

KAMBA RAMAYANAM — A STUDY

WITH TRANSLATIONS IN VERSE OR POETIC PROSE

OF

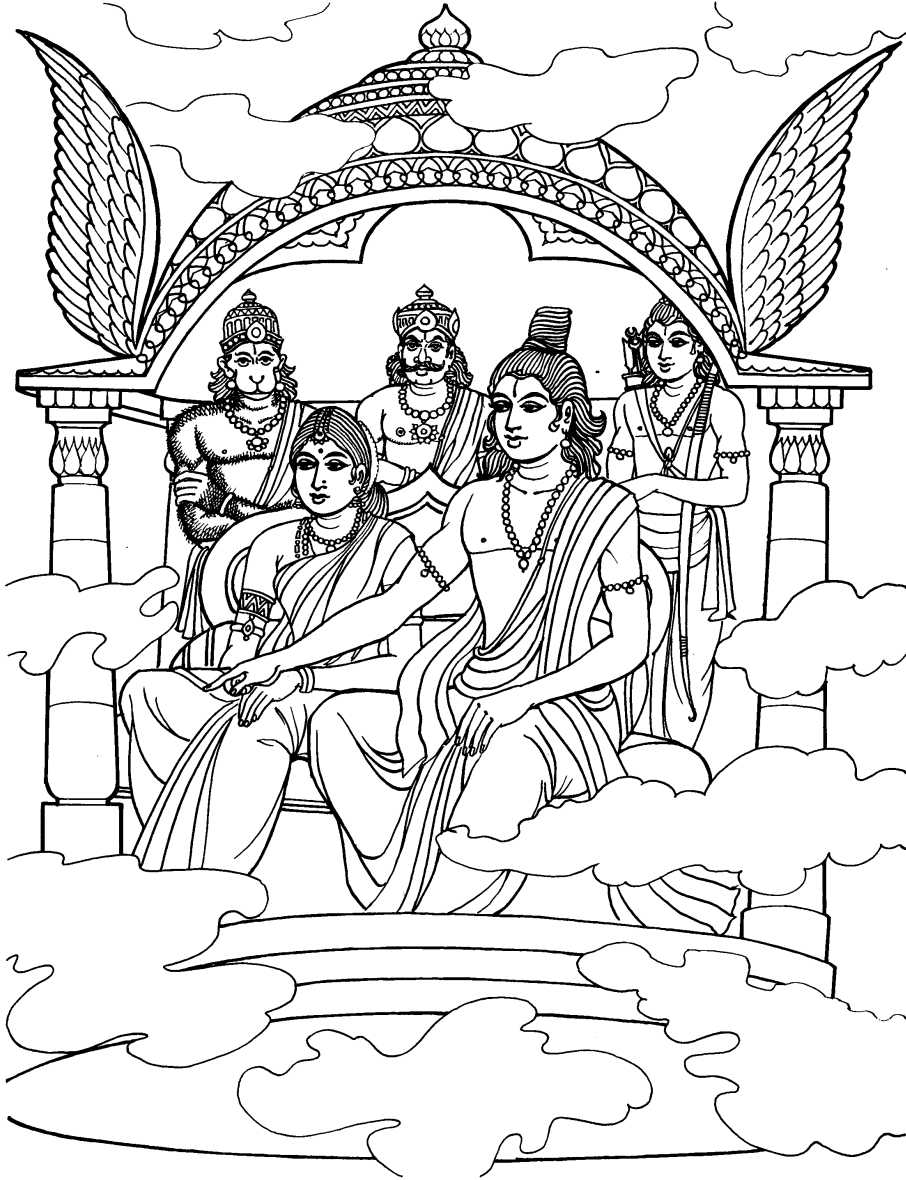
OVER FOUR THOUSAND OF THE ORIGINAL POEMS

By V. V. S. AIYAR

WITH A FOREWORD

BY Honorable Sri K. SANTANAM,

MINISTER OF STATE, TRANSPORT & RAILWAYS, INDIA



A DELHI TAMIL SANGAM PUBLICATION

1950

Other Works by V.V.S. Aiyer

English

THE TIRUKKURAL — Complete Translation (Out of print)

A HISTORY OF INDIA (Unpublished)

Tamil

MANGAYARKARASIYIN KATHAL— Short Stories

LIFE OF CHANDRA GUPTA MOURYA

LIFE OF BOOKER WASHINGTON NAPOLEON (A book on Military Strategy — Confiscated by the late British Government in India)

THAN-NAMBIKKAI — Translation of Ralph Waldo Emerson's Self-reliance.

2nd Edition by Sarvodaya Pirasuralayam, Virapandi, Tiruppur (1950).

GURU GOVIND SINGH— A Biographical sketch.

2nd Edition (1950) by Navayuga Pirasuralayam, Karaikudi.

KURUNTOGAI — Translation in English verse of the ancient Tamil Classic.

(Unpublished Manuscript lost in 1942 disturbances.)

Published in 1950 First Edition

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PUBLISHED AT MADRAS BY

THE DELHI TAMIL SANGAM,

M. C. 1/3038, PARLIAMENT STREET, NEW DELHI.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

We are publishing this book due to a dearth of publishers of whom there are too many worthier than us to publish it. If the gods had been kind, this work would probably have been published a quarter of a century ago by reputed English publishers under the sponsorship of the great Irish poet, George Russell, more widely known as 'A.E.'

We had intended to tell in this note the story of how we came to do this work, and of the many difficulties and obstacles we had to surmount, chief among which is our colossal ignorance of the job and of everything else besides. But we are now so nearly bursting with pride in the successful achievement of our labors that, if we let ourselves go, the four-hundred odd pages of this book will not be sufficient for the epic of our travails.

So we content ourselves with expressing our deep sense of gratitude to all those who have helped us spontaneously and ungrudgingly in publishing this book. They are so many, and however small or big their help has been, the love behind the aid of each of them yields place to none else. We mention by name only a few.

To Aiyar's son, Dr. V. V. S. Krishnamurthy who honored us with his faith and entrusted the manuscripts to us and stood by us with every possible help, we cannot find adequate words to express our gratitude.

We are indebted to the Editors of the Dinamani, the Dinamani Kadir, the Hindu, the Indian Express, the Hindustan Times, the Atma Jyoti of Ceylon and other publications for the publicity they so generously gave to our projected publication. We thank them most sincerely for this invaluable help. We owe the success of our effort to the tireless band of friends and associations in Delhi and other places who took upon themselves the onerous task of canvassing subscribers. We can never cease to be grateful to them. We should next thank all our subscribers who so trustingly paid the price several months in advance and made it possible to publish this book. We thank them for their faith in us.

We take great pleasure in being able to print a Foreword from Hon'ble Sri K. Santanam, Minister of State, Transport and Railways, India. He is a close friend of Aiyar and his family and he has followed with keen interest the progress of the publication of this book. We sincerely thank him for taking the trouble to write this Foreword in the midst of his pressing duties.

We are indebted to the Director of the HIND, an excellent quarterly published in France and devoted purely to the culture and literature of Bharata Kanda, for permission to quote certain extracts from an article by Monsieur S. KICHENASSAMY (Sakti sei) on *Le Ramayana de Kamban*, in the second issue of the first volume (1949). The HIND is published from 41, Rue de la Bienfaisance, Paris 8e, price 1,000 francs a year — 250 francs per issue. We take this occasion to tender our thanks also to the few authors and publishers from whose works we have taken small extracts to adorn our foot-notes. Being very brief extracts we have not sought specific permission, which omission, we sincerely hope, these large-hearted friends will overlook in the cause of knowledge. Suitable acknowledgements have been made at the proper places.

We have, throughout the book, linked the translations in English verse with the original poems and have given references to Book, Canto, and stanza. These references follow the edition of the Kamba Ramayanam in Tamil (with elaborate commentaries) in seven volumes by Sri V. M. Gopalakrishnamachariar of 17, T.P. Koil Street, Triplicane, Madras. The Roman figures refer to the Kandams or Books, the small Roman figures to the Padalams or Cantos, and the Arabic numbers to the stanzas.

Quotations by Aiyar from the Valmiki Ramayana have been printed in italics. Except in one or two places, Aiyar has taken these quotations from Griffith.

The foot-notes, except in the case of reference numbers to the original poems in Kamba Ramayanam are by the author in nearly all cases. We have, however, felt called upon to add a few. As these are, in intention and form, completely in accord with Aiyar's plan, who, if he had lived to publish this work, would have added these notes, we have not distinguished them by any special sign. There are none by us, we hasten to assure the readers, which expresses any opinion or criticism. Ours are innocuous ones like meaning of a phrase or word, chiefly for the benefit of the foreign reader. In a few cases, however, where the notes should be so marked on account of their import, we have shown the letter 'P' within brackets.

Aiyar had intended to crown his work with the character-study of Sita and had fittingly reserved it to the last. Cruel fate, however, stretched its talons and tragically snatched him away from this world before he could sing Sita's virtues. Though very reluctant to make any additions to Aiyar's work, we felt a certain infelicity in letting the work appear without Sita and hence a character-sketch has been added to this book. It is written by a member of the Delhi Tamil Sangam.

Prof. A. Srinivasa Raghavan who had very kindly agreed to write this chapter, and, in fact, to edit the rest of the book as well, has been prevented from doing so by pressure of work, want of leisure and ill health. We know how much our subscribers will be disappointed. We tender our sincere regrets to them. It has been our endeavor — we had almost said, an obsession with us — to make this work free of that common eye-sore of publications in this country — the list of Errata. Still, some errors have escaped our vigilant eyes; we offer no excuses but beg to be forgiven. We absolve our printers from all responsibility for any of these

Though the book itself is a testimony to the excellent work of our printers, The Jupiter Press Ltd., of Madras, it cannot speak of two of their outstanding claims on our gratitude. Their prompt execution of the work at every stage and their close co-operation only has made it possible to bring out this book so quickly. As whatever we may say will appear a hyperbole — we feel so enthusiastic about this trait of our printers — we pass on to their next virtue — the almost unique excellence of their proofs, first or second. Sometimes, we had uncharitably wished that they were not so perfect, as such perfection made our guilt in making later corrections stand forth very glaringly. We acknowledge with pleasure and gratitude the invaluable help of the small band of friends who typed the manuscripts, sometimes again and again, ungrudgingly, and of those who checked them and the press proofs so carefully. Any excellence in the get-up of this work is due to their tireless help.

The cover design is by Sri R. Mahadevan who has adopted the Sangam as the special beneficiary of his selfless service. We cannot refrain from mentioning with gratitude Mr. S. Ramaswamy who has looked after our work at Madras. Without him, we do not know into what snares and pitfalls we would have fallen. Our acknowledgements to those to whom we are indebted in the Introductory Essay on Tamil and the chapter on Sita are made in the respective chapters.

We thank God who has deigned to use us as His instrument for this service to Kamban and Tamil, and we tender this work with humility at His lotus feet as our humble offering.

30th June, 1950. THE DELHI TAMIL SANGAM.

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THE DELHI TAMIL SANGAM



(Founded— January 1946)

Founder-President Sri S. Subramanyam. Founder-Secretary Sri A. V. Kuppuswamy.

The Sangam was begun in a small room in a local boarding house in January 1946 with less than a dozen members.

It was fostered with great care by the selfless work of the Founder-President and the first Secretary of the Sangam and it was chiefly due to them that the Sangam occupies its present position of the cultural center of the Tamilar in Delhi.

The Sangam is housed in a building kindly provided by the Chief Commissioner of Delhi to whom the Sangam is ever grateful.

The objects of the Sangam are:

To provide a venue for the Tamilar to enjoy the cultural benefits of the Tamil Literature in its three fields — Poetry and Prose, Music, and Drama, and to enable them to establish cultural contacts with the people of the local province.

The Sangam fosters the following activities in furtherance of its objects: —

- (a) Conducting of Study Classes in Tamil literature.
- (b) Arranging lectures by eminent scholars on Tamil and cognate subjects.
- (c) Weekly Summer talks by members of the Sangam.
- (d) Celebration of the two important Tamil festivals — The Pongal and the Tamil New Year — and of Days of the Great Savants of Tamil.
- (e) The publication of a manuscript Tamil Magazine for the self-expression of the members.
- (f) Maintaining an excellent library of Tamil literature.
- (g) Conducting a class in Hindi for the members.
- (h) Maintaining a Free Reading Room (in memory of the orator and patriot S. Satyamurthi) for the Public of Delhi and providing same with English, Hindi and Tamil Newspapers and Periodicals.

FOREWORD



This profound study of Kamba Ramayanam seeks to present to the world the greatness of the immortal epic of Hindu Culture as portrayed by the greatest of Tamil poets. It is no exaggeration to say that Maliki's Ramayana almost superseded the Vedas and the Smritis as the fountain source of Hindu religion and morals. It was inevitable that it should become the ambition of the poetic geniuses who arose from time to time in the various parts of India to seek to render the Ramayana into their own languages. Of these attempts, the Ramayana of Kamban in Tamil and that of Tulsidas in Hindi (*Brij Bhasha*) stand foremost. They are often considered superior to the original by their enthusiastic admirers. I do not subscribe to this view. Taken as a whole, I think Valmiki's Ramayana is incomparable in its simplicity, dignity and power to move the mind. It is nevertheless true that for sheer beauty of language and delicate portrayal of character and emotion, Kamban ordinarily equals and often excels Valmiki. The author, V.V.S. Aiyar, who undertook this difficult task of presenting the study in English of Kamba Ramayanam was a remarkable personality. Perhaps, the simplest way to assess him is to say that he stood in the field of politics and erudition in the same relation to Lokamanya Tilak as Subramanya Bharati stood to Rabindranath Tagore in the field of poetry. With the dawn of the Gandhian era, V.V.S. Aiyar had changed over from his older ideas of violent revolution to those of non-violent *satyagraha*. Unfortunately, he died before he could play an effective part in the new struggle for national liberation.

Aiyar's love of the Tamil language and his eagerness to enrich it and interpret it to the non-Tamil world were second only to his passion for Indian independence. He died before his fame could be securely established. The Delhi Tamil Sangam has done a great service to all lovers of literature by undertaking the publication of this study. It is to be hoped that their attempt will be crowned with success and the volume will have the popularity it deserves.

K.SANTANAM.

KAMBAN



Kamban, the author of the Ramayana in Tamil, which is the subject of critical study in this work by V.V.S. Aiyar lived in the 9th Century C.E.¹ He was born in Tiruvazhundur in the Cola country. His father was Athavan, a priest by caste. Kamban appears to have been a poet in the court of the Cola and Cera Kings, but his steadfast patron was Sadayappan of Tiruvennai-nallur whose name is referred to in ten places in Kamba Ramayanam.

Kamban was a devotee of Nammalvar, one of the famous Vaishnava saints and poets. Kamba Ramayanam was composed by him about the eight hundred and eighties and according to the procedure of those days was recited by him for approval to an audience of the literary elite — a sort of Academy of Letters² — assembled in Srirangam in the month of Panguni (March-April) of the year 807³ of the Salivahana Sakabda (885 CE) on the full-moon day when the star *Uttaram* was in the ascendant.⁴

Kamban was acclaimed by the assembly as the *Kavi-chakravarti* — the Emperor of the Realms of Poesy — a title which every succeeding generation has been but confirming ever since. Many are the stories which have come down to us in poems and by word of mouth about Kamban's difficulties before he had his work approved, about his spirit of independence and poetic hauteur and about the jealousies and intrigues of his contemporary poets; but fact and fiction have so intermingled in these anecdotes that it is impossible to separate them today. They, however, bear evidence to the high veneration in which Kamban was and is held to this day in Tamil-land.

We should not omit to mention that in his work of over ten thousand and five hundred stanzas of four lines each, there are many interpolations too difficult to identify, though a hundred of them are now known to have been inserted by one Velliambala Thambiran. These interpolations, however, have not detracted the generations of Tamilians from their undying love for this great work.

His other works are said to be

Sadagopar-antadi,
Silaiyehupathu,
Aerezhupathu,
Saraswathi-antadi.

¹ Some say the 12th Century.

² Mushairas and Kavi-sammelans of these days.

³ The original poems allow an interpretation to mean 1107 instead of 807.

⁴ The Anniversary Day of the wedding of Shri Rama and Sita

VARAGANERI VENKATESA SUBRAMANYA AIYAR



V.V.S. Aiyar was born his father's first son, on 2nd April 1881, in a village near Karur in the Trichinopoly District of the Madras Province. His father Venkatesa Aiyar had settled at Varaganeri, a suburb of Trichinopoly, and in his retired days was resisting mass conversion of the Harijans to Christianity and was arranging for their reconversion to the Hindu fold. V.V.S. Aiyar, whom we shall hereafter mention as Aiyar for short, matriculated at the early age of twelve ranking fifth in the Presidency and was married the same year; and graduated when but sixteen. His college-mates relate his annoying patience during discussions and controversies and his smiling away all opposition in the College Free Thinkers' Society, his drinking deep from Spencer and Spinoza, Milton and Moliere, and of his being the favourite of all his professors.

When twenty, he was to be seen practising as a lawyer at the Trichinopoly Bar; and five years later, he sailed to Rangoon to seek his fortune in Burma. But within a year he was bound for England to become a barrister.

London: Master of Latin, he came out first in *Roman Law* and "was an all round brilliant student". Nearly three years had rolled by and he was soon to return to India as an ambitious barrister to make fabulous fortunes, but Destiny was shaping him for quite a different life.

Wrote his associate: —

"In 1907, the maid-servant at the famous India House in London handed a visiting card to us and presently a gentleman neatly dressed and inclined to be fashionable warmly shook hands with us, and told us that he came over to London to qualify himself as a full-fledged barrister.... He assured us of his intention to study English music and if possible also English dance as well. We entered our mild protest against thus dissipating the energy of one's youth in light-hearted pastimes ... The gentleman, unconvinced, though impressed, took our leave, promising to continue to call on us every now and then. He was. V.V.S. AIYAR.

"In 1910, we stood as a prisoner in London Brixton Jail. The warder announced, visits and anxiously we accompany the file of prisoners to the yard, we stand behind the bars; wondering who could have come to call on us and thus invite the unpleasant attention of the London Police. Presently a dignified figure enters the box in front of us. It was V.V.S. AIYAR. His beard was closely waving on his breast. He was unkempt. He was no longer the neatly dressed fashionable gentleman. His whole figure was transformed with some great act of dedication of life."

Aiyar and Gandhiji: Diwali, the universal festival of rejoicing in the whole length and breadth of India, has a special significance to the South Indian. Aiyar and his companions in India House at London were anxious to celebrate the Diwali in Indian style as far as it was practicable in England, and Aiyar went seeking leading Indian after Indian in London to grace the occasion. But he met with no success. Aiyar heard that one Mr. Gandhi, a man of new ways, had come to London to represent the case of Indians in South Africa. After searching for him in the luxurious hotels and similar rendezvous of fashionable Indians of those days he found him in a humble home and invited him to preside over the celebrations. Gandhiji made searching enquiries about the mode of celebrations and when he was assured that it would be in purely Indian style he readily agreed. This was the first occasion on which Aiyar met Gandhiji. With his, revolutionary zeal, Aiyar did not want to miss the opportunity of pressing his views on the rising leader. He spoke to him with vehemence about the revolutionary creed as the only possibility of winning independence for India. Gandhiji in turn preached him his newly-found satyagraha. Aiyar returned feeling naively confident that two or three more pep talks by him to Gandhiji would convince him and bring him to his way of thinking.

Aiyar was away when Gandhiji came to India House. The other companions of Aiyar, who were busy cooking, saw a thin, simply-dressed poor Indian and immediately pressed him into service and allotted him all the more menial jobs in the kitchen. Aiyar returned to the house to find the principal guest of the evening employed in the kitchen. He made profuse apologies to Gandhiji but he put him at his ease with his winning smile and heartily joined in the celebrations.

The Die is Cast: The moment came when he was to be called to the Bar. But he firmly refused to take the oath of allegiance to the King, whom he would not recognize as the King of his country as well. Such was his irrevocable decision to completely dedicate his life for the cause of Indian freedom.

London to Amsterdam: This was sufficient proof of the volcano he was, and an urgent warrant was issued to arrest this fiery anarchist. During the night, the C.I.D. Police had occupied situations in the Hotel in which Aiyar resided, to take him away in the morning. Aiyar, scenting this, as a Jean Valjean, left the hotel at midnight, taking with him the barest necessities, and among them the volumes of Kamba Ramayana were to be found: such was his love for Kamban from whom he would not part even in such perilous times.

A broad intellectual forehead, a bold aquiline nose, a strong athletic form and a majestic beard adding colour to the arresting personality — yet the spy of the Scotland Yard was certain that this was the "South Indian Brahmin revolutionary" he was to arrest, his appearance like a Punjabi Sikh notwithstanding; and to fix the identity he handed over a telegram to V.V.S. Aiyar. With an uncanny presence of mind, Aiyar immediately returned the telegram unopened to the C.I.D. man stating that he was delivering it to the wrong addressee. The official was quick to point out the inscription ' V.V.S.' on Aiyar's handbag, and quicker was Aiyar to reply " Yes! My name is Veer Vikram Singh". The sleuth had to go away quietly.

Paris to Pondicherry: Crossing the Channel was not the end of the trouble. The British Secret Police in France were censoring all his letters, and the moment he entered any British territory he was to be taken into custody. Aiyar was constantly writing to his father of his desire to settle in Brazil where land was rich and plentiful, instead of going to India where he might be arrested and jailed. Could not his father, Aiyar asked, arrange for a hundred hardworking South Indian families to go with him to Brazil and colonise that country.

On a certain morning of November 1910, news reach the Government and the family of his presence at Pondicherry! And neither could believe it. The ruse was this: a bundle of letters in Aiyar's handwriting to his father and relatives was handed over by Aiyar to one of his friends in Paris to be posted every week, and this fixed the attention of the British authorities in France to Paris and to the ship routes to Rio de Janeiro.

In a few days a certain Muslim gentleman was swiftly passing through Italy and Greece, Turkey and Egypt. He was very devout, constantly writing from the KURAN, and performing *Namaz* five times a day on the ship's deck. The ship touches Bombay, Colombo, and Tuticorin before he alights at Pondicherry harbour. Within a few hours, telegrams signed "V.V.S. Aiyar" are handed at the post office by this very same "muslim gentleman" informing the British Government of his presence in French India. Aiyar was then just 29 years of age.

Pondicherry: Aiyar's life at Pondicherry for ten years from 1910 to 1920 is so fully packed with thrilling exploits, imperturbable courage in the face of worst dangers, and brilliant achievements in literature, that it is difficult to detail them all in this short sketchy note. And in all his revolutionary activities and literary work, we may mention, his wife was a source of constant help. Smuggling of revolvers, proscribed literature, arms and ammunitions to British India was a mere routine.

A versatile linguist knowing Latin, Greek, German, Persian, Urdu, Sanskrit, Hindustani, Telugu and Canarese, etc., Aiyar soon mastered French to study Napoleon's War Memoirs in the original; and

wrote a synthetic treatise on military strategy, adapting Napoleon's method of warfare for a war against the British rulers. Lokamanya Tilak sent his nephew to Aiyar to copy down the manuscript and Aiyar had to send him back in the guise of a gypsy to save the manuscript and the messenger from the secret police.

Desiring to prepare a background of revolutionary mentality among his countrymen, Aiyar wrote Tamil biographies of Napoleon, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Rana Pratap Singh, Chandra Gupta, etc., and wrote some excellent short stories as well.

Finding it impossible to dislodge Aiyar from Pondicherry by fair or foul means, the British Government took advantage of the Great War of 1914-18 and made the French Government believe that Aiyar was secretly communicating with the EMDEN which was then scouring the Bay of Bengal. Although these false allegations could not be proved, still as an ally of the British, the French Government agreed to deport Aiyar to Algiers in Africa. In order to gain time, Aiyar started a round of negotiations and wanted to leave something behind him to keep his memory green among his countrymen. Translation of the Tamil Classic — KURAL — into English was decided on as his best legacy for the country. It was on 1st November, 1914 he put his pen to paper. Day after day he pounded away at the translation, every bqc. V. V, 6. AIYAR evening thinking that he might be deported the next morning, On 1st March, 1915, the manuscripts were ready for the press. Though completed in such perilous circumstances -and haste, Aiyar's translation is considered the best even today.

Second Meeting with Gandhiji: Gandhiji came in 1917 to Pondicherry and Aiyar met him for the second time. To this date, Aiyar had not forsworn his belief in revolutionary methods, but when Gandhiji met him it was a case of '*veni, vidi, vici.*' Gandhiji came, saw him, and conquered him. Aiyar became a convert to the principles of Ahimsa and he who never went about without a revolver in his possession, now exchanged it for the *Takli*. To his dying day he remained true to his new religion and there were often moments when his closest friends wished that he was not such a staunch devotee of Ahimsa.

Back to the Indian Scene: The general amnesty of 1920 saw Aiyar an editor of a Tamil daily newspaper at Madras. But he was soon to spend nine months in Bellary Central Jail during 1921-22 on a charge of sedition. It was in those nine months of prison life that Aiyar wrote his *Magnum Opus* — which we now offer to the lovers of literature today.⁵

Aiyar needed some books for consultation and we translate here the letter he wrote to a friend in Benares.

He said:—

"Dear brother, you would have come to know of my stay here through the newspapers. I have still six more months to stay here. I expect they would pass just as the last three months have passed — in literary work. You could do me a service. I am writing a Study of Kamban. I require in this connection Griffithes English translations of Valmiki⁶ and Tulsidas⁷ Ramayanams and I also require As I cannot think of any one else who could get them for me, and as at present I have very little money, and as these books will be

⁵ Between the leaves of Aiyar's rough manuscripts was found a faded cutting from a newspaper quoting records in daily or weekly cutout of writing by famous authors. Dr. Johnson's *Rasselas* of a little more 20,000 words produced in a week, Mark Twain's 4,000 words a day, Stevenson, Du Maupassant, Balzac, Hutchinson of "If Winter Comes" fame, Oppenheim and Wells have inspired Aiyar. His manuscripts show dates and numbers of words written each day. In nine months of prison life, with its unbending routine, Aiyar lags not far behind these masters with his work of a little over 140,000 words, more than a third of which are set inverse.

⁶ The author of the original Ramayana in Sanskrit.

⁷ The author of the Hindi rendering of the Ramayana.

available in Benares only, I have to trouble you. As soon as I come out of prison I shall pay you the price."

More follows with a list of the books and where they will be available. He continues:—

"I have finished nearly a hundred pages of the work. I am now at present writing the character study of Lakshmana. I expect the book to run to about five hundred pages. Wherever I have quoted any poems from Kamban I am trying to translate them in verse as far as possible. I hope that this work will reveal the glories of Kamban to the scholars in North India and to those Tamilians who have forgotten their Tamil. My address is V.V.S. Aiyar, No. 65, Central Jail, Bellary."

The Last Phase: Released from jail, Aiyar again plunged into the vortex of his work. After a short swift tour of India, Aiyar started an Ashram at Shermadevi, Tinnevely District in 1922-23, called the TAMIL GURUKULAM, where the pupils and the teachers ploughed the fields and reaped the harvest, laid bricks and built huts, weaved cloth, printed books and magazines, did carpentry and gardening, learnt self-defence, archery, sword fights, etc. Aiyar's ambition was to create a race of Tamilians similar to the Sikhs of the Punjab, and he wrote a biography of Guru Gobind Singh to instil the ideals in the minds of his countrymen.

The Heroic End: It was 10 a.m., 3rd June, 1925. The sun was shining with all its splendour. The Kalyan-Thirtha Falls was roaring at a distance with a majestic voice amidst a scene of great beauty and charm. Aiyar joined the party of pupils he had sent two days ago from the Ashram for a visual education trip. All went up the hill and Aiyar was helping the safe passage of the students across the proximal side of the falls. Aiyar's daughter, Subhadra, insisted on her crossing the river, just as the others, but as Fate would have it, she tripped into the deep fast current with the cry, "Father! Father!" — and within the fraction of a second Aiyar had jumped into the stream not a bit thinking about the consequences and he almost held his daughter by her locks, but only to find it slipping away, and in a few moments both were submerged in the hungry waters of the Tamrabaraparani.

Thus ended in but 44 years one of the most momentous of lives.

"How we long to write of the goodness and gentleness of disposition, how when betrayed you stood unshaken, how you served them who owned you not: how you suffered when unknown and made not the slightest mention of it when you got known your greatness must stand undimmed though unwitnessed by man like the lofty Himalayan peaks. your services and sacrifices must be buried in oblivion as do the foundations of a mighty castle "

GANDHIJI ON AIYAR

From *Young India* — 18th June, 1925 (Editorial page)

The readers of Young India will share my regret over the death by drowning of Sjt. V. V. S. Iyer. I had the pleasure of meeting him in London years ago. He was then a fierce anarchist. But he gradually mellowed down. The fire of patriotism burnt none the less brightly in him. He was a staunch non-cooperator and latterly he had intended to devote himself entirely to conducting the Shermadevi Gurukul. I always regarded him as a fine, sincere and persevering servant of the nation. May his soul rest in peace! —
M. K. G.

(Reproduced by Courtesy of the Navajivan Trust.)

A STUDY OF THE RAMAYANA OF KAMBAN

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

It is not easy to convince the literary world at this late hour of day that there is, unsuspected by the greater part of it, a Tamil poet who is worthy to take rank with the greatest names in literature. It is, however, my purpose in this book to try to prove that in the Ramayana of Kamban the world possesses an epic which can challenge comparison not merely with the Iliad and the Aeneid, the Paradise Lost and the Mahabharata, but with its original itself, namely, the Ramayana of Valmiki. This is not the language of mere patriotic enthusiasm. It is an opinion that has grown slowly with years and after deep and careful study. And I hope to make the impartial reader rise from the study of this monograph with a conviction of the truth of my contention and with a desire to know more of the poet than what he will see exhibited within the pages of this volume.

I spoke of Valmiki's work as the original of Kamban's Ramayana. But Kamban has not translated Valmiki. He has merely taken the story immortalized by the Aryan sage and, though he has followed it closely enough in all its details, has written an entirely original poem. Bentley said of Pope's Iliad, "It is a pretty poem, but you must not call it Homer." Of Kamban's Ramayana we should say reversing the language, "It is not Valmiki's Ramayana, but it is a grander poem".

It is a curious fact that during the whole course of our long literary history, until very recent times, no Sanskrit classic has been literally translated into any of our vernaculars⁸. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavata, and the Skanda Purana have been among the literary treasures that poets from every part of India have attempted to render into their mother-tongues. But in no single vernacular is there a literal translation of any of these divine poems which dates from more than three or four decades ago. On the contrary, all the old poetical renderings of these classics in the vernaculars are no more than free adaptations from their originals.

This tendency to rewrite the stories of the Sanskrit classics instead of translating them seems to be a common instinct with the peoples of India, for, so far as we can see, it cannot have been the result of imitation by one people of the literary methods of another. The earliest adaptation of a Sanskrit classic into a vernacular tongue is most probably that of the Mahabharata into Tamil by Perun Devanar who is said to have lived in the first century of the Sakabda⁹.

Since then, the Skanda Purana, the Ramayana and the stories of Nala and Harishchandra, among others, have been rendered into Tamil by scores of poets, but not one of these renderings is a mere translation. We find the same phenomenon in Telugu. The monumental Bharatam of Nannayya and Tikkanna has nothing in common with Vyasa's Mahabharata except the story. There is nothing to show that the authors of the Telugu Bharatam took to this method of adapting the Sanskrit epic instead of translating it from the example of Tamil poets. The same is the case with Bhaskara's Ramayana, Tulsi Das's Rama-Charita-Manas and other vernacular classics of India. All these poets have dealt very freely with their originals. Their tropes and fancies, their imagery, their descriptions and dissertations are not those of the original poems but their own. They develop certain incidents, cut down certain others, and introduce interludes, fables, allegories or new incidents according to

⁸ The Bhagavad Gita appears to be the only exception so far as we know. It has been literally translated into Tamil verse by the great Acharya Manavala Maha Muni in the 12th century of the Sakabda, i.e. the 13th century C.E.

⁹ i.e. the 2nd Century of Christ.

their pleasure. In short what they write are new poems altogether and not translations. And this tendency is to be seen among writers of Provinces situated so wide apart as Bengal and the Tamil country and Gujarat, and of ages extending from the first century up to our own times.

If we look into the matter carefully, this method of popularizing the stories revered by the people will appear much better than the western method of literally translating them into poetry. For, the attitude of mind in which the poet has to place himself in the attempt to translate from one language into another acts as a drag upon all his higher faculties, so that even poets of a very high order are failures when they descend to translation on a large scale. Coleridge hit the nail on the head when he said:— "the translation of poetry into poetry is difficult, because the translator must give a brilliancy to his language without that warmth of original conception from which such brilliancy would follow of its own accord ". The mind of the poet is checked in its flight when it is weighted with the thoughts and images of the original which he has to render closely into another language. His mind loses its natural flow and has to substitute for it a simulacrum by all sorts of subterfuges. And the result is a travesty of the original which is not merely below the original, but even below the average quality of the works of the translator himself, as one can see by comparing, for instance, Pope's Iliad and Odyssey with his other works.

Hence it is that Indian poets even of the second rank have with unerring good sense abstained from translating the Sanskrit classics, but instead have rewritten them in their own way for their countrymen. Thus while Europe has — to take one representative each from the Greek and the Latin literatures — but one Iliad and one Aeneid, and a host of translations of these epics, India has not one Ramayana and one Mahabharata, but at least a score of Ramayanas and Mahabharatas. No doubt these are of unequal merit, but each one of them is at least as great as the unhampered flight of its author's genius could make it.

We should think that this difference between Europe and India in the method adopted for the rendering of the classics into the vernaculars is due to the fact that, while the nations of Europe have cut themselves away from their ancient religions as those of Greece and Rome, the peoples of India are, on the other hand, even to this day followers of the religion of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and the Skanda Purana and the Bhagavata. To the modern European, Jupiter and Minerva and Mars and Vulcan are nothing more than names, though with poetical associations. Chateaubriand goes so far as to call them devils who took form to corrupt mankind. But to the Hindu of today, Rama and Krishna, Uma and Sarasvati are heroes and divinities worshipped with the same fervor with which they were worshipped by his ancestors before him. While it is only the scholar in Europe that can feel for Andromache and Hector, and Hercules and Cassandra, every Hindu, be he or she the most innocent of letters will shed tears with Sita and Draupadi, and swell with pride at the exploits of Bhima and Hanuman. Therefore, in taking up these stories as the subject matter of their epics our poets had no need to look to the literary classes alone for readers, but could appeal to all their countrymen who spoke their language; and that ought to be the reason why they rewrote in their mother-tongues, instead of translating, these epics so much loved of their people. Perhaps the poets of Europe too would have followed a similar course if there had been epics that treated of the stories of Abraham or Jesus, great, and ancient enough to make the greatest poets think it a matter not derogatory to their dignity to rewrite them in their own language. The absence of such ancient poems of transcendental merit may in part explain the fact that in modern Europe the natural instinct of epic poets to embody in poetry the fundamental beliefs of their race and civilization has produced not one or more central stories for the whole of Europe, but such different poems as the Divine Comedy, Jerusalem Delivered, the *Paradise Lost* and *Les Martyrs*.¹⁰

¹⁰ Though this work is in prose, Chateaubriand has conceived the theme and conducted the story in epic style

However this may be, here is the fact that Kamban has merely sung again in Tamil the great story of the Ramayana and yet has been adjudged by his contemporaries, no mean judges of poetry, as the Emperor of the Realms of Poesy — a title which every succeeding generation in the Tamil country has been but confirming ever since.

Other poets have taken their stories from earlier authors or contemporary tradition, and have won immortal fame by singing them. Indeed it may almost be said that no great poet has ever cared to invent a story. For, even Valmiki got his story from Narada and Brahma, Vyasa sang of the events that took place before his own eyes, and Homer wrote the Iliad and the Odyssey out of the traditions current in his time. Corneille and Racine looked to Greece and Rome and Spain for the themes of their tragedies. It is well-known that Shakespeare borrowed his stories from any source that was near at hand and not infrequently rewrote for his own stage dramas which were popular in his day. But the sources from which these masters drew their stories were almost always of very indifferent merit, and none but the curious student of literary criticism would now care to look into them. Kamban's case, however, is entirely different. He has not merely taken his theme from the greatest of Sanskrit epics but has followed it in almost every detail step by step. He has himself challenged comparison, though in all humility, with the first of Sanskrit poets, and yet not one of the critics who have compared his work with that of Valmiki has ever denied him place among the greatest poets of the world. It is now for the larger critical audience of India and of the rest of the world to appraise Kamban's work and adjudge to him his proper place among the sons of Sarasvati.¹¹

¹¹ The goddess of learning.

CHAPTER 2

THE STORY OF THE RAMAYANA¹²



Though Kamban has followed Valmiki very closely in the conduct of his epic, and though no Indian is ignorant of the story, I propose to give here in a short summary the main incidents of that immortal story, always following Kamban, so that even those who have not yet made themselves acquainted with the same may be enabled to follow this study with ease.

Ages and ages ago the island of Lanka which is to the south of India, and which was in those days hundreds of times larger than it is at present, was inhabited by a race of beings called Rakshasas, who are described as huge and often misshapen giants, strong and powerful, and active and energetic to a degree much beyond the race of men. They crossed over to the mainland often and disturbed the peace of the holy men living there. Ravana, their king had, by his great austerities and devotion to Shiva and Brahma, received from them the blessings of enormous strength, long life, and victory against every possible opponent. Valiant, proud, and ambitious, he made war against heaven and earth. Wherever he went victory followed him, and the whole universe was powerless to stand against him and trembled with the fear of the Rakshasa name. He destroyed sacrifices, killed Rishis and other holy men, subdued the gods, and made war on mankind. The gods implored Vishnu, the Protector of the universe, to free them from the yoke of Ravana and the Rakshasas, and their prayer was heard. Ravana in the pride of his strength had deemed man and the monkey as too much beneath him to pray to Shiva and Brahma for victory against them. Vishnu therefore promised to the gods that he would Himself come down on earth and be born as man and that He would destroy Ravana and his Rakshasas forever. He also commanded the gods to be born on earth as monkeys and apes and bears and await his *avatar*.¹³

So Vishnu incarnated Himself as man and was born in the family of the Raghus as Rama, son and heir to Dasharatha, Emperor of India. Rama had three brothers, Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrughna. The four brothers grew in age and years, in learning and all the princely arts. Even as the ocean smiled upon by the silvery orb of the moon swells in joyous strength, even so did these children grow in grace and beauty, strength and learning. Rama and Lakshmana excelled in archery and all the arts of war. Bharata and Shatrughna learned, as royal children must, they are of using the bow and the arrow, but were milder in temperament. All three brothers vied with each other in their love for the valiant, the sweet-souled, the serene Rama.

The fame of Rama attracted a sage called Vishvamitra who requested Dasharatha to send Rama with him to guard his sacrificial fire from pollution by the evil Rakshasas. Dasharatha had never hitherto parted with Rama. Rama was the light of his eyes, dearer than very life unto him. So the prayer of the sage struck him in the heart. ' Even as a man blind from birth, who had been blessed with vision for a brief space of time, would groan helplessly if he should suddenly lose his new acquired power of sight, even so grieved the king.' Dasharatha prayed the sage to leave Rama who was too young to fight, and offered himself to go with him to guard his sacrifice, but the very suggestion of a denial of his request excited the wrath of Vishvamitra and his serene aspect grew terrible to behold. Vasishtha¹⁴ however advised Dasharatha to accede to the request of Vishvamitra and the king allowed Rama, and also Lakshmana, to accompany the holy man.

¹² This chapter is the substance of a lecture delivered before the Highgate Hill Unitarian Church, London in 1908 by the author and partly printed in the last issue of the "Swaraj" of Shriman Bepin Chandra Pal in the subsequent year.

¹³ Incarnation

¹⁴ The family preceptor.

Rama and Lakshmana destroyed the Rakshasas that attempted to pollute and desecrate the sacrifice. On its completion the Rishi took the princes to Mithila. The king of Mithila, Janaka of Vedic fame, had a daughter called Sita whom he had vowed to give in marriage to any prince who was able to bend the bow of Shiva, the God of Destruction. Vishvamitra had in his heart decided that sweet-eyed Sita should wed his ward Shri Rama, and that was the reason why he took the brothers to Mithila. Destiny itself seemed intent on consummating the union.

*The spirit of Mithila seemed to say, 'I prayed both day and night,
And sweetest Lakshmi, lotus born, of fairest form and bright,
In answer to my prayers left her thousand petalled flower;
She left her home and sought to dwell in my own greenest bower.
Come my gracious lord, to see and wed that purest one'.
The pennants seemed her outstretched arms welcoming Dasharatha's son.¹⁵*

The artful Rishi took Rama and Lakshmana through the very street where Sita's bower was situated. As luck would have it, Sita was standing on the top floor of her palace surrounded by her girlfriends. To his great delight Vishvamitra saw Rama looking in that direction, noted that he encountered her eyes, and that afterwards he looked at nothing else. For who could look on that face, sweet with the sweetness of Indian spring, carrying memories of blue heavens and sunny glades, of the scent of a thousand delicate flowers, of the warbling brook and the voice of the *koil* — who could look on that face and not have his heart enthralled? The poet becomes speechless before the ineffable perfection of her loveliness and falls down before it. He dares not describe her form. He says, 'what shall we compare that form to, by the standard of whose loveliness alone can all other beauty be measured? The eyes of men as well as those of the gods are too weak to drink in the full effulgence of that heavenly form. As the Ocean of Milk, when it had yielded ambrosia, could afterwards give nothing that is sweeter, even so, when the Creator had made Sita, he could create no higher beauty, for He had realized perfection. What shall we say is the cause that Lakshmi left her lotus home and was born on earth? Is it the prayer of Brahmans of infinite holiness? Is it the prayer of the earth or the heavens, of the Devas, or Virtue's self? She stood there a very queen of light, a sight to make the very stones melt with love. The very Genius of Beauty acquired new loveliness by mingling with her form'.

In due course Rama was introduced to Janaka who ordered the bow to be brought before the prince. Rama appeared to undertake an impossible task. For had not heroes of mature strength, anxious to win the hand of Sita, tried to bend that bow and failed? Sita must have prayed in her heart earnestly that he might succeed in bending the bow. For, when Rama saw her for the first time, her eyes also had lighted on him, and she had decided in her heart that he alone should be her lord. Rama however took the bow without the slightest misgiving. Everybody held his breath and looked on with intense expectation. But they saw him take the bow, they only heard it snap. Such was Rama's strength and such the ease with which he broke the powerful bow of Shiva. The world was glad and the gods leaped with joy. For was not the union of Rama with Sita to be the cause of the deliverance of the worlds from the tyranny of the Rakshasas?

Dasharatha was invited to Mithila, and the marriage was celebrated amidst festivities and rejoicing.

The scene changes. The rosy hues of the morning last but a few minutes. Soon the basest clouds ride with ugly rack on the Sun's celestial face 'and from the forlorn world his visage hides'. Great things have to be done for the world by Rama, and great things have never been achieved from on a bed of down.

¹⁵ I x 1 (See Publisher's Note for elucidation of these reference numbers in this book.)

Dasharatha desired that Rama should be installed as emperor during his own lifetime. He therefore called the assembly of the wise who approved of Rama and consented to his being made their sovereign. The day of installation was fixed for the morrow and Dasharatha gave orders for decorating the city and making other preparations for celebrating the great event with due pomp and ceremony. But Rama was destined not to wear the imperial diadem for fourteen years more.

Now Dasharatha had three wives: Kausalya the mother of Rama, Sumitra the mother of Lakshmana and Shatrughna, and Kaikeyi the mother of Bharata. Among them all Kaikeyi seemed most attached to Rama, but her love was selfish. She saw that Rama was good and brave and valiant, and she nursed her pride when she loved him. When therefore Manthara, one of her maids, told her that if Rama were to obtain the crown, the influence of Kausalya would grow to the detriment of her own, lust of power and jealousy of her rival smothered the affection based on vanity, and she determined that her own son Bharata should be placed upon the throne. Cunningly she made Dasharatha swear that he would grant her prayer whatever it might be, and then she demanded that Bharata should be crowned in place of Rama. The King begged her, remonstrated with her not to press her request, but she was obdurate. Long before, when he was warring one time with the Asuras, Dasharatha had been saved in the midst of a battle by the personal prowess of this queen, and had then promised her that he would grant her without question any two requests that she might be pleased to make to him at any time. 'I claim the boons that you did once promise me,' she said. 'You may grant them or refuse them as it pleases you. The one is the installation of Bharata, and the other is the exile of Rama into the forests for fourteen years'. The King stood aghast. For he had promised to grant her prayers whatever they might be, and his word must be kept, whatever the cost might be. Not ten thousand Ramas should keep him from the performance of his promise. The race of the Sun ought never to be sullied by a promise broken. And so Dasharatha submitted with a mortal pang to her hard-hearted desire and sank on his bed senseless.

Kaikeyi herself now sent for Rama, and he came in his chariot not suspecting what had happened during the previous night. He saluted her with humility and affection as usual. But her heart was made of stone. 'There is one thing, Rama', she said, 'which your father commands you to do'. In the words of the poet,

*She said, 'The king commands that all the earth
By ocean girt your brother Bharat shall rule;
And you shall wear the twisted hair knot, and tread
The forests wide with saintly steps, and bathe
In sacred waters, and in fourteen years
Return to fair Ayodhya and live in peace.'
Can I in words describe how Rama looked
When fell these cruel words from Kaikeyi's lips?
Who can his calmness fitly paint?
For what it was so like before, the faultless lotus
Opening to the dawn, his unchanged look
Outshone in tranquil grace!'¹⁶*

Rama's reply to Kaikeyi was calm and filled with the heroism of renunciation.

*Even were it not my father's royal will,
He said, 'would Rama your son transgress your word?
And Bharata's fortune, can it ever be
Less dear to me than mine? I say no more:
I take your blest command a sacred duty;*

¹⁶ II iii 107-108.

*Behold, this very day I start and take My leave.*¹⁷

So saying he bowed down at her feet, pressed them to his eyes, saluted the direction where his father lay unconscious, and turned towards his mother's palace.

When Kausalya saw him stand before her alone and unattended, — him, who she was every moment fondly expecting, would come with all the signs of new-anointed royalty to see her first and receive a mother's heartfelt blessing — when she saw him stand there in her presence alone, her heart throbbed with a vague sense of impending evil. And when he prostrated himself at her feet she blessed him with an anxious trembling heart, and then asked him why he had not been crowned that day. The gentle Rama told her, 'It is now decided, mother, that Bharata, your son, is to be our king.' And the artless queen who loved all the sons of her husband with an equal affection said, ' This is contrary to usage; but renunciation doth well become you, son. And, having bestowed the scepter on your brother, live with him in friendship and in peace ". Rama was touched to hear her exalted sentiments of disinterested love and was pained at the necessity of having to disillusion her. He told her that the king had commanded him to do a certain thing for the salvation of his soul, and that was that he — Rama — should live in forests in the company of sages, and return in fourteen years. Like a deer struck to the heart by the murderous arrow, she fell to the ground and broke out into heart-rending sobs. But Rama consoled her. He said that nothing should make him disobey his father or make his spoken word a lie, and that she should help him to obey his father's commands. The duty of the wife in the end conquered the affection of the mother, and she blessed him, and with a painful wrench of the heart she let him go.

The news of Rama's impending exile soon spread abroad and reached the ears of Lakshmana. Impetuous was the love which Lakshmana bore to Rama. He swore a great oath that he would place Rama upon the throne, even were the gods of all the worlds to stand between him and his purpose. But Rama met him, spoke gentle words to him, soothed his stormy spirit, and took him to Sumitra. The grand queen loved Rama as her very life. She was filled with grief at the turn that affairs had taken. But consoled by Rama she soon recognized that what must be must not be wept over but endured. Not only this. She commanded her son Lakshmana to accompany Rama in his exile. She addressed him these memorable words: 'Consider Rama as Dasharatha's self and look upon Sita as your own mother, myself; the forests wild shall be to you as pleasant as Ayodhya; I bless you, son, depart with a joyful heart'. Rama prayed her to look after his mother and father and took his leave.

It remained now to broach the unexpected news to Sita and take leave of her. In the presence of Sita, therefore, thrilling with the expectation of seeing him come to her crowned with the imperial diadem, Rama stood, attended by Lakshmana only. When she saw his uncrowned head and forest-dwellers' robes she could not understand at first what it all meant. Rama explained to her the situation and asked leave of her. Then, in the words of the poet,

*She grieved not that her lord his kingdom left
And throne; but the words he spoke — ' grieve not, my love,
I take your leave ' — did send an arrow through
Her heart. ' Right holy's your purpose to obey
Your mother's commands,' she said. 'But, lord, your word
To me to stay at home when you leave
An exile for the wilds unknown, that word
Has pierced my heart'. Said Rama, 'Your tender feet
Are not made to tread the stony wilds that burn
Like molten wax'. 'But can the stony wilds,'
Said she, 'burn more than separation from my Rama?'¹⁸*

¹⁷ II iii 110.

So saying, before Rama could frame any reply, she went back into her apartments, put on coarse robes, and without a word more stood by his side ready to accompany him to the forests. All the men and women that witnessed that strong love and quiet determination, wept with renewed grief.

And so they left for the forest, renewed their old friendship with the sturdy forest-chief Guha who rowed them across the Ganga, and wended their way southward.

In the meantime Dasharatha had died of a broken heart. Bharata and Shatrughna were away from Ayodhya while all these things were happening and they were recalled in haste by the council of ministers. As soon as Bharata returned and learned the cause of all this grief he cursed his mother, he cursed himself, he cursed the day that he was born. It broke his heart to think that it was for his sake that Rama had been exiled by his mother, and a great sorrow filled his soul. He determined therefore, to bring back Rama and install him on the throne of the Raghus. He performed the obsequies of his father, put on coarse garments, and went into the forests to seek Rama. The people of Ayodhya burned with a desire to see Rama and bring him back, and so followed Bharata. The forest chief Guha at first thought that Bharata was come to capture and destroy Rama and wanted to give him battle. But when he saw his garments and grief-stricken appearance his sturdy heart melted and a boundless love and reverence sprang in his heart for Bharata. He then directed him to the road that Rama had taken. Bharata at last met Rama, fell at his feet, and wept like a child. 'Take back the crown that is yours, brother, oh my brother!' he said, but Rama lifted him up, embraced him like a tender father, and told him that he could not go back upon his word, and that until the fourteen years had passed he would not cross back even into the borders of Ayodhya. Bharata's remonstrations were all in vain. At length he made Rama promise that he would be back at Ayodhya on the first day of the fifteenth year. He then vowed that he himself would not enter the capital until that day, but would have the affairs of the kingdom conducted by ministers and wise men, and that if he did not see Rama on that first day of the fifteenth year of Rama's exile he would light a fire and fall into it as accursed both of God and man. The expostulations of Rama would not move him from his resolve and Rama had to promise as he asked him to. Rama then moved southward into the Dekhan forests.

For thirteen years Rama, Lakshmana and Sita lived a life of pastoral peace in the forests. True to his mother's word, Lakshmana did everything to make the life of Rama and Sita as happy as possible. When Rama decided to stay at any place for some considerable time, Lakshmana would make a clearing in the forest, erect a thatched hermitage on a lonely eminence not far from a babbling brook, and plant flowers and creepers around the cottage. He would go into the forest, collect fruits and edible roots for their food, and generally do everything that could conduce to the comfort or add to the happiness of his brother and sister. The deep silence of the forest, the vast panorama of nature around them, the green hillock, the grassy heath, the giant trees up reaching to the vaults of heaven, the wild creepers hanging luxurious from the tops of the tall trees and reaching to the ground, the cool shade, the scraps of blue sky here and there visible through the dense foliage in the interior of the forest and on that account the more lovely and the more eagerly looked for, all these contributed to their life of Arcadian beauty and sweet simplicity. In the mornings, after the daily baths and customary devotions, the brothers would go out into the jungle and return to the cottage laden with the banana and the bread-fruit and the sweet mango and edible roots, and would lay them before Sita. In the meanwhile Sita would have prepared the welcome meal. After serving them their meal she would partake of the food and then join them in the out-house. As evening drew near, they would go out of the hermitage and enjoy the sublime beauties of the tropical forest. They would listen now to the murmuring of the brook, now to the distant sound of a waterfall, now again to the far-off roar of the lion, now to the mellow calls of the sweet-throated koil or the tender cooings of the woodland dove. Now they would play with the sportive fawn. And now again they

¹⁸ II iv 224, 226-228.

would watch the frolicking monkeys jumping and leaping up the trees. Thus they would enjoy the thousand and one sweet things that Nature shows to those that seek her in her solitudes. Rama would tell Sita stories from the Vedas and ancient Puranas of pastoral loves and city magnificence, of religious calm or daring heroic war, and would raise alternate emotions of love and pity, wonder and admiration in her responsive heart. Sometimes her rich voice at Rama's request would fill the forest solitudes with the very soul of music, and then even the koil would hush her tones and acknowledge a master. Thus passed the life of that pair, happy in the unmeasured fullness of each other's love.

But the race of the Rakshasas had to be destroyed and the peaceful course of this perfect love was to be interrupted.

One day Shurpanakha, the sister of Ravana, in her wanderings through the forest saw Rama and at once fell in love with his godlike form. She approached him but he repelled her advances. To revenge herself and to remove the cause, as she thought, of Rama's disregard for her, she attempted to carry away Sita. But Lakshmana who was watching over Sita with a brother's care punished Shurpanakha by mutilating her. The Rakshasa army, which advanced on Rama to avenge Shurpanakha's wrongs, was completely annihilated by him. So she set off to Lanka and there detailed her woes to Ravana her brother. She said, falsely, that she was about to carry away for him a woman of perfect beauty when her husband's brother maimed her, and there she was, injured in his cause. Her description of Sita's beauty maddened Ravana with passion and raised in him an irrepressible desire to possess such a woman. He who had burned with rage on seeing his sister's wrongs and hearing the fate of his army and had sworn to avenge them, now forgot his sister's wrongs and forgot the prowess of him who could single-handedly annihilate a whole army, but remembered Sita and remembered her alone. He burned with the desire of making her his wife.

Ravana decided to carry off Sita by stealth. He therefore directed a Rakshasa named Maricha to cross over to the mainland, to take the shape of a golden colored deer, and to go near Sita and attract her. When she should want Rama to capture him for her, the Rakshasa was to give them the slip and draw Rama into the woods. The plan was that Ravana should then surprise Sita alone and carry her away.

So the golden deer came and frolicked about the hermitage. Sita saw it and was charmed with its seductive beauty and sportiveness and begged Rama to capture it for her. Lakshmana warned Rama that there was some unknown danger lurking behind all this. However, seeing Rama neglect his warnings he himself offered to go, but with a petulant, fateful obstinacy Sita asked Rama himself to go. So Rama went after the deer bow in hand. The disguised Rakshasa however drew him on farther and farther and farther into the interior of the forest. He would stand still pretending to browse the tender grass. But when Rama with cautious step would approach him and be on the point of catching him, he would arrow away with lightning speed and begin to sport in a farther field. Rama had run after him for such a long time and had gone so far, and the Rakshasa was so provoking in his deceitful gambols, that he lost his temper and aimed an arrow at him. The Rakshasa was mortally wounded. But even at the moment of death he wanted to serve Ravana, and so he gave up his breath, sending up a groan in the intonations of Rama's voice, and his groan was loud enough to reach the hermitage. Rama saw some great evil in this abnormal cry and hastened back.

But in the meantime Sita heard the Rakshasa's cry and, believing that it was Rama calling for help, asked Lakshmana to look for him in the jungle. Lakshmana apprehended some terrible evil if he left Sita alone, while on the other hand he was absolutely confident that there was no foe living who could harm Rama in combat. He, therefore, told Sita that no harm could come to Rama and that he should not leave her. But Sita spoke cruel words to him; and so with a heart heavy with gloomy forebodings he obeyed her and followed in the direction of Rama's steps.

Like a thief Ravana had been watching for this opportunity, and he came in the garb of a religious mendicant before Sita's cottage. The door of the Hindu home is ever open for wayfarers to walk in and claim hospitality, and so he went in. He was welcomed by Sita. In the course of the conversation he fell to praising himself (in the third person) and his rule, while still pretending to be a wandering Sadhu. To her remark that the praise of the Rakshasa did not become a holy man he replied that Ravana was the master of the world today and that it was well to be on the side of the strong. 'Fear not then,' she said; 'for Rama has sworn to annihilate the Rakshasa with all his army'. The pretended mendicant replied, 'The hare would beat the tusked elephant or the horned deer gore the lion to death if men should be able to destroy the Rakshasas'. He also spoke of the vast size and twenty arms of Ravana.

'Of what avail are twenty arms?' said Sita. 'For did not Parashu Rama kill Kartavirya, the king of the thousand arms, even he who had kept Ravana in prison for years?' The allusion to his former defeat and shame struck him in the heart, and burning with rage and foaming with passion, the false form burst and revealed the Rakshasa. As living beings in sight of the awful God of Death, Sita trembled with fear. But Ravana uprooted and lifted sheer the cottage in which she was and placing it in his vast flying chariot flew towards Lanka.

Jatayu a powerful Vulture and a friend of Rama fought with Ravana in mid-air in order to rescue Sita, but Ravana cut him down with the great sword of Shiva and Sita's one forlorn hope was crushed. In the meantime Lakshmana had found Rama and both hurried home with a beating heart. Sita was not there and the tender-hearted husband was convulsed with grief. There were the marks of large feet and the trail of a heavy chariot on the ground close by. Filled with a thousand anxieties the brothers followed the trail and fell in with the Vulture-King struggling against death. He told them that Sita was carried off by Ravana the Rakshasa king and that he himself had been mortally wounded in his attempt to rescue her. Rama wept tears of gratitude and bitterness at the feet of Jatayu who expired with Rama's name upon his lips. With a heart bleeding with grief for the loss of Sita and the death of the devoted King of Vultures, Rama performed his obsequies and swore a great oath, once again that he would uproot the whole race of Rakshasas.

Rama now pursued his way southward towards Lanka. After a few days' journey he met Sugriva, a chief of the Vanaras¹⁹, who was living in constant terror of his brother Vali. Rama learned from him that his brother was not only on the look-out to kill him but had even deprived him of his wife. The memory of his recent loss moved Rama to punish the wrong-doer with his own hand. So Vali was killed and Sugriva was anointed king of the Vanaras. In return for this help Sugriva agreed to take upon himself the task of searching all over the world for Sita and help Rama in recovering her. And the Vanaras were sent in different directions to search for her. Among those that undertook to wander over the world for Rama's sake was Hanuman, the Indian Hercules. He was the very ideal of strength and endurance and loyal devotion and intuitive wisdom. He had been the first of the Vanaras to see Rama and Lakshmana and at the very first look he had decided that they were not ordinary men but heroes whom it should be an honor and glory to serve. His devotion to Rama was intense. It was the loyalty of immense physical strength to magnificent manhood, of perfect valor to god-like heroism. Hanuman was among those who went south. He crossed the ocean and reached the city of Lanka. Every palace, every court, every temple, every conceivable place he entered and searched for Sita. He saw Mandodari the wife of Ravana sleeping on a luxurious couch in her apartments. Her perfect beauty suggested to him the thought that she might be Sita. But the richness of her attire and belongings and the absence of any signs of deep grief on her face soon told him that she could not be Sita. He passed. As he was entering the portico of another palace bad portents appeared. And he thought "Alas! this city, with all her magnificence, is doomed to perish!" He penetrated further and saw the gigantic form of Ravana reposing majestically, but rolling with pain

¹⁹ Lit. "forest dwellers" — powerful human/monkey like creatures who were shape-shifters.

and mental anguish. On seeing him, his first impulse was to wake him and fight with him. But soon second thoughts told him that it was neither wise nor right, for that was not in the instructions given him by Rama. And 'as the ocean, though powerful enough to dash down the shore and flood the earth, yet bides its time and leaves not its appointed limits', even so did Hanuman check his impulse and leave Ravana to the proper vengeance of Rama.

At last after a thousand anxieties he saw Sita in a grove of Ashoka trees surrounded by Rakshasis, like a deer in the midst of leopards, the color faded from her cheek, her eyes raining a perpetual shower of tears, lean and emaciated, her hair one twisted knot — there she was like a picture smoked, like the moon eclipsed, like the lotus killed by frost. 'Might it be that my lord had not met Lakshmana?' she was saying to herself. 'How could he know that I am here, in this sea-girt island? Or would he have spurned me as unworthy of him, for that I had spoken harsh words to Lakshmana? Oh who would give him the tasteful betel-leaf? And how he would grieve when he sees a guest!' She would think on that lion face that was not overcast at the sudden command of exile, that face which, both when asked by his father to accept the imperial crown as well as when commanded to leave all and live a forest life, like the pictured lotus was ever the same! She wept for the iron arm that broke Shiva's bow. She thought of Rama's grief when Bharata refused the crown and condemned himself to a forest life, and she wept.

It was in the midst of these reflections that Hanuman saw her. He saw and he felt that it was she. He blessed Rama, he blessed her stainless virtue, he blessed her father's race. While he was in this state of grateful joy at seeing Sita alive and pure, Ravana appeared on the scene. This was one of his many visits to Sita to attempt to persuade her to divorce Rama and marry him. He recounted to her his greatness, his strength, and his powers, his victories in the past and his present prosperity. All his wealth, his power, his very scepter he said, he would place at her feet and himself would remain her slave, if she would but consent to wed him. On hearing these words, grown more hateful by constant repetition, Sita's face burned with indignation and wifely pride, and she replied to him in these words:—

'To pierce mount Meru, to shatter the vault of heaven, to annihilate the fourteen worlds, is not one arrow from Rama's quiver sufficient? You were afraid of that arrow and that arm: therefore is it that you acted like a thief and carried me away here in his absence. Do you affect to despise my lord and his brother for that they are mere men?'

'It was a man that killed Kartavirya, the same Kartavirya who imprisoned you in former days. Think you that they are only two? He that ends the world and all in it is only one Know you not that Parashu Rama quailed before my blessed lord — even that Parashu Rama who killed Kartavirya, whom I worship because he kept you once in close confinement.'

She would have continued further, but Ravana could not endure it any longer. Conflicting emotions rent his heart, but at length he spoke these words:—

'My first impulse, Sita, was to put you to the sword for daring to use such words to me. But, O my love, if I kill you, I kill myself. You mock me with my defeats, as you call them. But were they reverses? They were all sport, my victories as well as my defeats. And think you I was afraid to meet Rama in battle? No! for if he had died as die he must against me fighting, you, who even now continue to love him, would have put an end to your life. It is to guard against this that I brought you away in secret. Grant that I failed in war against my foes; how comes it that I rule the earth and heaven, and without a second? Though I should never willingly expend my wrath upon these pygmies who are wasting their life in austerities, yet for your sake I shall even stain my valor that has extinguished the might of the Supreme Three and gods, and stoop to fight these feeble folks. But I shall not kill them — I shall merely bring them over here and make them my

slaves. Though they are worthless puny men, they deserve not to die, at least for the service they have done me in having brought you within my reach. But if you want them killed, if you can believe in my strength only when I destroy them, if that alone will please you, I shall even kill them.'

The mention of blood inflamed his wrath once again and he continued, trying also to see if threats could make her yield. He said:—

'I shall even go to Ayodhya and, killing Bharata with all his host, I shall march on Mithila like the Fire of the Day of Dissolution, and after uprooting your kith and kin I shall drink your blood also! you are bringing your own end nearer by provoking me, O Sita!'

And then looking at his flashing steel he frowned and said:—

'There are but two months left, within which you must yield. If you do not become mine within that time I shall, kill you straight away.'
*So saying he frowned and went his way; 'bearing her image away in his heart'.
 Hanuman had been watching this interview with a beating heart.*

In the meanwhile, however, despair had seized the heart of Sita. She had been hoping against hope that Rama would come and rescue her. But days and months had passed and there were no signs of Rama coming, and the Rakshasa always returned, unabashed by previous insults, to press his suit. She could not endure her situation any longer. So, as soon as Ravana went away, she went near a tree with the intention of ending her life there. But just then Hanuman revealed himself to her and told her that he came from Rama. The sound of that beloved name fell like angel's music upon her ears — it was the falling rain that bathed her heart which was fading away under the shadow of despair. Hanuman gave her Rama's ring as a sign that he was the genuine messenger of Rama. She set her eyes on it. How shall we describe her, says the poet, how she changed, and what she said when she beheld that well-remembered ring? What will be the joy of the dead man if he starts back into, life? What will be the joy of the bereaved mother when she sees her deceased child brought back to life? What will be the delight of the blind man when he gains the use of his eyes? Even such joy and such delight were Sita's when she saw that mute messenger of Rama's love. She took it into her hand, pressed it to her eyes, pressed it to her lips, pressed it to her bosom. Her whole frame swelled with joy — she smiled, she wept. Rama's ring was the philosopher's stone that turned her fading color to gold. She blessed Hanuman with a fervent, heartfelt blessing

'O you that brought me the message from Rama and gave me life — like a father and mother to me, and a fount of loving mercy besides — you have earned glory for this life and for all time to come. O hero of the mountain chest! O you who have lifted a heavy burden from my heart! If I be one who knows not ill, if my heart be pure and conduct right, may my blessing never fail, may eternity be to you like unto a day, and live you forever and forever!'

She then took from her head her head-ornament and handed it over to Hanuman desiring him to give it to Rama as a sign of her trust in him.

Hanuman, however, did not want to cross back to the continent without giving a taste of his prowess to the people of Lanka. He destroyed groves and palaces, felled down the Rakshasas that were sent against him, and, when taken prisoner before Ravana, defied him. Ravana commanded that Hanuman's tail should be set on fire, but when it was aflame Hanuman leaped all over Lanka lashing his tail far and wide, and thus burning down the Rakshasa capital he leaped back to the mainland. He himself escaped the effects of the fire through the blessing of Sita who prayed to the God of Fire to spare him.

Rama learned from Hanuman that Sita was living a life of martyrdom. His wrath was roused and he commanded Sugriva's army to cross over to the island. The Vanaras built a bridge by throwing big rocks and trees into the channel separating Lanka from the mainland, and over it the Vanara army marched to Lanka. And the great war began.

The war was a war of heroes. The first day Ravana himself led his army. But before the sun set his army was gone, his Chariot was broken into pieces, his bow was split in twain, his very sword was broken in his hands. The chivalry of Rama saved him his life. And he warned him that he was doomed unless he gave up Sita. Ravana, however, did not speak a word and returned silent and sullen. Says the poet, 'he grieved not that all the foes he used to mock in ancient days would now jeer at him; but he grieved that Sita of the lance-like look would smile at his empty boasts and mock at his wordy valor.' As a soldier and warrior he wonders at Rama's valor and strength. He tells Malayavan, his grandfather,

*'When all my mighty strength was being crushed
By clouds of arrows from his death-showering bow,
Think you that there was care in his look? Oh no.
His tranquil face showed careless sport, not war!
I've faced the thunderbolt of Heaven's king,
The triple lance of awful Dhurjati,²⁰
The flaming disk of Vishnu, first of Gods, —
But what are they to Rama's fiery arrow?
Of all the masters of the art of war,
Though Vishnu is the first, I did believe
That none could strive against great Kartavirya;
But even he isn't worth the fallen dust
Of Lakshman's feet; what then of mighty Rama?
I tell you, father, it humbled Ravana's valor.
O father, if Janaki of patience like
The earth, should see his feats of valor on
The field, she'd hold the God of Love himself
And me as nothing better than dogs. (6:5; 17, 23, 25, 27, 30)*

However, a few words from Mahodara, his chief minister, were sufficient to make Ravana forget the prowess of his adversary. At Mahodara's suggestion Ravana's brother, Kumbhakarna was awakened from his age-long sleep. But when he came to know the purpose for which he was called, he advised Ravana to give up Sita. Ravana paled with fury when he heard his words. 'I called you not to seek your advice', he said. 'I thought you were a warrior bold — I did not know that you had forgotten all your valor. you may go and worship men'. A Rakshasa of immense size and a hero of faultless valor, Kumbhakarna was wounded at his brother's words. 'Pardon me my hasty words,' he said, 'I shall take my club and go to battle. But think not that I shall come back bearing victory or my life. At least after my death, O my brother, release Sita and save your life with honor. If they conquer me and live, O lord of Lanka, be sure that they would vanquish you. So, at least after I shall have died on the field, give up that Pearl of Chastity. Pardon me any wrongs that I may have committed against you. your blessed face I am not given to see again. I take your leave.' So saying, he went forth to battle. And Ravana wept.

Now another of the brothers of Ravana, Vibhishana by name, had left Ravana when he refused to give up Sita, and was now with Rama. With Rama's permission he came to Kumbhakarna and advised him to come to the side of Rama. The reply of Kumbhakarna was most heroic. He said,

²⁰ Shiva

'It is right to warn a misguided king and instruct him in his good. But when he persists in his evil course and he is doomed to fall, is it not infinitely better for me to die before him than live to see him fall! He is lord of all the world, the most valiant among the valiant, the bravest among the brave. Shall he enter Yama's realm²¹ alone and without a brother by his side? It is appointed that Rama shall kill Ravana. Shall I who have vanquished even the God of death, bow down before a mere man, and he my brother's foe? Go back, my brother, and live with the victor, for though a Rakshasa, the creator has made you virtuous and good. As for me, let me do the duty I owe to my liege and lost my life in his fight, but not alone shall I die! Hanuman, Sugriva, and Vali's son— why, none of the monkey kind shall return alive if they are rash enough to fight today.'

The battle began. The Vanara army swayed to and fro unable to bear the shock of Kumbhakarna's attack. Great was the loss on the side of Rama. Wherever he attacked Kumbhakarna carried death with him. But at length Rama's arrow cut off his head and the Rakshasa army was annihilated. In the meantime, at Lanka, Ravana was again pressing Sita to accept him. This time also he experienced the same repulse. Sita's reply is superb and it is impossible to conceive of greater heroism or devotion on the part of woman. Neither the majestic form of the Rakshasa king, nor his prosperity — for the gods were his servants — nor his fame had any attractions for her. She said in the course of her superb reply:—

'Think not I love my wasted form, think not I love my life. Think not that I fear to die and earn a glorious name. It is not fear of death that makes me live and endure your hateful words. The hope of once again seeing my blessed lord — whose ornaments are his virtues — it is this alone that reconciles me to life. I long to see the day when, with Lakshmana guarding his holy person, his arrows shall send you to the other world; and that is why I do not yet end my life.'

It was in the course of this interview that messengers brought to Lanka the news of Kumbhakarna's fall. And great was the grief of Ravana.

But the war went on. And his passion for Sita increased with every defeat.

Ravana's son Meghanada, who was called Indrajit for having conquered Indra, next led an army against Rama. Twice he was victorious, but the third time he was completely routed. He too, whom the poet admiringly describes as the first among those who wield the bow, grew hopeless. And with trembling heart and awe-filled look he told Ravana that it was useless to contend against Rama and Lakshmana and that the release of Sita alone would save the kingdom.

When he heard these words Ravana laughed a great laugh. And in lines pregnant with heroic thought Ravana addressed his son:—

'It is not with the hope that those who have hitherto died on the field would bring me victory, it is not with the hope that those who yet live would win me success, it is not with the hope that you would vanquish me my foes — it is not with any of these hopes that I provoked this foe. I relied on myself and myself alone and entered into this war. Keep your foolish counsel to yourself, son. This mortal frame, in duration like a bubble on the waters, I would fain lay down on the battle-field in full sight of the Devas, earning fame that will never have an end — but I will not give up Sita. Is it for releasing her that I possess twenty arms? Even should I fall, even then, so long as the Vedas will last, my name will also stand, if Rama's name will live. Death is certain— no one escapes that — man today is, tomorrow he ceases to be — but when does Fame cease to live? If I send away Sita, then who will count me as Ravana? The very gods will laugh,

²¹ The other world.

and casting their fear away will come and besiege my city. Even if I be doomed to fall, it is not in me to stoop to littleness; have I not carried my victorious arms to the ten directions²²? As for you, you may go home and, removing the barbs from your arm, you may rest on your couch, sleeping both day and night.'

And in the same breath, like a tiger enraged he thundered forth, 'Bring me my war-chariot!' Indrajit was cowed. He fell at his father's feet and begged to be pardoned. 'I go' he said; 'but I shall not return. May better counsels prevail at least after I am gone.' So saying the doomed Rakshasa went back to the battle-field.

A fierce battle did he fight. Like a lion at bay he fought with desperate valor. But an arrow from Lakshmana's bow ended his life and he fell a headless corpse.

When Ravana was informed of his death his grief knew no bounds. Tenderly does the poet sing of the father's inconsolable grief at the loss of his heroic son. I shall give the purport of but one stanza here. "If your Gandharva, Yaksha, Siddha, and Rakshasa wives, silver-tongued they one and all, will fall at my feet and ask me 'where is our lord?' shall I only weep in chorus with them, my son?" Mandodari, the mother of Indrajit was even more inconsolable. The poet depicts with sympathy the poignant grief of the mother's heart. Here is the translation of two stanzas:

*'When like the waxing moon, you grew in years,
I had the fortune, my son, with pride to see '
You defeated Indra; but now your headless corpse
To see and mourn — O son, what have I done
To behold this plight?
And still I cling to life, Inconstant life! (5:28:47)
In olden blessed days,
With tinkling anklets when you were yet a child
Slow-crawling on the ground, you brought a pair
Of fierce lions and made them fight like rams:
When shall I once again behold such sight! '(5:28:49)*

And she has forebodings that Ravana's life too is doomed. She says:—

*Of all the hosts that marched out of Lanka
To meet in battle Rama and his force,
None has as yet with life returned. Alas!
Like stubble they have gone, at touch of fire!
Alas! I fear that Sita's sacred charms,
Destiny-like will drive my Ravana too
To an untimely, gory death! (5:28:53)*

But evil counsels still prevailed. The first day's awful massacre, Kumbhakarna's fall, the death of Indrajit, the failure of numbers of armies that were dispatched after that, from none of these did Ravana learn his lesson. He was destined to learn it only at the cost of his life.

Determined to make one bold and final stand he collected his army and himself marched at its head. Grand was the sight of that army. The mighty form and fierce aspect of Ravana created a panic in the Vanara army. The Rakshasas fought with desperate valor. But Rama and Lakshmana and Hanuman encouraged their forces and re-established their line. Ravana fought like a lion of the forest. But his hour was come. And Rama bent his bow named *Kodanda* and shot his fearful arrow direct to Ravana's heart.

²² Eight cardinal points, the heavens above and nether regions.

*It quenched his three crore years of mortal life,
It quenched the strength of all his austerities,
It quenched the word of Brahma granting him
Perpetual victory; it quenched his strength
That bent the world beneath his awful rule;
It pierced his adamant chest and quenched his life.
Such was the force of Rama's sacred arrow. (6:36:198)*

So Ravana fell. But even when he fell there was a majesty about him which the poet describes with the greatest admiration:—

*His mighty wrath, fierce as the untamed lion's
Was quenched in blood; his awful strength was gone;
His powerful arms had ceased to move; his love
Consuming like volcanic fire, which filled
His heart, had ceased to beat; but the hero's face
Even at that awful moment wore a look
Of majesty, surpassing all its splendor
Even of days when saints and Rishis had
To flee from his oppressive rule! (6:36:201)*

So the prophecy was fulfilled and the world was freed once more of the spirit of evil.

Sita was released from her prison. But her trials were not ended. Rama insulted her in sight of the assembled leaders and army saying that women of honor in her condition would have committed suicide and not have lived in the enemy's city for one whole year. The whole assembly wept at these cruel words. Sita's heart was broken. She asked Lakshmana to prepare a fire so that she might end herself in the flames. But when she fell into the fire, the Fire would not burn her. On the contrary, the God of Fire was burned by the fire of her purity! And Rama now accepted Sita.

The fourteen years of exile were now over. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana travelled homeward in an aerial car accompanied by Vibhishana and the Vanara army.

In the meantime, Bharata saw the last day of the fourteenth-year dawn and yet there were no signs of Rama's coming home. He had never forgotten that Rama was sent into exile for his sake and the thought had been consuming him every day these fourteen years. So he lit a fire with the intention of burning himself to death. Rama, however, had always in his mind Bharata's vow and that was why he travelled in the aerial car. To provide against every eventuality he also sent swift-flying Hanuman to where Bharata was, to tell him of his coming.

Hanuman surprises Bharata in the act of walking round the fire and assures him of Rama's approach. Rama also arrives soon, consoles Bharata, and offers to crown him. But Bharata refuses the crown once again and Rama is crowned Emperor of Aryavarta to the delight of all the worlds.

CHAPTER 3

IN MEDIAS RES.²³



The reader will have noticed that the Ramayana follows in its natural order the life of the hero from his birth and childhood up to the close of the action which forms its theme. On the other hand the epics of Europe, as is well known, follow their prototype and example, the Iliad, and start the story as near the end as possible, filling in the earlier events by slight allusions as well as by episodic narrative. These epics have an undeniable advantage over the Indian Maha-Kavyas in that their dramatic opening arrests the imagination even at the very commencement of the poem, while the Indian epics have to gather some momentum before they are able to carry with them the attention of the modern reader. But our great epic poets have proved that one may tell a story in chronological order and yet write a poem that generations will not willingly let die.

It is Aristotle that first formulated the rule that the story of the epic should not be told in chronological order. He says in the 23rd chapter of his Poetics as follows:

"Concerning the poetry which is narrative and imitative in metre, it is evident that it ought to have dramatic fables in the same manner as tragedy and should be conversant with one whole and perfect action which has, a beginning, middle, and end in order that, like one whole animal it may, produce its appropriate pleasure, and that it may not be after the fashion of histories in which it is not necessary to treat of one action, but of one time. . . . Hence in this respect also Homer will appear to be divine when compared with other poets, because he did not attempt to sing of the whole Trojan War though it had a beginning and an end. For if he had, it would have been very large, and not sufficiently conspicuous, or if it had been of a moderate size, it would have been intricate through the variety of incidents. But now, having selected one part of the war, he has made use of many episodes such as the catalogue of ships and other such ones with which he has embellished his poem."

Horace has followed Aristotle closely, and he too has given his sanction to this canon. For after praising Homer's manner of beginning the Odyssey he says in his art of Poetry,

"To sing of the return of Diomed, the poet does not ascend up to the death of Meleager; in singing of the Trojan War he does not begin with the two eggs of Leda. On the other hand, he hastens with the reader into the very midst of the action²⁴ taking for granted that he is fully acquainted with the story."

The authority of these masters — to which we should add also the example of Virgil — has overshadowed all later literary criticism, and we find almost all European poets and critics make a fetish of this rule and bow down before it. Milton followed it consciously and deliberately as we see that he uses the very words of Horace in his argument to the First Book of the Paradise Lost 'which action passed over, the poem hastens into the midst of things ' etc. Boileau writes in his L'art Poétique in this way: "Away with those halting rhymers whose phlegmatic spirit would make them preserve the order didactic even in their elan! Poor analysts, who while singing the exploits of a hero follow the order of events! They dare not leave one incident out of sight. Apollo was never liberal with his fire to such as these!"

²³ Into the Midst of Things.

²⁴ In medias res, non secus ac notas, auditorem rapit.

Dacier, Boileau's contemporary, was so much obsessed with this rule that he wrote a very elaborate commentary to the following effect on three lines of Horace:²⁵

"Horace reveals here one of the greatest secrets of the art of poetry. A historian always follows the order of events. But the order which poets follow in the treatment of their subject is entirely different. For in the drama, as in the epic, the great masters place the opening of the scene as near to the catastrophe as possible, and take hold of the action always near the end. Their art enables them to bring back before our eyes all that had gone before. Homer, Sophocles and Euripedes have never departed from this rule, and it is an admirable one. For in postponing the catastrophe which we are awaiting every instant, and in interposing between it and us a series of probable and natural incidents, they awaken our curiosity and excite in us one after another all the passions — a thing which a methodical arrangement can never do. In order to be convinced of the truth of this, one has only to read Apollonius of Rhodes who has written a poem on the Argonauts. Longinus admits that there is not a single fault in this work; but it is mortally weary reading. One could give several reasons as to why this should be so, but the principal reason is its chronological sequence. It is methodic throughout, and that is the worst error into which an author could have fallen; for there are none colder than those poets,

'Who singing of a hero the exploits grand
Poor annalists, pursue the events' course.'

"Vida has treated at length this question of arrangement in the Second Book of his Poetics, where he says finely that the reader, carried by the art of the poet to the very end of an action, and filled with a vain hope, commences the reading of the poem with the greatest alacrity believing that he is very near the conclusion of the story, just as a man who sees his port imagines that he is about to enter into it; but he is much farther from it than he imagines — he is fated to retrace his course and fly over many a sea. He then adds that a wise poet will never begin, to take an example, the Trojan War at the judgment of Paris and place every incident in its natural order as if he were writing annals or a journal and not a poem."

