

Markandeya Purana, Books VII, VIII

Rev. B. Hale Wortham

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ART. XIII.—*Translation of the Markandeya Purana.*
Books VII. VIII. By the Rev. B. HALE WORTHAM.

BOOK VII.

ONCE upon earth there lived a saintly king
Named Harischandra; pure in heart and mind,
In virtue eminent, he ruled the world,
Guarding mankind from evil. While he reigned
No famine raged, nor pain; untimely death
Ne'er cut men off; nor were the citizens
Of his fair city lawless. All their wealth,
And power, and works of righteousness, ne'er filled
Their hearts with pride; in everlasting youth
And loveliness the women passed their days.

It so fell out, that while this mighty king
Was hunting in the forest, that he heard
The sound of female voices raised in cry
Of supplication. Then he turned and said,
Leaving the deer to fly unheeded: "Stop!
Who art thou, full of tyranny and hate,
That darest thus oppress the earth; while I,
The tamer of all evil, live and rule?"
Then, too, the fierce Ganesa,—he who blinds
The eyes, and foils the wills of men,—he heard
The cry, and thus within himself he thought:
"This surely is the great ascetic's work,
The mighty Visvamitra; he whose acts
Display the fruits of penance hard and sore.

Upon the sciences he shows his power,
While they, in patience, discipline of mind,
And silence perfected, cry out with fear,
'What shall we do? The illustrious Kausika
Is powerful; and we, compared with him,
Are feeble.' Thus they cry. What shall I do?
My mind is filled with doubt. Yet stay; a thought
Has come across me: Lo! this king who cries
Unceasingly, 'Fear not!' meeting with him,
And entering his heart, I will fulfil
All my desire." Then filled with Rudra's son—
Inspired with rage by Vigna Raj—the king
Spake up and said: "What evil doer is here,
Binding the fire on his garment's hem,
While I, his king, in power and arms renowned,
Resplendent in my glory, pass for nought?
Surely the never-ending sleep of death
Shall overtake him, and his limbs shall fail,
Smitten with darts from my far-reaching bow,
Whose fame this lower world may scarce contain."
Hearing the prince's words, the saint was filled
With wrath o'erpow'ring, and the sciences
Fell blasted in a moment at his glance.

But when the king beheld the pious sage
All-powerful, he quaked exceedingly,
And trembled like the sacred fig-tree's leaves.
Then Visvamitra cried: "Stop, miscreant!"
And Harischandra, humbly falling down
Before the saint, in accents low and meek:
"O Lord! most holy! most adorable!
Oh, blame me not! This is no fault of mine!
My duty calls," he said, "I must obey."
"Is it not written in the Holy Law,
'Alms must be given by a virtuous king;
His people must be fought for, and be kept
From every ill'?" Then Visvamitra spoke
And said: "To whom, O king, should'st thou give alms?
For whom in battle should'st thou fight? and whom
Should'st thou protect? Oh, tell me, nor delay,
But quickly answer, if thou fearest sin."
"Alms should be given to Brahmans," said the king:
"Those who are weak should be protected: foes
In battle should be met and overcome."

Then Visvamitra spoke and said: "O king!
If thus indeed thou rightly dost perceive

Thy royal duty, give thine alms to me;
I am a holy Brahman, and I seek
A dwelling-place; moreover I would gain
A wife: therefore bestow on me thine alms.”
The king, his heart filled with exceeding joy,
Felt, as it were, his youth return, and said:
“Fear not! but tell me, son of Kausika,
Thy heart's desire; and be it hard to gain,
Or be it easy, it shall still be thine.
Say, shall I give thee gold, or wealth, or life?
Or shall I give thee wife, or child, or land?
Or my prosperity itself?” “O king!”
The sage replied, “thy present I accept;
But let thine alms, I pray, be granted first,—
The offering for the kingly sacrifice.”
“O Brahman!” said the king, “the alms are thine;
Further than this, whatever be the gift
Thou mayest desire, freely I give it thee.
Ask what thou wilt.” Then Visvamitra spake:
“Give me the earth, its mountains, seas, and towns,
With all its kingdoms, chariots, horses, men;
Its elephants, its treasure-houses too;
Its treasures vast, and all whate'er beside
Is recognized as thine: oh! give me all,
I pray, except thyself, thy wife, thy son,
And this thy righteousness, that follows close
Beside thee. Sinless one! oh thou who art
Perfect in righteousness! oh give me all—
All beside these. What need of further words.”

