasons, a work on astronomy, a poetical history of the gods, and many other books.¹³

Vikramaditya established the Sambat era, dating from A.C. 56. After a long, happy, and glorious reign, he lost his life in a war with Shalivahana, King of Pratisthana. That monarch also left behind him an era called the 'Shaka,' beginning with A.D. 78. It is employed, even now, by the Hindus in recording their births, marriages, and similar occasions.

King Vikramaditya was succeeded by his infant son Vikrama-Sena, and father and son reigned over a period of 93 years. At last the latter was supplanted by a devotee named Samudra-pála, who entered into his body by miraculous means. The usurper reigned 24 years and 2 months, and the throne of Delhi continued in the hands of his sixteen successors, who reigned 641 years and three months. Vikrama-pála, the last, was slain in battle by Tilaka-chandra, King of Vaharannah.¹⁴

It is not pretended that the words of these Hindu tales are preserved to the letter. The question about the metamorphosis of cats into tigers, for instance, proceeded from a Gem of Learning in a university much nearer home than Gaur. Similarly the learned and still living Mgr. Gaume (*Traité du Saint-Esprit*, p. 81) joins Camerarius in the belief that serpents bite women rather than men. And he quotes (p. 192) Cornelius à Lapide, who informs us that the leopard is the produce of a lioness with a hyæna or a pard.

The merit of the old stories lies in their suggestiveness and their general applicability. I have ventured to remedy the conciseness of their language, and to clothe the skeleton with flesh and blood.

¹⁰ Mr. Ward of Serampore is unable to quote the names of more than nine out of the eighteen, namely: Sanskrit, Prakrit, Naga, Paisacha, Gandharba, Rakshasa, Ardhamágadi, Apa, and Guhyaka – most of them being the languages of different orders of fabulous beings. He tells us, however, that an account of these dialects may be found in the work called *Pingala*.

¹¹ Translated by Sir Wm. Jones, 1789; and by Professor Williams, 1856.

¹² Translated by Professor H. H. Wilson.

¹³ The time was propitious to savans. Whilst Vikramaditya lived, Mágha, another king, caused to be written a poem called after his name. For each verse he is said to have paid to learned men a gold piece, which amounted to a total of 5,280*l.* – a large sum in those days, which preceded those of *Paradise Lost*. About the same period, Karnáta, a third king, was famed for patronising the learned men who rose to honour at Vikram's court. Dhavaka, a poet of nearly the same period, received from King Shriharsha the magnificent present of 10,000*l.* for a poem called the *Rama-Malá*.

¹⁴ Lieut. Wilford supports the theory that there were eight Vikramadityas, the last of whom established the era. For further particulars, the curious reader will consult Lassen's *Anthologia*, and Professor H. H. Wilson's *Essay on Vikram*, (New) As. Res. ix. 117.

INTRODUCTION

The sage Bhavabhuti – Eastern teller of these tales – after making his initiatory and propitiatory congé to Ganesha, Lord of Incepts, informs the reader that this book is a string of fine pearls to be hung round the neck of human intelligence; a fragrant flower to be borne on the turban of mental wisdom; a jewel of pure gold, which becomes the brow of all supreme minds; and a handful of powdered rubies, whose tonic effects will appear palpably upon the mental digestion of every patient. Finally, that by aid of the lessons inculcated in the following pages, man will pass happily through this world into the state of absorption, where fables will be no longer required.

He then teaches us how Vikramaditya the Brave became King of Ujjayani.

Some nineteen centuries ago, the renowned city of Ujjayani witnessed the birth of a prince to whom was given the gigantic name Vikramaditya. Even the Sanskrit-speaking people, who are not usually pressed for time, shortened it to ‘Vikram,’ and a little further West it would infallibly have been docked down to ‘Vik.’

Vikram was the second son of an old king Gandharba-Sena, concerning whom little favourable has reached posterity, except that he became an ass, married four queens, and had by them six sons, each of whom was more learned and powerful than the other. It so happened that in course of time the father died. Thereupon his eldest heir, who was known as Shank, succeeded to the carpet of Rajaship, and was instantly murdered by Vikram, his ‘scorpion,’ the hero of the following pages.¹⁵

By this act of vigour and manly decision, which all younger-brother princes should devoutly imitate, Vikram having obtained the title of Bir, or the Brave, made himself Raja. He began to rule well, and the gods so favoured him that day by day his dominions increased. At length he became lord of all India, and having firmly established his government, he instituted an era – an uncommon feat for a mere monarch, especially when hereditary.

The steps,¹⁶ says the historian, which he took to arrive at that pinnacle of grandeur, were these:

The old King calling his two grandsons Bhartari-hari and Vikramaditya, gave them good counsel respecting their future learning. They were told to master everything, a certain way not to succeed in anything. They were diligently to learn grammar, the scriptures, and all the religious sciences. They were to become familiar with military tactics, international law, and music, the riding of horses and elephants – especially the latter – the driving of chariots, and the use of the broadsword, the bow, and the mogdars or Indian clubs. They were ordered to be skilful in all kinds of games, in leaping and running, in besieging forts, in forming and breaking bodies of troops; they were to endeavour to excel in every princely quality, to be cunning in ascertaining the power of an enemy, how to make war, to perform journeys, to sit in the presence of the nobles, to separate the different sides of a question, to form alliances, to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty, to assign proper punishments to the wicked, to exercise authority with perfect justice, and to be liberal. The boys were then sent to school, and were placed under the care of excellent teachers, where they became truly famous. Whilst under pupilage, the eldest was allowed all the power necessary to obtain a knowledge of royal affairs, and he was not invested with the regal office till in these preparatory steps he had given full satisfaction to his subjects, who expressed high approval of his conduct.

¹⁵ History tells us another tale. The god Indra and the King of Dhara gave the kingdom to Bhartari-hari, another son of Gandharba-Sena, by a handmaiden. For some time, the brothers lived together; but presently they quarrelled. Vikram being dismissed from court, wandered from place to place in abject poverty, and at one time hired himself as a servant to a merchant living in Guzerat. At length, Bhartari-hari, disgusted with the world on account of the infidelity of his wife, to whom he was ardently attached, became a religious devotee, and left the kingdom to its fate. In the course of his travels, Vikram came to Ujjayani, and finding it without a head, assumed the sovereignty. He reigned with great splendour, conquering by his arms Utkala, Vanga, Kuch-behar, Guzerat, Somnat, Delhi, and other places; until, in his turn, he was conquered and slain by Shalivaban.

¹⁶ The words are found, says Mr. Ward, in the *Hindu History* compiled by Mrityungaya.

The two brothers often conversed on the duties of kings, when the great Vikramaditya gave the great Bhartari-hari the following valuable advice:¹⁷

‘As Indra, during the four rainy months, fills the earth with water, so a king should replenish his treasury with money. As Surya the sun, in warming the earth eight months, does not scorch it, so a king, in drawing revenues from his people, ought not to oppress them. As Vayu, the wind, surrounds and fills everything, so the king by his officers and spies should become acquainted with the affairs and circumstances of his whole people. As Yama judges men without partiality or prejudice, and punishes the guilty, so should a king chastise, without favour, all offenders. As Varuna, the regent of water, binds with his pasha or divine noose his enemies, so let a king bind every malefactor safely in prison. As Chandra,¹⁸ the moon, by his cheering light gives pleasure to all, thus should a king, by gifts and generosity, make his people happy. And as Prithwi, the earth, sustains all alike, so should a king feel an equal affection and forbearance towards every one.’

Become a monarch, Vikram meditated deeply upon what is said of monarchs: – ‘A king is fire and air; he is both sun and moon; he is the god of criminal justice; he is the genius of wealth; he is the regent of water; he is the lord of the firmament; he is a powerful divinity who appears in human shape.’ He reflected with some satisfaction that the scriptures had made him absolute, had left the lives and properties of all his subjects to his arbitrary will, had pronounced him to be an incarnate deity, and had threatened to punish with death even ideas derogatory to his honour.

He punctually observed all the ordinances laid down by the author of the *Niti*, or institutes of government. His night and day were divided into sixteen pahars or portions, each one hour and a half, and they were disposed of as follows:

Before dawn Vikram was awakened by a servant appointed to this special duty. He swallowed – a thing allowed only to a *khshatriya* or warrior – a Mithridatic every morning on the saliva,¹⁹ and he made the cooks taste every dish before he ate of it. As soon as he had risen, the pages in waiting repeated his splendid qualities, and as he left his sleeping-room in full dress, several Brahmans rehearsed the praises of the gods. Presently he bathed, worshipped his guardian deity, again heard hymns, drank a little water, and saw alms distributed to the poor. He ended this watch by auditing his accounts.

Next, entering his court, he placed himself amidst the assembly. He was always armed when he received strangers, and he caused even women to be searched for concealed weapons. He was surrounded by so many spies and so artful, that, of a thousand, no two ever told the same tale. At the *levée*, on his right sat his relations, the Brahmans, and men of distinguished birth. The other castes were on the left, and close to him stood the ministers and those whom he delighted to consult. Afar in front gathered the bards chanting the praises of the gods and of the king; also the charioteers, elephanteers, horsemen, and soldiers of valour. Amongst the learned men in those assemblies there were ever some who were well instructed in all the scriptures, and others who had studied in one particular school of philosophy, and were acquainted only with the works on divine wisdom, or with those on justice, civil and criminal, on the arts, mineralogy or the practice of physic; also persons cunning in all kinds of customs; riding masters, dancing-masters, teachers of good behaviour, examiners, tasters, mimics, mountebanks, and others, who all attended the court and awaited the king’s commands. He here pronounced judgment in suits of appeal. His poets wrote about him:

The lord of lone splendour an instant suspends

¹⁷ These duties of kings are thus laid down in the *Rajatarangini*. It is evident, as Professor H. H. Wilson says, that the royal status was by no means a sinecure. But the rules are evidently the closet work of some pedantic, dogmatic Brahman, teaching kingcraft to kings. He directs his instructions, not to subordinate judges, but to the Raja as the chief magistrate, and through him to all appointed for the administration of his justice.

¹⁸ Lunus, not Luna.

¹⁹ That is to say, ‘upon an empty stomach.’

His course at mid-noon, ere he westward descends;
And brief are the moments our young monarch knows,
Devoted to pleasure or paid to repose!

Before the second sandhya,²⁰ or noon, about the beginning of the third watch, he recited the names of the gods, bathed, and broke his fast in his private room; then rising from food, he was amused by singers and dancing girls. The labours of the day now became lighter. After eating he retired, repeating the name of his guardian deity, visited the temples, saluted the gods, conversed with the priests, and proceeded to receive and to distribute presents. Fifthly, he discussed political questions with his ministers and councillors.

