

TALE XXIII.

THE sprite said, "Your majesty! there was a city named Dharmpur, where a king named Dharmaj ruled. In his city was a Brahman named Govind, versed in the whole four Vedas and all the six learned treatises, and a careful observer of all his religious duties; and Haridatt, Somdatt, Yagyadatt and Brahmatt were his four sons. They were very learned, very clever, and at all times obedient to their father. After some time his eldest son died, and he, too, was at the point of death through grief for him."

"At that time, Vishnusharmā, the king's family priest, came and began reasoning with him, saying, 'When this (being) man enters the mother's womb, he first suffers pain there; secondly, falling under the influence of love in youth, he endures the anguish of separation from his beloved; thirdly, becoming old, he is involved in suffering through his body being feeble. In brief, many are the sorrows attendant on (man's) being born in the world, and few (are) the

joys; for the world is the source of sorrow. If a man were to climb to the top of a tree, or go and sit on the summit of a mountain, or remain hiding in water, or sneak into an iron cage and remain therein, or go and conceal himself in the infernal regions—even then death would not let him escape. Moreover, whatever one may be—whether learned or a fool, rich or poor, wise or unwise, strong or weak—still, this all-devouring death lets no one escape. The full duration of a man's life is a hundred years; of this, half passes away in night, and half of the half in childhood and old age; the remainder is spent in contention, the (distress arising from) separation from those we love, and affliction. Further, the soul that is, is as restless as a watery wave; how, then, can it yield man any peace? And now, in this Iron Age, to meet with truthful men is a difficult matter; while countries are daily laid waste, kings are avaricious, the earth yields little fruit, thieves and evil doers commit violence on the earth, and but little of religion, devotion, and truth remain in the world; kings are tyrannical, Brahmans covetous, men have fallen under the influence of women, wives have become wanton, sons have begun reviling their fathers, and friends (have begun to display) enmity. Observe, further, that death did not even spare the great Chimanyu, whose maternal uncle was Kanhaiya, and father Arjun. And when Yama¹ carries off a

¹ *Yama* is the judge of the deceased, and ruler of the infernal regions: also, the god of death.

man, wealth remains behind in his house, and father, mother, wife, son, brothers and kindred—no one proves of any avail; his good and evil deeds, his vices and his virtues alone accompany him; while those same kinsfolk take him to the burning-ground and burn him. And see (how) the night comes to an end on one side, while day dawns on the other; here the moon sets, there the sun rises. In the same way youth departs, old age comes on; thus, also, time goes on passing away, and yet, even while perceiving this, man does not learn wisdom. Observe, again, in the First, or Golden Age, Mandhāta, a great king, who filled (*lit.* covered) the whole earth with the fame of his virtue; and in the Second, or Silver Age, the glorious monarch Rāmchandra, who, bridging the sea, destroyed such a fortress as Lankā, and slew Rāvan; and in the Third Age, Yudhisthir reigned in such a manner that people sing of his renown to this day—yet death did not spare even these. Moreover, the birds which fly in the air, and the animals which dwell in the sea, when the hour arrives, even these fall into trouble. No one has escaped sorrow on coming into this world. To grieve on this account is folly. It is best, therefore, to practise religious duties.”

“When Vishnusharmā had reasoned with him in this manner, it came into the Brahman’s mind that he would thenceforth perform meritorious and pious acts. Having thought this over in his mind, he said to his

sons, ‘I am about to sit down to a sacrifice; you go and bring me a turtle from the sea.’ On receiving their father’s command, they went to a fisherman, and said, ‘Take a rupee, and catch a turtle for us.’ He took it, and caught one, and gave it to them. Then the eldest of the brothers said to the second, ‘Do thou take it up.’ He said to the youngest, ‘Brother! do thou take it up.’ He replied, saying, ‘I will not touch it; a bad smell will cling to my hands, and I am very nice¹ in (my) eating.’ The second said, ‘I am very particular in my intercourse with women.’ The eldest said, ‘I am particular in (the matter of) sleeping on a bed.’”