We have quoted these extracts at some length purposely as we want the reader to realize how deep and widespread is this superstition in the West with regard to the order of narrative in the graver poems. But, as we have said before, our epic poets have shown that the rule in question is not as absolute as western critics seem to imagine. For our poets have followed the chronological order in their great poems, and yet have succeeded in producing epics that are as fresh today as when they first issued from their lips. Valmiki sang our first national epic. He has called it variously as the Life of Rama, the Destruction of Ravana or the Grand Story of Sita, and in fact the whole life story of Rama and Sita up to "the overthrow of Ravana is described in its natural order in the epic proper. And yet the interest of the story never flags for a moment in the whole course of the poem which is very nearly three times as long as Homer's Iliad; on the contrary the interest grows steadily until the very end is reached. The same will be found to be the case with the Mahabharata if we remove the didactic portions like the Shanti and the Anushashana Parvas, which seem to have been added by our sires to the main story in order to give it an encyclopedic character. Our own poet Kamban has not departed from the chronological order in the treatment of his poem, and yet the whole story in his hands rises into a crescendo of interest from the commencement till the very close of the action.

²⁵ *Ordinis hoec virtus erit et venus, aut ego fallor, Ut jam nunc dicat, jam nunc debentia dici, Pleraque differat, et proesens in tempus omittat.*

These lines may be translated thus: ' In the matter of the order of a poem, merit and gracefulness consist, if I am not mistaken, in saying at the commencement those things that ought to be said in the beginning, and in postponing several things to the end, abstaining from treating them In the beginning of the poem.

As a matter of fact, it is not the 'hastening into the midst of things', or 'the taking hold of the action near the end' that has given Homer the first place among the poets of the west.²⁶ But rather it is his superb knowledge of the human heart with all its joys and sorrows, and his love of Nature in all her aspects, joined to a rich imagination and a noble earnestness of purpose, all guided by the indefinable but supreme quality of poetic tact that knows how to make all the parts adhere together into a single organic whole — it is these we say, that have made him the greatest of western poets and the Iliad the greatest of western epics. The liquid flow of his story and his majestic style are but the natural results of these grand qualities. But not satisfied with giving Homer the first place among the poets of the West, or even, if they pleased, to satisfy their chauvinistic pride, the first place among the poets of the World, European critics have made him into a sort of tyrant of the Republic of Letters, raising every single trait and trick of his grand poems into an immutable law which every other poet disobeys at the cost of his reputation.

The rule in question, however, is so artificial that none can give any substantial reason as to why it should be so. We have seen above how Vida supported it. But we wonder if any reader has ever deluded himself on reading the opening lines of the Aeneid that Aeneas was at the end of his labors and was going immediately to plant the seed of the Roman Empire on Italian soil.²⁷ Nor do we believe that the opening lines of the Iliad or the Odyssey create the delusion that the end of the narrative is not far off. Such a delusion might conceivably be induced in the minds of scholars who are deciphering an unknown poem in a forgotten language; but how can we suppose that the reader of any well-known epic will believe that his business as reader and the poet's business as narrator is going to end at the very threshold of the poem? Great poets are able, of course, by their supreme art to throw us off our guard at the critical moments of the story and make us hope and almost expect that a great misfortune that threatens the hero may pass over, and may not materialize. But the delusion that Vida and Dacier require to support the dicta of Aristotle and Horace is something entirely different, and we do not believe that any reader of the great western epics has ever experienced such a feeling.

The real advantage of opening the story near the end of the catastrophe consists in this that the interest of the reader is captured at once at the very commencement of the poem. But this method has a compensating disadvantage in that the poet is obliged to cry halt to the action before he has proceeded very far, and to narrate the earlier portions of the story which are bound to be much less interesting than the main action. Even the greatest poets have to beat time with flat verses till they judge that the epic has drawn itself out to a length sufficient to allow the taking up of the main thread of the story. On the other hand, the chronological order followed by eastern poets, if it makes the beginning of the poem plain and unadorned, has this great advantage that the interest of the story gathers force in an ever-progressive degree to the very end of the poem.

Thus Kamban's Ramayana is divided into six books. The First Book describes the birth and education of Rama and his marriage with Sita on whose beauty and spotless chastity turns the catastrophe of the epic. In this book we have many episodes, most of which may well have been

²⁶ It is out of our province to discuss here the unitarian authorship or otherwise of the Iliad or the Odyssey. The question is far from being settled as yet. But we may take it that there was a poet in Asia Minor who called himself Homer and who had a great deal, to do with the Homeric poems. We shall in this study merely accept the tradition, and always speak of the Iliad and the Odyssey as the works of Homer. There is the same difficulty with regard to the authorship of the original Samskrit Ramayana. Here also we shall only accept the tradition and generally speak of it as the production of Valmiki and Vatauki alone.

²⁷ The reader will have noticed how this view conflicts with that of Horace when he says, '*in media res, non aecus ac notas, auditorem rapit*' — the poet hastens the reader into the very midst of the action, taking for granted that he is fully acquainted with the story.

suppressed. In the Second Book, we have the plot of Manthara and Kaikeyi to thwart Rama's coronation, and as a consequence to bring about Rama's exile to the forests. The Third Book, which is called the Jungle Book, brings upon the scene, who carries away Sita from Rama's cottage home in the forest. This forms the seed of the action proper of the poem. The Fourth Book is episodic in appearance, but in reality, it introduces to us the Vanara hosts who are to play such a large part in the war. The character of Vali is superbly drawn, and we are made to feel that we can never have enough of this hero's majestic words. The next book, distinguished as the Book of Beauty gives us the sublime picture of Sita standing firm in her chastity in the midst of temptations and threats. This increases tenfold our moral indignation against Ravana and prepares us for the war in the last book which is called the Book of Battles, and in which is described with great power the fall of Ravana's generals and finally of Ravana himself.

It will be seen from the above that Kamban is able to make the story rise steadily in interest from beginning to end. Compare this with the *Paradise Lost*, written by one of the greatest poets of any age or country but who felt himself bound by the example of the *Iliad* and the rule of Aristotle which we have quoted above. In this poem the four books from the fifth to the eighth deal with the war of the angels in heaven and the creation of the world and man; while the eleventh book and the greater part of the twelfth deal with the vision of the future shown by the Archangel Michael to Adam. But these books, though they are beautiful in themselves, and are artfully soldered on to what goes before and after, still create the impression that the action is interrupted merely for the sake of the episodes.²⁸ If even Milton has found it a difficult matter to make his episodes organic and integral parts of his epic, it is no wonder that lesser poets who have submitted themselves to this canon of Aristotle have been unable to keep their episodes from bulging Out of the general cadre of their story.

Thus we see that the rule of opening the epic *in medias res* has at least as much disadvantage as it has advantage, while the chronological method, if it does not ensure an arresting beginning to the poem, has at least the advantage of keeping it from turning sloppy in the middle.

From treating the story chronologically flows another result, namely that the poet is able to make the main story occupy a longer period of time than if he followed Aristotle's rule. This may not be considered an advantage by western critics. But there seems to be a greater fullness of life and greater stateliness in an epic which deals poetically and with are with the birth and youth and manhood of his hero and his achievements.

But after all these are secondary matters. If we prefer the chronological treatment of the oriental epics for their steadily increasing interest and for their greater stateliness, we are not blind to the grand poetical qualities of the epics as understood by Homer and Milton. We can appreciate the art that takes up the action near the catastrophe and is able to weave into the story the details that give it greater volume and fullness. We claim only that the *in medias res* theory should not be raised into an absolute rule, disobedience to which *ipso facto* throws the epic into the second rank.

I think we may conveniently consider here the length of our epic. Kamban's *Ramayana* contains 10,569 stanzas of four lines each. Being about thrice the length of the *Iliad*, it may be thought to be over-long for an epic. But Valmiki's *Ramayana* in the southern recension, contains 21,018 shlokas,

²⁸ It is indeed a question if the tendency on the part of later poets to introduce the earlier portions of the story episodically as if narrated by one character to another, is not due to Aristotle's dictum, based on the example of Homer, that the author of an epic should seldom speak himself, but should throw as much of this work as he can into the mouths of those who are his principal actors.

the vast majority of which consist of two lines each.²⁹ The Mahabharata goes up to 100,000 shlokas. And Chand Bhat's Prithivi Raj Rasa is said to be at least as long as the Mahabharata.

There is of course no fixed rule as to how long an epic should be. Dandi, a Sanskrit critic, only says that it should be *asamkshipta*, that is, not short. It is of course allowed by western as well as eastern critics to be so long as to be incapable of being read through at a single sitting. And if it cannot be finished at one sitting it does not matter how long it is, provided that it is *rasabhava-nirantara* i.e. satisfies our sense of the grand and the beautiful by appealing to the higher emotions in an artistic manner.

We have heard of a Japanese novel, of which even the 200th volume or so which has been recently (About 1920) published has not brought the end of the story in view. This story makes, we need not say, an extreme demand upon the patience of the reader, but even here we do not know if the book finds any detractors in Japan on account of its length. However, while we are not prepared to go as far as the author of our Japanese novel, we can allow the epic poet to choose for himself how long he will make his poem. If popularity with the mass of the people, as well as with the learned, is a test of the justness of a poet's choice as to length, we find that Indian epics, long as they are, have been listened to from beginning to end without flagging enthusiasm as they are read and explained by Pandits during evenings continuously for many months at a stretch. And as Kamban's Ramayana holds the reader's interest sustained up to the very end, we cannot condemn it as excessively long, but on the contrary, we should be thankful to the poet for providing us with such abundance of rich and delicate food for our imagination and our spirit.

²⁹ We exclude from the calculation the Seventh Book which is of the nature of the cyclic poems of Greece.

CHAPTER 4

THE ARCHITECTONICS OF THE RAMAYANA



The build and the structure of the Ramayana of Kamban are superb. The poem satisfies the soul with its *ampleur*, the proportion of its parts, and the are with which the parts are combined into an organic whole. It is true that the story follows the order of events chronologically. But there are a hundred ways in which a story can be narrated even in the chronological order, and it is in the choice that the poet makes from among these that we see whether he is the supreme artist or an ordinary writer. And Kamban has shown his genius for the architectonics of poetry both where he follows Valmiki as well as where he departs from his order.

The question of the build of the epic is not treated in detail in any of the treatises of rhetoric in Sanskrit that have come to light up to now. There must have existed books which examined this question deeply, for we cannot imagine that a people who have laid down elaborate rules for the construction of the drama could have neglected such an obvious subject of critical study as the detailed anatomy of the epic poem. These are either lost to us or are waiting to be discovered in the Bhandaras (archives) of our temples and of our States. The rhetorical works that have been printed up to now discuss generally only questions of style, figures of speech, and the emotions as subjects of poetical treatment. The *Mahakavya Lakshanas*, so called, are not much more than lists of what subjects should be necessarily treated or described in an epic.

In the Kavyadarsha, however, Dandin, after describing ten figures of speech finishes with three shlokas on what he calls Bhavika. He says,

"Bhavika is said to the essential quality of the *Prabandha* or poem; for *bhava* is the idea of the poet as to how he should arrange the poem and set forth its parts. The mutual harmony of the parts both in the subject matter as well as in the canto divisions; the leaving out of useless incidents and the placing of everything in its proper place; the individuality and character in the treatment even of the sublime which comes of a vigorous diction and well-ordered words — all this is the result of *bhava*, i.e., the inner poetical sense. And the right employment of the *bhava* gives rise to the quality called *Bhavika*."

In the above lines is contained, though in mere skeleton, the whole theory as to how the epic, as any other kind of long poem, should be constructed. It is interesting to compare these lines with the words of Aristotle in reference to the same matter, that the epic should be a unity like one whole animal. The animal has different organs, no doubt, but all its organs adhere together perfectly to make up that one animal. The author of the Mahabharata too, we may note in passing, compares his work to a majestic tree with branches and stem, and fruits and flowers, but which in its entirety is a single whole. The epic, therefore, should be a unity, with parts of course, but parts which go to make up and show off that unity.

Now the one action of the Ramayana, as Valmiki proposes in the beginning of the poem, is the destruction of Ravana, and every incident of the story contributes to this end. This idea is never absent from the mind of Kamban. When Tadaka, who comes to spoil the sacrifice of Vishvamitra, is shot by Rama, she looks, according to him, 'like Ravana's standard of victory felled down to the ground as a foreboding of his future fate.' When Kaikeyi yields to the evil advice of Manthara, it is

*Because the promise must be fulfilled now
That Vishnu to the gods had made, because
The gods did work their Maya, and the saints*

*Had earned the fruit of virtuous deeds, and the cup
Of Rakshas sins was full, — her heart was hardened.
For if the world to-day the ambrosial strains
Of Rama's praise does drink, does not it owe
The joy to Kaikeyi's cruelty? (2:2:77, 78)*

And when Ravana lies dead on the field, Mandodari lamenting his death says, among other things.

*The fairy charms of Sita, her chastity
Divine, the passion of my Ravana,
Shurpanakha's disgrace, and banishment
Of Rama by command of the King of kings,
All these and more, what are they but the fruit
Of Indra's great austerities? (6:36:241)*

Here we see the poet referring all these different incidents: as leading but to one only end, namely, the destruction of Ravana, for it is only after Ravana was destroyed that Indra could get back his heavenly kingdom.

Let us now examine the plot of the Ramayana in some detail. In the beginning of the First Book, the destruction of Ravana is proposed, and Vishnu Himself promises to come into the world as the son of Dasharatha and destroy the Rakshasa. The interest of the reader is from that moment fixed upon Rama, the avatar of the Supreme God, and all his doings. The First Book is taken up with the exploits of Rama's youth and his marriage with Sita who is the incarnation of Lakshmi. The killing of Tataka, the episode of Ahalya, the love of Rama for Sita and of Sita for Rama, Rama's bending and breaking of the mighty bow of Shiva, Parashu Rama's pride and its punishment, all these form a number of varied incidents interesting in themselves and at the same time calculated to make the reader expect high things of Rama. The march of this book is rather slow owing to the various episodes that are cast in the form of stories told by Vishvamitra to Rama and by Shatananda to Janaka. The journey of Dasharatha to Mithila which Valmiki describes in but one or two shlokas is elaborately described by Kamban in four Patalas I which take up about 300 stanzas. This is a great deal too much. But these patalas occur in the First Book before the epic has gathered its proper momentum. Moreover, many of the stanzas in these cantos are of great idyllic beauty.

In the Second Book, Rama's character is magnificently developed in his attitude towards Kaikeyi, Kausalya, and Lakshmana. The story too marches rapidly. The conversations between the several persons here are pitched in a high key, and the nerves of the reader become highly strung even at the thousandth reading. Between every one of these meetings, the pitch is lowered a little for the reader to take breath before he is confronted with the next scene of high-strung emotion. The art with which the climax is prepared in the meeting with Sita can never be sufficiently admired. The struggle of Dasharatha between his love of Rama and love of Truth, his anger against Kaikeyi, his despair at the charioteer's return without Rama, the whole contrast between Rama's expected coronation and his banishment, Bharata's renunciation, Guha's attachment to Rama, his suspicion of and indignation against Bharata and his subsequent recognition of his sublime nature, the rivalry in the heroism of renunciation between Bharata and Rama — all these make the Second Book a superb piece of work.

In the Third Book, the first thirteen years of Rama's life in the forests are passed over very rapidly though not without the poet reminding us of the purpose of Rama's avatar. In the fourteenth year, Shurpanakha's passion for Rama triggers the series of incidents that end with the death of Ravana. The fight in which Rama annihilates the fourteen thousand Rakshasas who come to avenge Shurpanakha gives us a foretaste of the magnificent battle-pieces with which Kamban fills his Book of Battles. Ravana's passion for Sita is described in a very extravagant way. Our idea of probability requires that Ravana should have seen Sita at least once before his soul could be fired with a desire

to possess her at whatever cost. Tulsi Das has felt this and so he introduces Ravana as one of the suitors to her hand at the Swayamvara at her father's court. The extravagance of Kamban's description of Ravana's passion however, faulty as it is, has a meaning, for only such a passion can explain Ravana's persistence in keeping her in spite of the worst defeats and disasters. Rama's going after the golden deer and Sita's fatal obstinacy in sending Lakshmana after Rama are narrated with great skill. Ravana now meets Sita alone in the cottage. The poet expends all his art in the colloquy between the disguised Ravana and Sita, and the bursting of the false form and the revealing of Ravana in his true shape are made to take place exactly at the right moment. The battle of the Vulture-King provides a heroic and touching episode to this book and Ravana carries off Sita without further hindrance. Kamban shows his sense of the fit in not describing at this stage, as Valmiki does, another interview between Sita and Ravana, in Lanka. It is only in the next book that he describes the first meeting of Sita and Ravana after her captivity, and he merely suggests their previous interviews by one sentence put in the mouth of Ravana:

*'The days are passing one by one away,
And this is all the kindness you have shown to me! 5:4, 26.*

Lakshmana's adventure with Ajomukhi is but a repetition of Rama's with Shurpanakha and is therefore superfluous, but Kamban employs it to reveal to us the deep love that Rama has towards Lakshmana. Kabandha closes, as Viradha began, the adventures of Rama and Lakshmana with the Rakshasas in the Forest Book. These three incidents have the same kind of fairy-tale ring about them as the adventures of Ulysses with the Cyclops and Circe have in the Odyssey.

The Fourth Book introduces to us new characters in the Vanaras of Kishkindha. The poet exhibits to us the intensity of Rama's desire to avenge his wrongs when he makes him determine the death of Vali the moment he hears from Hanuman that Vali had deprived Sugriva of his wife. The single combat of Vali and Sugriva, Vali's fall, his reproaches against Rama and final acceptance of the justice of his punishment, all these form one of the finest episodes in the poem. The Fourth Book ends with the sending of the Vanara host in all directions in search of Sita.

In the Fifth Book Hanuman, the favorite servant of Rama, discovers Sita. Ravana's interview with Sita, Sita's despair, Hanuman's delivery of Rama's message, his desire to leave a mark in Lanka worthy of his might, his subsequent capture, his release, his setting of Lanka on fire, and his return to Rama crowd this book with a multitude of shifting scenes each flowing from its predecessor as a natural and inevitable consequence.

The Yuddha Kanda or the Book of Battles is at least as long as the Iliad. The scene opens in Lanka charred by the conflagration started by Hanuman. The Council of the Rakshasas is less interesting than the debate in the Second Book of the Paradise Lost, but the episode of Hiranya is magnificent. Vibhishana recites to Ravana the story of the great Asura who was destroyed for his pride, and advises Ravana to avoid a similar fate by sending Sita back to Rama. Ravana, of course, refuses to listen to this advice and war begins. Every battle is a masterpiece, and there is hardly a repetition in the descriptions of such a multitude of battles. The reader will see in subsequent pages that the battle-pieces of Kamban cannot at all suffer by a comparison with Homer's best battles. But battles are not all the contents of the Yuddha Kanda. In this book scenes of the deepest pathos alternate with scenes of grand-souled heroism; despair and hope, and hope and despair weave their light and shade about the heroes and heroines, the terrible and the sublime play about us in all their grandeur. The story gathers fresh force and animation at every step till the death of Ravana. The poet, however, does not stop here but desires to enhance the glory of Sita and bring out into greater prominence the virtue of Bharata. And so, we have the ordeal of Sita which raises our feelings to a pitch which almost bursts our hearts. Bharata's sensitive heart is next presented to us in his sublime determination to expiate his imagined share in his mother's sin by falling into a fire that he has

kindled. And the poem ends sweetly with the coronation of Rama and the happy announcement that all the worlds were contented and in peace.

Now the plot in almost all its details is Valmiki's. But if Kamban takes the situations from Valmiki, he has treated them absolutely in his own way. In the manner of developing the situations, in the gradation by which the climax of each situation is brought about, in the justesse which knows how to bring out all its capabilities out of each situation, we feel the touch of the master-artist. In the manner also in which the incidents have been joined together to form the whole, no ordinary skill has been displayed. Every limb of Kamban's story is of course familiar to the student of Valmiki. But on going through the whole poem of Kamban, one is constrained to exclaim, ' here is a building which is built on the same plan no doubt, and with the same materials, but which possesses a striking individuality of its own.'³⁰

³⁰ Further remarks on Kamban's skill in the Architectonics of poetry will be found in the succeeding chapters where the characters are examined and studied in greater detail. See especially chapter XI where the episode of Vali is examined closely with special reference to Architectonics.

CHAPTER 5

THE SUPERNATURAL ELEMENT IN THE RAMAYANA



Every epic has got a supernatural element in it which interlaces itself with the human element in the story, and the action of both these elements in themselves as well as in their interaction form together the warp and the woof of the whole story. Thus we have in the Iliad and the Odyssey and the Aeneid, Zeus and Juno, Minerva and Mars, Neptune and Apollo who interfere directly or indirectly with the actions of the several human heroes, Aeolus who could unlock the winds and lash the sea into a tempest; and similar beings endowed with more than human power and strength, and with ability to move from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven with ease. In the Paradise Lost Milton introduces Satan and Beelzebub, Raphael and Abdiel, the Messiah and even God Himself as the chief actors in the story along with Adam and Eve. In his *Les Martyrs* Chateaubriand brings into play Satan and other fallen angels, the Spirit of Jealousy, the Spirit of Vengeance, the good angels and God as some of the protagonists of his story. In a similar manner, all other epic poets have in some way or other made use of the supernatural element in order to give more than ordinary importance to the action which they celebrate in their epics. The taking in of the aid of the supernatural in Epic Poetry has become such a universal habit that even Pope thought his Rape of the Lock not dignified enough without the play of this machinery, and so he introduced in his revised edition elves and fairies which certainly add to the interest of the original poem.

In our Ramayana also, the supernatural element plays a very important part in the action of the story. But it is, as is natural, of a character different to that of the western epics. It is always difficult to adjust the focus of one's mental vision to the conditions of a world different from that to which it has been previously adjusted; and it is this difficulty that is to a large extent responsible for most of the criticism that those whose taste is formed on a study of the western epics alone are used to make against eastern epics. We should draw the attention of such critics to the words of Mr. Mark Pattison which he uses in connection with the Paradise Lost, but which are capable of being applied with equal truth to all epic poetry and even broadly speaking to every fine art. He says,

" The world of the Paradise Lost is an ideal, conventional world, quite as much as the world of the Arabian Nights or the world of chivalrous romance or that of the pastoral novel. Not only dramatic but all poetry is founded upon illusion. We must, though it be for the moment, suppose it true. We must be transported out of the actual world into that world in which the given scene is laid. It is chiefly the business of the poet to effect this transportation, but the reader (or hearer) must aid. If the reader's imagination is not active enough to assist the poet, he must at least not resist him. When we are once inside the poet's heaven, our critical faculty may justly require that what takes place there is quite consistent with itself, with the laws of the fantastic world. But we may not begin by objecting that it is impossible that such a world should exist. If in any age the power of imagination is enfeebled, the reader becomes more unable to make the effort and he ceases to co-operate with the poet. Much of the criticism of the Paradise Lost which we meet with resolves itself to the conditions that the poet demands, a determination to insist that his heaven peopled with deities, dominations, principalities and powers shall have the same material laws which govern our planetary system. It is not, as we often hear it said, that the critical faculty is unduly developed in the nineteenth century. It is that the imaginative faculty fails us; and when that is the case, criticism is powerless — it has no fundamental assumption upon which its judgments can proceed."

A sympathetic understanding of the nature and conditions of the conventional world postulated by the poet is therefore indispensable to the critic if his criticism should be rational and fruitful. Such an understanding is equally necessary for the simple lover of poetry who desires only aesthetic enjoyment. So, we propose in this chapter to give an account, necessarily brief, of the nature of the

supernatural beings that take part in the story and of the miraculous machines of destruction used by them as well as by the human heroes in their battles

There are mainly two classes of beings which partake of the character of the supernatural in the Ramayana. They are the *Rakshasas* and the *Vanaras*. We shall take the *Rakshasas* first. They are beings of enormous power and size, and should be, strictly speaking, labelled as preternatural beings. Ravana has ten heads. Trishiras has three heads. Some other *Rakshasas* and *Rakshasis* have heads of horses, wolves, jackals, lions, etc. By performing great and severe *tapas* (austerities) these *Rakshasas* have acquired enormous physical strength and many magical powers. They can bend the bow with such force that their arrows can break to pieces the rocks hurled against them by their enemies. They can assume whatever shape they please at their will. They can fly through the air with or without aerial chariots. They hold other worlds than this terrestrial world in subjection under themselves. They can create automatons looking like human beings or *Rakshasas*. In short, they possess all the powers and qualities that are attributed to the gods in the Greek mythology. As a class, the *Rakshasas* hate virtue and doers of virtue and love a life of vice and luxury. Destruction and humiliation of men and gods are their chief delight.

Besides the ordinary powers and strength of the *Rakshasas*, Ravana possesses some very extraordinary powers. He is able to lift with his hands the great Mount Kailas with Shiva Himself enthroned upon it. He fights and conquers the *Ashta-dik-gajas* — the eight immense elephants which are supposed to bear aloft the world from its eight sides and corners. The God of Death and Varuna³¹ have to acknowledge defeat at his hands. The Sun and the Moon, and Fire and Wind obey his every wish. The very seasons obey him, and come and go at the slightest expression of his will. In short, his austerities have earned for him from Shiva and the other gods power and strength only short of omnipotence.

Gods as such do not take an active part in the story. They have been conquered by their enemies, the *Rakshasas*. Their world, the *Svarga*, is in the hands of Ravana. Their wives and daughters are working as maids to the *Rakshasa* 'women' in Lanka. They themselves are doing menial service to their *Rakshasa* masters. Their king Indra is a wanderer away from his kingdom and throne. Even the Supreme Three³² have been defeated by Ravana and live under a self-denying ordinance, resolving not to interfere with his doings till the strength of his austerities has begun to wane.

But at the command of Vishnu — one of the Supreme Three — who is the one designed in this age to destroy the evil and unrighteous *Rakshasas* and *Asuras*, the gods are born as *Vanaras* or giant monkeys on earth. But while they are born on earth they keep also their own divine bodies in *Svarga*, or wherever they are for the moment. The *Vanaras* are therefore spoken of both as the sons of the respective gods as well as their incarnations. The *Vanaras*, at least their leaders, have the same preternatural strength and courage as the *Rakshasas*. They can also assume at will whatever shape they please. They can leap over immense distances of space. Hanuman, the greatest of the *Vanaras*, can fly across the sea from the mainland to Lanka and fly back. Again he flies to the hill of drugs situated far north of the Himalayas and returns with the hill in his hand in the course of a single night. He can grow as high as the heavens and pervade the world with his body. Angada and Sugriva are almost equal to him in strength but do not possess his pervasive power. The strength of the *Vanaras* is such that they can tear trees and rocks by the roots and hurl them against their foes. The reader will not be far wrong if he imagines the *Vanaras* as possessing almost all the strength and powers of the gods of the Greek epics. Only, unlike the latter, they compose the entire army of one of the combatants in the war.

³¹ Rain-God

³² Brahma, Vishnu and, Shiva.

Garuda and Sampati and Jatayu must be classed separately among the supernatural and preternatural beings of the Ramayana. Garuda is the great golden eagle, the *Vahana* or carrier of Vishnu. He is the enemy of all serpents and he appears on the battle-field to free Lakshmana and the Vanaras from the serpent noose of Indrajit. At his mere approach all the serpents of the noose either die or slink away. Jatayu and Sampati are vultures — the sons of Aruna, the charioteer of the Sun, and they are the Icarus and Daedalus of Indian story. They had tried to fly up to the very Sun and had fallen down scorched by his fierce rays. Jatayu, the younger, was protected from being burnt by Sampati who shaded him from the sun and had his own wings burned off. At the period of our story, Sampati lives on the Mahendra hill at the southernmost point of the mainland, till the choral repetition — of Rama's name makes his wings miraculously to grow. Jatayu is the friend of Dasharatha and so Rama has a tender filial affection for the noble Vulture-King. Jatayu, as the reader will remember, attempts to prevent Ravana from carrying off Sita, but after a terrible struggle falls mortally wounded by Ravana.

These are about all the preternatural beings that take part in the action of the epic. Although Rama and his brothers are divine incarnations, Kamban, like Valmiki, treats their actions as those of mere human heroes, only endowed with some extraordinary powers. For instance, Kamban does not gift Rama with the pervasive power or enormous size and strength of Hanuman, though everywhere he reminds us that he is the Supreme One who is immanent in everything and who transcends even the Three Persons of the Trinity. In fact, Rama and his brothers are human in their actions and their physical condition, though they are divine in their ultimate nature.

But if Rama and Lakshmana are merely men in their actions, they possess the power to command the gods to do their bidding even as Ravana and the Rakshasa leaders have. We speak of their power to convert their arrows by means of mantras or spells into weapons possessing the power of Agni and Vayu,³³ Shiva and Vishnu and Brahma, and other deities. Arrows thus impregnated by spells are called Astras. It is these astras that deserve to be called machinery, a term which western critics are used to apply to the supernatural beings etc., that influence the action in the Iliad and other epics.

The *astra* should be imagined by the reader to be an arrow which the spell, pronounced by the bowman at the time of aiming it, converts into a weapon possessing preternatural power, generally the power of a god. Thus the *Agneya-astra* must be supposed to be an arrow which the spell of the archer impregnates with the Shakti or force of Agni, the God of Fire. Such an arrow must be imagined to fly against the enemy carrying living fire in its bosom and burning down everything before it. Similarly the *Varuna-astra* would be the weapon possessing the force of Varuna, the God of the Ocean, and hence would be aimed against the *Agneya-astra* whose fire it would extinguish. The *Maheshvara-astra* would be an arrow filled with the force of God Shiva or Maheshvara, the *Narayana-astra* would be an arrow filled with the force of God Narayana or Vishnu, and the *Brahma-astra* would be an arrow filled with the force of Brahma, and so on. The *Naga-pasha* or the serpent-noose must be imagined to be an arrow or a succession of arrows which the appropriate spells convert into deadly serpents which bind themselves round the bodies of the enemies and strangle them. Kamban speaks also of the *Maya-astra* which creates any illusion that the sender pleases before the eyes of the opponent. In rare cases, incantations are supposed to be pronounced upon other weapons than arrows," and then these weapons, — sometimes even a blade of grass serves as a weapon to the expert in the science of astras — become the appropriate *astras*.

The reader will observe that when an *astra* is aimed against an archer, his obvious defense according to this convention would be to send against it an *astra* of superior power which would

³³ Fire and Wind.

conquer or neutralize it. Thus arrows would wrestle against arrows in mid-air, each armed with the force given to it by the respective archers.

Out of all these *astras*, the *Brahma-astra* is supposed to be the most powerful, though in one or two places Kamban speaks of the *Narayana-astra* and *Maheshvara-astra* as equally or even more powerful weapons. These *astras* are to be supposed to fly through the air with fatal force, giving birth, both on their way as well as when they strike the enemy, to innumerable destructive machines and even beings such as cobras, demons, etc. The torpedoes and shrapnel, and flame-throwers and poison-gas shells and similar destructive weapons so abundantly used in the late war are the analogues of the *astras* of the Ramayana. And who knows if the first ideas of some of the terrific weapons of modern times were not put into the heads of their European inventors by the description of the several *astras* mentioned in the Ramayana!

Rama and Lakshmana on the one side and the great leaders of the Rakshasas on the other are described by the poet as great experts in the science of *astras*. Rama's arrows have another peculiarity in that they come back to his quiver after doing the destruction for which they were sent.

Although the gods do not take part in the action of the story except through the *astras*, they make their appearance sometimes in their own persons in the course of the action. Thus, when Bharata persists in inviting Rama to come back to Ayodhya, the Devas who are standing around unseen by the assembled people pronounce a command, which is heard as a disembodied voice, that he should himself go back and rule the kingdom for fourteen years. Again Rama and Lakshmana see Indra approach Sharabhanga in order to offer him residence in his own heaven. Matali, the charioteer of Indra, is ordered by the gods to drive Rama in the heavenly vimana or air chariot of Indra during the final battle with Ravana. And finally the gods and the deceased Dasharatha come down on earth at the time when Sita falls into the fire and advise Rama to take her back to himself.

We believe we have now placed before the reader all that is necessary for a proper understanding of the conventional world in which the action of the Ramayana unfolds itself. Now we shall take up the study of the more important characters of our story and see how Kamban treats them in his epic.

CHAPTER 6

RĀMA



In the delineation of character, Kamban stands on a level with the greatest poets of the world. The lines are drawn with a firm hand, and the characters are painted with such accuracy and fullness that from any single sentence, and sometimes even from a single phrase in a speech, one can tell the person speaking without any the least doubt.

Here too, naturally, Valmiki has set the stamp on the characters of the Ramayana. But in Kamban's hand they have become much grander. The student of Valmiki will wonder how his Rama and Bharata, Ravana and Kumbhakarna, Vali and Hanuman, Sita and Kausalya and the rest could be improved. The fact, however, is there that Kamban's heroes and heroines are beings of a decidedly higher stature than those of Valmiki.

The idealization of Rama is not solely or chiefly the work of Kamban. The fact is that the Rama of Valmiki has so captivated the heart of India that the whole nation has expended on him all the love and devotion of which its rich nature was capable. The Tamil Alwars, and especially Kulasekhara the Chera Prince, have given literary expression in their devotional verses to the popular pronouncement that Rama is the Supreme Narayana Himself in human form. In Kamban's time, therefore, the ideal man had grown into very God, the mere repetition of whose name with devotion would lead unto heaven. What Kamban has done is to give the impress of the master-artist to the character that had grown into its fullness and grandeur by the devotion-filled meditation of generations of the sons of India.

This, however, was no ordinary task. It is easy to pile epithets upon epithets and constantly repeat that Rama was a divine king. But to create the poetical impression of the divinity of Rama's character and to maintain the epic in all places at the level that will alone harmonies with such an impression is a vastly different thing. And Kamban has eminently succeeded in this extremely difficult task.

With regard to the other characters, and especially with regard to the Rakshasas, the heightening of the color is mainly Kamban's work. With the instinct of the born artist, Kamban must have seen that the idealization of Rama alone without raising the other personages of the story to a similar height of character would not produce a harmonic whole. And so he has made his Ravana and Indrajit, Sugriva and Angada, Kausalya and Mandodari much grander characters than they appear in Valmiki's poem. And although Valmiki's Bharata is one of the finest creations of poetry, the little touches that Kamban has given to the figure have rendered Bharata's virtue even more resplendent than in the original Ramayana.

With these preliminary observations, we shall examine more closely the characters of Kamban's Ramayana, giving greater attention to the more prominent characters therein.

Rama, of course, will claim our first attention. In three or four places Valmiki has deified Rama. Even these passages, however, modern critics regard as interpolations. But, howsoever this may be, everywhere else in Valmiki, Rama is only the valorous prince, perfect in virtue, but nothing more than a simple mortal man. In Kamban, however, it is rare to meet with any reference to Rama which does not indicate his divinity. He is the Supreme Lord, he is Narayana, he is the one that sleeps the sleep of wakefulness in the Ocean of Milk, he is the Great One whom even the Vedas have not seen. If he runs after the golden deer, 'he sets forward the foot that measured the three worlds'. If Rama and Sita love each other at first sight, 'is it not the meeting again of those that were together in the Ocean of Milk, and were separated only for a while?' It is the same from beginning to end.

But this constant deification of Rama does not stand in the way of the most human emotions being attributed to him. He feels all the anguish of separation from Sita. He is stunned on hearing of the death of his father. He is affected by the simple affection of Guha and the self-reproach of Bharata. He weeps at the fall of Lakshmana in one of his encounters with Indrajit, and is beside himself with grief at the report that Indrajit had murdered Sita. And yet we do not feel that there is anything unnatural in Rama's human acts and emotions. There is the same mingled divinity and humanity about Kamban's Rama as about the Christ of the Gospels and of the Paradise Regained.

The fascination which the character of Rama has exercised upon the mind of India is a measure of the great art with which our poet, among others, has delineated him. Rarely has literature anywhere taken upon itself the task of creating such valor and such virtue. And still more rarely has it risen to the level of such a creation.

And what a character is that of Rama! All the qualities that belong to the hero are to be found in him to perfection. He is the very personification of valor. He is not elated even when the imperial crown is offered to him. Valmiki's Rama announces to his mother the fact of his prospective coronation with just a touch of joy. And to Lakshmana he says with greater expansiveness,

'Rule you this kingdom with me, O Lakshmana. This fortune is for you too who are my other self. Life and the crown I desire for your sake more than for myself.'

But Kamban takes care not to put even these words into the mouth of Rama. He says,

'When Dasharatha had finished, the Lotus-eyed One was not elated, neither despised he the gift. But, feeling that it was his duty to obey his father's commands, he consented! (2:1:70)

After this, Kamban does not allow Rama to speak a word in the poem till he makes his grand reply to Kaikeyi. By this, Rama is made to appear more stoic than in Valmiki. The poet, as the reader is aware, draws pointed attention to this stoicism at this place. And he calls it again to our mind when he describes Sita's thoughts while she is a captive in Lanka. She would think, he says,

'On that face, which, both when asked by his father to accept the imperial crown as well as when commanded by his mother to leave all and live a forest life, like the pictorial lotus was ever the same!' (5:3:20)

Another effect of this stoical calmness is that Rama not only does not himself accuse Kaikeyi anywhere, but deprecates others accusing her. When Lakshmana rages against her on hearing of Rama's exile for the first time, Rama calms him saying,

'They blame not streams if water sometimes fails; blame you not then our king, nor our mother: 'It's fate that drives us on, my brother! Why then this rage?' (2:4:134)

A fine sidelight is thrown on this trait in Rama's character when the poet makes Bharata say to his mother, when she announced to him that she had exiled Rama for his sake,

*'You live yet! And still my spell-bound hand
Leaps not forth to finish you! Did not
I fear that Rama, my sovereign, would resent
The deed, shall even the name of 'mother' stay
My arm from slaying you?' (2:9:72)*

Note here how the poet raises Rama in our estimation by making Bharata say that Rama would never tolerate the slaying of Kaikeyi even for her triple crime. But it is not only that Rama forgives Kaikeyi her evil, he retains his former love for her even in his exile. For among the many things that Sita wants Hanuman to remind Rama about, she says,

"And when I had a parrot fair I loved,

*I asked my lord what name he liked to give o her.
And he with tenderness replied,
Give her my virtuous mother Kaikey's name.' "* (5:6:83)

If Rama, however, is a *vairagi*³⁴, when it is a question of his own personal fortunes, he is tender as a woman when he sees others suffer. Thus when he sees Lakshmana's princely hands engaged in building a cottage for him in the forests, he exclaims to himself thus:—

*'The flower-like tender feet of Janaka's daughter³⁵
Are strong enough to tread the jungle paths;
And Lakshman's hands are skilled to build for us
A tasteful cottage home. Ah, those whom Fate
Has helpless cast upon the world, what's there
That they'll not learn to do!'* (2:8:52)

The poet again touches on this side of Rama's nature when he makes Sita recall to mind while in the Ashoka grove in Lanka.

*The pain of Rama when he saw his brother³⁶
Wear not the crown upon his head, but wear
The dusty twisted knot of hair. (5:3:25)*

The grief of Rama at the fall of Lakshmana, in one of Indrajit's battles, is pitched in a higher key:

*Now he would plough the ground with his limbs; now he would heave heavy sighs; now
he would swoon away as in death; soon coming to himself he would act as one who
knew not what he was doing; suddenly he would cry aloud; 'Lakshmana, O Lakshmana!
'Then he would place his hands under Lakshmana's nostrils, and call out, 'Do you live
my child? '*

*Again he would gently press Lakshmana's feet with his lotus hands; he would pat his
thighs; he would look intently into his lotus eyes, fair like fresh-gathered flowers; he
would listen at his heart to see if it was yet beating; he would look at the heavens; he
would lift up his body and place it against his heart; then he would lay it down upon the
ground; suddenly he would exclaim, ' Is the foe fled away? '*

*He would look at his bow and then at the deadly noose thrown by the enemy; he would
look at the night that appeared as if it would never end; he would look at the gods that
were crowding in the heavens; he would want to tear the earth itself up by its roots.*

*He would cast his eyes on the heroes assembled round; he would think of the fate that
had brought about this misfortune; once again he would look at his powerful bow and
then at his arrows; and then he would cry aloud, 'Has ever man suffered like me?'*
(6:18:222 – 225)

We shall close the study of this phase of Rama's character with one more extract. Seeing that it was difficult to overcome his enemy by pure force of arms, Indrajit wanted to destroy their morale and so he created an automaton resembling Sita, breathed life into it by his magic art, cut off its head in the presence of Hanuman, and flew away upon his aerial chariot saying that he was going to invade Ayodhya. When Hanuman brought this news to Rama, Rama's grief knew no bounds, and he swooned away. At length, rising from his trance, Rama spoke these words:—

'It seems my curse ends not with Sita even:

³⁴ A renunciate, indifferent to material life.

³⁵ Sītā

³⁶ Bharata when he came to forest to invite Rama to take back the Crown that Kaikeyi had deprived him of.

*Needs must it swallow up my race; nor know
I now whom else it will destroy. O Lord!
Is there an end to this? and then, my brothers,
Will they be spared? In his aerial car
Faster than thought, the foe towards Ayodhya
Has flown, and is returned. The home that gave
My life, is shattered now, while Sita here
Has fallen under the murderer's knife! What else
Is coming, I know not, nor welcome death I find!' (6:25: 78, 79)*

This capacity for poignant suffering is but the obverse of Rama's naturally affectionate disposition. The poet does not forget to point out that even as a child Rama had kind words and sweet looks for the strangers. When Vasishtha approves of Rama's coronation, he says:—

*'It's little if I say he loved all men
Even as he loves himself: the love he bears
To you, even that's the measure of his love
To all things living.' (2:1:38)*

When the rough forest king Guha comes to see him on the banks of the Ganga, Rama is so moved by his love for himself that he begins to love him as if he were a blood-brother. And so, when Guha desires to accompany him southward and serve him all the fourteen years of his exile, he addresses to him these feeling words:—

*'You are dear to me as life: and this my brother
Is brother to you as well, and this fair one
Is kin to you; and all the sea-girt earth
Is your of right whilst I adventure on,
Your duties doing. Happiness comes to us
Alone in the wake of misery. Grieve not
Therefore that now we part: we were but four
Before: to-day with you we're brothers five
Attached one to another with loving bonds.
Lakshman, your brother, is here to suffer all
For me
Your other brother Bharat is there to guard
Our kindred in the north; now tell me who
But you can guard our kindred here? your men,
Are not they mine? Then stay you here and watch
Over them till I return.' (2:6:68-71)*

Such was the depth of Rama's affection for Guha that Sita in her lonely stay at the Ashoka grove would go into raptures when she remembered,

*..... how Rama said to Guha, humble forester as he was, 'Lakshmana is your own
brother, and Sita here is brother's wife to you!'*

Two others Rama loved with the same kind of brotherly affection — Sugriva, whom he swore to avenge as soon as he heard that his elder brother Vali was hounding him, and Vibhishana, who was disgusted at the conduct of his own brother Ravana in refusing to send back Sita, and who had come to Rama as a refugee from Lanka. So, when he crowns Vibhishana as King of Lanka, he tells him,

*'When Guha joined us on Ganga's banks,
I counted myself blessed with brothers four:
Sugriva to me a fifth did add; and now*

*With you we are become seven loving brothers.
Blest verily is father Dasharatha:
One son he banished to the forests wild,
But sons on sons do grow on him, and bless
His royal name.'* (6:4:146)

Towards Bharata and Lakshmana and Hanuman, Rama's affection grows into a tenderer plant. We have referred to Rama's grief at seeing Bharata coming to the Chitrakuta hill clad in hermit's weeds. He has few occasions to exhibit his love for him in the course of his wanderings in the forest and the war with the Rakshasas. But Bharata is never absent from his heart even for a single moment. And the memory of his sublime nature was one of the most dearly prized companions of his lonely thoughts. For when he sends a message through Sumantra to Ayodhya from the threshold of the jungle country, he asks him to request Vasishtha on his behalf to console Bharata in his grief when he should hear of his exile, and asks him also to tell Bharata not to be angry with his mother for having brought about his banishment. When Lakshmana, seeing Bharata approach towards where Rama was on the Chitrakuta hill, charges him with desiring to kill Rama, Rama expostulates with him and says,

'It is your love to me, brother, that makes you blind to Bharata's virtues. I regard the Vedas themselves as no more than commentaries on Bharata's life. Is it the part of wisdom not to see that it is his love for me that draws him here and that he must be coming here to offer me the crown?' Can you suspect thus our Bharata, the touchstone of honor, the very God of supreme Virtue?' (2:12:44, 45.)

How near Bharata was to Rama's heart is shown in a more pointed manner by the poet when he describes the single combat of Vali and Sugriva. As Sugriva and Vali were wrestling with each other, Lakshmana spoke to Rama condemning the conduct of Sugriva in having invited him to kill his own brother. But Rama said;

*.....'If all
Were 'like in their devotion to their brothers,
How can my' Bharata be placed the first
In the list of loyal brothers?' (4:5:34)*

The reader will not fail to notice the veiled blow aimed at Lakshmana himself³⁷ who must have been proud, and not without reason, of his unwavering loyalty to his brother Rama. This veiled cut at Lakshmana by praising Bharata, is suggested by Valmiki himself, but he introduces that sentiment at the time when Rama is consulting his council as to whether they should admit Vibhishana into their camp as an ally. And Valmiki makes Rama say there — and Rama is addressing both Sugriva and Lakshmana at the time — 'Not all brothers, child, are like Bharata, nor all sons like myself!' This snub is crueler being administered in the presence of others — though friends — while the self-praise takes away something from the character of Rama. The situation that Kamban has chosen for the expression of the sentiment, and the suppression of the self-praise show him once again the grand connoisseur as well as artist that he is.

But the superior praise given by Rama to Bharata does not mean that he loves Lakshmana less. In fact, how could he love anybody more than his inseparable companion who had left all and was suffering all for his sake? We have referred to Rama's feelings when he saw Lakshmana building him his cottage and also when Lakshmana was brought down by the Naga-pasha of Indrajit. We may say that Rama regarded him as his own child. For did not Sumitra tell Lakshmana in his own presence that he should look upon Rama as a father? And was not Lakshmana doing him every service that a son does to his father?

³⁷ For if Lakshmana suffered all for Rama, was he not unkind to his 'Other brother Bharata?

And so Rama heaps on him all his tenderest epithets — but almost always in his absence. Thus when he finds that what Lakshmana had forewarned him of had come true, namely, that the golden deer was not really a deer but a Rakshasa in disguise, he exclaims to himself,

'Ah, wise, verily wise is my dear child, the life of my life, the soul of my very soul!'

So also when Lakshmana was way-laid by Ajomukhi and did not come back in time, Rama went out in search of him in the forest and gave vent to his love and anxiety for him in these- words:—

*'Still he is not come back, the dearest part
Of my life. Alas, has he sunk beneath the load
Of my great grief? Eyes have I none but him
To lead me on in this dark wood. How then
Can I with bleeding heart the jungle scan
And find out if he lives? O Lakshmana!
My only staff in life! have you the heart
To hide your face from me? Do you hear my child?
Hard verily is your heart!
Sit just to make me roam in search of you
As well, my fearless lion, who left your all
And followed me?'* (3:9:63,67,68,71)

We shall give one final extract from our poet to illustrate Rama's affection for Lakshmana. When Lakshmana went to fight his last battle with Indrajit, Rama did not accompany him but remained in the camp awaiting the result. And this is how Kamban describes his feelings during Lakshmana's absence:—

*He waited on with an anxious, tortured heart,
To himself oft repeating, 'sure, he will
Conquer the guileful Rakshasa,' and praying
'May Dharma be an armor to my brother!'
..... And keeping ever his eyes fixed on the way
His brother would come, even as good Bharata
In hermit's robes with many a prayer was
Awaiting him, at length he saw the march
Triumphal of his brother towards the camp.* (6:27:64)

The sight drew tears from Rama's eyes. And this is how the poet comments upon it:—

*The tears that flowed from Rama's lotus eyes
When he his brother's form described, were they
The liquid stream of love? or were they tears
Induced by painful memories of the past?
Or were they tears of joy?
Or were they but
The tokens of His mercy infinite?* (6:27:65)

The affection of Rama to Hanuman is the affection of a great Guru to a great disciple. He honors the learning and wisdom and physical strength of the great Vanara. But this respect is warmed by personal affection which arose at the very first sight of him, and grew stronger by every day that passed. It is to him that Rama entrusts his signet ring and his most intimate message to Sita, at the time that he sends the Vanara host in search of her. It is to him that he entrusts the ring once again, this time in order to prevent Bharata from falling into the fire. It is him that he keeps by his side as his constant companion and friend, and it is on his joyfully offered shoulders that he rides during his great battles with the Rakshasas. If we say that Rama was all affection for Guha, Sugriva and

Vibhishana, and that he loved Hanuman, Lakshmana and Bharata, how shall we describe his love for the beautiful, the holy, the all-suffering Sita? It was an all-absorbing love, was his love for his incomparable spouse. The great composer of South India, Thiyagayya, says that Rama's love for Sita was as unique as his loyalty to his pledged word and his skill in archery.³⁸ That love adds new nerve to his lion-like strength at Janaka's court, because,

*The massive bow that like the Meru hill
Before him lay, he lightly lifted up
As if it were the wedding garland bright
For his beloved! (1:12:33)*

That love makes him distractedly apostrophize the moon and Manmatha³⁹ on the night previous to the *Svayamvara* of Sita. And that same intense love makes him rave like mad man when he loses her, and fall down like a lightning-struck sal tree when he hears that she has just been murdered by Indrajit.

Kamban does not describe any entrancing love scenes between Rama and Sita. He makes them first speak to each other only when Rama desires to take leave of Sita at the time of starting for the forest. There is a world of suggestion in their words of their happy domestic life, and it is generally by suggestion that Kamban speaks of the ineffable love that they bear towards each other. Thus while walking towards the country watered by the Ganga, Rama and Sita enjoy in each other's company the delightful sights of rural nature. They see the swans sporting with each other in the distance. Sita sees her lord's feet mock the lotuses in freshness of color and beauty of shape. The blue lotus luxuriantly growing in the brooks puts Rama in mind of the soft eyes of his beloved Sita. The lake banks where sleep the royal swans, the sand dunes in the open country, the groves full of young trees and smiling flowers, and the great Ganga herself delight their hearts and add romance to their ever-deepening love. They bathe together in the holy Ganga. They enjoy together the wild beauties of the forest, and it is there that Rama's words become more and more tender towards Sita. She is Arundhati⁴⁰ to him and sweeter than ambrosia. She is his indescribable beauty. She is to him the *amrita* that rose at the churning of the Milk Ocean. She is the sweet-singing koil bird fairer than the dancing peacock. She is his light, and the life of womanhood itself. She is the fair one that could teach virtue to Arundhati's self. She is the one the very thought of whom is ambrosia to him.

Rama's passionate love for Sita appears most when, at the time of giving his final instructions to Hanuman just before the Vanaras were sent all over the earth to search for Sita, he dwells with delight upon the beauty of her form, and calls to mind the little telling incidents of their married and pre-marriage days. Thus he tells Hanuman,

*" Even the lotus has its petals pale,
The moon has got its spot, and where is form
Of any kind without the slightest fault?
'But you will see no imperfection mar
Her shapely form. Great Brahma made the flute
And vina, parrots, koils, and children's babble,
And then he coped all sweetness with her voice:
But naught could he create to parallel
Her speech and tone; and can he ever succeed
If he should try even now for all his life?
Though earth and heaven should search to find it's like*

³⁸ *Oka mata, oka banamu, oka patni!* One his word, one his arrow's aim, and one his beloved spouse.

³⁹ The God of Love

⁴⁰ The wife of Vashistha held up to all womankind as the ideal of wifely virtues and womanly chastity

*What can approach amrit⁴¹ in taste? And what
 Can ever compare with the sweetness of her speech?
 You think of honey and amrita: but can
 They ever delight the ear?
 Remind her that our eyes did first commingle
 When I a stranger came to Mithila town,
 The while she stood beside the dovecot fair
 In her virgin bower. Recall again to her
 How I beheld her form, like a lightning young,
 And full of grace, at Janaka's palace hall.
 Tell her I call to mind her great resolve,
 When I the bow of Shiva broke in two,
 To end herself if I should other prove
 Than whom she saw with holy Kaushika.
 Recall to her my words, when she resolved
 To follow me to wilds unseen before:
 I said, ' O Sita, you were a fount of joy
 To me till now: but now you will become
 The source of grief innumerable if you
 Persist in your desire.' And she replied
 With tears in her eyes, ' when you leave
 Your crown, and take yourself to forest life,
 O love, is everything supportable
 By you excepting only me? ' And last
 Remind her how, when we had barely passed
 The gates of Oudh, she stopped and asked, ' Where is
 The forest boundless in expanse? Are we
 Arrived in it? ' (5:10:60,62,63,76 – 72.)*

How deep, how tender, how loyal must be the love that could treasure up in its heart, and dwell with intense delight upon such incidents as these? So when, with the aid of her magical powers, Shurpanakha takes the shape of a woman of entrancing beauty and approaches him with lustful intentions, Rama merely exclaims, “where is the limit to beauty of form?”, but his heart is absolutely untouched. As the meeting with Shurpanakha brings into prominence the unshakeable loyalty of Rama's love for Sita, we translate the scene and give it below almost in extenso:–

And the daughter of duplicity approached, full of sweet speech, her feet shapely and soft as the fresh red lotus and leaf-buds, her appearance recalling to mind the tender creeper and the swan and the young peacock.

The Goddess of the golden lotus herself would yield to her in beauty; her face gleamed with the light of her lance-like eyes; and she was like lightning descending from the skies.

Her form had the grace of the Kalpaka creeper; her words breathed tenderness and love; she walked on like a gay peacock, but her eyes she took from the young fawn.

Her anklets and her belt-bells, her gold garlands and the bees buzzing about the flowers in her hair-, announced that a fair one was approaching, and Rama turned his eyes in that direction.

⁴¹ The nectar of immortality – drink of the gods

She came like softest ambrosia which the Devas were delighted to offer and with her waist a little bent under the weight of her superb bust, and He who in His mercy opened the eyes of wisdom to His devotees I now saw her before his eyes.

He saw that melting form, the like of which was not to be found in Svarga or the earth or the world beneath, and thought within himself, ' Who can confine the Spirit of Beauty? Where is the limit to beauty of form? '

And she that was full of desire put into her expression all the charm she could command, joined her hands together in salute, lightly brandished the lances of her fascinating eyes, and softly stepped aside like a young fawn. (3:5: 31– 37)

After preliminary inquiries, in reply to which she says that she is the sister of Kubera and Ravana, Rama asks her what she wants of him, and then the colloquy continues thus:—

*'It's hard for fair ones nobly born to speak
The love that burns their hearts: alas for me,
My life doth ebb away and there is none
To help me here.
What can I in this plight,
Save speak to you in boldness all I feel?
I pray you, save me from the cruel arrows
That Manmath aims at me! ' Thus boldly she
Her bad and lust-filled heart laid bare, the while
Her lightning glances did her tale confirm,
Whereat Kausalya's son thought in his heart,
'No shame has she, and evil is her mind.'
She did not see his thoughts, and once again
Began: ' I knew not until now that you
Were here: and so my time and youth were lost
In service done to hermits deemed wise.'
Said Ram, 'The Shastras do such unions
Condemn as you desire: for you come
Of Brahman stock, and I am Kshatriya born.'
'If this is all you urge,' said Shurpanakha
'I die not yet; for though my father was
Brahman, mother was a Rakshasa queen.'
He heard the lustful Rakshasi: the shade
Of a budding smile suffused his lotus lips
While thus he spoke: ' The wise declare that men
Should not damsel wed of Rakshasas birth.'
'What fool I was to say,' thought Shurpanakha,
'That I was Ravana's sister! ' Then aloud
Said she, 'As fruit of great austerities
I have my shameful Rakshasas birth cast off,
And God has blessed me with this comely form.'
To her, thus He whom Vedas themselves find
For ever to be beyond their utmost depth:
'If you are sister to the sovereign,
As you say, of all the worlds, and if
Your other brother is Kubera, afraid
Am I to marry you unless they give*

*You 'way in solemn form!' 'But know not you,'
 Persisted she, ' Gandharva rites are fixed
 For those like us whom mutual love has joined?
 When thus our love is sanctified, my brothers
 Will gladly welcome you. Now they make war
 On holy men; and full of sin and rage
 Are they; unaided you should not approach
 To where they are. When I shall make you king
 Of earth and heaven, then will they come and serve
 And clasp your lotus feet.' Ram laughed aloud,
 And said, * with you as wife, and Rakshasas hosts
 As friends, with all the endless wealth that comes
 To me with you, am I not blessed indeed?' (3:5: 45 – 56)*

Although she saw that Rama was mocking at her, she did not give up hope. And so, as Sita approached Rama just at the moment, she thought that she might be just another woman like herself who was come to Rama with intentions similar to her own, and she warned him against her saying that she, Sita, was a man-eating Rakshasi disguised. But when Sita nestled herself in Rama's breast for fear of herself, and when Rama bid her go away and went into his cottage accompanied by Sita who was still clinging to him,

*She was like one struck dumb, her life was fled.
 Her breath stopped short, nor knew she where she was
 Or what she thought. But jealous thoughts soon rose
 And agitated once again her breast.
 And then she slowly said within herself,
 Deep verily is his love for her!⁴²*

That was Rama's love for Sita, a deep abiding love, which charms, the most fascinating, could not for a moment alter. It was his excessive love for her that made him disregard Lakshmana's warning and go after the golden deer himself, and thus sow the seed of endless misery to himself as well as to Sita. For when Lakshmana offered, as the best of a bad bargain, to hunt the deer and bring it himself,

*Pouting her ambrosia-dropping ruby lips,
 Like a sweet-tongued parrot young she lisped, ' Then, you
 Would not yourself pursue and capture him
 For me? ', and left him with tears flowing down
 Her cheeks. But Rama could not bear to see
 Her in a pet, and said, ' My golden love,
 Behold I myself go and I shall bring
 Him in a trice.' (3:7: 237, 238.)*

So saying he asked Lakshmana to guard Sita in his absence and hurried after the golden deer.

Again when he returned from his fruitless hunt and found not Sita, he was

*like the soul that had left the body for a while and returning on its way finds it not in its
 place and mourns its loss. He was like one whose all was swallowed up by the earth and
 who had nothing else to call his own. (3:8:158)*

The depth of Rama's love is again described by Hanuman to Sita at the Ashoka grove when he tells her how Rama was grieving for her. One stanza must suffice for us. He says,

⁴² 3:70. Aiyer follows a different reading of the 3rd line of the original poem

'I bless you, mother, for I have found out at last the secret spring of Rama's life. you have not quitted his heart and that is why he lives yet. And where hath he a life to part with, when you his life are here? ' (5:5:77)

It is this same intense love that makes Rama's heart thrill at the sight of the jewel that Sita sends him through Hanuman. Says the poet,

He was like a man changed. When the jewel was placed in his hands, his feelings were even as on the day when first before the holy fire he clasped her hand. His hair stood on end; tears flowed freely from his eyes; there was a tremor in his arms and chest; sweat drops suffused his whole body; he breathed heavily; his body swelled with joy. Oh, who can tell all that passed in his heart? (5:15:82,83)

There is a blot in Rama's love, but of that we shall speak when we come to Sita. Now we shall close the study of Rama's character with an examination of his valor, his magnanimity, and his loyalty to his pledged word.

Rama is the ideal hero of India. The great poet Bana gave the drama of Rama's life that he wrote, the name of *Mahā-vīra-charitra* — the life of the Great Hero. Shri Krishna, when he is describing his own glories as the Supreme One in the tenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, gives Rama the first place among warriors. He says, "*Rāmaḥ śāstra bhṛtām aham*" — among those skilled in the handling of weapons of war know me to be Rama. And Kamban's description of Rama's valor and exploits rises fully to the height of such a grand conception. Indeed, in a way, the whole story of Rama's life in our epic is a story of heroic deeds and valiant fights. Even while he was very young, the fame of his strength had spread far and wide, and the Rishi Vishvamitra chose him, of all princes and heroes, as the protector of his *Yajña-bhūmi*.⁴³ And great warrior that he himself was in the days of his worldly life, Vishvamitra, supplemented the military training of Rama and Lakshmana during their sojourn with him, with his own special teaching.

Rama's skill in archery and the strength of his arm are admired by the poet at every step. Tadaka's adamant body is pierced by one arrow sped from his mighty bow. Vishvamitra cannot speak too highly or too often of his strength and skill. When Ahalya is freed from her curse by the touch of the dust fallen from his feet, Vishvamitra tells him her story and at the end of it burst out with the following words:—

*'And even the sin of Gautama's wife has been
Ordained for good: therein I see a hope
For the suffering world. For in the marvelous fight
With Tadaka I saw the strength of your arm,
And here I see the virtue of your feet! ' (1:9:82)*

Again at Janaka's Court, while introducing Rama, Vishvamitra must needs sing the praises of Rama's valor in three verses:—

'Note thou, my lord, the strength of the beautifully long and muscular arms of this manly boy, who is dark even as the ocean with its incessant roaring breakers: it was but one arrow of his, but it pierced the heart of Tadaka of the flaming eyes, and after piercing her heart tore through the rocks, and the trees, and the solid earth itself.

Endless were the heads of the Rakshasas that fell that day and were piled one over another like hills on hills. One arrow of his sent one of the Rakshasi's sons to the other world: I know not what became of her other son; but you see that my yajña is completed and I am here.

⁴³ Sacrificial ground

'Again, O king, behold the weapons which I taught him to use — weapons that Brahma himself will not find it easy to handle. Think of it, even I who taught him their use; am astonished at the way that they obey his will and arm.' (1:11:26–28)

Kamban generally takes care that Rama does not boast about his prowess himself. But there are occasions when Rama cannot but speak of his strength and power himself. For instance, when he hears from Jatayus' lips that Ravana has carried away Sita, he bursts out into a terrible wrath and threatens the whole world with destruction. Kamban describes his wrath in these words:–

*He scarce had spoken when rushed the blood at once
To Rama's eyes; a storm was in his breath;
A frown settled on his manly brow; the spheres
In terror shook; the stars their orbits fled!
The worlds lay crouching lest his sudden wrath
Should burst on them; when with a smile that meant
Destruction dire, he thus addressed the bird:⁴⁴
Behold the world on its stable axis moves
And gods unmoved look on, while in their sight
A Rakshasas carries off a helpless dame,
And you are mangled thus in her defense!
I will destroy them all in one single ruin.
The stars shall scattering fall! The sun shall burst!
The void of heaven shall shimmer with the light
Of burning spheres! And water, air, and fire
And all that lives and moves shall soon dissolve
To their embryo atoms! And my wrath shall end
The gods themselves in heaven. And you will see
The circling universe and all that lies
Beyond, burst like a bubble in the stream! ' (3:8:201,203–206)*

When, after the rainy season is over, Sugriva does not bring his Vanara host according to his stipulation in order to begin the search for Sita, Rama sends Lakshmana to Kishkinda, the capital of Sugriva, with the following threat:–

*'Tell him,' said Rama, ' that the bow which We
Have bent to establish Righteousness, and end
All evil ones, unbroken yet doth rest
In Our hands; and let him know that Yama⁴⁵ has not
Yet ceased to work, nor We to handle arrows! (4:8:4)*

When Ravana's spies are caught and are brought before him, he bids them tell Ravana that he would destroy him, even if Rudra and Vishnu and all that live in all the worlds come and help him, and that he would pacify the spirit of Jatayus by sacrificing to it in the blood of his adversary.

When at the close of the first day's battle Ravana's bows and chariots are destroyed, and he stands alone, unarmed, with all his army annihilated, Rama addresses him some stinging words wherein he speaks of his own prowess. Here are some of his words:–

*'Know you the gods themselves with all their might
Win not if unjust is their cause. you had
This very day been dead, did not I stay*

⁴⁴ Jatayus.

⁴⁵ Yama is the God of Death

*My arm for pity sake, because you stand
 Helpless, alone, upon the field. If you can,
 To-morrow bring the flower of your troops,
 Or seek in flight precarious safety. Listen!
 If you send Sita back, and Swarga's throne
 Restore to Indra, and Vibhishana crown
 As Lanka's king, yourself his will obeying,
 Then I my deadly arrows shall withhold.
 But if, perverse, in your evil you persist,
 Bring all your strength and face me on the field.
 Your evil soul might turn to good if you
 Should even die by my arrows. But think no more
 You can return alive from here.' (6:14:252–255)*

But such passages where Rama himself speaks of his prowess are comparatively rare. The reader gets an idea of Rama's valor much more from the lips of the other characters and Rama's acts of heroism on the field than from Rama's speeches. The reader will remember Ravana's description of his first battle with Rama. The terrible Parashu Rama when he sees him bend with ease the bow with which he challenged him, bows down his head in acknowledgment of defeat and says:–

*'I doubt not now that you are Vishnu's self!
 Saved is the earth from all her ills, for even
 The bow I gave you now cannot suffice
 For your lion strength!' (1:22:38)*

The invincible Vali, as the reader will find in Chapter 11, speaks of Rama's valor in no measured terms. And it is his valor more than anything else that binds the mighty Hanuman and Sugriva to his cause and to himself for ever. And

*..... it humbled Ravana's pride:
 No further proof you need of Rama's valor.⁴⁶*

If Rama's valor is great and unique, his magnanimity is greater and still more unique. We have seen how he abstained from further attacking Ravana when he stood defenseless and unarmed on the field of battle. Even while he was a mere youth, his chivalrous instincts were so delicate that he would not aim his arrow against Tadaka because she was a woman, and Vishvamitra had to persuade him hard to attack her, reminding him of her violence against all things living that came within her reach. The reader will remember that he entertains no rancor against Kaikeyi for bringing about his exile. When his father descends from Swarga and embraces him on the battle-field in Lanka at the time of Sita's sacrifice, the one boon that he asks of him is to call back the curse which he had pronounced while still in the land of the living against Kaikeyi and Bharata. This is how our poet presents the colloquy between father and son:–

*Thus Ram his father tenderly addressed:–
 'When you were here below, O father mine,
 You abjured my mother Kaikeyi
 And Bharata your lawful son: grant me
 To-day that she may once again be mother
 To me, and he my brother as ever before.'
 'I grant', said Dasharatha, 'that guiltless Bharat
 Be once again your brother: but the sinful she,'*

⁴⁶ We do not describe in this chapter the exploits of Rama in detail, as we reserve them for the chapters dealing with the Rakshasas, and especially his great adversary Ravana.

*(And the hands that held his Rama to his heart
Fell limp, the while he spoke these vengeful words)
'The heartless one that robbed you of your crown
And made you wear these hermits' weeds, shall not
Escape my curse!' The pure one thus replied:
'The sin was not my mother's, but rather mine,
That I saw not the kingly office is
The pregnant source of endless sins and crimes,
And at your bidding undertook to rule
Ayodhya, yourself living. Once again,
Therefore, let me plead with you, call back that curse.'* (6:37:129–131)

And when Ravana had fallen in battle, Rama does not, like Achilles, war with the dead, but directs Vibhishana to perform his obsequies with all traditional rites, saying — and how nobly — ,

*Although his evil has cleaved our heart in twain,
Let us forgive!* (6:36:216)

It is this magnanimity — greatness of soul — which makes him the Supreme *Sharanagata Vatsala*, the lover of the suppliant refugee. He is ever waiting with open arms to receive with love all, no matter who or what they may be, and whatever the injuries they may have done to him, if, relying upon nothing else, they take refuge in him. It is this large heart that embraces all, forgives all, receives all, that has endeared his name to all the children of India from generation to generation. And it is this same grandeur of soul that has raised him from the position of an ordinary emperor to that of the hero of the great national epic of *Bharata Khanda*,⁴⁷ and from the position of the epic hero to very godhood. We shall give here some of the best instances of the display by him of this grand quality.

When on his entrance into the forest, the Rishis pray to him to protect them against the Rakshasas, Rama offers to them unhesitatingly his *abhaya*,⁴⁸ and says,

*If they surrender not,
My arrows will bring them down even if they flee
To other worlds!
.....What use is life to me,
If I end not the sinners that oppress
Brahmans of holy vows?
..... Whoso his life
Does sacrifice for saving Brahmans, cows,
Or feeble ones, aye whoso sacrifices
His life for saving other life, behold
He's worshipped by the gods!* (3:3:17,19,21)

Although Indra's son had injured Sita disguising himself as a crow, and although he himself had aimed against him in his anger his death-dealing astra, he yet pardons him when he falls at his feet and prays for protection. When Sugriva approaches him, worn, weak, oppressed, and hunted by his great brother, Vali, and he hears his (Sugriva's) story from the mouth of Hanuman, he at once swears, careless of all consequences, that he would destroy Vali and place Sugriva on the vacant throne. When Vali charges him with attacking him unawares, Rama repeats to him the vow that he had taken:—

⁴⁷ The continent of Bharat — India

⁴⁸ Protection, — literally, immunity from fear

*'It is my ever-pressing vow to help
The oppressed, the poor, and those forlorn'* (4:7:102)

When Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana, comes to Rama's camp as a refugee from the wrath of his brother, Rama consults the Vanara Council as to whether they should admit him as a friend or no. Differences of opinion naturally arise, among which the most interesting is that of Sugriva who forgets his own past record and opposes the admission of Vibhishana on the ground of his treachery to his own brother. But, after hearing all of them, Rama finally accepts the opinion of Hanuman, giving expression at the same time to the following grand sentiments:—

*'Let there be victory, let be defeat,
I cast not out the man that refuge takes
In me. Why speak of this Vibhishana?
Let come to me as suppliant the man
Whose cruel hands my parents, brothers, friends,
Had done to death. If leaving all other hope
He comes to me, himself surrendering,
Thenceforth he is my brother, lover, friend!
Even if he does prove false, my glory never
Would be eclipsed: 'twill only burn brighter.'* (6:4:108,109)

He is ready even to forgive Ravana if he would come back to virtue and wholly surrender himself to him. For, does not Indrajit himself say to his father,

*'If you will cease desiring Janaki,
Their⁴⁹ wrath will cool, and they will go from hence
Forgiving us our evil ways.'* (6:27:6)

Such is the grandeur of soul of this supreme hero! We need not expatiate much on Rama's loyalty to his pledged word, because the whole story is hinged and motived on that loyalty. But we should not forget that Rama gives as much respect to the promise forcibly exacted by his step-mother from his father as he gives to his own pledged word. When Kausalya prays him not to leave her, he silences her by saying that he should not make his father's spoken word a lie. So he would not go back to Ayodhya even after his father's death, and even though Bharata himself places the crown at his feet. He would not have been the hero that he is, if he had listened to Bharata and if he had taken back the crown that he offered to return. *Satya-sankalpa*⁵⁰, and *Dridha-vrata*⁵¹, these are the titles that he loves most, and these titles no hero in story or in life deserves in an equal degree with Rama.

With this we shall close the study of Rama's character. Not that we have exhaustively described or even mentioned all the fine traits in the character of this great hero. We can write about the delicate way in which he manages his friends and allies. For, he always knows, as if by instinct, what to say to each and when to say. For instance, when he accepts Hanuman's opinion regarding the admission of Vibhishana, he makes the rest of the Vanaras also accept the opinion cheerfully by saying:—

*'But for your excess of prudent care for me, would not every one of you have told me
yourselves that we should unhesitatingly take unto ourselves the suppliant Rakshasa? '*
(6:4:120)

And look at the delicacy with which, after removing from Sugriva's mind the sense of his defeat in debate by the preceding words, he asks him to go and bring him the Rakshasa chief.

⁴⁹ Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa

⁵⁰ He whose one dynamic motive is truth.

⁵¹ He who never gives up a worthy resolution.

We can also write much about the great respect he always shows to his elders, how even when he is obliged to contradict or disobey them, as, for example, when Vasishtha reiterates and supports Bharata's request to him to return to Ayodhya, he makes them feel that he does not abate one jot from the reverence that he owes them. We can write about his uniform kindness and ready accessibility even to the lowest of the low. But, all this is unnecessary. We hope, we have given the reader sufficient material to form an adequate mental picture of the Rama of Kamban, and we hope that this will create in him a desire to study the poet in his own words and enjoy the entire picture with all its details filled in.

And where, is Rama's like or superior in epic story? Can we name Nestor along with him? Can we name Ulysses? Can we name the pious Aeneas? Can we name Yudhishtira or Bhishma? Can we name along with him even the Messiah of the Paradise Lost or Him of the Paradise Regained? We think every one of these falls short by many an inch of the stature of our Rama. Rama has the valor of Achilles, but is free from the littleness that would, for instance, conjure Jove to hurl the Greeks, his own countrymen,

*headlong to their fleet and main,
To heap the shores with copious death and bring
The Greeks to know the curse of such a King.*

Rama has the dignity of Nestor and the cleverness and the skill of Ulysses, but Nestor lacks the fire and delicate moral sensibility, and Ulysses the straightness, of the *Prachaṇḍa Kodaṇḍa Rāma*⁵² who will go through fire rather than go back upon his pledged word. The Messiah is not worked up by Milton with the same power with which he has worked up his Satan and Beelzebub or Adam and Eve, and his figure does not leave a lasting impression upon the readers' imagination as does the figure of Satan; and there is a shadowiness about him which takes away a great deal from him, though as literary creations they impress the reader with no less force than the character of our hero.

In fact, Valmiki searched long for an ideal hero whose achievements he could work out into a *Mahā-kavya*, and Narada suggested to him the name of Shri Rama as the proper subject for his contemplated poem. And, grandly has Valmiki exalted and idealized the character of the great hero. But if Valmiki's Rama is grand, Kamban's Rama is, as we have remarked before, grander still. Kamban would leave no littleness, no crookedness, no commonness, in his hero.

If Kamban's Rama admits Vibhishana into his friendship, he would not immediately question him about the defenses of Lanka, so as to give the impression, as Valmiki's hero does, that he took him primarily for his usefulness as Lanka's traitor. When Viradha lifts Sita up in order to carry her off, Valmiki's Rama laments in these words:—

'O my Lakshmana, the intentions of Kaikeyi towards us, the object with which she claimed and obtained her prayer, the desire nearest to her heart — have all been very quickly fulfilled today. For, far-sighted woman that she is, she was not satisfied merely with obtaining the crown for her son; she took care to banish me to the forest also — me who have the good of all beings at heart. Behold, today my step-mother's heart must be verily delighted!'

Again, when Sita has been actually carried off by Ravana, Valmiki makes his Rama say to Lakshmana:—

'When I am dead for the sake of Sita, and when you are gone, would not Kaikeyi's heart be full of joy? And would not holy Kausalya, the mother bereaved of her son, have to wait on Kaikeyi who has her son living and who has everything that she desires in the world?'

⁵² Rama of the terrific bow called Kodaṇḍa.

But the thoughts of Kamban's Rama, as we have remarked in another connection, never descend to this weak accusation of Kaikeyi. They are always pitched in a higher key. Never from his lips fall any words that condemn Kaikeyi who has done him so much injury — not even when the worst misfortunes befall him. Valmiki again, makes his Sita, while at Ashokavana, to apostrophize Rama and say,

*'Perhaps, your father's hard commands fulfilled,
You are returned to fair Ayodhya; and there
Perhaps, your vows performed, you fearless sport
With large-eyed virgins young.'*

But Kamban's Rama is too grand to be capable of being suspected thus by his beloved Sita. For the thoughts of Kamban's Sita, while she is in this mood, would only take this line:—

*'Perchance his brothers and mothers, have they come
Again, and called him back to lovely Oudh?
But he would never return, the while the days
To Kaikeyi vowed unfulfilled yet remain.
Alas, has any ill befallen him?' (5:3:17)*

We may go on multiplying instances without end to show to how great a height Kamban has raised the character of Rama, but we hope that even the most partial admirer of Valmiki will be satisfied with the extracts that we have given from our poet, and will accept our contention that Kamban's Rama is cast in a grander mold than Valmiki's hero. And if he is superior to- Valmiki's hero, is he not Mahavira indeed, — the grandest among the heroes of epic poetry?

CHAPTER 7

LAKSHMANA

HIS CHARACTER AND HIS FIRST BATTLES WITH INDRAJIT.

In this chapter, we take up the study of the character and exploits of Lakshmana, the brother and inseparable companion of Rama. Lakshmana has identified himself so much with Rama that the devotees of Rama in the Tamil-land delight to call him by the name of 'younger lord'. His valor is equal to that of Rama himself, for he is able to bring down 'the first' of those that wield the bended bow, namely, Indrajit, the son of Ravana, But the mainspring of his character is not valor or heroism, though he possesses these qualities to a wonderful degree, but love — an all-absorbing, self-forgetting love — for his brother, the chief of his race and the first of men.

We do not see much of him in the First Book. He, of course, accompanies Rama to the forest when Vishvamitra takes Rama to guard his sacrificial grounds against Tadaka and her host. He is perfected in his knowledge of archery by the old Rishi who teaches him along with Rama the method of invoking magical weapons. He marries a daughter of Janaka at Mithila. But, generally speaking, he is but the shadow of Rama all through the Bālakāṇḍa of the Ramayana.

His character, however, unfolds itself rapidly in the Second Book of the poem. He accompanies Rama to the Durbar Hall when their father sends for the latter, and is present when Dasharatha announces to Rama his intention to crown him as sovereign of Ayodhya. But when the next morning Kaikeyi sends suddenly for Rama, Lakshmana does not go with him, and so is ignorant of the new developments that are taking place. The news, however, is not long in reaching him, and when he hears that his beloved brother is being deprived of his rightful crown by the machinations of his step-mother, his whole frame throbs with uncontrollable anger, and he starts for fight like a cobra provoked. Says the poet:—

*When Lakshmana learnt that Kaikeyi had the pledge
Revoked of Dasharatha, and forced exile
On Rama, he rose indignant like the fire
That does on Dissolution's Day all things
Consume. His eyes shot flame; his front shone bright
Like noon-day sun, and scorched his very hair;
And sweat suffused his limbs; his breath came in
And went tempestuous; and terrific
He looked like Adi Shesh⁵³ himself, in all
His fury roused! (2:4:116)*

When he grasped the full significance of the news that reached his ears, he laughed aloud saying,

*'Does she desire to give to a dog the meat prepared for a lion-cub? Wise indeed is
Kaikeyi!' (2:4:117)*

He put on his armor, girded on his sword, and took his bow and quiver. He wore on his ankle the anklet worn by the invincible hero. And as he strode along the streets of Ayodhya, the fell sound of his anklet-bells rose and fell shaming the roar of the sea; and none dared to encounter him. And he challenged all men saying:—

⁵³ The thousand-hooded divine cobra on the Sea of Milk, on whose lap sleeps the Supreme Narayana. Lakshmana is the *avatār* of Adi Shesh.

*'I stand prepared to lighten Mother Earth,
Extinguish all the sons of guilt, and heap
Their lifeless corpses up to heaven, and crown
My Rama as Ayodhya's king. Whoever desires
To offer battle, let them come! Be it gods
Or Nagas, Vidyadhars, men or even the Three
Supreme who challenge me, I let no woman
Usurp the throne in this my sacred land.'* (2:4:121,122)

As he was thus striding the earth like the very Meru mountain endowed with life, frowning on all around even as the burning midday sun, Rama heard the twang of his bow-strings the while he was consoling Sumitra in her grief at the sudden news of his parting. And,

*His golden anklet glittering in the sun,
Breathing ambrosial words, he hurried on
To where his Lakshmana stood: so flies the cloud
To quench the wind-fanned flaming forest fire Fume- crowned.* (2:4:125)

Rama saw him armed from head to foot and frowning against all things living, and asked him,

*'Why are you armed for battle, my Child?
Surely you are not going to fight the gods!* (2:4:126)

Lakshmana replied,

'I have vowed to crown you king, and that in the very face of her who has murdered truth and robbed you of your rightful inheritance. And even if it is the gods that stand in the way, they all shall burn in the fire of my wrath. When I hold the bow in this hand, even the gods will not dare to oppose me. If any oppose, they will be but targets for my fiery arrows. And I will give you the crown of all the earth! Deign to receive it at my hands.'

Rama tried to cool him by appealing to his sense of filial obedience and generally to his sense of righteousness. But Lakshmana did not grow calm. Burning like Rudra⁵⁴ himself in his anger, he burst out saying,

*'I know not father, mother, or lord: yourself alone are master, mother, father, all to me.
you have learnt to give away what is yours: now see me give back your own to you!'*
(2:4:137)

But when Rama asked him,

*'How will you win the crown for me, my child?
Would you fight Bharata the just, ever-faultless,
Or would you kill the adored of virtuous men
Our father? Or would you fight our mother?'* (2:4:139)

Lakshmana could only say,

*'Let enemies insult you in their pride,
Meekly I'll bear it all. Am not I born
To bear the burden of these idle arms
And pompous bow, impotent to avenge
Our injuries?'* (2:4:140)

⁵⁴ God of Destruction

And he became, says the poet, “even like the ocean that keeps from overflowing its bounds in obedience to the will of that same Rama.”

In the few words, “I know not father, mother or lord: yourself alone are master, mother, father, all to me,” — is contained the key to the whole character of Lakshmana. He cannot bear to see his Rama suffer in any way. So when Kaikeyi's maids bring to Rama coarse hermit's weeds to wear, Lakshmana says to them in bitterness,

*‘Behold, there stands he who is born to wear
All that she sends in the hardness of her heart;
And me behold, whose fate it is to look
Impotently on all these rending sights!’ (2:4:149)*

When Rama has put on those coarse garments, Lakshmana does not say anything but himself also silently and as a matter of course casts off his own royal robes and puts on the forest-dweller's garb. But when Rama expostulates with him and prays to him to remain in Ayodhya, his love receives a shock, and like a wounded lover he asks Rama, “In what have I offended you?” For he cannot so much as imagine how Rama could think of parting from him even when going to the forest. And then he continues thus:—

*‘Fishes live not if waters fail; and all
That lives must die if Mother Earth give way.
Now tell me, brother, on what do Sita's life
And mine depend
.....Your words that bid me stay.
While you Ayodhya leave behind — these words
Are crueler far than those that bade me calm
My wrath against your enemies. your wealth,
And all that is your own you leave here:
Would you abandon also us, my brother?’ (2:4:157,159)*

Such was Lakshmana's love for his Rama. It was now Rama's turn to yield. He saw Lakshmana's face and his own eyes filled with tears. How could he desist from tears at such words, and how could he desist from taking him with himself in his exile?