On the announcement of the herald that it was the sixth watch – about 2 or 3 P.M. – Vikram allowed himself to follow his own inclinations, to regulate his family, and to transact business of a private and personal nature.

After gaining strength by rest, he proceeded to review his troops, examining the men, saluting the officers, and holding military councils. At sunset he bathed a third time and performed the five sacraments of listening to a prelection of the Veda; making oblations to the manes; sacrificing to Fire in honour of the deities; giving rice to dumb creatures; and receiving guests with due ceremonies. He spent the evening amidst a select company of wise, learned, and pious men, conversing on different subjects, and reviewing the business of the day.

The night was distributed with equal care. During the first portion Vikram received the reports which his spies and envoys, dressed in every disguise, brought to him about his enemies. Against the latter he ceased not to use the five arts, namely – dividing the kingdom, bribes, mischief-making, negotiations, and brute-force – especially preferring the two first and the last. His forethought and prudence taught him to regard all his nearest neighbours and their allies as hostile. The powers beyond those natural enemies he considered friendly because they were the foes of his foes. And all the remoter nations he looked upon as neutrals, in a transitional or provisional state as it were, till they became either his neighbours' neighbours, or his own neighbours, that is to say, his friends or his foes.

This important duty finished he supped, and at the end of the third watch he retired to sleep, which was not allowed to last beyond three hours. In the sixth watch he arose and purified himself. The seventh was devoted to holding private consultations with his ministers, and to furnishing the officers of government with requisite instructions. The eighth or last watch was spent with the Purohita or priest, and with Brahmans, hailing the dawn with its appropriate rites; he then bathed, made the customary offerings, and prayed in some unfrequented place near pure water.

And throughout these occupations he bore in mind the duty of kings, namely – to pursue every object till it be accomplished; to succour all dependants, and hospitably to receive guests, however numerous. He was generous to his subjects respecting taxes, and kind of speech; yet he was inexorable as death in the punishment of offences. He rarely hunted, and he visited his pleasure gardens only on stated days. He acted in his own dominions with justice; he chastised foreign foes with rigour; he behaved generously to Brahmans, and he avoided favouritism amongst his friends. In war he never slew a suppliant, a spectator, a person asleep or undressed, or anyone that showed fear. Whatever country he conquered, offerings were presented to its gods, and effects and money were given to the reverends. But what benefited him most was his attention to the creature comforts of the Nine Gems of Science: those eminent men ate and drank themselves into fits of enthusiasm, and ended by immortalising their patron's name.

Become Vikram the Great he established his court at a delightful and beautiful location rich in the best of water. The country was difficult of access, and artificially made incapable of supporting a host of invaders, but four great roads met near the city. The capital was surrounded with durable

²⁰ There are three sandhyas amongst the Hindus – morning, midday, and sunset; and all three are times for prayer.

ramparts, having gates of defence, and near it was a mountain fortress, under the especial charge of a great captain.

The metropolis was well garrisoned and provisioned, and it surrounded the royal palace, a noble building without as well as within. Grandeur seemed embodied there, and Prosperity had made it her own. The nearer ground, viewed from the terraces and pleasure pavilions, was a lovely mingling of rock and mountain, plain and valley, field and fallow, crystal lake and glittering stream. The banks of the winding Lavana were fringed with meads whose herbage, pearly with morning dew, afforded choicest grazing for the sacred cow, and were dotted with perfumed clumps of Bo-trees, tamarinds, and holy figs: in one place Vikram planted 100,000 in a single orchard and gave them to his spiritual advisers. The river valley separated the stream from a belt of forest growth which extended to a hill range, dark with impervious jungle, and cleared here and there for the cultivator's village. Behind it, rose another subrange, wooded with a lower bush and already blue with air, whilst in the background towered range upon range, here rising abruptly into points and peaks, there ramp-shaped or wall-formed, with sheer descents, and all of light azure hue adorned with glories of silver and gold.

After reigning for some years, Vikram the Brave found himself, at the age of thirty, a staid and sober middle-aged man. He had several sons – daughters are naught in India – by his several wives, and he had some paternal affection for nearly all – except, of course, for his eldest son, a youth who seemed to conduct himself as though he had a claim to the succession. In fact, the king seemed to have taken up his abode for life at Ujjayani, when suddenly he bethought himself, 'I must visit those countries of whose names I am ever hearing.' The fact is, he had determined to spy out in disguise the lands of all his foes, and to find the best means of bringing against them his formidable army.

* * * * *

We now learn how Bhartari Raja becomes Regent of Ujjayani.

Having thus resolved, Vikram the Brave gave the government into the charge of a younger brother, Bhartari Raja, and in the garb of a religious mendicant, accompanied by Dharma Dhvaj, his second son, a youth bordering on the age of puberty, he began to travel from city to city, and from forest to forest.

The Regent was of a settled melancholic turn of mind, having lost in early youth a very peculiar wife. One day, whilst out hunting, he happened to pass a funeral pyre, upon which a Brahman's widow had just become Sati (a holy woman) with the greatest fortitude. On his return home he related the adventure to Sita Rani, his spouse, and she at once made reply that virtuous women die with their husbands, killed by the fire of grief, not by the flames of the pile. To prove her truth the prince, after an affectionate farewell, rode forth to the chase, and presently sent back the suite with his robes torn and stained, to report his accidental death. Sita perished upon the spot, and the widower remained inconsolable – for a time.

He led the dullest of lives, and took to himself sundry spouses, all equally distinguished for birth, beauty, and modesty. Like his brother, he performed all the proper devoirs of a Raja, rising before the day to finish his ablutions, to worship the gods, and to do due obeisance to the Brahmans. He then ascended the throne, to judge his people according to the Shastra, carefully keeping in subjection lust, anger, avarice, folly, drunkenness, and pride; preserving himself from being seduced by the love of gaming and of the chase; restraining his desire for dancing, singing, and playing on musical instruments, and refraining from sleep during daytime, from wine, from molesting men of worth, from dice, from putting human beings to death by artful means, from useless travelling, and from holding any one guilty without the commission of a crime. His levées were in a hall decently splendid, and he was distinguished only by an umbrella of peacock's feathers; he received all complainants, petitioners, and presenters of offences with kind looks and soft words. He united to himself the seven or eight wise councillors, and the sober and virtuous secretary that formed the high cabinet of his

royal brother, and they met in some secret lonely spot, as a mountain, a terrace, a bower or a forest, whence women, parrots, and other talkative birds were carefully excluded.

And at the end of this useful and somewhat laborious day, he retired to his private apartments, and, after listening to spiritual songs and to soft music, he fell asleep. Sometimes he would summon his brother's 'Nine Gems of Science,' and give ear to their learned discourses. But it was observed that the viceroy reserved this exercise for nights when he was troubled with insomnia – the words of wisdom being to him an infallible remedy for that disorder.

Thus passed onwards his youth, doing nothing that it could desire, forbidden all pleasures because they were unprincipally, and working in the palace harder than in the pauper's hut. Having, however, fortunately for himself, few predilections and no imagination, he began to pride himself upon being a philosopher. Much business from an early age had dulled his wits, which were never of the most brilliant; and in the steadily increasing torpidity of his spirit, he traced the germs of that quietude which forms the highest happiness of man in this storm of matter called the world. He therefore allowed himself but one friend of his soul. He retained, I have said, his brother's seven or eight ministers; he was constant in attendance upon the Brahman priests who officiated at the palace, and who kept the impious from touching sacred property; and he was courteous to the commander-in-chief who directed his warriors, to the officers of justice who inflicted punishment upon offenders, and to the lords of towns, varying in number from one to a thousand. But he placed an intimate of his own in the high position of confidential councillor, the ambassador to regulate war and peace.

Mahi-pala was a person of noble birth, endowed with shining abilities, popular, dexterous in business, acquainted with foreign parts, famed for eloquence and intrepidity, and as Menu the Lawgiver advises, remarkably handsome.

Bhartari Raja, as I have said, became a quietist and a philosopher. But Kama,²¹ the bright god who exerts his sway over the three worlds, heaven and earth and grewsome Hades,²² had marked out the prince once more as the victim of his blossom-tipped shafts and his flowery bow. How, indeed, could he hope to escape the doom which has fallen equally upon Bramha the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and dreadful Shiva the Three-eyed Destroyer?²³

By reason of her exceeding beauty, her face was a full moon shining in the clearest sky; her hair was the purple cloud of autumn when, gravid with rain, it hangs low over earth; and her complexion mocked the pale waxen hue of the large-flowered jasmine. Her eyes were those of the timid antelope; her lips were red as those of the pomegranate's bud, and when they opened, from them distilled a fountain of ambrosia. Her neck was like a pigeon's; her hand the pink lining of the conch-shell; her waist a leopard's; her feet the softest lotuses. In a word, a model of grace and loveliness was Dangalah Rani, Raja Bhartari's last and youngest wife.

The warrior laid down his arms before her; the politician spoke out every secret in her presence. The religious prince would have slaughtered a cow – that sole unforgivable sin – to save one of her eyelashes: the absolute king would not drink a cup of water without her permission; the staid philosopher, the sober quietist, to win from her the shadow of a smile, would have danced before her like a singing-girl. So desperately enamoured became Bhartari Raja.

It is written, however, that love, alas! breeds not love; and so it happened to the Regent. The warmth of his affection, instead of animating his wife, annoyed her; his protestations wearied her; his vows gave her the headache; and his caresses were a colic that made her blood run cold. Of course, the prince perceived nothing, being lost in wonder and admiration of the beauty's coyness and coquetry. And as women must give away their hearts, whether asked or not, so the lovely Dangalah Rani lost no time in lavishing all the passion of her idle soul upon Mahi-pala, the handsome ambassador of peace

²¹ The Hindu Cupid.

²² Patala, the regions beneath the earth.

²³ The Hindu Triad.

and war. By this means the three were happy and were contented; their felicity, however, being built on a rotten foundation, could not long endure. It soon ended in the following extraordinary way.

In the city of Ujjayani,²⁴ within sight of the palace, dwelt a Brahman and his wife, who, being old and poor, and having nothing else to do, had applied themselves to the practice of austere devotion.²⁵ They fasted and refrained from drink, they stood on their heads, and they held their arms for weeks in the air; they prayed till their knees were like pads; they disciplined themselves with scourges of wire; and they walked about unclad in the cold season, and in summer they sat within a circle of flaming wood, till they became the envy and admiration of all the plebeian gods that inhabit the lower heavens. In fine, as a reward for their exceeding piety, the venerable pair received at the hands of a celestial messenger an apple of the tree Kalpavriksha – a fruit which has the virtue of conferring eternal life upon him that tastes it.