“Thus did the three of them begin wrangling; and leaving the turtle where it was, they proceeded, quarrelling the while, to the king’s gate, and said to the gatekeeper, ‘Three Brahmans have come seeking justice; go thou and tell this to the king.’ On hearing this, the doorkeeper went and informed the king. The king summoned them, and asked, ‘Why are you quarrelling one with another?’ Then the youngest of them said, ‘Your majesty! I am very particular as to food.’ The second said, ‘Lord of the earth! I am very particular as to women.’ The

¹ I hazard this meaning for *ohatur* in the teeth of the vocabulary and the dictionaries, as, the meanings contained therein do not seem to me to apply. The student, however, may, if he pleases, substitute “sharp” or “clever” for “nice.”

eldest said, 'Incarnation of justice! I am particular in the matter of beds.' "

"When the monarch heard this, he said, 'Each of you submit to a trial.' They said, 'Very well.' The king sent for his cook, and said, 'Prepare various kinds of condiments and meats, and give this Brahman a thoroughly good repast.' On hearing this, the cook went and prepared food, and taking with him the one who was nice in the matter of food, seated him in front of the dishes. He was on the point of taking up a mouthful and putting it into his mouth, when an offensive smell came from it. He let it go, washed his hands, and came to the king. The king asked, 'Didst thou enjoy thy repast?' Then he said, 'Your majesty! I perceived a disagreeable smell in the food, (and) did not eat.' The king said again, 'State the cause of the offensive smell.' He replied, 'Your majesty! it was rice which had been grown on a burning-ground; the smell of corpses proceeded from it, and hence I did not eat it.' "

"On hearing this, the king summoned his steward, and asked, 'Sirrah! from what village does this rice come?' He replied, 'From Shibpur, your majesty!' The king said, 'Summon the landholder of that village.' Thereupon the steward had the landholder brought before the monarch. The king asked him, 'On what land was this rice grown?' He replied, 'On a burning-ground, your majesty!' When the

king heard this, he said to that Brahman, 'Thou art indeed a connoisseur in the matter of food.' "

"After this, he had the one who was nice in the matter of women sent for, and having a bed laid out in an apartment, and all the requisites for enjoyment placed therein, had a beautiful woman brought and placed near him, and the two while lying down began conversing with each other. The king was secretly looking on through a lattice. Now, the Brahman was about to give her a kiss, when smelling her breath, he turned away his face, and went to sleep. The king having witnessed this conduct, entered his palace and sought repose. Rising early in the morning, he came into the court, and summoned that Brahman, and asked, 'O Brahman! didst thou pass the night pleasantly?' He replied, 'Your majesty! I found no pleasure.' 'Why?' asked the king again. The Brahman replied, 'The smell of a goat proceeded from her mouth, and my mind was much distressed in consequence.' When the king heard this, he summoned the procuress, and inquired, 'Whence didst thou bring this (woman)? and who is she?' She said, 'She is my sister's daughter; her mother died when she was three months old, and I brought her up on goat's milk.' On hearing this, the monarch said, 'Thou art indeed a connoisseur in respect of women.' "

"After that he had a very fine bed prepared, and caused the Brahman who was a nice judge of beds to

sleep thereon. On its becoming morning, the king sent for him, and asked, 'Didst thou sleep comfortably through the night?' He replied, 'Your majesty! I had no sleep the whole night long.' 'Why?' asked the king. He replied, 'Your majesty! in the seventh fold of the bedding there was a hair, which was pricking my back, and I had no sleep in consequence.' On hearing this, the king looked into the seventh fold of the bedding, and lo! a hair was found. Thereupon he said to him, 'Thou art indeed a nice judge of beds.' "

After relating so much of the story, the sprite asked, "Who was the greatest connoisseur of those three?" King Bir Vikramajit replied, "He who was the connoisseur in the matter of beds." When the sprite heard this, he went again and hung on to that tree; (and) the king also went there on the instant, and bound him, placed him on his shoulder, and carried him away.

TALE XXIV.

THE sprite said, "Your majesty! in the country of Kaling there was a Brahman named Yagya Sharmā, whose wife's name was Somadattā. She was very beautiful. The Brahman began offering sacrifices, whereupon his wife had a beautiful boy. When he attained the age of five years, his father began teaching him the *Shāstras*. At the age of twelve years he had finished the study of all the *Shāstras*, and become a great scholar; and he began to be in constant attendance upon, and to help his father."

"After the lapse of some time the boy died, and in their sorrow for him his parents uttered loud cries of lamentation and wailing. On receiving this news all his kinsfolk hastened thither, and fastening the boy upon a bier, took him away to the burning-ground; and when there, began repeatedly gazing at him, and saying to one another, 'See! even in death he appears beautiful!' They were uttering words like these, and arranging the pyre, while an ascetic was also seated there engaged in religious austerity. He