And how Lakshmana serves his brother in the forest! His one study is to look after every little comfort of Rama and guard him against all enemies known and unknown. It is he that builds the leaf-huts wherever they move in the forest-country. It is he that gathers their food. It is he that mounts guard about the hut while Rama and Sita sleep undisturbed in the bed that he has lovingly made for them.

Guha sobs aloud when he sees the devotion of Lakshmana in watching, bow in hand, over Rama and Sita the whole night long. And Rama himself when he asks him to crown Vibhishana as king of Lanka, addresses him as “my child of the sleep forswearing eye,” and shows how the thought of all that his brother suffers for him is never absent from his heart.

Now this intense love for Rama makes Lakshmana regard as his own mortal enemies all who have injured Rama. He never stops to inquire whether they have actually injured him. It is sufficient if he believes that they have injured, or even suspects them to have injured Rama. This passion of hatred clouds his mind in all that concerns Kaikeyi and those connected with her. So, when Sumantra after conveying in his chariot Rama, Lakshmana and Sita to the forest takes leave of them, and asks them if they have any word to send home, Lakshmana for his part sends this message. He says,

*“I too have a message for him, as if
He were my king, who promised first the crown*

*To Rama, and then in the sacred name of truth
Resigned the throne in favor of his queen?
And then to Bharata proud this shall you say,
'Behold, Saumitri⁵⁵ lives yet, although
His hands unworthy failed to fight for Rama.'
And this thereunto add as if for me,
'Lakshmana forswears kinship with the son
Of Kaikeyi.' (2:5:43, 45)*

So also, when Bharata comes to the forest accompanied by the whole population of Ayodhya in order to request Rama to return and assume the crown, Lakshmana, as soon as he sees the moving host, jumps to the conclusion that he comes with a hostile design against Rama. So he rushes into the cottage, puts on his armor, makes ready his bow and quiver, and unburdens himself to Rama:–

' Behold yon Bharata, now an out-caste to this world as he has already become an out-caste to the next! you will see the prowess of your brother's single right arm against him and all his hosts. you will see me destroy the troops of Bharata and make Svarga bend under the weight of quick-rushing immigrants, the while Earth is lightened of her load. you will see rivers of blood floating with the carcasses of his elephants and horses, and with his broken chariots flowing to the sea and making the seven oceans one . . . you will see my feathered arrows pierce the hearts of those twin-brothers⁵⁶; and fly through the space carrying their bleeding flesh in their beaks. By the command of the tyrant prince, who was thereto induced by his favorite queen, Bharata is now the Sovereign of the Earth: you will presently see him ruling in Hell at my command! And you will soon see the guilty Kaikeyi roll on the ground in inconsolable grief, who delighted not long ago in the tears of your mother when you left for the jungle! (2:12:30, 34, 36, 38 – 40)

Such is the violence of his wrath that Rama listens quietly to all his out-pouring till they exhaust themselves, and then alone attempts to reason with him. And even then, see how he begins his reply with delicate flattery:–

“Do I not know, my Lakshmana, that there lives none that can stay your hand if you desire to confound even the fourteen worlds? But, my brother, have you thought that in the long list of our glorious ancestors, there has never been born one who ever swerved from the path of virtue?” (2:12: 42, 43)

But, whenever it is not a question of Kaikeyi or Bharata, Lakshmana's mind sees clear as crystal. He is in all other matters the wisest of the wise and the wariest of the wary. His devotion to Rama and Sita gives him a power of insight which is denied to Rama himself. So if Sita and Rama are deceived by the beauty of the golden deer, Lakshmana suspects treachery even at the very first sight of him. As Sita's and Rama's attraction for him grows greater, Lakshmana's suspicion grows only deeper. When Rama sets out to go and capture the deer for Sita, Lakshmana warns him saying,

*“If we pursue the deer, of this be sure,
We'll find ourselves encompassed by the guile
Of Rakshasas.” (3:7:232)*

But Rama will not listen to him. He replies:–

*“If this prove a Rakshasa disguised
He dies, and thereby I fulfill my vow;*

⁵⁵ Matronymic from Sumitra, Lakshmana being Sumitra's son.

⁵⁶ Bharata and Shatrughna. Shatrughna, though the twin brother of Lakshmana, is the inseparable companion of Bharata as Lakshmana is of Rama.

If but a deer I capture him for Sita.” (3:7:233)

Lakshmana again tries to dissuade him. He retorts:–

*“But . . . who is behind the veil
We know not; this mysterious golden deer,
What he may be, we hardly care to think.
Forego therefore the hunt, my brother. For wise
Are they that have condemned the pleasures of sport.” (3:7:234)*

Rama laughs at his fears, but his suspicions are not allayed. He proposes that at least Rama should stay at home and that he himself would go and hunt the deer and bring him to Sita. But, as the reader knows, his wisdom and forethought are useless. Sita goes into a tiff, and Rama, to satisfy her, asks Lakshmana to look after Sita and starts off himself in pursuit of the magic deer and, finding the dead body of the Rakshasa in place of the deer, he exclaims to himself — but too late to be of any use — “Ah wise, verily wise is my dear child!”

Similarly again, when Maricha, struck down by Rama's arrow, (who was the Rakshasa that had come assuming the form of the deer) groans piteously as he falls, but assuming the voice of Rama, Lakshmana is not at all deceived. He shows no anxiety for the safety of Rama. But Sita fears the very worst. She frowns at Lakshmana's coolness, and, in spite of his assurances, arrows cruel words at him which force him to leave her and go on the trace of Rama's footsteps, the while his mind is tortured with the worst forebodings for Sita's safety.

When Lakshmana and Rama return together to the cottage and see not Sita, it is Lakshmana that calms Rama and suggests that they should pursue the trace left on the ground by Ravana's car. On the way they find a flag fallen on the ground, and signs of fierce combat. When they see a number of golden crowns scattered here and there, it is Lakshmana that suggests that Sita might have been carried off by Ravana, and that Jatayus might be engaging with him on the way. They hurry on and hear the story of Ravana's flight from the dying Vulture-King. When Jatayus dies, Rama's heart is torn with grief and he weakens for a moment. But Lakshmana brings him to himself with his heartening words.

After this we see Lakshmana again at his best in the Book of Battles. We get only little glimpses of him before the war commences. For instance, we see him maim Shurpanakha and kill Ajomuki, the Rakshasi, who like Shurpanakha sought him with lustful intent. We see him charge Sugriva with un-brotherly conduct, and receive a sharp reprimand at the hands of Rama. We see him carry Rama's angry message to Sugriva, who, in his drunken binge, forgets to come to Rama with his forces at the appointed time. We see him take the word out of Rama's mouth when Vali puts to Rama his last question, and give to Vali the plausible answer which Rama would not and could not give.⁵⁷ In all these places, however, he is only a support-actor. It is only in the Yuddha Kanda that he has the stage wholly to himself for long periods at a stretch.

Lakshmana distinguishes himself greatly in the very first fight with Ravana. The reader will remember Ravana's unstinted praise of his archery and skill in war.⁵⁸ But he falls wounded by an arrow of Ravana. Ravana attempts to take him prisoner but is unable to lift him from the ground. The hands that could lift Mount Kailasa itself, with Shiva upon it, have not the power to lift Lakshmana from the ground — such is the divine power confined in that mortal body! But Hanuman rushes in and snatches the body of Lakshmana and carries him with ease to the camp. On the second day when Kumbhakarna carries everything before him and bears without flinching the

⁵⁷ See Chapter 11

⁵⁸ See Chapter 13.

shock of the huge rock that Hanuman threw against him with all his force, the latter says to himself:–

*“Scatheless he stands the shock! the hugest rocks
Seem powerless to bend or break his adamant frame!
Saumitri's⁵⁹ fiery arrows alone, perchance,
(If mortal weapons can avail), can have
The strength to pierce his giant shape.”* (6:15:203)

Lakshmana, on his part, seeing the havoc that Kumbhakarna is working in the Vanara army hastens towards that part of the field and restores the fight shooting down the Rakshasas by the hundred and by the thousand. Seeing his skill and aim and force, Kumbhakarna exclaims:–

*“The God who burned the cities three⁶⁰ alone
Can rival Lakshmana in the bowman's art!”* (6:15:228)

and directs his chariot against him. When Hanuman sees him come against Lakshmana, he leaps with joy saying:–

“These eyes will witness now unheard-of deeds of valor,” (6:15:230)

and runs to Lakshmana and asks him to seat himself on his broad shoulders.

When Lakshmana had seated himself on the shoulders of Hanuman, Kumbhakarna challenged him, saying:–

*“Behold, you are the brother of Rama, and I
Am brother to mighty Ravana: and lo,
The Gods assemble round to witness our deeds
Of war. 'Fore them I swear that I shall cleave
In twain the sacrilegious hands that dared
To hold my sister by the hair and deformed her!”* (6:15: 234, 235.)

Lakshmana replied,

*“Not learned in the braggart's art, we can
But answer you with the arrows point.”* (6:15:236)

The fight now began in right earnest. The Rakshasa shot numberless arrows from his mighty bow, and Lakshmana broke their fury with his own arrows before they could reach him. Again Kumbhakarna sent hundreds of arrows against him. Lakshmana's swifter arrows scattered them away. Now Kumbhakarna shot Hanuman with an arrow and Lakshmana also with a couple of fierce missiles. But Lakshmana, in spite of his deep wounds, bent his bow almost to a circle and shot down and destroyed Kumbhakarna's war-chariot and broke the bow in his hand. Just at that moment the reinforcements sent by Ravana arrived and engaged Lakshmana leaving Kumbhakarna time to arm himself. Kumbhakarna, however, after this sought other enemies, and Lakshmana's part in this day's fight ended with the struggle with these newly arrived Rakshasas.

Kumbhakarna fell by the hand of Rama in this second day's battle. When news reached Lanka that Kumbhakarna had fallen, Atikaya, one of the three sons of Ravana, swore that he would kill Lakshmana and make Rama grieve for his brother even as Ravana was grieving for his own brother, and marched to the battle with great éclat. Vibhishana knew his strength and hinted to Rama that Lakshmana might probably be unequal to the fight. But Rama smiled at his doubts and praised Lakshmana's valor in these words:–

⁵⁹ Lakshmana's.

⁶⁰ Lord Shiva

*“Ten thousand thousand Ravana may oppose
And all the Gods, and who in other worlds
Are counted mighty; may be Three Supreme
May try, and join their strength with theirs; even then-
They can't outmatch our Lakshmana's warlike skill!
Can heaven stand his deadly aim, or earth?
Breathes there an archer who can wield the bow
As he? What's Vishnu, Indra, Shiva, or I
Myself, before him, if he frown?” (6:17:78, 79)*

This is the only occasion where Rama seriously praises Lakshmana in his presence.

Lakshmana did obeisance to Rama and started for the fight. The battle raged furiously. The Vanara army was pressed back by the onrush of the Rakshasas; Lakshmana encouraged them by his voice and by the twang of his mighty bow which was the favorite home of Yama, the God of Death

Elephants and cavalry, chariots and Rakshasa infantry were destroyed by the hundred thousand. Daruka and Kala, Kulisa and Kala Shanka, Malin and Marut attacked him with tridents and lances and maces. But Lakshmana's arrows broke or turned away the missiles and killed the Rakshasas in the end. In the evolutions of the battle, Lakshmana came face to face with the main wing of the army commanded by Atikaya, and did great havoc. Seeing the force of his arrows, mountains trembled and the thunder-laden clouds feared for their safety. Hanuman joined, and in the sight of Atikaya killed Devantaka with a blow of his iron fist, and challenged and killed Trishiras who came to support Atikaya. Atikaya, however, did not waste time in attacking Hanuman but went for Lakshmana straight, saying to himself,

It is not the part of wisdom to take up another enterprise when my first vow is unaccomplished.' (6:12:108)

Lakshmana seated himself now on the shoulders of Angada who followed every movement of Atikaya's chariot to the admiration of the Vanara army. After shooting down Atikaya's guards, Lakshmana addressed the Rakshasa thus:—

*“Desire you to engage with me when all
Your men have met their fate or do you intend
To try your strength with me before?
The choice is yours!” (6:17:188)*

Atikaya replied:—

*“Others shall watch our combat: I am seeking
Alone to meet you, though the gods may stand
By you and offer battle. You may call
Your brother to give you aid or Shiv himself
And all the gods of heaven or other worlds:
And yet this day shall be your last!” (6:17:189, 190)*

So saying he blew his sonorous conch. But Lakshmana only smiled and said:—

*“Of those that you did name, not one will come
To engage with you. If fall I must, I fall
Alone. I tell you this. If you beat me.
You will have conquered them also!” (6:17:191)*

and then twanged his bow and sent an arrow laden with lightning against the chest of Atikaya. Atikaya sped first one arrow to meet it in the air and turn it off from him, and then Sent sixteen other arrows, fierce like cobras, against Lakshmana. Lakshmana cut them off with arrows of equal

force, pierced Atikaya's armor, and while he fainted with loss of blood chivalrously turned to another side and sowed the Rakshasa part of the battle-field with falling corpses.

When Atikaya recovered and saw the havoc played by Lakshmana's arrows, his pride was up and he sent a veritable iron-hail against him.

*His arrows covered the sky and all the bounds
Of heaven; the earth, it bristled with his arrows.
The Vanara heroes screaming rolled, tossed by
That iron-tempest Rocks flew to pieces
Struck with the arrows of mighty Atikaya. (6:17:197, 198)*

The sky became overcast. The sun was hidden behind a cloud of arrows. The earth trembled under the shock of missiles struggling against each other in mid-air.

*The Devas, each his neighbor trembling asked,
"Is all the Vanara host to end this day?
Has Lakshmana skill and strength to vanquish him?
Is it from the God of Death that Atikaya
His wondrous archery did learn?" (6:17:198)*

Atikaya wounded Angada and Lakshmana as well. But Lakshmana's anger was aroused; with one shower of lightning-laden arrows he cut off the heads of the Rakshasa's horses and broke the bow, and when he leaped up another chariot, sent against him the *Agni-Astra*.⁶¹ But Atikaya sent the *Surya-Astra*, the weapon inspired by the Sun-God, to neutralize it. While these two weapons were struggling against each other, Lakshmana pierced the Rakshasa's body with his sharpest arrows, but still he fought on unmindful of his wounds. Fiercely, and more fiercely, came his arrows, and Lakshmana could barely parry them. Just then Vayu, the Wind-God, whispered to Lakshmana that his adversary could not die by any other weapon except the *Brahmastra*, the weapon of the greatest power. Lakshmana, therefore, shot the Brahmastra and lo, the arrow cut Atikaya's head clean from the trunk and carried it off.

This battle with Atikaya, great as it is, is only a rehearsal for Lakshmana's greater battles with Indrajit. For Kamban, like Valmiki, reserves the great Indrajit as the fit target for Lakshmana's arrow. Already in the Sundara-kanda he had made Hanuman exclaim to himself when he saw Indrajit sleeping in his palace in Lanka,

*"Is he the Rakshasas' king or Kartikeya,
The son of Mahadeva, God of gods?
He looks like a lion sleeping in his den:
A terrific fight I see in the days to come
When Lakshmana and Rama encounter him." (5:2:141)*

And at the close of the combat with Atikaya, the poet finely suggests the coming battles with Indrajit in the following lines:—

*When wise Vibhishana saw this feat of arms
And heard the shout of gods above, he leaped
With joy, and said, ' If this is his matchless skill
In war, the fate of Indrajit himself is sealed.' (6:17:208)*

Great was the consternation in Lanka when the news spread there that Atikaya was dead. When Danamala, the mother of Atikaya, heard that her son had fallen on the field, she came beating her

⁶¹ Weapon inspired by the Fire-God.

breasts and fell sobbing at the feet of Ravana who was himself aghast at the death of his son; and she vented her grief at the loss of her son and rebuked Ravana in the following words:

*“Where is my child, the apple of mine eye?
Show me my son, O bring him back to me!
The Gods themselves did envy me as mother
Of him whom even Indra could not beat
In war: ah me, I see him delivered up
As prey to the arrow of a man to-day.
Aksha is dead, and dead is Atikaya,
And fallen are the warriors great in might.
Among your sons Mandodari's son alone
Is yet alive: now once again attempt
Your world conquests! . . . Silent you sit! . . . where now
Is your might gone? Have you lost the strength to tame
Your powerful foes? Hear you my words? Or hearing
Do you not understand? Or will not hear?
Will you not weep at least for your warriors dead?
O cruel! Black ruin have you brought on us.
Cursed, thrice cursed is your guilty lust:
And yet is this the last of the ills that are
To blight our race for Sita's sake. (6:17:269 – 272)*

The lamentations of Danamala and her companions reached the ears of Indrajit and, when he heard that it was Atikaya that had fallen on the field, he swore that if he should not fall to earth, that same day, Lakshmana who took his life, he would give himself in slavery to Indra whom he had twice defeated in battle. He then put on his armor, selected his troops, and marched to the war in a chariot drawn by a thousand lions, preceded by goblins and ghouls who heralded his approach saying:–

*“Behold the hero that brought Indra down as a prisoner tied to his chariot wheels!”
(6:18:21)*

Lakshmana had not left the field, thinking that, after the fall of Atikaya, either Ravana himself or at least Indrajit would head the next attack. And he was ambitious to try his mettle against one of them. So when the grand warrior — ' who had only seen the back of the gods flying for life and never their faces ' — came near, Lakshmana asked Vibhishana who he was. Vibhishana replied,

*“He is the hero who has crushed in war the king of Devas: hot will be the fight This
day,” (6:18:28)*

and advised him to take Hanuman, Sugriva, and other Vanara heroes to support him in battle.

As Lakshmana accepted his advice, Angada came back to him, and Hanuman also hastened to him. On seeing him pitted against the greatest warrior among the Rakshasas, Sugriva brought the pick of his troops in front and the attack commenced.

The encounter of the two armies was like two seas dashing at each other in full flood-tide. The Devas who had come down to earth to witness the greatest fight that mortal or immortal eyes could look upon, shut their ears to the deafening sounds of the trumpets and conches and the challenging shouts of the opposing heroes. The very field of battle cracked by the terrific force of the arrows and lances, trees and rocks hurled against each other by the contending armies, and the shattering encounter of Vanara and Rakshasa heroes. Blood flowed in torrents, carrying the floating corpses of dead heroes on either side. Death, parading in the form of Vanara heroes, broke the heads of the Rakshasas with trunks of uprooted trees, drank their life, or smashed their arms and feet. Even after the lances had pierced their vitals, the Vanaras sprang upon their enemies and died only after

mauling them or crunching them in their iron jaws. In every part of the enemy's army you could find the Vanaras, — on the heads of elephants and of horses, on the chariots of the Rakshasa leaders, on the top-ends of their mighty bows, and sometimes on the heads of the Rakshasas themselves. The bodies of the Vanara heroes broken by the maces of the Rakshasas floated down to the sea over the rivers of blood flowing from the field. But even then, the grip of their hands did not relax— they still held the rocks which they had uprooted in order to hurl against their foes! In the shambles made by the mighty paw of Hanuman, you could not distinguish either horse or elephant, banner or wheel, lance or bow or mace or even chariot.

The Rakshasa's assault now began in right earnest, and the common Vanaras fled from the field. But the leaders stood their ground and dammed the Rakshasa flood. The Rakshasas cared not who died or who lived, and dashed forward pounding the Vanaras with their maces and clubs. And yet, though suffering terribly, the Vanara leaders broke the force of the onset. Wherever Nila rushed, the eight-handed God of Death, Yama, armed with trident and axe and noose had his hands full capturing the souls of the falling Rakshasas. What is this sight? Is it a tempest? Or is it the roaring deep? Or is it all-consuming fire? No! It is the Vanara Kumuda who knocks down the Rakshasas: and Yama himself trembles at his work. Rishabha and Panaja, Jambhavan and Kesari, Mainda and his brother carry havoc in the enemy's ranks.

Seeing the Rakshasa attack broken by the leaders, the Vanaras that had fled away now formed up and were led to the attack by the chiefs. The Rakshasa army was pushed back. Indrajit saw this, and full of anger and pride he now came to the front causing to quake the very earth and the ocean by the twanging of his mighty bow. The arrows discharged from his bow clove through the air like deadly cobras, and broke to pieces the rocks and tree trunks flung by the Vanaras, and pierced the large bodies of the Vanaras themselves. Hundreds of thousands of Vanaras had fallen before a *muhurta*⁶² passed. But they died not in vain. Even at the moment of dying they would pull rocks by their roots and whirl them into the enemy's ranks. Nothing was visible owing to the tempest of arrows blowing from Indrajit's bow. No sound was heard except the thunder of its twang. The Vanaras turned and fled, unable to bear this whirlwind of missiles, and the Gods trembled when they saw their champions flying from field. The Rakshasa flood now recommenced to flow over. To stop it, Sugriva and Hanuman came forward whirling trees and fragments of rocks. When he caught sight of Hanuman, Indrajit remembered his exploits in Lanka when he had been there to look for, Sita, and challenged him in the following words:—

*“Fly not ignoble, stand your ground: I've come
To the front seeking you. You cannot wield
The bow, but endless boast of great prowess
You make. Think you with stones and twigs-
To vanquish me?”* (6:18:73)

Hanuman's reply was not less proud:—

*“Here also there be some, O feeble one, who
Can wield the banded bow, and you will taste
By proof their strength to-morrow if you escape
From here with life to-day. Face me if you can;
Think not you have an Indra here who fled
In olden times before your feeble arms!”* (6:18:74)

and he defied him still further in these words:—

“Would you fight with me?”

⁶² An hour and a half.

*Or would you measure your strength with Lakshmana?
Or choose you to face the matchless chief
Who has vowed to bring your father's ten heads down?
The choice is yours to make.” (6:18:75)*

As soon as the Rakshasa heard the name of Lakshmana he remembered his oath and addressed Hanuman as follows:–

*“Where is that doomed Lakshmana who took the life
Of my lion brother and reserves his own
As target to my tearing arrows? I've come
To cool my wrath in his blood! And when I shoot
The fiery arrows that the world can burn,
Can he and you and all your vaunted force
Suffice to feed their hungry mouth? I'll send
My troops and generals all away; alone
I'll stand, with none to back me but my bow
Invincible. And you may come with all
Your strength, and all that mortal men or gods
You can bring of force: the sun goes not down
This day before your severed heads have rolled
Upon the plain!” (6:18:76, 77)*

So saying, Indrajit shot hundreds of arrows into Hanuman's mighty frame. But, though bleeding all over his body, Hanuman aimed a huge stone at him saying,

*“In their thousands though they come, can elephants tame
The lordly lion boiling over with rage?
If you lack the patience to await Saumitri,
And want to fight, I give you this, now guard
Yourself, if you can!” (6:18:79)*

and hurled a huge rock at him.

But the rock broke into a thousand fragments when it struck the iron body of the Rakshasa, and, as if nothing had happened, he sent his shattering arrows against Hanuman. Hanuman was overwhelmed, but, just at that time, Nila came to his side and sustained the conflict. But neither he nor Angada who came to his support could long withstand that iron-hail.

Lakshmana saw this from a distance and hastened to the spot. The Rakshasa leaders who were furious against him for having killed Atikaya concentrated against him from all sides and aimed their deadly arrows at him. But the cunning hand of Lakshmana was able to break their force and bring the Rakshasas also to the ground. Seeing the rapidity and force with which the arrows flew from his mighty bow, the gods exclaimed,

*“Is it from Lakshmana's archery that the rain-cloud
Learnt to rain in torrents?” (6:18:95)*

The Rakshasa flood abated completely, but Indrajit stood his ground like a rock rising sheer from the bosom of a dried-up sea. And piloting his chariot that dashed on with the quickness of his own thought he stood before Lakshmana. Hanuman, meanwhile, had recovered from his shock and rushed to the front and desired Lakshmana to seat himself upon his shoulders so as not to give the advantage to the charioted Rakshasa. The giant fight began.

Now thundered the twanging bows. At that terrific sound the very boundaries of the world were shot away from their places. The mountains split. The concave of heaven cracked. The whole

universe became embroiled in a whirlwind of dust. The fierce arrows struggled in the air mauling each other to pieces. The Gods in Swarga trembled for their lives, and crouched in their hiding places for safety. The universal sphere rocked to and fro like a frail boat in a tempest. Hanuman paralleled every evolution of the enemy's lion-drawn chariot. The arrows flew so thick that even the Gods could not see whether the combatants were alive or dead or wounded. The bounds of the earth cracked to pieces at the deepening tumult. The spectators, astonished at the mastery and skill displayed by the combatants and their super-human deeds, exclaimed to each other,

*“Is not the art of archery infinite
And various? And where is the limit set
To strength of muscle? Wondrous is their skill
And prowess! Who has ever fought like these?
Never was such a fight seen before, and never
Will be!”* 6:18: 105,106)

There was no end to the flight of arrows. The two heroes parried each other's arrows and found time to aim newer ones against each other. Lakshmana's and Hanuman's bodies were flowing over with blood. The Rakshasa's chariots were broken one after another, and he got upon new chariots only to descend from their broken ruins the very next minute. Lakshmana's arrows killed the lions and horses that drew his chariot and tore open his armor. His body itself became a running sore. But even in the midst of his terrible suffering he admired Lakshmana's archery and exclaimed,

*“Superb is this man's skill with the bow. Let fools say that he may be Shiva or Brahma.
If he is not Rama or Narayana himself, I do not know who he is! Who is there in our city
who can match him in the art?”* (6:18:120)

Seeing the plight of Indrajit, his guard flew to his help, and on this side Angada came to support Lakshmana and Hanuman. The Vanara heroes flung rocks and stones and tree-trunks, and the guard too was all but destroyed.

The Rakshasa was ashamed at the fate of his army and exclaimed to his associates, ' What shame is this? Our army of forty myriad troops is destroyed! But they replied with pride, ' The Vanara forces are no less punished by the torrents of arrows — we are not behind them in valor! ' As Indrajit was still exhausted by the endless fight, such of his personal guards as were still alive took his place and continued the fight, but they too were soon overwhelmed.

The wounded Rakshasas ran panting for water, and panting died. Some slaked their thirst with water from the clouds and died drinking. Rakshasa women who had come to the field to encourage the heroes to greater heroism by their presence became *satis*⁶³ and died embracing their dying husbands on the battle-field itself. Some wounded Rakshasas warned their brothers and sons and said,

*“If this should be the might of Rama's brother,
The doom of Lanka is not far; so, fly
Before death overtakes you Indrajit.'
And so saying, died. (6:18:167)*

Now, Lakshmana saw that one single final effort would finish his foe and so, exhausted as he was, he pulled himself together and bent his bow and sped against Indrajit arrows more powerful than Yama's. The arrows tore sheer and felled down the new armor of the Rakshasa. But two of his faithful guards who were close by rushed against Lakshmana who was fighting singly from on the shoulders of Hanuman, and rained on him an iron-shower. Lakshmana, however, not only parried the arrows aimed at him, but destroyed their bows and chariots shooting down their horses. They

⁶³ Self-immolators on the funeral pyres of their husbands.

were not nonplussed but took their clubs and struck Hanuman on whom Lakshmana was seated. But who could match the great Maruti in hand to hand fight? He plucked their two maces each with one hand, and would have smashed them had they not fled from the field in utter dismay.

Meantime the Vanara heroes who had retired from the battle returned, and the Rakshasas also rallied, and again a hail-storm of rocks and tree-trunks and clubs and shattering arrows began to blow. Indrajit, who had by now recovered from his exhaustion, broke the force of the enemy's missiles with his mighty arrows saying, 'Is this all your boasted might?' The sun was about to sink into the western ocean. Vibhishana noticed the rapidly sinking sun and warned Lakshmana saying,

*“Invincible is Rakshasas blood when Night
Does ride the heavens: if you fell not the foe
This minute, he wins, and all the laurels won
This day do go in vain.”* (6:18:180)

So with one mighty effort Lakshmana shot his terrific arrows against his great foe. The chariot broke into a thousand fragments, but the Rakshasa was not hurt. In a trice that 'most worthy among the workers of evil and dearly beloved of the Spirit of Illusion' assumed an invisible shape and rose from his shattered car, and entered the solid darkness of the lowering sky.

The gods were filled with joy when they saw no trace of Indrajit. And Lakshmana also was glad that victory had blessed his arms. He got down from Hanuman's shoulders and handed his mighty bow to Angada, and, as a preliminary to giving himself much needed rest, he began to pull out the arrows with which Indrajit had sown his body all over. But,

*Alas! He knew not that the hour was great
With fate inevitable For, their foe
Of cobras fierce the dreadful spell pronounced
And sped his arrows on them with mortal aim.
Lo, every arrow became a monstrous snake
And hissing clove the air with force abnormal,
Driving the very darkness forth, and bound
Their arms with many a scaly fold involved.* (6:18:188 – 190)

The cobra-arrows flew in their myriads and bound every one of the Vanara host after wounding them all over the body. Vibhishana alone was not touched as Indrajit had pronounced the incantation only against non-Rakshasas. Blood flowed in torrents. The heroes were writhing with pain. They were hungering to revenge themselves on the Rakshasa, but, whenever they tried to rise, the strangling hold of the serpents would drag them down and keep them transfixed to the spot where they had fallen. They would look at Lakshmana and feel for his bonds ten times more intensely than for their own torturing pains. They would ask Vibhishana, 'Is there no remedy for this?' They would say, 'Hanuman alone can save us in this plight,' and ask, 'Is he alive?' But Hanuman's mighty arms too were bound in the same living coil and he, though unmindful of his pain, was tortured with grief for the fate of Lakshmana. Angada, Nila, Sugriva himself — all were held prisoners in the same strangling hold. And Lakshmana,

*though conscious of power to break through his bonds was robbed of his will to break
through, even as the human soul, though possessed of infinite wisdom, is still entangled
in the folds of Maya.* (6:18:201)

Soon a deadly silence began to creep over the Vanara army. The heart of Indrajit was at last glad. 'I have today accomplished my oath,' he said; 'Lakshmana and the monkey host are destroyed today, and after resting tomorrow I shall return and finish the other man and whatever remains of the Vanara army.' And, his heralds announcing his victory before him, he entered the gates of Lanka and proudly marched off to Ravana's palace, the while he was pursued by other missiles — the

admiring glances of the Rakshasa damsels. There he announced his victory to his father, and taking his leave he went to his own palace and began to rest his tired limbs.

Rama had not come to the field this day, as he had the fullest confidence in Lakshmana's strength and valor, and as he desired to give him all the honors of the day. When he was informed of the fate that had overtaken his brother, he was overwhelmed with grief. Having recovered from the first paroxysm of grief, he reprimanded Vibhishana on his coming near him for not calling him to the field when Indrajit came to engage Lakshmana.⁶⁴ But Vibhishana with tears in his eyes told him all that had happened, and how the last weapon was an unforeseen surprise even to him and added,

*“They're living yet: but for the magic spell
Could ever mortal valor have sufficed
To bring them down? Grieve not, therefore, my lord,
But hope: can sin over virtue ever prevail.”* (6:18:233)

Rama now asked Vibhishana to tell him the nature and power of this cobra-noose of which he had never heard before. 'It was created by Brahma,' he replied, 'and obtained from him by Shiva and gifted over by Shiva to such as do very severe tapas and pray for it. And,

*No force can ever lose its strangling hold:
It falls not till its victims die. If ever
The noose can be uncoiled, self-uncoiled
Alone it will fall: not even the four-faced One
Supreme can break its mortal spell!'* (6:18:232)

Rama cried out in despair,

*“Shall I direct my arrows against the Gods
Who forged the deadly arm? Or shall I end
The worlds and take my life? Shall I reduce
To ashes this sinful city? If the God
Who framed this spell undoes its fatal force
I'll cool my wrath: if he refuse, be sure
Within a trice I end the universe
Even as Shiva the three cities did! If dies
My brother, then what to me is glory?
What is Dharma? And what is infamy?”* (6:18:238 – 240)

But how can he, who came down specially to protect the universe, continue for long in his mood? And so the poet says,

*..... But in his heart
The springs of mercy soon began to flow:
He called to mind how heinous it would be
To end the worlds for wreaking vengeance on
A single foe; and then unknowing what
To do, he sank in blank despair.* (6:18:241)

When Rama was thus become a prey to despair, and the gods were trembling with fear as to how all this would end, the heavenly Eagle, Garuda, the terror of all serpents mortal and immortal, who also had been watching the combat along with the gods from a distance, spread his mighty wings for flight, and arriving at the place where Rama was standing, fell at his feet and worshipped him as his

⁶⁴ Rama did not intend to allow Lakshmana to fight without his aid against Indrajit. He permitted him to go alone only against Atikaya.

master, the Supreme Narayana Himself. At the very touch of the air flapped up by Garuda's wings, behold, the serpent noose lost its spell and the Vanara heroes and Lakshmana broke through their bonds as if they were no stronger than filaments of lotus stalk, and rose as if fresh from the hands of the Creator Himself. The magnificent stanzas in which Kamban describes the majestic flight and appearance of Garuda have scarcely a parallel in literature for the roll of their rhythm and the grandeur of the image that they present to the eye of imagination. Though conscious of the impossibility of giving an adequate translation of them, we feel bound to attempt a translation and give some idea to the reader of their grand swing.⁶⁵

As soon as the Vanaras were released from the cobra-noose, they raised a shout that shook Lanka to its very center, and Ravana soon learned that the magic spell was broken and that the Vanaras were as ready for fight as ever. He then sent for his son and told him that, as it was but natural that he should desire again to fight those that had escaped so narrowly from his hands, he should command the army that day also. But, as Indrajit was too tired, he requested his father to send others to engage the enemy, and so other leaders and Makaraksha, the son of Khara, were sent against the Vanara host.

Mahaparshva and Dumaraksha, two of the five commanders now proposed to be sent, were at first found out to be none but the guards of Indrajit that had fled from the field the previous day from the clubs of Hanuman, and Ravana ordered that their noses should be cut off and that they should be paraded through the streets of Lanka and proclaimed as base cowards. But Mali opposed, saying that they had fought very hard and stayed on the field almost up to the very last, and, if they had run away from the battle-field, Indrajit had also all but done the same. And who was not afraid in Lanka in these days? For, said he:—

*“In Lanka's streets let Lakshmana's name be called
Aloud but once: alas, a panic wild
At once does seize our people, and they'd hear
No more but shut their doors!
That dreaded name such terror inspires!”* (6:19:13)

Ravana was, therefore, persuaded to give these commanders a fresh opportunity to retrieve their good name. They and the Other commanders with their troops fought bravely but could not stand against the Vanaras. In the end they were all destroyed and Indrajit had again to take the field.

This second fight of Indrajit was still more furious than the first. Rama commanded the Vanara army to fall back, as they were unable to fight the divine weapons that the enemy was using, and took the field himself alone with the bow. Arrows after arrows flew against the enemy, laden with death. The vast army of Indrajit was blown to the winds, and Hanuman, seeing that grand display of the archer's art, smacked his broad shoulders with his mighty paw and sent up a shout of admiration and joy. When Lakshmana saw Indrajit coming forward to engage personally with Rama, he prayed his brother to allow him to fight the Rakshasa singly by himself. Said he,

*“The serpent noose, my brother, that helpless bound
My limbs, has cast a slur upon my name;
And men will point at me and say, ' his friends
He could not save from worse than death; nor could
He stand against a valiant foe; and yet
He lives! ' If Indrajit's head, my arrows
Do not remove, the luster of my name*

⁶⁵ The translation of these seven stanzas are missing in the manuscript. Aiyar appears to have postponed translating them but died before he could do it. They are verses 243 to 249 of the 18th Padalam of the Sixth Book. An inadequate translation is offered with apologies to Aiyar and the reader in Appendix I.

*Is gone forever. I burn to engage this foe
Unaided, yourself only looking on;
And killing him in single fight, emblaze
My name before men for service legal done
To you, my king and lord. And witness heaven,
If I bring not Indrajit down this day,
May I lose the merit forever that I
Have earned by faithful service done to you." (6:21:39 – 43)*

When Lakshmana took this solemn oath, the gods were filled with joy and said, ' the days of our grief are over! ' And the endless worlds echoed that joy and the Spirit of Righteousness rejoiced. And the heart of Yama also was glad.

So, during this day, Rama plays but a minor part and even that only during the earlier hours of the battle.

The brothers blew their conches, and at the terrific sound even the lions yoked to the chariot of Indrajit trembled. Clubs and steel discuses, lances and spears, maces and sling-stones were now hurled at the brothers and also at the Vanaras who were drawn up at a distance. The fire-winged arrows of Lakshmana brought down the chariots and horses, elephants and Rakshasa heroes by the thousand. In that fell massacre you would not know which were the leaders and which the ordinary Rakshasa soldiers. Lakshmana's arrows would drop the head of the sons in the cars of the fathers and the mangled heads of the fathers in the chariots of their sons and then resume their flight. Rama also joined his fatal arrows to Lakshmana's, and in the end, Indrajit stood almost alone with his chariot broken, but, his high spirit as high as ever. And getting on to another chariot, and directing it to where the two brothers were standing, he addressed them and said,

*"Would both of you today engage with me
Or desires one alone to fall a prey
To this arrow? Or wish you with the remnants
Of your broken force to meet your fate?
Decide, I'll grant your every wish!" (6:21:61)*

Lakshmana haughtily replied,

*"I've sworn to fell you dead upon this field
To-day. you may choose the sword or bow
Or lance or fists or any weapon else
Your whim dictates: I'll meet you arm for arm
And bring you down.'" (6:21:62.)*

The rejoinder of Indrajit is no less haughty:

*"I mean today to make the elder brother
Against nature's way survive the younger born.
If first I send you not to your doom, and make
Your elder brother weep and mourn your loss
I call not myself son of mighty Ravana! . . .
Mistake me not for Kumbhakarna the brother,
I am the son of Ravana! I have sworn
To soothe the ancestors of those my brothers dead
And him my mighty uncle, by oblations
Offered in the red blood of both of you!" (6:21:63, 66)*

Lakshmana would not be beaten even in this war of words:

*He said, "Vibhishana is with us here
 Destiny-chosen to offer libations
 To all the race of doomed Rakshasas.
 But that which you owe to your dead father,
 The water-libation, I'll make him give
 Tear-mingled to your predeceased soul!" (6:21:67)*

Without further words the Rakshasa rained his fiery arrows upon Lakshmana and Angada, Hanuman and Rama. But Rama saw the Rakshasa alone and unaided, and so, did not bend his bow against him but let Lakshmana alone engage him. The sky was sown with flying arrows burning and tearing each other to pieces, and everything around appeared to be on fire. Lakshmana could only parry Indrajit's swift-flying arrows for a long time, but, when the Rakshasa's hand began slightly to slack owing to his terrible exhaustion, he seized his opportunity and killed the lions yoked to his chariot. Anger nerved the arms of Indrajit, and he regained his old vigor and ploughed the bodies of his enemies with his terrific arrows, and blew his sonorous conch to the trepidation of the Vanara host. Lakshmana again awaited his opportunity and, when it presented itself, he pursued his advantage and struck down Indrajit's strong armor and twanged his mighty bow. Rama was delighted to see his grand archery, and called the Vanara army standing at a distance to cheer him with their sphere-rending shouts.

Indrajit saw that Lakshmana was invincible by his ordinary weapons, and thought again to employ his magic. But waiting first to know what the brothers were thinking on their part, he rose into the sky, and becoming invisible approached near where they were standing. Lakshmana knew by the previous day's experience what his enemy was capable of, and so proposed to his brother that he should use the terrific Brahmastra and finish him and all Lanka. As soon as he heard these words, Indrajit flew straight to Lanka saying that, if they would attempt to use that world-shattering missile, he would forestall them and prepare it himself against them.

But here on the field, Rama replied to Lakshmana that if he vised the missile in his anger it would destroy not only Indrajit but all the worlds besides, and that, therefore, he should not use it now and endanger the universe for the sake of one enemy. The Vanara host now returned to the field, and there was immense joy among them to see that the Rakshasa had fled away. Rama also went to the rear to make fresh sacrifices to the gods, by the strength of which sacrifices alone could the different divine, weapons and missiles be used and parried with effect.

Indrajit, however, asked his father to send Mahodara with fresh troops to engage the enemy while he himself went to do the necessary sacrifices to the gods and obtain the power to send the Brahmastra against them. Mahodara, therefore, led his vast army into the field. But Hanuman now took the huge shape that he could at will and scattered and destroyed a wing of the Rakshasa force headed by Akamba. Sugriva and Angada joined in the melee and they attacked and destroyed or drove from the field other divisions of the enemy. But Mahodara with his magic powers checked the advancing Vanara troops, reformed his army, and then by feints at retreating drew the Vanara heroes and Lakshmana further south towards the walls of the city.

As all sound of battle died away in the distance, Rama, who was in the midst of his sacrifices for the divine weapons, became anxious to know what was happening, left the sacrificial grounds, and retracing his steps towards the battle-field followed the track of his army which was being drawn further and further south by the fascinating magic of Mahodara. Confusion reigned everywhere, and it was after hours of anxiety that Rama learned from Hanuman that unless he himself sent some missiles of divine power the Rakshasa magic could not be overcome. Rama bent his bow therefore and sent his arrows instinct with the divine power of Shiva, and Mahodara, seeing that his magic refused to stand against this class of weapons, rose up in the air and bided his time.

The field now being absolutely clear of the Rakshasa troops, Rama went back to the sacrificial ground to complete his sacrifices for the divine astras. But soon after, Indrajit returned having perfected his sacrifices and obtained the cruel missiles called Brahmastra that destroy whole masses at one fell throw. He had not the compunctions that prevented the brothers from using such a weapon, and so standing under the cover of the illusion again produced by Mahodara he bent his bow, pronounced the mantras of the Brahmastra and released the arrow. At once millions on millions of arrows flew with deadly force from inside that deadly arrow, and killed the Vanara heroes by the myriad and even Lakshmana himself.

Having achieved his fell work, Indrajit went back in triumph to Lanka and proudly told his father that his enemies were now destroyed forever, for, said he, ' would Rama, if living, forget his valor when I stretched his, dearest friends and brother upon the field? ' When Rama came back to the field after finishing his sacrifices and renewing the power of his *astras*, he was stunned at the sight that met his eyes. Wherever he turned, he saw nothing but heaps of Vanara corpses. He saw his Sugriva and Hanuman, Angada and Nila, and the rest ploughed with bleeding wounds and fallen at the head of their respective divisions; and his tears fell like showers. But when he saw his Lakshmana also a lifeless corpse, he fell down plumb, like a sola tree struck by the thunderbolt. And who was there to console him in that awful moment of soul-shattering grief? Who was there to separate him from the body of his brother which he was embracing with his trembling arms? And who was there to lift him up and bring him to himself? He was alone, all alone in that wilderness of the dead!

After hours of silent anguish in that weirdly dark night, Rama thus gave expression to the measureless grief that was agitating his mind:

*"I died not when I heard of our father's death,
Though he gave me a kingdom,⁶⁶ for in your love
I learned to forget his loss: but, you now dead,
What's life to me? I come, my brother, I come.
But were you brother alone? you were to me
A child and father, mother and blessings all:
And you are gone! And you are gone without
A saying a 'Farewell'. Alas! have I become
Crueller than you? For I see you dead
And still, pretending sorrow, I bear to live.
My heart is made of stone, it breaks not;
Even your loss I shall bear and cling to life!
In all these fourteen years of forest life,
Through sun or shower, you labored hard for me
And never did rest: are you now gone for eternal rest?
You had forsworn even sleep: would not awake?
Your one desire, child, was to see me crowned:
Now open your eyes, behold, I'm grown home-sick;
Take me to Oudh and crown me with your hands!
Ah wretch I am that knows not what is love
Though losing you, my brother, I am not dead.
Now who is brother to you? Alas our bonds
Are broke: Nor I nor life are kin to you! . . .
My love of throne has untold misery brought*

⁶⁶ Read: ' I died not though he a kingdom gave ' (to me) . The original allows also a rendering as ' I minded not when he gave away the kingdom.' (P)

*On father, mother and all. And for this love
 Of Sita I have sacrificed you
 You were a brother born but became a friend
 Inseparable, you did your father leave
 And mother and Dharma itself and followed me.
 But do I follow you now you are dead? . . .
 Why did I part from you, and let you fight
 Alone with Indrajit? I hate myself;
 I hate this life inconstant: I come, I come!
 Behold, I follow you!’ (6:21:206 – 209, 218, 210, 212, 214, 217)*

Thus lamenting, Rama once again fell into a swoon. Rakshasa scouts now thought that Rama also was dead and ran to Lanka and informed Ravana that the whole Vanara army and the two men lay dead upon the field. Ravana was now triumphant and ordered that Sita should be taken over the battle-field and shown the corpse of her husband.

After Sita had come and gone, Vibhishana who had gone to look after the provisions of the army returned and saw the carnage and the dreadful silence over the whole field. Relieved to find "that, though Rama could not be waked from his swoon, he had no wounds on his body, and hoping that Lakshmana and the rest. would escape from this *astra* even as they did from the *Naga pasha*, he searched the field torch in hand to see if any of the great heroes were living, so that he might consult with them as to what they should do in this great disaster. He at last saw Hanuman with his body drilled with the terrific shafts of Indrajit but with life not extinct; and then, removing the arrows from his body and cooling him with fresh water from the clouds, he brought him back to consciousness. Hanuman now rose with Rama's name upon his lips, saw with grief the shambles that their army was, and asked if Jambhavan was yet alive as he alone could suggest a remedy in that great hour. Jambhavan was searched for and fortunately found alive. On being asked, he said that on the Sanjivi hill grew the drugs that could heal all wounds and bring the dead back to life, and that Hanuman should fly thither and bring the drugs, and with their aid restore to life the fallen army.

So Hanuman flew through the air the thousands of miles lying between Lanka and the hill, lifted the hill sheer with his hands and flew back to Lanka before the day broke. As soon as the hill of drugs was brought, the very air at once wafted balsam, and the Vanara heroes and Lakshmana rose as if from sleep with all their wounds healed and fresher than ever before.⁶⁷

Lakshmana had now escaped from two disasters. Although he fought with a valor equal to that of his enemy, the latter's magic powers and unscrupulousness were able to wrest victory out of defeat. The challenges that he had thrown out to Indrajit were yet unfulfilled, and it was by miracles that he himself escaped with life. These two miracles, however, showed that the gods were on his side and that he would end by destroying the Rakshasa. But how great fights had again to be waged, through what great fire he had again and again to pass before he was able to bring the head of Indrajit to the ground!

⁶⁷ As the Rakshasa dead had been thrown into the sea at the command of Ravana, the balmy air was of no use for them.

CHAPTER 8

INDRAJIT: HIS EXPLOITS AND DEATH



While describing Lakshmana's exploits in the last chapter, we had inevitably to speak of Indrajit, the ablest fighter in the Rakshasa army. In this chapter we shall study his character as Kamban depicts him and describe his last great fights with Lakshmana whom he had chosen as his especial opponent.

We have already referred to Hanuman's estimate of his valor even when he was asleep. He is the only Rakshasa who dares to use hard words to Ravana. For, when he hears that Hanuman, during his first visit to Lanka, after discovering Sita had destroyed Rakshasa army after Rakshasa army that were sent against him, and also had killed his brother Aksha who had commanded the last army, he rushes to the presence of his father and chides him saying,

You weigh not the danger beforehand but rush unthinking into it, and then you suffer. Even after seeing the prowess of that monkey, you have sent against him in batches those who could never hold their own against him. Is it not then you that have killed' them? When the Kinkaras and Jambumali and the five commandants with their goodly force returned not with life from the fight, how can we call our enemy monkey? Ought we not rather to rank him with Shiva and Brahma and Vishnu? You have in the days past broken the force of the Elephants that hold the universe in its place, and conquered the three worlds and lifted mount Kailash itself with Shiva upon it. But now what will wash this humiliation received at the hands of the monkey who has killed our Aksha? After this, even a victory will not be a matter for rejoicing! (5:12:9 – 11)

So also, when his father tells him that Atikaya was killed in the battle with Lakshmana, he boldly attacks him saying:—

*Isn't it Lakshmana that killed my brother? No! it's you
That sent him to the slaughter. Knowing their might
Why sent you not for me before? The foe
That killed my other brother you sent away
Unthinking, for, sooth, he as an envoy came.
And now where are your sons to guard your throne?
Past are your days of glory, Sire!" (6:18:7, 8)*

But though he chides his father to his face, he is extremely jealous of his father's glory. For instance, when he learns that Hanuman had ended Aksha he exclaims,

*"Alas, 'tis not my brother that is dead —
It is my father's glory faded lies
Upon the ground." (5:12:5)*

When, on reaching the battle-field he sees the ground soaked with the blood of Rakshasas killed by Hanuman, he is filled with shame that Rakshasa blood should be spilled in Lanka by a monkey. Says the poet,

*He saw his comrades dear to him as life
Or the apple of his eye, all fallen dead
Upon the ground, and endless phalanx fierce.
He saw the shambles they had become, and at
The sight he bit his lip; and who could sound
The grief and shame that agitated him?*

A stick that probes a bleeding wound does give a lighter pang. (5:12:18)

When, at the Rakshasa council, Ravana speaks of heading an army himself against Rama, Indrajit considers that he should never think of doing a thing that is so much beneath his dignity and asks him to send himself. He says, sarcastically,

*“And you to march against this puny man!
O great will be the glory you will reap,
And great the triumph in that noble war!
Verily you despise the Rakshasas
That bear the weapons divine, now rusty grown,
That Mahadeva gave and Brahma blessed;
And I am grown the least before your eyes
Of those that wield the sword!” (6:2:58, 59)*

And then changing the mood he continues,

*“Even if all the worlds conspire against you
And range their powers upon the field, I'll brave
Them all and bring you victory. If I fail,
I'll brag not myself son to you, but deem
Myself a low-born craven. . . . you will see
The Vanaras bite the dust, and Mother Earth
Groan with the weight of rolling heads: and I
Shall torture Sita with the blood-curdling sight
Of Lakshmana's gory head and Rama's. (6:2:60, 61)*

We have given the reader, we hope, in the last chapter an adequate idea of his superb valor. Kamban calls him the 'perfection of all valorous qualities'. He leaps with joy when he finds a brave and mighty enemy to fight with. Thus, during Hanuman's first visit to Lanka,

*Though he had conquered worlds before,
The mighty form of Hanuman when he saw,
And the field heaped up with masses of the dead,
“Here is a foe that's worthy of my steel,
He thought, and was delighted at his luck
In having such a foe to fight. (5:12:15)*

The gods and the whole world live in perpetual terror of his valor. As an instance, when he marches to punish Hanuman after the death of Aksha,

*Now thundered loud the trumpets and the bells
Jingling on warriors' anklets proud. The king
Of gods did tremble for his very life.
Even the Three Supreme from Yoga turned
Expecting fierce war. (5:12:4)*

The Devas' fear of him, however, was as much due to his magic arts as to his valor. For he was an expert in the employment of the black art as in the wielding of the weapons of war. So much so, that anybody who displays an extraordinary cunning is dubbed at once in India as Indrajit. We have seen him, in the last chapter, resorting to the *Naga pasha* and *Brahmastra* after concealing himself from human sight. We shall presently see him try to throw Rama off his guard by another of his magic tricks and by false threats uttered before Rama's most faithful servant Hanuman.

For, when he found that Rama was not touched even by his Brahmastra which brought down the whole of the Vanara army, his hopes of final victory by pure deeds of valor began to grow dim, and

he spoke to his father, disclosing his plans for the third day's fight, prefacing his speech by his opinion of Rama:

*“Man he is not, nor Indra, ancient foe,
Nor Rishi striving after Brahma-Jñana⁶⁸
I doubt not now that he's the Ancient One
Adored by all, as Vibhishana held forth,
But not for that shall we our strivings cease:
Though fallen are our heroes great there's hope
Of victory yet for us: if I but go
To the field of Nikumbhala and undisturbed
I can perform my magic rites, I win
The power to conquer even him.” (6:25:13, 14)*

And then he explains how he proposes to put the man and the Vanaras on the wrong scent:–

*“By magic I'll make a breathing shape
Like unto Janaki, and sever its head
In sight of Hanuman, and straight proclaim
I fly to Oudh, and for revenge destroy
The city and its king. Despair will seize
The Vanara army and the Man and they
Will either leave this land or send to Oudh
The mighty Hanuman and suspend war
Till he return. Meantime my rites complete,
I fall on them with mortal weapons new,
And bring you triumph sure.” (6:25: 16 – 18)*

Ravana agreed to this and Indrajit went his way to make the living automaton.

Meantime, the Vanara army that was restored to life by the hill of drugs determined to set fire to Lanka, and set about to throw burning tinder and torches into the interior of the city.

"Hanuman who had gone north to restore the Sanjivi hill to its place returned to Lanka and joined in the work. As, however, he approached the western gate of the city, Indrajit appeared before him sword in hand, dragging by the hair the automaton made like Sita, and said,

*“It is for Sita you are making war:
My father cares not for her, and lo
I spill her blood even before your eyes! (6:25:31)*

Hanuman didn't know his trick and was taken aback. In his confusion he thought a soft word might save Sita and so he prayed to Indrajit to release her. He therefore addressed him in these words:–

*“O worthy son of a worthy race (You are
The fifth in direct line from Brahma great)
Kill not a woman, shame not your ancient line!
You have the Shastras mastered and the Veda:
Know you not it's a crime and also shame
To fell a woman dead? Behold, the Earth
Does tremble at the sight and heaven above
And yet you pity not! O spare the fair!
If you deliver her to me, I'll pray*

⁶⁸ Knowledge of the Ultimate Reality.

*That all the worlds may own you king forever.
Alas, forget you the glory great of your race?
Disgrace not you its ancient name!" (6:25:34, 35)*

Indrajit only laughed at Hanuman and replied,

*"Well have you said! We'll purchase safety, soon,
Me and my father, by delivering Sita!
And great will be the glory thereby reaped!
No, I will kill her straight and send my shafts
That'll make you flee for life, and establish firm
My father's throne — But all I have not said:
For I shall first to Oudh and burn her walls;
Guard her if ever you can! Behold I speed
Thither: Nor gods can save your master's mothers
Or brothers. Behold, my flaming arrows fly!
Already, hark, their death-groans rend the air! (6:25: 38-41)*

So saying, while still the automaton was piteously praying for life, he drew his sword and with one stroke severed the head from its body and directed his charioteer to steer his aerial car northward.

Hanuman fell where he stood, stunned, even like a mountain torn by its roots. The poet describes his grief and lament for Sita's fate in these words:—

*"O swan! 'he would cry out, and sob; and then
Would cry, 'O jewel of womankind!' He would
Then call aloud, 'O mother mine; ' then groan,
Asking in deep despair, ' Is there no god? '
And then would curse his heart that it did not
In pieces break when she was killed before His eyes.*

*He thought of springing on his foe,
But lacking force he fell upon the ground
And groaned. His eyes did flash with rage.
His frame did shiver for the anguish of his heart;
And knocking his huge head against the ground
He thus lamented loud: 'I thought the night
Which did the three worlds envelop had passed,
And dawn was nigh; alas, the thrice black pall
Of Misery has fallen once again
Upon the Earth, and she submerged groans
Beneath the flood of sin. For the cruel foe
Has felled down Sita, and Dharma mangled lie! '*

*The foe does kill that lovely princess pure;
I see her killed — a woman killed before
My eyes! — and yet I stand transfixed to the spot
Even like a bird that has its wings lopped off!
bravely have I from captivity
Rescued her! Maithili, my Rama's spouse,
That mother of unsurpassed austerities,
That spotless daughter of a spotless race,
A helpless one — her he has cleaved in twain,
And I have let him go: and now I weep*

*As if I have a heart that compassion feels!
 I braved the dangers of the deep, O mother,
 And carried Rama's message here, and your
 Over there, not for to end this cursed race
 Nor for to force you from their hands: I came
 Alone to see you killed before your time!
 And men would curse my name for ever. When Rama
 Did wander in his grief over hills and dales
 Like one distraught, I had the fortune great
 To rouse him back to life with the words, 'I saw
 Your love, I saw her still alive'. And now
 Am I to say, 'I saw the Rakshasa kill
 Your spotless wife? 'Ah, wretched is my fate! "
 "I was proud I could the ocean cross, and bridge
 The abyss unbridged, and carry off the hill
 Of drugs and aye bring back the dead to life.
 And I to myself boasted, 'There is none
 Among the Vanaras like you'. Alas,
 All my exploits are now no more than scent
 Dissolved in ocean stream. I dared not spring
 Upon the murderous foe and mangle him
 To death; I died not straightway rending my frame
 In twain; but saw him kill her undisturbed.
 And still I'll live to fatten this body mine
 With food: is then my glory small? " (6:25:45 – 53)*

After this lament Hanuman came to himself sufficiently to enable him to run to Rama and inform him that he saw Indrajit kill Sita. When Rama heard the words he was stunned:

there was no shudder in his frame; he did not breathe heavily; his eyes did not move, nor tears came from them; he spoke not a word; burst not his heart; he did not fall to the ground; he did not sob; there was no sweat showing over his body — the gods even were not able to sound the depth of the anguish in his heart! (6:25:58)

The Vanara heroes who heard the news fell as uprooted rocks at the feet of Rama. But Rama, *who was unmoved even as a statue, looked not at the faces of his friends; he would not even reply to Lakshmana's questions; he lost control over himself; and with his heart carved and cut by the scalpel of deep attachment to Sita, he fell down on the ground even as a man dead. (6:25:60)*

Lakshmana could not bear to see Rama tortured with such grief. He felt that all their endeavors had come to naught with the tragic end of Sita. Especially could he not bear the shame that they were unable to prevent such a fate from befalling the woman whom he looked upon as his own mother. 'And he also sank down in grief like a calf that has lost its mother'.

At length, Vibhishana brought Rama back to consciousness, but Rama was still too full of sorrow. Lakshmana too, soon after, came to himself; and, though full of anguish himself and sinking under the weight of such a terrible disaster, he felt that owing to the attachment of Rama to Sita, Rama's heart would break, endangering even his life, and so he addressed to Rama these trumpet-like words:—

*“When Fate her darkest hour unrolls, and all
 Appears lost, 'tis only weaklings lose*

*Their heart and hopeless sink in black despair.
 But will you be like them? When tarnished is
 Our race itself by this irreparable loss,
 Why slacks your arm from ending all the worlds
 And Dharma's self at one fell stroke? Here was
 A woman weak, a helpless one, of life
 Austere, and she your spouse, as Lakshmi fair:
 If her the Rakshasas kills and you are still
 Engulfed in sorrow, your rage unroused, I ask,
 Is life so dear? Or do you pity feel
 For men and gods? What have you now to do
 With Dharma itself? What care we now for gods
 Or Rakshasas, for Gurus, Brahmans, Veda
 Itself? When violence prospers in the world
 And Righteousness in ruin ends, why sit
 We here with folded arms? Why hesitate
 To end the triple worlds with fire and sword?
 Behold, the worlds are still revolving on
 In their appointed spheres; the gods are still
 Alive; and men are bowing yet to Dharma
 As if it still exists! And clouds yet yield
 Their plenteous rain to man! And bent with grief
 We sit and weep and rise not to end them all!
 Is not our valor great? Our duty was
 If we but knew, to burn this city vile,
 And scattering fire around, to line with flames
 The roads, all through, that Indrajit passed.
 And send him to his doom. This unattempt,
 If impotent we sit with indolent arms
 And water with our tears the earth, will not
 Our manliness look small? At Ayodhya too,
 We feared this Dharma, and renounced our throne
 And wandering in the forests wild, we lost
 Our Sita, tricked by villainous Ravana's guile;
 And yet we kept our wraths within our bounds.
 Here also to this outrage fell if we
 Should submit meek, what doubt but he will bind us
 In chains and bid us slave for him? Should we
 Desperate, die by our own hands, the world
 Will laugh at us and say we lacked the strength
 A helpless woman's murder to avenge
 And died consumed with shame. Yield not, therefore,
 My brother to this unmanly, weak despair,
 The portion of the feeble in mind and heart.” (6:25:65 – 71)*

Sugriva was fired up with these words, and rose up to spring on Lanka. But Hanuman told the company, what he had forgotten to say before, that Indrajit had threatened to march on Ayodhya and that he had seen the Rakshasa direct his aerial car northwards. Rama's anxiety over the fate of his brothers and mothers at Ayodhya was even greater than his grief for the loss of Sita. After a moment's agitation he thought of pursuing the Rakshasa on the shoulders of Hanuman. But Lakshmana, heartened Rama by reminding him of Bharata's valor while Vibhishana proposed that,

as he doubted that Indrajit might have played some trick of illusion, he should first go disguised to Ashoka-vana and see if Sita was alive. This proposal was immediately agreed to, and Vibhishana soon returned with the happy news that Sita was still alive and unharmed. He also further informed them that Indrajit had gone to the field of Nikumbhala to perform a sacrifice, and proposed that Rama should send Lakshmana immediately to attack him there and prevent the completion of the sacrifice, as it had been foretold to Indrajit that if he completed this sacrifice at Nikumbhala he would be able to totally destroy his enemies, no matter who they might be. Rama agreed and gave Lakshmana the great bow of Vishnu given him by Parashu Rama, and after instructing him with what weapons to parry the Rakshasa's divine weapons and enjoining him not to use the Brahmastra even if the enemy should use it, sent him to the fight with his blessings.

At Nikumbhala Indrajit was engaging in the sacrifice, invoking the gods for invincibility and final victory. The sacrificial ground was guarded on all sides by the Rakshasa army standing silent in circular formation called the Chakra-vyuha. Lakshmana and his host now came to interrupt the Yajna and the battle began.

The Rakshasas met the Vanaras with their rocks and tree-trunks by their arrows and maces, clubs and lances. The Vanaras and the Rakshasas fell by the thousand, and the sacrifice was interrupted. The limbs and trunks of the dead Rakshasas fell on and desecrated the sacrificial fire. Their heads fell on the pots of the sacrificial water and broke them in pieces. The blood of the Rakshasas flowed in streams and extinguished the fire in the main sacrificial pit. The sacrificial buffaloes were killed by the swords and lances still grasped by the torn and falling arms of Indrajit's loyal soldiers. Lakshmana's arrows destroyed the Rakshasa army:—

“like the whirlwind, like the engineering art of the Kalingas⁶⁹, like an epidemic of disease, like acid thrown in milk.”

Wherever Indrajit turned his eyes he could see only the heaped-up carcasses of elephants and heroes, the broken fragments of chariots, the heads of his valorous soldiers, and a sea of blood.

“He could not see the bodies of his heroes — he could see only streams of blood issuing from the fragments of their mighty limbs. He saw the rest of his troops flying for life everywhere and dying or dead or crouching with terror in their flight. And so he stopped his invocations, and rose like a smoke-topped pyramid of flame — about to be quenched. He thought that the extinguishing of the sacrificial fire foreboded his own end. But like a true son of battle he feared not but prepared to meet Lakshmana and the Vanara army.”

Hanuman now came within his earshot, and taunted him with these words:

*“O Rakshasas of a hundred million lies;
I thought I saw you kill our Janaki
And fly to Oudh? When did you thence return,
My warrior bold? I hope success has smiled
On you! I hope you have that city fair
Uprooted, and Rama's race destroyed! I hope
You have your bow-craft shown to saintly Bharat,
Strong as the mighty Shesha that bears aloft
The spacious earth and all that is thereon!
I hope you have his youngest brother met*

⁶⁹ Read: 'military engineering art'. Aiyar here renders the original phrase 'Kalinga-K-Kammiar noolena' in a sense more apposite to the other terms denoting forces of destruction than the more commonly accepted meaning of 'the yarn of the workers on (the) cloth (loom)' which is inappropriate as it refers to the frequent and easy snapping of the yarn and is therefore the thing destroyed.' (P)

*In battle face to face and conquered him!
 I would not be surprised if even their heads
 You have as trophies brought. Know you perchance
 That now your circling battle-front is pierced?
 Has the twang of Lakshmana's battling bow by chance
 Entered your ear? . . . Is it the noose to-day
 That you will wield, or Brahma's fatal arrow?
 Is it the arrow of Mahadeva or Vishnu's disk
 You propose to hurl? We die with fear,
 O mighty sire, of all your armory! . . .
 Even if Maheshvar comes to save your life,
 Or Vishnu from His Sea, your doom is fixed
 Today. I see the tremor ominous
 On the wrong side of your frame: stay to fight
 This day? Behold the hero challenging
 Who's sworn to take your life; the thundering twang
 Of his strong bow, I crave to know, is it
 An indispensable part of sacrifice?
 The Gods are come to see him wield the bow
 The supreme archer, brother to mighty Ram.
 Death comes to every man one day — so why
 Do you hesitate? (6:26: 70 – 78)*

Though Indrajit now saw that he could not contend against Lakshmana, his hauteur did not abate an inch, and he flung these words at Hanuman:—

*“Well have you learnt my words from me, and now
 Forestall me well! And you to taunt me thus!
 Where is the fight, in all our battles fought,
 In which you were not crushed? With life restored
 You forget clean your enemy's death-winged shafts!
 Again you thirst for death and challenge me:
 Have you preserved the drug that saves from death?
 Let Lakshmana come or Rama, let those that feel
 They can now come to guard you from my arrows!
 The gods will only see the carcasses
 Of Vanaras dead heaped up upon the field,
 And anguish of their human masters feeble!
 Long as I have my brawny arms and bow
 I let no foe return alive — or man
 Or hunch-backed ape. Even if you refuge take
 In heaven, I will pursue you even there
 And end you all: and even Sanjivi Hill
 Cannot restore you back to life! Because
 My sacrifice is interrupt, dream not
 Therefore that victory will now be yours,
 Nor brag in imitated speech of prowess
 That'll never be yours. I waste my words no more:
 The arrows that one by one will cleave your necks
 And drop your heads upon the blood-red sword
 Will blazon forth my might to all the worlds.*

*I am not skilled like you in the boaster's art,
But this I'll say: thrice have you bit the dust
Before me. Have ever you stood your ground to face
Me in my rage? And now at least have you
To face me trained yourselves? Or will you fall
Upon the field and stretch yourselves in death?
Or will you flee from here for life? (6:26: 80 – 85)*

So saying Indrajit blew his war-conch and twanged his bow. At the mere sound the common Vanaras threw down the stones and tree-trunks in their hands and ran for their lives. The leaders, however, stood their ground and gave him battle. Hanuman took a giant rock and hurled it with such a force that even his father, the God of Wind, trembled with fear. And the gods said, 'what is too heavy for such brawny arms?' The rock flew with the force of a thousand thunderbolts, and the worlds trembled at it, and the Rakshasa host fled in terror. But Indrajit laughed, and saying,

*"Well done, my Vanara brave! you hope with stones
To throw me down and kill me before the gods.
Perhaps a monkey can achieve this feat!" (6:26: 91)*

sent a forceful shaft against that rock and blew it into fragments; but even the unwinking gods did not see when or how he aimed his arrow. As Hanuman was lifting another rock Indrajit sent a score of arrows against him and struck him down senseless.

Sugriva now took his place. But Indrajit despised his strength and said,

*"Even though they rush on him with scowling eye,
Does ever the lion turn from elephant chase,
And stop to war with chattering monkeys vile?
Go, bring me Lakshmana who may stand some fight
And give my arrows some work: fall not a prey
To their deadly point. Saw not your Hanuman
Felled down? are you stronger?
Hold I not still My mighty bow?
Has ever my right hand failed
Me up to now? have you forgot your lesson
Of yesterday? Or have you gained new strength?
Show me the man, and flee with all your host
To your native hills!" (6:26:98, 99)*

So saying, he turned towards where Lakshmana stood, but the Vanara heroes rained on him rocks and stones, and received his arrows on their limbs. Great was the havoc that the Rakshasa's arrows played upon the Vanara army, and Vibhishana prayed to Lakshmana to check his course. Hanuman had now recovered from his shock, and taking Lakshmana upon his shoulders strode to the front and stood facing Indrajit's chariot. And though the chariot was drawn by a thousand horses, neither in appearance nor in fact did the advantage rest with the Rakshasa — so mighty and so swift was the great Vanara. Lakshmana's arrows shot through the air like fire, like thunderbolts, like ghouls searching for living prey, like famine, like epidemic disease, like the fruits of the sins of man when they return home to him in their season, like molten metal, like vultures sweeping over their prey for the sake of their living. But, for every arrow the Rakshasa had a counter, and he shot his arrows in such multitude that Vanaras wondered whether the world could contain any more of them. Indrajit's chariot bounced over hill and dale, mound and plain, to catch Lakshmana at a disadvantage, but Hanuman was as swift as the war-horses of Indrajit, and he never for a single moment exposed Lakshmana's unguarded side to the enemy. Such was the swiftness of their spinning around that even skilled warriors could not tell which was Lakshmana and which the

Rakshasa. The gods were glad that they able to see such a fight as never was fought before. The combatants looked like two *avatars* of Durga — the war-goddess — striving against each other.

The gashes in the bodies of the combatants alone showed that the arrows had left the bow-strings — so rapid was their flight. Far as the eye could see, the sky was dark with flames and smoke. The very stars became cinder in that iron-hail. The twang of the bow-strings rent the air like thunder. The raging arrows clashed into each other. The seas dried up, the hills crumbled to pieces, the trees caught fire, the bodies of the combatants were crumpled up in the fire of the burning arrows.

At length the armor of Indrajit was torn open and his body was pierced by Lakshmana's arrows. But he did not mind this and shot his arrows which wounded Hanuman all over. Seeing Hanuman wounded, Lakshmana got down and aimed at the Rakshasa's chariot and sent it into a thousand fragments. Indrajit now wounded and stunned Lakshmana with ten arrows rapidly fired. But the latter at once recovered and pierced the enemy's chest and arms with arrows. Then Indrajit drew out his celestial weapons one after another, but Lakshmana was able to parry them all by similar ones. At length, seeing no other way, he sent the Brahmastra against Lakshmana. The gods trembled and prayed for his life. But, though it was against the injunction of his brother, Lakshmana sent the Brahmastra himself to parry his enemy's weapon, and showed to him that it was not for his ignorance of its use that he desisted from using it during the second battle. Indrajit's Brahmastra was destroyed by Lakshmana's which in addition threatened to consume the whole world. But Lakshmana aimed another missile at his own Brahmastra. Indrajit now thought that perhaps the Narayanastra may finish Lakshmana, and so, saying,

*“If you can parry this, none can oppose
You on the field. But this will send you sure
To heaven — I know it cannot fail,”* (6:26: 146.)

he aimed it at Lakshmana with all his might. It came like a roaring fire, and Lakshmana, knowing that it could not be opposed by any other divine weapon, meditated on Narayana, its presiding deity and faced it; and lo, it turned aside, went round Lakshmana, and gathering its force into itself evaporated in smoke, harmless. Indrajit wondered at the miracle and once more doubted that Lakshmana might be the great Narayana himself. But checking his thought, and saying, 'It does not matter who he is, I will fight him to the end,' he invoked the Maheshvara-astra and sent it flaming through the air. It came filling the vault of the sky and exploding from its body lances and axes, red-hot arrows and living fire, poisons and cobras and thunderbolts, the grisly shapes of death, and black ghouls and giant demons.

*The world-consuming fire now issued from
Its loins, and now the whirlwind sweeping clean
The earth and all that lives on Judgment Day.
And now the waters of the seas beyond
The seven did issue forth from its entrails.
The sky it darkened as with outer darkness.
The gods in terror fled, and Rishis left
With whitened face the field: The Vanara host
Sank in despair upon the ground; and moon
And sun and all the worlds their orbits swerved
In fear! Vibhishana trembled at the sight
And called the holy name aloud of Ram,
But lion-like Lakshmana only smiled. 'Fear not',
He said to those who ran to him in fear:
'Fear not, trust in my valor, you are saved.'
He said, and straight invoked the Infinite One*

*On whom Shiva himself meditates, and sped
His arrow with unsurpassed force. And lo,
It shattered in the air the exploding arrow
Of Ravana's mighty son. It did no more,
For Lakshmana in his mercy did command
That it should spend itself when was destroyed its deadly target.
The heavens did shout for joy
And earth; the seas and clouds the chorus joined;
And Dharma and Wisdom cried out, 'Victory!'
But where's the wonder when Jaya-lakshmi's⁷⁰ self
Did leap for joy? (6:26:156 – 160)*

Indrajit now came to realize that one who could break the force even of these astras with such supreme skill should be God. But he slacked not in his duty to his king. Even while Lakshmana was aiming at the Maheshvara-astra, leaving Indrajit free for the moment, the latter took advantage of the respite, and rained his terrific arrows upon him and the Vanara leaders.

But, just then, Vibhishana appeared before him, and when Indrajit saw him actually in the act of aiding and advising his enemy, his indignation grew to white heat, and he burst out in the following words:—

*'You traitor base that have your duty broke,
And beggar-wise do cringe before a man,
Echoing like a drum his every word!
Think you I'll spare your miscreant head today,
Because, indeed, you are my father's brother?
Though, all our leaders dead, the sovereignty
Of earth and heaven be slipping from our hands,
We yet can bear our breasts to our enemy's arrows:
But can we think of life stained with shame?
As fish that leave not streams though water fails
The Rakshasas race will leave not Ravana's side
But die with him: the earth alone will rest
And you with it; but who will own you king?
'It's not your valor helped my father great
(Who lifted sheer the hill that Shiva guards)
To conquer Brahma and wield the scepter proud
Of the varied world you may rule, when we
Are dead, over Brahma's race, by gods adored,
Yourself a slave to man! What care you
For glory? Ends it not with us? Ah no!
Is not your glory great? For have you not
Our secrets to the foes betrayed who maimed
Your sister? Help not the men to kill
Your brother and me and all the Rakshasas race? . . .

'And on the day that Ravana's mighty frame
Shall fall by Rama's arrows on the dusty field,
Will you, O valorous prince, his blood-stained limb
Embrace and roll upon the ground in grief?*

⁷⁰ The Goddess of Victory

*Or will you join the victors in their shouts
Triumphal? Or will fall at Rama's feet
And cringe for favors, blessing him? I thirst
To know your mind, my noble uncle brave! (6:26: 164 –170.)*

Vibhishana justified himself for having left a brother who carried off a chaste wife from her husband and persistently refused to restore her back to him. And he closed his justification by saying:–

*'I know that "Sin can never overcome
Virtue: I've taken refuge in Shri Rama
The God of Gods; let glory come to me
Or shame; let evil come to me or good:
I am content.' (6:26:177.)*

But Indrajit bent his bow, and saying:–

*'Alas! your dreams of glory and of good,
O uncle, will dissolve, the moment dire
My barbed arrows pierce your traitorous breast,' (6:26:178.)*

aimed a deadly arrow against him. But Lakshmana cut it off in mid-air and saved Vibhishana. Indrajit now aimed a lance and threw it towards his uncle's chest, but it was parried and broken in its flight by Lakshmana's arrows. Vibhishana's anger was now roused, and taking his mace in hand he attacked Indrajit. Indrajit's charioteer was killed, and the horses were either killed or dispersed. But Indrajit was not hurt. He, on his part, however, sent a shower of arrows against him, and shouting a shout that sent the spheres in shivers disappeared in the clouds.

Indrajit had done all that he could to bring victory to his father. Young, brave, full of resource, and proud of the great record of his past achievements, he entered upon the war full of hope. He knew, of course, the valor of his enemies. But their courage and strength only gladdened him. For, their greatness would give a luster to his victory while their feebleness would only have brought a paltry success. The first battle, however, proved to him that Lakshmana was not an ordinary fighter. He conquered him only with the divine weapon of the Serpent-noose. When Lakshmana escaped miraculously and stood to give further battle, he wondered but did not despair of defeating him. He made more elaborate preparations, but his words to his father have the true ring of the warrior who believes that he holds the key to ultimate victory. But when he found that this success was also only temporary, and that his enemies were able to resuscitate even the dead, his hopes fell. His belief in the sufficiency of the strength that he already possessed was gone, and he, therefore, desired to make new sacrifices to the gods and obtain the gifts of invincibility and ultimate success in battle. The reader has seen how his sacrifice was an utter failure. The only resource in which he put his faith being gone, his third entry into the field was characterized by hopelessness. But even when he has lost his hope, his nerves are firm, and he displays all his resources and, all his skill. His words are still in the high key. His withering taunt of his uncle does not lack anything of his customary bravado. But the poet ably brings out in that speech the despair that has now entered his heart. His words are brave, but he has begun to envisage the defeat and death of himself and his father. And when he flies over to the audience-hall of Ravana, direct from the field of battle at Nikumbhala, his looks betray his defeat and despair to his father.

Ravana saw for the first time in his life the scared look of- despair on the face of his son. And he thus addressed him:–

*'The barbed arrows still fixed in your chest
Announce the failure of your sacrifice;
Your more than adamant frame trembles like*

*A planting twig: and you have the stricken look
Of cobras when they see the eagle swoop
On them. So, son, now tell me what has passed.'* (6:27:2)

Indrajit replied with bitterness and humility in these words:–

*'Your brother has betrayed my secrets, Sire,
To the foe who has my sacrifices spoiled,
And broke the force of all my arrows divine. . . .
If weapon blessed of Him who made the heavens
And earth bows to him and turn aside
Harmless, what can our other arms effect?
Our race has sinned, or such a subtle foe
Arises not for us. If Lakshmana frowns,
I fear he can blow the three worlds to dust.*

*The brothers refrained from using Brahma's arrow
In battles past, because, it would they feared
Damage the peopled worlds; and so I won.
But now they've parried clean my heaviest arms,
And having tasted our unconquered might
They stand resolved to finish all our race!
Think not therefore, my liege, that I am seized
With fear: I speak for love of you: If you
Will conquer your desire for Rama's spouse
And release her, they will forgive our sins,
And go from hence.'* (6:27:3 – 6)

It is not a weakling who spoke these words. For Kamban adds,

*So said the Rakshasa
Whose arms had to their center shook the worlds!* (6:27:6.)

When Ravana heard these words, his heart brimmed over with contempt and anger. His pride was up. The mere thought of somebody forgiving him was poison to him. And with his reason-submerging passion for Sita still possessing his mind, how could he, with patience, listen to the words asking him to conquer his desire for Rama's spouse? And so:–

*The king of Lanka laughed, and with stinging words
He thus addressed his son: you are,
My son, now unfit grown for war; I see
Confusion in your mind; fear not the race
Of men, and worry you no more. This day
I'll take the field with only bow in hand,
With none to guard my side, and I'll bring
You victory! Think not I counted on
The Rakshasas who are already fallen:
Think not that I did count on those who're yet
Alive: think not I hoped that you would beat
My foes upon the field: in my sole right arm
I placed my trust, and I provoked this war!
You talk like a child, my son: this life,
Transient as the bubble in the stream,
I may even in the sight of beaten gods*

*Forfeit upon the field, for then it will shine
 With glory's halo that will never dim:
 But, can I renounce her, I twenty-armed?
 Even if I lose, if Rama's name will stand,
 My name, will not it also last as long
 As Vedas are sung on earth? We live to-day,
 To-morrow finds us not: but glory, does
 It ever die? Let it be known for once
 That I have sent Sita away, would not
 The gods besiege my Lanka? Die, I may;
 But can I stoop to shame and littleness —
 Even I who am the terror of the heavens
 And earth? What more? you may go to your home
 And, from your chest the infinite barbs removed,
 Lay down upon your bed and sleep in peace! '
 He said, and turning on the instant towards
 The attendant heralds like a tiger roused,
 He thundered, ' Order forth my battle-car.' (6:27:7 – 12.)*

As the reader will remember, Indrajit was cowed down. The days in which he could upbraid his father were now over. He fell at his feet pathetically saying:—

*"Pardon, my liege, the boldness of my words:
 At least when I am gone, may your eyes see
 The good,' (6:27:13.)*

and made his preparations to go to the field for the last time.

He took with him the great weapons that the gods had surrendered to him after their defeat at his hands, and after giving away as gifts all that he had about him to the poor and needy who desired the same of him, he left the presence of his father. Even as he was going, he would glance at his father at every step, and tears would fill his eyes every time that he glanced.

*And as he went, the Rakshasa heroes flocked
 To him, and weeping said, 'we cannot stay
 While thus you part; we'll follow you and die
 Even by your side.' But he their ardor checked,
 And saying, 'Range yourselves around our king
 And liege; I'll beat them even yet, fear not! '
 He went alone. (6:27:15.)*

As he passes along the street towards where his chariot was awaiting him, the Rakshasa beauties look at him with varying emotions:—

*Some bowed to him; some blessed him in their heart;
 Some trembled for his life; some sobbed to see
 Him part; his lordly walk did fascinate
 Some fair ones; others melted longing for
 His love and soft embrace. (6:27:16.)*

In the meantime Lakshmana and the Vanara heroes were wondering where their foe had gone, and what he intended doing. They had seen too much of his powers before, to leave the field boasting of victory. They therefore waited. At length they heard the thundering roar of the chariot majestically moving towards them in the distance. The sparkling of its gold plates and gems and jingling bells

pierced the gloom of night, making it look like a column of moving fire or some vast aurora borealis. It was the matchless, unique car which had ranged the heavens and earth and brought victory after victory to the Rakshasa arms. The seas boiled; the hills shook; the elephants that bore the heavens aloft fled in terror; the earth was scarred with deep gashes; dust covered the earth and sky and made the darkness darker — such was the force with which that grand chariot rolled on towards the battle-field. But even that double darkness was ever and anon pierced by the dazzling brilliance of its gold and gems, and made the hooded snakes shrink their hoods and slink back to their holes.