Scarcely had the god disappeared, when the Brahman, opening his toothless mouth, prepared to eat the fruit of immortality. Then his wife addressed him in these words, shedding copious tears the while:

‘To die, O man, is a passing pain; to be poor is an interminable anguish. Surely our present lot is the penalty of some great crime committed by us in a past state of being.²⁶ Callest thou this state life? Better we die at once, and so escape the woes of the world!’

Hearing these words, the Brahman sat undecided, with open jaws and eyes fixed upon the apple. Presently he found tongue: ‘I have accepted the fruit, and have brought it here; but having heard thy speech, my intellect hath wasted away; now I will do whatever thou pointest out.’

The wife resumed her discourse, which had been interrupted by a more than usually copious flow of tears. ‘Moreover, O husband, we are old, and what are the enjoyments of the stricken in years? Truly quoth the poet —

Die loved in youth, not hated in age.

If that fruit could have restored thy dimmed eyes, and deaf ears, and blunted taste, and warmth of love, I had not spoken to thee thus.’

After which the Brahman threw away the apple, to the great joy of his wife, who felt a natural indignation at the prospect of seeing her goodman become immortal, whilst she still remained subject to the laws of death; but she concealed this motive in the depths of her thought, enlarging, as women are apt to do, upon everything but the truth. And she spoke with such success, that the priest was about to toss in his rage the heavenly fruit into the fire, reproaching the gods as if by sending it they had done him an injury. Then the wife snatched it out of his hand, and telling him that it was too precious to be wasted, bade him arise and gird his loins and wend him to the Regent’s palace, and offer him the fruit – as King Vikram was absent – with a right reverend brahmanical benediction. She concluded with impressing upon her unworldly husband the necessity of requiring a large sum of money as a return for his inestimable gift. ‘By this means,’ she said, ‘thou mayst promote thy present and future welfare.’²⁷

Then the Brahman went forth, and standing in the presence of the Raja, told him all things touching the fruit, concluding with, ‘O, mighty prince! vouchsafe to accept this tribute, and bestow wealth upon me. I shall be happy in your living long!’

²⁴ Or Avanti, also called Padmavati. It is the first meridian of the Hindus, who found their longitude by observation of lunar eclipses, calculated for it and Lanka, or Ceylon. The clepsydra was used for taking time.

²⁵ In the original only the husband ‘practised austere devotion.’ For the benefit of those amongst whom the ‘pious wife’ is an institution, I have extended the privilege.

²⁶ A Moslem would say, ‘This is our fate.’ A Hindu refers at once to metempsychosis, as naturally as a modern Swedenborgian to spiritism.

²⁷ In Europe, money buys this world, and delivers you from the pains of purgatory; amongst the Hindus, it furthermore opens the gate of heaven.

Bhartari Raja led the supplicant into an inner strong-room, where stood heaps of the finest gold-dust, and bade him carry away all that he could; this the priest did, not forgetting to fill even his eloquent and toothless mouth with the precious metal. Having dismissed the devotee groaning under the burden, the Regent entered the apartments of his wives, and, having summoned the beautiful Queen Dangalah Rani, gave her the fruit, and said, 'Eat this, light of my eyes! This fruit – joy of my heart! – will make thee everlastingly young and beautiful.'

The pretty queen, placing both hands upon her husband's bosom, kissed his eyes and lips, and sweetly smiling on his face – for great is the guile of women – whispered, 'Eat it thyself, dear one, or at least share it with me; for what is life and what is youth without the presence of those we love?' But the Raja, whose heart was melted by these unusual words, put her away tenderly, and, having explained that the fruit would serve for only one person, departed.

Whereupon the pretty queen, sweetly smiling as before, slipped the precious present into her pocket. When the Regent was transacting business in the hall of audience she sent for the ambassador who regulated war and peace, and presented him with the apple in a manner at least as tender as that with which it had been offered to her.

Then the ambassador, after slipping the fruit into his pocket also, retired from the presence of the pretty queen, and meeting Lakha, one of the maids of honour, explained to her its wonderful power, and gave it to her as a token of his love. But the maid of honour, being an ambitious girl, determined that the fruit was a fit present to set before the Regent in the absence of the King. Bhartari Raja accepted it, bestowed on her great wealth, and dismissed her with many thanks.

He then took up the apple and looked at it with eyes brimful of tears, for he knew the whole extent of his misfortune. His heart ached, he felt a loathing for the world, and he said with sighs and groans:²⁸

'Of what value are these delusions of wealth and affection, whose sweetness endures for a moment and becomes eternal bitterness? Love is like the drunkard's cup: delicious is the first drink, palling are the draughts that succeed it, and most distasteful are the dregs. What is life but a restless vision of imaginary pleasures and of real pains, from which the only waking is the terrible day of death? The affection of this world is of no use, since, in consequence of it, we fall at last into hell. For which reason it is best to practise the austerities of religion, that the Deity may bestow upon us hereafter that happiness which he refuses to us here!'

Thus did Bhartari Raja determine to abandon the world. But before setting out for the forest, he could not refrain from seeing the queen once more, so hot was the flame which Kama had kindled in his heart. He therefore went to the apartments of his women, and having caused Dangalah Rani to be summoned, he asked her what had become of the fruit which he had given to her. She answered that, according to his command, she had eaten it. Upon which the Regent showed her the apple, and she beholding it stood aghast, unable to make any reply. The Raja gave careful orders for her beheading; he then went out, and having had the fruit washed, ate it. He quitted the throne to be a jogi, or religious mendicant, and without communicating with any one departed into the jungle. There he became such a devotee that death had no power over him, and he is wandering still. But some say that he was duly absorbed into the essence of the Deity.

* * * * *

We are next told how the valiant Vikram returned to his own country.

²⁸ This part of the introduction will remind the reader of the two royal brothers and their false wives in the introduction to the *Arabian Nights*. The fate of Bhartari Raja, however, is historical.

Thus Vikram's throne remained empty. When the news reached King Indra, Regent of the Lower Firmament and Protector of Earthly Monarchs, he sent Prithwi Pala, a fierce giant,²⁹ to defend the city of Ujjayani till such time as its lawful master might reappear, and the guardian used to keep watch and ward night and day over his trust.

In less than a year the valorous Raja Vikram became thoroughly tired of wandering about the woods half dressed: now suffering from famine, then exposed to the attacks of wild beasts, and at all times very ill at ease. He reflected also that he was not doing his duty to his wives and children; that the heir-apparent would probably make the worst use of the parental absence; and finally, that his subjects, deprived of his fatherly care, had been left in the hands of a man who, for aught he could say, was not worthy of the high trust. He had also spied out all the weak points of friend and foe. Whilst these and other equally weighty considerations were hanging about the Raja's mind, he heard a rumour of the state of things spread abroad; that Bhartari, the regent, having abdicated his throne, had gone away into the forest. Then quoth Vikram to his son, 'We have ended our wayfarings, now let us turn our steps homewards!'

The gong was striking the mysterious hour of midnight as the king and the young prince approached the principal gate. And they were pushing through it when a monstrous figure rose up before them, and called out with a fearful voice, 'Who are ye, and where are ye going? Stand and deliver your names!'

'I am Raja Vikram,' rejoined the king, half choked with rage, 'and I am come to mine own city. Who art thou that darest to stop or stay me?'

'That question is easily answered,' cried Prithwi Pala the giant, in his roaring voice; 'the gods have sent me to protect Ujjayani. If thou be really Raja Vikram, prove thyself a man: first fight with me, and then return to thine own.'

The warrior king cried 'Sadhu!' wanting nothing better. He girt his girdle tight round his loins, summoned his opponent into the empty space beyond the gate, told him to stand on guard, and presently began to devise some means of closing with or running in upon him. The giant's fists were large as water melons, and his knotted arms whistled through the air like falling trees, threatening fatal blows. Besides which the Raja's head scarcely reached the giant's stomach, and the latter, each time he struck out, whooped so abominably loud, that no human nerves could remain unshaken.

At last Vikram's good luck prevailed. The giant's left foot slipped, and the hero, seizing his antagonist's other leg, began to trip him up. At the same moment the young prince, hastening to his parent's assistance, jumped viciously upon the enemy's naked toes. By their united exertions they brought him to the ground, when the son sat down upon his stomach, making himself as weighty as he well could, whilst the father, climbing up to the monster's throat, placed himself astride upon it, and pressing both thumbs upon his eyes, threatened to blind him if he would not yield.

Then the giant, modifying the bellow of his voice, cried out —

'O Raja, thou hast overthrown me, and I grant thee thy life.'

'Surely thou art mad, monster,' replied the king, in jeering tone, half laughing, half angry. 'To whom grantest thou life? If I desire it I can kill thee; how, then, dost thou talk about granting me my life?'

'Vikram of Ujjayani,' said the giant, 'be not too proud! I will save thee from a nearly impending death. Only hearken to the tale which I have to tell thee, and use thy judgment, and act upon it. So shalt thou rule the world free from care, and live without danger, and die happily.'

²⁹ In the original, 'Div' — a supernatural being, god, or demon. This part of the plot is variously told. According to some, Raja Vikram was surprised, when entering the city, to see a grand procession at the house of a potter, and a boy being carried off on an elephant, to the violent grief of his parents. The king inquired the reason of their sorrow, and was told that the wicked Div that guarded the city was in the habit of eating a citizen per diem. Whereupon the valorous Raja caused the boy to dismount; took his place; entered the palace; and, when presented as food for the demon, displayed his pugilistic powers in a way to excite the monster's admiration.

‘Proceed,’ quoth the Raja, after a moment’s thought, dismounting from the giant’s throat, and beginning to listen with all his ears.

The giant raised himself from the ground, and when in a sitting posture, began in solemn tones to speak as follows:

‘In short, the history of the matter is, that three men were born in this same city of Ujjayani, in the same lunar mansion, in the same division of the great circle described upon the ecliptic, and in the same period of time. You, the first, were born in the house of a king. The second was an oilman’s son, who was slain by the third, a jogi, or anchorite, who kills all he can, wafting the sweet scent of human sacrifice to the nostrils of Durga, goddess of destruction. Moreover, the holy man, after compassing the death of the oilman’s son, has suspended him head downwards from a mimosa tree in a cemetery. He is now anxiously plotting thy destruction. He hath murdered his own child – ’

‘And how came an anchorite to have a child?’ asked Raja Vikram, incredulously.