The king, with heart rejoicing, and unchanged
In countenance, hearing the sage's words,
Said, humbly bowing down before the saint,
“So be thy wish fulfilled.” “O saintly king,”
Said Visvamitra, “if the world is mine,
And power, and wealth, I pray you who shall reign,
Since in this kingdom as a devotee
I dwell?” Then Harischandra said: “Ere this,
Before the world was thine by my free gift,
Thou wast the lord of all; how much more now?
Thy right is doubly sure.” Then said the sage:
“If this indeed be so,—if the whole world
Be truly mine, and all its sovereignty,
Then should'st thou not remain, nor leave thyself
Aught of that kingdom which thou hast renounced,
But, casting off thy royal ornaments,
Thou should'st depart, clothed in a dress of bark.”
The king, obedient to the sage's word,
Stripped off his royal dress, and, with his wife

And son, made haste to go. Then said the saint:
 “Stop, Harischandra! Hast thou then forgot
 The offering for the kingly sacrifice
 That thou hast promised us?” Replied the king:
 “O mighty saint! the kingdom now is *_thine*;
 All have I given to *_thee*: and as for me,
 What have I left?—nought! save myself,
 My wife, my son!” “Thou sayest the truth, indeed,”
 Answered the sage; “but yet there still remains
 The offering for the kingly sacrifice.
 And this know well: A vow to Brahmans made,
 If unfulfilled, works special woe to him
 Who made the vow. For in this sacrifice
 Must offerings of worth be freely made
 To Brahmans;—offerings until they cry
 Hold! that suffices for us! Therefore pay
 Thy promised vow, nor longer hesitate.
 ‘Alms are for Brahmans,’ thou thyself hast said,
 ‘Those who are weak must be protected: foes
 In battle must be met and overcome.’“
 “O saintly priest!” answered the king, “my wealth
 Is all departed: nothing now remains
 For me to give: yet grant me time I pray,
 And I will pay the offering!” “Noble king,”
 Said Visvamitra, “speak I pray thee! Say
 What time dost thou appoint that I should wait?
 Speak! no delay! or else my curse of fire
 Shall burn thee up.” Then Harischandra said:
 “Most holy Brahman! when a month has past
 The money for the offering shall be thine.
 Now I have nothing. Oh! be pleased to grant
 Remission for the present.” Said the sage,
 “Go! go! most noble prince! maintain thy faith!
 And may'st thou prosper! may no enemies
 Harass thy road.” Commanded thus, the king
 Departed as an outcast;—he, the king
 Of all the earth, an exile with his wife
 Unused to go afoot, and with his son
 Went forth: while cries and lamentations rose
 On every side: “Our hearts are filled with pain,
 Why dost thou leave us thus? O virtuous king!
 Show mercy to thy subjects. Righteousness
 Indeed shines forth in thee; if thou art full
 Of mercy, may it overflow on us.
 Stay! Mighty Prince! one moment, while we gaze
 With lover's eyes upon thy beauteous form.
 Alas! our Prince! Shall we ne'er see thee more?
 How changed thy princely state! Thou, who did'st once
 Go forth, surrounded by attendant kings,
 Who marched on foot; while stately elephants
 Bore e'en thy ministers. Now, Lord of Kings!