The rump of the Rakshasa army now reformed itself and advanced with terrific war-shouts. Indrajit rained arrows in showers, and Lakshmana advanced to face him, deafening the world with the twanging of his bow. The Rakshasas and the Vanaras fled on either side unable to bear the iron-rain rained on them by the two matchless heroes even like clouds. Hanuman's whole body was pierced by the Rakshasa's arrows which entered it like cobras entering their holes, and he minded them not and fought on. Lakshmana tore off with a single powerful arrow the armor of the Rakshasa. But, in spite of it Indrajit did not stop his shooting, but rained his arrows fiercely on his foe. All his arrows, however, were parried by the superior craft of Lakshmana. So he took a spear, the gift of Shiva, and launched it right against the neck of his enemy. But Lakshmana sent an arrow which, went with the force of curses of the great Rishis, and cut the lance in two in mid-air. Again the Rakshasa tried his deadly' arrows. But Lakshmana aimed at his quivers and destroyed his whole store of arrows, and with another skillfully aimed arrow felled his charioteer's hill-huge head to the ground.

But Indrajit flinched not. He took the reins himself. He directed his horses with consummate skill with his left hand, and holding his bow in the same hand, he plucked the arrows stuck in his own mighty body — for his quivers were gone — and speeding them back against his foe sent a shudder through the limbs of all beholders with his war-cries. Even the gods, his enemies, admired his skill and resource, and rained on him the flowers of heaven saying:—

'Verily this Indrajit is the first among the heroes who deserve to be called the bravest of the brave. True valor flinches not even at the point of death! (6:27:30)

Even Lakshmana exclaimed:—

*'He flinches not: his hand is firm; he plucks
The arrows I have buried in his chest
And aims them back at me, and lo, they come
Innumerable! Methinks pure Valor ends
With him and Ram! (6:27:31.)*

Now Vibhishana said to Lakshmana that Indrajit might possibly rise with his chariot into the sky, or, giving up normal fight, try his magic illusions; and suggested that, as the Rakshasa is more powerful in the night than during the day, he should try to prolong the fight without giving him a moment's respite till daybreak. But Lakshmana proudly replied:—

*Would not his car career in the sky
When I my shattering arrows fling and tear
Its wheels? To-day, be sure, there's only one
Issue to the fight: this day he meets his doom! (6:27:33.)*

After some more fierce fighting Lakshmana was able to shatter the chariot of the enemy. But Indrajit stood on the center-plate, of the car and showered his arrows upon Lakshmana, and then rose into the sky. Lakshmana only heard his thundering war-cries — he saw not his form. By the force of the *tapas* that he had done in former days, Indrajit released the flood-gates of heaven and rained hail-stones upon his foes. The Vanaras fell by the thousand, but none could locate him in the sky. So, Lakshmana sowed the sky with his fiery arrows and forced him to reveal himself. As soon

as he saw him, Lakshmana used all his might and sent a powerful arrow against him that severed his left arm. It fell like a cloud bearing the many-colored rain-bow in its bosom, and in its crash-down it shattered rocks and trees and killed innumerable Vanaras also. The gods wondered and said:–

*'We'd thought the moon would fall or Mount Meru
Would crumble and roll upon the ground, ere arm
Of Indrajit could broken be. If this
Could from its mighty trunk be torn, then life
Is but a machine toy: where is the use
In clinging fast to it? (6:27:46.)*

But even then Indrajit was not daunted. He took a lance which Indra long ago had obtained by doing great austerities and at his defeat had surrendered to him, and hurled it with a mighty force against Lakshmana. It came like a whirlwind mad, like the 'male' thunderbolt, like fire, like Death when on the Day of Destruction he consumes all. But the end of the Rakshasa was come. It flashed in the mind of Lakshmana just at that moment that without the greatest tapas, a foe who could send such a lance with such force even when his left arm was clean cut off could never be killed. And what tapas could be greater than taking the name of Rama with an act of stupendous faith? So he turned aside to avoid the lance, placed an arrow in the rest saying,

*'If Rama is none but He incarnate, whom
The Vedas sing and Brahmans worship,
Then speed, my faithful arrow, and hale the head
Of yonder Indrajit!' (6:27:51)*

pulled the string with all his might and let it go.

It flew through the air, shaming the Chakra of Vishnu, the thunderbolt of Indra, and the deadly trident of the Fire-eyed God⁷¹, breathing out flames all over, it struck Indrajit in the neck and dean carried off his head!

*When Indrajit fell dead, the first of those
That wield the mighty bow, the gods felt sure
That Ravana's cruel rule could last no more,
And danced with joy all over the fields of heaven,
Unknowing even their clothes had fallen off
Their forms: so look the images of the saints
Which Jains worship in their temples.*

The gods now made themselves manifest on earth, and their presence resuscitated the Vanaras who had fallen on the field. For had they not fought on the side of Virtue?

So fell the mighty Indrajit. Lakshmana, like Achilles, lacks the supreme grandeur of soul that refuses even to appear to take revenge on the dead which characterizes Shri Rama Chandra. For, he has the head of the fallen Indrajit carried as a trophy to his camp and displayed before his brother.

But the valor of Indrajit is not lessened by any indignities shown to his dead body. As the poet makes Lakshmana himself say, he is the very personification of valor equal to Rama himself in that grand male virtue. It is true that he was bad, cruel, wily. But his valor and the heroism that he displays till the very moment of his fall make us forget his evil qualities and remember him only as the proud defender of his father's glories. And the last scene between him and his father, the tears that he sheds for him, the appeals that his loyal Rakshasa knights make to him to be permitted to die by his side, and his request to them to stand by his father rather than follow him, all these add to the

⁷¹ Shiva

tragic pathos of the circumstances that make this once proud hero enter upon his last conflict with the consciousness that, however bravely he might fight, he could not escape his doom.

CHAPTER 9

VIBHISHANA & KUMBHAKARNA

We have seen in Indrajit the warrior whose heart is whole, that is, is not torn by a conflict of duties. He finds that his father has provoked a war: he does not care to inquire whether he is right or wrong, but straightway resolves to fight his battles for him, and relying on his valor proudly enters the field with the confidence of victory. In this chapter we propose to study the characters of the brothers of Ravana who felt that Ravana is heading towards ruin in retaining Sita in Lanka, but who acted each in a different way in pursuance of his own idea of what duty requires of him.

Vibhishana is the youngest of the three Rakshasa brothers. While Ravana and Kumbhakarna, (the latter in the intervals of his deep sleep of months at a time) were conquering and oppressing the worlds, Vibhishana was doing acts of righteousness and mercy in Lanka. The reader will remember Indrajit's taunts that he had no part or lot in the conquests made by his father.

The first time that we meet him in the epic is when he interposes in favor of Hanuman when Ravana orders that he should be put to death. He says that the envoy always acts for another, and that, therefore, he should never be put to the sword.

We have heard of kings putting even women to death,' he said, 'but never yet have we heard of princes killing ambassadors. Even the gods will mock at us if we stoop to this sacrilege..... Did not even the Men desist from killing our sister? They sent her away alive after only maiming her And, if this envoy is killed, how will the enemies know and fear our power and strength? (5:13:113, 116)

Here we see Vibhishana using only those arguments that would find favor with his brother. And Ravana also listened to his advice without questioning any further. But, when after Hanuman had burned down Lanka and it had been rebuilt, the war-council met, he stoutly opposed the war and recommended that Sita should be sent back to her husband.

Indrajit had scarcely ended his fighting speech when Vibhishana intervened in the debate and began by reprimanding his nephew, saying:—

'You are still too young, my boy, to join in this debate. Your mind sees not whole; you do not realize the critical nature of the times we now live in, nor the consequences of the advice that you give. you are like a blind man who would foolishly attempt to touch up a picture that is being painted by artists.....

'Even those who had in former times conquered the gods in their might and ruled them in their pride with an iron rod, have only fallen ignominiously in the end. For who are the evil ones that ever permanently ruled the Devas? A truce, therefore, to your childish, foolish talk!'

After silencing Indrajit, he began to address Ravana in these words:—

*'If you will not my words
Despise, my liege, I'll tell you what I judge
Will save our state from overwhelming ruin.
You're father, mother, brother to me, and lord,
To whom I worship owe. I'm pained to see
You threatened with the loss of sovereign power
More glorious far than Indra's heavenly rule.
And that is why I dare to stand 'fore you*

*And war oppose. I boast not learning great,
 Or subtle mind that probes all things to their root,
 Or gift of tongue that audience compels.
 Yet hear me to the end, and then alone
 Condemn..... Our Lanka fair and all your wealth
 Therein is burned: but are they wise who say
 It is a monkey caused this ruin dire?
 No, it's the fire of Sita's chastity
 That has, believe me, our glorious town consumed.
 That may recall to mind the oracle old
 That said that through a damsel fair
 Will wane the mighty Rakshasas power. Has it,
 My brother, now lost its force? ' (6:2:72 – 75, 77)*

Then, after saying that Ravana, in the days when he obtained blessings and boons from the gods for his austerities, had neglected to obtain invincibility at the hands of men and Vanaras, and after reminding him that he had been overmatched in strength by Kartavirya Arjuna, the man, and Vali, the Vanara, he assured him that Sita was none else but the incarnation of the woman who had fallen into the fire swearing to destroy him in her next birth as a revenge for his attempting to violate her, and that Rama and Lakshmana were none but the Supreme God incarnated in two bodies for the salvation of the world. He said also that he had heard that the great Vishvamitra had been their preceptor in archery and military science, that Rama had broken the bow of Shiva, and that Agastya had armed him with the bow with which Vishnu had destroyed the Asuras, and the arrows and astras with which Shiva had consumed the three flying cities. He then continued:–

*'The mighty frame of Vali fell transfixed
 By Rama's deadly arrow; the seven trees
 That covered the earth and sky uprooted were
 By that same force; and the rock-like heads of Khara,
 Viradha and all were rolled upon the ground —
 And who but Ram that did this feat achieve?
 Then who could face this Man upon the field?
 And saints and sages do believe that he
 Will end our race, and walk erect. And gods
 Who lived but in your smiles, have fearless grown,
 And say that Janaki's the deadly poison
 That is to kill the Rakshasas*

*Dark are the omens that we see about:
 Our horses and our elephants — trophies won
 From Devas in our fights of yore — now enter
 Their stalls with right legs to the fore: and hair
 Of many a Rakshasas youth and many a maid young
 Catch fire without a cause; and jackals huge
 Do promenade our streets in search of prey
 So let us not the glory of our race
 Distain with shame, but send away the fair
 Sita, ever fixed in her chastity.
 No higher victory can bless our arms
 Than this surrender willing! (6:2: 90-92, 95, 96, 99.)*

Vibhishana ended. But Ravana merely mocked at him laughing. He said:–

*You spoke of judgment and of wisdom, brother:
 But what has come over you? The puny race
 Of men, you say, will conquer Rakshasas might:
 'Sit fear or love of them, I crave to know,
 That does possess your mind? I am not armed
 With blessings of the gods, forsooth, to fight
 With men. But did the gods give me the power
 Express to break the might of the Great Elephants
 That bear the earth aloft, or lift the mount,
 The throne of Shiva? you spoke of curses breathed
 Against me by Nandi-deva: But am I not
 The target of endless curses which the weak
 Have flung at me? And of the Devas, Saints,
 And Sages, who are there that curse me not?
 And yet I rule the heavens and the earth without
 A peer! Where then are gone their curses? I know
 Your Rama killed Vali great who conquered me.
 But who could face the mighty ape and win?
 And Rama ambushed him and aimed his arrow!
 Now who but you can sing the power of him
 Who broke the crumbled bow of Shiva, and lost
 His throne by woman's guile, and lost his home
 By Ravana's sport? ' (6:2:101,102,106,108,109.)*

But Vibhishana again pressed his point that Rama was the Supreme God, incarnated as man expressly to destroy the Rakshasas who were oppressing the worlds, and that, therefore, he should not provoke him, but return his spouse to him and live with him at peace. But Ravana again spoke of his own might and past achievements, and asked:–

*'When I, the king of heaven brought in chains,
 Or broke the tusks of the Elephants divine,
 Or won in every war the rebel gods
 Provoked, where was the God Supreme then hid?
 Lacked he his might those days?
 Seated upon their Eagle and their Bull
 Vishnu and Shiva have fled before my arrows
 That broke their backs even as lightning breaks the rocks'
 He ceased: and winking to his wicked peers,
 He taunted thus his brother: ' Fear not I'll call
 You to the field: rest you at home secure! (6:2:113, 116, 117.)*

Even now Vibhishana did not give up his attempt to cure his brother of his pride and lust. He prayed to him to listen to the story of Hiranyakashipu who was far more powerful and stronger than him, and who ruled over even other universes than this, and yet who was torn to pieces by the claws of Vishnu incarnated as Man-Lion.⁷²

Though hardened in his heart against the sending away of Sita, Ravana yet listened to the story. It did not, however, make any impression on him and when Vibhishana had finished, he only taunted him more cruelly and frowned at him. He said:–

⁷² This episode is one of the most interesting in the whole Ramayana, and we shall devote a separate chapter to it.

*'You praised him who was rejoiced to see
 His father clawed to death. And where shall we
 In all the world his like behold, except
 In you who take the side of your brother's foes?
 And like him do you thirst to rule this land
 When I have fallen upon the field? Think you
 That Fate will grant your wish?
 You bear love to men who're now become
 My foes: You do conspire my fall: your heart
 Is set upon the Rakshasas crown. What can
 My real enemies more? The day when I
 Commanded that the Vanara should be killed
 You saved him from my wrath. I knew not then,
 But now I see, the reason why. Your eyes
 Saw far, and even then you did decide
 To join him. A coward you, unfit
 For martial deeds! your heart is full of dark
 Designs, and you do love my hated foes,
 Belying your race: methinks the cobra is
 Less deadly than you. Yet I kill you not
 Fearing reproach. But open not your lips
 Again, and leave me straight! If you do show
 Your face in these my realms, you die at once! (6:4:4,6,7- 9)*

Vibhishana at once rose up by his Rakshasas power into the sky, but even yet his heart yearned for his brother. He again spoke to him of righteousness, but Ravana would not listen to him. And so, saying, 'I intended nothing but your good, but you will not listen: forgive my boldness, I go,' he flew with four of his councilors towards where Rama was encamped on the mainland with his Vanara army.

He saw the army and asked his councilors what they should do. They said that they must see the Holy One, and he accepted their opinion saying:—

'Let us take refuge in Rama's feet and then we shall be freed from the cycle of birth and death.' (6:4:20)

He waited till the day dawned, approached the camp, and standing in front of it cried aloud, 'O Raghava, I take refuge in you!' But the Vanara guards mistook him and his companions for enemies and wanted to fight them. The cry, however, had fallen on the ears of Rama and he immediately sent a messenger to ascertain who was in distress. The messenger ordered the guards to desist from molesting the Rakshasas and after ascertaining from Vibhishana all that was necessary to know, returned and told Rama all that he had gathered. Rama now called a war-council and asked each of his friends to give his opinion as to whether Vibhishana should be admitted to their camp or no. After much discussion, Rama, as the reader will remember, accepted Hanuman's opinion and desired Vibhishana to be brought in. When Sugriva came and told Vibhishana that Rama had given him refuge and invited him to his presence,

*Tears fell down Vibhishana's sable cheeks,
 Joy filled his anxious heart, and his hair stood
 On end; and thus unburdened he his mind:
 'Did He accept my homage, even mine,
 Who am the brother of him who parted Sita
 From Him? Or did He pity feel, because*

*I come a refugee from Ravana's wrath?
Unworthy though I be, O sir, I am
By Rama's truth exalted high even as
The poison was when it was drunk by Shiva.
If this should be His mercy's way, and this
The counsel of His noble heart, then doomed,
Alas, is all our Rakshasas race!
The blessed Hero, Savior of the men
Of holy life, has pledged His word august
And has accepted me His devotee!
Great is my blessing, for I'm saved from cycle
Of birth and death and aye from the burning pit! ' (6:4:125 – 127,129)*

Vibhishana was in due course ushered into Rama's presence and accepted by him as a brother.

Rama then solemnly crowned him as King of Lanka, declaring that the sovereignty of Lanka would rest in him so long as his own name would last on earth. And all the worlds shouted for joy.

Valmiki motives Rama's acceptance of the Rakshasa to a large extent on the tantra of Bheda — i.e. the policy of taking over to his side the person who has become the enemy of one's enemy. For although — as Valmiki tells the story — Rama tells the war-council that he will never turn out any person who comes to him as a friend even though he may have many faults, yet when Sugriva objects to him as a traitor to his brother, and therefore unworthy of faith, he says:—

*'The Rakshasa desires sovereignty; and people of this stamp are usually very clever. . . .
He fears for his fate in his native country and that is why he takes refuge with me giving
up his brother.'*

After Sugriva has again reiterated his original objections — which appear to be, from the standpoint of dramatic construction, entirely superfluous and untimely because Rama's decision has been already very clearly expressed and Sugriva brings forward no new arguments — Rama gives utterance to those grand words which are so highly prized by all Vaishnavas, among which occurs the sentence:—

*When a man filled with fear
Seeks refuge at my hands, I never say nay,
I give him protection — that is my vow — so
Bring him in whether it be Vibhishana or even
Ravana himself.⁷³*

The effect of this noble *abhaya-pradāna*⁷⁴, however, is almost utterly spoiled when Valmiki makes Rama ask Vibhishana, at the very moment that he falls at his feet, to tell him all about the defenses of Lanka and the army of the Rakshasas.

⁷³ Griffith translates thus:—

"Bound by a solemn vow I swear
That all my saving help should share
Who sought me in distress and cried,
'Thou are my hope, and none beside.'
Then go, I pray thee, Vanar King,
Vibishan to my presence bring.
Yea, were he Ravan's self, my vow
Forbids me to reject him now.

⁷⁴ Offering protection from fear and danger.

That Valmiki depicts Vibhishana as partly at least attracted to the side of Rama by his desire to usurp his brother's throne would appear from the words that he puts into his mouth when he sees Rama and Lakshmana fallen on the battle-field wounded by the arrows of Indrajit. Among other things Vibhishana, in Valmiki, says:—

*'Those two warriors on whose valor I counted
So much for the sake of my advancement
Are now fallen on the field and are dead.
Today I live a ruined man, with all
My dreams of sovereignty gone forever.'*⁷⁵

These words, taken along with Rama's quoted before, make of Vibhishana little more than a common traitor who has had the good fortune of having foreseen in time the sure ultimate victory of Rama. And this should explain the bad odor that surrounds the name of Vibhishana among modern critics of the Ramayana in Bengal. But in the south, where the cult of Rama as the avatar of Vishnu, if it did not actually take its origin, at least found its greatest devotees of genius in the early centuries of the *Salivahana* era,⁷⁶ the character of Vibhishana was seen from a standpoint widely different from what would be justified by the delineation of Valmiki. He began to be looked upon as the great Bhakta of Rama, instead of as a selfish adventurer. And it is as a Bhakta that Kamban delineates him. That is why he takes care that he does not anywhere put into his mouth such selfish sentiments as Valmiki does not hesitate to put. That is why he elaborates his remonstrations with Ravana to such an extent. And that is why, again, he does not allow his Rama to speak of Vibhishana as coveting his brother's throne, or to begin to discuss with him the defenses of Lanka at the very moment of his giving his *abhaya*.

Kamban, of course, makes Rama obtain from Vibhishana every information concerning Ravana and Lanka. But Rama, in Kamban, does not attempt to obtain such information at once or of his own initiative. After Vibhishana had been admitted into Rama's friendship, Kamban describes Rama as lamenting once again over the separation of Sita. As Rama is thus lamenting, Sugriva comes to Rama and lightly reprimands him saying:—

*'How is it that you are thus indulging in vain laments when you ought to be up and doing
after learning all that we can from him who has lately joined us as an ally?'*

It is only after this that Rama invites Vibhishana to tell him all about Lanka.

By all these devices the sentiments of the critical reader are bespoke in favor of Vibhishana and Vibhishana's character is saved from the charge of treachery that the circumstances of his position inevitably bring against it.

It is not that Kamban does not realize that Vibhishana can be delineated as, at least in part, a self-centered adventurer. He has studied his Valmiki, too closely for that. He does realize the possibility of such a delineation and it is this realization that makes him consciously and deliberately remove the possibility of such an impression being created by some of Vibhishana's actions. So, when Lakshmana falls on the field bound by the cobra -noose, —Kamban puts this lament in the mouth of Vibhishana:—

⁷⁵ Griffith translates as follows:—

I on their might for aid relied,
And in my cause they fought and died.
Lost is the hope that soothed each pain:
I live, but live no more to reign,
While Lanka's lord, untouched by ill,
Exults in safe defiance still.'

⁷⁶ beginning from 78 A.D.

*'By side of Lakshmana are fallen all
 Upon the field, and I alone remain
 Untouched: O! What will people say of me?
 The world will surely think I stood by him
 Alone to have him killed by Indrajit,
 Myself a false-faced spy betraying all
 To my brother's son. Me miserable! With mace
 I did not rush upon the foe and bring
 Him to the ground, and prove my valor.
 Nor quitted I this cursed life when I
 Beheld my Lakshmana fall: and still I weep
 As if my heart is full of love! If I
 Had joined in the fight, I could have shattered
 The Rakshasas force, and proved my loyal heart
 To Rama. Now neither am I loyal and true
 To the land that gave me birth, nor to the Men
 With whom I refuge took. I am become
 A faggot that burns at both its ends! (6:18:209–212)*

Owing to the delicacy of his position, Vibhishana does not take part in the actual fighting in any of the battles. It is only after Indrajit aims at him his lance in his third battle that he forgets himself and strikes his chariot and horses down with his mace. But it is he, as the reader will remember, that advises Lakshmana at every critical moment as to what weapon to use and generally what to do. That is why Rama exclaims to Lakshmana when Indrajit's head is brought before him after the last battle:—

*"It's not your arms, O lion among men, that brought
 The foe of Indra down; nor owe we this
 Triumph to blessing of a god, or might
 Of Hanuman though great as Shesh himself:—
 It is Vibhishana with his counsel sage
 That's guided us to victory! ' (6:27:71)*

In order to increase the interest of the reader in Vibhishana, Kamban adds some able touches to a scene suggested by Valmiki⁷⁷ in the crude, and at a single stroke raises heaven-high the characters of Vibhishana, Angada, Hanuman, Sugriva, and especially of Lakshmana, and gives them the stamp supreme of Indian heroism. While in one part of the field Rama was fighting single-handed the whole reserve force of Ravana, Ravana marched with a big army against the Vanaras led by Lakshmana. When every other weapon had failed against Lakshmana, Ravana took the *Mohana-astra*, the unfailing missile created by Brahma with which even Shiva was conquered by Manmatha, and sent it against Lakshmana. It would have ended him then and there had he not, at the suggestion of Vibhishana, parried it with the only weapon that had power over it, namely, the *Narayana-astra*. Seeing his brother, whom he regarded as the blackest traitor imaginable, ruin his only chance of victory at the time when it was so near, Ravana burned with anger and hurled against him the deadly lance called *Shakti* which could not be parried by any missile in the three worlds. The lance came cleaving the air with a mighty force, and Vibhishana who knew its secret told Lakshmana that nothing could withstand it and that therefore his end was come.

*'But', Lakshmana said, 'You know my skill, fear not,
 Be sure I'll break its force,' and aimed his arrows*

⁷⁷ Book VI, Canto 101, Southern Recension

*Against the rushing lance. But impotent
They fell, as sinners' curses against the man
Of life austere. Great Lakshmana saw, and quick
As thought, he stepped before Vibhishana
To shield him from the deadly arm. For death
Was naught to him: but could he bear the thought
Of seeing him destroyed before his eyes
Who fearing the vengeance of a brother had taken
Refuge with Rama? And what is fleeting life,
Thought he, when weighed 'against lasting glory earned.
By sacrifice of self? But could the good
Consent to save themselves at other's cost?
Vibhishana rushed before: but Angada
Outstripped them both, while Hanuman and the king
Of Vanaras sprang in front to face the lance.
But Lakshmana would not change his first resolve
And rushing past them all received its point
Upon his mighty chest. It pierced him through
From front to back and felled him down. (6:31: 28-32.)*

Vibhishana was touched to see Lakshmana fall while saving his own life, and mace in hand he dashed against Ravana and struck down his horses and charioteer. But Ravana rose into the sky, and seeing Lakshmana fallen a prey to his lance, a better result than what he had intended to achieve, he did not care to aim at Vibhishana whom he despised as a coward; and proud of his victory he flew over to his palace inside the walls of the city.

To resuscitate Lakshmana, Kamban, like Valmiki, sends Hanuman again to the Sanjivi hills to bring the healing drugs. But while Valmiki describes the flight of Hanuman in the same detailed fashion as he had done the previous one, and makes him look for the hill — he having lost his bearings — , Kamban with great tact relieves the reader, who is fearing a repetition of past descriptions, by describing the flight and return in half a stanza.

When Rama heard what had happened, his heart leaped with joy. He embraced his brother and said:—

*'By fearless sacrifice, without a thought
Of self, of your precious life for him who has
his safety sought with us, you have, my brother,
Proved yourself worthy child of Raghu's race:
Who can your greatness measure? We can but try
To follow you. You have in truth surpassed
Even him our great ancestor who the dove
Redeemed with his own bleeding flesh. What more?
You have the saying proved, my child, that men
With truth-filled heart would rush through fire to save
Their own from grief, even as the cow would face
The tiger and the lion to save its calf.' (6:31:48,49)*

The love of Lakshmana and Rama has cast a halo round the name of Vibhishana and the whole of Vaishnava India has included him in its catalogue of saints and Bhaktas. But the loyalty of Kumbhakarna to his nation and to his king makes him the more interesting and the more lovable of the two brothers of Ravana. For, though he upbraids Ravana for his crime in carrying off Sita and

retaining her in Lanka, he would not leave his side and betray his secrets to his enemy though he comes to know that enemy to be God himself in human form.

At the war-council, in Valmiki, Kumbhakarna's speech is not properly worked up. There he charges Ravana with having provoked the war without having consulted his ministers. He does not at all touch upon the moral aspect of the affair in his speech which does not fit in either with what goes before or what comes after. After saying that, although his brother had got into a scrape, he would yet destroy his enemies, Kumbhakarna prophesies⁷⁸ that by a second arrow Raghava would kill him, that is Kumbhakarna.⁷⁹ But in the very next sentence he continues,

*Then I shall drink his blood..... I shall kill
Rama and Lakshmana and eat up the Vanara chiefs.
Therefore enjoy all luxuries, drink wine, and attend
To your royal duties without any further anxiety.
When I send Rama to his doom, Sita will become
Yours forever.'*

Ravana, however, fights his first battle without Kumbhakarna who had gone in the meanwhile into his deep sleep of months. When he is defeated, he wakes Kumbhakarna from his sleep and prays to him in abject tones to take the field against Rama and Lakshmana. But now Kumbhakarna speaks in quite a different tone altogether. He speaks now of Dharma and Adharma and says that Ravana would go to hell for his unrighteousness and then makes a long-winded speech about the necessity of consulting one's ministers and advisers before entering upon a big undertaking. He winds up, by asking Ravana to follow the advice that Vibhishana had given in the beginning. When he ends, Ravana frowns upon him, talks some commonplace and then begs him to 'repair my errors with your valor.' When he hears these words, Kumbhakarna without any more ado asks him to give up his fears, for he will fight and kill Rama and Lakshmana and drive the Vanaras out of Lanka. 'Fear Rama no more,' he says with a patronizing air, 'I shall finish Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman,' etc.⁸⁰

But Kamban has given quite a different character to Kumbhakarna. At the war-council Kamban's Kumbhakarna condemns the unrighteousness of keeping Sita in Lanka, but, as the enemy had been provoked and war had become inevitable, he proposes that although it was impossible to conquer him who had killed Khara, they should cross the sea and attack Rama in force on the mainland itself. His Rakshasa pride makes him say:—

'You have left the path of the righteous and you have made us hang down our heads: but if at this stage we send away the fair Sita we shall be merely called cowards. It does not matter if we die, for, then our fame at least would remain unsullied.' (6:2:53.)

⁷⁸ This must be due to some interpolation in the text. It is unfortunate that the editors of the Valmiki Ramayana have not given the same attention to the text in this passage as they have given generally to the whole poem.

⁷⁹ Griffith, however, renders differently:—

"No second arrow shall Rama cast:
The first he aims shall be his last:
He falls, and these dry lips shall drain
The blood of him my hand has slain;
And Sita, when her champion dies,
Shall be your undisputed prize." (P)

⁸⁰ To add to the anarchy of the situation, Valmiki makes Mahodara, one of the councillors of Ravana, reprimand Kumbhakarna for opposing Ravana like a child, and Mahodara does this after Kumbhakarna had changed his mind and agreed to start for the field!

But, in Kamban also as in Valmiki,⁸¹ he does not go to the field on the first day of the war as another spell of his long sleep had come over him, and Ravana believed that he could win the war without him. When, however, Ravana finds his enemy's strength by bitter experience, he has Kumbhakarna awakened from his sleep, and after feeding him with cart-loads of meat and casks full of wines asks him to march against the Vanara army. The words of Vibhishana which he had heard at the time of the war-council must be supposed to have impressed themselves upon Kumbhakarna's mind and entered deeply into his soul during his hibernation, for, he addresses Ravana now in quite a different strain altogether. He speaks in this way:—

*'Is war begun, and grief of Sita, chaste
Beyond compare, is it un-ended yet?
Is our good name that filled the earth and heaven
Become a story of the past? And day
Of our final doom foretold, has it begun
To dawn?
Your sin has Heaven's king restored to his throne
And brought the Rakshasas race to ruin's edge.
And Devas you have freed from Rakshasas yoke!
Destruction hangs over you and all your house,
Inevitable. The Dharma that did build
Your power has fled before your eyes: now what
Can prop your tottering throne? your foes are full
Of truth; their every act is based on Dharma;
And courtesy is in their speech. Can we
Who know but guile, untruth and sin, hope ever
To last? And can they ever be overwhelmed?
The ape who storm-like could the ocean leap
Is yet alive; Rama's quiver holds yet
The arrow that tore great Vali's chest. What more
Want we for our success?
One final word
I'll say to you. If you would hear, it'll do
You good. If you would not, I fear your fate
Is doomed. So send this damsel to her spouse
And falling at his feet, conciliate

Your brother and live in peace. If this you hate
To do, and do decide to fight to the end,
Battle at least with all your forces joined,
And try to overwhelm the foe.'* (6:15:83–89)

But all this advice is only gall and wormwood to the proud Ravana.

*"It's not to consult you," said he, "that I
Did call you here". I bid you go and fight
The men: are you a councilor sage, that you
Presume to give advice? A craven you,
Afraid to face the foe in battle! I've filled
Your gluttonous mouth with flesh and flowing wine:
Now close complete your drowsy, falling lids*

⁸¹ But Valmiki makes Indrajit's triumphs with his cobra-noose and other weapons precede the flight with Kumbhakarna. In fact there is much that is anticlimactic in Valmiki's description of the war.

*And go to sleep! Vibhishana's gone before:
Follow you him and fall at the feet of men
And hunch-backed monkeys all. Such glory well
Becomes Vibhishana your brother and you! '
He said, and turning to the waiting heralds
Burst forth, 'Bring now my chariot, and send
This challenge out by beat of drum: let earth
And heaven combine in aid of Rama; I am
Prepared to meet them on the gory field! ' (6:15:90–93)*

So saying, stood up and made ready to start for the field, but Kumbhakarna stopped him. And taking his mighty trident in his hand, he fell at his brother's feet and thus spoke to him:–

*'Forgive me, my brother, I go: but I hope not
For victory against the Men. It's fate
That drives me on. This day will be my last
Upon the earth. But brother, at least when I'm
No more, release the human damsel fair.
I see no other way. (6:15: 94)*

As he is thus speaking, a prophetic vision comes on him and he continues:–

*"Our Indrajit, I see, will fall by arrow
Of Lakshmana, brother of Rama. And all that him
Survive, behold they're scattered like the dust
Against the angry storm. If me they beat,
My brother, it's certain they will vanquish you.
It's only fools repent when all is lost:
Be wise in time and send her back to Ram.
And Dharma also points that way.
If from our childhood up to now, my king, I have
Ever offended you, I pray to you
With folded hands, forgive your erring brother!
My heart doth tell me, brother, this meeting is
Our last. These eyes, alas, will look no more
Upon your dear face! I take your leave." (6:15:86-98.)*

He left the presence followed by the tear-filled eyes of Ravana and those about him. He then ascended his car and marched at the head of a vast army. Rama saw his colossal form from far away, and, amazed, asked Vibhishana who and what he was. After saying that he was his own elder brother and that he was the terror of the gods, Vibhishana added that he had like himself advised Ravana to send back Sita, but that, though Ravana had refused to listen to his advice, he had decided to fight and perish on the field. Sugriva, who was by, suggested now that they should try to separate him from Ravana and win him over to their side. Rama agreed, and as they were thinking as to who was the fit person to approach him, Vibhishana offered to go himself.

The whole of this scene between Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana is Kamban's own invention, and he has worked it up grandly. He brings out beautifully the contrast between loyalty to a losing cause and loyalty to Dharma but which is coupled with disloyalty to one's king and brother. Vibhishana passed the pickets of the Rakshasa army and sent word to his brother that he was come to see him. Kumbhakarna, while he was sorry, unknowing his purpose, that Vibhishana had left Rama's camp, was yet delighted to have the opportunity of casting a last look upon his brother, and ordered him to be brought before him. Vibhishana came in and saluted his brother by falling at his feet.

*He lifted up the brother that clasped his feet,
 And folding him unto his breast, he thus
 Addressed him: 'I was glad to learn, my brother,
 That you had left our doomed camp and taken
 Refuge with Rama. Why leave you now his side,
 you innocent, and come to us that rush
 Headlong into the jaws of death? Will you
 Exchange your nectar for our poison black?
 Although our glory's sun is set for ever,
 I thought Pulastya's⁸² race would be redeemed
 By you, and I was glad. But you have dried
 My lips and broke my heart by your return.
 You have thrown yourself at their feet who are
 The props of Dharma, and they will never give
 You up, even when it means their death.
 You're freed from curse of death so long as men praise Rama,
 And you have escaped the curse of Rakshasas birth:
 What further craving then does bring you here?
 By serving the One Supreme with all your soul
 You have the blessing gained of holy life
 And pure: will you yet look on us as kin
 Who hanker after others' wives? Great Brahma
 Has blessed you with a righteous heart, my child,
 And wisdom unsurpassed; while Rama's word
 Has given everlasting life. And still you're here:
 I fear they have not cured the cravings low
 Of your Rakshasas birth!*
*If you spurn the shelter he has given
 And cast your lot with us, pray tell me, brother,
 When all the Rakshasas race is swept from off
 The face of the earth by Rama's furious arrows,
 Who will be there to offer sacrifice
 To our Manes? Go back, therefore, to Raghava
 And enter Lanka after it is purged
 Of all this sinful crew; and, crowned by Ram
 Enjoy a reign of glory unsurpassed.'* (6:15:130-135, 137, 138.)

Vibhishana heard to the end and told his brother the purpose of his visit in these words: 'The grand-souled hero who his mercy sweet.

*Has showered on me unworthy, will accept
 Your homage too, if you will come to him,
 And save you from the cycle of birth and death.
 The crown that he has offered me, I'll place
 At your feet, and serve you as my king and lord,
 For you are elder born. you will not hear:
 But death is certain if you stand against
 Rama. When he his naming shafts does send,*

⁸² One of the mind-born sons of Brahma, and the first ancestor of Ravana and his brothers.

*Can you escape? And whither can you fly?
 Throw not, therefore, your life away, my brother,
 But base your ways upon the eternal Veda.
 The righteous care not whether it is father, mother,
 Or child, but cut themselves away, if these
 Persist in mortal sin*
*For crime of one, shall we that know no guilt
 Ruin ourselves by fighting on his side?
 And holy Parashuram, did he not kill
 His very mother for her sin? Even Shiva
 Cut off great Brahma's head when he from right
 Did swerve: you're wise, learn you upon them. Shall we
 Support a heinous crime and choose the way
 That leads to hell? The flesh diseased that grows
 Upon our body we cut off and burn
 If we would keep the body whole: do ever
 The wise mix paste of sandalwood to change
 The stench of ocean stream?
 You cannot hope to save your brother now.
 And even if fight with all your former strength
 What would it all avail? you may throw
 Your life away: you may matter give
 For vassal gods to mock: but in the end
 Will aught but Hell receive your departed soul?
 Though great your valor, you have not tasted joys
 Of sovereign power, but wasted all your youth
 And manhood in unbecoming sleep. And now
 Desire you to fight for sin, and waste
 Your life itself? O brother, follow me:
 The time itself is ripe; and blessed by Rama
 Conquer your sleep and gain eternal life
 And sovereignty which is your right. Perhaps,
 You think it disgrace to owe your crown
 To Rama. But know that He is God of gods
 Himself, who's born as man to establish Dharma. . . .
 If you would come to Rama you would earn
 The friendship of the gods and blessings choice
 Of Rishis; and none would dare to injure you.
 And joy would come to you that knows no end.
 It's he that in the fullness of his love
 And mercy sent me here. Do ever the wise
 Go gathering flowers when fruits hang ripe upon
 The tree? Abandon you therefore the camp
 Of Sin and follow me.' 6:15: 139-142, 144-150, 152, 153.*

So saying, Vibhishana again fell at Kumbhakarna's feet. The great heart of Kumbhakarna was touched, but the resolution of his mind was not shaken. So, taking up his brother and embracing him once again, he thus spoke to him while tears flowed down freely from his sable cheeks:—

*'Can I refuse to give my life for him
 Who all these years has cherished me, and now*

*Has sent me to the field to fight? Is life
 So dear, that's transient as the wavelets playing
 On the flowing stream? So if you want to heal
 My sorrow, brother, tarry not, but do
 Return to Rama. By great devotion you
 Received from Brahma the blessing of a heart
 That's free from thoughts of sin: the crown therefore
 Of all the worlds does well befit your head.
 But I'm a sinner born, and Fate is just
 That dooms me to death; — and it will crown
 My head with glory's light, my sole delight.
 When kings do swerve from virtue, it's but right
 To chide and try to turn their hearts from sin.
 But if they would not hear, can those who have
 Their bounties tasted see their masters run
 To ruin, unmoved? No, when the enemies press,
 They'll gird their swords, and seek their fate upon
 The field before he falls fore doomed. When Rama
 Does aim his fatal arrows, and Ravana falls
 Embracing the earth; surrounded by his kin
 And loyal troops, shall he a brother lack
 To fall with him, — he who the worlds and gods
 Without a rival ruled? And when his arms
 That lilted sheer the rock of Shiva are tied
 With cruel cords by messengers of Death,
 Shall he with downcast eyes approach the throne
 Of Yama, his vassal even today, without
 A brother by his side?
 And can I brook —
 Even I who have defeated the God of Death
 Himself — can I consent to pass my days,
 Singing with an aching heart the praise of him
 Who will have pierced my brother's mighty chest? . .
 So tarry not, my child; and if you have
 Regard for me, or love, return to Rama,
 Abide with him. Think not I can be turned
 From my resolve by further words. Now go:
 And when we're dead, (this is my dying prayer)
 Do propitiate our Manes with Vedic rites, and save
 Us from the gates of hell. Weep not, my brother
 When time doth smile on us, all things we touch
 Are turned to gold: but when the tide has fled
 Despite our every care we rush to ruin,
 Helpless. What can I tell you more whose eyes
 See straight and clear? So do not pity us
 Nor waste your tears, but go from hence in peace. (6:15: 155-160, 164.)*

He ended, and embracing Vibhishana once again he said with tears flowing down his cheeks unchecked,

'This day does break forever the tie that bound

Us from our childhood's days!' (6:15: 167)

Vibhishana's tongue was parched. Tears filled his eyes and his heart was big with unspeakable grief. But as Kumbhakarna was firm in his resolve, he saw that he could not do anything more to change his mind, and so he fell at his feet once again and without a word turned back his step towards Rama's camp. All the Rakshasa soldiers at every step joined their hands in Worship as he passed by.

Kumbhakarna was glad that he went back, but the actual fact of separation broke his heart, and his eyes rained blood, the very fountains of his tears being dried up!

But soon he recovers his poise and the fight begins. The fight is described in the best style of Kamban but we shall not describe it elaborately as we have to claim the attention of the reader for many more single combats and battle-pieces yet. Still we do not desire to deprive him of the enjoyment of some of the great challenges of the heroes with which this canto abounds. And so we shall describe this battle as briefly as possible.

After the common Vanaras and Rakshasas had fallen on either side, and Nila the commander-in-chief of the Vanara forces had been knocked down by Kumbhakarna with the left-hand — he did not aim his trident against him because the Vanara was unarmed — Angada, the son of Vali, came to the attack. He took up a mighty rock and hurled it with force against the Rakshasa to the amazement of the gods who cried, ' The end of Ravana's brother is come! ' But Kumbhakarna received it on his adamantine shoulders, and the rock broke into a thousand fragments. The Vanaras who saw the strength of the Rakshasa by this proof fled in terror. But Angada stood his ground and caught by the hand the huge mace that his foe threw at him, while the Devas blessed him and admired his strength and skill. With the same mace in his hand he sprang upon the chariot of Kumbhakarna, intending to pound him to death with it. But Kumbhakarna eyed him in wrath, and asked him:—

*'Are you the king of Vanaras flocked from far
To leave their bones to whiten on our coast?
Or may you be his son? Or are you he
Who burned our city fair and triumphed over
Our heroes bold? Declare at once.'* (6:15:191)

Angada replied:—

*'Know me to be the son of him who caught
Your brother with his vice-like tail, and flew
Lightly to the oceans four to worship Shiva,
The while your brother breathless struggled against
His strangling hold. Behold I'm come to end
You here; and what my father to your brother
Did, I propose to do to you: for I
Shall lift your carcass with my coiling tail
And place it reeking at my Rama's feet.'* (6:15:192.)

And then,

*'Your thought is just,' said laughing Kumbhakarna,
'For verily the world will laugh at you
If you fight not for him who from a cover
Concealed did kill your parent innocent
With a single arrow. Now that you fight this war —
For your father's foe — the chivalry of the world*

*Will sure acclaim you bravest of the brave!
But I believe you speak not the truth:
You cannot even dream of touching me.
Much less would hope to fly with me to Ram.
I fancy it's your wish to taste the point
Of my fell trident that has in the past
The front of Devas oft pierced, and fall
Supine, your hands and feet throwing wild
Even like your tail! ' (6:15:193,194)*

Angada did not care to reply, but struck a thundering blow upon the rock-like body of Kumbhakarna with the captured mace. But the mace broke into a hundred fragments, and the Rakshasa stood unmoved as if nothing had happened. Angada now aimed a blow with his fist, but his enemy guarded himself and knocked him down senseless with his own fist. Angada was removed from the field by his friends, but Hanuman appeared on the scene just at that minute. He lifted up a massive rock and aimed it against Kumbhakarna's head. But Kumbhakarna caught it in his hands and sent the same with force against Hanuman. The rock broke into fragments when it struck the chest of Hanuman, giving out sparks like the iron hammered on the blacksmiths anvil. Hanuman now uprooted another and heavier rock and, poising it in his hand, addressed his enemy thus:—

*'This rock I hurl at you: if from its shock
You can escape alive, the world will count
Your might invincible, and I shall deem
Myself defeated at your hands, and face
You not again in battle; and great will be
Your fame on earth.' (6:15: 200.)*

Kumbhakarna laughed and thus replied:—

*'What speak you of shock and life and death?
I tell you this: I'll let it strike my frame:
If when it strikes I move from where I stand
The breadth of a single hair, I shall admit
Defeat, and own myself, a weaker one
Than you! ' (6:15: 201.)*

Hanuman now threw his rock, but Kumbhakarna did not move. He received it on his mighty shoulder and, behold, it broke into fragments to the terror of all the worlds. Hanuman kept his word, and went away crestfallen.

The reader will remember that Lakshmana now fought with the Rakshasa and broke his bow and chariot and that the reinforcements sent by Ravana separated them. In the melee, Kumbhakarna found himself opposed by Sugriva, whom he soon overpowered and caught in his arms. He looked upon his capture as very lucky, as the Vanara host would lose heart if he could remove him from the field altogether. So he hurried towards the fort carrying Sugriva, who had already swooned in his hands. Hanuman followed hesitating to fight, as he respected his own word that he would not fight with him again. But Rama had already been apprised of Sugriva's plight, and bow in hand he" came to the rescue of his friend and built an impassable wall, solely with his fast-flying arrows, across the path of the Rakshasa. Unable now to move forward, the latter now turned round and seeing Rama challenged him thus:—

*'Think you I am Kabandha, or Vali the ape
Who lived on flowers, that you dare to cross*

*My path and hope to throw me down? Come you
 To free Sugriva? I scorn to fight your brother
 Or Hanuman or Vali's son: for where's
 The glory in defeating them? I searched
 For you all over the field, but nowhere were
 You found: your forces fled, your brother deemed
 It wise to seek some other foes; while son
 Of Vayu lost his gauge and slunk away.
 Sugriva came my way, and lo, I have.
 Him in my arms a prisoner tight. I thank
 The luck that brought you here. I mean to send
 You to the doom that others of our foes
 Have found before, and free my brother's heart
 Of all anxiety. What more of words?
 I challenge you in sight of gods to loose
 My iron hold and free this luckless ape
 By force of your much-praised arrows. If can,
 I shall agree that Sita too will be
 Freed from her garden prison.' (6:15: 281-285.)*

Rama laughed and thus replied:—

*.....'If I cannot cleave in two
 Those arms that captured have my friend and brother,
 I shall hold myself beaten: I shall fight
 No more with you.' (6:15: 286.)*

So saying he sent two arrows which wounded the Rakshasa in his forehead. Blood gushed from his wounds as water from mountain springs, and Kumbhakarna fell unconscious. The touch of warm blood awakened Sugriva from his swoon, and he released himself from the slackened arms of Kumbhakarna; and like the monkey that he was, he bit his nose and ears and sprang back to where Rama was. The pain brought Kumbhakarna back to consciousness, and bitten with shame and roused to wrath he took his sword and buckler and rushed against Rama and the Vanara troops. The Vanaras died or fled in thousands. Rama disarmed him with his arrows but soon reinforcements came and the battle was prolonged. The Rakshasa host, however, was like stubble before the fire of Rama's arrows, and soon Rama was again face to face with Kumbhakarna and asked whether he would now at least submit and join him, or whether he would flee towards Lanka. Though a little disfigured by fancy, and a little wanting in taste in some portions, the spirit of the reply of Kumbhakarna is grand and proud. He said:—

*'It needs not that I speak of other things:
 But can I care to live with disfigured face
 Even like my sister, whom your brother and you
 Attacked and maimed when she had none
 To help? The haughty eyes of gods lay quenched
 For ages by our arms: that this might last
 Forever, I prayed my brother to release
 Sita, your spouse: unheeded in the council
 Of the wise, my tongue and voice were quenched
 For once and all, but this I bore though grief
 Did eat my heart. But can I now endure
 My life, and shall I seek my death to escape*

*When quenched is my nose by feeble foes?
 You counsel flight: but having taken the field
 For to drink your blood, and let my brother win
 The fair he loves, now shall I move the gods
 To laughter by lamentations loud addressed
 Even like my sister to my brother? Although
 You are the peerless one, unique in all
 The worlds, are not a knight immaculate
 By instinct come of human birth? Know not
 The duties of the knight, whatever his race
 Or clime? Then tell me have I other course
 Than fall on you and take your head from off
 Your trunk?' (6:15: 328-331)*

So saying he sent a massive rock whirling against Rama but Rama's arrows proved the stronger. Realizing now that he could not prevail against Rama, Kumbhakarna thought that the best way in which he could serve the cause of his brother was to destroy as many Vanaras as possible, and so he hurled shields and maces against the Vanaras and killed them by the thousand. But his time was come, and Rama, after tearing down his armor, sent a powerful arrow which brought down his right arm. Says Kamban:—

*Were heroes ever born like him? He took
 His brawny right arm severed in his left,
 And roaring like an angry lion, he dashed
 Into the Vanara host and felled them down
 In heaps. The Vanaras fled: the peopled worlds
 Now dreading more the severed arm than that
 Which yet remained, exclaimed, ' Though Rama stands
 With Kodanda bent, can our Vanara champions bold
 Escape their fearful fate today?' (6:15: 341, 342.)*

The Vanaras were flying for very life: the river of blood that was freely flowing from Kumbhakarna's colossal body floated: with many a carcass down to the sea: the amazed gods fled in, terror of his fury: but he rushed upon Rama with a force that threw down many a mansion and many a hill and sent back the sea for many a mile. But Rama coolly bent his bow and struck down his other arm also. Kumbhakarna, however, did not fall down or cease his struggle even then. With his feet he kicked and trampled and crushed down yet more thousands of the Vanara army. Soon another arrow flew from the bow-strings of Rama and cut off one of his feet.

But even then, with the remaining leg he leaped about and sent the Vanaras to their doom! The remaining leg also was severed by the arrows of Rama, but with his tongue the Rakshasa lifted up the massive rocks that were lying on the field and blew them all with all his might against the enemy and killed many of the Vanaras. Rama was struck with his inexhaustible strength and resource and devotion to his brother. But this feat was the last flicker of the dying forest-fire — the last rumbling of the dying.. volcano. Even his might was sinking and he lamented thus about the impending fate of his brother:—

*'A thousand Ravana's even cannot suffice
 To stand against my Lord and win: and here
 I lie, an armless, legless trunk, and see
 No way to further aid my brother. A life
 Of endless joy and luxury was his:
 Alas, I see its end approach, brought on*

By lust unholy.' (6:15:354)

Kumbhakarna's life of Rajasic activity was now over. The ineffable light of Sattva now lighted up his soul. With the advent of this light his habitual affection for Ravana sloughed off his mind and he addressed Rama in these words:—

*'You come of the race of him, my Lord,
Who weighed his flesh to save a luckless dove:
Would you refuse a dying prayer? My brother
Who has found refuge from our evil with you,
May he, O Rama, forever be your care!
Though he is Rakshasas born, his heart knows not.
The iniquity of Rakshasas birth. He has
Now come to you who are the Ancient One
Disguised in princely weeds: I pray you once
Again, protect him first and last. For Ravana
Who hopes yet to prevail against you, does hate
Vibhishana as a traitor black, and will
Attempt to end him though a brother born.
See, therefore, that Vibhishana does not leave
The side of Lakshmana or Hanuman,
Or your protective wings. Now for myself
I'll make a last request to you. Let not
The Rishis and the gods deride me, Sire,
For my face deformed: so shoot your powerful arrow
Clean through my neck, and send my severed head
To sink beneath the sea beyond the ken
Of living kind.' (6:15: 356-360.)*

Rama took pity on him and complied with his wish. With one arrow he brought down his head and with another having the force of a thunder-storm, he sent that hill-huge head flying through the air to sink into the ocean.

So ended the mighty Kumbhakarna. Instead of remaining very little more than a sleepy and gluttonous giant as Valmiki has left him, the mighty Rakshasa has become in the hands of Kamban a seer and a Bhakta, a tender-hearted brother, and a stern pursuer of duty. He reminds us of Bhishma and Kama in Indian story, and Hector of the Homeric Epic. He sees that his king and brother is fighting for injustice, and that Dharma is on the side of the enemy. In the natural conflict of duties that arises in this situation, he chooses to be true to the salt he had eaten. He foresees his fate, but will not flinch from it, though he knows, and his brother Vibhishana has shown, that he can save himself. He finds that he cannot 'refuse to give his life for him who all these years has cherished 'him, 'and now has sent him to the field to fight.' He cannot let Ravana, after having enjoyed prosperity that even the Devas envied, lack a brother to fall with him upon the field of battle. And above all, he cannot brook the idea of singing hallelujah to one who must kill his brother — though that one should be God Himself incarnate. In the end, when he dies, we hear the soft lyre of friendship and brotherly love mingling its strains with the trumpet of battle, and we love him both for his devotion to Ravana and for his affection and tenderness for Vibhishana.

CHAPTER 10

THE EPISODE OF HIRANYAKASHIPU



The episode of Hiranyakashipu is one of the few additions that Kamban has contributed to the story of the *Ramayana*.⁸³ His epic imagination was so filled with the colossal figures of the great Asura and his destroyer the Man-Lion, that he has alluded to them more than a dozen times in his grand similes. But he was not satisfied with these slight references and allusions, and wanted to describe the world-bestridding Asura and the Avatar that destroyed him in greater detail. And with his finely intuitive cultivated taste with regard to everything concerning the Architectonics of Poetry, he has placed this episode in the place that is most fitted for it. For what place would be more natural and more fitting for this episode than the speech of Vibhishana in the war-council in which he attempts to advise his brother to make peace with Rama? Here was an Asura endowed with far greater strength and enjoying greater power than Ravana, and yet he was destroyed by an Avatar of Narayana who was now incarnated again as Rama to destroy the evil ones of this generation. Should not Ravana learn a lesson from the fate of Hiranya?

This story is grandly described in the Seventh Skandha of the Bhagavata Purana and is a great favorite with all Bhaktas. But Kamban as usual would not follow his original in all its details, but would only retell the story in his own way, giving his own touches, so that the story becomes as much his own as it is Shuka's.⁸⁴

We must say that his description of Hiranya's physical proportions is marred by hyperbolic details of the worst type which defeat their own purpose; for they do not succeed in making an adequate and satisfying aesthetic impression on the mind. He says:—

The seven oceans of the universe, whose depths it is impossible to sound even with the joined trunks of two of the great elephants that support the universe, would only wet the feet of the great Asura when he walked in them. Where could he bathe? The waters of the rivers were too little for his colossal body: the waters of the seas were too bitter: the waters from the clouds he would not touch, for they were warm: he would therefore pierce the vault of the sky and bathe in the showers descending from the waters of the universe beyond. The hills of the rising and setting sun were the jewels in his ear-rings. He tried the Mandhara mountain with which the Devas and the Asuras had

⁸³ Indian readers of this book will, we are certain, feel proud to learn that far-off Paris, who, like Sita in Ravana's isle, had kept her soul and honour untarnished throughout Hitler's occupation, has so rapidly stepped back into her unchallenged position of the Queen of Culture that once again ambassador's of culture from all parts of the world are crowding into her court. There, in Paris, is published an excellent quarterly magazine, HIND, devoted purely to the rich and varied culture of Bharata-Khanda called India. Monsieur S. KICHENASSAMY (Sakti Sei.) has contributed to the second issue of the first volume a learned article on *Le Ramayana de Kamban — the Kamba Ramayana* — from which we quote certain sentiments here and elsewhere which accord so perfectly with those of Aiyar in the pages of this book. He says:—

" Etant donne egalement que le sujet m'a ete pose en ces termes: le Ramayana de Kamban, je m'efforcerais surtout d'opposer l'oeuvre tamoule a l'oeuvre sanskrite; cela me permettra d'elucider un point tres important: la valeur morale de l'oeuvre de Kamban."

Writing with special reference to the chapter on Hiranyakashipu, he voices Aiyar's — nay, the entire Tamil world's — pride when he says: "Irayappadalam " la chute inevitable du puissant Iranya devant la foi inbranlable de son fils Prahalada. Ce chapitre inconnu chez Valmiki est une creation stupefiante d'art et de genie: l'on eut consent! a prendre tout le Ramayana mais pas ce chapitre, car il couionne la plus belle pattie de l'oeuvre de Kamban, le Yudda Kandam. " — (P)

⁸⁴ In Vyasa's Bhagavata, the stories are always put into the mouth of Shuka who tells the stories to king Parikshit.

churned the Ocean of Milk to see if he could use it for a walking staff, but finding it too light for him he threw it away.

He had the combined force of all the five elements of creation. He would rule the sun and the moon. He would depute in his whim the god of one element to perform the functions of another. Drunk with power and pride, sometimes he would take the reins out of the hands of Vayu and rule the winds and storms; sometimes he would usurp the functions of Varuna and direct the movements of the oceans; at other times he would do the work of Indra or Agni, Yama or Nairruti, and even that of Ishana.⁸⁵ At every tread of his, the heads would be crushed of the thousand-headed *Adishesha* — the primeval Cobra that bears the earth on his- shoulders. When he walked, his crown would graze the vault of the sky. The very elements would dissolve and fly away when he strode along.

He ruled not this universe only that we see about us. The universe beyond also acknowledged his sovereignty and only his. Devas and Yogis, Rishis and even the Supreme Three — all were his vassals, and would live only by praising and blessing his name. By intense tapas he had obtained this awful power, and the blessing that nothing that could even be conceived by the mind should be able to kill him. He had placed his throne on the Meru mountain itself, and from that center he was ruling tyrannically over the universes without a second or a rival.

Many ages passed thus and at length a child was born to him whom he named Prahlada. While Prahlada was still in the womb, Narada the great Bhakta had taught his mother the truth that Narayana was the one supreme God and that love to Him was the only true salvation here and hereafter. The conscious child had stored the teaching in his heart, and from the moment of his birth he became a Bhakta — a devotee of the Supreme One. He grew in love and devotion, and in his fifth year he was sent by his father to study under the royal *guru*.

The guru began the teaching by asking the boy to pronounce the words 'Worship to Hiranya', for the tyrant in the pride of his heart had ordained that these words should be substituted for the words 'Worship to the One Supreme God Narayana ', with which words alone all studies had always been begun before his time. But the child of wisdom closed his eyes, and with tears of joy flowing down his cheeks cried out, ' om̐ namo Narayanaya' — Worship to the Supreme God Narayana. How could the cringing master tolerate such, sedition? These words fell like thunder upon his ears, and he cried out:—

'You have brought ruin on me, O sinful wretch! ' Is not the thought of self and the preservation of their own position safe from the wrath of the tyrant the primary thought and concern of all slave-minded teachers of all ages and climes? Our guru then continued,

*And you have dug a grave for your own self.
And where is it did learn to despise words
That even the gods repeat with loyalty
And love, and to pronounce those cursed words
That you did utter even now? ' (6:3: 24.)*

Prahlada replied,

*'I uttered but the name of Him who is
The root wherefrom all Vedas spring. Wherein,
O master, have I sinned? The name pronounced
Has brought salvation to myself and you
And even to my father and king.' (6:3: 25.)*

The master trembled, and conjured the boy to begin with blessing his father's name. He said:—

⁸⁵ Indra, Agni, Yama, Nairruti, Varuna, Vayu, Kuber and Ishana are the respective guardian deities of East and the rest of the eight cardinal points.

*'Your father, boy, is the sovereign liege of all:—
And even the ancient one who made the gods
His homages pays to him. You must begin
Therefore your studies with the holy name
Of Hiranya on your lips are wiser than
Your master? Ruin me not therefore, my boy,
By uttering once again the name that now
You uttered! ' (6:3: 26.)*

The child could not tolerate this blasphemy, and proclaimed: thus his faith:—

*'I'll honor naught, my master, but the name
Of the Lord Supreme. He has illumined my mind
And taken possession of my heart: when He
The Infinite One thus dwells in me, can aught
Be hid from me? If such there be, I'll learn
From you, so it is not opposed to truth.
Who else is worthy worship but the One
Whose praises fill the Brahman's' Veda, whose name
The knowing ones and sages, even gods
Repeat to escape the bonds of birth? I stand
Upon the rock to which the Vedas lead,
And jñāna⁸⁶ and sacrifice. What more is there
For me to know or learn? That bliss is mine
That's earned by those who meditate in caves
And forests, solitary, careless how
They eat or drink or dress. For what shall I
Endeavour more? Behold the men who serve
With loving heart the servants even of Him
Who measured with His feet the universe.
Though they should learning lack, their illumined soul
Can pierce the secrets of the Veda; and from
Their honeyed lips would flow ambrosial verse!
Now He has filled my heart, who is my Lord
And also yours, and Lord of all the worlds
And even of Brahma's self: all knowledge, sire,
Is therefore come to me: and for you too,
O master mine, this is the highest good:
I pray you, bow to Him! ' (6:3: 27–33.)*

The Brahmin master trembled with the thought that Hiranya would attribute all these ' seditious ' doctrines to his own teaching and put him to death. So he rushed to the Asura's presence like a scared man and thus addressed him with many a bow:—

*'Your humble servant prays to you, my lord,
Give ear: your son has uttered words that I
Cannot pronounce, even conceive in thought
Without endangering all my hope of earth
And heaven! And he has refused to read the Veda,
Saying he knows all that there is to know.' (6:3: 35)*

⁸⁶ Wisdom

Hiranya could not understand what the teacher meant, and asked him to repeat the words uttered by his son. But the terrified guru only mystified him still further by saying:—

*'If I those words before you utter, lord,
Words mortal to the ear to hear as venom
Of cobras to the blood, my sinful tongue
Would sure to ashes burn, and the pit of Hell
Would open wide its mouth for me.'* (6:3:37.)

Hiranya therefore ordered his son to be brought before him, and when Prahlada stood before him saluting, he embraced him with tenderness and love and asked him what he had said to provoke the teacher to anger. Prahlada told him:—

*'I only took the holy name of Him
Of Whom the Vedas witness bore when first
Was heard their sacred sound: and there unto
I only added this: whoso shall think
Or speak or hear of Him, shall cross the sea
Of misery, and higher good than this
There's none in all the world.'* (6:3:40.)

The words used by the poet to convey the idea contained in the first three verses of Prahlada's reply could also be interpreted to mean:—

*I only took the holy name of Him
Who stands without a rival, with which name
The great begin the chanting of Veda;*

and so Hiranya thought that there was nothing in his son's words for the Brahman to disapprove of. For it was with his name that, according to his ordinances, the chanting of the Vedas were being begun in those days. Yet, thinking that it was better to have it made clear, he asked Prahlada to pronounce the name itself. Then to his great and rising indignation he heard these bold words which his saintly son spoke:—

*'Would hear the words that fill all worldly wants?
Would hear the words that open the gates of heaven?
Would hear the words that give to sacrifice
Its virtue and the power to grant our wish?
Listen then, they're Aum Namō Narayanaya —
I bow my head to Narayana, the Lord Supreme.
Whenever Brahma, Shiva, or human whoso forgets
This mantra has forgot his Self. It's hard
To prove by signs; for they alone can know
Whose eyes see whole, whose heart is free from likes
And dislikes both. This mantra is the boat
That saves us from the eddying whirls of life,
And death, and endless pursuing deeds. It is
A jewel dear to all — the cream of all
There is to know in Veda. And so it is
These words I uttered loud, my father, that
You may be saved, and I, and all the world
With us.'* (6:3:44–46.)

The amazed Asura could hold his patience no longer and thus burst out:—

*'This scepter stern, my boy, beneath whose sway
 All worlds have lain in dread for ages past,
 Would straight have burned the tongue that spoke and mind
 That dared conceive these words seditious! Now speak:
 Declare, and quick, which rebel uttered them,
 Or taught the same to you? The sages, seers,
 And gods that dwell in all the moving worlds
 Do worship naught but these my feet — their vows
 And prayers are ever addressed alone to me,
 Their lord. Who told you he is God, who often
 Has come to try his strength with me, and who,
 As often defeated, has in panic fled,
 Thanks to old Garuda's powerful wings, and now
 Lies fast asleep somewhere in the Sea of Milk?
 Innumerable as the ocean sands
 Are those our fathers who, before I came
 To sovereign power, had been destroyed by him:
 Can good ever come to rats, perverse, if they
 Shall sing the praises of the hooded snake?
 My brother, who could, if he did please, devour
 The fourteen worlds, this Vishnu gored to death,
 Coming on him in shape a boar. Did I
 Beget you boy, to sing with joy the name
 Of him the enemy of our race, whose hands
 Are stained with our own blood? See you not me
 With power omnipotent endowed? Whence did
 You learn, you luckless wretch, what sight denies
 And every other sense, that there is one
 Above us who creates, sustains, destroys?
 There is no higher truth than this as Veda
 Itself will witness, that our actions yield
 Their proper fruit — the good deeds good, and ill
 Their ill appropriate. Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva,
 Who rose by their austerities to their
 Dominions in their proper worlds, have now
 By great efflux, of time their places lost;
 And by my proper tapas I am raised
 To sovereign power unrivalled over all
 The worlds: success despaired, now none does wish
 To endeavor after it, and all have sought
 Refuge from ill beneath my awesome throne!
 I've banished from my realms all sacrifice,
 And tapas, and all hankering after knowledge
 Forbidden. Him whom these do falsely praise
 You declare almighty. Who know not
 Security themselves, can ever they save
 Others? I pardon you your childhood's prattle:
 But cease henceforth such senseless talk, and learn
 In all humility, all that this sage
 Will in his wisdom teach.'* (6:3:47–56.)

Prahlada heard to the end with filial respect, though every word of his father's speech was a javelin to his heart. But when he had ended, he affirmed fearlessly, like Abdiel, the faith that was in his heart, and the truth as his intellect perceived it. He said:—

'The seed is the parent of the tree. . . Can we measure His greatness who creates all things within Himself, lives Himself apart, and yet immanent shines in all the work of His hands? He hath none before Him, and none there is after Him. Deathless is He!

.....

The mind cannot conceive Him — for the Upanishads declare He is beyond the logical intellect. Words cannot describe His nature as He is, nor is there another to whom, or which we can compare Him. How then can those who sense Him not uncover His secret?

He is action and her fruit, and He is ordainer too thereof. Whoso will know His greatness in his heart, will cross the sea of good and evil. ...

The cause He is that produces, and He is the effect also that is produced: but there is no *organon*⁸⁷ by which you can know what He is in Himself. The many see not His wonderful magic.

Behold, He is the scentless, seedless lotus, many-petalled and unique, blossoming on the stalk⁸⁸ studded with the fifty sounds — safely lying in the secret cave of all living kind from the Supreme Brahma downwards.....

He came as the single sound undifferentiated, and then, evolved as sound triune, and then became the Word⁸⁹

Time He is and Space. He is Cause and Instrument: He is Effect also and its Enjoyer! Virtue He is and the- glories that virtue brings. And behold His Power, He contains all creation within Himself as the seed contains the banyan tree.

He is the artist, and the world is His Vina. Within He is, and without, and yet nothing touches Him. And it is He that gives the Vedas.

He is the life of the unique sound Aum. He is the Light of the Inner Light..... He is the Fire and the worlds are the smoke.

He is the garland, and the religions and sects are the flowers thereof. But He is beyond the grasp of the fanatics. For he is the Ocean, and the sectarians know only the wave. And yet He is in the wave also!

And as I feared, father, that your vast power, and life itself, might vanish by your contempt for the Supreme Lord, I sang His praises that your days may be long and your power may be lasting.' (6:3: 58, 59, 62, 64, 69, 70, 72, 74-78.)

When Prahlada finished, Hiranya's rising rage burst into flame, throwing the very sun out of his sphere and the heavens out of their foundations. His eyes dropped blood. And, to the terror of all the worlds, he thundered out these words, fierce as the boiling poison of the sea:—

*'Have not I foe enough in him who's sprung
To my misfortune out of my own loins,*

⁸⁷ Instrument

⁸⁸ The stalk is the spinal cord. The lotus is the brain. The fifty primary sounds (letters) of the Samskrit alphabet are meditated on by yogis in the brain as well as in the different plexuses of the spinal cord.

⁸⁹ Nada — the mystic sound *Aum*. Also compare: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God;, and the Word was God." — The Gospel of St. John — I:i.

*And pays his worship and his love to him
Who is my foe of foes? Put him to death! ' (6:3: 80.)*

The ministers of his vengeance rose at once and, taking Prahlada into the open, aimed their most deadly weapons against him. But all of them feel powerless to harm him who in the midst of that iron-storm forgot not the loving utterance of the name of the Lord. When Hiranya was informed of this, he ordered them to light a big fire and throw him into the flames. They obeyed him, but

"... even as the words of the chaste Sita cooled the fire to Hanuman when we⁹⁰ set fire to his tail, even so did the repetition of the holy name make the fire feel cool to his fair body up to the very marrow of his bones". (6:3:86)

When the executioners told Hiranya that fire did not burn his son, he ordered them to throw the God of Fire into a dungeon and the boy into a pit containing the eight venomous cobras. The cobras were, therefore, set on Prahlada, but in whatever part of the body they bit him, drops of ambrosia exuded from the bitten flesh; and it was the fangs of the cobras that fell off, while he remained scatheless, unforgetful of the holy name.

Hiranya next ordered that an elephant should be driven against him and made to trample him under foot..... Indra himself, in fear, supplied his Airavata⁹¹ and the elephant came rushing on him in fury. As he came within earshot Prahlada addressed him thus:—

*'Remember, father Airavat, He dwells
Within the lotus of my heart, who flew
To save your kinsman struggling in the jaws
Of the fierce crocodile!'⁹²*

When Airavata heard these words, instead of knocking him down and trampling on him, he fell down on his knees and worshipped him. Hiranya ordered the elephant to be put to death for thus slighting his orders, and so in order to save himself he rose reluctantly and dashed against Prahlada. But lo, when the tusks but touched his golden body they broke to pieces and fell off even as if they were plantain stalks!

Hiranya then tried to drown Prahlada in the sea with a rock attached to his body, but the boy did not sink: he floated even as the Supreme One floats on the banyan leaf during the Great Deluge of the universe. Neither was the cup of poison that he gave him to drink able to kill Prahlada who drank it as if it were very *amrita*.

As nothing else appeared to have power over the child, Hiranya at last determined to kill him with his own hands. As he neared him wild with rage, the divine child fell at his feet and softly said,

*'My life belongs to Him who made the worlds
And all that is therein: how can you hope,
My father, to destroy what's His? (6:3: 118)*

We shall now continue the story in the words of the poet which rise henceforth from height to height of sublimity till the crescendo is reached in the last defiance of Hiranyakashipu.

*Hiranya heard; but still, though full of wrath,
He did not strike him, curious to see
If young Prahlad could reveal his God; and thus*

⁹⁰ Ravana and his minions — the reader will recollect that Vibhishana is relating the story.

⁹¹ The name of Indra's state elephant

⁹² Allusion to the story of Gajendra, the lord of elephants, who was saved by Vishnu when he called on His name. Vishnu hurled His discus against the crocodile who had seized the Elephant-king by the leg when he was bathing in a lake. The crocodile was killed and the Elephant was released.

Addressed he him: ' you talk much, my boy;
 Tell me, if can, who made the worlds? Is it
 The three who live by praising loud my name?
 Or else is it the Rishis? Or is it
 The gods that have been crushed for once and all? '
 Prahlad replied:— ' It's Hari, father, who
 Created all these worlds. Is it the worlds
 Alone He made? " It's He that gives life —
 Our very souls are His. Why, like the scent
 In flowers, and oil in sesame seed, He dwells
 Immanent everywhere. I adore, and so
 He shows Himself to me. You love not the
 Father, and hence you see not Him who killed
 Your golden-eyed brother. Three are His forms,
 And three His qualities: His eyes are three,
 The sun and the moon and the fire. His worlds are three,
 And triune the Effulgence of His Self.
 And He is the witness argus-eyed, who sees
 Delighted, the eternal dance of transient life.
 And this is the final truth that Vedas teach.'

Hiranya smiled contemptuous, and said,

'You say, though himself only one, he dwells
 In every object seen in all this vast
 Multiple universe. We'll test this first
 And then decide what's best for us to do.
 Now show me him if he is in this pile?'
 What of this column, father? ' said Prahlad:
 'You'll find Him in a span of space; divide
 An atom into a hundred parts, and you
 Will find my God in every one of them:
 He is in Meru hill; your very words,
 I say, are filled with Him: and you will find
 'Before long my every word a solemn truth.'
 'Enough of words,' Hiranya spoke in wrath,
 'Discover me him inside this pillar here,
 Who, you declare and rebel gods believe,
 Pervades this universe: if you fail
 I'll fall on you as on the elephant does
 The lion, and tearing you to pieces, drink
 Your blood and eat your flesh! '
 The wise one thus softly replied:
 'You cannot kill me, Sire!
 But this I vow: if at any spot at which
 You place your hands, my blessed Lord does not
 Reveal Himself, I'll myself will end my life!
 For even when I address this solemn vow
 To Him, if He would not respond to my prayer,
 And even after that I cling to my life,
 I shouldn't deserve to see my God, for then

My love could not be perfect.' 'Be it so!'
Hiranya cried in wrath and with his arm,
The home of victory, he struck against
The massive column high a thundering blow.
He struck, and lo the heavens opened wide,
The universal globe asunder burst,
And rumbling came the laugh of the Man-Lion fierce,
Tremendous, ominous! When Prahlada heard
Him laugh whom even Brahma seeks in vain,
He danced for joy, his eyes with tears filled,
He chanted loud His holy name, and hands
In worship joined above his tender head. . . .
Hiranya heard, and wild with rage exclaimed,
Say, who are you that dared laugh? are you
The god of whom this boy prattles? And have
You found your ocean small and refuge sought,
You despicable creature, within this pillar here?
Come forth if you would fight with me, Come forth! '
The pillar burst, the Lion stood self-revealed;
He grew and filled this universe, and those
Around, and who can know and tell of all
His wondrous doings in the great Beyond?
The globed vault did burst, and from the depths
Above to those below all space was torn
Sheer! (6:3: 119-130.)

Continues the poet:

Have any the science to count the arms that the Man-Lion had? The Asura force of ten thousand millions was annihilated by Him, and His terrific form confronted every single Asura separately with one head and two arms and three fiery eyes.

But can evil ever come to the good? While He was tearing to pieces all the evil Asuras with His terrific claws, He protected all good souls from harm by keeping them within Himself even as a mother does her infant.

He ate up alive the elephants and the horses and the fighting Asuras, and then drank up the oceans seven with all their myriad living beings, and crunched between His teeth the very thunderbolts of heaven. Seeing His unquenchable rage Dharma herself trembled for her safety!

Not one Asura he left alive in all the three worlds! Not even the fetus in the wombs of the Asura women were spared! And seeing no more Asuras alive in this universe behold, some arms of His were searching for them in the worlds Beyond!

Thus before the mind could so much as realize what was "happening, the world-pervading Man-Lion destroyed all the Asuras excepting alone Prahlada who was the staff of the Gods, and his father; now He strode towards the place where the great Asura was standing.

And there he stood, vast like the Meru mount,
His diamond-studded sword unsheathed for fight,
His buckler hiding sheer the heavens from view.
At his thundering shout the Devas shuddered, and
The mountains trembled and the seven seas.

*Prahlada saw his dauntless father stand
 With firm-set lip prepared to meet the shock
 Of the advancing Lion, and nearing him He said,
 Even after seeing the strength abnormal
 Of the Lord Supreme, O father, why would not
 The truth perceive? Even now you can submit
 To Him: and when you fall at His feet,
 He would forgive your evil deeds of old.'
 Hiranya frowned, and thus defiance hurled:
 'Listen, ingrate! In sight of you I will
 Cut down the Man-Lion's branching arms and feet,
 And then I'll give my sword your blood to drink!
 And when it shall have nobly done my bidding,
 I'll pay my homage to that matchless steel.
 Hast ever seen this head obeisance make
 To living being? Not even to soften heart
 Of woman has it ever yet bowed, you boy! '*

So saying Hiranya laughed a mighty laugh. A shudder ran through the worlds when they heard the laugh which they had ever known to be the forerunner to his terrible deeds of valor. As the Man-Lion approached him, Hiranya advanced to meet Him, and they closed, the Man-Lion with his uncountable arms and the Asura armed with 'his sword of victory. They rose above all the worlds into primeval space for freedom of movement! And what could we compare their forms to? The Asura resembled that vast Meru mountain, and the blessed Lord resembled — all else besides. The Lord of Illusion, with his arms rising tier on tier looking like waves on waves, and with his world-quaking roar, resembled the Ocean of Milk when it was being churned, and the Asura resembled the mountain which churned it.

But how long can a mortal hold against the Supreme Lord in his terrific form, and fighting hand to hand? With one mighty hand, at length, the Man-Lion took hold of Hiranya's feet and whirled him round and round. His crown and jewels struck against the circular walls of the universe and fell shattered to pieces; his ear-jewels called *kundalas* fell one to the east and the other to the west, and remain to this day as the rocks of the rising and the setting sun. And it is his jewels that give their brilliance to the sunrise and the sunset even now. At length, at the time of the twilight which is neither day nor night, the Man-Lion sat at the gate of Hiranya's palace, laid him on his thighs and tore open his entrails with his spear-like claws, and freed the Devas from their thralldom.

Kamban has perfectly succeeded in impressing us with the supreme pride and consciousness of illimitable power of the great Asura. The gods were nothing to Hiranya. He alone was the undisputed master of the universe, and none deserved worship but himself. Even when he sees the terrific Man-Lion destroy his army in a trice, his heart does not shrink; on the contrary his words assume greater firmness and pride. And his end too is equally heroic, contending face to face with God, and requiring Omnipotence Itself to destroy him.

The story of Hiranya in the Bhagavata is more didactic than artistic in composition and purpose, though some of the highest flights of poetry are to be found in it. But Kamban gifted as he is with a highly dramatic imagination, would introduce his own changes in it in order to bring the dramatic into full play. Thus, while Shuka, the narrator of the Bhagavata stories, makes Prahlada speak his mind for the first time before his father who is made to casually ask him what he had learned, Kamban makes him repeat the holy name of Narayana before his master at the very commencement of the instruction. This gives our poet the opportunity of making the teacher tremble for his safety at hearing the banned words, and of extracting the full poetic value out of this circumstance. Again,

according to the original, after this incident, the boy is sent away by the father, after a slight reprimand, to the masters to learn the proper doctrines. When, after sometime had elapsed, Hiranya calls for him and again questions him, Prahlada replies in the same strain, and in his wrath Hiranya orders him to be tortured and killed. Prahlada, however, as in our story, escapes miraculously from all the cruel tortures to which he is subjected. After this, at the request of the teachers, Hiranya again sends the boy to them to learn the orthodox doctrines. This is clearly against all poetic probability, for how could Hiranya or the teachers believe that Prahlada could be converted after all these cruelties and miraculous escapes? There at the school, instead of being converted to his father's view of the universe, himself converts his classmates to the love of Hari. The teachers, therefore, bring him back to Hiranya saying that his conversion is hopeless. The last scene before the striking at the pillar too, is not so well developed by Shuka as by Kamban who brings out the contrast between the wrathful and proud Asura and his calm and devotion-filled son in a few but intensely worked up stanzas. Kamban again would make the Man-Lion finish the Asura army before coming to the leader Hiranyakashipu, and thus keep the climax to the very end. The challenge of Hiranya to the Man-Lion in Kamban is, again, more in character than the last words that Shuka puts into his mouth. The words that fall from the lips of Hiranya in the Bhagavata after the appearance of the Man-Lion are only these:—

“What? Most probably this Hari, with his great cunning has assumed this powerful body with the intention of destroying me.”

And how feeble these words read when compared with the first challenge of the Asura in Kamban!

The last request of Kamban's Prahlada to his father to submit to the God makes him more loveable than Shuka's Prahlada who does not speak to his father after the Man-Lion had appeared; while the last reply of Kamban's Hiranya to his son makes him look grander than the Asura in the Bhagavata.

Potanna in his Prahlada Charitra, as perhaps everywhere in his grand redaction of the Bhagavata, has not made any changes in the story as told by Shuka. His version is a close paraphrase in Telugu of the original Bhagavata, expanding certain leading ideas and images in the narration, but all-religiously keeping to the very order in the development of the story. He has added no new trait or color to the original sketch. But Kamban's imperial imagination must needs remelt even the best minted coin of the other sovereigns in the realm of poetry, and put its own impress and superscription on the reminted gold. And so we have in this episode, Hiranya expanded to even more colossal proportions, and a Prahlada more tender than the creations of Vyasa and Shuka.

CHAPTER 11

VALI AND SUGRIVA



In the character of Hiranyakashipu Kamban has shown to us unequalled prowess and valor combined with extreme pride refusing to acknowledge the supremacy of Almighty Power till destroyed by It in Its terrible aspects. In this chapter we shall see his presentation of valor and powers of the same degree but combined with many generous and noble qualities, and yet which was extinguished by Shri Rama for a single delinquency. We shall devote the greater part of the chapter to Kamban's Vali.

After Ravana had carried off Sita, Rama and Lakshmana, as the reader knows, went southwards and searched for her everywhere in the impenetrable forests of Dandaka. At length a great *tapasvini*⁹³ named Sabari told them that a Vanara called Sugriva who was residing on the Rishyamuka hill would be of great help to them in their search, and they accordingly sought him on the hill. Although Vali was the king of the Vanaras, and the more powerful of the two brothers, and Sugriva was in hiding for fear of Vali, the saintly woman considered that Vali who had unjustly driven Sugriva out of his kingdom and deprived him of his wife, and was even after his life, was undeserving of Rama's friendship; and that was why she sent him to Sugriva in preference to Vali.