‘That is what I am about to tell thee,’ replied the giant. ‘In the good days of thy generous father, Gandharba-Sena, as the court was taking its pleasure in the forest, they saw a devotee, or rather a devotee’s head, protruding from a hole in the ground. The white ants had surrounded his body with a case of earth, and had made their home upon his skin. All kinds of insects and small animals crawled up and down the face, yet not a muscle moved. Wasps had hung their nests to its temples, and scorpions wandered in and out of the matted and clotted hair; yet the hermit felt them not. He spoke to no one; he received no gifts; and had it not been for the opening of his nostrils, as he continually inhaled the pungent smoke of a thorn fire, man would have deemed him dead. Such were his religious austerities.

‘Thy father marvelled much at the sight, and rode home in profound thought. That evening, as he sat in the hall of audience, he could speak of nothing but the devotee; and his curiosity soon rose to such a pitch, that he proclaimed about the city a reward of one hundred gold pieces to any one that could bring to court this anchorite of his own free will.

‘Shortly afterwards, Vasantasena, a singing and dancing girl more celebrated for wit and beauty than for sagesse or discretion, appeared before thy sire, and offered for the petty inducement of a gold bangle to bring the anchorite into the palace, carrying a baby on his shoulder.

‘The king hearing her speak was astonished, gave her a betel leaf in token that he held her to her promise, and permitted her to depart, which she did with a laugh of triumph.

‘Vasantasena went directly to the jungle, where she found the pious man faint with thirst, shrivelled with hunger, and half dead with heat and cold. She cautiously put out the fire. Then, having prepared a confection, she approached from behind and rubbed upon his lips a little of the sweetmeat, which he licked up with great relish. Thereupon she made more and gave it to him. After two days of this generous diet he gained some strength, and on the third, as he felt a finger upon his mouth, he opened his eyes and said, “Why hast thou come here?”

‘The girl, who had her story in readiness, replied: “I am the daughter of a deity, and have practised religious observances in the heavenly regions. I have now come into this forest!” And the devotee, who began to think how much more pleasant is such society than solitude, asked her where her hut was, and requested to be led there.

‘Then Vasantasena, having unearthed the holy man and compelled him to purify himself, led him to the abode which she had caused to be built for herself in the wood. She explained its luxuries by the nature of her vow, which bound her to indulge in costly apparel, in food with six flavours, and in every kind of indulgence.³⁰ In course of time the hermit learned to follow her example; he gave up inhaling smoke, and he began to eat and drink as a daily occupation.

³⁰ In India, there is still a monastic order the pleasant duty of whose members is to enjoy themselves as much as possible. It has been much the same in Europe. ‘Représentez-vous le couvent de l’Escurial ou du Mont Cassin, où les cénobites ont toutes sortes de commodités, nécessaires, utiles, délectables, superflues, surabondantes, puisqu’ils ont les cent cinquante mille, les quatre cent mille, les cinq cent mille écus de rente; et jugez si monsieur l’abbé a de quoi laisser dormir la méridienne à ceux qui voudront.’ —*Saint Augustin, de l’Ouvrage des Moines*, by Le Camus, Bishop of Belley, quoted by Voltaire, *Dict. phil.*, sub v. ‘Apocalypse.’

‘At length Kama began to trouble him. Briefly the saint and saintess were made man and wife, by the simple form of matrimony called the Gandharbavivaha,³¹ and about ten months afterwards a son was born to them. Thus the anchorite came to have a child.

‘Remained Vasantasena’s last feat. Some months passed: then she said to the devotee her husband, “Oh saint! let us now, having finished our devotions, perform a pilgrimage to some sacred place, that all the sins of our bodies may be washed away, after which we will die and depart into everlasting happiness.” Cajoled by these speeches, the hermit mounted his child upon his shoulder and followed her where she went – directly into Raja Gandharba-Sena’s palace.

‘When the king and the ministers and the officers and the courtiers saw Vasantasena, and her spouse carrying the baby, they recognised her from afar. The Raja exclaimed, “Lo! this is the very singing girl who went forth to bring back the devotee.” And all replied: “O great monarch! thou speakest truly; this is the very same woman. And be pleased to observe that whatever things she, having asked leave to undertake, went forth to do, all these she hath done!” Then gathering around her they asked her all manner of questions, as if the whole matter had been the lightest and the most laughable thing in the world.

‘But the anchorite, having heard the speeches of the king and his courtiers, thought to himself, “They have done this for the purpose of taking away the fruits of my penance.” Cursing them all with terrible curses, and taking up his child, he left the hall. Thence he went to the forest, slaughtered the innocent, and began to practise austerities with a view to revenge that hour, and, having slain his child, he will attempt thy life. His prayers have been heard. In the first place they deprived thee of thy father. Secondly, they cast enmity between thee and thy brother, thus dooming him to an untimely end. Thirdly, they are now working thy ruin. The anchorite’s design is to offer up a king and a king’s son to his patroness Durga, and by virtue of such devotional act he will obtain the sovereignty of the whole world!

‘But I have promised, O Vikram, to save thee, if such be the will of Fortune, from impending destruction. Therefore hearken well unto my words. Distrust them that dwell amongst the dead, and remember that it is lawful and right to strike off his head that would slay thee. So shalt thou rule the universal earth, and leave behind thee an immortal name!’

Suddenly Prithwi Pala, the giant, ceased speaking, and disappeared. Vikram and his son then passed through the city gates, feeling their limbs to be certain that no bones were broken, and thinking over the scene that had occurred.

* * * * *

We now are informed how the valiant King Vikram met with the Vampire.

It was the spring season when the Raja returned, and the Holi festival³² caused dancing and singing in every house. Ujjayani was extraordinarily happy and joyful at the return of her ruler, who joined in her gladness with all his kingly heart. The faces and dresses of the public were red and yellow with gulal and abir, – perfumed powders,³³ – which were sprinkled upon one another in token of merriment. Musicians deafened the citizens’ ears, dancing girls performed till ready to faint with fatigue, the manufacturers of comfits made their fortunes, and the Nine Gems of Science celebrated the auspicious day with the most long-winded odes. The royal hero, decked in regal attire, and attended by many thousands of state palanquins glittering with their various ornaments, and

³¹ This form of matrimony was recognised by the ancient Hindus, and is frequent in books. It is a kind of Scotch wedding – ultra-Caledonian – taking place by mutual consent, without any form or ceremony. The Gandharbas are heavenly minstrels of Indra’s court, who are supposed to be witnesses.

³² The Hindu Saturnalia.

³³ The powders are of wheaten flour, mixed with wild-ginger root, sappan-wood, and other ingredients. Sometimes the stuff is thrown in syringes.

escorted by a suite of a hundred kingly personages, with their martial array of the four hosts, of cavalry, elephants, chariots, and infantry, and accompanied by Amazon girls, lovely as the suite of the gods, himself a personification of majesty, bearing the white parasol of dominion, with a golden staff and tassels, began once more to reign.

After the first pleasures of return, the king applied himself unremittingly to good government and to eradicating the abuses which had crept into the administration during the period of his wanderings.

Mindful of the wise saying, 'if the Raja did not punish the guilty, the stronger would roast the weaker like a fish on the spit,' he began the work of reform with an iron hand. He confiscated the property of a councillor who had the reputation of taking bribes; he branded the forehead of a sudra or servile man whose breath smelt of ardent spirits, and a goldsmith having been detected in fraud he ordered him to be cut to shreds with razors as the law in its mercy directs. In the case of a notorious evil speaker he opened the back of his head and had his tongue drawn through the wound. A few murderers he burned alive on iron beds, praying the while that Vishnu might have mercy upon their souls. His spies were ordered, as the shastra called 'The Prince' advises, to mix with robbers and thieves with a view of leading them into situations where they might most easily be entrapped, and once or twice when the fellows were too wary, he seized them and their relations and impaled them all, thereby conclusively proving, without any mistake, that he was king of earth.

With the sex feminine he was equally severe. A woman convicted of having poisoned an elderly husband in order to marry a younger man was thrown to the dogs, which speedily devoured her. He punished simple infidelity by cutting off the offender's nose – an admirable practice, which is not only a severe penalty to the culprit, but also a standing warning to others, and an efficient preventative to any recurrence of the fault. Faithlessness combined with bad example or brazenfacedness was further treated by being led in solemn procession through the bazaar mounted on a diminutive and crop-eared donkey, with the face turned towards the crupper. After a few such examples the women of Ujjayani became almost modest; it is the fault of man when they are not tolerably well behaved in one point at least.

Every day as Vikram sat upon the judgment-seat, trying causes and punishing offences, he narrowly observed the speech, the gestures, and the countenances of the various criminals and litigants and their witnesses. Ever suspecting women, as I have said, and holding them to be the root of all evil, he never failed when some sin or crime more horrible than usual came before him, to ask the accused, 'Who is she?' and the suddenness of the question often elicited the truth by accident. For there can be nothing thoroughly and entirely bad unless a woman is at the bottom of it; and knowing this, Raja Vikram made certain notable hits under the most improbable circumstances, which had almost given him a reputation for omniscience. But this is easily explained: a man intent upon squaring the circle will see squares in circles wherever he looks, and sometimes he will find them.

In disputed cases of money claims, the king adhered strictly to established practice, and consulted persons learned in the law. He seldom decided a cause on his own judgment, and he showed great temper and patience in bearing with rough language from irritated plaintiffs and defendants, from the infirm, and from old men beyond eighty. That humble petitioners might not be balked in having access to the 'fountain of justice,' he caused an iron box to be suspended by a chain from the windows of his sleeping apartment. Every morning he ordered the box to be opened before him, and listened to all the placets at full length. Even in this simple process he displayed abundant cautiousness. For, having forgotten what little of the humanities he had mastered in his youth, he would hand the paper to a secretary whose business it was to read it out before him; after which operation the man of letters was sent into an inner room, and the petition was placed in the hands of a second scribe. Once it so happened by the bungling of the deceitful kayasths (clerks) that an important difference was found to occur in the same sheet. So upon strict inquiry one secretary lost his ears and the other his right hand. After this petitions were rarely if ever falsified.

The Raja Vikram also lost no time in attacking the cities and towns and villages of his enemies, but the people rose to a man against him, and hewing his army to pieces with their weapons, vanquished him. This took place so often that he despaired of bringing all the earth under the shadow of his umbrella.

At length on one occasion when near a village he listened to a conversation of the inhabitants. A woman having baked some cakes was giving them to her child, who leaving the edges would eat only the middle. On his asking for another cake, she cried, 'This boy's way is like Vikram's in his attempt to conquer the world!' On his enquiring 'Mother, why, what am I doing; and what has Vikram done?' 'Thou, my boy,' she replied, 'throwing away the outside of the cake eatest the middle only. Vikram also in his ambition, without subduing the frontiers before attacking the towns, invades the heart of the country and lays it waste. On that account, both the townspeople and others rising, close upon him from the frontiers to the centre, and destroy his army. *That is his folly.*'

Vikram took notice of the woman's words. He strengthened his army and resumed his attack on the provinces and cities, beginning with the frontiers, reducing the outer towns and stationing troops in the intervals. Thus he proceeded regularly with his invasions. After a respite, adopting the same system and marshalling huge armies, he reduced in regular course each kingdom and province till he became monarch of the whole world.