Thyself art driven forth on foot. Yet, stay!
Think, Harischandra! how wilt thou endure
The dust, the heat, the toil? Stay, mighty prince,
Nor cast thy duty off. Oh, show to us
Some mercy, for herein thy duty lies.
Behold, we cast off all for thee! Our wives,
Our wealth, our children, our possessions, all
Have we relinquished; like thy shadow,
We would follow thee. Oh leave us not!
For wheresoe'er thou art is happiness,
And heaven itself would be no heaven to us
Without our prince." Then, overwhelmed with grief
At these laments, the king stayed on his course,
In pity for his loving citizens.
Then Visvamitra, filled with rage, his eyes
Rolling with wrath, exclaimed: "Shame on thee! shame!
O full of falsehood, and of wickedness.
How! would'st thou, then, speaker of lies!
Resume the gifts that thou hast freely made,
And reinstate thee in thy kingdom?" "Sir!
I go!" replied the king to these rude words,
And trembling crept away in haste, his wife
Holding him by the hand. And, as she went,
Her fragile form o'ercome with weariness,
The Brahman smote her fiercely with his stick.
Then Harischandra, pained with inmost grief,
Seeing the stroke, said meekly, "Sir! I go!"
Nor further spoke. Filled with compassion then,
The Visvadevas said: "What sin is this?
What torments shall indeed suffice for him
By whom this pious king—the offerer
Of prayer, and sacrifice, has been cast forth.
Who now will sanctify the Soma-juice
With prayers and hymns, at the great sacrifice,
That we may drink it with rejoicing hearts?"

Then, having heard these words, the Brahman turned
Upon the Visvedevas; and, in wrath
Exceeding hot, he spake a fearful curse:
"You shall be cast down from the height of heaven,
And live as men." The curse had hardly passed
His lips, when filled with pity for their fate,
The sage yet further added: "you shall live
Indeed as men, but yet, there shall be born
To you no son, nor shall you know the state
Of marriage. Envy, love, and wrath shall ne'er
Hold sway o'er you: and when the appointed time
Has past, you shall re-enter once again
The courts of heaven, and wear again the form

Which you had lost.” The Visvedevas then
Came down from heaven, and, clothed in human form,
Were born as men, the sons of Pritha, wife
Of Pa.n.du. Therefore those five Pa.n.davas—
Mighty in war—by Visvamisra cursed,
Knew not the state of marriage. Thou hast heard
The tale of Pa.n.du's sons; thy question, too,
Of fourfold import has been answered.
I pray thee, say, what further would'st thou hear?

BOOK VIII.

Said Jaimini: An answer ye have found
To all my questions; and indeed have filled
Me full of deepest interest. Oh! I long
To hear yet more! Alas! that saintly king!
What grief he suffered! Did he e'er attain
To any comfort answering to his woe?
Noblest of Birds! Oh tell me this, I pray.

The Holy Birds continued: Then the king,
O'ercome with grief and pain, hearing the words
Of Visvamisra, with his wife and son
Journeyed along, dragging his weary steps.
At length the holy place appeared in view—
The shrine of Siva; thus within himself,
He said: “Benares, sacred to the god,
Lies now before me; there shall I find rest,
For there man has no power.” The king approached
The gates on foot: lo! at the entry stood
The Brahman Visvamisra. Mighty Saint!
The king, his hands in supplication joined,
With humble reverence, said: “Here is my life,
My wife, my son, I offer all to thee;
Accept, I pray, the offering! or choose
Whatever else thou wouldst!” But the sage
Replied: “The month is past! most saintly king!