After much travel Rama and Lakshmana came to the hill. Sugriva came to see them after ascertaining through Hanuman that they were not men sent by Vali to kill him. After preliminaries were over, Rama told Sugriva that he sought his help in his great difficulty.⁹⁴ On the other side Sugriva replied that he was being pursued and hunted by Vali, his brother, and that it was Rama that must protect him from the latter. Rama pitied his helpless condition, and impressed with his generous nature swore eternal friendship with him.

After this, Valmiki makes Rama and Lakshmana go to Sugriva's home of their own accord, and Sugriva to casually mention that he had been even robbed of his wife by Vali. But Kamban with his greater dramatic skill represents Sugriva as inviting Rama after the swearing of friendship to his cottage on the hill, and Rama as asking him whether he also had lost his wife like himself, seeing that there was no Vanarini in the cottage to serve the guests. Here too he takes care that Sugriva does not tell his story himself in reply to Rama as in Valmiki, but makes Hanuman as his chief councilor to tell it for him and thus saves Sugriva from personally referring to his misfortune as *hrita bharyah* — one who has been robbed of his wife.

Hanuman describes in detail Vali's exploits and strength and ends by saying that Vali had taken away Sugriva's wife. The moment that he heard the last words, Rama's eyes grew red with rage, for

*Could he who gave away a crown that was
By right his own to a brother to enjoy —
Could he forgive an elder brother, who
Had robbed the younger of his wife by force,
And now was hunting him unto death? (4:2:112)*

So Rama swore to Sugriva that he would kill Vali with his bow and restore his wife to him and make him king of Kishkindha. In order to give Sugriva confidence in his strength, Rama destroyed with one arrow of his the seven sala trees that could never be cut down by any living being, and cleared the ground of the colossal skeleton of Dundubhi the Asura, who had fought with and been

⁹³ feminine of *tapasvi* — one who performs spiritual austerities

⁹⁴ Valmiki would make Lakshmana tell Sugriva that Rama had come to take refuge under him — *Sharanam gatah*.

defeated by Vali. Sugriva was now convinced of Rama's capacity to destroy Vali. He therefore agreed to go and challenge Vali on his hill, the arrangement being that while they were engaging each other Rama should send his arrow and dispatch Vali.

When the challenge of Sugriva reached his ear, Vali rose from his bed and frowning listened again. When he understood that it was his brother that was calling him to fight he laughed a laugh that threw the fourteen worlds off their foundations and sent them whirling into outer space. His usual anger against his brother soon took possession of his heart, and he now appeared like the ocean boiling for the final deluge on the Day of Dissolution. The mountain on which he stood sank under his weight. His eyes glistened with the fire of his hatred, shaming the aurora of the north. When he smacked his arms with his palm, as wrestlers do, the thunderbolts of heaven dropped down, and the very hill on which he stood split to pieces. Even the God of Death was terrified at his aspect, for he looked at that moment like the Time Spirit brooding over and directing the destruction of all creation on the final day, or like the boiling mass of poison that rose from the ocean when he helped in churning it for the gods.

He was just starting to go to answer the challenge of his brother when Tara his wife came in his way and tried to dissuade him from going.

'Stop me not,' he said, checking her: 'stop me not, O wife, fair even as the mountain peacock of the noblest breed! I will answer his challenge and return to you after drinking his life, even as I churned the ocean and got amrit in olden days!' (4:5:14.)

But she persisted saying,

*Sugriva knows your strength by proof, my lord,
And never can stand against your iron fists.
He is not born again to hope afresh,
Nor has he greater strength acquired to-day
By blessing of the Gods; if now he dares
To challenge you, it is because he has
An ally strong enough to give him hopes
Of easy victory.'* (4:5:15.)

Vali only laughed at her fears and said,

*'Even if all the three worlds, Tara, stood
Combined against me they are bound to fail!
Can you forget the day when Asuras
And Devas sought to churn the Sea of Milk?
The Mandhara mountain was the churning rod,
And Vasuki the mighty cobra was
The string! They pulled, but had not strength enough .
To turn the awful mount. I saw their plight
And moved with pity helped, and lo! the sea
Did yield his glories to my mighty arm.
Though countless are the foes both Asuras
And Gods, who tried their strength with me, has one
Till now prevailed 'against me? Even the God of Death
Trembles at my name: Who then could come
To help Sugriva? Should there be such a fool
As loves to call on his own head his doom,
Then know that whoso faces me in war,
One half his force, and blessings earned by him*

*From Gods do pass to me sheer: such the power
That Shiva has blessed me with. Fear not, therefore,
My Tara, give me leave! ' (4:5:20)*

But Tara's fears were not dispelled. She had heard too much from her servants to be satisfied with Vali's assurances. She therefore begins:–

*'My lord, I learn from trusty servants shrewd
That he has found a great ally in Rama
Who for his sake has sworn to end your life To-day (4:5:21)*

Vali had heard so much of Rama's nobility and chivalry and brotherly and filial love that he had come to look upon him as the ideal hero. So when Tara spoke of him as conspiring with Sugriva to kill Vali, Vali could not at all believe it. Not merely that. He could not brook to hear the ideal of his heart vilified, as he thought he was, by these words of Tara. Hence, before she could say all that she had heard, he cut her speech short and spoke to her these angry words:–

*'What have you said, with that blaspheming tongue
Of yours, Tara? Know you not Rama is born
To show the way of virtue to the world
That has forgotten Dharma, and crying loud
For a savior in vain, has helpless sunk
In dark despair? But that you are a woman
And have in ignorance erred, you should have died
For this blasphemy! How will he think on this,
Whose eye can see beyond this transient life?
Can Dharma falsify itself, that's born
To save all living kind? Though all the world
Lay at his feet, he gave his crown away
Smiling to his brother at the bidding cruel
Of his step-mother. In lieu of blessing him
For the grandeur of his soul, do I now hear
You slander Rama? Even should all the worlds
Come thronging on and rush on him at once,
Does he an ally need beside his bow
To battle by his side? Then think you
That he would hanker after alliance
With a worthless ape? He does his brothers love
Even as his life: would he then aim his arrows
At me, when I and my brother are engaged
In combat to decide on rights upon
The sword? Know he's a sea of mercy sweet!
Rest here a while therefore; within a trice
I'll beat Sugriva, and send him to his doom,
And scattering all who come to his aid
I'll join you: dispel your fears! (5:5:22 – 27)*

Tara feared to say more, and Vali dashed down the hill to accept the challenge of his brother. When he stood before Sugriva with the hill behind his back, he looked like the Man-lion who came out of the massive column when it was struck by the great and terrific Asura. They did not waste time in mere words, but started to wrestle with each other with many a war-shout.

Rama who was ambushed behind a clump of trees close by with Lakshmana, was amazed at their size and force, and said to his brother,

*What oceans can we liken to their frames?
What clouds? What storms? Or What deluging⁹⁵ fire?
And can one universe hold two such clouds,
Deluges, storms, or frowning seas? ' (4:5:31)*

But Lakshmana was then thinking of something else. He said,

*'..... Sugriva has
A Yama brought to end his brother: though
Their fight is worthy praise, my heart is pained
To see this fratricidal fight, and so
I cannot judge in calmness, brother! '
He ceased.
But still his heart returned upon its theme,
And thus unburdened he his mind: ' They say
It is unwise to put our faith in those
That are unnatural: when he can harden
His heart against a brother, and fall on him
As on a foe, what can his loyalty
Be worth to strangers, brother? ' (4:5:32,33)*

For this once even Kamban's Rama talks like a cynic. He began by asking,

"Can we expect ideal morals among These foolish apes? ' (4:5:34)

But as Lakshmana's reference to brotherly love brought the memory of Bharata, the ideal brother, to his mind, he added, not without intending a slight hit at Lakshmana who in the pride of his loyalty to Rama was unjust to Bharata,

*'And then, my child, if all
Were like in their devotions to their brothers,
How can my Bharata be placed the first
In the list of loyal brothers? '*

And then he continued thus:—

*'And O hero of the well-developed arms
Which show like rocks armed with the banded bow,⁹⁶
Wherever you go, the lovers of virtue are
But few; the many love her not. We have
To take men as they are: and, brother, is there
A man of whom we can say, ' lo, here is
A man without a single flaw?'⁹⁷*

In the meantime Vali and Sugriva had well warmed to their fight. The poet describes the combat grandly, and we shall try to give some parts of that description to the reader:—

They looked like two mammoths wrestling, like two rocks dashing against each other, like two lions trying to tear each other to pieces. Some time they stood facing each other with

⁹⁵ The Fire of Hindu mythology which consumes the world during the Deluge.

⁹⁶ By this flattering epithet, Rama intends to heal the wound that his previous words must have inflicted on the heart of Lakshmana.

⁹⁷ 4:5:35. Rama here hints that they themselves are engaged in a questionable transaction at this very time, though he would not withdraw from it now.

steady feet, some time they whirled round and round each other like a potter's wheel. The earth could not bear their pressure when arm pressed against arm; fire sparks were thrown out when foot knocked against foot. Their quick blows and guards and locks recalled the sheen of the lightning in heaven. And they were like planets colliding with each other in the sky.

We have not seen sea fronting sea, or mountain pit itself against mountain, or Wrath taking shape and boiling, dividing itself in two. Then what else can we compare their wrestling to?

The fire burning in and dropping from their eyes burned the clouds and reduced rocks to a mass of ashes. The mammoths of the cardinal points trembled for their lives, the gods who had come to witness the fight fled away in terror.....

Seeing them knock each other down unmindful of the blood that was pouring from their bruises and wounds, the bystanders wondered and asked each other, ' Are they struggling in the sky or are they on the peak of the hill? Are they on the earth or are they gone beyond the universe? Or are they within our own eyes? '

The smack of their arms cleaving the air like the tidal waves on the stormy sea, was heard to the very ends of the universe: the resonance of their fists striking at each other's arms and chests resembled the full-mouthed thunder of the Day of Dissolution.

When they struck with their fists on each other's chests, it was like the hammer of the mighty-armed smith falling on a massive piece of heated iron on the anvil. Veritable sparks flew' from their iron chests thus struck.

They would press each other with their chests, aim kicks at each other with their mighty legs, throw each other down with force with their hands; they would join each other and knock each other down with fists, and uprooted trunks of trees, and rocks. They would roar with wrath and glare at each other.

They would lift each other with their arms and throw each other down, they would wet their hands in the blood rushing from their blows, they would whirl round each other like mighty kites flown in the wind, they would knit their arms and body round each other, they would hug each other and fall. They would twist their tails round each other's bodies- and draw them tight till the bones cracked and broke, they would lock each other with their legs and slip from each other's locks, they would pierce each other's bodies with their lance-like claws, and leave cave-deep wounds upon each other's mountain-huge bodies. (4:5:36-38, 40-43, 45-48.)

At length Vali had the upper hand, and with all his force aimed a blow against Sugriva which sent him flying into the air. As Vali also had been terribly exhausted by the struggle he did not pursue him, but stopped there and rested on the ground taking breath. Sugriva limped on to where Rama was hiding and fell at his feet. No words were needed from Sugriva to tell Rama of his condition. Rama told him that he did not aim his arrow during the late struggle as he could not distinguish between them both, and asked him to wear a garland of flowers and resume the fight, when, he said, distinguishing between the two he would aim at Vali and bring him down.

So again Sugriva came and engaged with Vali who with a superior smile — which but lightly concealed his frown terrifying to the very God of Death — struck at his brother's life-spots with all his might. Sugriva vomited blood, and blood flowed in torrents from his eyes and nose and ears also. Unable to bear the punishment, he looked towards the spot where Rama stood concealed. But Vali, with the consciousness of certain victory filling his heart, heartlessly followed up his success

with further knock-out blows. And then he gripped firmly Sugriva's neck with one hand and his hip with the other, and lifting him sheer poised himself to dash him with a terrific force upon the rock.

Just at that minute Rama, who was watching his opportunity with his bent Kodanda, placed an arrow on the rest, drew back the string and sent the arrow flying with a mighty force. Says the poet:—

*'Who can conceive the force of that fiery arrow?
Great Vali's frame which had the strength combined
Of earth and water, fire and wind, was pierced
By it even as is pierced a plantain ripe
By a sharp needle! (4:5:57)*

Vali's strength failed. And he fell even as the Meru mountain would fall uprooted on the Day of Dissolution by the whirlwind. And as he fell, the grip of his hands loosened releasing Sugriva; but immediately he caught the feather side of the mortal arrow with his hands and struggled with the added might of his hind paws and tail in order to stop it from boring its way through his adamantine frame. The very God of Death bowed his head in admiration when he saw the force of his will and the might of his limbs even at that moment. In his wrath at being thus ambushed and shot at, he would wish to demolish the very vault of the heaven, and attempt to rise in order to strike at it; he would think of destroying the world to its very bounds; he would plough the ground with his iron limbs and desire to bore the earth down to its very root.

As the arrow was still boring into his body he would wonder who could have sent that weapon against him. 'May it be the Gods,' he would think to himself. But soon he would give up that thought asking himself, 'have they the force to handle such a missile?' Again he would ask himself who could it be? And smile at his inability to fix upon his assailant. And then he would declare it must be the deed of one who has the power of the Supreme Three. Again he would wonder,

*'Is it the disc of Vishnu or the lance
Of blue-necked Dhurjati⁹⁸? Even thunderbolt
Of Indra, and the lance of Karthikeya
Whose point has bored through rocks, do lack the force
To pierce my chest! What can it be, O what? '
Again he struggled to pull it out saying to himself,
'There stands no bow that can this fell missile
Propel. Or, did a Rishi send it winged
With his curse? ' (4:5:64.65)*

So saying he bent forward and then helping his paws and tail with his jaw, drew it out sufficiently to see that it was only an arrow. As soon as he saw it, he determined to draw it out completely and see who aimed it against him, for all great warriors carve their names upon their arrows in order to give their enemies the chance of knowing by whom they were attacked and challenging them if they so desire.

*At length the hero of the dauntless heart
Drew out the arrow; Gods and Asuras
Who saw that wondrous feat felt new force thrill
In their limbs: for who can help admiring strength?
Out rushed the blood resounding even like
The sea in flood-tide; and it flowed past rocks
And woods as if it wished to seek the sea.
Sugriva saw the blood gushing out like*

⁹⁸ Shiva

*A mountain geyser from the rock-like chest
Of Vali: and he was much moved despite himself:
The tie of birth was stronger than his hate
Implacable, and so with scalding tears
Cascading from his eyes he fell upon
The ground senseless.*

In his wrath Vali forgot his first thought and tried to break the arrow, the head of which was still sticking in his body, but it would not break even to his mighty hands. He now remembered again his original intentions, and turned the portion that had been drawn out towards his eyes in order to see whose name was engraved upon its stem. And what did he see?

*He saw the name which is the Word, the seed
From which sprang all the worlds: the glory which gives
Its own self as the highest need to those
Who meditate thereon: the healing drug
To the ills incurable called earthly life:
He saw with his eyes the sacred mantra Rama —
Sweet to the eyes to see and ears to hear —
Carved on the dreadful arrow. He saw and laughed
And blushed as thus he spoke: ' By birth of Rama
Who has disgraced the name of soldier and
His bow, great Surya's race, alas, has lost
Its name for Dharma which ever was known to be
Its shield! Is it for this he left his home
And took like saint or sage to forest life?' (4:5:71, 72.)*

Meantime his pain became more and more intense. Now his head would fall limp on the ground. Now he would laugh an explosive laugh. He would again fall to musing and say, ' perhaps this also may be an act of virtue, who knows? ' Now he would roll in pain ' even as the elephant fallen into the trap-pit prepared by the hunter, with the spear still sticking in his gigantic frame.' And he asked himself,

'If he swerves from the right what can we say of the common run of men? Verily he has acted worse than myself.' (4:5:74)

But while he was saying these words aloud, He appeared, whose name is always- mentioned the first in the list of righteous men and kings and who incarnated himself as man in order to «stablish righteousness on earth. Vali saw that form, looking as if a blue cloud laden with rain had descended from the sky, adorned with many a fresh-blown lotus, and with the rainbow gracing its body. And as he came near he looked him straight in the face and addressed him these words frowning:

*'O Rama, Fate indeed has blindly made
You son of him who threw away his life
For honor's sake and truth's; but should you too
Have seen the light before the saintly Bharata?
You punish evil deeds: but do they cease
To be ill deeds when you are yourself doer? . . .
'Can any count your blessings? Learning, birth,
Beauty, and valor are all yours; and you
Are heir to a scepter wielding power over all
The worlds! And you have shown the strength and skill
Of your arm even now: were all these given*

*To you alone to bring eternal shame
 Upon the name of Knight? and you are wise,
 I've heard it said!
 'All highly virtues come
 By instinct to the children of your race:
 How then could you this deed of shame commit?
 I fear your mind has lost its balance, since
 You did from Janaka's swan-like daughter part,
 Who was as life to you and very soul!*

*'Now tell me, Rama, has Manu anywhere
 Ordained that if a Rakshasas parts your wife
 From you, you must at once destroy the king
 Of apes? Where's gone your tenderness, O man?
 And how have I offended you? If you
 Should run thus after infamy, on whom
 Should Glory shed her rays?*

*'In all this wide
 World ocean-girt, should the Age of Iron dawn
 Alone upon an ape? Are equity
 And right reserved alone for feeble ones?
 I did forget; when Might commits sin
 Does not the world bestow on it a crown?*

*'And who can beat your glory? For you gave
 A kingdom to your brother at Ayodhya!
 And here in jungles wild, to balance that
 You have my kingdom on my brother here
 As gift bestowed!*

*'You have now yourself shown, O Rama, that power
 Can work its will, unjust or just, secure:
 But say, if you are right in killing me,
 Because you could your arrow aim unseen,
 Can you at all the Rakshasas king accuse
 Of carrying off your spouse by force or guile?
 'When two in duel stand engaged, the just
 Regard them both with equal eye: but if
 A man is moved towards one, and hid behind
 A bush, does shoot the other down with sharp
 And pointed arrows aiming at the heart,
 Is it an act of Dharma? — or something else?*

*'It is not valor you have shown, or love
 Of equity; there is no feud between
 Your house and mine; my body did not press
 Your earth with its intolerable weight; and sure
 You would not call your sinful deed a deed
 Of mercy: what then was in your mind, O Rama?
 'If you did hanker after an ally
 To fight the war against the Rakshasas king,
 What wisdom led you turn your back upon*

*The tusker roaming fearless over the wilds
And kneel you down before a puny hare?*

*'It is the moon alone that had a spot
Till now upon her face: the sun remained
A stainless globe of light. But you have taken
"Your birth in his thrice glorious house, and lo,
He beats the moon in, the blackness of his spot!*

*'Are not ashamed to show your face as man
And warrior, who have laid a trap for me,
And lying concealed behind a bush, have aimed
A mortal arrow against my chest, when I
But came to meet a foe that challenged me?
Your conduct gives the lie to the learning which
They say you possess: your deed has brought
Disgrace upon your great forbears! for, Man!
You have not killed Vali, but have destroyed
The fence that shields the seedling Dharma from ill!*

*'O fie on you! A foe has carried off
Your spouse, while on your idle shoulder lies
That bow mocking your valor.
It's only good
In unfair fight concealed for shooting down
An unarmed foe? ' (4:5: 76-84, 86-90.)*

Thus did Vali address his bitter reproaches to Rama who was standing before him calm and unperturbed the while Vali's words were coming on like sharp-pointed arrows. When Vali had exhausted all his sarcasms and invectives, Rama justified himself as follows:—

'When you had gone after your foe, O Vali, inside the mountain cave, and days innumerable passed without any trace of you, Sugriva desired to follow your footsteps and look for you; but the councilors of your state prevented him and desired him to assume the crown. He protested that he must fight and die ending the enemy that must have killed you, his brother, and that he would not think of ascending the Vanara throne. But your sage ministers and generals, and ancients would not allow him to have his way, and crowned him king of Kishkindha. When you returned victorious, he was glad, and he explained to you how he came to sit upon the throne. But you got enraged and desired to kill him though he prayed to you as a suppliant to spare him. Although he fled to countries far and wide, you did not take pity on him who is your own mother's son. It is only the curse of the Rishi Matanga that checked you from seeking him on yonder hills where he had at length sought refuge.

'You talk of mercy and gentle birth and equity and valor: depriving another of his wife — is it mercy? Or nobility of birth? or justice? or valor? The arrogant tyranny that fights without cause, and pitiless cruelty towards the weak are the chief unpardonable crimes against the laws of chivalry. And lust towards the wife of another is the highest crime against Dharma. This is the conclusion of the wise. you know the Dharma and understands what is right and what is wrong. And still you did not care for Dharma or the right. For if you had cared, would you have desired the dear wife. of your brother? Because of all this, and because your brother has come to me a friend, dear as life, I shot my arrow at you ' . ' For,' concluded Rama,

*'It is my ever-pressing vow to help
The oppressed, the poor, and those forlorn.' (5:4:92-102)*

Against this elaborate counter-attack Vali defended himself thus:—

'Brahma, O sire, has not ordained for us Vanaras the same laws of marriage that he has established for you men, amongst whom the chastity of women is a most cherished possession. He has made us to mate as we please. There is no marriage amongst us, nor conduct based on the Vedas, but what comes out of our own inclination of the moment. Where then have I offended against Dharma, O Rama? ' (5:4:104,105.)

Rama now clinched his argument, repudiating the self-justification of Vali in this way:—

*'You call yourself a brute; but as you are
The son of Indra, king of gods, and can
Distinguish right from wrong, who can accept
Your specious words, unworthy of a king?
It's not the body but the mind that rules
The moral life. Can you be called a brute
Ignoring right and wrong, who know the ways
Well-trodden by the wise of austerities?
Can we that tusker class with brutes, who when
The savage crocodile did grip his leg
Called on the Lord Supreme, and for his trust
And love was blest with ever-lasting life?
And he, my noble father, who did fight,
Moved by his love of Dharma, to save my spouse
Lamenting in the enemy's chariot,
And falling has attained the hero's heaven,
Was not he born a vulture in form and shape?
'They alone are brutes who know not right from wrong.
Hast you not shown by words that have even now
Fallen from your mouth, that there is not a truth
In all the moral codes that you ignore?
If one cannot the right from wrong discern,
He is a brute though bearing human form.
But even brutes the wise look on as gods
When they do shape their life on Manu's laws.
By great devotion to the God⁹⁹ whose lance
Did quench the might of Yama, you have been blessed
With strength combined of all the elements four.
But many by their later sins do fall
From heights that good deeds once had earned for them:
While not a few there are who have retraced
Their steps from sin, and have become great saints
And even gods. So beings rise or fall
By their own deeds, or good or ill: you know
This truth, and yet you have your brother's house
To ruin brought and have destroyed his peace! ' (4:5: 111-115)*

Vali was now convinced that he deserved to die for the great and unpardonable wrong that he had done to his brother. But being brave himself, and knowing Rama to be the very embodiment of

⁹⁹ Shiva

valor, he could not understand why Rama took the cowardly expedient of shooting him unawares. So he asked Rama:—

'O you of perfect rectitude, I grant all that you have said: but why have you shot me, concealed behind a bush, like a base and cruel hunter shooting down a beast? '
(4:5:116.)

Rama had no real reply to this pertinent question. His action could be explained to Vali only by a specious reason.¹⁰⁰ So Kamban takes care that Rama does not answer this question himself, and makes Lakshmana take it upon himself to reply to it. Lakshmana said,

*'When first your brother refuge sought with us
From your unrighteous rage, my brother swore
That he would send you to the halls of Yama.
He feared that you too, should he show his face
To you, might haply wish to save yourself
And fall a suppliant at his feet,¹⁰¹ and so
It is that he concealed himself to aim
His arrow at you.'* (4:5: 117.)

The generous-hearted and, therefore, simple-minded Vali questioned no further. He saw that Rama was the Lord of the earth and heaven and felt that he could never do an unrighteous act. So he bowed to Rama and thus addressed him:—

*You who are the embodiment of right!
From even the way that you have dealt with us
I clearly see your justice stern and love
To living kind as deep as is a mother's.
Forgive my sins, O Lord, and counting me
A mere ape, take not to heart the words
With which I you reproached. O giver of good,
Who are the medicine rare that cures the ills
Of birth and death! you have your arrow aimed
Against my chest, and at the point of death
Has given me insight.
You are the One Supreme,
You are Three in One, you are the All:
What else there is, even are thou! Both Sin
You are and Dharma, and foe you art, and friend!
Is there a Dharma other than your arrow
Which has destroyed the blessings given by Shiva
And other gods, and pierced from front to back
My powerful chest? Great Shiva blesses all
By power acquired by only saying your name.
Now what is hard for me to get, when I
Behold your holy self in flesh and blood?*

¹⁰⁰ The real reason is that if Rama faced Vali, half his strength would go over to Vali in accordance with the blessing he had received from Shiva. So Rama could not use all his normal strength while Vali will get a new accession of strength which would have successfully prevented Rama's arrow from entering his body and killing him.

¹⁰¹ The reader will remember Rama's sentiments as regards suppliants expressed in his speech in the Vanara council when Vibhishana came to seek refuge. Lakshmana's idea is that if Vali should have fallen at Rama's feet he would have been in a dilemma — whether to kill Vali and make good his solemn oath to Sugriva or to save Vali and falsify it

*Sages have said that you are everything
 And all, and Time, and fruit that Time evolves:
 The world's the flower, and you the scent thereof.
 Can heaven escape me now that I have seen
 Yourself with fleshly eyes? you I have seen
 Who are but Dharma in human shape: what more
 Is there for me to see? And all the sins
 That I have done from ancient days up to
 This moment — all are burnt away today!
 Is there a better good that brother can
 To brother do? Sugriva has brought you here
 To kill me with your arrow, which straight does take
 Me to the realms of heaven, leaving him
 The tasteless, empty crown of an earthly realm.
 'Permit me now, O Rama, to make to you
 A dying prayer: if he, my brother, errs,
 His mind confused by drink, aim not at him,
 I pray with joined hands, the death that's named
 Your arrow that you have aimed at me. And see
 That your own brothers point not the finger of scorn
 Against Sugriva for having brought about
 My death: for you had yourself sworn to right
 His wrongs; and how could he be charged for deeds
 That flow therefrom as effects from their cause?
 'For other things, O victor, though unblessed,
 That fortune might yet have been mine to place
 Before you Ravana tied unto my tail,
 And show you all my little monkey tricks.
 Alas, even this has been denied to me.
 But what avails it now to think of all
 That might have been? Let's think alone of that
 Which might yet be: if you desire the king
 Of Lanka to be brought to you over here
 In chains tied hand and foot, or anything
 Impossible for others to attempt,
 Behold this Hanuman, he will fulfill
 Your every command. Look on this hero, Lord,
 As a bow ready bent in your own hand.
 Look on my brother as yours; nowhere can find
 Allies like unto these. Pursue, therefore,
 O Rama, your search for Sita fair, your queen.' 4:5: 119-130.*

He ceased; and then calling Sugriva to his side he advised him thus:—

*'Remember, and doubt not, Sugriva, that the Supreme One declared by the Vedas,
 Rishis, Brahma himself and the Shastras, has incarnated Itself and walks the earth as
 Rama in order to re-establish Righteousness here below. It is on his name that those
 meditate who desire lasting good. If proof you want, is not the fact that he has been able
 to wound me mortally itself sufficient proof? When even those who die by his arrow
 attain the highest heaven, though they might have been committing all the deadly sins,
 and all the days of their lives, how can we measure the good that will be the portion of*

those who serve him with love? . . . Yield not to the temptations natural to our kind, but remember with gratitude the help that he has given you, and help him in your turn even to the extent of your life. Obey his every command implicitly, and attain Eternal Life. Forget not yourself in the pleasures of your palace, but remember that kings are like fire: think not they would forgive one when one sins against them.' (4:5:132-134, 136, 137)

After thus admonishing Sugriva, Vali turned to Rama and said:–

*'O son of the king of kings, I here consign
To your protection and paternal care
Sugriva here and all his kin!'*

Angada, the son of Vali, then came from his hill sent for by Sugriva at Vali's request. When he saw his father lying in the sea of his own blood, he fell on his body, 'even as a star of tiny magnitude falling upon the full-orbed moon,' and lamented loud. But Vali embraced and consoled him saying,

'It is for my own good, child, that Rama has done this to me. Birth and death come inevitable to all who live in the three worlds. It is because I have earned great merit by my austerities that this end has come to me, and Rama who stands as the Eternal Witness in the hearts of all has come to me in person and given me salvation. Now give up your childhood thoughts, my boy, and if you would learn, behold, the One Truth than which no higher does exist has come down to earth in flesh and blood for our eyes to see, and stands before us, its feet touching the ground. Worship you therefore Him, my child, as the medicine to the Illusion-bred disease of birth! Think not ever that He has wrought my death, but work for your salvation by serving Him, and if he has wars to wage, aid him with all your might and fight his battles for him.' (4:5:146-149.)

He finished, and embracing him once again, he addressed Rama and said:–

*'Behold this only child of mine, O Lord!
He loves Dharma, but is a consuming fire
To the stubble called the black-skinned Rakshasas race.
I leave him to your tender care, O Rama!'* (4:5:151.)

Angada then fell at Rama's feet, and Rama as a token of his accepting the pledge handed to him his sword. Seeing that, the seven worlds shouted for joy.

Vali was now perfectly happy. He saw his boy accepted by Rama, and himself, as having fallen by Rama's hand, was sure of salvation. He had therefore nothing more to desire or say. And so, even with the sight of Rama blessing Angada, his soul passed away in peace.

Vali is a grand creation of Valmiki. His strength and stature, valor and self-confidence, love and hate, and last great repentance, have been drawn by Valmiki in firm outline. His reproof of Rama is scathing and true to life. But Rama being nothing more than a great king to Valmiki, he has not hesitated to put specious arguments and cruel and unfeeling expressions - in the mouth of Rama when replying to the invectives of Vali. Bhaskara, the Telugu poet, has closely followed Valmiki in the relation of the incidents as well as in the speeches of Vali and Rama. As this is one of the finest of *ghattas*¹⁰² in both Valmiki and Kamban, each poet endeavouring to give the reader the best that he is capable of, we extract in Appendix II¹⁰³ the vital portions of this episode in Valmiki's

¹⁰² Episodes.

¹⁰³ Aiyar had not provided the extracts, or at least the manuscripts which have come to us do not contain them. We have done our best in the circumstances and have provided in the Appendix as copious extracts as may be necessary. Aiyar appears to have contemplated a comparison between Kamban and Tulsidas as well, for we find in his rough manuscripts translations of extracts from Tulsidas's Ramayana under the heading ' Appendix '. But as Aiyar had not in his final

Ramayana, so that the reader might see for himself in detail what Kamban takes from his original, and what he makes of it. We shall, therefore, content ourselves here with pointing out and comparing only the salient features of the episodes in the two authors.

In the first place Valmiki has made a comparatively long time to elapse between the first and second engagements of the brothers. In Valmiki, after the first engagement, Sugriva flies far into the hill of refuge, whither Rama and others follow him. This compels Valmiki to put piteous words in the mouth of Sugriva from the effect of which even the genius of Kamban has not been able to rescue his character. Griffith thus translates Sugriva's condition and words as given by Valmiki:—

*Then, for intolerable shame,
Not daring yet to lift his eyes,
Sugriva spoke with burning sighs: '
Your matchless strength I first beheld,
And dared my foe, by you impelled:
Why have you tried me with deceit
And urged me to a sure defeat?
You should have said, 'I will not slay
Your foeman in the coming fray.'
For had I then your purpose known
I had not waged the fight alone.'
The Vanara sovereign lofty-souled,
In plaintive voice his sorrows told*

The reader will remember Kamban's description of Sugriva's defeat after showing equal valor and almost equal strength. Contriving the situation in the fashion that he has

done, he has avoided the necessity of putting any words, which must necessarily be weak and feeble, in the mouth of the future king of the Vanaras. It is Rama, in his story, that explains to him on seeing him in his exhausted condition, why he did not aim his arrow against Vali. So also in the second fight after the interval, Sugriva in Kamban only looks in the direction where Rama was standing.

When Sugriva challenges Vali for the fight, and Tara tried to dissuade Vali from accepting the challenge, Valmiki makes Vali hear her words to the very end. And he dismisses her reference to Rama only with these words:—

*'Nor, O my love, be you dismayed
Though Rama lend Sugriva aid;
For one so pure and duteous, one
Who loves the right, all sin will shun.'*

But see how Kamban's keen sense of the dramatic makes Vali interrupt Tara as soon as she says that Sugriva has got an ally who would conquer Vali for him. And how cleverly again Kamban makes his Vali cut short her words at her mere mention of the name of Rama as the ally she spoke of in the beginning! The zealous and passionate defense of Rama by Vali to his wife at once increases Vali's moral stature and intensifies the tragedy of the situation. For while on the one hand Vali admires Rama's grandeur of soul in parting with his crown to Bharata, looks upon him as the

manuscripts made any reference to Tulsidas about this episode we refrain from publishing that Appendix. The appendix begins: "This episode of Vali has not been well handled by Tulsidas. The reader has seen how much poetry Valmiki has introduced into this episode and how much of heroism and pathos and other rasas Kamban has embellished it with. By the side of these, Tulsidas's Vali vadha upakhyaana looks callow indeed. We shall give hereunder the vital portions of it in order to satisfy the curiosity of the reader: " After comparing extensively with the supreme Valmiki it appears pointless to compare again with Tulsidas, which may be why Aiyar finally discarded the appendix. (P)

mighty hero who requires none to help him, and enthusiastically declares him to be the very Avatar of Dharma and a sea of mercy, on the other hand Rama is full of rancor and hatred against Vali and stands ready ambushed to kill him by treachery.

Again, just as a great musician conscious of his powers would keep his hearers in suspense by interposing between them and the climax that they are expecting, a surprise *avritta*,¹⁰⁴ perfect in itself and satisfying to the ear in spite of the delay in the expected crescendo, so Kamban introduces an aside between Rama and Lakshmana before he would allow the reader to see the fight of Vali and Sugriva and hear Vali's reproof and subsequent exoneration of Rama. In that little conversation of the brothers, Kamban displays all the art and skill of the Hoysala sculptor in the carving of the tiny elephant in the Hoysalesvara temple at Halebid.¹⁰⁵

The wrestling of Vali and Sugriva is more elaborately described in Kamban than in Valmiki. The reader's interest is kept keyed up to the highest pitch from beginning to end of the whole fight, and though he expects Rama to shoot Vali down, the description of the last grip of Vali makes him almost believe that soon all will be over with Sugriva. Compare Valmiki's description,

*Then Rama saw Sugriva quail,
Marked his worn strength -grow weak and fail,
Saw how he turned his wistful eye
To every quarter of the sky.
His friend's defeat he could not brook,
Bent on his shaft an eager look,
Then burned to slay the conquering foe,
And laid his arrow on the bow.....*

with Kamban's description of the final step of the fight where he presents the reader with the picture of Vali lifting Sugriva bodily up, and poising himself to dash him upon the rock. Kamban takes care to avoid the impression of slowness in the action which the last four lines of the above quotation give.

The struggle of Vali with the arrow, in Kamban, culminating with the line ' for who can help admiring strength¹⁰⁶ is one of the finest word-paintings ever painted in literature of sheer physical force and might. And note his art which by delaying the appearance of Rama sharpens the curiosity of the reader as to what Vali will say to him when he sees him, while at the same time delighting the reader to the full with his majestic, slow-moving, cinematograph-like picture of Vali's struggle with Rama's arrow. This is higher art than that of Valmiki who interposes no action, let alone action that captures all the attention of the reader, between Vali's fall and Rama's appearance, and satisfies himself merely with a description of the ornaments and physical appearance of the great Vanara.

Even Rama's appearance before Vali, how finely Kamban stage-manages it, introducing it first with the reading of the name by Vali, and then with his' soliloquy over the treachery of Rama, and lastly completing the picture by again reminding the reader of Vali's condition which was 'even as an elephant fallen into the trap-pit prepared by the hunter, with the spear still sticking in his gigantic frame.'¹⁰⁷ We shall also bring to the notice of the reader, another master-stroke of the poet deliberately introduced with a deep underlying purpose, but which looks as if it was merely flourished into the canvas by a lucky accident or as the result of an over-exuberant fancy. We refer

¹⁰⁴ a musical paragraph.

¹⁰⁵ The elephant is carved in perfect proportions, though a bean will cover the whole carving. It will be found in the southern face of the temple. Halebid is in Hassan district in Mysore State.

¹⁰⁶ 4:5: 67; see page 178

¹⁰⁷ 4:5:73

to the swooning away of Sugriva at the sight of the blood flowing from Vali's wound. By this one little stroke Kamban has to a large extent redeemed the blackness of Sugriva's treachery to his brother.

For he desires that Sugriva, the sworn ally and brother and constant companion of Rama in the future, should bear as white a character as can possibly be given to him without doing violence to the main incidents of the story as given by Valmiki.

Vali's speech attacking Rama is so exhaustive in Valmiki that Kamban finds himself obliged to use most of the arguments and turns out of it. The ideas in the verses from line 14 of Vali's first speech up to line 42 alone¹⁰⁸ seem to be his original contributions to the arguments and attacks of Vali. But the reader will notice that while, in Valmiki, Vali's speech is rambling and lacking in order, in Kamban it is certainly more cogent, and rises in intensity gathering new force to itself as it unrolls itself until the final taunt is delivered.

But what is most worthy of remark in the colloquy in Kamban is the greater dramatic skill displayed by the poet from beginning to end, and the high moral tone that pervades the replies of Rama. In Valmiki, as we have remarked before, Rama's arguments are specious. He declares himself to be the Deputy of Bharata, and the executor of his orders. He says:—

*'We now, as Bharat had decreed,
Toil each sinner to repress
Now Bharat rules with sovereign sway,
And we his royal word obey
And we, chastising those who err

His righteous doom administer
..... We
Obey our king and are not free.'*

The second and final argument of Valmiki's Rama — that he, as a kshatriya, was quite at liberty to kill, in whatever manner he pleased, Vali — who was no more than a monkey — lacks tenderness and truth, and is unworthy of the character of Rama.

But in Kamban, the argument is based on indisputable grounds of morality. Vali in the pride of his strength and power was pursuing his innocent brother with the object of killing him and besides had deprived him of his wife. 'Therefore ' says Rama, 'I shot my arrow at you. For,

*It is my ever-pressing vow to help
The oppressed, the poor, and those forlorn.'*¹⁰⁹

Vali's defense of his conduct with regard to his brother's wife- and Rama's reply thereto are Kamban's contributions to the story. Rama's reply is grandly conceived. In his allusion to Jatayus, the poet gives us an exquisite blend of the *Vira* and *Karuna rasas*.¹¹⁰

Vali now admits that Rama is justified in punishing him with death. But why is it that he, a warrior and lover of Dharma, did take to the cowardly expedient of ambushing him and then aiming his arrow at him? As we have remarked before, there is no real justification for it except expediency. Vali is blessed with the Tragic capacity of drawing to himself one half of the force and powers of any opponent that would face him, and God himself may not take away the fruits of austerities earned by any being — virtuous or vicious. And hence Rama circumvents the boon conferred upon Vali by Shiva by shooting him without coming before him. So by making Lakshmana reply to

¹⁰⁸ See pages 179, 180— lines beginning "I fear your mind has lost" to "And kneel you down before a puny hare".

¹⁰⁹ 4:5:102. Also see pages 181 and 182.

¹¹⁰ The heroic and pathetic emotions.

Vali's question, Kamban has saved Rama from the dilemma of either speaking an untruth or admitting a limitation to his powers.

The conversation between Tara and Vali, beautiful as it is from the point of view of dramatic construction, serves a subtler purpose in the hands of Kamban. As we have already remarked above, it impresses the reader with the super-normal physical prowess of the Vanara king and the grandeur of his soul in defending a great man from the slander of his own wife. But Kamban in the same conversation and the subsequent march of the episode is also slowly preparing a justification for Rama's action. The reference by Vali to his immense prowess and magical capacity¹¹¹ mentioned by us above aims at making the reader think that perhaps even Rama could not have killed Vali if he should have faced him. And if Vali must be killed for his crimes against Sugriva, as the reader like Vali himself must agree after Rama's justification, what has Rama to do except shoot at him from behind a cover without facing him? But at the same time, see how Kamban takes care that Vali does not say that this magical power would work against Rama also. It is after his reference to his magical power that Tara mentions Rama's name, and naturally one would expect Vali to say that that magic would cover Rama's case as well. But the careful Kamban does not put these words into his mouth. For he wants to leave the capacity of Rama to fight face to face with Vali an open question, being satisfied with the impression in the mind of his reader that possibly the *Vara*¹¹² of Vali would have enabled him to withstand the force of Rama's arrow if Rama had appeared before him.

The last words of Vali in Kamban, again, convert the ordinary hero of Valmiki into a being endowed with supreme moral grandeur. In Valmiki, Vali's words on behalf of Angada and Tara crowd out his generous gift of his might-bestowing garland to Sugriva, and the reader does not get poetically impressed with Vali's grandeur of soul in bestowing the gift on his late enemy instead of on his own son. But in Kamban, every word of Vali after his acknowledgement of his sins is calculated to increase his moral stature. Vali's addresses to Sugriva and Angada and Rama are a masterly study of how the clarified soul will look upon the affairs of the world after attaining jnana. He not only exonerates his brother of his murder, but looks upon him as one who helped him to attain the highest salvation. He recommends him tenderly to Rama. The manly pathos of his reference to the help that he could and would have rendered to Rama had fate been kind to him is a beautiful touch of the poet. And then it is a grand stroke to make Vali recommend Hanuman to Rama. While on the one hand it raises the character of Vali in pardoning Hanuman for his disloyalty against himself,¹¹³ on the other hand it makes us think highly of, and start with a decided partiality for the Vanara whom Vali regards as his own equal in strength and valor. This reference is a fitting introduction to Hanuman's grand exploits in the Fifth and Sixth Books of the Poem, and it is in the fitness of things that Vali is made to extol his great powers.

The reader may have noticed that Kamban's Vali does not, as Valmiki's Vali does, recommend Tara to Rama or Sugriva. He does not even see and console Tara who comes on the scene only after his death. But the ending of Vali in Kamban is so dramatic and satisfying to the poetic sense that the mind does not inquire why Kamban did not make Vali see and speak to Tara before he passed away.

¹¹¹ In Valmiki, as the reader will see in the Appendix, Vali makes no such reference to it in his speech to Tara.

¹¹² The blessing given by gods to beings with whose devotions and austerities they are pleased.

¹¹³ i.e., by joining Sugriva in his exile and aiding and abetting him in the bringing about of Vali's death.

CHAPTER 12

HANUMAN



Today Hanuman holds a unique place among Hindu gods and heroes. Temples dedicated to his godhead are scattered all over India. Miracles are performed in his name. Scholars meditate on his powers for years, and as a result of that meditation attain intellectual powers unimaginable by people belonging to the younger civilization of the West.¹¹⁴ Ramadas, the Guru of Shivaji, imagined himself to be an incarnation of Hanuman and dotted the whole of Maharashtra with temples built to his divinity. The orthodox Hindu still believes that Hanuman is even today living in his own identical body, and that when this Kalpa ends and another Kalpa begins, he will be appointed by the Supreme as the regent of the Brahmaloaka and creator of the universe. We shall in this chapter study the character and exploits of this great hero of the Ramayana as our poet has developed them:

The most outstanding feature of Hanuman's character is his devotion to Rama. At the very first sight of Rama and Lakshmana — at the time that he comes to find out who they might be — as they were wandering on the slopes of the Rishyamuka hill, his heart melts with love for them. He feels as one who unexpectedly falls in with friends from whom he had parted long before.

'How even tigers and leopards,' he thought within himself, 'look on them with tenderness, even as they would on their own cubs! Peacocks and other birds fly in groups and shade the delicate bodies of these strangers from the hot rays of the sun with their great wings: clouds cool them with their little rain drops, marching over them as they walk on. The burning stones on their way become soft and cool as honey-dripping flowers to their feet at every step. Even trees and plants worship them, bending down their heads when they come near. Are they Dharma's self? Are these beings gods indeed who wipe off the sorrows of living kind and give them salvation, burning away the inevitable fruits of their deeds? My very bones melt, the flood-gates of love are opened within my heart, and I see no limit or end to the affection that surges within me towards them!' (4:2:12-15.)

He nears Rama and Lakshmana, disguised as a Brahman youth, and impresses Rama greatly with his modest bearing and his replies to his questions. After listening to but a few words of his, Rama says to Lakshmana,

'It appears that there is no knowledge, brother, that this young man has not acquired. He looks a very ocean of Vedic lore. Who can he be, this child of the eloquent tongue? May he be Brahma or may he be Shiva?' (4:2:20.)

As he took leave of Rama after this short interview, promising to bring Sugriva to him, Hanuman fell at his feet. Rama protested that being a Brahman he should not have fallen down at his feet. But Hanuman, 'who was born to save Dharma from her loneliness,' told him that he was only a Vanara; and intending to show Rama his capacity to serve him, he stood assuming his own proper shape. Even the Meru mountain appeared too small to be compared to his high and mighty shoulders. Seeing his vast size and superhuman strength, Rama spoke to his brother these words about Hanuman:—

'Even that perfection which cannot be expressed by the Vedas, or even perceived by the uncorrupted Jñana, has descended to this earth, brother, taking the shape of a Vanara.'

¹¹⁴ The late Tiruppati Kavi, the great *Shatavadhani* * and poet of Andhradesha, is said to have attained his phenomenal memory and poetic gifts by meditating on this great servant of Rama. (* *Shatavadhani* — one who could concentrate his mind on a hundred topics at the same time.)

We have won this grand hero for a friend, and the omens are good: vanished now are all our sufferings, and days of happiness are dawning for us. And think of the greatness of the king of the Vanaras who has such a hero to obey his every command.' (4:2: 36, 37.)

As Hanuman is on his way to Sugriva after seeing them, his mind is incessantly dwelling on their noble features and nobler virtues. And when he sees his master, he cannot contain himself, but says to him:—

'O sire, we are blessed indeed, beyond measure, both myself and your race! For the Yama is come who has the force to destroy Vali: we have crossed the sea of misery!' (4:2:40)

and he dances for joy, 'even like the God who drank the poison¹¹⁵ to save mankind.

With every minute, however, his love and admiration for Rama go on differentiating themselves from his love and admiration for Lakshmana, and he adds to the former another emotion, namely that of *Bhakti*.¹¹⁶ His attraction to Rama finally becomes as inevitable as the attraction of iron to the magnet. His whole heart fills itself quickly with the image of Rama to the exclusion of almost any other. He can never from now on speak of Rama in the language of moderation. For he has come to believe Rama to be greater than the Trinity — he believes him to be the Ultimate Brahman Itself. So in the course of the same account to Sugriva of his meeting with the Men, he says,

'Rama is Vishnu himself worshipped by the Devas: for what man could have killed Maricha who came disguised as a magic deer?' (4:2: 49.)

Hanuman's belief in the divinity of Rama was further confirmed by the incident of Sampati which we shall relate here. After the death of Vali and the ending of the rainy season, Sugriva assembled his Vanara forces and sent them all over the earth to search for Sita. Hanuman marched south under the command of Angada, the son of Vali. After a great many adventures his party reached the promontory of Mahendra abutting itself into the channel between India and Lanka. Sita had not been discovered so far, and now the ocean barred their further advance. The time of one month fixed by Sugriva for them to return with their task accomplished was fast drawing to a close, and they were filled with despair and sorrow at not having discovered her. While they stood on the hill discussing whether they should take their lives there on account of their failure or should return to Kishkindha and report their ill-success to their king, Hanuman said, 'we must rather pursue our search and fall like Jatayus who gave up his life in defense of Sita!' Sampati, who was a brother of Jatayus, was living on that hill with his wings burnt out, in the hope that somebody might come there and repeat the name of Rama, when alone, the Sun-God had told him, his wings would grow again for flight. When he heard Hanuman speak of Jatayus as dead, he walked to where the Vanaras were holding their council and full of grief asked them how Jatayus had died. When Hanuman told him that he had died by the sword of Ravana, the great vulture king wept pathetically and asked him why they had fought with each other. But when Hanuman replied that he fell while trying to rescue Sita while she was being carried off by Ravana, the grief of Sampati was turned to joy, and he exclaimed,

*'Thrice blessed is my brother, O son of Truth,
Who gave his life in cause of holy Ram!
If in defense of Rama's spouse my brother
Was killed, how can we say, he died? He has
Attained immortal fame, and life that knows*

¹¹⁵ Shiva

¹¹⁶ Devotion

*No death. When he did earn the love of Ram,
Who's great as Righteousness itself, he earned
A glory that does rarely come to men, Or gods.
What matters now if he is dead?
What joy is greater than what is now his? ' (4:13: 43-45.)*

He then desired the Vanara heroes to repeat in chorus with devotion the name of Rama. They repeated; when lo, his wings grew to their original size and strength. He told them the Daedalus-Icarus-like story of himself and his brother, how in the pride of their youth and strength they rose sheer into the sky to explore the Svarga, how the Sun-God grew wroth at their presumption and concentrated his rays upon them, how in order to save his younger brother Jatayus he, Sampati, flew over and protected him from the burning rays while his own wings were being singed and burnt, and how the Sun-God at length took pity on him and blessed him saying that his wings would grow when the Vanaras, who would in due course of ages come in search of Sita, would repeat the holy name of Rama in his hearing. After thus detailing to them the story of himself and Jatayus, Sampati told them that he had actually seen Ravana carrying away Sita in his chariot, and that she was at the moment actually in Lanka, beyond the sea. He then spoke to them of the dangers of the deep and the prowess of Ravana, and suggested to them that one of them might try, if possible, to cross over to Lanka and ascertain everything; and if that should not be possible they should return to give the information to Rama. So saying, he spread his wings for flight and flew away to assume the guardianship of the Vultures now left without a king by the death of Jatayus.

When Hanuman saw the Vulture's wings, singed ages before, grow by the mere hearing of Rama's name, Hanuman's belief in Rama's divinity increased a hundredfold, and required only the sight of Sita at her bowery prison to become absolute. So much so that when after seeing Sita, and after destroying the Rakshasas whom he had provoked, he was captured by Indrajit and was brought before, and Ravana asked him,

*'Are you Narayana, or wielder fierce
Of the thunderbolt,¹¹⁷ or he of the triple lance?¹¹⁸
Or Brahma? Or the cobra bearing high¹¹⁹
The earth?
You must be one of them in disguise come! ' (5:13:70)*

Hanuman replied without hesitating:—

*'I'm none of those that you have named even now:
Nor do I serve such puny beings as these.
Know me as messenger of Him whose eyes
Are even as the blood- red lotus, who
Stands pledged to save from bonds of ill and good
Rishis and Gods, and even the Three Supreme . . .
He is the God Supreme, the embodiment
Of Dharma Itself, whose nature absolute
Even the Vedas have not power to sound;
Who in the hoary ages past came down
To save the elephant who called aloud
'O Lord Supreme, I trust myself to you! '
Know that the Ultimate Cause that has no first*

¹¹⁷ Indra

¹¹⁸ Shiva

¹¹⁹ Adishesh

*Or last or middle, or time or measure that bounds,
Has thrown away the lance and disk and pot
And armed itself with bow and murderous arrow,
And leaving sea and flower, and Silver Hill
Has come to show itself in fair Ayodhya.'* (5:13: 74, 75, 79, 80.)

What wonder is there that, believing as he does Rama to be the Supreme God, Hanuman should love and serve him as a devoted servant? From the moment that he has decided for himself that Rama is God, Hanuman lives for him and him alone. He has no other interest in the world except the service of Rama. Rama's friends and relations are his own friends and relations, and Rama's enemies are his own foes.

And when Rama blessed him with his love and affection, and made it known to him, among other ways, by taking him apart (when the Vanaras were being commissioned to go in different directions in search of Sita) and entrusting to him his most intimate message to Sita, Hanuman's enthusiasm for Rama's service knew no bounds. So, as the reader will remember, he joyfully accompanied Angada to the Southern Ocean.

The Vanaras were glad that they had obtained some reliable information from Sampati about the whereabouts of Sita. But 'who could cross the sea and enter Lanka? Nila and other leaders said that they had not the strength to attempt the feat. Angada said that he could by a supreme effort cross over to Lanka, but that he could not after that trust himself to cross the ocean back to the mainland. Jambhavan the Nestor of the Ramayana both in years and wisdom, excused himself saying that his feet had become too delicate for such superhuman efforts ever since they stumbled against the Meru mountain, the while he walked round the earth announcing by beat of drum the glories of the Lord on the day, ages before, that He measured the earth and heaven as Trivikrama. But he addressed Hanuman and reminded him thus of his prowess and his great qualities:—

*'O you whose days will longer last than life
Of Brahma himself! you are a scholar subtle
And wise, of unsurpassed eloquence.
The very God of Death does tremble when
Your wrath is roused: such is your strength renowned!
Nor fire, nor air, nor water can destroy,
Nor weapons scathe your mighty frame. And who
Is there we can compare to you? For you
Alone can rival thyself. If you spring
From here, you can with ease alight upon
The outer universe
You can expand and equal Meru mount
In size: if you desire, you can enter
Within the space minute that doth divide
One line of falling rain from its fellow
Even if all the worlds do stand opposed
You can withstand their might, unknowing fear . . .
You stand firm-based on justice, chastity,
And truth — your heart un-agitated stands
Forever free from thoughts of sex
So cross the sea (You have the proper strength
And force to achieve that dreaded task), and give
Us back our lives, and earn for yourself fame,
And for your king the joy of pleasing Rama!'* (4:16: 9-12, 14, 15, 19.)

Here, in the words of Jambhavan, we have all the noble traits of the Vanara enumerated by the poet. Hanuman's might and physical prowess are unequalled. The reader will call to mind his fights with Indrajit and Kumbhakarna which we have described in the chapters dealing with these Rakshasas and their battles. He will not also have forgotten how Hanuman flies over to Mount Meru from Lanka in order to bring the Sanjivi plant, and how he plucks the hill itself by the roots and carries it in his hand. The Hindu wrestler and gymnast even today meditates on him and his prowess, and sings his praises before he begins his daily exercises. Hanuman, again, is the eternal bachelor, preserving the strength of his body and the purity of his heart and chastity of mind for noble achievements and fame, and the service of his divine master.

Hanuman did not speak about his prowess — he was, as it were, unconscious of it — till Jambhavan suggested to him that he was the only fit person to cross to Lanka and return with news of Sita. But when he heard the words of Jambhavan, already filled as he was with his unbounded enthusiasm for the service of Rama, he became conscious of his powers and thus proclaimed his determination and his confidence:—

*'Do you command me to uproot the isle
Of Lanka yonder, and place it before you here?
Do you command me to destroy the brood
Of sinful Rakshasas and fly to Ram
With Sita freed? Behold I will obey
Your every behest. I'll cross the ocean stream
Of a hundred yojanas¹²⁰ with a single step,
Even as the Lord Trivikram strode the worlds!
And I will tame the wicked Rakshasas
Though gods should fight upon their side. Each one
Of you has got the force, within a trice
To leap the oceans seven, subdue the worlds,
And Sita lead to Ram, wherever she is
Kept imprisoned. So who is blessed like me
Who am commissioned by such worthy heroes
To do this task and show my skill to them.
Even if the ocean burst its bounds and stride
Along with terrific roar to engulf the worlds,
Even then, your blessings and my Ram's commands
Would lift me up as wings on either flank,
And I could fly across like Garuda great!
So give me leave, O friends, and wait for me
Upon this hill till I return, my task
In yonder isle fulfilled.'* (4:14:21 – 25)

In Valmiki also Hanuman speaks of his own prowess after Jambhavan's encomium of himself. Griffith translates his speech thus:—

*'The Wing-God, Fire's eternal friend,
Whose blasts the mountain summits rend,
With boundless force that none may stay,
Takes where he lists his viewless way.
Sprung from that glorious father, I
In power and speed with him may vie,*

¹²⁰ One yojana = 36 miles 3 furlongs.

*A thousand times with airy leap
 Can circle loftiest Meru's steep:
 With my fierce arms can stir the sea,
 Till from their beds the waters flee
 And rush at my command to drown
 This land with grove and tower and town.
 I through the fields of air can spring
 Far swifter than the feathered King,
 And leap before him as he flies
 On sounding pinions through the skies.
 I can pursue the Lord of Light
 Uprising from the eastern height,
 And reach him ere his course be sped
 With burning beams garlanded.
 I will dry up the mighty main,
 Shatter the rocks and rend the plain.
 Over earth and ocean will I bound;
 And every flower that grows on ground,
 And bloom of climbing plants shall show
 Strewn on the ground, the way I go,
 Bright as the lustrous path that lies
 Athwart the region of the skies.
 The Maithili lady will I find —
 Thus speaks mine own prophetic mind —
 And cast in hideous ruin down
 The shattered walls of Lanka town.'*

Compare this speech with the words that Kamban has put in the mouth of Hanuman. Just one or two strokes of the brush, a softening of the color here, a slight change of the color there and behold Hanuman is changed in the hands of Kamban from a boasting Vanara into a hero, conscious of his strength of course, but free from the spirit of bravado.

As Hanuman's search for Sita and his adventures in Lanka during and after the search show some of the best traits of his character, and are also the best and often remembered of his exploits, we shall give Kamban's description of the same in some detail.

After taking leave of his companions, Hanuman climbed up to the highest peak of the Mahendra promontory, and stood like a pillar supporting the vault of the sky. Then poising himself for flight, with hands and tail outstretched in air, his neck drawn in, his legs bent, and his chest contracted, he pressed down his feet and rose sheer into the sky and clove through the air towards Lanka. After sundry adventures during the course of his flight, he sprang on the further shore and began to reconnoiter the environs of the capital.¹²¹

There, in Lanka, he saw every magnificence that could be imagined by man or god. The sky-reaching turrets of its very private houses, the height of its fort walls, the depth of its moat, its gold-plated chariots, and bejeweled elephants, its high-bred horses and proud warriors, its lancers and bow-men and knights of heavy armor, impressed Hanuman with the strength and power and prosperity of the Rakshasas. He saw the wondrous trees of heaven growing in the pleasure parks of the Rakshasas and the river of Svarga flowing by their house-gardens. He saw the court-beauties of

¹²¹ Kamban's description of the flight of Hanuman across the sea is full of fancy, and lacks the grand simplicity and naturalness of Valmiki's. description of the same. But still it is rich with fine similes and is done in le grand style.

Indra's Amaravati¹²² serving as handmaids to the Rakshasis, and gods waiting upon the Rakshasas. And he saw the dancing and the singing, the playing and the sporting of Rakshasa beauties and Devadasis¹²³ to the delight of the Rakshasas in their homes and public halls. Seeing the magnificence of the mere outer city Hanuman exclaimed to himself:

*'If archers here are strong, the dancers seem
More dangerous; the warriors surpass
Them both, while swordsmen seem invincible.
And when I see my Rama, what shall I say
Of Karpanas and Dands and Bhindipals¹²⁴? ' (5:2:41)*

His capacity to assume whatever shape he pleased stood Hanuman in good stead here. He contracted himself in size and approached the gateway of the fort. The sun had set, and Rakshasas were mounting guard armed with spear and lance, axe and pestle and bow, *karpana* and *musundi*, steel discus and clubs, slings and noose and other weapons.

*'Where are the gods,' he said, 'or Asuras
Who have the strength to force these gates? If such
Should be our foes, and such their grand defense,
Can we for victory hope when war begins?
It is not hard to cross the roaring sea:
But sea of Rakshasas arms to cross is not,
I fear an easy task. If I relax
Ever so little my wariness, I can't
Return with task accomplished to my lord.
And it will be a terrific war, when war
Breaks out.' (5:2: 72, 73.)*

Avoiding the gateway, Hanuman jumped over the battlements and entered the city. Here he had need of all his coolness and resolution and strength, for the Argus-eyed Guardian-Spirit of Lanka, unconquered ever since the foundation of the state, opposed his further march, and advanced against him with fierce mien. Seeing however that he was a Vanara, she called out to him to 'leap back and fly from here'. But cogitating within himself whether it would be proper to kill a being which appeared to be female, he said to her:—

'What harm is there if I just look 'round the city and satisfy my curiosity? you see I am but a poor monkey.' (5:2:83) The spirit grew enraged at his want of prompt obedience and addressed him thus:—

*'Say who are you that dare to slight my word?
Even he who burned the flying towns of yore
Would fear to tempt my anger thus. Think you
That Lanka is a place for curious mites
To peep into an' explore? ' So spoke the form
And laughed. Hanuman echoed the laugh, and fanned
Her anger more. ' Who then are you? ' she roared;
'And say, for whom do you spy? you would not stir,
It seems, till all your life is shaken out of you.'
Great Hanuman smiled and quietly said,
'I go not hence before I take a round in Lanka fort.' (5:2:85)*

¹²² Capital of Indra's celestial empire.

¹²³ Celestial maidens

¹²⁴ Most probably battering rams and other artillery of ancient and medieval times

Seeing his nonchalance the spirit ransacked her brains to guess who he might be. She thought within herself,

*He comes not on an honest errand. Sure
A Vanara he is not: Even God of Death
Would sink to earth when he encounters me.
Who can he be? He smiles as He who drank
The ocean poison — Three-eyed Mahadeva! (5:2:86)*

And fearing danger for Lanka if he were not ended, she aimed at him her three-pointed lance, which came on him like a thunderbolt. But he caught it adroitly with his teeth as if in sport, and broke it into two as Garuda would break a cobra in mid-air. The Spirit was taken aback at seeing his force and skill, and then recovering herself rushed at him with other divine weapons. But Hanuman closed with her and wrested all of them from out of her hands before she could hurl them. So she struck him with her fists with such force that sparks of fire flew about at the stroke. Hanuman desired merely to punish her, while sparing her life as she bore a woman's form, and so he struck at her with but half his force. But she fell down vomiting blood.

And then, behold, from the prostrate form arose a Spirit divine and fell at Hanuman's feet. She told him that she was an inmate of Svarga, who had been cursed by Brahma for misbehavior and sent down to earth to guard the city and site of Lanka, and that Brahma had promised to her at the moment of cursing her that the day that a monkey should knock her down here the curse would expire. And,

*'What was foretold in ages past,' she said,
'Has come to be, for Virtue does triumph
And sin does fail, when all is said and done.
Enter therefore and do your work: you can
Achieve your wish — what can you not achieve? ' (5:2:95)*

So saying she rose into the sky and sought her home in Svarga, while Hanuman entered the city without further trouble ' even like a drop of acid for the milk of Rakshasas power '.

And what luxury did he not see in that island city which was adorned with the plunder of a hundred realms? The gems inlaid on the turrets of the palaces converted night into very day. The Rakshasis could see their faces mirrored upon the crystal walls and the golden pavements of their palatial homes. The flooring of the stages in their theatres was made of burnished gold. It was the Deva damsels that danced and acted for the Rakshasas' pleasure. Rakshasis moved from place to place in vimanas canopied over with pearls. The daughters of Svarga sang for the Rakshasis, played on their divine instruments and delighted the Rakshasa couples with their soul-capturing music. Some Rakshasas and their wives were reveling in the luxuries of wine and love and delicate sensual delights. Even Devas and Rishis were singing the praises of the Rakshasas and blessing them — such was their fear for the name of Rakshasa.

Hanuman went on searching everywhere for Sita, entering through chinks and key-holes and windows and taking every shape convenient for the time being. After long searching without encountering any notability, he entered a huge hall adorned with the trophies taken from the realms of Indra — Indra's own lustrous jeweled crown, inlaid in the vast canopy, scattering the darkness of the night to the very ends of the earth. He saw the gigantic form of a Rakshasa sleeping there like Adishesha¹²⁵ or like a veritable heaving ocean.

The form was dark even as if all the darkness of the world had been concentrated in one place, and as if all that there is of sin in the universe had taken fleshly shape. The *Devadasis* — maids of

¹²⁵ The huge thousand-hooded divine cobra bearing the earth on its heads

heaven — were pressing his feet. His breathing was like the whirlwind awaiting the Day of Dissolution to blow everything into atoms. And he looked in his sleep like a huge cobra mesmerized by the wizard's spell, or like the ocean reserving its all-destroying force for the Day of Final Dissolution. It was only from the single head of the Rakshasa that Hanuman corrected his first impression that he might be Ravana himself, and inferred that he might be his famous brother Kumbhakarna; and so he subdued his rising wrath and passed on.

After entering and searching several other palaces, he saw Vibhishana sleeping on his bed in his home. He saw his noble face, and thought that Dharma itself had taken shape and was living in a Rakshasa body in order to escape detection and destruction at the hands of the wicked Rakshasas of Lanka. He did not see Sita there and passed on. After some more searching he came before the citadel within which Indra had been kept imprisoned. He entered and saw Rakshasas with fierce weapons and fiercer aspect guarding the gates and courts. He who could by his magic pass through even chinks which smoke cannot enter, went in and saw Indrajit reposing in sleep like a lion. Seeing the heroism and valor shining in his manly face, he thought within himself,

*'Is he the Rakshasas king or Kartikeya,¹²⁶
The son of Mahadeva, God of gods?
He looks a lion sleeping in his den.
A terrific fight I see in the days to come
When Lakshmana and Rama encounter him.
With such a hero to conduct his wars,
Where is the wonder that Vishrava's son¹²⁷
Is, master of the universe? Except
Vishnu or Brahma or Shiva, can any face
This Rakshasa upon the field? ' (5:2: 141,142.)*

So saying he passed, and crossing another moat he was before another citadel. He jumped over its walls, and there, behold, a more magnificent sight than had hitherto attracted his eyes unrolled itself before his vision. Every building was like a palace of Wonderland- Diamonds and emeralds, sapphires and rubies, moonstones and cat's-eyes, made the night shine with tenfold more brilliance than day. Women of perfect beauty were in all stages and postures of sleep and repose, and dalliance and sport, many were pining for the love of Ravana who had forgotten all his dames after he had conceived his passion for Sita. *Vina*¹²⁸ and *mridanga*¹²⁹, and the sweet voices of the beauties of heaven entranced some, inflamed the passions in the hearts of others, and saddened yet others by calling up memories of their absent lovers. There were dicers playing on golden boards, betting garlands of pearls and the crown jewels of conquered kings. There were Rakshasa beauties dancing and singing sensual songs forgetting sleep.

But in none of these palaces did he find the object of his search. At length he entered the superb palace which belonged to Mandodari, the wife of Ravana. There she lay a queen among beauties, her feet pressed by Menaka and Rambha, Tillottama and Urvashi,¹³⁰ the deer-tail fans softly waving over her reposing form, the god of soft breezes himself regulating to a nicety the amount of cool air that must be allowed to touch her delicate body. Seeing her glorious form, unequalled by any that

¹²⁶ Son of Shiva, so called because six heavenly maidens from the constellation Kartik (Pleiades) were his nursemaids.

¹²⁷ Ravana

¹²⁸ The most melodious of Indian musical instruments.

¹²⁹ The soft-sounding drum

¹³⁰ Famed beauties; and danseuses of the court of Indra, the king of the Devas.

he had anywhere seen, throwing into the shade by the brilliance of its beauty even the dazzling gems that adorned her apartments,

*There crossed a thought in Hanuman's mind that she
Might be his Rama's spouse. The thought consumed
Like flaming fire his limbs and heart and soul,
And thus he spoke within himself: ' Ah me,
In vain has been my huge gigantic size
And more than mortal power. But perish that thought!
If she who sleeps over there should happen to be
Sita — her virtue trodden underfoot
And bond of love and chastity undone —
With this day ends the unsullied honor of Ram
But shall it end alone? No, no! with it
Shall end this town with all her Rakshasas,
And after I have killed them all, I will
My own accursed life straightway destroy! ' (5:2:199, 200.)*

So saying he looked at her once again, and seeing that her lineaments were not human he said to himself,

*'She looks not human, but seems a Danava
Or Yaksha dame. Ah woe is me that I
Could entertain this sinful thought! For can
A woman who has looked on Rama as Lord
Ever cast her eyes upon another being
Though he were Manmatha himself? ' (5:2:201)*

And now taking a nearer view of the Asuri, the great Vanara, who was an expert also in the science of face-reading, concluded thus:—

*'Though on her person are not wanting signs
Of luck, I find her days of prosperity
Are over. She looks as if she is alarmed
In dream: she stutters forth some words in fear:
This forebodes her widowhood; and ruin,
I see, hangs over this extensive fort.'*

So saying he left the abode of Mandodari and entered the magnificent palace of Ravana. As he entered, the earth trembled, the right eyes and brows and limbs of the Rakshasis sleeping or serving therein quivered; a shudder passed through the firmament to the farthest bounds of the earth; the clouds thundered without lightning; and the pots containing sacrificial water burst. Hanuman's prophetic eyes saw the impending fate of all this splendor, and

*His heart was moved, and he exclaimed, 'Alas,
A few days more, and there'll be nothing left
Of all this matchless splendor! For be he
Who he may, everyone must reap or good
Or ill, as he has sown! And who can escape
The rigor of this law? ' (5:2:205.)*

Inside the palace he saw Ravana sleeping on a faultlessly white silver bed of vast expanse. With his huge body of many heads and hands he looked like a black ocean scattering gems and gold, with its innumerable waves reposing on another sea, the Sea of Milk; or like the great Man-Lion with his innumerable heads and hands and sun-bright crowns reposing in the cave of the golden Meru after

destroying Hiranyakashipu. Though a thousand maids of heaven were waving their golden-handled fans of deer-tail, and the coolest of cool breezes was playing over him, the thought of Sita disturbing his heart even in sleep was wearing his life away inch by inch. The breeze that was waving over the sandal paste on his body, instead of cooling him, served only to fan the flame of his passion. His very soul having fled to where Sita was kept imprisoned, his dark and empty heart was even like an earth-hole which its cobra inmate had abandoned. His bed of silver was white-hot, and the flowers over his person burned to ashes even with the bees inside them — such was the burning heat of the passion in his heart.

A brilliant smile was now stealing over Ravana's face as he was dreaming that Sita had entered his chamber. When Hanuman saw the Rakshasa thus reposing without repose, his heart was agitated with a volcanic rage, eyes shot fire, and heaven and earth split to pieces at his frown. And he cogitated within himself:—

*'Of what avail is all my strength, and what
Will people say of me, if the jeweled crowns
Of him who stole the lovely spouse of Rama
I kick not down, nor break his serried heads?
And what will be my service worth if, him
Encountered, I my valor fail to show?
My service should be real — not vain pretense.
Shall he with life escape even when I've seen
Him here? Let me but kick his crowned heads
And break his branching arms, and end this town;
I care not, what befalls me thereafter! ' (5:2: 219, 220)*

So saying he ground his teeth and clenched his fists for action. But immediately he began to reason within himself whether this was the right thing to do; and after considering more coolly, he decided that it was not proper for him to use force at that moment. He said to himself:—

*'I have not executed yet my lord's
Commands: it is not wise to turn aside
From present work unfinished and to run
After enterprises new and strange. And now,
To think of it, if I had acted rash
On the impulse, grievous would have been the fault! ' (5:2:221)*

"Kamban moralizes in a grand stanza on the self-control of Hanuman. He says:—

*'Though mighty as the Shulin¹³¹ who could drink
The boiling ocean poison at a draught,
Will ever the wise launch on an enterprise
Difficult without deliberation due?
Hanuman stayed his hand, even as the deep,
Which, though it can overwhelm the earth, yet bides
Its time and keeps itself within its bounds.' (5:2:222)*

A deeper reason also prevented Hanuman from then and there waking Ravana and fighting him. He thought:—

*Let me restrain this rage, for overshadowed
Will be the fame of Rama, if a Vanara low
Should end the wicked one who stole his spouse*

¹³¹ He of trident — Shiva

And keeps her in captivity. (5;2:223.)

Ravana's features and condition relieved him completely with respect to one matter. The reader will remember the suspicion that rose in his mind when he saw Mandodari. Now that he had seen Ravana exhibiting all the signs of unrequited passion, the burden was lifted from off his heart completely, and he carried himself out from the presence of Ravana on the wings of the happy thought that Sita was safe from his sacrilegious touch.

But as he came out of Ravana's palace he saw that all likely and unlikely places in Lanka had been searched by him and yet he had not seen Sita. So he fell into a despairing mood and soliloquized thus:—

*'Alas, that jeweled one is not in this
Extensive fort. Has he, perchance, killed her
Because she would not yield her charms to him?
Or has he eat her in his wicked rage?
Or haply does he hold her captive close
In another world? I know not what to think
Or where to search for her? What shall I say
To Ram when I return from here? I fear
My sorrows will not end unless with life.
Kakutstha (Rama) would be thinking I would bring
A message from his Sita: while my lord
Sugriva would even expect that I'd return
Accompanied by Sita freed: and this
Is what I've done: Can I at all return
To Rama, success achieved in the task that I
Have undertook? Or shall I have to end
My life with those that I have left upon
The continent to wait for my return? '
Over all these seven hundred yojanas¹³²
Of land, there's not a living thing that I
Have missed, and yet I have not seen the spouse
Of Rama: having crossed the ocean stream,
Am I to sink beneath this sea of grief?
Shall I yon Ravana ply with blows, and force
Him to discover Sita? Or shall I
Burn down this city with its wicked king?
I may the Devas ask: but how can they
Reply, when they with terror die at sight
Of Rakshasas arms? Who else will me direct? . . . '*
*'Sampati, king of Vultures said he saw
That lovely one in Lanka; even his words
Are falsified! Shall I not even now
Destroy myself? But shall I die without
Even revenge? For there is not a doubt
That Ravana did steal our Sita fair;
I may not die therefore, before I lift
This citadel and cast it in the sea.'* (5:2:225-227, 229-233.)

¹³² 36 miles 3 furlongs

But he still walked on to see if he had by chance missed seeing any spot, and as luck would have it, he espied a grove of Ashoka trees which he had not visited so far. And determining within himself that if he should not see Sita there he would destroy Lanka, he entered it. As he entered, the gods rained showers of flowery rain over him, for Sita was placed by the Rakshasa in that lovely garden.

*There in the midst of black-skinned Rakshasis,
Seated as a flash of lightning in the bosom
Of a sable cloud, he saw the sun-flower bright
That smiles alone to the light of Kaustubha —
The brilliant sun-like gem on Rama's breast.*

He doubted not but that she must be Sita — she was like a swan floating on the stream of tears flooding down her cheeks. -He became intoxicated with joy at sight of her holy grief, and exclaimed,

*'Dharma yet lives, and I will seek no more
My death! For I have searched, and lo, the Lord
Has blessed these eyes with sight of Holy Sita
The wicked tyrant of the universe
Has wrought this guile for his own destined doom;
For Rama is none but Vishnu come to earth,
And Sita, Lakshmi of the lotus throne!
'She looks a gem laid over with dirt; she's like
The moon, her rays by sunlight dulled; her hair
Has lost its gloss. But lo, (the Lord be blest!)
Her virtue stands intact: who can set bounds
To strength that Dharma gives to mortal life?
Whom shall I praise for this grand conquest over
Such great temptation? Shall I praise the valor
Of Rama? Or the grandeur of her hero-soul?
The gods are free from blame, and Brahmans true,
And Dharma firm-established stands; hence, what
Is there impossible for me? And I
Have not in vain the ocean crossed for Rama.
If Sita should from highest self-control
Have fallen even by the breadth of an hair,
I feared Rama's wrath would clean deluge the world.
That fear now is gone, and earth is now
Forever immune from ill. For what are they
Who live amid fire or kill their appetites
Or practice other austerities besides,
When placed beside the fire of Sita's soul?
Sita, behold, has given a luster new
To womanhood and chastity by the life
That she is leading in this Lanka proud.'* (5:3:65, 67-71, 73)

The thought of Rama suddenly comes to him and he pities him for not having the good fortune to see how Sita is living in the midst of so much allurements and force and fear. He says:—

*'What pity, it is not given to Ram to see
With his own eyes this holy one, as she
Does lead her life austere in Lanka's grove!'* (5:3:73.)

And then he continues and concludes thus his soliloquy:—

*'Was it the spirit of Dharma protected her?
Or was it Janaka's virtuous deeds did fence
Her body around from touch of ill? Or does
She owe her chastity and life to her
Own steadfast soul? Can my wonder ever cease?
And who has fought temptation like to her?
And when I speak of her to comrades mine
Can ever I tire of praising her holy life?
And what temptation? All the dazzling splendors
Of Rakshasas power were there to tempt her heart,
While Ravana's lawless might was there to force
Her body: and gods are serving him both night
And day. Who could withstand such snares? And yet
She won. Now vanished are all obstacles!
In sooth, can Sin over Virtue ever prevail? ' (5:3: 75, 76.)*

The reader will agree after reading the above that Kamban has risen to the highest ideals of loyalty to a heroic master and of love of Dharma in this soliloquy of Hanuman. How enthusiastic Hanuman becomes when he sees the perfect virtue of Sita! He cannot tire of her praises or of the enumeration of the temptations that she has overcome. A new strength has now filled his heart — the strength that comes to man when he sees a grand soul that had opportunities of falling but stands serene and triumphant — and he exclaims, ' what is there impossible for me now? '

As he was in the midst of these reflections, Ravana who had awakened from his disturbed sleep came in state to see Sita, and, in spite of the fruitlessness of his previous attempts, to again try to persuade her to accept himself as her lover.

As we propose to give large extracts from this interview in the chapters dealing with Ravana and Sita we pass it over here.

As Ravana went away spurned by Sita, he ordered the Rakshasi guards of her prison to threaten her in every manner possible and make her yield herself early. They abused her, therefore, and taunted her, and threatened her with their cruel weapons. But Trijata, the daughter of Vibhishana, checked them and consoled Sita. The Rakshasis held their tongue; and thinking that this was the proper time to make himself known to Sita, Hanuman pronounced some spells which made them go to sleep on the instant. As he was thinking, however, as to how he should approach her and what he should speak to her, the threats and taunts of the Rakshasis which had burned into her heart drove her to despair, and seeing the Rakshasis sinking to sleep Sita began to lament her fate. What with the Rakshasa's words and the threats of the Rakshasis, her despair had become so intense that she doubted the very love of her husband. Her lamentations were in this strain:—

*"I have been living all these days upon
The hope of seeing my Lord, and so I've been
Bearing with patience all the ills that came
On me. But, sooth, will he admit again,
One who has lived so long in this sinful land?
I see a stranger look with lust on me,
I swallow every word with which he fills
My ears, and yet I choose not death: is there
A Rakshasi more wicked than myself?
Dishonor now has lighted on my name
And can't be warded off: where is the chaste
In story or in life who has loved her life'*

*When forced away from home by lustful men?
 Is not my honor great, and modesty,
 Who cling even now to life?
 I must have sought my death the moment when
 Disgrace did come on me: do I expect
 To open a path for me to heaven, that I
 Extinguish not my life though stained with shame?
 I sent my Lord to hunt for me the deer
 That came as bait, and on his trace I forced
 My Lakshmana good, with many an insult heaped,
 Against his will; and lo, the Rakshasa
 Has parted me from Ram and brought me here
 To this accursed town. Can ever the earth
 Hold me if even after this my life
 I do not end?
 And shall I live to have the finger of scorn
 Pointed at me by women chaste and pure
 As one who parted from her Lord and lived
 In Rakshasas lands? And then, ah wretched me!
 When Ram shall have destroyed this race for ever
 And freed me from my prison, how shall I prove
 My virtue uncorrupt, if he should say,
 'Away, you are now worthy of my love ' ? " (5:5:11-13, 15, 17, 19, 20.)*

What hope will there be left except death for a woman who has worked herself up to think like this?
 So she concluded:—

*'So death alone is Dharma's way for me.
 And lo, the little merit I have earned
 Has sent the guardians of my body fast
 Asleep. And where can I a better place
 Discover to cast my life away? ' (5:5:21)*

So saying, she stepped towards a bower of jasmine creepers. But before she had walked many steps Hanuman presented himself before her, his heart agitated with grief and joy; and saluting her with joined hands, he addressed her saying:—

'Behold me, mother, I am the messenger of your Rama. Numberless are the Vanaras scattered the world over to look for you, but as a result of my austerities in the past I have the unique fortune of setting my eyes upon your feet. Though lamenting deep your loss, Rama knows not where you art, for if he knew think you that the Rakshasa race would not have been uprooted till now? Doubt me not, O you who are pure as the sacrificial lamb, for I shall tell you about matters that Rama alone can know.' (5:5: 22-25.)

After some hesitation Sita decided that he could not be a Rakshasa in disguise, and that he might be a Rishi or a god as his thoughts and words looked pure. And then saying to herself:—

*'What matters it if he a Rakshasa be
 Or god, or Vanara king? And let him come
 With violence in his thoughts or truth: he melts
 My heart pronouncing soft my lord his name,
 And sheds a ray of light in the utter dark
 Of my soul; is life a dearer gift? My heart
 Goes out to him: his words are choice, and free*

*From guile: and tears flow free from his love-filled eyes
While he does sob aloud: I'll therefore speak
To him,' (5:5:27, 28)*

she asked him who he was.

These words of Sita impress upon the imagination of the reader the devotion of Hanuman for Rama and all that belong to him, and his tenderness towards the helpless. By these few words, again the poet introduces to us as if without any art, the beginnings of the devotion of Hanuman for Sita and the grateful and tender affection of Sita for Hanuman which characterize their feelings towards each other in the future as the events unroll themselves.

Hanuman gave her his name and told her the story of the death of Vali and the coronation of Sugriva, and of the sending of millions of Vanaras all over the earth to look for her. Look at his generous praise of his fellows of whom he says:—

*'Each one of them can lift the earth on high
And cross the ocean stream.'* (5:5: 32)

And now he speaks of Rama!