It so happened that one day as Vikram the Brave sat upon the judgment seat, a young merchant, by name Mal Deo, who had lately arrived at Ujjayani with loaded camels and elephants, and with the reputation of immense wealth, entered the palace court. Having been received with extreme condescension, he gave into the king's hand a fruit which he had brought in his own, and then spreading a prayer carpet on the floor he sat down. Presently, after a quarter of an hour, he arose and went away. When he had gone the king reflected in his mind: 'Under this disguise, perhaps, is the very man of whom the giant spoke.' Suspecting this, he did not eat the fruit, but calling the master of the household he gave the present to him, ordering him to keep it in a very careful manner. The young merchant, however, continued every day to court the honour of an interview, each time presenting a similar gift.

By chance one morning Raja Vikram went, attended by his ministers, to see his stables. At this time the young merchant also arrived there, and in the usual manner placed a fruit in the royal hand. As the king was thoughtfully tossing it in the air, it accidentally fell from his fingers to the ground. Then the monkey, who was tethered amongst the horses to draw calamities from their heads,³⁴ snatched it up and tore it to pieces. Whereupon a ruby of such size and water came forth that the king and his ministers, beholding its brilliancy, gave vent to expressions of wonder.

Quoth Vikram to the young merchant severely – for his suspicious were now thoroughly roused – 'Why hast thou given to us all this wealth?'

'O great king,' replied Mal Deo, demurely, 'it is written in the scriptures (shastra) "Of Ceremony" that "we must not go empty-handed into the presence of the following persons, namely, Rajas, spiritual teachers, judges, young maidens, and old women whose daughters we would marry." But why, O Vikram, dost thou speak of one ruby only, since in each of the fruits which I have laid at thy feet there is a similar jewel?'

Having heard this speech, the king said to the master of his household, 'Bring all the fruits which I have entrusted to thee.' The treasurer, on receiving the royal command, immediately brought them, and having split them, there was found in each one a ruby, one and all equally perfect in size and water. Raja Vikram beholding such treasures was excessively pleased. Having sent for a lapidary, he ordered him to examine the rubies, saying, 'We cannot take anything with us out of this world. Virtue is a noble quality to possess here below – so tell justly what is the value of each of these gems.'³⁵

³⁴ The Persian proverb is – 'Bala e tavilah bar sar i maimun:' 'The woes of the stable be on the monkey's head!' In some Moslem countries a hog acts prophylactic. Hence probably Mungo Park's troublesome pig at Ludamar.

³⁵ So the moribund father of the 'babes in the wood' lectures his wicked brother, their guardian: "To God and you I recommend My children deare this day: But little while, be sure, we have Within this world to stay." But to appeal to the moral sense of a goldsmith!

To so moral a speech the lapidary replied, 'Maharaja!³⁶ thou hast said truly; whoever possesses virtue, possesses everything; virtue indeed accompanies us always, and is of advantage in both worlds. Hear, O great king! each gem is perfect in colour, quality and beauty. If I were to say that the value of each was ten million millions of suvarnas (gold pieces), even then thou couldst not understand its real worth. In fact, each ruby would buy one of the seven regions into which the earth is divided.'

The king on hearing this was delighted, although his suspicions were not satisfied; and, having bestowed a robe of honour upon the lapidary, dismissed him. Thereon, taking the young merchant's hand, he led him into the palace, seated him upon his own carpet in presence of the court, and began to say, 'My entire kingdom is not worth one of these rubies: tell me how it is that thou who buyest and sellest hast given me such and so many pearls?'

Mal Deo replied: 'O great king, the speaking of matters like the following in public is not right; these things – prayers, spells, drugs, good qualities, household affairs, the eating of forbidden food, and the evil we may have heard of our neighbour – should not be discussed in full assembly. Privately I will disclose to thee my wishes. This is the way of the world; when an affair comes to six ears, it does not remain secret; if a matter is confided to four ears it may escape further hearing; and if to two ears even Bramha the Creator does not know it; how then can any rumour of it come to man?'

Having heard this speech, Raja Vikram took Mal Deo aside, and began to ask him, saying, 'O generous man! you have given me so many rubies, and even for a single day you have not eaten food with me; I am exceedingly ashamed, tell me what you desire.'

'Raja,' said the young merchant, 'I am not Mal Deo, but Shanta-Shil,³⁷ a devotee. I am about to perform spells, incantations and magical rites on the banks of the river Godavari, in a large smashana, a cemetery where bodies are burned. By this means the Eight Powers of Nature will all become mine. This thing I ask of you as alms, that you and the young prince Dharma Dhvaj will pass one night with me, doing my bidding. By you remaining near me my incantations will be successful.'

The valiant Vikram nearly started from his seat at the word cemetery, but, like a ruler of men, he restrained his face from expressing his feelings, and he presently replied, 'Good, we will come, tell us on what day!'

'You are to come to me,' said the devotee, 'armed, but without followers, on the Monday evening the 14th of the dark half of the month Bhadra.'³⁸ The Raja said: 'Do you go your ways, we will certainly come.' In this manner, having received a promise from the king, and having taken leave, the devotee returned to his house: thence he repaired to the temple, and having made preparations, and taken all the necessary things, he went back into the cemetery and sat down to his ceremonies.

The valiant Vikram, on the other hand, retired into an inner apartment, to consult his own judgment about an adventure with which, for fear of ridicule, he was unwilling to acquaint even the most trustworthy of his ministers.

In due time came the evening moon's day, the 14th of the dark half of the month Bhadra. As the short twilight fell gloomily on earth, the warrior king, accompanied by his son, with turband-ends tied under their chins, and with trusty blades tucked under their arms ready for foes, human, bestial, or devilish, slipped out unseen through the palace wicket, and took the road leading to the cemetery on the river bank.

Dark and drear was the night. Urged by the furious blast of the lingering winter-rains, masses of bistre-coloured cloud, like the forms of unwieldy beasts, rolled heavily over the firmament plain. Whenever the crescent of the young moon, rising from an horizon sable as the sad Tamala's hue,³⁹ glanced upon the wayfarers, it was no brighter than the fine tip of an elephant's tusk protruding from

³⁶ Maha (great) raja (king): common address even to those who are not royal.

³⁷ The name means, 'Quietistic Disposition.'

³⁸ August. In the solar-lunar year of the Hindu the months are divided into fortnights – light and dark.

³⁹ A flower, whose name frequently occurs in Sanskrit poetry.

the muddy wave. A heavy storm was impending; big drops fell in showers from the forest trees as they groaned under the blast, and beneath the gloomy avenue the clayey ground gleamed ghastly white. As the Raja and his son advanced, a faint ray of light, like the line of pure gold streaking the dark surface of the touchstone, caught their eyes, and directed their footsteps towards the cemetery.

When Vikram came upon the open space on the river bank where corpses were burned, he hesitated for a moment to tread its impure ground. But seeing his son undismayed, he advanced boldly, trampling upon remnants of bones, and only covering his mouth with his turband-end.

Presently, at the further extremity of the smashana or burning ground, appeared a group. By the lurid flames that flared and flickered round the half-extinguished funeral pyres, with remnants of their dreadful loads, Raja Vikram and Dharma Dhvaj could note the several features of the ill-omened spot. There was an outer circle of hideous bestial forms; tigers were roaring, and elephants were trumpeting; wolves, whose foul hairy coats blazed with sparks of bluish phosphoric light, were devouring the remnants of human bodies; foxes, jackals, and hyenas were disputing over their prey; whilst bears were chewing the livers of children. The space within was peopled by a multitude of fiends. There were the subtle bodies of men that had escaped their grosser frames prowling about the charnel ground, where their corpses had been reduced to ashes, or hovering in the air, waiting till the new bodies which they were to animate were made ready for their reception. The spirits of those that had been foully slain wandered about with gashed limbs; and skeletons, whose mouldy bones were held together by bits of blackened sinew, followed them as the murderer does his victim. Malignant witches with shrivelled skins, horrid eyes and distorted forms, crawled and crouched over the earth; whilst spectres and goblins now stood motionless, and tall as lofty palm trees; then, as if in fits, leaped, danced, and tumbled before their evocator. The air was filled with shrill and strident cries, with the fitful moaning of the storm-wind, with the hooting of the owl, with the jackal's long wild cry, and with the hoarse gurgling of the swollen river, from whose banks the earth-slip thundered in its fall.

In the midst of all, close to the fire which lit up his evil countenance, sat Shanta-Shil, the jogi, with the banner that denoted his calling and his magic staff planted in the ground behind him. He was clad in the ochre-coloured loin-wrap of his class; from his head streamed long tangled locks of hair like horsehair; his black body was striped with lines of chalk, and a girdle of thigh bones encircled his waist. His face was smeared with ashes from a funeral pyre, and his eyes, fixed as those of a statue, gleamed from this mask with an infernal light of hate. His cheeks were shaven, and he had not forgotten to draw the horizontal sectarian mark. But this was of blood; and Vikram, as he drew near, saw that he was playing upon a human skull with two shank bones, making music for the horrid revelry.

Now Raja Vikram, as has been shown by his encounter with Indra's watchman, was a bold prince, and he was cautious as he was brave. The sight of a human being in the midst of these terrors raised his mettle; he determined to prove himself a hero, and feeling that the critical moment was now come, he hoped to rid himself and his house for ever of the family curse that hovered over them.

For a moment he thought of the giant's words, 'And remember that it is lawful and right to strike off his head that would slay thee.' A stroke with his good sword might at once and effectually put an end to the danger. But then he remembered that he had passed his royal word to do the devotee's bidding that night. Besides, he felt assured that the hour for action had not yet sounded.

These reflections having passed through his mind with the rapid course of a star that has lost its honours,⁴⁰ Vikram courteously saluted Shanta-Shil. The jogi briefly replied, 'Come sit down, both of ye.' The father and son took their places, by no means surprised or frightened by the devil dances before and around them. Presently the valiant Raja reminded the devotee that he was come to perform his promise, and lastly asked, 'What commands are there for us?'

⁴⁰ The stars being men's souls raised to the sky for a time proportioned to their virtuous deeds on earth.

The jogi replied, 'O king, since you have come, just perform one piece of business. About two kos⁴¹ hence, in a southerly direction, there is another place where dead bodies are burned; and in that place is a mimosa tree, on which a body is hanging. Bring it to me immediately.'

