

saying, 'If thou wilt obey my command, become the wife of my servant.' She said, 'I have become the slave of thy beauty, how then can I become his wife?' The king replied, 'It was but this instant thou saidst to me, 'I will obey any command you may give me.' Now, whatever the good promise they perform. Keep thy plighted word, (and) become the wife of my servant.' On hearing this, she said, 'Your word is law to me.' Thereupon the king married his servant to her without the usual ceremonies,¹ and brought them both with him to his palace."

Having related so much of the story, the sprite said, "Tell me, O king! Of master and servant, whose was the greater virtue?" The king said, "The servant's." The sprite said again, "Was not the merit of the king greater, who obtained so beautiful a woman, and bestowed her on his servant?" Thereupon king Bir Vikramājī said, "What superior merit is there in their conferring favours, whose office it is to do so? But he who, while having his own interests to attend to, promotes the interests of another—*he* is the greater. For this reason, the servant's merit was the greater." On hearing these words, the sprite went and hung himself on that same tree; and the king went and again took him down from thence, placed him on his shoulder, and carried him away.

¹ A *ganḍharb* marriage is one where the usual formalities are dispensed with, and the parties become man and wife by mutual consent.

TALE IX.

THE sprite said, "O king! there is a city named Madanpur, where was a king named Bīrbar. Now, in that same country there was a merchant named Hīranyadatt, whose daughter's name was Madansenā. One day, in the spring-time, she went, with her female friends, into her garden, to stroll about and enjoy the scene. It so happened that, previous to her coming out, Somdatt, the son of a merchant named Dharmdatt, had come, with a friend, to take a stroll in the forest. On his return thence, he came into that garden; (and) on beholding her, became enamoured, and began to say to his friend, 'Brother! Should she ever be united to me, then my living will be to some purpose; and if not, then my living in the world is in vain.'"

"Addressing these words to his friend, (and) being distracted by the pangs of separation, he involuntarily approached her, and seizing her hand, began to say, 'If thou wilt not love me, I will sacrifice my life on

thy account.' She replied, 'Act not thus; that would be a sin.' Then he said, 'Thy amorous glances have pierced my heart, and the fire of separation from thee has consumed my body; my whole consciousness and understanding have been destroyed by this pain; and at this moment, through the overpowering influence of love, I have no regard for right or wrong; but if thou wilt give me thy word, new life will enter my soul.' She said, 'On the fifth day from this day my marriage will take place; but I will first have intercourse with thee, and afterwards abide at my husband's.' After giving him this promise, and taking her oath (to keep it) she departed to her home, and he to his."

"To be brief, on the fifth day her marriage took place. Her husband brought her to his home after the marriage. After some days the wives of her husband's younger and elder brothers compelled her to go to her husband at night. She entered the nuptial chamber, and sat quietly down in a corner. In the meantime, her husband seeing her, took her hand, and made her sit on the bed. In fine, as he was about to embrace her, she shook him off with her hand, and related to him all that she had promised the merchant's son. On hearing this her husband said, 'If thou really desirest to go to him, go.'"

"Having received her husband's permission, she started for the merchant's place. A thief seeing her

on the road, came up to her in delight, and said, 'Whither goest thou alone, at this midnight hour, in this pitch-darkness, bedecked with such garments and jewels?' She replied, 'To the place where my dearly beloved dwells.' On hearing this the thief said, 'Who is thy protector here?' She began to say, 'Cupid, my protector, with his bow and arrows, is with me.' Having said this, she then related her whole story to the thief, from beginning to end, and said, 'Do not spoil my attire; I give thee my word that, when I return thence, I will deliver my jewels to thee.'"

"On hearing this, the thief said to himself, 'She leaves me, in truth, with a promise to deliver up her jewels to me; then why should I spoil her attire?' Thus reflecting, he let her go. (He) himself sat down there, while she went to the place where Somdatt was lying asleep. She having suddenly roused him as soon as she got there, he arose bewildered, and commenced saying, 'Art thou the daughter of a god, or sage, or serpent?'¹ Tell me truly, who art thou? and whence art thou come to me?' She replied, 'I am the daughter of a man—the daughter of the merchant Hiranyadatt; Madansenā is my name; and dost thou not remember that thou didst forcibly seize my hand in the grove, and didst insist on my giving thee my oath; and I swore, at thy bidding, that I would leave

¹ *Nāg* is the name of the fabulous serpents (said to have a human face), inhabiting Pātāla, or the infernal regions.

the man I was married to and come to thee? I have come accordingly; do unto me whatever thou pleasest.”

“On this he asked, ‘Hast thou told this story to thy husband, or not?’ She replied, saying, ‘I have mentioned the whole affair, and after becoming acquainted with everything, he has allowed me to come to thee.’ Somdatt said, ‘This matter is like jewels without apparel, or food without clarified butter, or singing out of tune—all these things are alike. Similarly, dirty garments mar beauty, bad food saps the strength, a wicked wife deprives of life, a bad son ruins the family. Whereas a demon takes life on his being enraged, a woman, either as a friend or a foe, is in both cases the occasion of sorrow. What a woman does not do is of little moment; for she does not give utterance to the thoughts of her mind; and what is at the tip of her tongue she does not reveal; and what she does, she does not tell of. A wonderful creature has God created in the world in woman.’”

“After uttering these words, the merchant’s son answered her, saying, ‘I will have nothing to do with another’s wife.’ On hearing this she took her way back home again. On the way she met the thief, (and) told him the whole story. The thief, on hearing it, applauded her highly, and let her go. She came nigh her husband and told him all the circumstances; but her husband evinced no affection for

her, and said, ‘The beauty of the cuckoo consists in its note alone; a woman’s beauty consists in her fidelity to her husband; and the beauty of an ugly man is his knowledge; the beauty of a devotee is his patient suffering.’”

Having related so much of the story, the sprite said, “O king! whose is the highest merit of these three?” King Vikramājīṭ replied, “The thief’s merit is the greatest.” The sprite said, “How?” The king replied, “Seeing her heart set on another man, her husband gave her up; through dread of the king, Somdatt let her alone; whereas there was no reason for the thief’s leaving her unmolested. Hence the thief is the superior.” On hearing this, the sprite went again and suspended himself on that tree; and the king also went there, took him down from the tree, bound and placed him on his shoulder, and once more carried him away.