*And from the spot at which, your jewels bright
Were found by us, your Lord thought you
Must have been carried towards the south; and so
He took me apart, and did entrust me, mother,
With a message for your ear: his love, can it
Ever go in vain?'*

He continued,

*'And then, what can I say
Of how he felt when he was shown those jewels?
Weren't they giver of life to him? Believe
My word, O mother, it was those jewels you
Had thrown behind you saved your mangal string¹³³ Intact!*

Hanuman then concluded saying that Angada had come to the further shore at the command of Rama, and that he himself had crossed the sea at the bidding of Angada to look for her in Lanka.

The stanza in which Kamban describes the feelings of Sita when Hanuman finished his story is full of the highest pathos, but is very difficult of complete rendering into English. He says:—

*He ended: joy ineffable did fill
Her breast — her dried up limbs did swell with life
New found; and as the tears flowed freely from
Her eyes, from her reviving lips a cry
Escaped, ' Is life, in sooth, come back to me? '
And then she said to Hanuman, ' O Sire,
Would you describe to me my Lord his form? '*

Hanuman's description of Rama's person is done only in the conventional style. But if Kamban now and then submits to the conventions of the rhetoricians of his time, it is only for a time. For before

¹³³ The mangal string is the string on which the sacramental jewel called mangalya is strung. It is tied round the neck of the bride at the time of the marriage. It is only at the death of the husband that the string can be untied or cut. Hanuman means that but for the sight of her jewels Rama would have died of his grief for Sita, and that Rama's seeing them alone saved her from widowhood.

he goes very far, he spreads his wings for flight and' rises again to the highest regions of poetry. Thus after Hanuman's description of Rama's physical appearance, the poet describes Sita's condition and Hanuman's further speech in these words:—

*Even as a piece of wax when put in fire,
The heart of Sita melted away as he
Described to her Rama's manly form. He fell
Again at her feet, and said, " O mother, deign
To listen to words that Rama bid me say
To make you trust in me: 'Recall to her '
Said he, ' that when I prayed her to remain
At home and serve my mothers, as forest paths
Were thorny, wild, and steep, her eyes grew red,
And with a cloth of bark put on, she came
And stood beside me. Tell her on the day
That we for the jungle started, hardly had
We passed the city-gates when she did ask,
'Where is the forest, dear? ' Again remind
Her,' said your Rama, ' that when Sumantra¹³⁴ left
Us on the forest bounds, she clean forgot
Her grief and sent a message to her birds
And parrots left at home! ' "He ceased, and then
Thinking that he had said enough, he showed
To her the ring on which her Rama's name was carved. (5:5: 59-62.)*

We shall refer the reader to chapter 15 for a description of ' the effect that the sight and touch of the ring wrought upon Sita. The ring finally dispelled all her doubts and suspicions and a new hope now entered her heart. She blessed Hanuman for thus saving her life with the message of Rama. She then learned from him all that had taken place after she was parted from Rama. When Hanuman, however, said that he crossed the ocean from the mainland to Lanka, she found it hard to believe it. She, therefore, asked him how he could cross the sea without a boat. He said:—

*'Just as those, mother, who meditate on the holy feet of your Lord cross the endless ocean of
Illusion, even so I crossed the black ocean stream with my feet.'*

But as this did not satisfy her, he showed to her his Vishvarupa — the gigantic, world-filling form in which he flew across the sea. Says the poet:—

Saluting her still with his joined hands, he grew in size till his head almost touched the roof of heaven and he bent himself for fear lest his head should actually strike against it. The gods wondered when they saw that universe pervading form, whether absolute power belongs to elements five that compose the world or to Hanuman alone. The stars in the heaven looked like fire-flies hanging to his hairs — so high he stood and so huge he looked! Eyes could not take in his size nor the mind conceive his form; one could not ascertain which were the sun and the moon and which the ear-rings shining in his ears and in that form he could see with his own lotus eyes the eyes of gods and men looking to him for their protection and safety from Rakshasa violence. (5:5: 100-302, 104.

When Sita saw the Vishvarupa of Hanuman she felt that, with such an ally as he, Rama could destroy the Rakshasas with ease. But while on the one hand she was satisfied with the exhibition of Hanuman's strength and might, on the other hand she could not bear without a sense of fear the

¹³⁴ the charioteer

sight of that world-pervading form; and so she prayed him to resume his original shape. Hanuman obeyed her, and when he stood before her as an ordinary normal Vanara, she sang his praises thus:—

*It were little if I say you can the earth
Uproot, and lift her with her stable hill,
Or take the hooded snake that bears the world
Aloft and make of it a plaything light
In your hand! you have the strength of the raging storm:
Is it a praise indeed to say that you
Did cross the sea that does not hide its head
In shame? your single prowess will suffice,
O long-armed hero, to extend the fame
Of Rama and his grace, and make them live
For untold ages green in the minds of men.
What pity Lanka's isle is not beyond
The oceans seven, for to demand of you
The exercise in full of all your might! . . .
Whenever I thought of Rakshasas might and power
I used to fear that Rama had none besides
To help him but his brother: but now that fear
Has left me quite, for what is Rakshasas might
When he has such a hero for ally?' (5:5: 109, 110, 112.)*

All trace of her despair and grief had now left her soul. She felt herself free of all care and even full of joy. She therefore continued:—

*'Even if death comes to me, I can
Now pass away in peace, for even now
I feel as if I'm from this loathsome prison
Released. And lo, I shall be soon avenged
Upon the cruel Rakshasas who must fall
With all his race destroyed. And what do I
Desire now more? My Lord his holy feet
Have now adorned my head and Glory begins
To shed her light on me, and no disgrace
Will ever attach itself to Sita's name! ' (5:5:113)*

The large soul of Hanuman, however, is not elated at her praises. His reply is full of modesty and the praise of his companions and his leader. He says,

'O you, chaste as Arundhati,¹³⁵ more numerous than the sands of the sea are the Vanara leaders who serve Rama. I am but a humble servant of those mighty chiefs, obeying the commands that they lay upon me. Seventy Vahinis¹³⁶ is the total of our Vanara force. Is this ocean large enough for them even if they set themselves to drink each but one handful of water from it? It is because he did not know the whereabouts of this Lanka that it is still undestroyed. Can it long remain on its foundations now that we have seen it? Vali's brother is there and Vali's son, and Mainda and Tumind and the fierce Kumuda.' (5:5:114 – 116)

¹³⁵ The wife of Vashistha and the ideal of chastity.

¹³⁶ Armies. In the latter-day world of mere men, this term meant a detachment of an army consisting of 81 elephants, as many chariots, 243 horse and 405 foot. Some put it at three times this figure. But here the term obviously stands for very very much more.

Hanuman gives an impressive list of the Vanara leaders and concludes,

'They can lift this earth and even the other worlds from their foundations. And they are as obedient to Rama's will as his very arrows. What are these Rakshasas to them? '
(5:5:117)

After saying everything calculated to give her hope and courage, Hanuman told her that he would like to carry her on his shoulders and place her at the feet of Rama. But her innate sense of delicacy would not let her consent to it and she only sent instead a pathetic message to Rama through him. She accompanied the message with her head-ornament which she desired him to give to Rama as a pledge of her affection and her trust in him.

At last walking round her in devotional homage Hanuman took leave of her and walked away. But once again alone, he wanted to leave a memorial of his visit to Lanka, and after some thought he decided to destroy the grove and provoke a quarrel with the Rakshasas and put his prowess to the best use in Rama's cause. Things happened as he wished, for the mischief that he committed in the grove was bruited abroad and Rakshasa after Rakshasa, and army after army were dispatched against him by Ravana. But not one Rakshasa returned alive even to tell the story of the fate of the armies. At length even Aksha, the son of Ravana, was crushed to death by the mighty paw of Hanuman. The reader will remember how Indrajit chided his father for not measuring earlier the strength of the Vanara and thus having been the cause of the death of his own son.

When at length Indrajit came with his big army against him, Hanuman was not terrified, but on the contrary was glad to meet such a famous foe. He thought within himself in this way when he came in sight:—

*The prowess I have shown in killing some
Of these heroic Rakshasas has had
Its quick effect; for here I see the foe
Of Indra coming on. It matters not
If now I fall or conquer him, for great
Will be the fame in either case. If I
Succeeded in killing him, it will be as if
Ravana himself has fallen crushed beneath
My arm. And he would know his end is come,
And send our Sita back; while Rakshasas pride
Would lick the dust, and Indra'd come again into his own. (5:12: 25 –27)*

Hanuman scattered and destroyed Indrajit's forces, and at length engaged with Indrajit himself. Hanuman fought with the branches of trees while the Rakshasas assaulted him with his arrows. The fight continued for long and Indrajit's bow itself was broken by Hanuman. At last seeing no other way to end Hanuman, Indrajit sent the Brahmastra against him, and it bound his limbs and made him prisoner. Although the Brahmastra is the most shattering weapon known to the heroic armory, Hanuman had been granted the blessing of invulnerability against it by Brahma himself in former times, and so he was merely overpowered by the weapon and not killed.¹³⁷

He was dragged by the Rakshasas and Rakshasis in his temporarily helpless state and placed before Ravana by Indrajit. Ravana was sitting in state surrounded by his ministers and courtiers and musicians and dancers, and when Hanuman was brought before him his very sight angered Hanuman as the sight of the cobra would rouse the wrath of the eagle. His first impulse was to

¹³⁷ Brahma's blessing also limited the bondage to an hour and a half.

break asunder the noose that was still holding him in its bonds and spring upon Ravana. He thus revolved the matter in his mind:—

*'When on his bed I saw him sleep, I thought
It was not just to kill him unawares:
Now that my luck had made him sit upon
His throne, I shall not further think, but shall
Now fall on him, and felling down his heads
Shall free our Sita, and take her back to Ram.
If in the presence of Gods and Danavas,
Who guard in terror Sita's bowery prison,
I do not clip his crowned heads, what'll be
The worth of all my courage and my might? . . .
It will be a shame if after seeing him —
The chance of a full life-time — I do return
With only words exchanged with the Rakshasas king.
I need not even conquer him: I'll have
Renown if even I die in fight engaged with him.'* (5:13: 56, 57, 59.)

But presently he grew more collected and looked at the situation in a different light. Now he argued within himself in this way:

*' He looks too strong for me to kill — his power
Does forbid hopes of easy victory.
And can a mortal triumph over him
But Rama? He cannot conquer me if fight
Begins, nor can I hope to bring him down.
And days unending will elapse without
Success: so wisdom rules against a fight.
And has not Rama sworn that he would lop
Himself the severed heads and branching arms
Of Ravana and free the world of fear?
And Sita's oath stands that she would end
Her life, if Rama does not within a month
Invade these realms in force: I shouldn't therefore
Engage in doubtful fight, and waste my time.
So I shall stand before the Rakshasa
As carrier of the message of my King.'* (5:13: 61-65.)

So Hanuman took upon himself the job of ambassador and waited to be questioned by the Rakshasa. We have extracted Ravana's questions and Hanuman's answer in the first pages of this chapter. After saying that he was serving Rama, Hanuman assumed to speak on behalf of his own king Sugriva and advised Ravana to send back Sita to Rama and save himself. Ravana only grew indignant at his presumption and ordered his attendants to kill him. But Vibhishana interfered and dissuaded Ravana from putting him to death saying that a messenger sent by a king should never be killed. Ravana agreed not to kill him but desired to give him some punishment, and so he directed that his tail should be tied round with cloth and all sorts of combustibles, and set on fire.

Sita when she heard of it trembled for Hanuman's safety and prayed to the God of Fire not to burn him, and lo, though the fire played all about him, enveloping him in flames, Hanuman felt cool up to the very marrow of his bones!

When Ravana desired to punish Hanuman, he counted without his host. For as soon as his tail was on fire, Hanuman freed himself by force from the guards that were holding him on either side, and

jumped about the whole city flourishing his tail in every direction. The whole of Lanka was soon in flames. All that was made of silver and gold in the city erected by the hand of the heavenly architect melted in the flames. Groves and parks and theatres and palaces caught fire and crashed down. Elephants and horses died, and chariots were burned to ashes. Rakshasas and Rakshasis ran for their lives all over the city. The cries of women and children and dumb suffering animals filled the sky. In a few hours the whole of Lanka so fair to look on — the cynosure of all eyes in the universe — became a mass of cinder and ashes.

As soon as Ravana saw Hanuman jumping about, he commanded his guards to recapture him, but that was impossible. Hanuman seeing the miraculous escape of Sita's grove alone from the general conflagration, attributed it as well as his own immunity from fire to Sita's unique chastity, and making a last salute to her and receiving her last message he got upon a rock, and putting out the fire in his tail sprang across the seas and rejoined his companions.

They were delighted to see him back in their midst from his great adventure, and wept, and danced, and jumped about in joy. Some embraced him, some drank him with their eyes, some lifted and carried him on their shoulders. Some brought honey and fruits and roots, and placed them before him saying that his very face showed to them that he had come back with success in his undertaking. Some looked on his wounds — the wounds caused by Indrajit and other Rakshasas in his fights — and wept tears of grief. At length after saluting Angada and Jambhavan and each of the rest according to his dignity and worth, Hanuman told them that Sita was safe and had sent a glorious message through him to Rama. Then, says the poet:—

*The Vanaras joined their hands in worship, and
Their hearts with joy unspeakable filled, prayed him
To tell the story of his flight and back
In full. So he described the holy life
Of Sita and her great austerities —
And how she gave and how he brought the gem
That would, as sign that she did live, delight
The heart of Rama. But the story of his fights
With Rakshasas, or of his setting fire
To Lanka town, he passed in silence over,
For he was loth his own exploits to tell. (5:15:9)*

Such was the modesty of this great and mighty hero. But they inferred all that he hesitated to say, for they said,

*'The wounds announce your struggles with your foes,
While your return proclaims your victory.
The columns dark of smoke, that yonder rise
Into the sky betray the ruin you
Have brought upon your enemies! What need,
Alas, of words about the strength of foes
When brought is not the queen with you? ' (5:15:10)*

But all the same glad that their party was able to trace out (the whereabouts of Sita, they returned to Kishkindha to place before Rama the happy results of their wanderings. Hanuman's account of his work to Rama occupies a very high rank in literature for the grandeur of its sentiments, but we shall reserve it for the chapter on Sita as it deals chiefly with her. Sugriva would not waste even a single minute — even to thank Hanuman for his great work — after receiving news of Sita, and so the whole army began to march southwards.

Hanuman now prays Rama to honor him by riding upon his shoulders, and Rama graciously complies with his request. In Valmiki the position is reversed. It is Rama that proposes that he would ride upon Hanuman's shoulders. It is wonderful how Kamban attends even to such minute matters and invests his characters with greater delicacy and sweetness. *De minimis non curat poeta*,¹³⁸ says the critic. But Kamban's chisel can carve a bee on a lotus with the same ease with which it can shape a giant or cut a battle-piece.

We have had occasion in previous chapters to speak of Hanuman's valor and physical strength, and so we need not dwell much upon them here. In fact, is not the whole Ramayana in a way the story of Hanuman's valor and might? There is not one opponent of his who does not at once recognize his strength and heroism. We have seen Indrajit classing him with the Supreme Three even before seeing him 3; and when he sees him he is glad that he has such a foe to engage with. Ravana refers to the part played by our hero in the first day's battle in these words:—

*'My foe upon the monkey rode: (but who
Can say he only was a monkey tailed?)
The while he fought I wondered whether it be
The whirlwind that he rode, or leaping Fire,
Or Death himself. Can even Garuda
The heavenly Eagle bear the fierceness
Of that fight so lightly as that Hanuman.'* (6:15:29)

When Kumbhakarna aims his terrible lance at Sugriva, and all beholders are every moment helplessly fearing that he cannot escape its force, it is Hanuman that leaps into the air and cleverly catches it and snaps it into two. And the sound of the snapping was as deep as when the bow of Shiva was broken by Rama for the sake of the fair hand of Sita!

Kumbhakarna wonders at his strength and says,

*'The mind cannot conceive nor tongue can praise
The might uncommon of your arm! Whom can
I couple with you, who stand alone to achieve
The impossible? Engage with me, and I
Shall even now abide by what I said before.'* (6:15:262, 263)

But Hanuman had already made and lost his bet against Kumbhakarna. So his code of honor prevented him from again engaging him, and he went his way, satisfied only with saving the life of Sugriva.

When Malyavan, the grandfather of Ravana, hears that the Hill of Drugs had been brought from the north to raise the dead in the Vanara army, he at once thinks of Hanuman as the only person who had the strength to achieve such a gigantic task. And so he says to Ravana:

*'Who has the strength but Hanuman to fly
From hence and cross the Meru mount within
A trice, and bring the hill of drugs over here?
For he it is who has into the deep
Of things with solemn thought explored.
Who can with life escape if he uproot
This rock of Lanka and dash it against
The earth? How can we war with him? If he*

¹³⁸ Poets do not care to bother about trifles.

*Should bring the Meru mount and drop it plumb
On this isle, have we the strength to break its force?
If on destruction he is bent, there's naught
To stop him from the attempt! I say its fools
Alone who say that They of whom the Vedas
Do speak are only Three: I do declare
That with this Hanuman, the Gods Supreme are Four! ' (6:25: 3–5)*

In the Vanara army also, wherever there is a difficult task to perform — a task that cannot be done by ordinary Vanaras — it is Hanuman that is thought of by the leaders as the proper person to be entrusted with the same. We have seen in this chapter how Jambhavan praised him on the sea-shore, and pointed to him as the only Vanara who could cross the sea and return with success achieved from Lanka. We have seen how in the different battles he aided the other heroes at critical moments, and how often he saved the situation for the Vanara army from the mortal onslaughts of Kumbhakarna and Atikaya and Indrajit.

We have referred more than once to Hanuman having brought the Hill of Drugs in order to save the Vanara army from the effects of the *Brahmastra*. The reader will remember that Vibhishana brings back Hanuman from the unconsciousness into which Indrajit's weapon had stunned him. He takes him to where Jambhavan, the wisest of the Vanaras, was lying overpowered by the same astra. As soon as Jambhavan hears Hanuman's voice he exclaims in joy,

*'Now all is not lost: we shall conquer yet:
We shall even now rise from this fall — we shall! ' (6:23:20)*

Such is his faith in Hanuman.

He then asks Hanuman to save Lakshmana and Rama and the seventy Vahinis of Vanaras by bringing the Hill of Drugs from the north. The rolling stanzas which Kamban puts into the mouth of Jambhavan, describing the route which Hanuman ought to take, and those in which the poet describes the flight of Hanuman are a treat to the lover of Tamil poetry, and will call to the mind of the English scholar the sonorous stanzas of Byron on the Ocean, both in the beauty of rhythm and the grandeur of the images that they suggest to the imagination.

When the Hill of Drugs wakes up Lakshmana and the Vanara army as if from sleep, Rama embraces Hanuman and with tears in his eyes thanks him in these words:

*'Once we were horn of Dasharatha, O friend,
But those our bodies now are dead which took
Their birth from him. And now we're born again,
And you it is to whom we owe this birth!
O you that saved us from overwhelming ruin,
You have enabled us to fight again
Our foe, and saved our vows and honor dear
As life, our ancient line and Veda itself!
And as you did my brother save, and all
This host from the jaws of death, may never Death
Approach your frame: live you for ever and ever! (6:23:111 – 114)*

When once again Hanuman saves Lakshmana, Rama's words to him though few are full of tenderness and soul. Says Rama,

*'O great one, Fortune has blessed me with your love
and friendship: what can I lack in life? ' 6:31:46)*

Hanuman's tender regard for Sita is one of the finest traits in his character. In this chapter itself, the conversation between Sita and Hanuman, and Hanuman's soliloquies that we have translated would show his chivalry and devotion to that paragon of women. And can the reader have forgotten Hanuman's behavior and words when Indrajit cut off the head of the automaton made to look like Sita?

We think we have spoken of Hanuman both in this chapter and elsewhere sufficiently to give a tolerably living conception of the hero whom not only Kamban but all lovers of Rama love as their very Guru and God. But as we have said before, from the moment that he enters on the scene, Hanuman absorbs to himself an interest equal to that of Rama or Sita, and the three last books of the Ramayana must be studied from beginning to end in order to obtain a full and adequate mental picture of the great Vanara hero who came into the world ' to remove the helplessness of Dharma '. The parting words which Kamban puts in the mouth of Rama when after his happy coronation he sends Hanuman back from Ayodhya to his own Kishkindha are very beautiful, and are a measure of Hanuman's place in the story. Says the poet:

*And turning full on him his eyes that rained
Affection and love, he said, ' There's none like you,
When dangers hedge us round, to free us from
Their fangs and lead us to shelter safe!
What guerdon can I give you for the help
Invaluable that you have rendered me
In the past? Embrace me, O my hero brave! ' (6:39:20)*

What reward indeed can be greater than embracing the sacred" body of Rama whose beauty painters could not paint or sculptors chisel, and which none but Sita, not even the Rishis, were given to touch in that incarnation. But Hanuman's modesty and devotion would not allow him to put himself on a plane of equality with his master. He just hung down his head and stood aside — thus showing to the world how true merit always effaces itself avoiding public recognition. We shall also leave our hero in this same attitude, only pointing to him as a beacon light to those who desire to achieve greatness- in this world and the next.

CHAPTER 13

RAVANA



In this chapter we take up the study of the character and exploits of the great enemy of Rama, as depicted by our poet. Ravana's chief characteristic in our story is his unrestrained passion for women. But he is much else besides. He is a Rakshasa learned in the Vedas, handsome with the handsomeness that strength and the consciousness of valor give, who by great austerities has acquired immense strength and invincibility and victory in war. He has conquered the Devas and the Asuras and the Yakshas and the Nagas, and exercises sway over the Three Worlds. In former days he had fought with every being considered powerful and had always either conquered them or made friends with them. The very mammoths that bear the universe on high from the eight extremities thereof had owned him victor after having had their tusks broken, while charging at his breast. Even the Supreme Trinity desisted from interfering with him, for austerities must always have their full effect till their strength was exhausted, and his austerities were not ordinary. He had been defeated only twice — and that only in single combat — once by Vali and another time by Kartavirya Arjuna, but in spite of these defeats he continued as ever before to be the master of the universe, these enemies never thinking it possible to remove him from his throne.

These are the antecedents that Valmiki himself gives to Ravana. Generally speaking, his delineation of Ravana is worthy of the antecedents that he presupposes for him. He depicts him as a hero proud and fierce and full of the authority that comes of supreme power. Everybody obeys Ravana's slightest word. None dare question his acts or even his orders. Where anybody has to differ from him, he expresses his opinion with due deference and after profuse apologies. But in one or two places Valmiki has forgotten himself and has lowered the dignity of Ravana. When, after being maimed by Lakshmana, Shurpanakha returns to Lanka, Valmiki makes her address Ravana thus:

*'Will you absorbed in pleasure, still
Pursue unchecked your selfish will;
Nor turn your heedless eyes to see
The coming fate that threatens you?
The king who days and hours employs
In base pursuit of vulgar joys
Must in his people's sight be vile,
As fire that smokes on funeral pile.
How, heedless, wicked, weak, and vain,
Will you your kingly state maintain?
Thou, lord of giants, void of sense,
Slave of each changing influence. . . .
Your counsellors are blind and weak,
Or, you from these had surely known
Your legions and your realms overthrown.
Enslaved and dull, of blinded sight,
Intoxicate with vain delight,
You closest still your heedless eyes
To dangers in your realm that rise.
A king besotted, mean, unkind,
Of niggard, hard, and slavish mind,
Will find no faithful followers heed
Their master in his hour of need.*

*O weak of mind, without a trace
Of virtues that a king should grace,
Who have not learnt from watchful spy
That low in death the giants lie.
Scorner of others, but enchained
By every base desire,
By you each duty is disdained
Which time and place require. '*

And how does receive this gratuitous and meaningless insult from a woman?

*As thus she ceased not to upbraid
The King with cutting speech,
And every fault to view displayed,
Naming and marking each,
The monarch of the sons of night,
Of wealth and power possessed,
And proud of his imperial might,
Long pondered in his breast.*

Bhaskara, the Telugu poet, just follows the lead of Valmiki and makes Shurpanakha reprimand Ravana with bitter words thus:

'Glorious indeed is the manner in which you and your favorites are ruling the realms under your sway! you are perfectly satisfied with your low pleasures. your powerful arms that lifted high the Kailas mount, now hang useless by your side; the glory of your authority that extended over the three worlds has now lost its luster: your arms have been victorious all over the worlds as far as space extends, but the light of your victories has now grown dim: your fame that has been flourishing up to now has now begun to fade away.

'For when I gave out that I am your sister, it only provoked my injurers the more, and this is the way they have dealt with me innocent! And still they live! Verily I cannot find words bitter enough to address you, O hero of the serried heads, valiant in battle as Rudra himself! '

Tulsidas too repeats the same scene of Shurpanakha reprimanding Ravana in his audience-hall, as if Ravana, though her brother, was not the proud and hitherto undisputed ruler of the universe. He puts such words into her mouth as,

'You spend your time in revelries and sleep both day and night ' etc.

Contrast these with the way that Kamban represents the meeting of the maimed sister with her brother:

She entered the northern gate of the city with her hands joined over her head as a suppliant. . . . The Rakshasas that looked on her grew red with rage; some spoke words like thunder; some could not speak at all; their eyes rained fire and they bit their lips; some were heard to say, ' could Indra have been guilty of this sacrilege? or could it be Brahma? or may it be Shiva? Others would answer, ' where are the foes that we can point to in this universe? It is impossible that any in this triple universe should have attempted this deed: it must be the doing of some from the Worlds beyond.'

The music of the Vina and the Mridanga, of the Yal and the flute, of the Shankha and the horn, all were hushed that day in Lanka and only lamentations were heard for the fate of Shurpanakha.

While all Lanka was thus immersed in grief as she walked along, she reached the audience-hall of Ravana and fell at his feet as a cloud settling at the foot of a hill. Darkness fell over the universe as pall. Adishesha, who is bearing the earth on his shoulders, was terrified as to what would happen when Ravana's anger was roused, and bent down his head. The mountains of the earth shook. The Sun was beside himself with fear. The mammoths that bear aloft the universe fled, and the Devas concealed themselves in nooks and corners.

With smoke rushing through his mouths even as he bit his lips with his teeth, his very moustaches trembling and smelling with the fire of his breath, with his teeth giving out the sheen of lightning while he ground them in his anger, he thundered out, 'whose deed is this?'

She replied, 'There are two men who are like him whose standard is the fish.¹³⁹ They are protecting the earth from ills and live in the forest; there is none that can compare with them in beauty of form; it is they that cut at me with their swords!'

When she said it was men that did this injury to her, he laughed a laugh that resounded to the very ends of the earth, his eyes radiated fire, and he asked, 'Is this all that these feeble hermits have done; or have they done anything more? Fear not you and speak you without concealing all that befell.' (3:7: 24-29, 36, 45, 46, 49-51)

Kamban represents Shurpanakha as still under the infatuation of her passion for Rama and Lakshmana, and makes her describe their beauty and prowess with extreme warmth, at the end of which description she gives out that their names are Rama and Lakshmana and that they are the sons of Dasharatha.

When he had heard to the end, Ravana broke out thus:

*'It's men that've maimed my sister dear as life,
And having maimed her they're yet alive? And still.
His sword in hand and bitten not with shame,
Lives Ravana yet, not even hanging down
His eyes or heads! Behold they live who have offended me:
And lo, my sword is by my side; my arms
Un-paralyzed do hang; the years that Shiva
Has blessed me with are running on — I live!
Are you ashamed, O heart? and fear you
To bear the dire disgrace never felt before?
Think not yourself too weak: your heads are ten,
And twenty are your arms, full strong enough
To bear this weight of shame!' (3:7:58,60,61)*

So saying, and with his eyes flashing fire, he asked, 'And what were Khara and the Rakshasas doing without killing these feeble men?' As soon as he asked this question, tears gushed from her eyes as if from a fountain. She struck her breast and fell down upon the ground. Again joining her hands she began, 'Your kindred all are dead, O Sire!', and continued thus:— 'As soon as they heard my complaint, Khara and the rest of the bull-like heroes rose with their troops and marched against them, but all of them fell within a space of four hours, struck by the arrows of the lotus-faced prince called Rama.'

When he heard that his brethren had died at the hands of a man, and who fought only singly, grief and indignation, struggled in his heart, and tears flowed and lights flashed from his eyes as rain and

¹³⁹ Manmatha — the Indian Cupid

lightning play about a storm-cloud. The grief that was submerged under the fire of his anger now acted like ghee and roused it into a flame; and he asked her, 'What is it that you had done them, that they laid violent hands on you and chopped your lips and nose?' 'My fault,' she began, 'it related to a woman whose waist is like the lightning, whose tender arms are like the bamboo stem, and whose color is that of pure gold. I imagine she is Lakshmi herself who has left her lotus home and lives with Rama!'(3:7:67)

'And who is She?' asked Ravana, when she began thus:—

*'Her name is Sita: blessed is the earth
That bears her tender feet upon her lap.
Her bosom shines like cups of burnished gold:
The music of her voice recalls the sounds
Of woods, and groves, and honey tender-sweet.
Her tresses rich adorned with flowers, she is
A queen among the fair of heavens! If she
Who dwells in the lotus is not worthy even
To be her maid, how can I make you feel
Her beauty? Like a deep-black cloud do show
Her tresses fair, and also falling rain.
Her feet are cotton-soft, her fingers show
As corals tender-red. Ambrosia she
Has robbed, and lo, her ravishing speech doth flow
Therewith. And though her face is not larger than
The lotus, her eyes are deeper than the sea!
They're fools who say that Manmatha was burnt
By fire of Shiva's eyes. This is the truth:
He saw this damsel and smitten was with love
For her form; but being spurned by her,
He wasted sheer away and a martyr died
To love — such is the beauty of her form!
Shall I her arms describe, or the eyes that rove
Upon her gold-bright face? Or shall I praise
Her other charms? I am confused for I
Have not the skill to paint her lovely limbs
In words! But you will surely see yourself
Tomorrow: why should I your time consume?
If once her charms are yours, O Sire, your heart
Can never rove again and all your wealth
You'll place at Sita's feet: and mark my words:
You'll bless me for my pains when once you look
On her: but all your queens will vent their hate
On me — for verily I bring them naught but ruin.'*

After rousing Ravana's passion for this unseen beauty, Shurpanakha now reveals the motive which induced her to do so. She tells him:

*.....'Possess her, immerse your soul
In love, while all the world shall sing in joy
Your marriage song: a reward now I claim:
Put forth your valor and, defeating Rama
Wed me to him, for, him I love as life.*

*Though great the merit earned by austerities,
As destiny does rule us all, no good
Can come to us except in its own time.
For, Sire, its only now that you are given
To enjoy the advantage of your twenty eyes
And arms! It's such a fair that I did try
To bring for you, when Lakshmana brother of Ram,
Attacked and wounded me. I hurried here
To tell you this, and after telling all,
To go and end my life disgraced forever! ' (3:7: 79-81.)*

Here in this conversation we see how Kamban keeps high the prestige and dignity of Ravana. His sister talks to him as a suppliant and not as a virago who is used to treat her brother with scant courtesy. See also how our poet exploits to the full the dramatic possibility of the situation. Shurpanakha coming as an injured suppliant with hands over her head, the remarks of the Rakshasa people at the unheard of insult to their power and prestige, Ravana's indignation at the sight of the wrong to which his sister had been subjected, his self-deprecation that in any part of his dominion such an ignominious insult should be offered to his sister, the bringing in of the reference to Khara at the psychological moment — all these are contrived and arranged with the justness of the trained master-artist.

Here also we may note, in passing, Kamban's just taste in the matter of the architecture of the epic. Those who have finally arranged and revised the Benares and Southern Recensions — which agree with each other very closely — of Valmiki's Ramayana have not exhibited in this part of the story that apprehension of *bhavika* which they so generally exhibit in their recensions. In Canto 31 of the Forest Book in these recensions, a Rakshasa named Akampana, after acquainting Ravana of the prowess of Rama continues thus:—

*'But guile may kill the wondrous man:
Attend while I disclose the plan.
His wife, above all women graced,
Is Sita of the dainty waist,
"With limbs to fair proportion, true,
And a soft skin of lustrous hue..
Round neck and arms rich gems are twined:
She is the gem of womankind.
With her no bright Gandharvi vies,
No nymph or goddess in the skies;
And none to rival her would dare
'Mid dames who part the long black hair.
That hero in the wood beguile,
And steal his lovely spouse the while.
'Bereft of his darling wife, be sure,
Brief days the mourner will endure.'*

This plan pleases Ravana and he goes to Maricha and tells him:—

*'My guards, the bravest of my band,
Are slain by Rama's vigorous hand;
And Janasthan, that feared no hate
Of foes, is rendered desolate.
Come, aid me in the plan I lay
To steal the conqueror's wife away.'*

Maricha, however, speaks of the great prowess of Rama and advises Ravana to give up his dangerous ideas. He says,

*'And pacified and self-possessed,
To Lanka's town return.
Rest you in her imperial bowers
With your own wives content.
And in the wood let Rama's hours
With Sita still be spent.'*

Ravana takes the advice and returns to Lanka. Then Shurpanakha comes to Ravana's court and after reprimanding him, gives an account of Khara's fall, Rama's beauty and prowess, and Sita's charms and advises him — she also as Akampana — to steal away Sita. Ravana again flies to Maricha, to demand his help. This conversation between Maricha and Ravana, though much more elaborate, is constructed as if the first visit and conversation had not taken place at all.

This is such an obviously faulty *bhavika* that we cannot understand how the commentators like Govindaraja and others did not correct the error and remove the incident of Akampana and the first meeting with Maricha from the story. It is a still greater wonder that Bhaskara copies even these re-duplications in his rendering of the Ramayana. Kamban, as the reader would have noticed, has cut away the Akampana incident altogether and concentrates all his poetry and are in the elaborations with Ravana.

The Passion of Ravana for Sita, being the *bija* — the seed— from which grow all the subsequent incidents of the story, we should have expected Valmiki to have emphasized and elaborated it at the end of the conversation between Shurpanakha and Ravana. But neither in Canto 36 where Ravana tried to persuade Maricha to disguise himself as a deer in order to inveigle Rama and Lakshmana from the side of Sita, nor in Canto 40 where he threatens Maricha with death if he does not obey his direction, does the Sanskrit poet lay emphasis on Ravana's passion for Sita. We shall see how Kamban sows the seed and develops it. When Shurpanakha had finished the description of Sita's person, says the poet:—

'all his anger and valor and sense of shame now left his heart, even as all good emotions leave the soul into which sin has gained entrance. Now lust and the pangs that accompany lust became like two fires and mingled with his soul. Struck by the arrows of Manmatha, he forgot Khara, he forgot the strength of his arm who maimed his sister, he forgot the disgrace that had befallen him, he forgot the limits of the blessings received by him, but he forgot not the fair of whom his sister spoke.

His thoughts and the name of Sita of the slender waist had ceased to be two and had become but one single current: had he now another mind to leave off one of them and to take only the other? How else could he forget her? Can even the learned conquer lust unless they have acquired wisdom.

Even before he brought away the fair one whose form was like unto the peacock, the Lord of Lanka imprisoned her within the dungeons of his heart! And thereby his heart began to slowly melt away even as butter when placed in the sun.

Because his own destiny egged him on from behind, and because his actions and thoughts of the past were maturing in order to bear their appropriate fruit, and also because the days of his prosperity were fast approaching their appointed end, the pangs of his passion grew more and more intense even as the seed of evil secretly sown by an ignorant fool. And Manmatha acquired the strength to hit the Rakshasa, for in passion lies the force that can wear away strength. (3:7: 82-87.)

Kamban then describes the pangs of the Rakshasa filled with his lustful thoughts. The whole description amounting to eighty stanzas is an extravaganza in which Kamban submits to, or rather, he joyously and riotously follows the examples set by earlier epic-poets and by his period. Thus he depicts Ravana as feeling a burning sensation all over his body — the result of his passion for Sita. The cool breeze that blows from the sea only roasts his limbs. He goes into a grove with spreading and shady trees and tries to rest in a summer-house or a bed of new-plucked flowers. But though it is mid-winter he cannot bear the heat. He roars, 'I hate this season, change it.' At once winter disappears and spring takes its place. 'But what can cure those men who have drunk the poison of love?' So, displeased with it, he calls for the autumn. That season too does not suit him, 'Let there be no seasons!' he commands, and then all the seasons disappear and Lanka shines like heaven itself where there are no seasons, but one uniform and entrancing flow of time. But even then the body of the Rakshasa continues to burn, for, 'what is there in times and seasons? Unless one conquers passion with self-restraint one can never escape its stings.'

Then he calls for the moon, and then the sun, and finally the night, and each one of them comes trembling at his bidding. The darkness is 'palpable', 'visible', 'thick', 'black like a heart without truth. In the night Ravana sees the form of Sita floating before him in the form of a coral creeper. He raves about her and at length calls Shurpanakha and asks her to tell him whether the form before him is the very woman that she had described in the morning. But she on her part raves in her passion.

She says:—

'The figure that stands over there is that of Rama of the strong bow, with his lotus-eyes and lips like red fruit, with his broad chest and strong arms and long beautiful flower garlands. Behold he stands like a blue hillock.' (3:7:149.)

But when he says that the figure that he sees is female in shape, she replies that men in love are used to see the forms of" their loved ones projected before their mind's eye as if they are real persons. To the question how it is that she saw the form of Rama, she satisfies him by saying that ever since he maimed her she could not forget him. He asks her again 'what will become of me who am suffering these tortures on account of her!' She then gives out the suggestion which is the seed of all the subsequent action of the Ramayana:—

'You are the undisputed master of the universe. Why are you then hesitating to act? Go to the place where she is and capture her for yourself!'

It is after this that Ravana consults his councilors and then hurries to where Maricha was leading a retired life, to persuade him to help him by his wiles to capture Sita.

We have given a resume of this extravagant scene, in order that the reader might see Kamban as he is, both in his strength as well as in his weakness. Although Pandits of the old school will go into ecstasies over these verses, critics whose taste is corrected by a comparative study of the Western as well as Eastern poetry cannot but condemn the extravagances in which Kamban indulges in these verses. But the beauty and merit of our poet, is that there are few occasions in which he offends the taste of even the most exacting of critics. On the other hand, the richness of his poetry, and the general justness of his taste, and his architectonic skill are so conspicuous that these defects look only like the dark spots in the sun.

But even this extravagance, faulty as it is when taken by itself, serves a very necessary purpose in the scheme of the story. For, what but such an intense and unreasoning passion could make Ravana cling to Sita to the last, in spite of his own terrible defeats and the loss of Kumbhakarna, Atikaya, Indrajit, and even his reserve force? So although we should like that this passion had been described in a more natural manner, we cannot but admire Kamban's instinct in deciding that it ought to be described very elaborately in this part of the story. This passion of Ravana for Sita is not, however,

the vulgar lust of a depraved heart, but the tender and delicate desire of a heart that desires reciprocal affection. He wants to conquer Sita's heart and win her willing love. He does not desire to force her hand. There is indeed the story and Kamban speaks of it in more than one place, that there is a curse on him that, the moment he tries to unite with a woman against her will, his head would burst into a hundred fragments. But our poet depicts Ravana as if he genuinely, and not for fear of the curse, desired the willing affection of Sita. And so the words he addresses to Sita are always full of a rare delicacy, taking every circumstance into consideration. At the first meeting With Sita in the forest of Dandaka, Valmiki makes Ravana speak bluntly to her like a vulgar wooer of her beauty. Though coming disguised as a sannyasin, Valmiki's Ravana tells her, among other things,

*'Your charms of smile and teeth and hair
And winning eyes, O you most fair,
Steal all my spirit, as the flow
Of rivers mines the bank below.'*

His speech also lacks consistency with itself. For while very soon, without any further ado, he is going to announce himself as Ravana, the words,

*'Leave, lady, leave this lone retreat
In forest wilds for you unmeet,
Where giants fierce and strong assume
All shapes and wander in the gloom.
Here giants roam a savage race,
What led you to so dire a place?'*

are more calculated to injure than help his cause. Sita is not indignant at this vulgar and almost lascivious admiration, but tells her story at his request, and in the end asks him as to who he is. His reply can hardly be called delicate. He says:—

*'Lord of the giant legions,
Ravana the Rakshasas king am I:
Now when your gold-like form I view,
My love, O you of perfect mold,
For all my dames is dead and cold.
A thousand fairest women, torn
From many a land my home adorn.
But come, loveliest lady, be
The queen of every dame and me.'*

We shall see how Kamban presents the first meeting of Ravana and Sita.

As soon as Lakshmana left the cottage, Ravana disguised himself as a hermit with a triple staff in hand, in order the better to deceive his victim. His body was now thin as if he had worn it away in fasts. He wore a tired look as if he had been walking a long distance. He chanted the Vedas to the accompaniment of the Vina on which he was playing himself. He stepped with the softness of flowers falling on the ground — he could not have been more circumspect if the earth he walked on was spread over with fire. Sita took him for a hermit of pure thought and welcomed him.

The flood-tide of passion was agitating the sea of his heart and his frame was suffused with sweat as he saw with his eyes — her who was the crown of beauty, the home of honor, and the queen of chastity. At her sight his strong shoulders swelled and shrank. It is little if we say that his eyes were intoxicated with the sight of her beauty even as bees get drunk with the dripping honey of the flowers; the intoxication of his heart alone

could compare with that of his eyes. He thought to himself, ' Can these twenty eyes be sufficient to drink in the beauty of this fair one who has left her lotus home and come to live here below? What pity I have not. a thousand unwinking eyes? It is to enjoy the ocean of this damsel's charms that I have been blessed with three crore years and a half of mortal life and all the other blessings that my austerities have earned.'

Again he thought, ' I shall make her queen of all the three worlds and appoint all the Asuras and Devas with their wives to obey her every command, and I shall myself obey her slightest wish.' Another mood came on and now he said to himself, ' If this is the loveliness of her face, when she is under a cloud of grief, what must be the charm of her heavenly smile? I shall give away my throne to my sister who discovered this beauty to me '. While he was thinking on these things in his passion-inflamed breast, Sita wiped away a falling tear from her eyes and offered him the mat made of rushes to seat himself. He took his seat placing the triple staff beside the mat. (3:8: 20-22, 26-34)

Although Kamban fills in here the picture quite differently from Valmiki, he does not hesitate to take a hint from Valmiki for some sublime images which he imports into this scene. So before he takes up the conversation between Sita and Ravana, he prepares a grand background by saying that when the Rakshasa sat there revolving his nefarious purpose in his head,

*The mountains trembled at the Rakshasas' sight,
And trees a tremor felt from lowest root
Up to their topmost height. The birds grew dumb,
While beasts in terror crouched, and cobras stole
Away with shrunken hoods! (3:8:35)*

The conversation between Ravana and Sita in Kamban begins in this way:

*He sat and sitting asked, ' who is the sage
That lives here? And tell me, lady, who
Are you? ' When large-eyed Sita thus replied:
'The chief of Dasharatha's royal race does live
In this retreat with his devoted brother:
And he has taken to this forest life
In obedience to his high-born mother's commands;
You must have heard his name, O holy Sire! '
'I've heard of him,' he said, 'but know him not,
Though once I wandered by the realms that are washed
By Ganges holy stream. But who are you,
And who's your father, O dame of large bright eyes? '
'I am the daughter,' Sita said, ' of royal sage
Janaka who honors holy men like you
As Gods. My name therefore is Janaki,
And I'm the wife of Rama of the race
Of Kakutstha. Now holy sir, you seem
To hail from far off lands, for tired is
Your look. I pray you tell me, whence do you
Your holy person bring? ' (3:8: 36-40.)*

In reply to this question, the pretended holy person fell to praising Ravana and his glories. After giving a glowing account of his sovereignty, beauty, and power and valor, he continued thus:—

*'Though countless are the beauteous damsels who
Desire to call him Lord, he hasn't given*

*His heart to one of them: he is searching earth
And heaven for one who could delight his heart.
I passed these days in Lanka where he reigns:
But as a longing came on me to join
My friends in holy endeavor, I left
His realms and am come back to Janasthan.' (3:8: 49, 50.)*

The reader will notice the art with which the conversation is pushed on and the dexterous manner in which Ravana is made to lay siege to Sita's heart. No expression escapes the lips of Ravana, which is indelicate, rough, or rude. Ravana works only by suggestion, and very remote suggestion at that. The suggestion is so remote that Sita does not notice it at all at this stage and only asks him,

*'O sir that should regard the body even
As weight unbearable, how did you choose
To dwell in the city of the sinful beings
Who honor not the Vedas or Brahmanas
And who do eat the flesh of living kind?
You left the forest-land where sages live,
Nor did you care for the fertile realms where men
Of holiness do congregate, but lived
Amidst those Rakshasas of wicked life.
What have you done, O Sire of holy vows? ' (3:8: 51, 52.)*

And then the colloquy continues thus:

*The Rakshasas thus replied:— ' O lady fair
We who have conquered evil, how can we fear
The Rakshasas as cruel beings! And if
You want the truth, I declare they are not worse
Than gods. In truth, I find the Rakshasas
A friend invaluable to men like me.'*

*When Sita heard his words she thought within
Her heart, 'he is no holy man who thus
Associates with evil ones — he is
Of those who follow with their lips alone
The path of holiness.' She did not know,
Poor innocent, that the wily Rakshasas
Could at their will assume whatever shape
Or form they pleased; and so she didn't suspect
A worse guile. (3:8: 53, 54.)*

*The wily Rakshasas felt at once that he
Had raised suspicions in fair Sita's breast,
And thus attempted he to smooth them down.
'And you must call to mind, O Janaki,'
He said, ' that when the Rakshasas do rule
The worlds without a peer, what can we do
Of holy endeavor unless we walk
Their way and earn their friendship and their love? ' (3:8:55)*

The substance of the subsequent portion of this interview till Ravana reveals himself as he is, has been given at page 15 et seq., 3 and so we shall not translate it here. We have; however, we hope, placed sufficient material before the reader to enable him to judge for himself the difference

between Valmiki and Kamban in the description of 's courting, and consequently in the delineation of Ravana's love for Sita. In the second interview also between Ravana and Sita, which takes place in the Ashoka grove, when Hanuman sits concealed in the foliage of a tree close by, Kamban preserves this same delicacy on the part of Ravana very carefully. Valmiki on the other hand makes Ravana blunt and rough in this interview also.¹⁴⁰ He makes him begin his speech thus:

'Why do you cover your breasts and body at sight of me, O you whose thighs are like the trunk of an elephant? I desire you O Sita; look upon me with favor!'

Observe the enormous difference of tone in Kamban. He says:—

*What was to him a poison mortal, he
Thirsted to taste, as if it was the drink
Immortal, "and his speech he thus began:
'O Koil sweet of the slender waist, when will
You look on me with pity?
The days are passing one by one away,
And this is all the kindness you have shown
To me! Mean you to accept me when I'm dead —
Aye, murdered by your cruelty?
O you who are lovely like a tendril of gold,
You despise my throne of high renown!
But granting that your husband lives yet,
And you can see again Ayodhya town,
Would not you find the joys but human joys?
And what's the highest blessing tapasvins
Desire? It is the joyous life of those
That do my favors win by service faithful!
O Sita, life and youth are transient,
You cannot youth enjoy for long: if all
Your days of youth are wasted thus, when do
You hope to reap the fruits of life? 'It's not
For me, I grieve: I shall die willingly,
If that's your wish: but if your heart is turned
To bitterness, show me another one
Beside yourself for charm that never cloy,
And love and beauty's perfect shape.
Shall Janak's race in female loveliness,
And strength of mind and other noble charms
Alone be rich, and will you make men say,
That it does lack in tenderness and pity
And has a niggard heart?
When all your good deeds of the past, betimes
Matured, are come to yield you golden fruit,
Will you for spite despise the fruit and sulk
Away?
You canst, if you my prayer grant, acquire
With ease a glorious name as savior proud
Of the Rakshasas race: do you the shame prefer,*

¹⁴⁰ This interview is really the third in Valmiki. For he intervenes unnecessarily another interview between Ravana and Sita as taking place immediately after they reach Lanka.

*To be pointed at as its destroyer fell?
 Fortune has placed within your reach, unasked,
 The imperial crown of all the worlds, and wives
 Of gods will be maids to wait on you;
 And you scorn the gift! Was ever fool
 Like you? O scorn it not but do accept
 Me as your slave, who rule the triple worlds
 Without a rival or a peer! ' He ended:
 And raising his hands above his ten heads,
 He fell prostrating at her feet. (5:6: 24, 26-29, 31-37.)*

If the love of Ravana for Sita is of a higher type in Kamban, it is, as the reader will have seen here and elsewhere, not the less deep or less passionate or less absorbing. No defeat, no death — death even of his nearest and dearest — will induce him to part with her or give up the hope of making her his own. It is only when Indrajit had fallen on the field that in a paroxysm of grief, he rushes sword in hand to kill her, but the words of Mahodara cool him and he becomes himself again. In a fancy of Mandodari, when she laments for her fallen lord, our poet has concentrated all that can be said of the depth of Ravana's love for Sita, and with that we shall close this phase of Ravana's character. Kamban makes her say thus:—

*'The noble frame that lifted high the mountain
 Of Shiva is pierced through and through by arrows:
 There is not even space for a sesame seed
 To rest over all its vast expanse! Did Rama
 Desire to sound and see the exact spot
 Where did reside my Ravana's mighty spirit?
 Or did that hero's conscious arrows believe
 That love for Janaki might yet remain
 Concealed within that handsome frame, and did
 They probe for it, over every needle-point
 Of space therein? ' (6:36: 239.)*

It is not always, however, that Ravana's heart was so fully engrossed by passion for women. It is only after hearing about Sita that passion for women became the predominant note of his character. But before that, love of power, love of warlike enterprises and love of glory were the chief characteristics of the great Rakshasa. Even after the entry into his soul of this inordinate passion for Sita, glory and love of military achievement occupy a very high place in his heart. So, when Maricha tries to dissuade him from his nefarious attempt to steal Sita away, replied to one of his arguments in these words:—

*'My sway is undisputed over the worlds:
 If new foes rise what can delight my heart
 Better? ' (3:7: 199.)*

Thus again during the first interview with Sita, he cannot bear her remarks against his prowess, although she is speaking to him not knowing who he is, he being still disguised as a wandering hermit. So,

*When she these stinging words did speak, his eyes
 Flashed fire: he ground his lightning-laden teeth
 Which crashed out thunder: and his false form burst,
 Revealing all his branching arms and crowns
 Up reaching to the sky. (3:8: 64.)*

It is this sense of honor that makes him feel acutely the ignominy of the maiming of Shurpanakha by Rama and Lakshmana. When Hanuman had burnt the city of Lanka and escaped alive, he feels the shame of it more keenly than the loss of his immense treasures or even the destruction of his capital. He says in his council after the rebuilding of the city by the -architects of the heaven:-

*'The world resounds with bruit of our disgrace,
And yet I am not dead, but sit with pride
Upon this throne
The air of Lanka smells with tresses singed
Of Rakshasas dames, and yet we sit in peace
As if enjoying the odor
If the Vanara at least had fallen killed
By Rakshasas swords, our honor might have been
Redeemed: but now we're drowned in ignominy.'* (6:2: 12-14.)

Again, when Sugriva leaps on him, the while he was observing. the enemy's army at the commencement of the hostilities, and after a hand to hand struggle with him plucks away the gems on his crowns, he feels acutely the shame of such a defeat and says to himself; ' It were better if I had died.'

And where except perhaps in Milton's Satan, can we find greater pride or determination than exhibited by Ravana in the course of the war? Ravana's authority is greater than Satan's: none dares question his authority, none dares even to presume to advise him except Kumbhakarna. And see how he treats Kumbhakarna when he advises him, and how Kumbhakarna submits to his will the moment he sees that Ravana is threatened. It is true that Indrajit uses bitter words to Ravana, and Danamala is even harder as her words are more taunting. But in both these cases it is in the paroxysm of their grief that these words escape their lips. And on both these occasions, Ravana himself was grieving along with them for the loss of his valiant sons on the field.

Note, however, Indrajit's concern for the honor of his father, even at the moment that he reprimands him for sending Aksha against Hanuman after he had shown such prowess. For when he sees Aksha's body on the ground he says:-

*'Alas it's not my brother lying dead —
It is my father's glory faded lies
Upon the ground.'* (5:12: 5.)

And, after the third battle with Lakshmana, when he advises Ravana to send Sita away, see how submissive Indrajit's tone has become. He is afraid even to say that it is through Ravana's passion for Sita that all these misfortunes have befallen them. He merely says,

'Our race has sinned or such a powerful foe arises not for us.' (6:27:4.)

Such is the awe with which Indrajit regarded his father. And need we recall to the reader the reply of Ravana to this suggestion of his son, to the sublime sentiments and haughty tone of which very few passages in World literature can afford a parallel? In how many epics can we find sentiments and language¹⁴¹ like the following?

*'Think not that I did count
On those my men who are already fallen:
Think not I counted on the crew that's yet*

¹⁴¹ We always refer to the words of Kamban and not to our translation, the inadequacy of which, we realise more keenly than the hardest of critics.

*Alive. Think not I hoped that you would beat
 My foes upon the field: in my sole right arm
 I placed my trust and I provoked this war!
 Even if I lose, if Rama's name will stand,
 My name, will not it also stand as long
 As Vedas are chanted on earth? And who can death
 Escape that comes to all? We live to-day,
 To-morrow finds us not: but glory, doth
 It ever die? Die I may
 But can I stoop to shame and littleness? ' (6:28: 8, 10, 11.)*

And in the mouth of how many of the creations of poetic genius will such words appear as natural as these do in the mouth of Ravana? In fact, Kamban has carved his Ravana in such proportions that no words that may be put into his mouth can be too brave or too exalted for his moral stature.

Now, while Ravana is proud and exacting when what he thinks to be his honor is concerned, he is not without deep affection for his brother and sons. In fact his love for them falls short only just a little of his love of glory and honor. We have seen how he melts into tears when Kumbhakarna starts for the field. When messengers come and tell him that Kumbhakarna has fallen in the field, he falls down unconscious like an uprooted *sal* tree. Says the poet:—

*From childhood's days they had not lived apart:
 Though two their bodies, their life was only one.
 When such a brother died, and for his sake.
 The heart of Ravana broke in two, he swooned:
 And thus lamented he his fate aloud:
 O brother, who have destroyed the Danava hosts,
 As a tusker does the over-grown lotus pond!
 O hero, who erased great Indra's name
 From the list of kings! O first of Rakshasas!
 Lived I so long alone to hear these words?
 O you of the flashing lance, your dear face
 Is hid from me: I speak these words and yet
 I cling to life! If you have gone, O brother,
 In the hardness of your heart abandoning me,
 Who will believe again in brotherhood's love?
 If you are fallen thus upon the field,
 Would not yon Indra go in triumph back
 To his celestial realm? And Danavas
 Who live in terror of our eye, wouldn't they
 Our valor mock and try to walk erect?
 O you, to whom the Meru hill was but
 A scrubbing stone at bathing time! The word
 That you are killed by the arrow of a man —
 That word does burn me to the quick and does
 Consume my heart with shame
 The triple lance of Shiva blunt fell,
 And disk of Vishnu, and the thunderbolt
 Of Indra, King of Heaven lost their force,
 The moment they did touch your adamant chest!
 And do I hear it said the feeble arrows
 Of yonder men had power to pierce your frame?*

*And so I hear it said they're strutting over
The field in glee, proud of this victory? '
While you were marching proud in victory
To victory, I had my fill of the joy
Of life, but now that you are dead, my brother,
I do not care to live. I cannot live
Alone, nor shall I let you go alone:
I come, my elephant proud, I come, I come!' (6:16: 83, 86)*

Similarly, when Atikaya's death was announced to him, tears gushed forth from his eyes: he sobbed and stood like a sea agitated by the changing emotions — dashing one against another — of grief and shame, and pity and indignation, and heroic determination. Now he would look in the direction of the battle-field; now he would look at the Devas standing around: now he would think on the unbearable shame of his son's defeat and death; now he would look at his sword that had earned for him so many triumphs; now he would wring his hands in despair. Now like a mad man he would in turns smile and weep, frown and crouch in shame. Now he would think of demolishing the vault of heaven; now he would think of lifting the earth; now he would think of destroying all life in one fell swoop. Then he would think of cleaving in two the bodies of all who bore the name of woman. But when this thought would cross his mind, he would feel the pang as of a wound that is seared by fire. None around him did open his mouth. None even dared to breathe. Those who stood by him suppressed their very thoughts. Such was their terror when his heart was thus torn with grief. But it is the news of Indrajit's death that causes him the greatest grief. For, unique was the love that he had for this son: and unique the pride that he felt in his prowess and achievements. People knew the intensity of his love so well that those who brought the news from the field trembled and shook ' to the very root of their teeth,' and just stuttered out the words ' your son has fallen today '. The tapasvins and the Devas and the Devadasis and others who stood by his side vanished from there, fearing that in the first paroxysm of grief and anger Ravana would surely end the world. When he heard the words, his eyes flashed fire, and he drew his sword and with one fell sweep he beheaded the messengers who brought him the news. Such was the madness of his wrath and grief.

He then fell down on the ground, and ' boiling like the churned ocean when it vomited forth the poison,' he bewailed the loss of his son thus:

He would cry out 'O my child!'; he would call out 'O my great son!' Now again he would cry, 'O my life, do I yet live when you are dead?' He would ask, 'Has Indra been avenged?' and again, 'did the doomed Devas shout in triumph at his fall?' and once again, 'are Shiva and the thief who has taken refuge in the Sea of Milk now freed forever of their terror?' (6:28: 7, 10, 11.)

The poet then puts one lament each into each of the ten mouths of Ravana. Though this looks rather too artificial, there are some fine thoughts in these stanzas which are worth being placed before the reader:

With one mouth he would call out 'O child!' With another he would ask, 'Shall I yet sit on the throne and rule?' With the third mouth he would accuse himself saying, 'O you of powerful arms, can I continue to live who have delivered you over to the foe?'

Another mouth would lament, 'You have not embraced me, O son, with your powerful and beautiful arms; while another would cry aloud, 'shall a deer eat up a tiger cub?'

With another mouth he would exclaim, 'Art you really dead, my son? I have lost in you the best of friends. Is it guile or treachery that overcame you?' And then he would say, 'Will you not come to me?' And then again, 'I have become alone, all alone! My heart breaks and fear has seized on me!'

With another he lamented, 'Death must have lacked courage to face you and take your life away, O son of measureless valor! To what other world then have you gone unknown even to me?' (6:28: 16, 17, 19, 22.)

After bewailing thus at his palace, Ravana rose and went to the battle-field to search for the body of his son.

He searched the heaps of the slain for the body of his son. After a long search he found his mighty arm, its grip of the bow not loosened, though it was severed from the trunk. Tears fell down his cheeks and his heart melted at the sight as the ghee in fire. ... He took the arm — long and beautiful like the body of a cobra — jingling with the sounds of armlets and bangles, and quivers and arrows infixed in it, and Placed it like a holy relic on his head. He would embrace it with his arms; he would put it round his neck; he would touch his eyes with it with great devotion; he would put it again on his head; he would swoon away; he would sob again. At last he saw the body like a vast ocean and he fell on it and wept. He took the body, and with tears welling up from his eyes, pressed it to his bosom and groaned. Who has ever felt the pangs that he did feel at that time?

He would pluck the arrows from the body one by one, and even break to pieces the arrows thus plucked; he would suddenly fall into a swoon; he would kiss the body and embrace it; he would desire in his wrath to crunch with his teeth the sun and all the seven worlds. (6:28: 26-32.)

He then searched for the head, but could not find it anywhere upon the field. So he concluded that the men must have carried it away; and the thought pierced his heart as a wound reopened. And he once again burst forth in lamentations in this way:—

*'I could the elephants tame that bear the earth
Aloft; I could the hill uproot and lift,
On which the great God three-eyed sits enthroned;
All these were feeble foes enough. Are men
Alone to be too strong for me? O fie
On me that bear this load of shameless life,
And see them live unscathed, who've killed my son
And carried off his head! And I have burnt
Fair Alaka¹⁴², and Indra's spacious realms
As food to fire consigned, and have I ruled
The worlds without a rival all these days,
Only with these my eyes to see my child's
Fair limbs devoured by greedy jackals vile?
bitter is my food than food of dogs!
Of those who proudly marched to war with him,
I see not one alive; all, all are fallen,
While, of the foes, the men are yet alive!
Nor is that monkey killed; and many stand
Unharm'd: Is not the valor of Ravana great?
If your Khandarpa, Yaksha, Siddha wives —
The fairest of the fair, whose very speech
Is music soft — if they, O son, should come
And falling at my feet should cry, ' O give
Us back our lord! ' shall I my tears join*

¹⁴² The capital of Kubera's kingdom

*With theirs and weep with them, even I who have
Vanquished the God of Death himself in war?
In days gone by I've carried fire and sword
To Indra's realms, and had them brought beneath
My scepter strong; but now to passion fallen
A slave, the funeral sacrifices, which
In the course of nature you should offer me,
I have to offer you with mingled tears
And sighs! Who's there like me in all the worlds?' (6:28: 35-39.)*

It now remains for us to consider the valor and exploits of Ravana. In fact, it is his valor and great prowess and invincibility on which the whole story of the epic is based. For, it was because the gods could not themselves destroy his tyrannical power that they went to Vishnu and prayed to him to come down and destroy him, and that He consented to incarnate Himself as 'the emperor's holy son'. The power and the unrivalled conquests of the Rakshasa loom large over the whole background of the Ramayana. When Rama enters the forest, Agastya and the other Rishis come and pray to him to free the world from Ravana's tyranny saying:—

*'For untold years we have been suffering from the tyrannous rule of Ravana, who has acquired the sovereignty of the three worlds by his endless tapas. Who can overpower the mighty Ravana, who makes the Devas flee before him and carries away their wives, who makes the very confines of the universe resound with the cry of his enemies and plunders all their wealth? . . . We see the Rakshasas spread themselves up to the farthest worlds, but nowhere can we find the holy Devas. Shiva has loaded the Rakshasas with all his blessings and sworn that he would not raise his hand against them, while Vishnu has been often defeated by them. Brahma is able to get on with his work only by flattering them, and the sun and other planets are only lately released from their prisons in the land of the Rakshasas.'*¹⁴³

It is with these and similar exploits behind him that Ravana comes before us in the Ramayana. And so it is that the hyperbolic language, which Kamban puts into Ravana's mouths and of others concerning his prowess and exploits, does not sound incongruous or absurd but quite consistent with his character and stature. We shall take one case as an instance. In his interview in Janasthan, just before revealing himself, Ravana says to Sita:—

"Do you want the Meru Hill to be uprooted, or the vault of heaven to be broken, or the ocean to be stirred to its depths, or the fire in its bosom to be extinguished, or even the earth to be lifted on high? Which of these is impossible to Ravana, whose words are few but deeds are mighty and many. Who do you take Ravana to be, O innocent one?" (3:8: 62.)

Though ordinarily speaking, this is the language of wild exaggeration, we feel no incongruity and our poet has, by his grand style as well as by the attitude he gives to other characters in the presence of Ravana, succeeded in giving the impression of reality to these hyperbolic descriptions of the valor and power and physical strength of the Rakshasa. The reader will remember readily the contrivances that Kamban makes in order to create this impression. We shall, therefore, give here the translation of but one passage out of the many scattered in all parts of the Ramayana and especially the Yuddha Kanda, the cumulative effect of all which passages is to make more distinct and to intensify the impression.

¹⁴³ These are six poems which are to be found in some editions of;> Kamba Ramayana between the 14th and 15th poems in Book 3 padalam 3.

After the Vanara army had crossed over to Lanka, Rama sends an ultimatum to Ravana asking him either to deliver Sita or come out and fight. It is Angada, the son of Vali, that was selected to go and deliver the ultimatum personally to Ravana, for Rama said:—

*“If this time too we send our Hanuman,
Our foes will think there's none besides him here
In all our host to dare the Rakshasas power,
And fearless enter Lanka town. I wish
That Angada go today; for, even if forced
To fight, he has the valor, force to force
To meet, and safely to our side return.” (6:13: 9.)*

Angada made his respects, and springing into the air like a lion, he flew into Lanka with the swiftness of Rama's arrow, brimming with joy with the thought,

*“Now who of all the Vanaras are like
To me, for with his holy lips my Rama
Has said, ' If Hanuman is not to go,
Whom can we send but Angada? ” (6:13: 13.)*

When Angada dashed through the streets of Lanka, the Rakshasas fled in terror, believing him to be Hanuman come back to desolate their city once again. Such was the appearance and powerful aspect of the mighty son of Vali. But this hero, when he sees Ravana seated, listening to the accounts received of his foes and inspecting with pride his army as it was marching to the field, wonders at his strength and thinks within himself in this way:—

*“We pride ourselves upon our having crossed
Yon puny strait, and what have we but stones
And trees with which to fight? Has even the God
Of Death the force to vanquish him? Then who
Can meet the Rakshasa of the shining arms
Upon the field on equal terms? I see
A feeble ray of hope in Rama's bow.
But that I see that he has come to battle
In person, who did with a single arrow
My father's chest pierce through — my father great
Who triumphed over this Ravana himself —
Can I believe there lives a living man
Or God who can defeat this mighty giant? ’ (6:13:6,7)*

And then Angada impresses on us the same idea by another turn of thought. He continues:—

*‘Who has the power to kill this Rakshasa,
Though broken by his unrequited passion?
And so I think that none is stronger than
My uncle brave, who yesterday did spring
On him and tore from off his crown the gems,
As Garuda tears its gem from the cobra's hood! ’ (6:13:13)*

We have now described the main traits of Ravana's character, so far as is possible within the limits of space we have fixed ourselves. We shall close the study of the great enemy of Rama with a short description of the two great battles which he fights with him.

When Angada returned from the palace of Ravana he told Rama, in reply to his inquiry about the success of his embassy, that —

'His passion will not abate till all his heads do roll upon the ground.' (6:13:43)

and so Rama gave his final orders for the battle.

Rocks and tree-trunks were, in accordance with his instructions, thrown in the moat surrounding Lanka town, and a bridge made for the Vanara army to march up to and scale the walls of the city. They were divided into four divisions, each of which marched and established their line at the four gates of the city. The scouts of each of these divisions sprang upon the walls and attacked with roots and trunks of trees the divisions of the enemy as they were marching out. The enemy's soldiers dislodged these scouts from the walls with great difficulty, and at length found themselves face to face with the divisions of Rama in the great plains outside their city.

The fight began on all sides in right earnest. Rocks and stones and trees were flung fiercely by the Vanara heroes against the Rakshasas, while the Rakshasas used their bows and swords, maces and lances, with terrific effect against the Vanaras. Elephants and horses rolled down on the ground, their blood running in streams to the ocean, chariots were broken to pieces, and Rakshasa heads were piled one over another like mountain boulders. The Vanaras fell in thousands and tens of thousands, and their bodies floated down to the sea in the very stream formed of their blood. Angada and Sugriva, Nila and Jambhavan, and Hanuman fought fiercely, and the Vanaras under their commands annihilated the Rakshasa armies on all the four fronts. The Rakshasa messengers brought to Ravana the news of the failure of the armies under Durmukha, Suparsu, Vajramushti, and Prahasta. Ravana was stung with shame to hear that the despised monkeys were able to destroy the warriors that had conquered worlds after worlds in the past. He exclaimed:—

*"Did monkeys beat the veteran Rakshasa troops
Who brought down Indra's flag? The word does burn
My heart like ghee-fed fire! The Vanara mites
To beat the Rakshasas of the rock-like arms!
Well have the wise declared, 'Think not that fire
Or foes are weak, but ever keep them down.'" (6:14: 91, 92.)*

So saying, he ordered reinforcements to march out immediately to the support of his broken armies, and himself prepared to take the field in person.

*He did the battle-car ascend to which
Were yoked one thousand stallions fleet. It was
The car that Indra left as prize, when he
Did flee before the Rakshasas arms, and which
Had flown over heaven, a symbol of Ravana's pride
And sovereignty unrivalled. Ocean-like
Was its grand reverberating roll. His bow
Was by his side, the bow which he, before
He took, had worshipped with devotion deep.
Can we at all describe in words its force,
When the God of Death himself with terror dies,
Whenever he hears its twang?*
*Although the tuneful Vina was the sign
Upon his banner bright, his standard did
Overshadow all the universe and seemed
To lick the heaven and earth like Yama's tongue. (6:14: 95, 96, 101)*

He took all the divine weapons that past austerities had armed him with, and marched to the northern front. When Rama was informed that Ravana had come to the field, he also put on his

armor and girded his sword, and bow in hand, he left the camp from where he was watching the fight, and approached the fighting line with the choicest of his troops.

In the meantime, the fight between the reinforcements of Ravana and the Vanara troops was fierce and awful. There was great carnage on both sides. When Ravana at length arrived on the field and twanged his mighty bow, even the Rakshasas trembled at that resonant twang; what then of the Vanaras? Even the Devas were filled with terror, as if they heard the thunder of the Day of Deluge. The Vanaras turned and fled. But Sugriva who was there lifted a big boulder and aimed it straight at the Rakshasa. It came whirling through the air giving out sparks of fire, but one arrow from Ravana's bow broke it into fragments and it fell harmless. Seeing that, Sugriva tore a tree by the roots, as if tearing the very bowels of the Earth-Goddess, but, before he could aim it, the enemy sent an arrow which cut it into a thousand pieces, even in the hands of Sugriva. The latter then lifted a huge rock and hurled it on the foe, but even that met the same fate as the previous one. Before he could do anything further, Ravana sent a shower of arrows and buried, them into his mighty frame, and he fell exhausted.

But just at that time, Hanuman, who had been fighting on the western front, came to know of Sugriva's condition, even as if he had been all the while by his side, and rushed to his help in a trice. And then, saying:—

'Would you show your skill and battle with me, O Rakshasa, the while Sugriva gets ready to resume the fight?' he lifted bodily a huge hillock and hurled it against with his arm, true like Veda's self. Ravana looked fiercely on him, and saying, 'Come on for your share', sent simultaneously against it the arrows which blew it into atoms. Hanuman broke another mountain peak and aimed against one of Ravana's arms with all his force. It struck the arm true, but broke to pieces the moment it touched it. Such was the strength of Ravana's arm. Indignant at his failure to make an impression on the Rakshasa's body, Hanuman was taking a larger rock, but Ravana sent his terrific arrows and pierced Hanuman's body with them.

Hanuman, however, stood his ground firm, and while the Devas were wondering whether any mortal being could have such endurance, he tore up a tree by its roots and sent it whirling against Ravana. The tree struck the charioteer and felled him down, and ricocheted and killed other Rakshasas besides. Another charioteer took the place of the fallen Rakshasa; Ravana sent a heavier rain of arrows which buried themselves all over Hanuman's body and put him out of action for a time, while blood flowed in torrents from his wounds. As Hanuman sank on the ground, Ravana exclaimed:—

*'Think you with stones and trees, and hairy arms
And fists, and shining teeth and empty words,
To vanquish Rakshasas might? When I have come,
(Though tarnished is my glory when I face
Such puny foes) and send my iron hail
Against you, can you hope to escape with life? ' (6:14:139)*

But, not desiring to aim at a foe already stricken down, Ravana aimed millions of arrows against the Vanara troops which had reformed in the rear. The troops were agitated terribly, even as a sea that is agitated by storms. Now Lakshmana, who was in the rear, advanced to meet Ravana, like a Meru Hill armed with a bow. At the sound of his bow-string, the Rakshasa army fled as herd of elephants at the roar of a lion. He sent his arrows against Ravana, but the veteran troops of Ravana formed themselves as a guard before him and gave battle to Lakshmana. They were, however, destroyed by the unceasing rain of arrows from the bow of Lakshmana. Chariots and elephants, horses and Rakshasas rolled one upon another, stricken by his cobra-like arrows. Even the Devas could not say whether he was still aiming or whether he was discharging the arrows from his bow. The lances and maces and other arms aimed against him by the Rakshasas were all broken to pieces by his arrows.

*Down fell the Rakshasas heroes bold upon
The field, some struck by Lakshmana's fiery arrows,
And some by the severed heads of their own friends.
The bow of Lakshmana won its laurel crown
On that day of days, while fiercely burned the fire,
Named Ravana's heart, at triumph of his foe.*

So Ravana faced Lakshmana and employed all his bowman's skill against him, but could make no impression on him. Lakshmana was able to parry all his weapons, ordinary and divine. While they were still engaged, Hanuman recovered from his swoon, and striding up between the two combatants addressed Ravana thus:—

*"It's true you, vanquished have the triple worlds
By your might that knew no waning; and you have
Destroyed the glory of the King of Heaven,
And spread your rule to the ends of the universe!
But this day, Rakshasa, will be your last"*

So saying, he took the gigantic shape which he showed to Sita, and challenged Ravana again in this way:

*'You are a skillful wielder of the bow,
And sword and mace, and every weapon of war.
You are a master of the warrior's art,
And great's your fame for valor and for strength.
But if you dare to fight with me with fists,
With one blow of my fist I will destroy
Your strength and skill and fame, and valor high
Renowned! Why waste more words? Although your frame
Could not be shaken by the mammoths eight,
Or Shiva's hill, can you forsooth, escape
Alive when you my matchless Vanara blows
Receive? If you die not when I my blows
Deliver, you may, O you of the rock-like arms,
Return my blow with all your might, and then,
If I remain alive, I shall no more
Challenge you on the field.'*

This was the first time, after Hanuman had burned Lanka, that Ravana saw him face to face and within ear-shot. While he was filled with anger for the injuries that he had done to Lanka as well as to Rakshasa prestige, Ravana admired his courage, and cleverness, and prowess, and so he addressed him in these words:—

*'You speak like a hero, O mighty ape!
Who else but you can fearless stand before
My presence stern? your glory is as great
As the universe itself: Can aught besides
Contain your fame? Though you have killed my kin,
And I do sit upon my chariot, bow
In hand, surrounded by my army vast,
Unarmed you stand defying me! Where is
Your peer in all the worlds, O hero great?
What god or Danava or mortal man
Will dare to challenge me, unless they're seized*

*With madness? Even the Three Supreme have not
The nerve to face me thus. And you stand
Rock-like, and do invite upon your chest
My shattering blow: Can I your praises sing
Enough? ' (6:14:167,169.)*

So saying, Ravana descended from his car and called on Hanuman to use all his force and knock him on the chest.

When Hanuman clenched his fist and struck on his chest a mighty blow, the hills crumbled into their component sand; sparks came out of the eyes of the Rakshasas; the brains of other Rakshasas came out of their heads by the shock of the blow; some others fell down dead; the teeth of some of the Vanaras fell out — the very roots of their hair felt the shock. The strings broke in the bows of the Rakshasas; the sea dashed upon the shore causing deep breaches; the eight royal mountains were split and boulders fell from their sides; the sun gave out sparks; the tusks of the elephants fell down; the weapons fell out of the hands of the opposing heroes: and sparks and jewels fell down from Ravana's chest. (6:14:174, 175.)

Even Ravana felt the blow and shook like the Meru hill when the Storm-God attempted to uproot it. The gods were glad and rained flowers on Hanuman, but Ravana soon came to himself and praised Hanuman's physical strength in these words:—

*'I see there is some strength even outside me,
And that I find in you, O mighty one!
All else but you I class eunuchs weak.
What! even Brahma cannot shake me, though
He sends his curse with all his spirit's force!
I own you have defeated me! There is
But one test more. If you can bear my blow —
The blow which on your chest like a thunderbolt
Will falling strike — and after that remain
Alive, then you can say that there is none
In all the world to equal you; no foe
Would dare to challenge you and you would live
Forever and forever.' (6:14:181, 182.)*

But Hanuman said:—

*“Have you not conquered me when you are yet
Alive unscathed? I do commend your strength!
Now take your even chance.” (6:14:183.)*

and bared his chest to the Rakshasa. Ravana clenched his teeth, made firm his mouths and pressed his lips, and, with eyes dropping fire, clenched his fists and struck a blow on Hanuman's broad expansive chest from which at once flew sparks of fire. Hanuman reeled at the blow.

*And when he reeled, the gods in heaven reeled,
And Dharma, Truth and Nobleness did reel,
And reeled the Vedas, Justice, Fame, and Ruth! (6:14:185.)*

But just at that minute, the Vanara heroes came on with rocks and rained them on Ravana. The very sun was concealed from sight and darkness set in — so thick was the shower of the stones which the Vanaras aimed at their foe. The Devas believed that the Rakshasas would be ended that very moment. But Ravana bent his bow and, quick as thought, aimed millions of arrows against them

and broke their force and saved himself and his army. He rested not there. Swearing that he would end the Vanara crew and the men that day, he sent an endless shower of iron rain which wrought dire destruction in the Vanara army. Nala, Gavaya, Angada, Jambhavan — all fell pierced by the lance-like arrows of Ravana.

Lakshmana saw the plight of his army and its leaders, and faced Ravana in right earnest. He parried the arrows of Ravana without missing even one, and thus saved the remnants of his army. He then sent ten powerful arrows and cut down the ten bows in the ten hands of his foe. The Devas were glad. Dharma burst forth into songs of triumph and even Ravana admired the skill of Lakshmana. He said addressing him:

*“Grand is your prowess, grand your skill in war,
And grand your valor, and the lightning quickness
Of your arm! I do commend your aspect stern,
And mastery of the bowman's art. And who
Is there to equal you but he, your brother,
Who brought the Rakshasas with Khara down
In Dhandaka forest the other day, or he
My son, who with his single bow could break
Devendra's might, or I myself your foe? ” (6:14: 203, 204.)*

And then, thinking that it would be impossible to defeat Lakshmana with any weapon that could be propelled by the bow, Ravana took the lance that Brahma had given him in the days gone by, and hurled it with all his force against Lakshmana. But before Lakshmana could think of any weapon that could overpower it, it struck him in the chest and laid him low on the field, to the terror of the Devas and the Rishis and to the joy of the Rakshasas. Seeing, however, that Lakshmana was not killed, Ravana desired to capture him prisoner. So he descended from the chariot and attempted to lift him with all his twenty arms. But Lakshmana, who was conscious, realized his oneness with the Infinite One, and then even the arms that lifted Shiva with his Kailas Mount were powerless to move him! Exhausted by his fruitless endeavor, Ravana just moved from the place in order to rest his hands a little. At once Hanuman, who was watching, everything, sprang to where Lakshmana was, and armed with the power of love, lifted him up as if he were a child, and dashed away to the rear.

Rama now came to the front and engaged with his mortal foe. But Hanuman safely deposited Lakshmana in the rear, and ran to Rama and begged him to ride upon his shoulders 'though they are not worthy'. Seeing the ease with which Hanuman was bearing Him, who in three steps measured the worlds,' even Garuda hung down his head':—

*Hanuman was the Sea of Milk, and Rama
Was Vishnu riding over its waves, The son
Of Vayu was the eternal Veda, and Rama
Was Jñana that ever resides upon the crown
Of Veda! (6:14: 221.)*

The twanging of Rama's bow was like the roar of Rudra, when on the Day of Dissolution He devours the earth and the sea, and the sky with all that exists. The Rakshasas were stunned, unable to move from their places. Their tongues were parched and they trembled, and then they fled. The marshaled worlds shook in terror, and even Brahma and Shiva were afraid.

Meantime, Ravana sent against Rama seven arrows, fierce as the Arc of the Day of Destruction, whose force was enough to drink the ocean dry, break the earth and pierce the vault of heaven. Rama parried them with an equal number of arrows, and aimed five arrows against Ravana which gave out sparks making ashamed even the Kalagni — the fire of the Final Day. The battle then

engaged in right earnest. The Rakshasas around Ravana also aimed their arrows and lances and stones against Rama, but he parried them all and destroyed the Rakshasa's army wholesale. Hanuman kept pace with the enemy's chariot with ease and did not give any advantage to the enemy even for a moment.

Before one could say, 'he is on the ground,' he would be high up in the air; wherever Ravana or his soldiers turned their eyes, there they would see Hanuman sure and certain carrying Rama upon his shoulders. For he was swifter even than Rama's thoughts that flew in advance of his arrows. (6:14:232.)

The battle-field became veritable shambles; the spirits who live on corpses danced for joy; rivers of blood were flowing inexhaustible, carrying the severed heads, trunks and bodies of elephants and horses and men. The Rakshasa women were lamenting for their dead husbands, and embracing the dead bodies, themselves died as *satis* upon the battle-field itself.

At length, Death masquerading as Rama's arrows had destroyed all the Rakshasas upon the field excepting alone Ravana. Ravana boiled with rage and drawing the bowstring with all his force buried two terrific arrows in Rama's arms. But Rama only smiled, and aimed at his enemy's bow and broke it into two. Ravana took another bow, but before he could bend it, Rama again sent a shower of arrows which cut off the heads of his horses, brought down his Umbrella of Victory, and tore open his armor. Another chariot drew up behind him, but he was not destined to ascend it. Rama's fiery arrows tore it to pieces, and Ravana could only view him with concentrated fury. But Yama himself trembled at his scowl.

Then Rama with his invincible arrows broke the diadems on Ravana's heads, who now looked like the night without the moon or the day without the sun.