Raja Vikram took his son's hand, unwilling to leave him in such company; and, catching up a firebrand, went rapidly away in the proper direction. He was now certain that Shanta-Shil was the anchorite who, enraged by his father, had resolved his destruction; and his uppermost thought was a firm resolve 'to breakfast upon his enemy, ere his enemy could dine upon him.' He muttered this old saying as he went, whilst the tom-tom-ing of the anchorite upon the skull resounded in his ears, and the devil-crowd, which had held its peace during his meeting with Shanta-Shil, broke out again in an infernal din of whoops and screams, yells and laughter.

The darkness of the night was frightful, the gloom deepened till it was hardly possible to walk. The clouds opened their fountains, raining so that you would say they could never rain again. Lightning blazed forth with more than the light of day, and the roar of the thunder caused the earth to shake. Baleful gleams tipped the black cones of the trees and fitfully scampered like fireflies over the waste. Unclean goblins dogged the travellers and threw themselves upon the ground in their path and obstructed them in a thousand different ways. Huge snakes, whose mouths distilled blood and black venom, kept clinging around their legs in the roughest part of the road, till they were persuaded to loose their hold either by the sword or by reciting a spell. In fact there were so many horrors and such a tumult and noise that even a brave man would have faltered, yet the king kept on his way.

At length having passed over, somehow or other, a very difficult road, the Raja arrived at the smashana, or burning place pointed out by the jogi. Suddenly he sighted the tree where from root to top every branch and leaf was in a blaze of crimson flame. And when he, still dauntless, advanced towards it, a clamour continued to be raised, and voices kept crying, 'Kill them! kill them! seize them! seize them! take care that they do not get away! let them scorch themselves to cinders! let them suffer the pains of Patala.'⁴²

Far from being terrified by this state of things the valiant Raja increased in boldness, seeing a prospect of an end to his adventure. Approaching the tree he felt that the fire did not burn him, and so he sat there for a while to observe the body, which hung, head downwards, from a branch a little above him.

Its eyes, which were wide open, were of a greenish-brown, and never twinkled; its hair also was brown,⁴³ and brown was its face – three several shades which, notwithstanding, approached one another in an unpleasant way, as in an over-dried cocoa-nut. Its body was thin and ribbed like a skeleton or a bamboo framework, and as it held on to a bough, like a flying fox,⁴⁴ by the toe-tips, its drawn muscles stood out as if they were ropes of coir. Blood it appeared to have none, or there would have been a decided determination of that curious juice to the head; and as the Raja handled its skin, it felt icy cold and clammy as might a snake. The only sign of life was the whisking of a ragged little tail much resembling a goat's.

Judging from these signs the brave king at once determined the creature to be a Baital – a Vampire. For a short time he was puzzled to reconcile the appearance with the words of the giant, who informed him that the anchorite had hung the oilman's son to a tree. But soon he explained to himself the difficulty, remembering the exceeding cunning of jogis and other reverend men, and determining that his enemy, the better to deceive him, had doubtless altered the shape and form of the young oilman's body.

⁴¹ A measure of length, each two miles.

⁴² The warm region below.

⁴³ Hindus admire only glossy black hair; the 'bonny brown hair' loved by our ballads is assigned by them to low-caste men, witches, and fiends.

⁴⁴ A large kind of bat; a popular and silly Anglo-Indian name. It almost justified the irate Scotchman in calling 'prodigious lecars' those who told him in India that foxes flew and trees were tapped for toddy.

With this idea, Vikram was pleased, saying, 'My trouble has been productive of fruit.' Remained the task of carrying the Vampire to Shanta-Shil the devotee. Having taken his sword, the Raja fearlessly climbed the tree, and ordering his son to stand away from below, clutched the Vampire's hair with one hand, and with the other struck such a blow of the sword, that the bough was cut and the thing fell heavily upon the ground. Immediately on falling it gnashed its teeth and began to utter a loud wailing cry like the screams of an infant in pain. Vikram having heard the sound of its lamentations, was pleased, and began to say to himself, 'This devil must be alive.' Then nimbly sliding down the trunk, he made a captive of the body, and asked 'Who art thou?'

Scarcely, however, had the words passed the royal lips, when the Vampire slipped through the fingers like a worm, and uttering a loud shout of laughter, rose in the air with its legs uppermost, and as before suspended itself by its toes to another bough. And there it swung to and fro, moved by the violence of its cachinnation.

'Decidedly this is the young oilman!' exclaimed the Raja, after he had stood for a minute or two with mouth open, gazing upwards and wondering what he should do next. Presently he directed Dharma Dhvaj not to lose an instant in laying hands upon the thing when it next might touch the ground, and then he again swarmed up the tree. Having reached his former position, he once more seized the Baital's hair, and with all the force of his arms – for he was beginning to feel really angry – he tore it from its hold and dashed it to the ground, saying, 'O wretch, tell me who thou art?'

Then, as before, the Raja slid deftly down the trunk, and hurried to the aid of his son, who, in obedience to orders, had fixed his grasp upon the Vampire's neck. Then too, as before, the Vampire, laughing aloud, slipped through their fingers and returned to its dangling-place.

To fail twice was too much for Raja Vikram's temper, which was right kingly and somewhat hot. This time he bade his son strike the Baital's head with his sword. Then, more like a wounded bear of Himalaya than a prince who had established an era, he hurried up the tree, and directed a furious blow with his sabre at the Vampire's lean and calfless legs. The violence of the stroke made its toes loose their hold of the bough, and when it touched the ground, Dharma Dhvaj's blade fell heavily upon its matted brown hair. But the blows appeared to have lighted on iron-wood – to judge at least from the behaviour of the Baital, who no sooner heard the question, 'O wretch, who art thou?' than it returned in loud glee and merriment to its old position.

Five mortal times did Raja Vikram repeat this profitless labour. But so far from losing heart, he quite entered into the spirit of the adventure. Indeed he would have continued climbing up that tree and taking that corpse under his arm – he found his sword useless – and bringing it down, and asking it who it was, and seeing it slip through his fingers, six times sixty times, or till the end of the fourth and present age,⁴⁵ had such extreme resolution been required.

However, it was not necessary. On the seventh time of falling, the Baital, instead of eluding its capturer's grasp, allowed itself to be seized, merely remarking that 'even the gods cannot resist a thoroughly obstinate man.'⁴⁶ And seeing that the stranger, for the better protection of his prize, had stripped off his waistcloth and was making it into a bag, the Vampire thought proper to seek the most favourable conditions for himself, and asked his conqueror who he was, and what he was about to do?

⁴⁵ The Hindus, like the European classics and other ancient peoples, reckon four ages: – The Satya Yug, or Golden Age, numbered 1,728,000 years; the second, or Treta Yug, comprised 1,296,000; the Dwapar Yug had 864,000; and the present, the Kali Yug, has shrunk to 832,000 years.

⁴⁶ Especially alluding to prayer. On this point, Southey justly remarks (Preface to *Curse of Kehama*): 'In the religion of the Hindoos there is one remarkable peculiarity. Prayers, penances, and sacrifices are supposed to possess an inherent and actual value, in one degree depending upon the disposition or motive of the person who performs them. They are drafts upon heaven for which the gods cannot refuse payment. The worst men, bent upon the worst designs, have in this manner obtained power which has made them formidable to the supreme deities themselves.' Moreover, the Hindoo gods hear the prayers of those who desire the evil of others. Hence when a rich man becomes poor, his friends say, 'See how sharp are men's teeth!' and, 'He is ruined because others could not bear to see his happiness!'

‘Vile wretch,’ replied the breathless hero, ‘know me to be Vikram the Great, Raja of Ujjayani, and I bear thee to a man who is amusing himself by drumming to devils on a skull.’

‘Remember the old saying, mighty Vikram!’ said the Baital, with a sneer, ‘that many a tongue has cut many a throat. I have yielded to thy resolution and I am about to accompany thee, bound to thy back like a beggar’s wallet. But hearken to my words, ere we set out upon the way. I am of a loquacious disposition, and it is well nigh an hour’s walk between this tree and the place where thy friend sits, favouring his friends with the peculiar music which they love. Therefore, I shall try to distract my thoughts, which otherwise might not be of the most pleasing nature, by means of sprightly tales and profitable reflections. Sages and men of sense spend their days in the delights of light and heavy literature, whereas dolts and fools waste time in sleep and idleness. And I purpose to ask thee a number of questions, concerning which we will, if it seems fit to thee, make this covenant:

‘Whenever thou answerest me, either compelled by Fate or entrapped by my cunning into so doing, or thereby gratifying thy vanity and conceit, I leave thee and return to my favourite place and position in the siras-tree, but when thou shalt remain silent, confused, and at a loss to reply, either through humility or thereby confessing thine ignorance, and impotence, and want of comprehension, then will I allow thee, of mine own free will, to place me before thine employer. Perhaps I should not say so; it may sound like bribing thee, but – take my counsel, and mortify thy pride, and assumption, and arrogance, and haughtiness, as soon as possible. So shalt thou derive from me a benefit which none but myself can bestow.’

Raja Vikram hearing these rough words, so strange to his royal ear, winced; then he rejoiced that his heir-apparent was not near; then he looked round at his son Dharma Dhvaj, to see if he was impertinent enough to be amused by the Baital. But the first glance showed him the young prince busily employed in pinching and screwing the monster’s legs, so as to make it fit better into the cloth. Vikram then seized the ends of the waistcloth, twisted them into a convenient form for handling, stooped, raised the bundle with a jerk, tossed it over his shoulder, and bidding his son not to lag behind, set off at a round pace towards the western end of the cemetery.

The shower had ceased, and, as they gained ground, the weather greatly improved.

The Vampire asked a few indifferent questions about the wind and the rain and the mud. When he received no answer, he began to feel uncomfortable, and he broke out with these words: ‘O King Vikram, listen to the true story which I am about to tell thee.’

IN WHICH A MAN DECEIVES A WOMAN

In Benares once reigned a mighty prince, by name Pratapamukut, to whose eighth son Vajramukut happened the strangest adventure.

One morning, the young man, accompanied by the son of his father's pradhan or prime minister, rode out hunting, and went far into the jungle. At last the twain unexpectedly came upon a beautiful 'tank'⁴⁷ of a prodigious size. It was surrounded by short thick walls of fine baked brick; and flights and ramps of cut-stone steps, half the length of each face, and adorned with turrets, pendants, and finials, led down to the water. The substantial plaster work and the masonry had fallen into disrepair, and from the crevices sprang huge trees, under whose thick shade the breeze blew freshly, and on whose balmy branches the birds sang sweetly; the grey squirrels⁴⁸ chirruped joyously as they coursed one another up the gnarled trunks, and from the pendent lianas the long-tailed monkeys were swinging sportively. The bountiful hand of Sravana⁴⁹ had spread the earthen rampart with a carpet of the softest grass and many-hued wild flowers, in which were buzzing swarms of bees and myriads of bright-winged insects; and flocks of water-fowl, wild geese, Brahmini ducks, bitterns, herons, and cranes, male and female, were feeding on the narrow strip of brilliant green that belted the long deep pool, amongst the broad-leaved lotuses with the lovely blossoms, splashing through the pellucid waves, and basking happily in the genial sun.