*He also looked like kings who though they stand
Unrivalled in their wealth and sovereign power,
Straightway their honor and their name do lose.
The moment noble poets send their shafts
Of stinging satire. (6:14: 249.)*

And as he stood unarmed, his arms hanging loose like the shoots of a banyan tree, his toes scratching the ground, his faces and heads shorn of their luster as of their ornaments, his eyes looking down upon the ground, while all the worlds were exultingly saying 'this is the fate of those who go against Dharma', Rama took pity on his plight and desisted from killing him, but at the same time he addressed him the stinging words that we have translated in another connection.

So ended the opening battle of the war in which Ravana intended to put an end to his foe.

After this battle, as the reader will remember, Ravana did not come to the battle-field for many days. He had Kumbhakarna waked up, and sent him to the field. When he died, Atikaya offered to lead the army himself, and when he also fell, Indrajit chide Ravana for not sending him earlier, and took the responsibility of the command and led his great attacks on the Vanara army. On his fall, Ravana sent word to all the Rakshasa colonies all over the universe and assembled a big army— his whole reserve force — and dashed it against the enemy and himself took the field. Rama opposed the reserve forces single-handed, detailing Lakshmana and his army to face Ravana. The reader will remember how Ravana sent his lance against Vibhishana, and how Lakshmana bared his breast to it. When Lakshmana fell pierced by the lance, Ravana returned triumphantly to the city believing Lakshmana to be dead. He also expected that his immense reserve would bring him an easy victory. But the reserve was destroyed by the wonderful archery of Rama, while Lakshmana and the fallen army were resuscitated by the drugs brought for a second time by Hanuman. Kamban describes the battles with the reserve forces in 235 stanzas with his usual power and verve, but space forbids us to

even summaries that description to our reader. At length there was nothing left for Ravana but his guard, and he determined to lead them in person.

But if nothing remained in Lanka except the guard, the guard were an immense and most powerful force, and it was Ravana in his fury that now led them.

He put on the golden armor that Brahma had created at a great sacrifice, and which had been a trophy won by himself from Indra. He wore the anklets round his left ankle, at whose sound the worlds trembled as at the sound of thunder. He girded on his trusty sword and threw over his back the inexhaustible quiver of arrows to which the waters and sands, and fish of the sea and even science (knowledge) were too small for comparison. He put on his pearl and diamond garlands, and walking out of his palace under the shade of his pearl-umbrella, he ascended his war-chariot. The thousand horses yoked to the chariot were of the highest breed — being descended, some from Uccaishvaras, 'the divine-horse that came along with ambrosia at the churning of the ocean of milk, some from the horses drawing the chariot of the sun, and some born to the Storm-God in the womb of the Ocean Fire. Drawn by such horses,

*The car could run upon the land or sail
The sea; it could ascend the sky and fly
In the air; it could the fire cross unscathed;
And in a trice it could ascend to the world
Of Brahma's self! and,
It was the home of Victory! (6:34:20, 23)*

He blessed the car with many a flower thrown, made gifts to innumerable brahmins, generous beyond the dream of avarice, and ascended the car exclaiming:—

*'Or Janaki shall beat her breasts today
And mourn her Rama with disheveled hair, or poor
Mandodari shall fall upon my corpse
And rend her breast in inconsolable grief!
So fierce shall be my fight if Rama cross
My path today! ' (6:34:26)*

He then smacked his arms in the manner of wrestlers, and at the thundering sound the vault of the sky clove into two, the mountains split, the earth felt as if a wound was opened in her side, and even the sun fled from his golden car. He twanged his bow in high joy at the coming final fight, and at the terrible twang the hills burst to pieces and the Danava and Deva women touched their *Mangal*¹⁴⁴ strings fearing danger for their lords. And then proudly bearing himself like the thousand-headed *Adishesha*, to the terror of all beholders, he drove his chariot to the battle-field surrounded by his troops. The Supreme One and all the immortals saw the ocean agitated, the Devas filled with terror, and every living thing shaken with dread at the furious aspect of the Rakshasa.

Vibhishana informed Rama of Ravana's appearance in the car at the head of a vast army, and of the flight of the Vanaras at his approach, and Rama at once prepared himself to go to the front. He determined not to spare Ravana today. He put on his arms and girded on his sword, and saying:—

*'This day shall bring an end to Sita's grief
And suffering of the Gods for once and all.' (6:35:2)*

he took his bow and quiver of arrows. As he was about to start, Matali the charioteer of Indra brought him the car of Indra at the command of Shiva and the Devas.

Is it the chariot of the Sun? Is it

¹⁴⁴ Symbol of the married state for women among Hindus, like the wedding ring.

*The overpowering light that is to shine
On Dissolution's Day or can it be
The Meru hill? This car is larger far,
More brilliant. May this be the peerless car
Which in its bosom bears the Three Supreme? (6:35:17)*

Its inside was filled with innumerable divine drugs that could heal any wound or cut, and its roll was like that of the sea when the storm beats on, and tides on tides drive one against another upon its bosom.

In answer to Rama's enquiry, Matali told him that the Devas sent him the chariot of Indra in order that he might fight on equal terms with Ravana who was riding his miraculous car. A suspicion rose in the mind of Rama that this might be a trick of Ravana, but the conscious horses yoked to the car chanted the Vedas in order to dispel the suspicions of Rama. Rama looked at Lakshmana and Hanuman, and asked them what they thought of it. And when they said that Matali's words could be believed, he ascended the car and steered against the Rakshasa.

Ravana bit his lips when he saw that the Devas had sent Indra's car to his enemy, and determining to take his revenge on them after finishing Rama, he ordered his charioteer to direct his car straight on him. The Vanara army that had fled at the sight of Ravana, now reformed and advanced without fear when they saw the miraculous car of Indra come to Rama, and believed that now that Rama was equally equipped and armed, Ravana was sure to be defeated at his hands. The Vanaras began their battle with their usual weapons. But Mahodara prayed to Ravana to permit him to engage Rama, and asked him to contain Lakshmana and his troops on the other side. Ravana agreed and turned towards Lakshmana's front. But Mahodara could not long stand against Rama and soon fell struck by a single arrow of Rama.' Ravana, therefore, hastened towards Rama who destroyed the Rakshasas in their millions. Of the others, those that did not fly away stood apart, and Rama and Ravana faced each other at length, even as Wisdom and Evil Deeds, as Knowledge and Ignorance, as Righteousness and Sin in their final conflict. They looked as Garuda, the King of eagles, and Adishesha of the thousand hoods engaged in mortal combat; and like two of the mammoths bearing the universe ready to dash against each other; and even as Vishnu and Shiva fighting as to who is more powerful.

Ravana blew his conch that was ever used, by the thunder of its resonance, to create trepidation and terror in the hearts of gods. But then, without Rama's knowing it, his five divine weapons had taken their place by his side in the car, and his *Panchajanya*¹⁴⁵ now sounded of its own accord, feeling jealous of Ravana's conch.

Matali also sounded the conch of Indra, making the heaven, and sea, and the mountains tremble. The sound of Panchajanya and Indra's conch delighted the hearts of the Devis of heaven and they turned on Rama the arrows named their glances, even before Ravana's arrows began to shower on him.

*The twang of Ravana's bow was like the roar
Of all the oceans seven heard at once:
While twang of Kodanda Bow was like the chant
Of Veda Eternal on the Final Day. (6:36: 35.)*

Even Hanuman and the other leaders were terror-stricken at the sight of Ravana and his host. They were filled with despair not knowing what to do or where to turn. Ravana's war-shout and the sounding of his bow were unbearably terrific. The roar of the sea and the thunder of the clouds that are heard even now are only the reverberations of that war-shout and twang! He shouted, 'I shall

¹⁴⁵ Vishnu's divine conch

either lift up Rama with his divine chariot and dash him to the earth, or destroy his chariot with my arrows, powerful as the thunderbolt, and capture him prisoner with his bow! 'So shouting he aimed his arrows in veritable showers. They came like thunderbolts- and like fire, like death and like rain, and they were longer than the cobra that was tied round the Mandara mountain to churn the ocean. Rama parried them with a similar shower of arrows aimed with equal force. The combined shower

*Did cover the earth and sky, and hills and seas;
The eyes of even gods could see in all
The world naught but these iron-shafts.
Can even Men of Wisdom ever count them?
Darkness spread
All over the universe and there was fire
Burning all living kind — such was the fight
Of Ravana and Rama. And even Shiva
Wondering, did exclaim, 'Was ever fight
Like this?' (6:36:50)*

As Rama parried and destroyed with his arrows all the arrows that Ravana aimed against him, the latter thought he should try other weapons, and so he hurled lances and axes and maces against Rama. But they too were cut into pieces by Rama's sharp-pointed arrows. Rama now buried ten arrows into the body of Ravana, who, furious like the elephant goaded by the steel- goad, rose into the sky with his chariot. From the sky he showered a hail-storm of arrows against Rama and the Vanara army, and so Rama ordered Matali also to rise up into the sky with his car. And lo, it came over that of Ravana even as the globe of the sun over that of moon. The chariots now made their evolutions in the air, each warrior trying to take the other at a disadvantage. The evolutions were so rapid that even the gods could not tell which was Rama's car, and which the Rakshasa's. Meteors fell down, dashed against by the wheels of the chariots. There was no hill whose summit was not broken, no direction that escaped from the conflagration set in by the arrows and astras of the combatants, no living being that did not vomit blood in terror.

The chariots steered over the seven oceans and the continents seven, over the seven royal mountain ranges, and over the seven worlds. The walls of the universe were the only limit they respected. They pursued each other like the whirlwind and the thunderstorm, and yet the horses were not tired on each side.

Ravana at length saw his opportunity and sent a crescent-shaped arrow, which, however, only succeeded in carrying away the thunderbolt which was the standard flying on Indra's car. With the same breath, he buried his arrows in the heart of Matali and on the bodies of his horses, and aimed a terrible flight of arrows against Rama himself. Rama was quite invisible to the eyes of the Devas, so innumerable were the arrows that Ravana aimed at him. The Devas wept saying, 'Alas! Rama is conquered!' The Rakshasas shouted for joy, and the universe trembled.

*The God of fire his luster lost and heat;
The Sea unmoving stood without a wave;
The sun his chariot stopped in heaven; the moon
Moved not; and even rain-clouds were dried up
In the sky. (6:36: 80.)*

Even Vanara leaders and Lakshmana trembled for the fate of Rama. But Rama was not injured; he only showed his nonchalance by his leisureliness. At length, he surprised both friends and foes by the rapidity with which he broke up the screen of arrows which appeared to have all but destroyed him. And the Devas recovered from their despair. As the standard fell from Rama's car, Garuda himself flew and settled on the staff as the living standard of Rama.

Ravana then sent against Rama the *astra* called Tamasa, which came in the shape

*Of arrows tipped with fire and blood, of arrows
With face of Asuras and gods and spirits,
And cobras of the crooked fangs. They came
As darkness black, and eye-dazzling light, as rain
And thunder, and a veritable shower
Of iron hail. (6:36: 90, 92.)*

But when Rama sent the *astra* named of Shiva, the power of the *Tamasa* failed. Ravana then sent

*The Astra named the Asura which had
In former days the name of gods destroyed,
And mouth of Yama surfeited with lives.
It was the arm before which the king of heaven
Had fled in terror. (6:36:97)*

But the *Agni-astra* — the weapon named of fire — aimed by Rama burned it before it could reach him. After trying the weapon forged by Maya which also failed, broken by the *Gandharva-astra* of Rama, Ravana

*Now threw the mace on Rama with which in days
Of yore great Daruka had felled the gods:
(The four-faced god had forged it by his art;
The Asuras, fierce Hiranya and Madhu,
Had tamed their foes with its almighty force.) (6:36: 105, 106.)*

Everybody thought that Rama's end had come. The mace came with a force that made the very Meru Hill tremble, destroying all that crossed its way in space. But one arrow from Rama's bow was able to break that divine mace into fragments. Ravana now sent the *Maya-astra*, the weapon of illusion, against Rama. And behold, all the *Rakshasas* dead in previous battles appeared to have come back to life and to be advancing on Rama and the *Vanara* forces with terrific war-shouts. There was *Indrajit* and *Atikaya* and the other commanders of the *Rakshasa* armies up to the very reserve forces that fell only the previous day, all rushing with arms and shouting:—

*'Have you indeed defeated us? And do
Believe that we could die? You'll see our fight
This day! Advance, Advance! ' (6:36: 115)*

The gods and *rishis* believed the illusion true and were "thunderstruck to see alive the *Rakshasas* who had been destroyed by their defenders. Rama was also put out and asked *Matali* what he could do. *Matali* told him that it was illusion and would be destroyed the moment he sent an arrow pronouncing the Supreme Name of himself. Rama, therefore, pronounced his own name and sent an arrow presided over by the Spirit of Wisdom and behold, the *Maya* of Ravana was broken.

The trident of Shiva was then hurled by Ravana, which came flaming through the air, spreading a weird light over all things and terrifying the gods. The arrows that Rama aimed against it, all fell powerless to hurl it, and it came on and on, and nearer and nearer Rama. When even divine weapons could not prevail against it, Rama stood motionless. The *Devas* trembled to see Rama standing inactive, a target to the terrible weapon of Shiva hurled by the foe. *Dharma* itself was terror-struck. But as it struck his chest Rama pronounced the symbolic mantra of Hum and lo, the trident of Shiva broke into fragments! Seeing the exhibition of this divine power of Rama, Ravana exclaimed:

*"Who can this Rama be? He is not Shiva,
Nor Vishnu, nor the Four-faced One divine.*

*As for austerities, he looks not strong
Enough to mortify his flesh. Is he,
Perchance, the Universal Cause, of whom
The Vedas speak?" (6:36:135.)*

But his valor checks him from considering further as to who he might be. He disdains, in spite of suspicious appearances, to inquire into the true character of his enemy.

He, therefore, formed his resolution saying,

*"But be he who he may,
I will not swerve from war's straight path: I won't
Withdraw from my warrior's duty plain. I will
Yet conquer him. Even should I fall by his arrows,
My name for valor undismayed will last
Forever! let there be victory or death:
I turn not back! ' (6:36:136)*

So he fought with unabated fury. His *Nairriti-astra* came like millions of cobras spitting venom all over, but the *Garudastra* of Rama turned itself into eagles which bit the cobras to pieces and made the venom harmless. After many more astras had been aimed and parried, Ravana began to show signs of exhaustion, but Rama, who had not put forth half his strength up to now, was as fresh as ever, and now began to take the offensive. He aimed at one of the necks of Ravana a crescent-shaped arrow. It flew with a terrific force and cut and carried off a head of his and sunk it into the sea. But behold,

*Even as the virtuous soul that after death
Takes its birth again in a better frame,
Even so, upon the trunk another head
Arose, its fury unforgotten: is there
Among endeavors yielding golden fruit
A higher one than tapas? (6:36:152.)*

The new head defied Rama in tones of thunder, while that which was thrown into the sea was also roaring no less loudly.

Filled with fresh anger against Rama for having shamed him. by cutting off one of his heads, Ravana buried into Rama's chest a flight of fourteen of his sharpest arrows. But Rama did not mind his wounds and sent an arrow which cut off an arm of Ravana which fell down, but with its grip on the bow unloosened. Ravana took that fallen arm and dashed it against Rama, but it struck only Matali, who vomited blood at the shock. And again he aimed a *tomara* against Matali, thinking to destroy him and disable Rama from using the car. But Rama's arrows broke it on its way and saved the life of his charioteer.

Ravana now hurled his lance, and mace, and battle-axe against the foe. Rama, however, broke or parried them, and aimed arrows after arrows against him, which entered his trunk and limbs and eyes. Ravana sank exhausted in his chariot. His charioteer saw the plight of his master and steered his car back towards the rear. Matali advised Rama to kill Ravana even as his car was retreating, but Rama with the true chivalry of the Indian warrior said,

*"Do not the laws of war, O Matali,
Forbid the taking of an enemy's life
When he has thrown away his weapons of war
And agitated flees for life? The fight
Does end today! (6:36:175.)*

Before the car had retreated far, however, Ravana recovered from his swoon, but he did not see Rama in his front. He turned back, and found Rama standing in his place like a victorious hero. At once he turned furiously on his charioteer, and saying,

'You have, O villain, turned my chariot back

*And made yon Rama mock my valor before
The very gods! you have enjoyed my bounties,
And yet, though I did put my trust in you,
You have by turning back the car, made me
Appear a coward. Think you I'll spare your life? ' (6:36:178.)*

Ravana drew his sword. But the charioteer remonstrated with him saying, that he had fallen on his seat exhausted, and that if he had stayed longer he would have been killed with the arrows of Rama. He concluded:—

*'The charioteer must judge the condition
Of him who fights from on his car: when sinks
The hero powerless to continue
The fight, it's the duty of the charioteer
To save his master's life by wise retreat.' (6:36:182.)*

Ravana's anger cooled at these words. He therefore put back his sword into the scabbard and ordered his charioteer to retrace his steps and drive the car back to the front. He felt indeed that his end -was come, but he would not yield in valor to Rama. On the contrary, he fought with the strength of despair. The bystanders thought that it was another and a stronger Ravana that was fighting now, and trembled. Such was his new fury.

But Rama's blood too was up, and he determined, finally, to put an end to the Rakshasa. He aimed an arrow at his bow which had been given by Brahma, and broke it to pieces in his hands. And as Ravana took another bow and showed all his usual skill, and varied his attack with lances and maces and spears and *kappanas*, Rama thought that Brahmastra alone could end him. So, parrying the enemy's shower of weapons, he took the astra, pronounced the appropriate spells, and sent it tearing against the chest of Ravana. It flew with a ferocious speed, illumining the very ends of the universe, and shaming even the Sun of the Final Day by its dazzling light. The Chakra of Vishnu, which had also, as the reader will remember, taken its place on Rama's car, now joined its force to that of the Brahmastra, and impregnated with this twofold force, Rama's arrow struck and entered the mighty chest of Ravana.

*And Ravana fell mortally wounded!
The holy arrow of Raghava did drink
His three crore years of mortal life, and all
The strength of his austerities; it quenched
The blessing Brahma had bestowed on him
That none should have the power to conquer him;
It did the might extinguish which had brought
The universe beneath his awful sway;
And piercing clean his chest, it drank the blood
And straightway flashed through the air with lightning speed
Rejoicing in the grateful blessings breathed
By Gods and Brahmans true, and followed close
By the rain of flowers that they did shower all through
Its path, the arrow pursued its way to the Sea
Of Milk; it washed therein its bloody stains,*

*And turned, and flying over the waves that played
 On the sea of Ravana's blood, it entered quick
 And hid itself within the quiver of Ram,
 Its eerie home. '*

How remarkable is the end of Ravana! His valor shines to the very last, and the crescendo is completed in his short but sublime address to the charioteer. And even after he has fallen the poet would say,

*..... but the hero's face
 Even at that awful moment wore a look
 Of majesty, surpassing far the splendor
 Even of days when saints and Rishis had
 To flee for safety from his oppressive rule. (6:36:201)*

CHAPTER 14

BHARATA



We have, so far, studied all the main characters excepting Sita that are directly connected with the destruction of Ravana, which is the one action of our epic. We have also seen and discussed Kamban's delineation of the heroes of two of his grandest episodes, namely Vali' and Hiranyakashipu. Exigencies of space prevent us from studying the other characters of the story, interesting as they are, except in the manner that we have done hitherto, namely by bringing in their traits and doings as much as possible in the studies of our main characters. We shall close our examination of the characters of the Ramayana by discussing Bharata and Sita in this chapter and the next. Bharata is, as well as is not, intimately connected with the story of the epic. He is connected intimately with our story in that his love for Rama gives rise to some of the most touching episodes in the epic, and also, chiefly, in that it is for his sake that Kaikeyi forces Dasharatha to send Rama to the forest. He is not intimately connected with the story in that he is not associated with Rama in the destruction of Ravana and his forces. But the reader that knows not Bharata misses more than half the beauty of the Ramayana, and knows not one of the most just and tender-hearted and most touching characters known to story or history.

Bharata, like Lakshmana, does not appear much in the Balakanda. There we only hear that he loves Rama with a tender love, and that he marries one of the daughters of Janaka's brother. It is in the Second Book of the Ramayana that we see the whole evolution of his character, while the final touch is reserved for the end of the story in the Book of Battles. It is the cruel conduct of his mother, Kaikeyi, that brings Bharata to prominence in the story, and it is the remembrance of that same cruelty that ever after presses heavily upon his tender and noble heart. Hence, the reader must know something more than what we have given in the second chapter about Kaikeyi and her heartless behavior towards Dasharatha and Rama.

Kaikeyi was not always cruel. In fact, she loved Rama very ostentatiously, if not deeply. She was the wife to whom Dasharatha was most attached. She, therefore, naturally and as a matter of habit, tended and nursed the child on whom was set the whole soul of her lord. The beauty and noble qualities of Rama must have made Kaikeyi take pride in loving, which was the only way of owning, such a child. Rama on his part loved her deeply. He never made any difference between his own mother Kausalya and her.

So when Manthara, her favorite maid, tried to poison her mind against the coronation of Rama, Kaikeyi reprimanded her and even grew indignant.

When Manthara, filled with jealousy against Rama's and the world's happiness, ran to announce to Kaikeyi the sudden news of Rama's impending coronation and to rouse her to oppose it, Kaikeyi was half-asleep. So she pressed her feet to rouse her from her drowsiness, and when Kaikeyi did not even then rise from her bed, she exclaimed:—

'Even as the moon will not abate her light

*Effulgent, up to the very moment when
The dragon steals over to eclipse
Her face, you do, O lovely mistress mine,
Slumber secure even when disaster hangs
Heavy upon your head! ' (2:2: 45)*

Kaikeyi heard the words of Manthara and replied,

.....'When all my brave and worthy sons

*Are hale in body and swerve not from the path
Of righteousness, can ever disaster come
On me? They say, that joy ineffable
Belongs to them who're blessed with children whom
The world can never enough commend: can harm,
O Manthara, approach me ever, who have
Good Rama for a son? ' (2:2:47.)*

Seeing her wanderings in the realms of impartial love, Manthara tried to awaken in her the jealousy natural to a woman for her co-wife, and partly succeeded in her attempt. For, when she shed crocodile tears saying,

*'Woe unto you! your days of joy are over:
For, deep Kausalya has ascended now
To the topmost rung of fortune's ladder.' (2:2:48.)*

Kaikeyi replied with hauteur,

*If the King of kings is still my lord, and if
Bharat of unsurpassed fame is yet
My son, wherein is she,
Kausalya, better Than me? ¹⁴⁶ (2:2:49.)*

Pleased with the effect of her first assault, and believing that she had broken the defenses of her mistress's heart sufficiently well, in order to ensure a victory by a simple walk-over, Manthara aimed an arrow just tipped with a little venom. She said,

*'You ask wherein is Kausalya better:
Only there is a young man who has shamed
Manhood and earned the laughter of the wise
By bending against a woman — Tadaka —
His well-carved bow. Tomorrow he is to be
As king of Ayodhya crowned! ' (2:2: 50.)*

But the arrow fell blunted, for,

.....When she announced

*The happy news, Kaikeyi's heart was glad
Even as Kausalya's motherly heart: she felt
No jealousy within her heart; may it be
Because sweet Rama's father lived within
The palace of her heart? A very sea
Of joy arose within her soul, a light
As of the full-orbed moon shone on her face; 2:2:48. 2 II ii 49.
And she took out a garland made of gems,*

¹⁴⁶ In consonance with the noble sentiment Kaikeyi utters in the earlier poem, where she exclaims, ' can harm, O Manthara, approach me ever, who have good Rama for a son? ' this poem is rendered by some commentators as follows:-

*'If the King of kings is still her lord, and son,
Bharat of unsurpassed fame is her's,
Than this, what greater fortune here is yet
For her to reach? '*

Thus, the peace and unity which prevails among the queens, and which Manthara is now to destroy, is painted vividly in the surrender to Kausalya of the king whose favourite is Kaikeyi and of her own Bharata too. (P)

*The bright of their kind, and threw it round
Manthara's neck. (2:2:52)*

Manthara had not negotiated for this — to her mind — unnatural joy. She had thought that the announcement of Kama's coronation coupled with a slight reference to Kausalya as the person who would most profit by it would be sufficient to wake up the dormant feelings of rivalry in the heart of Kaikeyi. But instead of burning with jealousy that the son of another wife was crowned while her own son was away at his grandfather's home, here was Kaikeyi so overjoyed at the news that she presented a garland of gems herself to Manthara for bringing the tidings. So she thought that she should set about to lay siege to her heart in a more methodical manner, and accordingly put her plan into execution. She, therefore, wept and moaned, and wailed, and being a favorite maid, frowned at and even abused her loudly and dashed the garland on the ground. And then, eying her in wrath, she burst forth in these- words:—

*'O fool, you may if you desire, expose
Yourself along with Bharata, your child,
To sufferings of every kind; but I
Cannot endure to be the slave of those
That serve Kausalya, your cunning co-wife proud.
If Rama is crowned, your son will have to sit
As a common man upon the floor, the while
His brother with Sita seats himself upon
The Imperial throne; how comes your heart to be
In ecstasies over this impending fate!
Kausalya has not been unmindful, sure.
Of her interest and lo, her son will wear
The crown imperial. Poor Bharata!
He is not even dead, he lives! How can
He bear the sight? For the sin of being born
Your child, alas, his royal birth has gone
In vain! If Rama and his Lakshmana
Alone will share the glories of the crown,
It were better far, for Bharata and his brother
To exile themselves to forests dark than dwell .
In fair Ayodhya. Our luckless Bharata's name,
If not destined to shine in the proud list
Of monarchs of the earth, is it not better
If he is dead? I could not then divine,
But now I see too clearly, why the king
Did send your son by long and weary roads
Too far off Kekay. Alas, unfortunate child!
My luckless Bharata! your father is turned
Your foe, for he is partial to your brother;
And now your mother too is turned 'against you!
What will become of you? Of what avail
To you are now your valor, learning, youth,
Your beauty, and your skill in war, and all
Your noble traits? They are like nectar fallen
Upon the grass: they are a sheer waste
'A daughter of a glorious line of kings
You grew in palaces and wedded are*

*To the descendant of far-famed line
Of emperors, yourself a queen from head
To foot: and yet you plunge in a sea
Of misery despite the warnings wise
Of a friend. Is there a greater fool than you?' (2:2: 54-62.)*

Kaikeyi's affection for Rama and her sense of right were too strong to yield to this sapping and mining operation of Manthara, elaborate as it was. So she replied to Manthara with indignation flashing in her eyes, thus:—

*'The righteous kings of Surya's holy race,
O evil one, do never break the word
Even to save their life: and even as among
The crested peacocks,¹⁴⁷ it's the eldest son
That's marked as heir in Manu's royal house.
What did your tongue suggest, degraded-wretch?
You are no friend to me nor to my son,
Nor, if we look to Dharma, to thyself!
To evil drawn by ill deeds done by you
In the past, you speak thoughtless one, whatever
Your ill-regulated, low-born mind suggests!
If all that're born must die, and what is left
On earth by men as gain or lost for ever
Is only glory unsullied, then whatever
Is lost — whether life, or justice, or even right
And holy vows and works — can we give up
Traditions that descend from ancient Sire
To son? If others should suspect what passed
Between us two — but be you gone from before
My face! Bless you your stars, O sinful wretch,
That I refrain from cutting your tongue.*

¹⁴⁷ Manu is the first king of the Solar-race to which Rama belonged. It is a common belief among Indian poets that the first born chick of peahens, and it alone, is born with a crest on the head to mark it off from the rest of the young chickens. Kaikeyi says that Rama alone, as the first-born of Dasharatha is fit to succeed his father on the throne of Ayodhya.

[The above note of Aiyar follows the common interpretation by commentators who had only known books, and had not known Nature as knew the poet of the Thanikai Puranam, who made the first reference to this trait of the peacocks which has come down to us. We now know that it was not merely to a common belief that Kamban was referring to but it was a fact in Nature. We are indebted for this information to the Poet-laureate of Madras, Shri V. Ramalingam Pillai, — popularly known as the Namakkal Kavingar (poet of Namakkal) — whose article on this simile appears in the October 1949 issue of the Kalai-Magal, Madras. He says: 'It was in 1915 that I saw an article by an eminent American Ornithologist in the Scientific American. He had bred peacocks in captivity, and had marked with rings the chicks of one brood in the order of their hatching out of the eggs. Later, he continued to note their life day to day, and one of his observations was that the peahen always goes about with all its family along with it, and that, whenever an occasion arose for the peacocks to spread their tails and dance about, the order of precedence of fanning out the wings was invariably in the order of their emergence from the eggs.'

The ancient Tamil poets, who had lived close to Nature, had noted this interesting phenomenon ages ago, and had effectively used it in poetry. We would be failing in our duty if we did not add that the Namakkal Kavingar, in his youth, used to pose these verses to Tamil scholars and crow over their discomfiture, but once he met his match in a very old man in a remote township who pricked our poet-laureate's bubble with a bland statement of this life-habit of the peacock. (P)]

Avaunt, you fool, and open not your lips.' 1

In spite of these harsh words, Manthara did not own defeat. On the contrary, she determined to carry by storm what would not yield to the feebler operation of sapping and mining. So, 'like the poison that would not abate in virulence even after incantations are pronounced, but continues to attack the system,' she did not cease her attempt. She fell at Kaikeyi's feet, and saying, 'O my love, I won't refrain from telling you what is for your own good,' she pressed her assault on the heart of her mistress in the following words:—

*'If the eldest of your race alone can sit
Upon the throne as you declare, I ask
O princess mine, how can the sea-hued Rama
Be crowned while the King of kings is yet alive?
If he the younger did consent to wear
The crown, can say that tradition stops your son
Alone from claiming what is but his right?
And think of this: even those whose heart is filled.
With righteous thoughts and truth do alter when
Unrivalled power and wealth do come to them.
So, though your foes may never injure you
And your by open force, they will attempt,
I'm sure, to break your heart with mean affronts..
If her son rules as king, Kausalya's heart
Would be inflated, her ambitious mind
Would never even with owning the earth entire
Be satisfied. What will be left for you
But what she gives to you of her own grace?
When you will be in gruesome poverty
Immersed, if people come to you for help,
Would you beg of her the wherewithal to do
Your daily charities? Or would you bend down
Your eyes in shame? Or would you eat your heart'
In grief? Or would you close your door against
Their face? you are with madness seized, my love:
For, tell me, if your father or his kin
Should come to Ayodhya to shelter seek with you
From cruel foes, desire you they should
Be balked of all their hopes, and see instead
With hungering eyes your co-wife's opulence?
And think: the fear of your lord alone
Prevents king Janaka from falling on
Your father's realms; if Rama ascends the throne
Of Oudh, would the father of his wife, the king.
Of Mithila withhold his greedy hands
From Kekaya? And even if he forbears,
Are there not foes on foes conspiring against
Your father? If they fall on him, think thou:
That Rama would give him help? And helpless, how
Can he against his numerous enemies hold?
Alas, your kindred will be ruined, and you
Yourself will sink in a sea of misery?*

*What more? you have by your neglect brought ruin
Upon your son, for, be you sure, if Rama
Is crowned, it will be he alone and his
Beloved Lakshmana that will enjoy
The sovereign power: think you that others will have
A share? ' (2:2:67-76.)*

When Manthara finished, she had conquered. For Kaikeyi altered at once, and looking sweetly on her said, ' O great is your love for me and my son; now advise me, dear, as to how I can obtain the crown for Bharata.'

Manthara now reminded her that Dasharatha had in grateful recognition of her services as charioteer in olden times, promised to grant her any two requests, —whatever they might be — that she might at any time make to him, and that she should now demand the banishment of Rama and the coronation of Bharata as her two boons. Kaikeyi embraced her heartily for this timely advice and said,

*'You have now given the sea-girt earth entire
To my son Bharata: 'tis you that are
Henceforth the mother of the King to be,
Not I! Well have you said: My Bharat shall
Be crowned today and Rama forthwith exiled
To the forests: if my lord would not consent
To this, I'll take my life at his very feet! ' (2:2:83,84.)*

So she removed her ornaments and flowers, removed the *tilaka*¹⁴⁸ on her forehead, and laid herself on the ground awaiting the coming of Dasharatha. When he saw her in that condition, he swore in the name of Rama himself that he would do her pleasure if she would only mention it. She now reminded him of the old promise made before the gods and asked that he should grant her the two requests that she would presently ask of him. Ignorant of her guile, he said, ' Name them immediately so that I may grant them at once and take the weight off my mind.' But when she named her heartless requests, he fell like an elephant bitten by a snake. He sobbed and moaned; his lips were parched up; he swooned. But her heart remained as before — she did not relent. At length, he came to, and asked her ' are you turned mad or are you tutored by designing persons? Speak! ' But she coolly answered, ' Neither am I mad, nor am I tutored by evil persons; if you grant my two requests I shall accept them; if you refuse, I shall take my life here at your feet to your eternal dishonor.' These words tortured him to the quick and even made him curse Dharma and Truth. After thinking of a hundred things — even putting her to the sword — he, at length, fell at her feet and appealed to her better nature. He said:—

'Your son will not accept the throne, and even if he should accept, my subjects would oppose the idea. Do not, therefore, Kaikeyi, run after disgrace, but earn eternal glory by withdrawing your requests. Neither gods nor man will approve of this. With whose good-will, then, can you rule the earth? Rama is not greedy— he himself consented to the coronation only in response to my insistent request — and he will certainly apportion a part of my vast territory to your son.' (2:2: 26, 27.)

Seeing that she showed no signs of withdrawing her demand, he continued:—

' Even if you demand my eyes, I would yield them to you; should you ask for my life, even now it is yours. And, O woman, O fair one of Kekaya's generous race, if you desire, take you the crown, but insist not on your other prayer. My word once given, I

¹⁴⁸ Vermilion mark, a sign of married state.

will never break it; but even a demon would relent if anybody begs of it as I beg of you! So torture me not by a refusal, O Kaikeyi!' (2:3:28, 29.)

But she did not yield. ' you yourself has promised ', she said, ' to grant me my requests, and I insist on them. If, now, you hesitate, who else is there in the world to stand for truth? ' Dasharatha pleaded more pitifully. He said:—

*'Let your son reign, and you yourself may rule
The earth with him. I grant you this, and I
Shall not go back upon my word. I pray
But this, insist not that my son who is
Mine eye, my life, the beloved of all the world,
Should leave this land. My heart-strings break to see
That Truth itself tears me by the roots.
If he whose hands are like the lotus fair,
Should go from me, O noble one, my life
Will ebb away. I pray you save my life!' (2:3: 32, 33.)*

But even these piteous words did not move her. Her heart was made of wood. Neither did she care for honor. She therefore heartlessly replied:—

*'When you seek to go back on your word,
O warrior-king, can call it righteousness?
Is it not braving sin?' (2:3:34.)*

Dasharatha now lost all hopes of touching her heart, and rolled on the ground like a rock struck by the thunderbolt. He could not see a shore to the sea of grief in which he was getting drowned, and bewailed his fate and cursed Kaikeyi's hardness of heart. These words only made her crueller, and she threatened him that if he would not grant her requests immediately she would die by her own hand at his feet. ' Once upon a time,' she concluded, ' a king cut his very body to pieces in order to honor his pledged word. Of what use are your regrets now, after having promised once to grant my desire? '

When she stabbed him thus, without the slightest compunction, with her tongue, he gave up every hope, and crying out,

*'I grant you even this request; let Ram
To the jungles be exiled, I shall to heaven
Depart, and swim you — Bharata and you —
Dishonour's perennial stream for ever and ever.' (2:3:44)*

he fell into a swoon. So Kaikeyi had her heart's desire fulfilled and went to sleep the sleep of the just, unmindful of the suffering and the torture of her husband.

When morning dawned, the princes and people, ignorant of what had happened the previous night, assembled in the coronation hall with expectant heart to witness the coronation of their beloved prince. Not seeing the King, Vashistha sent Sumantra to Kaikeyi's palace to ask the King to come to the hall. But Kaikeyi, on her part, ordered Sumantra to bring Rama to her. Sumantra went with a joyous heart and brought Rama from his home to the palace of Kaikeyi. Says the poet:—

*Kaikeyi thought that Dasharatha would not speak
The cruel words himself, and so, when Ram
Entered her audience hall, before him who looked
On her as mother she came alone, even as
The spirit of Death! His heart did leap for joy
At sight of her as the calf when it sees*

*The mother-cow. He fell prostrate at her feet
 And stood in silence respectful but she
 Hardened her iron-heart, harder than heart
 Of Death himself, and said, ' there is a thing
 I have to tell you, son, and if you ask
 Whether your father sanctioned it, I do
 Assure you, I've the sanction of the king
 To tell it you.' To which Rama thus replied,
 'If father deigns to give me a command,
 And you communicate the same to me,
 I look on myself as the happiest son
 On earth — is there a happier son than me?
 Could all my holy endeavors give to me
 A better blessing than to hear and
 Obey such parents as you are. And you
 Yourself are father as well as mother to me.
 I 'wait his dear commands: speak them to me.' (2:3:103–106)*

It was to such a son and such a man that Kaikeyi spoke those cruel words which we have translated elsewhere.

So Rama went away with Lakshmana and Sita to the forests while Dasharatha died with the name of Rama upon his lips, Vashistha sent messengers to Kekaya to bring Bharata, but he instructed them not to inform Bharata of the death of Dasharatha or of the exile of Shri Rama. The messengers reached Kekaya in due course, and when they gave Bharata the note which- said that he must immediately start for Ayodhya,

*He was in ecstasies, his hair did stand
 On end, for yearned his loving heart to see
 His brother and elapse his feet in loving worship. (2:9:7)*

He, therefore, started immediately with his brother and retinue and hurried on to Ayodhya. As he entered the limits of his own country, however, he was shocked at the strange sight that greeted his eyes. No plough was seen ploughing on the fields. No garlands were seen on the necks of the men. The fields were not watered. Lakshmi herself seemed to have left the earth. There was no smile on the faces of the passers-by. No music was heard in the streets. The theatres and dancing-halls were deserted. Women's hair was unadorned with flowers. The whole country looked like a body from which the soul had fled away.

Bharata's heart was pained beyond description. He thought some great evil must have happened at home, and sighed, and hurried on with redoubled pace. As he entered the city, the sights were still more heart-rending. He saw not the flags flying that used to look as if shading the whole city from the heat of the sun. He heard not the sound of the drum which used to sound every day as if inviting the needy to come and receive the bounty of the emperor. He saw not the Brahmanas leaving the palaces with presents of cows and horses and elephants and gold. No musicians played on their Vina. No chariots or palanquins plied on the streets. No horses or elephants carried men and women, and the streets looked deserted even as a river dried up.

He entered the palace of his father but saw him nowhere. While he was still looking for him (and none would speak to him, as all suspected him to be in conspiracy with his mother) messengers came to him from his mother desiring his presence before her. He went to her and prostrated at her feet, when she, selfish woman that she was, asked whether her father and mother and sisters were well. He said that they were all well and in the same breath asked her where his father was. When she replied that he had died, he fell down like a sot tree struck by the thunderbolt. He slowly

recovered and lamented for his father's death in pathetic words. The poet indicates his attitude towards Rama in the following words that he puts in his mouth in the midst of his lamentation:—

*Did grieve that Rama's hand was bare, and did
You leave this earth desiring your scepter,
Which had never left your hands, should now adorn
The hand of the blessed one. But, indeed, if you
Had loved the son that your austerities
Did bless you with, would you have left him thus?
Nor alas, are you given to see with your eyes
The Coronation of your Rama! ' (2:9:55, 56.)*

Shatrughna consoled Bharata, and when he had recovered from the first paroxysm of grief, he said, '

*'As Rama alone is father, mother, and lord
To me, unless I bow my head at his feet
My heart cannot recover from this shock.' (2:9:58.)*

It is Valmiki that has built up this situation with great artistic skill and Kamban adopts his arrangements of this scene without much alteration. But the student of Valmiki will see that, as an artist of equally rich imagination, Kamban does not translate Valmiki even here but carries on the conversation in his own way, while with his greater dramatic skill he avoids the slowness of Valmiki and makes the scene unroll itself with greater rapidity. We shall see how Kamban handles the situation.

When Kaikeyi heard the words of Bharata that we have given above, she coolly replied and without any comment, that Rama had gone away to the wilderness with his brother and Sita. At these words Bharata felt as if he had swallowed living fire, and asked between many a sob and sigh:—

'Can fate bring forth a greater ill? And what more ill news are there for me to hear? Is it as punishment for any ill deed done by him that Rama has been sent to the forests? Or is it the wrath of the gods or Fate that has sent him in exile? If Rama had done an ill deed, men would have looked on it as they would have on any deed done by their mother herself — who then could have punished him? Oh, tell me, is it after father's death that he left or before? ' (2:9:60-62.)

After some more filigree work, Kamban makes Kaikeyi at last come out with the truth. She said:—

'I made your father grant me two of my wishes, by one of which I sent away Rama to the jungle, and by the other I got the throne for you. your father could not bear this and therefore it is he died.'

As soon as he had heard these words, his hands that were joined in reverence flew to close his ears against any further blasphemy. His brows met together in a terrific 'frown.' His eyes became blood-red and his cheeks trembled; his body was like a mass of fire; he bit his lips and struck the ground to the terror of the very thunderbolt. As he strode the hall — unable to stand still — the earth with Meru Hill tottered even like a boat tossed by storms in the open sea. The Devas and the Asuras trembled at his passion, and how many died not with sheer fright! The great elephants holding up the earth quaked with fear and the God of Death shut his eyes. Continues the poet:—

*The lion-like Bharata boiling with wrath
Hesitated not to strike because she was
His mother: he feared the anger of Rama, and so
It is, he left Kaikeyi unharmed. But he
His wrath did not conceal and thus burst forth:
'I hear you say that through your plot my father*

*Is dead and my brother gone to the wilderness:
And if I have not plucked your sinful tongue
By the roots till now, does it not mean that I
Have in my greed begun to rule the earth?
You live yet; and still my spell-bound hand
Leaps not forth to finish you '. Did not
I fear that Rama my master would resent
The deed, shall even the name of mother stay
My arm from slaying you? ' (2:9:70, 71, 74.)*

Bharata's filial affection, tenderness, sweetness, joy in life, all have now gone to the winds. After this revelation of Kaikeyi he cannot look at the world except in terms of her double guilt. And he cannot forget that he is the son of Kaikeyi and that it is for his sake that she executed her cruel plot. He begins to be obsessed with the idea that none would believe that he had no hand in his mother's conspiracy, and the idea oppresses his heart every minute with an increasing intensity. So self-reproach and self-condemnation become his normal state of mind. And Kamban paints this state of mind in all its aspects with the same victorious ease with which he paints other feelings. The following are extracts from the continuation of Bharata's address to Kaikeyi:—

'We have a king who gives up his life to keep his word; we have a hero who gives up the crown in obedience "to cruel words; and, if there is a Bharata to wear the crown in his place, will not the cycle of the righteous be complete?

'Can there be a greater renown to me than to make posterity point out to me as having destroyed the family tradition, helped by the plot of his mother and brought dishonor upon the race?

'Your heart is not heavy though you have killed your lord! Ah, devil in human shape, how your life persists! you will not even now end yourself! you gave me the milk of your breasts when I was a child, and now you have brought on me eternal disgrace. What more are the gifts that you are going to bestow on me, mother?

'With your tongue have you slain a king who would never utter an untruth, and acquired dishonor that will never end, and you desire to enjoy sovereignty and power forever. Fie on you that even when you saw the very cows and calves follow him to the forest, you did not find it in your heart to put an end to your life!

'Ah! Ram believes that I am privy to my mother's conspiracy, for, otherwise, knowing that father would die for not seeing him, would he not have returned at least to save his life? Has he not left for the forest wilds verily in the belief that I would not hesitate to sit on the throne?

'And yet I live! Will not the world point out to me as the wretch who consents to eat sweet white rice in plates while my elder brother is eating leaves in cups, themselves made of those very leaves?

'The good king died the very instant he heard the news that Ram had left for the forest, while I kill not the woman who is cruel as very poison, nor will I die. Am I not indeed, rich in dishonor? And yet I weep as if I have a loving heart!' (2:9:73, 74, 76, 77, 79, 81, 82.)

And then, after telling his mother that there was nothing for her now but to take her life and wipe out the dishonor that she had brought on herself, Bharata went to Kausalya, and clasping her feet wept for long.

'Where is my father, he cried, and where my brother? Came I to Ayodhya only to see this misery? Show me a balm to my bleeding heart, O mother! The race whose glory was brighter than the sun has now become blackened by the birth of Bharata.' (2:9:90, 93)

When Kausalya saw his rending grief, her natural anger disappeared and she felt that he was perfectly innocent and that he would not assume the crown. And she said:—

'Ah! child, perhaps you knew not the plot that Kekay's princess planned.' 2:9:96

Here we should remark that, by stopping short with these words, Kamban makes Kausalya more dignified in character than Valmiki does with the taunting speech he puts into her mouth. At the same time, by making Bharata eat his own heart and protest his innocence by many a terrible oath the moment he heard even these words, Kamban makes his Bharata also seem more sensitive than the same hero in Valmiki. Tortured by the words, though there was no more than the mere shadow of suspicion in them, Bharata took a terrible oath which is given in twenty stanzas, but from which we shall give only a few sentences. He said:—

'If I had known the evil planned by that evil one, may I fall into the hell reserved for men that show not mercy, for those who endeavor to destroy charities, for those who corrupt the wife of another man, and for those who destroy life in wanton cruelty!

May I suffer the torments reserved for those who do harm to the holy ones who have renounced everything and do tapas, for those who flee from before their enemies in war, and for those who rob the poor!

May I be roasted in hell even as he who fills his maw while his mother suffers from hunger in dire indigence, as the follower who flees from his master when he is attacked by foes, as he who betrays to his foes the man who has taken refuge with him.'

May I suffer the punishments inflicted in hell on the false witness, on him who is afraid of war, on him who eats away trust property, on him who draws all the milk without leaving enough for the calf, on the man who is ungrateful to his benefactor, on the man who would not defend women who are assaulted in his presence, and on him who eats when his neighbor is hungry!

May I writhe in hell as he who runs away from the battle-field fearing for his life, and as the king who robs the charitable foundations of his realms!

If I had desired the crown that Rama was to have worn, may I throw away my skill with the bow and the sword, and may I lose my valor, and for the sake of preserving the worthless body, may I live, a beggar in the place given to me by my enemies!

May I place my sword at the feet of my enemies and surrender my honor to them to be mocked at by women! May I lose the independence of my country and live a chained prisoner in the sight of my enemies! ' (2:9: 98-117.)

*When Bharata was taking the oath,
Kausalya felt as if she saw her Ram
Himself returned from his exile cruel. Her heart
Did fill with joy and new-returned love. (2:9:118.)*

She embraced him heartily and then sobbed with grief for the suspicions that she herself had entertained against him, though only for a very short time. And then she said to him — unable to contain her admiration of his nobility —

*'O prince of princes, O my Bharata!
Of all the kings that have adorned your House
From times beyond our memory, whom can*

*I name along with you for purity
Of heart? ' (2:9:20)*

And the more she thought of his crystal purity and of the unjust suspicion that had come on him, the more deeply she grieved and the more freely flowed her tears. While both were mingling their tears thus, the family priest Vashistha came and after condolences asked him to look to the performance of the obsequies of his father. So the embalmed body of Dasharatha was taken to the burning ground and placed on the funeral pyre. But when after the mantras were pronounced, Bharata rose to light the fire, Vashistha interposed and said:—

*Alas, my Bharata, you may not light
The funeral fire nor join in the rites:
For Dasharatha has repudiated you
Also in the anguish of his heart, before
His death. (2:9:130)*

These words went like a cruel poisoned arrow into the already tortured heart of Bharata, and he fell down like a cobra struck by the thunderbolt and thus lamented his fate:—

*'Of all the princes of my race who can
Compare with me? I am unfit to perform
My father's funeral rites; is it to seat
Myself upon the vacant throne alone
That I am born? . . . Alas, I am become
The solitary sapless, fleshless nut
Amidst the fruitful bunch luxurious
Growing on the palm tree called the Solar-race.
Ah, how my mother has emblazed my name
In the book of fame!' (2:9:136, 138)*

The funeral rites were performed by Shatrughna, Bharata only looking on with many a sigh and with a tortured heart. After everything was over Vashistha called the General Council of Princes and the People, and these called on Bharata to assume the crown. But,

*When he heard the Rishi's words, he trembled
Even more than men to whom the poison cup
Is offered; tears flowed down his cheeks; his tongue
Was parched; his eyes began to roll; his heart
Melted even as a woman's heart. And then
Checking the feelings of his heart he spoke
Thus to the assembled elders: ' when it's not
Against the Ancient Dharma for righteous men
To invite me to assume the crown, when lives
My elder brother who peerless stands in all
The Worlds, who can my mother charge with guilt?
Has the Age of the Kali dawned, O advisors,
That you approve my mother's cruel plot?
From Brahma downwards, on the ancient earth
Can you point out to me a prince who wore
The crown when the elder brother was yet alive?
Even if it should be Dharma, I cannot bear
The burden of this crown! Bring him therefore
From exile and crown him as king of Oudh.
If he refuse I'll go and live with him*

*The hermit's life austere of holy calm.
If you invite me 'gain to wear the crown
I am resolved to take my life; you have My mind.'* (2:10:13-18)

These words of Bharata created a thrill of admiration in the hearts of the councilors. They said:—

*'Even Rama agreed to wear the crown while lived
The emperor, but thou, O grand-souled hero,
Deny yourself this vast entrancing earth
And sovereign power: where is your peer among
The princes of the world? Need you a throne
To emblaze your name upon the hearts of men?
Or need ostentatious charities
Or sacrifices grand to earn a name Among men?
Even when the fourteen worlds dissolve
In air, your fame can never die!'* (2:10:19, 20.)

So ended the council, and at the desire of Bharata all Ayodhya started to the forest to meet Rama and persuade him to come back and take the crown. The army marched in front as guard and the whole population walked or rode behind. After marching a few days, Bharata and the army reached the banks of the Ganga. Guha, who was the king of the forest folk thereabouts, saw the army from a distance and imagined that Bharata was come to rapture and kill Rama, his friend. So, with his chest and arm swelling with joy at the expectation of battle, he called out his men and told them his thoughts in these words:—

'Arrived in force here is the prince who prevented the coronation of the friend of my heart, the dark-colored Rama, and usurped the throne for himself. But thinks he that my arrows cannot fly like fire-vomiting rocks? And if he escapes alive from before me, would not the world regard me as a worthless cur?

'Shall they cross today the deep waters of the Ganga, and are we bowmen afraid of the army because it is strengthened by elephant divisions? And shall we treat it as an empty breath — the declaration of lasting friendship made by Rama with us? And will not the world mock at me saying that the wretched hunter did not at least give his life for the sake of his friend?

'He reckons not that Rama is his elder brother. Nor does he fear that there is a younger by his side, fierce and strong as a tiger. If he minds them not, how is it he despises even me? Is it not after passing me that he can attack Rama? Or is it that the arrows of hunters cannot pierce the hearts of Kshatriyas?

'Will kings never have any sense of sin or dishonor or disgrace? Will they be callous to the feelings of love and hate? Be that as it may, is it not after slaying me that they can fall upon the friend of my heart?

'Is it not after crossing the Ganga that they can display the pride of their elephant and horse divisions? And you fierce hunters, have you not the power to destroy the beasts? And at the worst, is it not better to die before our Lord Shri Ram?

'Will you not destroy the bannered host in front, and have it said that you hunters restored sovereign power to the justice of princes? My Lord gave away to them a kingdom, and behold these cruel brothers grudge even the jungle land to him? ' (2:11:14-17, 19, 22.)

Frowning at Bharata in these and similar words, Guha stood on the southern bank of the river making his dispositions for the fight. Bharata, Shatrughna and the charioteer Sumantra walked to

the northern bank of the river, and as he recognized Guha, Sumantra pointed him out to Bharata as the dear friend of Rama.

*When Bharata heard that he was Rama's friend,
His holy heart was filled with joy, and saying,
'If he is a friend beloved of Rama, I will
Not wait for him to advance but myself go
And Meet him over there,' With quicker steps
He walked towards the water's edge. (2:11:27.)*

Guha could not distinguish the face and attire of Bharata.

*He saw his form with tree-bark clothed and soiled
With neglected dust: he saw his smile-less face
Even as the moon with all her glory shed:
He saw his anguished look that made even stones
With pity melt: and he astounded stood!
The banded bow dropped from his hand and sobbing
He thus expressed his awe-filled mind: 'Yon Prince
Resembles full my master Rama, while he
That's by him looks like Lakshmana fair; besides,
He wears the hermits' weeds; and there appears
No end to the anguish of his heart: he joins
His hands in worship and looks reverent towards
The south. Can ever a brother of Rama swerve
From righteous ways?' (2:11:29, 30)*

Guha told his chiefs that Bharata did not appear to have come with hostile intent and that he would cross over and ascertain the truth for himself. At the same time, however, asking them to guard the bank carefully, he went over in a boat to the other bank. On landing, he fell at the feet of Bharata who did him a similar honor and embraced him even more tenderly than if he had been his father. After all these salutations were over, Guha asked him what was the purport of his leaving Ayodhya and coming southward.¹⁴⁹ Bharata replied:—

*'My father who had ruled the worlds without
A single flaw has set at naught for once
The traditions of our ancient lines I come
To call our Rama home and set them right.' (2:11:33)*

Bharata's words drew sobs from the manly heart of Guha. Again he fell prostrate on the ground and clasping the lotus-like feet of Bharata, he addressed him these never-to-be-forgotten words:—

*'You have renounced as sinful, Sire, the throne
Your mother did demand and your father gave,*

¹⁴⁹ The student of Valmiki will see how much more delicate is Kamban's Guha, when compared to Valmiki's Guha, who tells Bharata to his face,

*'But this your host so wide disposed
Wakes in my heart one doubt and dread
Lest threatening Rama good and great,
Ill thoughts your journey stimulate.'*

It would be worthwhile to compare this whole episode of Guha as treated by Kamban at every step with Valmiki's treatment of the same. Valmiki has worked wonders in this episode but even the most partial admirer of Valmiki will have to admit that the touches that Kamban has added to it make it more entrancing, more grand. Unfortunately space forbids us to pursue the comparison here any further.

*Although yourself are free from blame. And you
 Art come to seek your brother with anguished heart.
 When I behold this self-conquest, I ask
 Can even a thousand Ramas equal you?
 How can a hunter ignorant like me
 Your praises fitly sing? Even as the sun
 Outshining does devour all other lights,
 You have transcended and eclipsed the fame
 Of all the sovereigns of your ancient line! ' (2:11:35,36)*

Bharata accepted the hospitality lovingly offered by Guha, and then asked him to show the place where Rama had slept while he remained with him. While Guha pointed to him the bed of grass on the stony floor as the bed whereupon Rama passed his night, Bharata could not bear the sight and fell down on the ground shaking all over with intensity of his grief, and soaking the very earth with his tears. And then he gave vent to his excruciating feelings, apostrophizing Rama thus:—

*'Even when I know that you did suffer, brother,
 Exile on my account and even when
 I hear it said you ate berries wild
 And roots as if they were ambrosia,
 And slept on this bed, I yield not up
 My breath! O brother shall not I even accept
 The crown? ' (2:11:40)*

And again impelled by brotherly affection, Bharata asked Guha to show where Lakshmana passed the night, to which the loving forester replied:—

*'When slept the dark-hued handsome Rama and she
 Upon this bed, your Lakshmana with his bow
 In hand and with many a sigh and tear did stand
 On guard outside the whole night through, without
 A wink of sleep.' (2:11:42)*

Bharata's self-torturing heart found in this news fresh matter for self-reproach and self-condemnation. He exclaimed:—

*Of all the brothers born with Rama, I've been
 For him the curse of endless miseries,
 While Lakshmana stands to remedy them as they
 Approach: can mankind sound the depths of love?
 Ah, grand's the service I have done to Rama! '*

Bharata now requested Guha to take the 'vast host across the Ganga. After all others had passed over, Bharata and the dowager empresses of Ayodhya got into a boat along with Guha. As they were crossing the river, Guha asked to be introduced to the queens. The stanzas in which Guha asks and Bharata replies are full of the pathos of passionate self-reproach; and we shall attempt to translate them for the reader.

*As Guha did salute Kausalya great
 And asked of Bharata, 'Will tell me, prince,
 Who is this holy dame? ' Good Bharata
 Replied, ' O brother, know her as the spouse
 Of him whose court was thronged with vassal kings,
 And as the noble queen who lost through my
 Unfortunate birth, the happiness that was*

*To have been hers as mother of the Lord
 Who in the ages gone begot the god
 From whom doth spring this triple universe! '
 Guha now turned to Sumitra and asked
 The prince to tell him who she was. ' She is, '
 The holy one replied, ' the second wife
 Of him who died and left a deathless name
 For truth, and mother of him who never parts
 From Ram and proves to all the world that Ram
 Has got a brother yet.' And last towards her
 The hunter looked, who though her lord had died
 And though her son with anguish wore away
 His heart, and Rama wandered in the wilds,
 Cared not for them but went on measuring away
 With her cruel greed-filled heart, the worlds that Vishnu
 Did measure with his feet. And then he asked
 'Who may this lady be? ' The prince replied
 'She is the mother of all these ills and nurse
 Of lasting shame; she wears my heart away
 With her callousness; for amid this endless host
 That looks a body bereft of life, is not
 Her face the only one that is not touched
 With sorrow's hue? Her heartlessness cleaves
 My heart in twain. If cannot know her straightway
 By her look, then know it is her sinful womb
 That held me many a weary month before
 My birth.' (2:11: 65, 68-70.)*

At length the whole party landed and pursued their way towards where Rama was staying in the forest. It is the plan of the poet to show off the pure gold of Bharata's character by melting it again and again in the fire of unjust suspicion and calumny. So here also Kamban exposes Bharata to the unjust charges of Lakshmana. The reader will not have forgotten the cruel words that Lakshmana hurled against Bharata when he saw him- advancing at the head of the immense multitude towards where they were. But Ram knew the real nature of Bharata and calmed Lakshmana with the words which are a partial compensation for the various attacks aimed at Bharata by unthinking people.

As they were thus discussing, Bharata himself approached, his hands joined in the attitude of worship, his body drooping down, his eyes flowing with tears, his whole person a very picture of anguish of heart.

Rama pointed him out to Lakshmana and said with a delicate irony:

'O my Child of the twanging bow, behold the panoply of war in which the angry Bharata advances to attack us.'

But Lakshmana did not require Rama's words in order to realize the injustice of his suspicions. For, as Bharata approached,

*His face grew pale; his tongue that even now
 Reviled his brother stuck to his palate dumb;
 His wrath was fled; his eyes did inundate
 The ground with tears; his bow dropped from his hand:
 And he astonished stood. (2:12:51)*

And Bharata came as the messenger sent by the Earth for her Lord Shri Rama, whose separation she could not bear any more, and saying,

*'You have forgotten Dharma and forsaken Truth
You have broken all our traditions.'* (2:12:53)

he fell at the feet of Rama as if he met his own father come back to life.

Rama embraced him with a fervent love and eyed again and again with grief the hermit's weeds in which Bharata appeared, and thought on a hundred things as possible reasons for the same. At length he asked him:

*"You are sunk in grief, my child; is our hero father well? ' Bharata broke to him the
unhappy news of his father's death,*

and Rama lamented long and deeply for him along with Bharata and Vashistha and his mothers. At length, counseled by "Vashistha, Rama offered the funeral oblations to his father, and entertained all that had come with Bharata.

The next day Rama assembled the chiefs and Rishis that had come from Ayodhya and at the assembly spoke to Bharata thus:

*'Our great father is dead and by his commands the empire belongs to you. Why then do
not you wear the crown, but appear in these hermit's robes? '* (2:12:96)

Bharata at once rose up with a visible shudder in his limbs, and joining his hands in reverence looked full in the face of Rama and replied as follows:

*'Who is there for righteousness, O brother mine,
But you thyself? Will break the traditions old
Of our house? For whom is penance fit but me
Who am the son of her, who with her boons
Rebellious killed the king, and did decree
An exile's life to you? Me miserable!
Born from the sinful womb of her who broke
The hearts of all, I think not yet to seek
My death, nor would I live the anchorite's life:
How am I going now to wash my sins?
When you leave the ancient throne that's your
Of right and lead the life of eremites,
Shall I forget myself and swerve from right
And rule the earth as one who Dharma destroys?
Our father dead for very excess of love,
And you come over to the desert wilds,
Defenseless lies the state: am I a foe
To watch my chance and steel the unguarded crown?
So right, my brother, the wrong by father done
And the evil brought by her the mother
Of wickedness, and do return to Oudh
And wear the imperial crown.'* (2:12:97-99, 101, 103)

Rama, however, would not admit Bharata's arguments. He said that his father and mother had ordered him to leave the country, and that he would not make his father a liar in this world by returning to Ayodhya. ' The duty of the son is to increase the glory of his parents and not to make their names a by-word of disgrace. your father,' Rama concluded, ' left you the kingdom by his express command, and by right of birth too it belongs to you. Take you therefore the reins of power

in your hands and rule the earth.' ' If the kingdom,' replied Bharata, ' in which you were born the eldest son to the king — you who have no peer in all the worlds — does really belong to me, then, my brother, I give it away to you. When the whole kingdom is hungering for your return, will you pass your time in selfish tapas? Come you therefore, O brother, and wipe off its sorrow by assuming the crown! '

*Rama would not change his fixed mind. He said,
 'If in your love you bestow your crown
 On me, can it belong to me? The years
 That I agreed to live in the wilderness
 Obedient to my father's will, are they
 Over today? Is there a higher virtue
 Brother, than truth? Is there a blacker sin
 Than swerving from the same? Let me therefore
 Reside, O brother, for the period undertook,
 An exile in the forest lands; and all
 These years rule you Ayodhya by my command!
 When father bid me wear the crown, my child,
 I feared to disobey and did submit
 My will to his. I bid you now to rule
 The land, and as I did to father yield,
 So do you yield to me and leave your sorrow.'* (2:12:114 – 117)

Now Vashistha intervened and as preceptor called upon Rama with greater authority, to return to the land and rule Ayodhya. ' But how can I go back,' asked Rama, ' upon the word once given? Is it right for you to call upon me to assume the crown, after I had promised to my father and mother to do their bidding? '

Vashistha could not oppose him with reason and so became silent. And Bharata, finding it impossible to persuade Rama to leave the forest, said in despair:—

*'If you will not go back on your resolve,
 Let those assume the crown who want to rule:
 I'll follow you and live the anchorite's life! '* (2:12: 129.)

The invisible gods, who had been closely following the debate, now thought that if Bharata's determination should induce Rama to return to Ayodhya, Ravana and the Rakshasas would remain unpunished, and so they caused these words to be heard in the assembly:—

'It is your duty Bharata, to rule the empire during all the fourteen years that Rama has undertaken to pass in exile in accordance with the will of his father.' (2:12: 131.)

When these incorporeal words were heard, Rama said to Bharata:—

'Behold the Devas have spoken and you ought not to disobey their words. So at my request and with my authority rule you the empire, brother.' (2:12: 132.)

Bharata had to yield. But he insisted on one stern condition. 'If you will not come back,' he said, ' exactly at the end of fourteen years and accept the scepter, I shall light a big fire and burn myself in it.' Rama saw the firmness of his heart, and melting away at his unselfish devotion to himself agreed to his condition.

Bharata with many a sob requested Rama to give him his *Padukas* — the wooden shoes that he wore — as he would rule the land in the name of these sacred shoes only as the symbol of Rama's personal authority; and Rama gave them — those shoes that give temporal as well as spiritual salvation to those that worship them in faith and love. And placing them upon his head and

shedding tears profusely at the thought of separation from Rama, Bharata at length took his leave with all his host and returned home. But he would not enter Ayodhya, for, was not Rama an exile therefrom? He therefore stopped at Nandigrama, placed the Padukas on the throne, and conducted the affairs of the state as their vice-regent, himself living the life of an anchorite!

And how he did pass the fourteen years of Rama's exile!

Not a day passed without his doing worship to the *Padukas* of his brother. He lived with his senses absolutely restrained, a very picture of tenderness and love. Tears would gush forth from his eyes at the very thought of his brother. Although he lived in the midst of plenty, he would eat nothing but roots and wild berries, the produce of the wild country. He would be constantly looking towards the south, the direction from which Rama should return, repeating to himself with tears and sobs, ' he would not belie his word, he will come, he will come.'

At length the day dawned on which Rama was due to arrive in Ayodhya and still there were no signs of his arriving. The anguish of Bharata's heart and his tears increased a hundredfold and he said to himself:—

*'He wouldn't forget the day agreed with me?
Nor be unmindful of his mother's love
Or anguish mine, and overstay his time.
I fear some evil has befallen him!' (6:37: 214.)*

Soon he recovered his poise, saying:—

*'But who can stand before my hero brother?
Nor gods, nor man, nor beings of the world
Beyond, nor even the Three Supreme could win
If him they faced in war!' (6:37:215.)*

But other doubts soon upset him and he resolved to die in the fire as he had declared to his brother at the time of parting from him in the forest. He said:—

*'But may it be
He thinks I might desire the crown, and stays
Away in the wilderness so that I might
Enjoy the throne in peace? But now the time
Is past that I should think and hesitate:
I can my torture bear no more, I'll die
And end my anguish with my life!' (6:37:216.)*

He, therefore, had a big rolling fire lighted on the fields and walked towards it. But, in the meantime, the whole city got to know of the matter, and everybody rushed to the field of fire, preceded by Kausalya, the mother of Rama, who hurried towards him weeping and sobbing. When he saw her, Bharata was taken aback and he saluted her falling at her feet. She took him up and embraced him and chide him and nobly lauded him in the following words:—

*"Its destiny, my son, that drove your brother
And father to their several fates; but what
Is it that you're about, O child? It is
A thoughtless deed; for if you end your life,
Our chiefs and people and your mothers all
Will feed the fire and end themselves. Will Dharma
Itself remain alive? The very world
Will from its orbit swerve and come to an end!
You know not your greatness, Bharata!*

*We have not seen a higher righteousness
 With these our eyes than your own holy life.
 Can ever your glory fade even when the worlds
 Dissolve? Ten million Ramas even
 Can never approach the love immaculate
 That burns within your soul! If you should die
 That are but Dharma's other self, can earth
 And heaven and all that breathes remain alive?
 If this day carries Ram, tomorrow he
 Is sure to come. Think not he'd break the word
 He himself gave to you. Tomorrow if
 'We see him not, be sure he has ceased to live!
 But grieving for the death of one, my child,
 Will you destroy great Surya's race itself
 Up to its very roots? And you are Dharma
 Itself in flesh and blood! ' (6:37:229 – 234.)*

So spoke the grand-souled Kausalya forgetting even her grief for the delay of Rama in the sight of the immaculate Bharata. She could contemplate the death of Rama without swooning — so much had the sacrifice of Bharata endeared him to her heart. How then could she look on and allow him to fall into the fire in a mistaken sense of sin?

*But Bharata would not listen to her. He said,
 'Say not, O mother, that your son has ceased
 To obey your word. I will no more preserve
 My life and risk the un-duteous violation
 Of my father's words and all traditions old
 Of our race. I'll stand by the oath I made, and keep
 My word. I'll also give my life for truth.
 And go to heaven. As Rama is the son
 And heir, the duty's his alone to save
 The state. It's wrong for others to wear the crown.
 Besides, obedience to the father's words
 And mother's, and the trampling down of tenderness
 And love do appertain to Ram alone.
 They are impossible for me, my mother!
 And I shall die and prove my innocence.' (6:37: 236-238.)*

So saying, he walked round the fire in worship as a preliminary to falling into it. All the people sobbed aloud. But just at that moment Hanuman who had been sent to Bharata by the considerate Rama appeared shouting,

*'My Lord is come, the noble hero's come!
 Can he survive if you should take your life?' (6:37:240.)*

and with his mighty paws extinguished the fire.

And then saying that Rama was being entertained by Bharadwaj, and that that was the reason of the delay of Rama in coming over to where he was, Hanuman showed to Bharata the Signet ring of Rama which he brought with him as evidence of the genuineness of his message. Bharata's joy at its sight was not one whit less than that of Sita when she saw it in Lanka. He kissed it, embraced it, and pressed it into his eyes. His emaciated body grew to itself again at the touch of the beloved jewel. He laughed and wept, saluted and embraced Hanuman again and again, fell at his feet, and leaped with excess of joy.

*'Dance, dance away with joy,' he said to those
Around; 'run, fly to where our Rama is!
Let's sing a song of joy! O sinners, why
Fall you not at the feet of Hanuman?'* (6:37:251)

And then,

*The tongues that had been crying for grief, began
To shout for joy; all eyes began to dry,
And heads that ploughed the ground were lifted up,
And all did clasp in worship Hanuman's feet.* (6:37: 247)

Bharata did all honors to Hanuman, gave orders to make all arrangements for a fitting reception to the hero of heroes, and when everything was complete, started with an immense multitude for the ashram of Bharadwaj. On the way Hanuman told him all that had happened after Rama went away South, in the midst of which account he gave him the welcome news that Dasharatha had come down on earth at the time of Sita's ordeal and withdrawn the curse against himself and his mother. Bharata grieved that it was not given to him to help Rama like Lakshmana in the destruction of Ravana. But all the grief and sorrow melted away the moment he saw Rama coming in the aerial chariot towards Ayodhya. He then felt as if he saw his father himself returned to life. He fell at Rama's feet and Rama took him up, and, unable to utter a word in the intensity of his grief and joy, embraced him till their very souls touched. Tears flowed unceasingly from Rama's eyes at the sight of the twisted knot of hair on the head of Bharata which had never been untied all these fourteen years. These tears and the love of Rama's heart, which was like that of the cow for its calf, were enough compensation to the heart of Bharata for the untold mental anguish that he had been suffering from the 'moment that he had heard of Rama's exile. And Lakshmana, who had misunderstood him in the early days of the exile, 'clasped his feet in loving worship.. The tortured heart of Bharata had at length found its balsam, and fluttering with joy he took his brother and the Vanara host to Ayodhya and crowned Rama to the delight of himself and that of the whole world. And never did he feel so much joy as. when at the time of the coronation he held the white umbrella, the symbol of victory and unstinting liberality, over the head of his brother.

KAMBAN'S SITA



Publishers' Note

V. V. S. Aiyar had intended to crown his work with the character-study of Sita and had fittingly reserved it to the last. Cruel fate, however, stretched its talons and tragically snatched him away from this world before he could sing Sita's virtues. Though very reluctant to make any additions to Aiyar's work, we felt a certain infelicity in letting the work appear without Sita, and hence, a character-sketch of Sita has been added to this book.

It is written by a member of the Delhi Tamil Sangam. Were we to apologies for including it in this book, we shall never cease doing so at every line of the sketch — we are so fully conscious, as is the author, of its unworthiness. But we owe to the readers, especially the foreign readers, a duty to give them a complete work. We sincerely hope that lovers of Aiyar will accept this chapter in the spirit in which it is offered. To be in keeping with the foregoing chapters, Tamil verses have been translated into blank verse. " Coleridge hit the nail on the head," says Aiyar, when he said, " the translation of poetry into poetry is difficult"; how difficult it is, the author of this sketch has realized only too well in the course of writing it. "Treat your Friends", says Thoreau, "for what you know them to be. Regard no surfaces. Consider not that they did but what they intended." We pray our friends to do the same and overlook the shortcomings in this attempt.

In some places, Aiyar's translations have been repeated; in all such cases, references to the pages where they first appear have been given.

We are greatly indebted to the Rev. John Joseph Crease. Principal of the St. Columbas High School, New Delhi, for his invaluable help in correcting this essay, particularly the verses. An utter stranger to us, he responded immediately to our request and devoted many hours of his valuable time to correct this essay. We alone know what it was like when it was submitted to him. If, after all his loving labors, it is still imperfect — as indeed it is — it is not his fault, but the fault of the poor material we offered him. We thank him most sincerely for his very kind labors. Our thanks are also due to Miss J. Dixon of the Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in India for various •corrections which she kindly suggested to be made in this essay. — Publishers.

SITA

*Atop the terrace of the Virgin Bower,
Upon the balcony overlooking swans
At play with mates (in lotus-teeming pool),
They saw a dazzling form — and stood entranced —
Effulgence sheer of gold, the fragrance sweet
Of blossoms, taste delicious nectar gives,
The pleasure perfect poesy yields.¹⁵⁰*

¹⁵⁰ I x 23 Aiyar, well-versed in the genius of the English language, has with unerring appropriateness translated the first two lines as follows:—

"The while she stood beside the dovecot fair, In her virgin bower

We have, however, closely adhered to the original. It has been suggested to us that the swans were not on the balcony, but the balcony overlooked the swans at play down below. But it is a convention, some may say, in Tamil poetry (cf. Nala-Damayanti) for swans to be by the side of a-, maid in love. If, therefore, the alternative sense is preferred, the

Thus the poet ushers Sita into the stage of the Ramayana, Rama and Lakshmana, walking down the streets of Mithila, gazing at the various sights to right and left of them and above them, stop enthralled by the sight of Sita on the terrace. Vishvamitra had not told them the real reason of his taking them to Janaka's capital, and so, they were not prepared for this vision. 2

"The artful Rishi", says Aiyar, " took Rama and Lakshmana through the very street where Sita's bower was situated." Says the poet:—

*So stood that maiden of rare loveliness
And eye caught eye and each the other ate;
As quiet they stood, minds into one were fused;
The hero looked at her and Sita looked at him.¹⁵¹*

And when she turned her eyes on him,

*The pair of pointed lances called her glance
Sank deep in shoulders broad of handsome Ram:
The lotus eyes of him with sounding anklets
In turn pierced the bosom of the maid —
Bewitching like enchantress fair of yore.¹⁵²
Enchained by lasoos called her drinking looks,
And heart to heart each one adducing 'main,
He of the banded bow and she with sword-like eyes,
In turn entered each other's heart.
That she could not the handsome one embrace,
The bangled maiden like a statue stood:
Her heart and will and beauty trailing him,
The youth with sage dissolved from sight. (1:10:37,39)*

Kamban's Sita was of an age to fall in love at first sight, and, 'in his Ramayana, she suffers through forty-two verses the pangs of love. Not a word has passed between the two, and as Aiyar takes care to point out, the first words which Rama speaks to her were when he asked her to stay in Ayodhya while he goes alone to the forests for fourteen years. Rama, in turn, suffers no whit less in the guest-house at Mithila, thinking of Sita whose name even is yet unknown to him. One glance at Sita, the yet unknown, was enough to set aflame the heart of Rama, and mere words about her were enough to enslave Ravana. When Shurpanakha had finished the description of Sita's person, says the poet:—

All his anger, and valor, and sense of shame now left his heart. Struck by the arrows of Manmatha, he forgot Khara, he forgot the disgrace that had befallen him, he forgot the limits of the blessings received by him, but he forgot not the fair of whom his sister spoke.

word ' overlooking ' may be changed to ' amidst the '. The words in 'lotus- teeming pool' are not in the original, but they do not affect the sense in either case.

¹⁵¹ 1:10:35. This rendering is by the Rev. H. A. Popley and appears in his work 'The Sacred Kural' published by the Association Press, Y.M.C.A., 5 Russell Street, Calcutta. Commenting on verse 10 of Chapter 110 of the Kural, Rev. Popley writes "Kambar's Ramayana in Tamil has a delightful illustration of this "; and gives the stanza we have quoted above. Students of the Kural will remember Aiyar's translation of the maxim which reads, "When eyes speak their consent to eyes, the words of the mouth are quite superfluous". Students of Kamba Ramayana and the Kural will also remember that Kamban has woven delightfully into his verses at various places numerous other maxims from the Kural.

¹⁵² 1:10:36. Enchantress — Mohini, a female form of spell-binding beauty, which Vishnu took aeons ago to divert the attention of the Asuras while all of the immortality-conferring amrit churned from, the Ocean of Milk was distributed only to the Devas.

Even Vishvamitra, the Raja-Rishi, is so much impressed by her beauty that he says to himself:

*'Let be that single bow; would not our Ram
Of mighty arms, like hill of emerald
In hue, even break the seven hills besides,
If it was for this lotus-dwelling maid
With smiting eyes like tender mango green
Slit in two.'*¹⁵³

Such is the beauty of Sita.

Sita's love was no passing fancy, though it was born in a moment. The Swayamvara was to be held the next day, and whoever was able to 'bend the bow of Shiva was, by a proclamation long since made far and wide, to be given the hand of Sita. She made a terrible resolve which, later, Rama is to relate to Hanuman. He says, as the reader will recollect,

*'Tell her I call to mind her great resolve,
When I the bow of Shiva broke in two,
To end herself if I should other prove
Than him she saw with holy Kaushika.'*

"Children are to be seen and not heard " was once a popular adage. Even till very recently, and now too in many Hindu homes, the young wife is neither to be seen nor heard. In all her life in her husband's home before she left with Rama for the forests, and in the livelong years of exile in the forests, we hear Sita speak — if we recollect right — only twice, once when, under great stress of emotion, she says,

*.....Right holy's your purpose to obey
Your mother's commands, but, lord, your word
To me to stay at home when you leave
An exile for the wilds unknown, that word
Has pierced my heart.'*

and, once again, when she asks Rama pettishly to catch the golden deer himself for her. Otherwise Sita's liquid eyes alone are the quiver-full arrows and eloquent messengers of her love. They were:—

*Far grander than the lovely fawn's — her eyes —
The lance with garland decked¹⁵⁴, and smiting sword:
The Kayal¹⁵⁵ her roving eyes envied! (1;10:26)
'The killing lance and Death itself, all these,
We would surpass, surpass,' they seemed to say:
The quality of her of dancing eyes
Who can ever tell, if hill and rampart strong,
Hard stone, and grass saw her and melted sheer?
Even so stood she, the Fruit of Womanhood! (1:10:32)*

It is with these eyes that she steals a glance at Rama on the wedding eve, when she was presented before Dasharatha. and

¹⁵³ 1:20:36. We have translated here the simile of a tender green mango to the eyes — exotic as it may seem to foreign readers — in order to acquaint the non-Tamils with a very picturesque simile peculiar to Tamil poetry.

¹⁵⁴ In token of victory.

¹⁵⁵ Kayal — carp (cyprinus fimbrialus); a kind of fish, to whose eyes of incomparably beauty, the eyes of damsels are frequently compared in Tamil poetry.

*Her doubts she shed beholding Truth behind
Report of bow uplifted and bow snapped;
And with the corner of her eyes, the while
She feigned to trim the bangles on her wrist,
She stole a glance and recognized Him without,
Besides within her heart. (1:10:37)*

For all this speechlessness, Sita's love for Rama was deep and vast. Rama was her very life and soul. "Our finest relations", says Thoreau, "are not simply kept silent about, but buried under a positive depth of silence never to be revealed." "Silence," he says elsewhere, "is the ambrosial night in the intercourse of Friends, in which their sincerity is recruited and takes deeper root". What greater friends are there than lovers? The love of the Hindu wife grows in such silence. "Even speech", says Thoreau, "at first, necessarily has nothing with it; but it follows after silence, as the buds in the graft do not put forth into leaves till long after the graft has taken." Sita stands as the ideal to all Hindu India for that speechless wifely love of immeasurable depth.

Till sorrow touched her in the shape of Ravana, Sita remains an unsophisticated woman — we had nearly said child — a very sheltered and petted woman. Dasharatha is immensely proud of the privilege of getting her for a daughter-in-law. " Though I have all the worlds seven ever to reign," he exclaims, " it is today that *Tiru*¹⁵⁶ has come to me."

Her mothers-in-law cherished her no less. When she prostrated at their feet after the wedding and sought their blessings, they embraced her and exclaimed:—

*“Who else in womankind more meet than her,
Who else is there for him of lovely eyes? “ (1:21:97)*

And they showered on her limitless gifts of gold and ornaments, costly clothes and lands, and a host of handmaidens. Her life was spent very happily in the cloistered seclusion of the palace, surrounded by the most devoted attention which was ever shown to any loved woman or wife.

She waited on the coronation day to see her lord come to her in his new-crowned glory. The reader will recollect the rude shock which she received when she saw him in hermit's garb, and the ruder one when she heard Rama bid her stay in Ayodhya while he wended his way to the wild forests. When she protested in the words we heard a little while ago, Rama said:—

*“Your tender feet
Are not made to tread the stony wilds that burn
Like the molten wax.’ ‘But can the stony wilds’;
Said she, ‘burn more than separation from
My Rama?’*

So saying, before Rama could frame any reply, she went back into her apartments, put on coarse robes and, without a word more, stood by his side ready to accompany him to the forests. In this act of putting on the coarse cloth of fiber is revealed Sita's unsophistication. It was more symbolic of her resolve to follow Rama to the wilds than an evidence of her realization of what the forest life would be. She was so innocently ignorant of the entire outside world that she did not know where the civilized country ended and where the wild forests began. Rama instructs Hanuman, as the reader will remember,

*..... ‘And last,
Remind her how, when we had barely passed
The gates of ‘Oudh, she stopped and asked, " where is*

¹⁵⁶ *Tiru* has two meanings — Prosperity, and Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Here the word is used in both senses.

*The forest boundless in expanse? Are we
Arrived in it? '*

In the forests, the Rishis at every halting place did their best to ensure the comfort of Sita and her lord; and when the dark-hued handsome Ram and she slept upon their bed, Lakshmana

*With his bow
In hand, and with many a sigh and tear did stand
On guard outside the whole night through, without
A wink of sleep.*

And how Lakshmana serves his brother and Sita in the forests I His one study is to look after every little comfort of Rama and Sita and guard them against all enemies, known and unknown. It is he that builds the leaf cottages wherever they move, which evoke these words from Rama:—

*'And Lakshmana's hands are skilled to build for us
A tasteful cottage home. Ah! those whom fate
Has helpless cast upon the world, what's
That they'll not learn to do! '*

Whatever miseries or hardships appear, Lakshmana stands at hand to remedy them as they approach. Rama too was well alive to Sita's tender soul and endeavored to shield her from all knowledge of anything like hardship or the cruelty of the forests. He made the journey through the wilds a veritable picnic. Walking down the banks of the Ganges in the first stage of their journey southward, Rama beguiles the tedium of the journey by pointing out to her the swans and their sport, the swarms of bees, the male elephant and its female coming down to the river to quench their thirst, and many other sylvan sights, and shields' from her all that may frighten her timid unsophisticated heart. We shall not attempt the impossible, much as we would love to give the reader a glimpse of the interplay of amorous glances between Rama and Sita at the sight of nature's settings which serve but as a foil to the love each bore the other. The mincing gait of the swan makes Rama turn his- eyes, ta the small fair feet of Sita which, ta take a phrase from the *Porunarattupadai*, resemble 'tongues of panting dogs and suit her smooth-haired ankles, well'. Sita sees the mighty male elephant and a tender smile buds on her face as she looks up at the massive shoulders of Rama. Thus, with love-play of glances, Rama protects Sita at every step from the hard realities of the world.

We shall quote one more instance and close this phase of Sita's character, Sumantra, the charioteer, who brought them down to the verge of the forest, was taking his leave and asked for messages from Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita to the court. Rama gave a long and statesmanlike message to his father; and Lakshmana, the impetuous, said:—

"Have I a message too for him, as if he were my king,"

and refused to give a message to his father. Both were fully conscious of the import of the occasion and each in his own way was venting the surging emotions in his heart, but Sita was blissfully innocent and when she was asked for her message, she said,

*"To King and aunts respects mine render first,
And tell my loving sisters three to tend
My golden starling and my parrot green." (2:5:40)*

Nothing shows more clearly than this message how little had the banishment made any impress on her mind. She is still the playful young queen concerned only for her pets. Just as Rama in the hands of Kamban has been sublimated into a God, Sita too takes her place with him as of right. Says the poet:—

"What need for any words from us when they

*Who parted from their bed on ocean dark
Unite again?" (1:10:38)*

Sita was the incarnation of Lakshmi herself

For all that, Kamban makes her most human as much in her concern for her pets as in her petulance or in her imperious reproof of Lakshmana.

Like any young wife and many an older matron, Sita could be petulant when her light wish was not fulfilled, as we see when she, with tremulous lips, insists on Rama catching the golden deer for her.

When Lakshmana is unwilling to leave her alone and go to the aid of Rama who, Sita believes, had come to harm, she turns on him with rage and contempt and spits out these words:—

*You heard my prince of faultless character
Has fallen by the guile of Rakshasas vile;
And still you tarry! Are you a brother true? (3:8:4)*

Lakshmana's logical arguments only infuriate her the more, and she brands him with scorching words thus:—

*"And some there are their very life lay down
On but a day's acquaintance, but you heard
The dying cry of him your elder one;
You startled not! You stand! What else can I
But end my life in fire?" (3:8:13)*

The frail woman's strength is her tears indeed!

Two women are designed to be, in the Ramayana, the agents of the destruction of Ravana — Sita and Shurpanakha. Shurpanakha failed in her attempt to seduce Rama, and as she watched him turn back into his cottage accompanied by Sita, who was still clinging to him, she left slowly saying to herself,

“Deep verily is his love for her.”

Out of this thought was born the plot which fulfills the destruction of Ravana and his host, and consummates the promise which Vishnu gave to the Devas in heaven. In the words of the poet:—

*She had the might to lay low root and branch
The King of sapphire-hued vile Rakshasas race:
She was the deadly cancer born with the quick
Which bides its time — inseparable! (3:5:8)*

Vibhishana, in his lament over the death of Ravana, sees in the fall of Ravana a deep-laid plot by Shurpanakha, fulfilled by meditated vengeance. He says:—

*"Nursing the grievance that you killed her invincible husband, she conspired evil, she of
the buck-teeth indenting her lip: the evil wretch has verily her vengeance wreaked!"*

“My fault?” she said, in answer to Ravana's query why men should mutilate her, "my fault? It related to a woman whose waist is like the lightning, whose tender arms are like the bamboo stem and whose color is that of pure gold." 2 And straightway, Ravana lost his heart to her of whom in retrospect Vibhishana says, again in his lament:—

*"Unless devoured, poisons never devour
Life; but this great poison Janaki,
So called, with eyes just looked at you, and lo!
It wiped out life!" (6:36:220)*

Thus Shurpanakha introduced Ravana to her ' who was to him poison mortal ' and which he instantly ' thirsted to taste, as if it was, the drink immortal'. And we all know the story of how he came in the disguise of a sanyasi to Janasthan to possess her.

Sita, the unsophisticated, is slow to suspect the false sanyasi when he says:–

*.....'In sooth I find the Rakshasa
A friend invaluable to men like me.'*

She thought within her heart, ' no holy man is he, who thus associates with evil ones,' but she did not know,

*Poor innocent, that the wily Rakshasas
Could at their will assume whatever shape
Or form they pleased: and so she didn't suspect
A worse guile.*

Sita and Rama had been brought up to respect and adore Rishis, but they cherished righteousness more than everything else in the world. ' The righteous care not whether it is father, mother, or child but speak up for the right boldly and unequivocally. The reader will recollect that when Vashistha too, who accompanied Bharata to bring back Rama to Ayodhya, joined his words, halting as they were, to the request of Bharata, Rama saluted him with joined palms and said:–

*'That grave commandment they ere laid on me,
With head bowed low I promised to obey:
The same you bid me break. So tell me now,
O worthy one, where lies my duty here? ' (2:12:128)*

Sita who had stood by when these never-to-be forgotten words were spoken, which silenced Vashistha into shame, Sita, who had heard Rama solemnly promise to the Rishis the utter destruction of all the Rakshasas, and had seen and heard of his might with the bow, was stung into fury when she heard Ravana the sanyasi say,

*.....When the Rakshasas do rule
The worlds without a peer, what can we do
Of holy endeavor unless we walk
Their way, and earn their friendship and their love'*

Her fears fled, her timidity shrank back, only her righteous indignation blazed forth.

*'The while the Prince of Dharma here performs
Austerities rare,' said she, ' dead will be
The Rakshasas of sinful walk of life
And all their kin: thereon the world will rid
Of menace be! (3:8:56)*

Ravana interrupted and said:–

*"If you say the men will overthrow
The Rakshasas with root and branch, forsooth,
The timid hare would kill the mammoth large,
And horned deer would gore the mighty lion
Of cruel claws! ' (3:8:57)*

Sita retorted with angry tears stinging her eyes:–

*It seems you have not heard the battle dire,
"Where perished yon Viradha called Red-Head,*

And Victory-laden Khar and all his host! ' (3:6:58)

She continued, prophetess-like:—

*'Will you not see tomorrow even before
Your eyes the Rakshasas of Lanka isle
And all their kin succumb to might of Rama,
And Devas pure exalted once again?
Can Sin over mighty virtue ever prevail? ' (3:8:59)*

This infuriated Ravana who shouted in bravado:—

'Dost you want the Meru Hill to be uprooted, or the vault of heaven to be broken, or the ocean to be stirred to its depths, or the fire in its bosom to be extinguished, or even the earth to be lifted on high? Which of these are impossible to Ravana, whose words are few, but deeds are mighty and many, O innocent one? ' (3:8:60)

Sita countered in her simplicity

*“Cluster of whirling arms, do they lend strength?
The clanging anklet hero, — who confined
The King of Lanka, Ravana you speak of —
His forest of arms galore, a thousand all,
Was it not a lad with arms no more than two
Who felled them all with but his axe?” (3:8:63)*

And with this spell she unlocked the doors of evil, and lo, the colossus grew before her eyes and struck her speechless with terror. Ravana stood revealed before her in his true form, 5 and with his ten tongues roared:—

*Look on my prowess by the Devas served;
Me to the earthy worms you dare compare!
You live, as woman you are, else to eat
You crushed had I even thought: but with the thought
My life I had perished too! (3:8:67)*

Saying so, he tried to soothe her fears and later voiced his foul desire.

Ravana's open declaration of love is given by- Kamban in less than a score of words, and for all the wisdom-destroying passion of Ravana, the words are highly dignified and are not the lustful ravings of a roving libertine. These, as Aiyar had pointed out, Kamban contained in Ravana's unspoken thoughts on seeing Sita. Ravana here says with great restraint,

*“Be not alarmed, my darling Swan! ' he said,
'While I on my unbending serried heads
Do bear on each a crown, and goddesses
Bedecked with jewels serve at your proud feet,
Do you deign share with me the monarchy
Of fourteen worlds.' (3:8:68)*

Sita's lotus hands flew to close her oars in horror, while she flung at him these words:—

*“To me, the chaste of Kakutstha the great —
Who bears the shapely cruel bow of note —
Even like the craven cur that covets
The pure oblation those of righteous life
Offer the flames, what said you, Rakshasa Vile?
Doth one lose birth and priceless honor old*

*For fear of losing precious life that fades
Even as the dew on tiny blade of grass?
Long ere the cruel arrows like thunder strike,
If you desire the safety of your life,
And would hide, fly, fly away! ' (3:8:69,70)*

He was not awed, but said, 'Your husband cannot harm me any, and his arrows will fall like arrows of flowers against my rock-like chest': and entreated again thus:—

*"O Goddess you to Her on lotus bloom!
To my body racked by the ill called love of you,
Give life; and take the place exalted far —
Not even to Deva damsels given to reach! '
So saying, he fell prostrate at her feet —
Even he of arms far stronger than the hill
Which bears aloft the world. (3:8:72)*

Sita screamed with outraged terror and called in panic on departed Lakshmana for help. Instantly Ravana scooped up her hut with her in it and rose sheer in his chariot into the sky towards Lanka. Thus Sita woke from her trusting simplicity to the cruel world. We have seen how up to the last moment terror only lent her greater courage and firmness to stand unshaken on the codes of life, worthy to be cherished more than life itself.¹⁵⁷

Ravana carried her off to Lanka and hoped to break her spirit with confinement. Racked by despair mounting with the tedious months, unwashed, unkempt, weeping all day long and the livelong night, eyes swollen with piercing the far northern horizon for Rama who came not yet, terrorized and cajoled in turn by fearful guards, emaciated to the bone by long self-denial of sustenance, Sita, hoped Ravana, would be more malleable. And he comes to her in all his pomp and glory many times to persuade her to take him; spurned again and again he returns like a cur to her feet. He came once when Hanuman was a hidden witness, and to Hanuman's ineffable joy, Sita lacked not a whit her righteous indignation or adamant loyalty to her chastity.

Ravana came in state surrounded by a guard of amazons, and Indra and other gods watched unwinking with bated breath and fearfully wondered:—

'What now, what evil plot thinks he, and who will it now end? '

Hanuman came nearer, the better to watch, repeating in silence the mystic name of Ram. Agonized, with his heart aflutter, he saw her shrinking and trembling, her very life in torment, and him mad with lust, and pronounced a benediction on Janaki:—

*'Blessed be Janaki,
Blessed be Raghava,
Blessed the Vedas four,
Blessed the Brahmanas,
Blessed be Dharma true. (5:4:23)*

The reader will recollect that Aiyar had pointed out that Ravana had paid other visits before, trying to wear down Sita's will, but he had been spurned time and again. 1 His assurance has, therefore, wilted, and he,

Who though he met his match in Mahadeva,¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Kural 14-1. 'Right conduct to true greatness leads; It should be held more dear than life Itself.' — Rev. Popley's translation.

¹⁵⁸ Shiva humbled him when he tried to carry away the Kailash Hill with Shiva and Parvati enthroned thereon.

*Had not ever his assurance lost, with lust
And shrinking shame¹⁵⁹ at war within his mind,
Halting, halting, humbly spoke thus. (5:4:25)
'The days are passing one by one away,
And this is all the kindness you have shown
To me!'*

he entreated, and bitterly exclaimed,

*"..... Mean you to accept me when I'm dead —
Aye, murdered by your cruelty? '
.....O scorn it not but do accept
Me as your slave, who rule the triple worlds
Without a rival or peer! ' He ended,
And raising his hands above his serried heads,
He fell prostrating at her feet.*

These poisonous words, grown unbearable by repetition, opened the flood-gates of Sita's wrath.

*The words, like smoking skewers, long ere they
Entered, her ears were scorched; her heart stood still;
Hot blood inflamed her eyes: she cared not for
What may befall her life, but stinging words
Not fit for womanhood, thus spoke:*

*'Improper are these noxious words of yours
To woman treading path of wedded life
Oh listen to me and learn, you scum of the earth!
Seen you ever women stony-hearted but
With chastity?*

*'To pierce the Meru or to crack the vault of heaven,
Or to lay waste the fourteen worlds entire,
Not any but the Aryan's arrow there is:
Witting, O witless fool, would you yet say
'Unseemly words and your ten heads lay low? I*

*'Because you were afraid that day, you sought
His absence, so you sent a crafty deer,
And by your skill in Maya came disguised:
If live you would, this moment set me free.*

*'When him, the poison to your cursed race,
You face, your eyes his gaze would stand indeed!
Your heads twice five and shoulders abundant
Will be but target for Ram's easy sport.
You are a fighter bold indeed! Did not
Jatayus fell you down to earth that day?*

*He who lived on the hill you took — the same
Who with his cruel feet did crush your pride —
His Meru bow with which he sped the arrow*

¹⁵⁹ 'Nan' the original term in Tamil stands for the spontaneous shrinking of the soul from wrong-doing — a sensitiveness to shame.

*Which wiped away the fortresses three, you what?
Seems you heard not the boom that noted day,
When it was snapped, as of but little might,
By prowess of the arm of Ram my mate!*

*You boast of hill uplifted; you declare,
The elephants guarding points twice four, I crushed '
You dared not come the while Ram's brother stood ,
At hand; yet bold you are to prostrate flat
At feet of woman too! '*

*O you of baleful eyes inspiring fear
In heaven and earth, I pray forsake forthwith
Your evil ways. The lotus-dwelling Lord,
Or Vishnu, Brahma, did you mistake my Ram
For one of these? You utter simpleton!*

*'O think not lightly these are bat mere men;
If mighty Kartavirya of thousand arms
Was by a man laid low, do ponder well
On might of Ram!*

*'If you despise them for they are but two,
The world's Destroyer on the Day of Doom,
Is he but one or more? When war is come,
How true are these my words you shall perceive!
Alas you will for certain lose your all
And perish dire!*

*'The Rishis did relate your prowess great,
And fame of Rakshasas might; if nonetheless they
Defaced your sister dear, and brothers' arms
And feet did lop, would you not think on it?*

*'The news of him who severed one and all
The mighty limbs of him of thousand arms —
Even he who held your twenty while he smote
Your face till blood your twice five mouths spit.
And more, immured you too — have you not heard?
O you outcaste to righteous path!*

*'To spells the biting serpent will lend ear,
But you, O Reveler, there is not one
To counsel what is meet and what is not,
And give rebuke.¹⁶⁰ But those there are who but
Reflect your thoughts, and you subvert. And so,
Could this result in aught else but your end?' (5:4: 38-42, 45, 46, 49-51, 57-59.)*

Ravana's mounting anger surged forth and would tear and eat her up but love opposed, and he departed and yet departed not. Love won, and he said some conciliatory words 3 and went his way bearing her image away in his heart '.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Kural 45:8. 'Behold the prince who reposes not on the support of men who can rebuke him: he will perish even when he hath no foes.' — Aiyar's translation.

Sita's unwavering firmness in the face of the greatest dangers and unimaginable hardships has been, and will continue to be, a beacon light through the centuries for millions of Hindu women caught in the sea of a wife's life, where the ogles are the rocks, the libertines, the sharks, the abductors are the storms, the silver-tongued family friend, the sunken coral reef, and the village zamindar is Ravana himself.

Much as Sita, in her fury roused, captures our imagination, her despondency and her rejoicing do no less pluck at our heart-strings, and we weep with her, we sigh with her, and our body and soul swell with joy at her joy.

The poignancy of Sita's grief in her solitude and the none-the-less pathetic rejoicing on seeing Rama's ring have been painted by the master-craftsmen of the epic with an intensity that has deeply moved not only scholars, but, in the re-telling through countless generations, has lost nothing and yet sways multitudes through story-telling, the stage and cinema, and even the rude village festival theatre with rough yokels for actors and a property tree for a background.

*Of Sita in tears, the poet says,
The noble Birth, the Chastity,
The Patience of extremist kind,
Benevolence and Feminine Grace,
If all these had a form and lived
Amidst surging sea of water.
It is Sita shedding tears;
A God with human heart is she.¹⁶¹*

In twenty heart-ringing stanzas, Kamban portrays her state and her despair-laden thoughts even while Hanuman was entering the Ashokavana where she was kept captive.

*Surrounded by the thronging Rakshasis
Of hefty loins, like mountain medicine herb
Sheer foreigner to moisture, even so,
Shriveled was she of bloom; and even like
Her slender waist, her body all was worn.

Forsaken had her eyes all sleep or droop
Of lids in weariness, or even wink:
Of body lusterless like a lamp in the sun,
So like a doe amidst fanged tigers wild,
She seemed.

Fall, sob, burn the body Over;
Start, yearn, grieve, think on Ram
And worship mute; droop, quake, sigh
With racking woe weep — naught else but these
She knew to do.

The heavy cloud, collyrium so black,
Aught else deep dark,¹⁶² espying would shed tears
Onrushing to the sea.

I'd fain give up this life, but seldom can
One's fate surmounted be,' she feared and thought,*

¹⁶¹ A Garland of Tamil Poetry published by the Karanthai Tamil Sangam, Tanjavur.

¹⁶² Rama was dark-hued

*For sake of Surya's race and blot thereto,
He would come, come he would, the Veda's Lord:
Thus hoping ever she quartered all around
The compass points with piercing eyes.*

*She knew not any other than
The single garment rarer far than smoke:
Her body stranger to swan-sporting pool,
Just like a figurine — which Manmatha
Did mold from ocean nectar— grimed with smoke,
Even so her body was! (5:3:3–5. 7, 9,11.)*

She would, puzzled, muse:

Perhaps Lakshmana met him not or haply he knows not there's one Lanka amidst the surfing sea.

or

Though the King of Vultures be dead, are there none besides, my state to reveal?

or

Hearing the thoughtless words me sinful uttered to Lakshmana, did he forsake me, for, I was wanting in wisdom?

or

Deeming Rakshasas would have spared me not this long while, but would have feasted on me, did he even so conclude? ' Now, is there aught I can do '.

or

*Perchance his brothers and mothers, have they come
Again, and called him back to lovely Oudh?
But he would never return, the while the days
To Kaikeyi vowed unfulfilled yet remain.
Alas, has any ill befallen him? (5:3:12-17.)*

She would recall the image of Rama scene by scene through the years past, and suffer tortures bitter-sweet.

*She'd swoon remembering her dauntless lion
As he stood with beaming face resplendent far,
The while the daughter stern of Kekay said,
'This foe-less country wide your brother's is.' (5:3:19.)*

Again,

*She'd meditate on that fair face of his,
Which both when bidden by his father dear
To rise to throne imperial of Oudh
As well as when his mother ordered him
To leave his all and live a forest life,
Just like the lotus bloom in picture drawn
Was ever the same! (5:3:20.)*

She would pine away,

Recollecting those shoulders bunching taut,

*To break in twain, long ere one could suspect,
The Meru bow the fire-eyed God, — even he
With Ganga-laden crest — did wield of old.*

Again, she would be agitated thinking on him — as peerless friend — when he said

*To him who plied the Ganges deep, Guha —
A lowly forester as even he was —
'Lakshmana my brother here is brother of yours;
And you my comrade; and this maiden here,
Is brother's wife to you.'* (5:3:23.)

*Her form would thrill again at thought of when
He gently freed his hand from hers — which ere
Her sire had with her's clasped, — and lifted up¹⁶³
Her tender foot in Vedic rite of yore.* (5:3: 24.)

She would grieve, recalling to mind:

*The pain of Rama when he saw his brother
Wear not the crown upon his head, but wear
The dusty twisted knot of hair.* (5:3: 25.)

She would sob inconsolably thinking of him as he was when

*Bereft of heritage, ere to the wild
Forests he left, on greedy Brahmana
A herd of heifers he bestowed and saw
His boundless avarice, and how a smile
Flitted across his face!* (5:3: 26.)

And she lifted her hands over her head in obeisance, as to her mind came:

*The single arrow he sped on Indra's son¹⁶⁴
And pierced its eye and lo, the raven world
Entire fell sightless by that single feat!* (5:3: 28.)

Ravana intruded on her in this state to plead his case again and we saw how she was roused to white-hot fury and piled insult upon insult on him till he slunk away like a whipped cur. She fell to soliloquizing again, and deep despair swamped her heart; and she sank under it even to the point of determining to take her life. Hanuman revealed himself by pronouncing aloud the life-saving name of Ram, and, after establishing himself in her confidence by speech and message, he presented to her Rama's signet ring.

Sita's relief and belief have been mounting, step by step, from the moment of hearing Rama's name, through suspicion, relief, trust, confidence and joy; but the sight of the ring was as a talisman to her and threw her into a delirium of ecstasy. "What shall I compare it to", says the poet: "was she

*Like even more dead unearned mukti (liberation) gained,
Or the fallen from Wisdom to Reality returned,
Or the barren woman who a child begot —
To what shall I compare her state?"*

¹⁶³ A symbolic ritual in the Hindu marriage ceremony when the bride- groom lifts the foot of the bride and, placing it on a grinding-stone, directs her to look at the Morning Star (Venus), the personification of Arundhati — the wife of Rishi Vashistha ' and the ideal of Chastity

¹⁶⁴ The story will be found later on, in Sita's own words, in the message she gives to Hanuman to carry to Rama.

*She took the ring and now to her bosom pressed;
Now set upon her head: and now on eyes
In kiss impressed: her shoulders filled with joy.
She wilted, cooled, burned; her breath did cease:
And revived anon.*

*She'd bury her nose in it: now hug it close
To her bosom; wiping off the clouding tears
From her joyous eyes, would gaze so long at it;
Would think to utter words but words would fail:
With mounting frenzy she put it in her mouth!*

Such was Sita's capacity for joy.

We shall see that Sita, pining as she was to rejoin her lover, and had, but a little while ago, been quartering all the points of the compass with her eyes for Rama's coming, and had, a moment since, resolved to end her life in despair, is still the supreme woman, ever mindful of what is befitting her chastity. Hanuman had just shown her his *vishvarupa* (universal form) to prove to her how he crossed the sea. Impelled by perhaps a suspicion of a desire to exhibit his prowess, and certainly, no less, by a genuine eagerness to end quickly Sita's misery, and serve Rama, he offers to carry her back on his shoulders to Rama,

When he said those sweet words, 'it is not impossible for him' thought Sita, and replied thus to him, who stood even like a yearling calf before its mother.

*'It's not impossible and well befits
Your prowess; truly what you contemplate
You would achieve! But it's not proper far,
Methinks, in my artless femininity
Of scanty sense.'* (5:6:12.)

She perceives the extreme love and devotion that prompted the offer, but recognizes more clearly the utter impropriety of accepting it; and with a delicacy, which only the truly great can be capable of, she refuses gently, piling reason upon diverse reason, which make Hanuman acknowledge the rightness of her words, without feeling foolish or sorry that he spoke. She begins, as we saw above, by belittling her sensibilities. She says, next, that she would be an encumbrance.

*"When over the ocean deep, the cruel foes
Surround and let fly angry arrows at you,
Nor poison fell to them, nor sure defense
To me will you be; but encumbered sore,
Falter, O you without a peer!"* (5:6:13.)

A slur to Rama's name, she knew, would hurt Hanuman to the heart and, therefore, she says next,

*"There's one thing further more: The Noble One's bow
Of mighty victories will tarnished be.
In truth, could there be worse gratitude?
Did you too think to trick me off even as
The dogs¹⁶⁵ that ran away with the amrita¹⁶⁶ pure?"* (5:6:14.)

Hanuman had, just a little while ago, told her of the mighty army mobilized on the mainland. She recollects this and, drawing the next argument from the former one, says with vehemence:

¹⁶⁵ Maricha and Ravana

¹⁶⁶ nectar of immortality = Sita

*“Unless in the war to come, my liege, the Ram —
His bowmanship displaying to the worlds —
Does feed to crows the eyes of him that dared
To look on me, shall I yet live?
Until those bowmen — whose exulting strings
In triumph twang — their archery do crown,
And marriage-tokens of shameless Rakshasis
Are severed with their noses likewise too,
Would ever my rescued honor honored be?” (5:6:15, 16.)*

What of my reputation, she asks, and says:

*“Till golden Lanka's heaped a mountain high
With the bones of the hateful enemies, my birth
And conduct, stainless chastity, all these.
Oh, how shall I reveal to strangers all?” (5:6:17.)*

The arguments gather force without offence, and she could now speak of her own prowess:

*“What to speak of these afflictive creatures vile
Over here? Let be the boundless worlds entire,
I could with curses burn. As slight it would be
To prowess great of Ram with the bow, the thought
I banned.” (5:6:18.)*

The clinching and the only argument could be said now:

*“One more there is to say, oh list, true one !
For bar the body of my Knight, even you
With senses five contained, or any male,
So named, could this form touch?” (5:6:19)*

So, go

*For, 'tis not meet. Now, to return in haste
To the lord of the Veda is your duty,' she said;
And the faultless one replied ' Aye! Aye! ' (5:6:26, 27.)*

In all the ten thousand and odd poems of the Kamba Ramayana, barely three or four chapters — *padalams* — are solely devoted to Sita, but, on this small canvas, the poet has painted her with such intensity and etched detail that, even years after we had laid aside the book, it is she who comes first to mind when thinking on the Ramayana, and it is the verses from her lips which well up to our lips from the springs of our heart. Swinging from the depths of despair to rapturous heights of joy, only to sound the bottom of despondence again, she keeps us prisoner with her in the lonely isle. Hanuman, after acknowledging that she was right, asked her for a message to Rama. Her reply is full of misgivings and, in spite of her, a certain bitterness rings in her sweet words.

*“But one more moon shall I endure even here —
This is my message true, O righteous one! —
More, I shall not my life sustain. And this,
I swear by him my King! Take this to heart!
'Though' I might not be fitting mate to him
Of garland rolling chest, though' his heart be void
Of truth, tell him it is his duty plain
To save his valour's fame.
'In but one moon austerity mine expires;*

*If he does not come here within that time,
Let him on banks of Ganga's tidal flood
With lotus hands of his, my obsequies
Perform!*

*“Remind him of the solemn vow he made
That day he took my hand in wedlock rite:
‘Not even in thought will I in this my life
A second woman touch ’; he swore to me:
Drum these words in his ear.”*

*Do make it clear to him that I but crave
With salutation low this single boon:
Even if I stay and end my life down here,
Let it be granted me to be reborn
And gain the blessing rare which ends all sin —
To touch his form divine.*

*‘The while he rules enthroned, or rides in state
The haltered elephant with bells of choice,
Or his resplendent aspects manifold
On avenues to see I am not blest.
Of what avail is it to speak of them?
Let me on my past Karma dwell.*

*‘To the world sore languishing for him so long,
At his mother's grief, and at distress which Bharat
Endures, he'll speed. To me in agony
Down here, how would he come? ’ (5:6:29, 30, 32, 34-37)*

Hanuman, the skillful ambassador and devotee of Rama, consoles her in a long-spirited speech. "What would good men and the learned say," he exclaims "if we returned without rescuing you from the captivity of the unrepentant foesYou will see here rise a huge mountain, reaching to the sky — rare even for Vali to cross — of the *talis*¹⁶⁷ discarded by the Rakshasis. And he concluded with a dire oath,

*‘Within that day you have now said to me
If he does not deliver you from durance vile,
O dame of fragrant locks; let infamy
Unutterable and sin envelope him.
Thence Ravana is he over there and he
Here now is truly Ram.’ (5:6:74.)*

Joy again suffused Sita's face, and she now gave out certain secrets to tell Rama as irrefutable evidence of Hanuman having truly seen her. In doing so, with characteristic feminine skill, she conveys to him a hint not to blurt out to Rama everything she had said before.

*“Now speed you hence; may you avoid all harm:
I have no more to add; all that I need,
I've said. To my liege repeat, as wise you are,
What is but propitious.” (5:6:76.)*

'Whisper to him how

¹⁶⁷ The gold ornament symbolic of the married state, and which is snapped off and discarded on being widowed.

*Once on the mountain side where elephants
Do range, a raven came and clawed me sore
With cruel toes, and lo, in fiery rage
He took a blade of grass that lay at hand,
And one relentless arrow he sped.*

*Recount how Jayanta, the lustful crow —
Devender's son — to Shiv and all the gods
Besides in terror flew, and each in turn
Asylum barred; and all with one accord
Cried: ' Fall, fall at his lotus feet
And refuge gain!'*

*" Say how when he, affrighted far, to earth
Flew down entreating loud ' O Lord, your feet,
Your feet's retreat I seek, ' and prostrate fell,
The Bounteous Lord well pleased did bid the arrow
Depart content with but one baleful eye.
Forthwith the raging arrow divine was spent.*

*Because you cried, ' asylum grant,'
The Lord said, ' straightway on your heinous crime
Forbearance I bestow.' And he decreed,
Hence let the raven race, whose form you bear
In front of me, have but one eye-ball each.'
And so it came to pass. Even this relate."*

*Add how as Jayanta left freed of fear,
The Devas flowers rained, and Lakshmana
Uncomprehending puzzled stood: even thus
This victory so sweet relate.' (5:6:77, 78, 79, 81, 82.)*

Though Sita felt great consolation when Hanuman said that the *talis* of the Rakshasa women would pile up into a huge mountain, and though she herself said ' where shall my honor be if Rama did not cut off the noses of these shameless women, nay, make them all bereft of the mangal string', she was truly pity personified indeed. We saw how when Sumantra asked her for a message to the court, her one thought was for her pets, and she said:—

*“And tell my loving sisters three to tend
My golden starling and my parrot green.”*

Again, when she was assailed by doubts and fears, now torturing herself with the thought that Rama had perhaps forsaken her for the thoughtless harsh words she spoke to Lakshmana, and now with the fear that he may have concluded that the Rakshasas would not have spared her so long and might have eaten her up, an inconsequential concern for Rama intrudes itself between her fears, and she grieves wondering:—

*“Now who serves him the tender salad leaves,
And when he guests receives how would he tend?” (5:3:15.)*

We see it again, her thoughtfulness for others, in her request to Rama while they were flying back to Ayodhya at the end of the fourteen years' exile. She looked in her aerial car and missed something. They were just then passing over a town, and when Rama, who was pointing out to her along the route the sites of many a poignant memory, said, ' this is Kishkinda,' she spoke up:—

“If this be Kishkinda, lord, oh list to me!

*Encircled by this mighty martial force —
Which even the Devas dread — but circled not
By retinue of countless damsels fair,
If I shall reach Ayodhya all alone,
My womanhood would greatly clouded be:
'Its duty your to take into this car
The Vanara damsels too!'" (6:37:176.)*

Who but Sita can picture better the anxiety-ridden hearts of wives parted from husbands, and sweethearts from lovers, and it is solicitude which prompts her request, but she would, like all givers, make the receiver a giver seem.

This natural pity becomes divine in the case of the Rakshasa women. After Ravana had been killed, Rama sent Hanuman to tell Sita the news. When he had re-breathed life into her wasted frame, Hanuman looks around and sees the Rakshasis who had guarded her in her captivity and had terrorized and cajoled her in turn to yield to Ravana. He turned to Sita and prayed "Permit me to annihilate all these Rakshasis but Trisadai¹⁶⁸, and burn them in their own sins." The terrified Rakshasis rushed to Sita, and clasping her feet would not forsake them.

*'Fear not, fear not,' assured the Mother Ruth,
And turning on the Maruthi, she asked
'What harm have these ever done, but spoke to me-
Even as he bid them speak?'*

*'It is by Karma done by me of old
This tribulation came, O you far more
Loving than mother mine? In sooth, these are
Not more inhuman than the hunchback maid:
Mind not what's past, O you wise one!'*

*'Grant me this prayer,' thus entreated she;
'Desist from torturing the minds of these
Affrighted fools — the home where evil dwells.'
Thus pleaded she whose face made even the moon's
Break out in spots with envy green! (6:37: 34, 36.)*

Thus she craved a boon for her enemies, even she who conferred the boon of immortality on Hanuman. But it is Sita the ideal wife, who has guided down the centuries countless Hindu wives, and earned for them too a share of her undying fame and glory. Sita has never a thought for herself, but it is always Rama's honor which is her concern night and day. For this, she would even lay down her life. Rama sent Vibhishana to fetch her from the Ashokavana. When Vibhishana gave her the message and asked her to get ready, clothed and adorned as befitted the queen of his Savior, Sita insisted on going to the presence of Rama as she was, unwashed, unkempt, 'a figurine begrimed with smoke'. But Vibhishana said, 'These are the commands of Rama,' and she said no more. The celestial maidens, Ramba and others, took great pleasure in getting her ready for her reunion with her lord, and right royally fitted her out in the costliest garments and ornaments. Vibhishana seated her in a *vimana* and brought her to Rama. Her heart swelling with joy as she neared him, she shed her sorrow thinking,

*'My mate in chain of births, and mate of mine
Nevertheless when irksome birth shall cease,
I have adored. It matters not if hence*

¹⁶⁸ Daughter of Vibhishana and the only friend to Sita in her captivity.

My mind I lose or even here fall dead.' (6:37: 59.)

To her, Rama said these words, at which the Rishis and Devas, and countless women too, albeit called Rakshasis, and all the monkey host — all who stood around — shuddered, and a horrified tumult arose. Rama said:—

*“You loved the fleshly form, and honor stained;
And yet died not: but risked your conduct pure
And stayed content one year in capital
Of Rakshasas of evil walk of life.
With what design have you returned unabashed?
Is it that I would cherish you?*

*It was not to rescue you I filled the sea,
And felled down root and branch the Rakshasas
With all their arms of might like thunderbolts,
And overthrew the lonely foe as well.
It was for naught but to redeem my name
That I to Lanka came?*

*Did you even eat the flesh of living kind
As sweeter far than amrita pure? And took
Your fill of heady wine and lived content?
Do tell me, loveless one, could there be more
Agreeable fare for us as well?*

*The luster of your virtues all has gone:
In noble lineage you were not born,
But like the spineless worm, born from the earth,¹⁶⁹
You have but played your part too well!*

*‘Womanhood and its glory, Noble Birth,
And the adamantine will called Chastity,
Enlightenment, Propriety, Truth itself,
By your birth have vanished like the noted fame
Of the king without beneficence.*

*The senses five would they contain, and in
Their conduct celibate, with matted hair.
Austerities endure. And should some ill
Befall them meantime, would even with their lives
Atone — the women of propriety fine.’* (6:36: 62-67.)

Sita was stunned by these words.

*And grieving like a wound by probe explored,
Blood and tears suffused her downcast eyes;
With senses dazed she heaved a sigh.
And she recoiled even like the lovely deer,
By raging thirst consumed in desert wild,
(And watched by teeming vultures from above)
Which sees a water-hole, but quicker still,
Sees a barrier insuperable!* (6:37:70, 71.)

¹⁶⁹ Sita was turned up by the plough in a furrow by King Janaka and was brought up by him.

She composed herself presently, and with great restraint addressed these words to Rama: "

*The son of Vayu (Hanuman) came and seeing me
Did truly say, ' My Lord, he would here come.'
Did not the lofty one tell you, my Lord,
My languished state? In sooth, a messenger
He failed to be!"*

*Austerities mine, and chastity so pure,
And all that I endured so long down here
Have madness been, and, yea, in vain. For, them,
O Noble one, you have not realized!*

*'I may be the most chaste to the world entire,
And of heart unfaltering, beyond even Brahma
To shake. Ah, foolish me! If you, who are
The focus of the world deny, would God
Acknowledge me?*

*Though He the lotus-borne (Brahma) and the Lord on the bull (Shiva)
And the Lord of Righteousness with conch in hand, (Vishnu)
Were they to gaze as in the ball of glass
On palm outstretched, could they a woman's heart
Ever gauge?*

*If thus with them, for whom do I retail
Down here austerities mine void of flaws?
Far better death than aught else; fitting too
It is, O Veda! — The same is your command;
The same my fate as well! (6:37: 73-77.)*

Sita had had forebodings of the probability of some catastrophe like this. The reader will no doubt recall to mind her misgiving which she expresses in these words:—

*..... 'But sooth, will he admit again
One who has lived so long in this sinful land? '*

and adds in self-reproach:

*..... "Where is the chaste
In story or in life who has loved her life
When forced away from home by lustful men?
Is not my honor great, and modesty,
Who cling even now to life? '*

Thus she castigates herself, and she further poses to herself the question, ' how shall I vindicate my chastity?'

*..... "Ah, wretched me!
When Rama shall have destroyed his¹⁷⁰ race for ever
And freed me from my prison, how shall I prove
My virtue uncorrupt, if he should say,
'Away, you are not worthy of my love?"*

¹⁷⁰ Ravana's

'So death alone is Dharma's way for me,' she had concluded long before in Ashokavana. So, now she asked Lakshmana, — who whatever misery comes, 'stands ready to remedy it as it approaches' — to light a huge fire, and apostrophizing it thus:

*"If by thought or word I'm stained, let fury yours
Burn me, O Lord of the flames!"* (6:37:84.)

she saluted her lord and leapt into the fire.

The Lord of Fire rose from the flames bearing her unhurt in his hands and led her up to Rama's side. Rama accepted her, and the world breathed.¹⁷¹ "Even the Gods Three, could they grasp a woman's mind?" said Sita addressing Rama; we could alter her words and say with absolute truth, "Even the Gods Three, could they Sita's virtue comprehend?" Sita asked Rama, "Did not Maruti tell you, my lord, my state?" He did indeed! But could even Rama fully comprehend?

'What pity,' thinks Hanuman, on first discovering Sita in the Ashokavana,

*"What pity 'tis not given to Ram to see
With his own eyes this holy one, as she
Does lead her life austere in Lanka's grove."*

We shall, in our lame and halting words, try to give the reader a faint idea of the exulting report of Hanuman to Rama on his return from Lanka, and conclude our sketch of the Divine Sita's character-study.¹⁷² From Dadhimuka's account of the riotous behavior of the Vanaras, Sugriva guessed that Hanuman had returned from Lanka, and Rama stood longingly watching his coming.

*"Came Hanuman: and coming, worshipped not
His Majesty's twin feet but turned to her"¹⁷³
Devoid of bloom; with hands held over his head
In reverence, he fell down fiat on earth,
And long intoned her name!"*

*I saw,' he sang in ecstasy, 'I saw
With my own eyes the Gem of Chastity
In sea-girt Lanka in the south. Cast off
Your fears, my Lord, and grief of old!*

*'On privilege as noble wife to you,
On truth as worthy daughter to your sire,
On proper conduct fitting her descent
From Janaka, King of Mithila, in sooth,
She has a crown bestowed — the Goddess mine!*

*'To gold, gold is the match; to her, she 'lone;
She matches you to you alone; and me,
She grants as well, there's none but me to match!*

'O bowman brave with mighty shoulders broad!

¹⁷¹ "There is a blot in Rama's love" writes Aiyar, "but of that we shall speak when we come to Sita", he promised. We cannot know of which particular incident he was thinking; it may have been of this Ordeal of Sita. We are but a worm and not Aiyar, and it is not for worms to gaze on the sun, with blots or without.

¹⁷² "Hanuman's account of his work to Rama," writes Aiyar "occupies a very high rank in literature for the grandeur of its sentiments, but we shall reserve it for the chapter on Sita as it deals chiefly with her." But he reserved it too long to our lasting regret, and it is with humility and dragging hesitation that we have ventured to translate but a fragment of this passage. We dare not attempt more, for, we shall but display our utter incompetence the more we venture further.

¹⁷³ The direction in which Sita was in far off Lanka.

*In roaring sea- laved Lanka on the hill
Not maiden rare of virtues great I saw,
But Noble Birth and Patience Boundless self
And her called Chastity, I saw all three
Step a dance in ecstasy!*

*'In her eyes you dwell, and in her thoughts as well;
Or her lips you play, and in the very depths
Of her heart besides; and in un-healing wound
Which Manmatha's arrow of blossoms has bored deep.
Then how could it be said that she has ever
Parted from you?*

*'In Lanka 'midst the ocean deep,
Beneath sky-reaching forest dark
Unknown to either morn or noon,
In a bower under lofty trees,
In the grassy hut your brother built,
Dwells she — the stern austerity
Of Austerity herself!' (5:15; 55, 58-60, 62-64.)*

APPENDIX

GARUDA'S FLIGHT¹⁷⁴

The while this happened down below the Devas stood
 Aghast, alarmed, and thrown into confusion sore,
 Afraid to think how far 't would go and how would end;
 Even then the Lord of Eagles, Garuda, at hand,
 With quaking heart intent on sure deliverance,
 Slowly he emerged from that encircling darkness.

Espying Ram of dauntless heart dismayed by the snake —
 His grace withdrawn from stubborn King of Lanka isle,
 And more, the world entire besides — the Garuda
 Never awed before, his heart now lost and grieved;
 And he sped on tempestuous wings which shook the Sea
 And lit the world around. The mammoths guarding close
 The compass points did cower with unwinking eyes
 Now closed in shrinking fear.

His eyes that scan thro' million leagues beyond,
 A stream of tears they shed the while he saw below
 The holy form of Ram overcome by trials sore:
 And spurred thereat, the while he winged thro' space,
 The sea so cool now waves on waves it threw on high,
 The worlds their darkness shed, the wings the Vedas sang,
 The spheres their work forsook, the serpent slack became.

His crown, it rolled the darkness up and sunshine spread;
 To farthest limits of the points eight sped its rays
 Of brilliance like the moonlight bright and pierced
 The bounds as well. Such was the glory of his crown
 Whose sheen was thrice as great as fiery orb of him
 That rises over the ancient mountain called the Meru.

A mountain too he seemed in the sky by lightning laced —
 With gold and gems galore and scented blossoms sweet
 Hugging and releasing again his mighty chest.
 He seemed as well a radiant sun from south astir
 And northward bound.

With golden visor shining on his forehead broad,
 And garlands sweet with flowers culled from forest wild*
 In rhythm rolling on his chest, he soared above

¹⁷⁴ Kamban's stanzas translated here have to be read in the original to enjoy the *sandham* (metrical foot) which he has used to make the lines reproduce in their cadence the flight of a majestic bird. Each line ends with an upward lift, producing the extraordinary impression of the soaring of a bird in flight. We have used in this translation the iambic hexameter, i.e., an unstressed and stressed syllable to a foot and six feet to the line. Being the flight of a bird and not the gallop of a horse, the iambic foot has been considered quite suitable to indicate the tempo. We make no apology for this poor effort, for we do not pretend to have any skill in the art of composing verses.

And saw the form divine and worshipped from afar,
Assuaging grief of separation long ago.

With both his palms like lotus bud aloft his head,
His radiance illuming clouds above, he dwelt
Again and 'gain on grievous lot of his for years
When he had missed the worship at those lotus feet
And privilege proud of perching up above his flag
The while the seven worlds in worship stood around:
And with intent to reach the earth he hurried on.
Came he and worshipped Him with heart and soul again
And 'gain. (Book VI, Padalam xix, Verses 243-299.)

VALMIKI'S VALI

(See Chapter 11)

Extracts from Griffith's translation of the Valmiki Ramayana.

Canto 4 LAKSHMANA'S REPLY

Cheered by the words that Rama spoke,
Joy in the Vanar's breast awoke,
And, as his friendly mood he knew,
His thoughts to King Sugriva flew: 4
Again,' he mused, ' my high-souled lord
Shall rule, to kingly state restored;
Since one so mighty comes to save,
And freely gives the help we crave.'
Then joyous Hanuman, the best
Of all the Vanara kind, addressed
These words to Rama, trained of yore
In all the arts of speakers' lore:
Why do your feet this forest tread
By sylvan life inhabited,
This awful maze of tree and thorn
Which Pampa's flowering groves adorn?
He spoke: obedient to the eye
Of Rama Lakshmana made reply,
The name and fortune to unfold
Of Raghu's son the lofty-souled:
Here Rama stands, his heir by birth,
Whose name is glorious in the earth
Sure refuge he of all oppressed,
'Most faithful to his sire's behest.
He, Dasaratha's eldest born 23
Whom gifts above the rest adorn,
Lord of each high imperial sign,
The glory of his kingly line,
Bereft of his right, expelled from home,
Came forth with me the woods to roam.
And Sita too, his faithful dame,

Forth with her virtuous husband came,
 Like the sweet light when day is done
 Still cleaving to her lord the sun.
 And me his sweet perfections drew
 To follow as his servant true,
 Named Lakshmana, brother of my lord
 Of grateful heart with knowledge stored.
 Most meet is he all bliss to share,
 Who makes the good of all his care.
 While, power and lordship cast away,
 In the wild wood he chose to stay,
 A giant came, — his name unknown, —
 And stole the princess left alone.
 Then Diti's son who, cursed of yore,
 The semblance of a Rakshasas wore,
 To king Sugriva bade us turn
 The robber's name and home to learn,
 For he, the Vanara chief, would know
 The dwelling of our secret foe.
 Such words of hope spoke Diti's son,
 And sought the heaven his deeds had won.
 You have my tale. From first to last
 Your ears have heard whatever has past.
 Rama the mighty lord and I
 For refuge to Sugriva fly.
 The prince whose arm bright glory gained,
 Over the earth as monarch reigned,
 And richest gifts to others gave,
 Is come Sugriva's help to crave;
 Son of a king the surest friend
 Of virtue, him who loved to lend
 His succor to the suffering weak,
 Is come Sugriva's aid to seek.
 Yes, Raghu's son whose matchless hand
 Protected all this sea-girt land,
 The virtuous prince, my holy guide,
 For refuge seeks Sugriva's side.
 His favor sent on great and small
 Should ever save and prosper all.
 He now to win Sugriva's grace
 Has sought his woodland dwelling-place.
 Son of a king of glorious fame:
 Who knows not Dasaratha's name?
 From whom all princes of the earth
 Received each honor due to worth:
 Heir of that best of earthly kings,
 Rama the -prince whose glory rings
 Through realms below and earth and skies,
 For refuge to Sugriva flies.
 Nor should the Vanara king refuse

The boon for which the suppliant sues,
 But with his forest legions speed
 To save him in his utmost need.'
 Sumitra's son, his eyes bedewed
 With piteous tears, thus sighed and sued.
 Then, trained in all the arts that guide
 The speaker, Hanuman replied:
 'Yea, lords like you of wisest thought.
 Whom happy fate has hither brought,
 Who vanquish ire and rule each sense,
 Must of our lord have audience.
 Bereft of his kingdom, sad, forlorn,
 Once Bali's hate now Bali's scorn,
 Defeated, severed from his spouse,
 Wandering under forest boughs,
 Child of the Sun, our lord and king
 Sugriva will his succors bring,
 And all our Vanara hosts combined
 Will trace the dame you long to find.'

Canto 5 THE LEAGUE

From Rishyamuka's rugged side
 To Malaya's hill the Vanara fled,
 And to his royal chieftain there
 Announced the coming of the pair:
 Thus spoke the Vanara prince, and, stirred
 With friendly thoughts, Sugriva heard.
 The light of joy his face overspread,
 And thus to Raghu's son he said:
 'O Prince, in rules of duty trained,
 Caring for all with love unfeigned,
 Hanuman's tongue has truly shown
 The virtues that are your alone.
 If you my true ally would be,
 Accept the pledge I offer you.
 This hand in sign of friendship take,
 And bind the bond we never will break.'
 Thus each to other pledged and bound
 In solemn league new transport found,
 Then King Sugriva
 To Raghu's noblest scion cried:
 'O Rama, racked with woe and fear,
 Spurned by my foes, I wander here.
 Bereft of my spouse, forlorn I dwell
 Here in my forest citadel.
 He spoke, and Raghu's son
 Thus answered with a gentle smile:
 Bali, your foe, who stole away
 Your wife, this vengeful hand shall slay.

Canto 8 RAMA'S PROMISE

Sugriva's heart with rapture swelled,
 And thus, by eager love impelled,
 He spoke in gracious tone, that, oft
 Checked by his joy, was low and soft
 I, by my brother's might oppressed,
 By ceaseless woe and fear distressed,
 Mourning my consort far away,
 On Rishvamuka's mountain stray.
 For sobs and sighs he scarce could speak,
 And his sad voice came low and weak,
 As, while his eyes with tears overflowed,
 The burden of his soul he showed.
 'By Bali's conquering might oppressed,
 Of power and kingship dispossessed,
 Loaded with taunts of scorn and hate
 I left my realm and royal state.
 He tore away my consort: she
 Was dearer than my life to me.

Canto 10 SUGRIVA'S STORY

Thus Bali spoke in words severe; And then unmoved by truth or fear, left me a single robe and sent
 His brother forth in banishment. He cast me out with scathe and scorn, and from my side my wife
 was torn. Now in great fear and ill at ease I roam this land with woods and seas, Or dwell on
 Rishyamuka's hill, And sorrow for my consort still.

Canto 12 THE PALM TREES

They sought Kishkindha's gate and stood
 Concealed by trees in densest wood.
 Sugriva, to the fight addressed,
 More closely drew his cinctured vest,
 And raised a wild sky-piercing shout
 To call the foeman Bali out.
 Forth came impetuous Bali, stirred
 To fury by the shout he heard.
 So the great sun, ere night has ceased,
 Springs up impatient to the east.
 Then fierce and wild the conflict raged
 As hand to hand the foes engaged,
 As though in battle mid the stars
 Fought Mercury and fiery Mars.
 To highest pitch of frenzy -wrought
 With fists like thunderbolts they fought,
 While near them Rama took his stand,
 And viewed the battle, bow in hand.
 Alike they stood in form and might,
 Like heavenly Asvins paired in fight,
 Nor might the son of Raghu know-
 Where fought the friend and where the foe;

So, while his bow was ready bent,
 No life-destroying shaft he sent.
 Crushed down by Bali's mightier stroke
 Sugriva's force now sank and broke,
 Who, hoping naught from Rama's aid,
 To Rishyamuka fled dismayed.
 Weary, and faint, and wounded sore,
 His body bruised and dyed with gore,
 From Bali's blows, in rage and dread,
 Afar to sheltering woods he fled.
 Nor Bali farther dared pursue,
 The curbing curse too well he knew.
 'Fled from your death!' the victor cried,
 And home the mighty warrior fled.
 Hanuman, Lakshmana, Raghu's son
 Beheld the conquered Vanara run,
 And followed to the sheltering shade
 Where yet Sugriva stood dismayed.
 Near and more near the chieftains came,
 Then, for intolerable shame,
 Not daring yet to lift his eyes,
 Sugriva spoke with burning sighs:
 "Your matchless strength I first beheld,
 And dared my foe, by you impelled.
 Why have you tried me with deceit
 And urged me to a sure defeat?
 You should have said, 'I will not slay
 Your foeman in the coming fray.'
 For had I then your purpose known
 'I had not waged the fight alone.'
 The Vanara sovereign, lofty-souled,
 In plaintive voice his sorrows told,
 Then Rama spoke: 'Sugriva, list,
 All anger from your heart dismissed,
 And I will tell the cause that stayed
 Mine arrow, and withheld the aid
 In dress, adornment, port, and height,
 In splendor, battle-shout, and might,
 No shade of difference could I see
 Between your foe, O king, and you
 So like was each, I stood at gaze,
 My senses lost in wildering maze,
 Nor loosened from my straining bow
 A deadly arrow at the foe,
 Lest in my doubt the shaft should send
 To sudden death our surest friend.
 O, if this hand in heedless guilt
 And rash resolve your blood had spilt,
 Through every land, O Vanara King,
 My wild and foolish act would ring.

Sore weight of sin on him must lie
 By whom a friend is made to die ,
 And Lakshmana, I, and Sita, best
 Of dames, on your protection rest.
 On, warrior! for the fight prepare;
 Nor fear again your foe to dare.
 Within one hour your eye shall view
 My arrow strike your enemy through;
 Shall see the stricken Bali lie
 Low on the earth, and gasp and die.
 But come, a badge about you bind,
 O monarch of the Vanara king,
 That in the battle shock mine eyes
 The friend and foe may recognize.
 Come, Lakshmana, let that creeper deck
 With brightest bloom Sugriva's neck,
 And be a happy token, twined
 Around the chief of lofty mmd.'
 Upon the mountain slope there grew
 A spreading creeper fair to view,
 And Lakshmana plucked the bloom and round
 Sugriva's neck a garland wound.
 Graced with the flower wreath he wore,
 The Vanara chief the semblance bore
 Of a dark cloud at close of day
 Garlanded with cranes at play.
 In glorious light the Vanara glowed
 As by his comrade's side he strode,
 And still on Rama's words intent,
 His steps to great Kishkindha bent.

Canto 13 THE RETURN TO KISHKINDHA

Thus with Sugriva, from the side Of Rishyamuka, Rama went, and stood before Kishkindha's gate
 Where Bali kept his regal state. The hero in his warrior hold

Canto 14 THE CHALLENGE

They stood where trees of densest green
 Wove round their forms a veiling screen.
 Over all the garden's pleasant shade
 The eyes of King Sugriva strayed,
 And, as on grass and trees he gazed,
 The fires of wrath within him blazed.
 Then like a mighty cloud on high,
 When roars the tempest through the sky,
 Girt by his friends he thundered out
 His dread sky-rending battle-shout.

Canto 15 TARA

That shout, which shook the land with fear,
 In thunder smote on Bali's ear,
 Where in the chamber barred and closed
 "The sovereign with his dame reposed.
 Each amorous thought was rudely stilled,
 And pride and rage his bosom filled.
 His angry eyes flashed darkly red,
 And all his native brightness fled,
 As when, by swift eclipse assailed,
 The glory of the sun has failed.
 While in his fury uncontrolled
 He ground his teeth, his eyeballs rolled,
 He seemed a lake wherein no gem
 Of blossom decks the lotus stem.
 He heard, and with indignant pride
 Forth from the bower the Vanara went,
 And the earth trembled at the beat
 And fury of his hastening feet.
 But Tara to her consort flew,
 Her loving arms around him threw,
 And trembling and bewildered, gave
 Wise counsel that might heal and save:
 O dear my lord, this rage control
 That like a torrent floods your soul,
 And cast these idle thoughts away
 Like faded wreaths of yesterday.
 O tarry till the morning light,
 Then, if you wilt, go forth and fight.
 Think not I doubt your valor, no;
 Or deem you weaker than your foe,
 Yet for a while would have you stay
 Nor see you tempt the fight to-day.
 Now list, my loving lord, and learn
 The reason why I bid you turn.
 Your foeman came in wrath and pride,
 And you to deadly fight defied.
 You went out: he fought, and fled
 Sore wounded and discomfited.
 But yet, untaught by late defeat,
 He comes his conquering foe to meet,
 And calls you forth with cry and shout:
 Hence spring, my lord, this fear and doubt.
 A heart so bold that will not yield,
 But yearns to tempt the desperate field,
 Such loud defiance, fiercely pressed,
 On no uncertain hope can rest.

 So lately by your arm overthrown,
 He comes not back, I wean, alone.

Some mightier comrade guards his side,
 And spurs him to this burst of pride.
 For nature made the Vanara wise:
 On arms of might his hope relies;
 And never will Sugriva seek
 A friend whose power to save is weak.
 Now listen while my lips unfold
 The wondrous tale my Angad told.
 Our child the distant forest sought,
 And, learnt from spies, the tidings brought
 Two sons of Dasharatha, sprung
 From old Ikshvaku, brave and young,
 Renowned in arms, in war untamed —
 Rama and Lakshmana are they named —
 Have with your foe Sugriva made
 A league of love and friendly aid.
 Now Rama, famed for exploit high,
 Is bound your brother's firm ally.
 Like fires of doom that ruin all
 He makes each foe before him fall.
 He is the suppliant's sure defense,
 The tree that shelters innocence.
 The poor and wretched seek his feet:
 In him the noblest glories meet.
 With skill and knowledge vast and deep
 His sire's commands he loved to keep;
 With princely gifts and graces stored
 As metals deck the mountains' Lord.
 You cannot, O my hero, stand
 Before the might of Rama's hand;
 For none may match his power, or dare
 With him in deeds of war compare.
 Hear, I entreat, the words I say,
 Nor lightly turn my need away.
 O let fraternal discord cease,
 And link you in the bonds of peace.
 Let consecrating rites ordain
 Sugriva partner of your reign.
 Let war and thoughts of conflict end
 And be you his and Rama's friend.
 Each soft approach of love begin,
 And to your soul your brother win;
 For whether here or there he be,
 Your brother still, dear lord, is he.
 Though far and wide these eyes I strain
 A friend like him I seek in vain.
 Let gentle words his heart incline,
 And gifts and honors make him yours,
 Till, foes no more, in love allied,
 You stand as brothers side by side.

You in high rank was wont to hold
 Sugriva, formed in massive mold;
 Then come, your brother's love regain,
 For other aids are weak and vain.
 If you would please my soul, and still
 Preserve me from all fear and ill,
 I pray you by your love be wise
 And do the thing which I advise.
 Assuage your brute wrath, and shun
 The mightier arms of Raghu's son;
 For Indra's peer in might is he,
 A foe too strong, my lord, for you.'

Canto 16 THE FALL OF BALI

Thus Tara with the starry eyes
 Her counsel gave with burning sighs,
 But Bali, by her prayers unmoved,
 Spurned her advice, and thus reproved:
 'How may this insult, scathe, and scorn
 By me, dear love, be tamely borne?
 My brother, yea my foe, comes nigh
 And dares me forth with shout and cry.
 Learn, trembler! that the valiant, they
 Who yield no step-in battle fray,
 Will die a thousand deaths but never
 An unavenged dishonor bear.
 Nor, O my love, be you dismayed
 You Rama lend Sugriva aid;
 For one so pure and duteous, one
 Who loves the right, all sin will shun.
 Release me from your soft embrace,
 And with your dames your steps retrace:
 Enough already, O mine own,
 Of love and sweet devotion shown.
 Drive all your fear and doubt away;
 I seek Sugriva in the fray
 His boisterous rage and pride to still,
 And tame the foe I would not kill.
 My fury, armed with brandished trees,
 Shall strike Sugriva to his knees:
 Nor shall the humbled foe withstand
 The blows of my avenging hand,
 When, nerved by rage and pride, I beat
 The traitor down beneath my feet.
 You love, have lent your own sweet aid,
 And all your tender care displayed;
 Now by my life, by these who yearn
 To serve you well, I pray you turn.
 But for a while, dear dame, I go,
 To come triumphant over the foe.'

Thus Bali spoke in gentlest tone:
 Soft arms about his neck were thrown;
 Then round her lord the lady went
 With sad steps slow and reverent.
 She stood in solemn guise to bless
 With prayers for safety and success:
 Then with her train her chamber sought
 By grief and racking fear distraught.
 With serpent's pantings fierce and fast
 King Bali, from the city passed.
 His glance, as each quick breath he drew,
 Around to find the foe he threw,
 And saw where fierce Sugriva showed
 His form with golden hues that glowed,
 And, as a fire resplendent, stayed
 To meet his foe in arms arrayed.
 When Bali, long-armed chieftain, found
 Sugriva stationed on the ground,
 Impelled by warlike rage he braced
 His warrior garb about his waist,
 And with his mighty arm raised high
 Rushed at Sugriva with a cry.
 But when Sugriva, fierce and bold,
 Saw Bali with his chain of gold,
 His arm he heaved, his hand he closed,
 And face to face his foe opposed.
 To him whose eyes with fury shone,
 In charge impetuous rushing on,
 Skilled in each warlike art and plan,
 Bali with hasty words began:
 'My ponderous hand, to fight addressed,
 With fingers clenched and firm compressed,
 Shall on your death-doomed brow descend
 And, crashing down, your life shall end.'
 He spoke; and, wild with rage and pride,
 The fierce Sugriva thus replied:
 'Thus let my arm begin the strife
 And from your body crush the life.'
 Then Bali, wounded and enraged,
 With furious blows the battle waged.
 Sugriva seemed, with blood-streams dyed,
 A hill with fountains in his side.
 But with his native force unspent
 A Sal tree from the earth he rent
 And like the bolt of Indra smote
 On Bali's head and chest and throat.
 Bruised by the blows he could not shield,
 Half vanquished Bali sank and reeled,
 As sinks a vessel with her freight
 Borne down by overwhelming weight.

Swift as Suparna's swiftest flight
 In awful strength they rushed to fight:
 So might the sun and moon on high
 Encountering battle in the sky.
 Fierce and fiercer, as fought the foes,
 The furious rage of combat rose.
 They warred with feet and arms and knees,
 With nails and stones and boughs and trees,
 And blows descending fast as rain
 Dyed each dark form with crimson stain,
 While like two thunder-clouds they met '
 With battle-cry and shout and threat.
 Then Rama saw Sugriva quail
 Marked his worn strength grow weak and fail.
 Saw how he turned' his wistful eye
 To every quarter of the sky.
 His friend's defeat he could not brook,
 Bent on his shaft an eager look,
 Then burned to slay the conquering foe,
 And laid his arrow on the bow.
 As to an orb the bow he drew
 Forth from the string the arrow flew
 Like Fate's tremendous discus hurled
 By Yama forth to end the world.
 So loud the din that every bird
 The bow-string's clang with terror heard,
 And wildly fled the affrighted deer
 As though the day of doom were near.
 So deadly as the serpent's fang,
 Forth from the string the arrow sprang.
 Like the red lightning's flash and flame
 It flew unerring to its aim,
 And, hissing murder through the air,
 Pierced Bali's breast, and quivered there.
 Struck by the shaft that flew so well
 The mighty Vanara reeled and fell,
 As earthward Indra's flag they pull
 When Asvini's fair moon is full.

Canto 17 BALI'S SPEECH

Like some proud tree before the blast
 Brave Bali to the ground was cast,
 Where prostrate in the dust he rolled
 Clad in the sheen of glistening gold,
 As when up torn the standard lies
 Of the great God who rules the skies.
 As fell the hero, crushed in fight,
 There beamed afar a triple light
 From limbs, from chain, from shaft that drank
 His life-blood as the warrior sank.

The never-failing shaft, impelled
 By the great bow which Rama held,
 Brought bliss supreme, and lit the way
 To Brahma's worlds which never decay.
 Rama and Lakshmana nearer drew
 The mighty fallen foe to view,
 The wounded Bali, when he saw
 Rama and Lakshmana nearer draw,
 Keen words to Raghu's son, impressed
 With justice's holy stamp addressed:
 'What fame, from one you have not slain
 In front of battle, can you gain,
 Whose secret hand has laid me low
 When madly fighting with my foe?
 From every tongue your glory rings,
 A scion of a line of kings,
 True to your vows, of noblest race,
 With every gentle gift and grace:
 Whose tender heart for woe can feel,
 And joy in every creature's weal:
 Whose breast with high ambition swells,
 Knows duty's claim and never rebels.
 They praise your valor, patience, truth,
 Your firmness, self-restraint, and truth:
 Your hand prepared for sin's control,
 All virtues of a princely soul.
 I thought of all these gifts of yours,
 And glories of an ancient line,
 I set my Tara's tears at naught,
 I met Sugriva and we fought.
 Rama, till this fatal morn
 I held that you would surely scorn
 To strike me as I fought my foe
 And thought not of a stranger's blow.
 But now your evil heart is shown,
 A yawning well with grass overgrown.
 You wear virtue's badge, but guile
 And meanest sin your soul defile.
 I took you not for treacherous fire,
 A sinner clad in saint's attire;
 Nor deemed you idly would profess
 The show and garb of righteousness.
 In fenced town, in open land,
 Never have you suffered at this hand.
 Nor can of proud contempt complain:
 Then wherefore is the guiltless slain?
 My harmless life in woods I lead,
 On forest fruits and roots I feed.
 My enemy in the field I sought,
 And never with you, O Rama, fought.

Upon your limbs, O King, I see
 The raiment of a devotee;
 And how can one like you, who springs
 From a proud line of ancient kings,
 Beneath fair virtue's mask, disgrace
 His lineage by a deed so base?
 From Raghu is your long descent,
 For duteous deeds pre-eminent:
 Why, sinner clad in saintly dress,
 Roam you through the wilderness?
 Truth, valor, justice free from spot,
 The hand that gives and grudges not,
 The might that strikes the sinner down,
 These bring a prince his best renown.
 Here in the woods, O King, we live
 On roots and fruit which branches give.
 Thus nature framed our harmless race:
 You are a man supreme in place.
 Silver and gold and land provoke
 The fierce attack, the robber's stroke.
 Can you desire this wild retreat,
 The berries and the fruit we eat?
 'It's not for mighty kings to tread
 The flowery path, by pleasure led.
 Theirs be the arm that crushes sin,
 Theirs the soft grace to woo and win:
 The steadfast will that guides the state,
 Wise favor to the good and great;
 And for all time are kings renowned
 Who blend these arts and never confound.
 But you are weak and swift to ire,
 Unstable, slave of each desire.
 You trample duty in the dust,
 And in your bow is all your trust.
 You care naught for noble gain,
 And treat virtue with disdain,
 While every sense its captive draws
 To follow pleasure's changing laws.
 I -wronged you not in word or deed,
 But your deadly arrow I bleed.
 What will thou, mid the virtuous, say
 To purge your lasting stain away?
 All these, O King, must sink to hell,
 The regicide, the infidel,
 He who in blood and slaughter joys,
 A Brahman or a cow destroys,
 Untimely weds in law's despite
 Scorning an elder brother's right,
 Who dares his Teacher's bed ascend.
 The miser, spy, and treacherous friend.

These impious wretches, one and all,
 Must to the hell of sinners fall.
 My skin the holy may not wear,
 Useless to you my bones and hair;
 Nor may my Slaughtered body be
 The food of devotees like you.
 These five-toed things a man may slay
 And feed upon the fallen prey;
 The mailed rhinoceros may die,
 And, with the hare, his food supply
 Iguanas he may kill and eat,
 With porcupine and tortoise meat.
 But all the wise account it sin
 To touch my bones and hair and skin.
 My flesh they may not eat; and I
 A useless prey, O Rama, die.
 In vain my Tara reasoned well,
 On dull deaf ears her counsel fell.
 I scorned her words though sooth and sweet,
 And hither rushed my fate to meet.
 Ah for the land you rule! She
 Finds no protection, lord, from you,
 Neglected like some noble dame
 By a vile husband dead to shame.
 Mean-hearted coward, false and vile,
 Whose cruel soul delights in' guile> 24
 Could Dasharatha, noblest king,
 Beget so mean and base a thing?
 Alas! an elephant, in form
 Of Rama, in a maddening storm
 Of passion casting to the ground
 The girth of law that clipped him round,
 Too wildly passionate to feel
 The prick of duty's guiding steel,
 Has charged me unawares, and dead
 I fall beneath his murderous tread.
 How, stained with this my base defeat,
 How will you dare, where good men meet,
 To speak, when every tongue will blame
 With keen reproach this deed of shame?
 Such hero strength and valor, shown
 Upon the innocent alone,
 You have not proved in manly strife
 On him who robbed you of your wife.
 Had you but fought in open field
 And met me boldly unconcealed,
 This day had been your fate to fall,
 Slain by this hand, to Yama's hall.
 In vain I strove, and struck by you
 Fell by a hand I could not see.

Thus bites a snake, for sins of yore,
 A sleeping roan who wakes no more.
 Sugriva's enemy you have killed,
 And thus his heart's desire fulfilled:
 But Rama, had you sought me first,
 And told the hope your soul has nursed,
 That very day had I restored
 The Maithili lady to her lord;
 And, binding Ravana with a chain,
 Had laid him at your feet unslain.
 Yea, were she sunk in deepest hell,
 Or whelmed beneath the ocean's swell,
 I would have followed on her track
 And brought the rescued lady back,
 s Hayagriva once set free
 From hell the white Asvatari.
 That when my spirit wings its flight
 Sugriva reign, is just and right.
 But most unjust, O King, that, I,
 Slain by your treacherous hand, should lie.
 Be still, my heart: this earthly state
 Is darkly ruled by sovereign Fate.
 The realm is lost and won: defy
 Your questioners with apt reply.'

Canto 18 RAMA'S REPLY

He ceased: and Rama's heart was stirred
 At every keen reproach he heard.
 There Bali lay, a dim dark sun,
 His course of light and glory run:
 Or like the bed of Ocean dried
 Of his broad floods from side to side,
 Or helpless, as the dying fire,
 Hushed his last words of righteous ire.
 Then Rama, with his spirit moved,
 The Vanara king in turn reproved:
 'Why do thou, Bali, thus revile,
 And caste not a glance the while
 On claims of duty, love, and gain,
 And customs over the world that reign?
 Why do you blame me, rash and blind,
 Fickle as all your Vanara kind,
 Slighting each rule of ancient days
 Which all the good and prudent praise?
 This land, each hill and woody chase,
 Belongs to old Ikshvaku's race:
 With bird and beast and man, the whole
 Is ours to cherish and control.
 Now Bharat, prompt at duty's call,
 Wise, just, and true, is lord of all.

Each claim of law, love, gain, he knows.
And wrath and favor duly shows.
A king from truth who never bends,
And grace with vigor wisely blends;
With valor worthy of his race,
He knows the claims of time and place.
Now we and other kings of might,
By his example taught aright,
The lands of every region tread
That justice may increase and spread.
While royal Bharat, wise and just,
Rules the broad earth, his glorious trust,
Who shall attempt, while he is lord,
A deed by Justice held abhorred?
We now, as Bharat has decreed,
Let justice guide our every deed,
And toil each sinner to repress
Who scorns the way of righteousness.
You from that path have turned aside,
And virtue's holy law defied,
Left the fair path which kings should tread,
And followed pleasure's voice instead.
The man who cleaves to duty's law
Regards these three with filial awe —
The sire, the elder brother, third
Him from whose lips his lore he heard.
Thus too, for duty's sake, the wise
Regard with fond paternal eyes
The well-loved younger brother, one
Their lore has ripened, and a son.
Fine are the laws which guide the good
Abstruse, and hardly understood;
Only the soul, enthroned within
The breast of each, knows right from sin
But you are wild and weak of soul,
And spurns, like your race, control;
The true and right you cannot find,
The blind consulting with the blind.
Incline your ear and I will teach
The cause that prompts my present speech.
This tempest of your soul assuage,
Nor blame me in your idle rage.
On this great sin your thoughts bestow,
The sin for which I lay you low.
Thou, Bali, in your brother's life
Hast robbed him of his wedded wife,
And keep, scorning ancient right,
His Ruma for your own delight.
Your son's own wife should scarcely be
More sacred in your eyes than she.

All duty you have scorned, and hence
 Comes punishment for dire* offence.
 For those who blindly do amiss
 There is, I think, no way but this:
 To check the rash who dare to stray
 From customs which the good obey.
 I may not, sprung of Kshatriya line,
 Forgive this heinous sin of yours:
 The laws for those who sin like you
 The penalty of death decree.
 Now Bharata rules with sovereign sway,
 And we his royal word obey.
 There was no hope of pardon, none,
 For the vile deed that you have done.
 That wisest monarch dooms to die
 The wretch whose crimes the law defy;
 And we, chastising those who err,
 His righteous doom administer.
 My soul accounts Sugriva dear
 Even as my brother Lakshmana here.
 He brings me blessing, and I swore
 His wife and kingdom to restore:
 A bond in solemn honor bound
 When Vanara chieftains stood around.
 And can a king like me forsake
 His friend, and plighted promise break?
 Reflect, O Vanara, on the cause,
 The sanction of eternal laws.
 And, justly smitten down, confess
 You die for your wickedness.
 By honor was I bound to lend
 Assistance to a faithful friend;
 And you have met a righteous fate
 Your former sins to expiate.
 And thus will you some merit win
 And make atonement for your sin.
 For hear me, Vanara King, rehearse
 What Manu spoke in ancient verse —
 This holy law, which all accept
 Who honor duty, have I kept:
 'Pure grow the sinners kings chastise,
 And like the virtuous, gain the skies
 By pain or full atonement freed,
 They reap the fruit of righteous deed,
 While kings who punish not incur
 The penalties of those who err.'
 Mandhata, once a noble king,
 Light of the line from which I spring,
 Punished with death a devotee
 When he had stooped to sin like you;.

And many a king in ancient time
 Has punished frantic sinners' crime,
 And, when their impious blood was spilt,
 Has washed away the stain of guilt.
 Cease, Bali, cease: no more complain:
 Reproaches and laments are vain,
 For you are justly punished: we
 Obey our king and are not free.
 Once more, O Bali, lend your ear.
 Another weightiest plea to hear,
 For this, when heard and pondered well,
 Will all complaint and rage dispel.
 My soul will never this deed repent,
 Nor was my shaft in anger sent.
 We take the silvan tribes beset
 With snare and trap and gin and net,
 And many a heedless deer we smite
 From thickest shade, concealed from sight.
 Wild for the slaughter of the game,
 At stately stags our shafts we aim.
 We strike them bounding scared away,
 We strike them as they stand at bay,
 When careless in the shade they lie,
 Or scan the plain with watchful eye.
 They turn away their heads: we aim,
 And none the eager hunter blame.
 Each royal saint, well trained in law
 Of duty loves his bow to draw
 And strike the quarry, even as you
 Hast fallen by mine arrow now,
 Fighting with him or unaware —
 A Vanara you — I little care.
 But, yet, O best of Vanaras, know
 That king who rule the earth bestow
 Fruit of pure life and virtuous deed,
 And lofty duty's hard-won mead.
 Harm not your lord the king: abstain
 From act and word that cause him pain.
 For kings are children of the skies
 Who walk this earth in men's disguise.
 But thou, in duty's claims untaught,
 Your breast with blinding passion fraught,
 Assail me who still have clung
 To duty, with your bitter tongue.'
 He ceased: and Bali sore distressed
 The sovereign claims of law confessed,
 And freed, overwhelmed with woe and shame,
 The lord of Raghu's race from blame.
 Then, reverent palm to palm applied,
 To Rama thus the Vanara cried:

'True, best of men, is every word
 That from your lips these ears have heard.
 It ill beseems a wretch like me
 To bandy empty words with you.
 Forgive the angry taunts that broke
 From my wild bosom as I spoke,
 And lay not to my charge, O King,
 My mad reproaches' idle sting.
 Thou, in the truth by trial trained,
 Best knowledge of the right have gained;
 And lay, just and pure within,
 The heaviest penalty on sin,
 Through every bond of law I burst,
 The boldest sinner and the worst.
 O let your right-instructing speech
 Console my heart and wisely teach.'
 Like some sad elephant who stands
 Fast sinking in the treacherous sands,
 Thus Bali raised despairing eyes;
 Then spoke again with sobs and sighs: '
 Not for myself, O king, I grieve,
 For Tara or the friends I leave,
 As for sweet Angad, my dear son,
 My noble, only little one.
 For, nursed in luxury and bliss
 His father he- will mourn J and miss '
 And like a stream whose fount is dry
 Will waste away and sink and die, — '
 My own dear child, my only boy,
 His mother Tara's hope and joy.
 Spare him, O son of Raghu, spare
 The child entrusted to your care.
 My Angad and Sugriva treat
 Even as your heart considers meet,
 For thou, O chief of men, are strong
 To guard the right and punish wrong.
 O, if you will your ear incline
 To hear these dying words of mine,
 He and Sugriva will to you
 As Bharat and as Lakshmana be.
 Let not my Tara left forlorn,
 Weep for Sugriva's wrathful scorn;
 Nor let him, for her lord's offence,
 Condemn her faithful innocence.
 And well and wisely may he reign
 If your dear grace his power sustain:
 If, following you his friend and guide,
 He turn not from your best aside:
 Thus may he reign with glory, nay
 Thus to the skies will win his way.

Though stayed by Tara's fond recall,
 By your dear, hand I longed to fall.
 Against my brother rushed and fought,
 And gained the death I long have sought.'

Canto 19 TARA'S GRIEF

But Tara in the Vanar's hall
 Heard tidings of her husband's fall;
 Heard that a shaft from Rama's bow
 Had laid the royal Bali low.
 Her darling Angad by her side,
 Distracted from her home she went.
 She hastened forth, her bosom rent
 With anguish, weeping as she went,)
 And striking, mastered by her woes
 Her head and breast with frantic blows.
 She hurried to the field and found
 Her husband prostrate on the ground,
 Who quelled the hostile Vanar's might,
 Whose back was never turned in flight:
 Whose arm a massy rock could throw
 As Indra hurls his bolts below:
 Fierce as the rushing tempest, loud
 As thunder from a laboring cloud:
 Whenever he roared his voice of fear
 Struck terror on the boldest ear:
 Now slain, as, hungry for the prey,
 A tiger might a lion slay:
 Or when, his serpent foe to seek,
 Suparna with his furious beak
 Tears up a sacred hillock, long
 The reverence of a village throng,
 Its altar with their offerings spread,
 And the gay flag that waved overhead.
 She looked and saw the victor stand
 Resting upon his bow his hand;
 And fierce Sugriva she descried,
 And Lakshmana by his brother's side.
 She passed them by, nor stayed to view,
 Swift to her husband's side she flew;
 Then as she looked, her strength gave way,
 And in the dust she fell and lay.
 Then, as if startled ere the close
 Of slumber, from the earth she rose.
 Upon her dying husband, round
 Whose soul the coils of Death were wound,
 Her eyes in agony she bent
 And called him with a shrill lament.
 Sugriva, when he heard her cries,
 And saw the queen with weeping eyes,

And youthful Angad standing there,
His load of grief could hardly bear.

Canto 20 TARA'S LAMENT

Again she bent her to the ground,
'Her arms about her husband wound.
Sobbed on his breast, and sick and faint
With anguish poured her wild complaint:
Again the hapless Tara wept
As to her husband's side she crept,
And wild with sorrow and dismay
Sat on the ground where Bali lay.

Canto 22 BALI DEAD

There breathing still with slow faint sighs
Lay Bali on the ground: his eyes,
Damp with the tears of death, he raised,
On conquering Sugriva gazed,
And then in clearest speech expressed
The tender feelings of his breast:
'Not to my charge, Sugriva, lay
Your injuries avenged to-day;
But rather blame resistless Fate
That urged me on infuriate.
Fate never agreed our lives to bless
With simultaneous happiness:
To dwell like brothers side by side
In tender love was still denied.
The Vanaras' realm is your to-day:
Begin, O King, your rightful sway;
For I must go at Yama's call
To sojourn in his gloomy hall;
Must part and leave this very hour
My life, my realm, my kingly power,
And go instead of these to gain
Bright glory free from spot and stain.
Now at your hands one boon I seek
With the last words my lips shall speak,
And, though it be no easy thing,
Perform the task I give you, King.
This son of mine, no foolish boy,
Worthy of bliss and nursed in joy, —
See, prostrate on the ground he lies,
The hot tears welling from his eyes —
The child I love so well, more sweet
Than life itself, for woe unmeet, —
To him be kindly favor shown:
O guard and keep him as your own.
Retain him ever by your side,

His father, helper, friend, and guide.
 From fear and woe his young life save,
 And give him all his father gave.
 Then Tara's son in time shall be
 Brave, resolute and famed like you,
 And march before you to the fight
 Where stricken fiends shall own his might.
 While yet a tender stripling, fame
 Shall bruit abroad his warrior name,
 And brightly shall his glory shine
 For exploits worthy of his line.
 Child of Sushen, my Tara well
 Obscurest lore can read and tell;
 And, trained in wondrous art, divines
 Each mystery of boding signs.
 Her solemn warning never despise,
 Do boldly what her lips advise;
 For things to come her eye can see,
 And with her words events agree.
 And for the son of Raghu's sake
 The toil and danger undertake:
 For breach of faith were grievous wrong,
 Nor would you be unpunished long.
 Now, brother, take this chain of gold,
 Gift of celestial hands of old.
 Or when I die its charm will flee.
 And all its might be lost with me.'
 The loving speech Sugriva heard,
 And all his heart with woe was stirred.
 Remorse and gentle pity stole
 Each thought of triumph from his soul:
 Thus fades the light when Rahu mars
 The glory of the Lord of Stars.
 All angry thoughts were stayed and stilled,
 And kindly love his bosom filled.
 His brother's word the chief obeyed
 And took the chain as Bali prayed.
 On little Angad standing nigh
 The dying hero fixed his eye,
 And, ready from this world to part,
 Spoke the fond utterance of his heart:
 'Let time and place your thoughts employ:
 In woe be strong, be meek in joy.
 Accept both pain and pleasure, still
 Obedient to Sugriva's will.
 You hast, my darling, from the first
 With tender care been softly nursed;
 But harder days, if you would 'win
 Sugriva's love, must now begin.
 To those who hate him never incline,

Nor count his foe a friend of yours.
In all your thoughts his welfare seek,
Obedient, lowly, faithful, meek.
Let no rash suit his bosom pain,
Nor yet from due requests abstain.
Kach is a grievous fault, between
The two is found the happy mean.'
Then Bali ceased: his eyeballs rolled
In stress of anguish uncontrolled.
His massive teeth were bared to view,
And from the frame the spirit flew.