The prince and his friend wondered when they saw the beautiful tank in the midst of a wild forest, and made many vain conjectures about it. They dismounted, tethered their horses, and threw their weapons upon the ground; then, having washed their hands and faces, they entered a shrine dedicated to Mahadeva, and there began to worship the presiding deity.

Whilst they were making their offerings, a bevy of maidens, accompanied by a crowd of female slaves, descended the opposite flight of steps. They stood there for a time, talking and laughing and looking about them to see if any alligators infested the waters. When convinced that the tank was safe, they disrobed themselves in order to bathe. It was truly a splendid spectacle —

'Concerning which the less said the better,' interrupted Raja Vikram in an offended tone.⁵⁰

— but it did not last long. The Raja's daughter — for the principal maiden was a princess — soon left her companions, who were scooping up water with their palms and dashing it over one another's heads, and proceeded to perform the rites of purification, meditation, and worship. Then she began strolling with a friend under the shade of a small mango grove.

The prince also left his companion sitting in prayer, and walked forth into the forest. Suddenly the eyes of the Raja's son and the Raja's daughter met. She started back with a little scream. He was fascinated by her beauty, and began to say to himself, 'O thou vile Kama,⁵¹ why worriest thou me?'

Hearing this, the maiden smiled encouragement, but the poor youth, between palpitation of the heart and hesitation about what to say, was so confused that his tongue clave to his teeth. She raised her eyebrows a little. There is nothing which women despise in a man more than modesty,⁵² for mo-des-ty —

A violent shaking of the bag which hung behind Vikram's royal back broke off the end of this offensive sentence. And the warrior king did not cease that discipline till the Baital promised him to preserve more decorum in his observations.

⁴⁷ A pond, natural or artificial; in the latter case often covering an extent of ten to twelve acres.

⁴⁸ The Hindustani 'gilahri,' or little grey squirrel, whose twittering cry is often mistaken for a bird's.

⁴⁹ The autumn or rather the rainy season personified — a hackneyed Hindu prosopopœia.

⁵⁰ Light conversation upon the subject of women is a personal offence to serious-minded Hindus.

⁵¹ Cupid in his two forms, Eros and Anteros.

⁵² This is true to life; in the East, women make the first advances, and men do the *béguettes*.

Still the prince stood before her with downcast eyes and suffused cheeks: even the spur of contempt failed to arouse his energies. Then the maiden called to her friend, who was picking jasmine flowers so as not to witness the scene, and angrily asked why that strange man was allowed to stand and stare at her? The friend, in hot wrath, threatened to call the slave, and to throw Vajramukut into the pond unless he instantly went away with his impudence. But as the prince was rooted to the spot, and really had not heard a word of what had been said to him, the two women were obliged to make the first move.

As they almost reached the tank, the beautiful maiden turned her head to see what the poor modest youth was doing.

Vajramukut was formed in every way to catch a woman's eye. The Raja's daughter therefore half forgave him his offence of mod – . Again she sweetly smiled, disclosing two rows of little opals. Then descending to the water's edge, she stooped down and plucked a lotus. This she worshipped; next she placed it in her hair, then she put it to her ear, then she bit it with her teeth, then she trod upon it with her foot, then she raised it up again, and lastly she stuck it in her bosom. After which she mounted her conveyance and went home to her friends; whilst the prince, having become thoroughly desponding and drowned in grief at separation from her, returned to the minister's son.

'Females!' ejaculated the minister's son, speaking to himself in a careless tone, when, his prayer finished, he left the temple, and sat down upon the tank steps to enjoy the breeze. He presently drew a roll of paper from under his waist-belt, and in a short time was engrossed with his study. The women seeing this conduct, exerted themselves in every possible way of wile to attract his attention and to distract his soul. They succeeded only so far as to make him roll his head with a smile, and to remember that such is always the custom of man's bane; after which he turned over a fresh page of manuscript. And although he presently began to wonder what had become of the prince his master, he did not look up even once from his study.

He was a philosopher, that young man. But after all, Raja Vikram, what is mortal philosophy? Nothing but another name for indifference! Who was ever philosophical about a thing truly loved or really hated? – no one! Philosophy, says Shankharacharya, is either the gift of nature or the reward of study. But I, the Baital, the devil, ask you, what is a born philosopher, save a man of cold desires? And what is a bred philosopher but a man who has survived his desires? A young philosopher? – a cold-blooded youth! An elderly philosopher? – a leucophlegmatic old man! Much nonsense, of a verity, ye hear in praise of nothing from your Rajaship's Nine Gems of Science, and from sundry other such wise fools.

Then the prince began to relate the state of his case, saying, 'O friend, I have seen a damsel, but whether she be a musician from Indra's heaven, a maiden of the sea, a daughter of the serpent kings, or the child of an earthly Raja, I cannot say.'

'Describe her,' said the statesman in embryo.

'Her face,' quoth the prince, 'was that of the full moon, her hair like a swarm of bees hanging from the blossoms of the acacia, the corners of her eyes touched her ears, her lips were sweet with lunar ambrosia, her waist was that of a lion, and her walk the walk of a king-goose.⁵³ As a garment, she was white; as a season, the spring; as a flower, the jasmine; as a speaker, the kokila bird; as a perfume, musk; as a beauty, Kama-deva; and as a being, Love. And if she does not come into my possession I will not live; this I have certainly determined upon.'

The young minister, who had heard his prince say the same thing more than once before, did not attach great importance to these awful words. He merely remarked that, unless they mounted at once, night would surprise them in the forest. Then the two young men returned to their horses, untethered them, drew on their bridles, saddled them, and catching up their weapons, rode slowly

⁵³ Raja-hans, a large grey goose, the Hindu equivalent for our swan.

towards the Raja's palace. During the three hours of return hardly a word passed between the pair. Vajramukut not only avoided speaking; he never once replied till addressed thrice in the loudest voice.

The young minister put no more questions, 'for,' quoth he to himself, 'when the prince wants my counsel, he will apply for it.' In this point he had borrowed wisdom from his father, who held in peculiar horror the giving of unasked-for advice. So, when he saw that conversation was irksome to his master, he held his peace and meditated upon what he called his 'day-thought.' It was his practice to choose every morning some tough food for reflection, and to chew the cud of it in his mind at times when, without such employment, his wits would have gone wool-gathering. You may imagine, Raja Vikram, that with a few years of this head-work, the minister's son became a very crafty young person.

After the second day the Prince Vajramukut, being restless from grief at separation, fretted himself into a fever. Having given up writing, reading, drinking, sleeping, the affairs entrusted to him by his father, and everything else, he sat down, as he said, to die. He used constantly to paint the portrait of the beautiful lotus gatherer, and to lie gazing upon it with tearful eyes; then he would start up and tear it to pieces and beat his forehead, and begin another picture of a yet more beautiful face.

At last, as the *pradhan's* son had foreseen, he was summoned by the young Raja, whom he found upon his bed, looking yellow and complaining bitterly of headache. Frequent discussions upon the subject of the tender passion had passed between the two youths, and one of them had ever spoken of it so very disrespectfully that the other felt ashamed to introduce it. But when his friend, with a view to provoke communicativeness, advised a course of boiled and bitter herbs and great attention to diet, quoting the hemistich attributed to the learned physician Charndatta —

A fever starve, but feed a cold,

the unhappy Vajramukut's fortitude abandoned him; he burst into tears, and exclaimed, 'Whosoever enters upon the path of love cannot survive it; and if (by chance) he should live, what is life to him but a prolongation of his misery?'

'Yea,' replied the minister's son, 'the sage hath said —

The road of love is that which hath no beginning nor end;
Take thou heed of thyself, man! ere thou place foot upon it.

And the wise, knowing that there are three things whose effect upon himself no man can foretell — namely, desire of woman, the dice-box, and the drinking of ardent spirits — find total abstinence from them the best of rules. Yet, after all, if there is no cow, we must milk the bull.'

The advice was, of course, excellent, but the hapless lover could not help thinking that on this occasion it came a little too late. However, after a pause he returned to the subject and said, 'I have ventured to tread that dangerous way, be its end pain or pleasure, happiness or destruction.' He then hung down his head and sighed from the bottom of his heart.

'She is the person who appeared to us at the tank?' asked the *pradhan's* son, moved to compassion by the state of his master.

The prince assented.

'O great king,' resumed the minister's son, 'at the time of going away had she said anything to you? or had you said anything to her?'

'Nothing!' replied the other laconically, when he found his friend beginning to take an interest in the affair.

'Then,' said the minister's son, 'it will be exceedingly difficult to get possession of her.'

'Then,' repeated the Raja's son, 'I am doomed to death; to an early and melancholy death!'

‘Humph!’ ejaculated the young statesman rather impatiently, ‘did she make any sign, or give any hint? Let me know all that happened: half confidences are worse than none.’

Upon which the prince related everything that took place by the side of the tank, bewailing the false shame which had made him dumb, and concluding with her pantomime.

The pradhan’s son took thought for a while. He thereupon seized the opportunity of representing to his master all the evil effects of bashfulness when women are concerned, and advised him, as he would be a happy lover, to brazen his countenance for the next interview.

Which the young Raja faithfully promised to do.

‘And, now,’ said the other, ‘be comforted, O my master! I know her name and her dwelling-place. When she suddenly plucked the lotus flower and worshipped it, she thanked the gods for having blessed her with a sight of your beauty.’

Vajramukut smiled, the first time for the last month.

‘When she applied it to her ear, it was as if she would have explained to thee, “I am a daughter of the Carnatic;”⁵⁴ and when she bit it with her teeth, she meant to say that “My father is Raja Dantawat,”⁵⁵ who, by the bye, has been, is, and ever will be, a mortal foe to thy father.’

Vajramukut shuddered.

‘When she put it under her foot it meant, “My name is Padmavati.”’⁵⁶

Vajramukut uttered a cry of joy.

‘And when she placed it in her bosom, “You are truly dwelling in my heart” was meant to be understood.’

At these words the young Raja started up full of new life, and after praising with enthusiasm the wondrous sagacity of his dear friend, begged him by some contrivance to obtain the permission of his parents, and to conduct him to her city. The minister’s son easily got leave for Vajramukut to travel, under pretext that his body required change of water, and his mind change of scene. They both dressed and armed themselves for the journey, and having taken some jewels, mounted their horses and followed the road in that direction in which the princess had gone.

Arrived after some days at the capital of the Carnatic, the minister’s son having disguised his master and himself in the garb of travelling traders, alighted and pitched his little tent upon a clear bit of ground in one of the suburbs. He then proceeded to inquire for a wise woman, wanting, he said, to have his fortune told. When the prince asked him what this meant, he replied that elderly dames who professionally predict the future are never above ministering to the present, and therefore that, in such circumstances, they are the properest persons to be consulted.

‘Is this a treatise upon the subject of immortality, devil?’ demanded the King Vikram ferociously. The Baital declared that it was not, but that he must tell his story.

The person addressed pointed to an old woman who, seated before the door of her hut, was spinning at her wheel. Then the young men went up to her with polite salutations and said, ‘Mother, we are travelling traders, and our stock is coming after us; we have come on in advance for the purpose of finding a place to live in. If you will give us a house, we will remain there and pay you highly.’

The old woman, who was a physiognomist as well as a fortune-teller, looked at the faces of the young men and liked them, because their brows were wide and their mouths denoted generosity. Having listened to their words, she took pity upon them and said kindly, ‘This hovel is yours, my masters, remain here as long as you please.’ Then she led them into an inner room, again welcomed them, lamented the poorness of her abode, and begged them to lie down and rest themselves.

After some interval of time the old woman came to them once more, and sitting down began to gossip. The minister’s son upon this asked her, ‘How is it with thy family, thy relatives, and

⁵⁴ Properly Karnatak; karna in Sanskrit means an ear.

⁵⁵ Danta in Sanskrit is a tooth.

⁵⁶ Padma means a foot.

connections; and what are thy means of subsistence?’ She replied, ‘My son is a favourite servant in the household of our great king Dantawat, and your slave is the wet-nurse of the Princess Padmavati, his eldest child. From the coming on of old age,’ she added, ‘I dwell in this house, but the king provides for my eating and drinking. I go once a day to see the girl, who is a miracle of beauty and goodness, wit and accomplishments, and returning thence, I bear my own griefs at home.’⁵⁷

In a few days the young Vajramukut had, by his liberality, soft speech, and good looks, made such progress in nurse Lakshmi’s affections that, by the advice of his companion, he ventured to broach the subject ever nearest his heart. He begged his hostess, when she went on the morrow to visit the charming Padmavati, that she would be kind enough to slip a bit of paper into the princess’s hand.

‘Son,’ she replied, delighted with the proposal – and what old woman would not be? – ‘there is no need for putting off so urgent an affair till the morrow. Get your paper ready, and I will immediately give it.’

Trembling with pleasure, the prince ran to find his friend, who was seated in the garden reading, as usual, and told him what the old nurse had engaged to do. He then began to debate about how he should write his letter, to cull sentences and to weigh phrases; whether ‘light of my eyes’ was not too trite, and ‘blood of my liver’ rather too forcible. At this the minister’s son smiled, and bade the prince not trouble his head with composition. He then drew his inkstand from his waist-shawl, nibbed a reed pen, and choosing a piece of pink and flowered paper, he wrote upon it a few lines. He then folded it, gummed it, sketched a lotus flower upon the outside, and handing it to the young prince, told him to give it to their hostess, and that all would be well.

The old woman took her staff in her hand and hobbled straight to the palace. Arrived there, she found the Raja’s daughter sitting alone in her apartment. The maiden, seeing her nurse, immediately arose, and making a respectful bow, led her to a seat and began the most affectionate inquiries. After giving her blessing and sitting for some time and chatting about indifferent matters, the nurse said, ‘O daughter! in infancy I reared and nourished thee, now the Bhagwan (Deity) has rewarded me by giving thee stature, beauty, health, and goodness. My heart only longs to see the happiness of thy womanhood,⁵⁸ after which I shall depart in peace. I implore thee read this paper, given to me by the handsomest and the properest young man that my eyes have ever seen.’

The princess, glancing at the lotus on the outside of the note, slowly unfolded it and perused its contents, which were as follows:

1

She was to me the pearl that clings
To sands all hid from mortal sight,
Yet fit for diadems of kings,
The pure and lovely light.

2

She was to me the gleam of sun
That breaks the gloom of wintry day;

⁵⁷ A common Hindu phrase equivalent to our ‘I manage to get on.’

⁵⁸ Meaning marriage, maternity, and so forth.

One moment shone my soul upon,
Then passed – how soon! – away.

3

She was to me the dreams of bliss
That float the dying eyes before,
For one short hour shed happiness,
And fly to bless no more.

4

O light, again upon me shine;
O pearl, again delight my eyes;
O dreams of bliss, again be mine! —
No! earth may not be Paradise.

I must not forget to remark, parenthetically, that the minister's son, in order to make these lines generally useful, had provided them with a last stanza in triplicate. 'For lovers,' he said sagely, 'are either in the optative mood, the desperative, or the exultative.' This time he had used the optative. For the desperative he would substitute:

4

The joys of life lie dead, lie dead,
The light of day is quenched in gloom;
The spark of hope my heart hath fled —
What now withholds me from the tomb?

And this was the termination exultative, as he called it:

4

O joy! the pearl is mine again,
Once more the day is bright and clear,
And now 'tis real, then 'twas vain,
My dream of bliss – O heaven is here!

The Princess Padmavati having perused this doggerel with a contemptuous look, tore off the first word of the last line, and said to the nurse, angrily, 'Get thee gone, O mother of Yama,⁵⁹ O

⁵⁹ Yama is Pluto; 'mother of Yama' is generally applied to an old scold.

unfortunate creature, and take back this answer' – giving her the scrap of paper – 'to the fool who writes such bad verses. I wonder where he studied the humanities. Begone, and never do such an action again!'

The old nurse, distressed at being so treated, rose up and returned home. Vajramukut was too agitated to await her arrival, so he went to meet her on the way. Imagine his disappointment when she gave him the fatal word and repeated to him exactly what happened, not forgetting to describe a single look! He felt tempted to plunge his sword into his bosom; but Fortune interfered, and sent him to consult his confidant.

'Be not so hasty and desperate, my prince,' said the pradhan's son, seeing his wild grief; 'you have not understood her meaning. Later in life you will be aware of the fact that, in nine cases out of ten, a woman's "no" is a distinct "yes." This morning's work has been good; the maiden asked where you learned the humanities, which being interpreted signifies "Who are you?"'

On the next day the prince disclosed his rank to old Lakshmi, who naturally declared that she had always known it. The trust they reposed in her made her ready to address Padmavati once more on the forbidden subject. So she again went to the palace, and having lovingly greeted her nursling, said to her, 'The Raja's son, whose heart thou didst fascinate on the brim of the tank, on the fifth day of the moon, in the light half of the month Yeth, has come to my house, and sends this message to thee: "Perform what you promised; we have now come;" and I also tell thee that this prince is worthy of thee: just as thou art beautiful, so is he endowed with all good qualities of mind and body.'

When Padmavati heard this speech she showed great anger, and, rubbing sandal on her beautiful hands, she slapped the old woman's cheeks, and cried, 'Wretch, Daina (witch)! get out of my house; did I not forbid thee to talk such folly in my presence?'

The lover and the nurse were equally distressed at having taken the advice of the young minister, till he explained what the crafty damsel meant. 'When she smeared the sandal on her ten fingers,' he explained, 'and struck the old woman on the face, she signified that when the remaining ten moonlight nights shall have passed away she will meet you in the dark.' At the same time he warned his master that to all appearances the lady Padmavati was far too clever to make a comfortable wife. The minister's son especially hated talented, intellectual, and strong-minded women: he had been heard to describe the torments of Naglok⁶⁰ as the compulsory companionship of a polemical divine and a learned authoress, well stricken in years and of forbidding aspect, as such persons mostly are. Amongst womankind he admired – theoretically, as became a philosopher – the small, plump, laughing, chattering, unintellectual, and material-minded. And therefore – excuse the digression, Raja Vikram – he married an old maid, tall, thin, yellow, strictly proper, cold-mannered, a conversationist, and who prided herself upon spirituality. But more wonderful still, after he did marry her, he actually loved her – what an incomprehensible being is man in these matters!

To return, however. The pradhan's son, who detected certain symptoms of strong-mindedness in the Princess Padmavati, advised his lord to be wise whilst wisdom availed him. This sage counsel was, as might be guessed, most ungraciously rejected by him for whose benefit it was intended. Then the sensible young statesman rated himself soundly for having broken his father's rule touching advice, and atoned for it by blindly forwarding the views of his master.

After the ten nights of moonlight had passed, the old nurse was again sent to the palace with the usual message. This time Padmavati put saffron on three of her fingers, and again left their marks on the nurse's cheek. The minister's son explained that this was to crave delay for three days, and that on the fourth the lover would have access to her.

When the time had passed the old woman again went and inquired after her health and well-being. The princess was as usual very wroth, and having personally taken her nurse to the western gate,

⁶⁰ Snake-land; the infernal region.

she called her ‘Mother of the elephant’s trunk,’⁶¹ and drove her out with threats of the bastinado if she ever came back. This was reported to the young statesman, who, after a few minutes’ consideration, said, ‘The explanation of this matter is, that she has invited you to-morrow, at night-time, to meet her at this very gate.’

When brown shadows fell upon the face of earth, and here and there a star spangled the pale heavens, the minister’s son called Vajramukut, who had been engaged in adorning himself at least half that day. He had carefully shaved his cheeks and chin; his mustachio was trimmed and curled; he had arched his eyebrows by plucking out with tweezers the fine hairs around them; he had trained his curly musk-coloured love-locks to hang gracefully down his face; he had drawn broad lines of antimony along his eyelids, a most brilliant sectarian mark was affixed to his forehead, the colour of his lips had been heightened by chewing betel-nut —

‘One would imagine that you are talking of a silly girl, not of a prince, fiend!’ interrupted Vikram, who did not wish his son to hear what he called these fopperies and frivolities.

– and whitened his neck by having it shaved (continued the Baital, speaking quickly, as if determined not to be interrupted), and reddened the tips of his ears by squeezing them, and made his teeth shine by rubbing copper powder into the roots, and set off the delicacy of his fingers by staining the tips with henna. He had not been less careful of his dress: he wore a well-arranged turban, which had taken him at least two hours to bind, and a rich suit of brown stuff chosen for the adventure he was about to attempt, and he hung about his person a number of various weapons, so as to appear a hero – which young damsels admire.

⁶¹ A form of abuse given to Durga, who was the mother of Ganesha (Janus); the latter had an elephant’s head.

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