Give me the present for the sacrifice—
 The offering thou hast promised.” “One half–day
 As yet remains before the month be past,
 Oh Brahman of surpassing piety,
 And penances unfading. Wait, I pray,
 A few short hours.” Then Visvamitra said:
 “So be it, king! once more I will return,
 But if the offering be not duly paid,
 Before the sinking of this evening's sun,
 My curse shall smite thee.” And the priest
 Departed, while the king, in anxious thought,
 Debated thus: “How shall I make the gift?
 The promised gift? where are my friends? my wealth?
 I may not beg for alms; how can I then
 Fulfil my vow? Nor even in the world
 Beyond shall I find rest. Destruction waits,
 If with my promise unfulfilled, I pass
 From hence. A robber of the holy saints;
 I shall become the lowest of the low.
 Nay, I will sell myself! and, as a slave,
 Redeem my promise.” Then the queen, in tears
 Bewildered, and afflicted, lost in thought,
 With face cast down, “Maintain thy truth,” she said,
 “Most mighty prince! Oh! let not doubt prevail!
 The man devoid of truth is to be shunned
 Like contact with the dead. The highest law
 Declares, that inward truth and faithfulness
 Must be maintained. Burnt sacrifices, alms,
 The study of the scriptures, penances,
 Are counted not for righteousness to him
 Whose word is faithless. Listen! noble prince!
 Is it not written in the sacred law:
 'The wise attain Salvation through the truth,
 While lies and falsehood are destruction's way
 To men of low and evil minds.' There lived,
 'Tis said, a king upon the earth, by whom
 The kingly sacrifice—burnt offerings too,
 Were offered in abundance. That same king
 Fell once from truthfulness, and by that fall,
 He lost his righteousness, and forfeited
 His place in heaven. Prince! I have borne a son”—
 Her utterance failed her, issuing forth in nought
 But sighs and lamentations. Then the king,
 With eyes o'erflowing, said, “Behold thy son!
 He stands beside thee! cast away thy grief!
 Tell me what presses on thee.” Said the queen,
 “Prince, I have borne a son; and sons are born
 To none but worthy women. This my son
 Shall take me—he shall offer me for sale—
 Then with the money gained, pay thou the priest
 The promised offering.” Hearing these words,

He fell down fainting. When his sense returned,
 Filled with exceeding pain, the king burst forth,
 Lamenting: "This, alas! most loving one!
 Is hardly to be framed in words, much less
 Be carried out in deed. Alas! alas!"—
 His spirit fled again, and to the earth
 He fell unconscious. Overcome with grief,
 The queen exclaimed, filled with compassion: "King!
 How art thou fallen from thy high estate!
 The ground is now thy resting-place, whom once
 A gorgeous couch received. Lo! this my lord,
 By whom wealth, honour, power, are freely given
 An offering to the Brahman—see, he lies
 Insensate on the ground. Ye gods of heaven!
 Tell me, I pray you, has this noble king,
 Equal to gods in rank, committed sin
 Against you, that he lies thus overcome
 With woe?" Then fell the queen, bereft of sense
 Upon the earth, o'erwhelmed with grief and pain,
 Seeing her husband's misery. When the boy
 Beheld his parents lying on the ground,
 He cried in terror: "Father! give me food!
 Mother! my tongue is parched with thirst!" Meanwhile
 Upon the scene the mighty Brahman came;
 And when he saw the king lie senseless, "King!"—
 Sprinkling cold water on his face—he said,
 "Rise up! rise up! Pay me the promised vow;
 For this thy misery from day to day
 Increases, and will yet increase, until
 The debt be paid." The water's cooling touch
 Refreshed the king; his consciousness returned;
 But when he saw the Brahman, faintness seized
 His limbs again. Then overpowering rage
 Seized Visvamitra; but before he left,
 The best of Brahmans said: "If what is just,
 Or right, or true, enters thy mind, O king!
 Give me the present. Lo! by truth divine
 The sun sends forth his vivifying rays
 Upon the earth. By truth this mighty world
 Stands firm and steadfast. Truth all law excels.
 By truth the very heaven itself exists.
 Wert thou to weigh the truth, and in the scale
 Opposing, wert to place burnt-offerings,
 And sacrifices countless, still the truth
 Would far outweigh them all. Why need I waste
 My words of loving-kindness upon thee—
 An ill-intentioned, false, ignoble man.
 Thou art a king,—so should the truth prevail
 With thee. Yet hear me;—if the offering
 Be still unpaid when th' evening's sun has sunk
 Behind the western mountain to his rest,

My curse shall smite thee.” Speaking words like these
 The Brahman left him; and the king, o’ercome
 With fear—a fugitive—robbed of his wealth—
 Degraded to unfathomable depths—
 The victim of his evil creditor—
 Heard once again the counsel of his wife:
 “O king! sell *me*! nor let the fiery curse
 Dissolve thy being!” Urged repeatedly,
 The king at length replied: “Most loving one!
 What the most wicked man could hardly do,
 That same will I:—and I will sell my wife.
 Alas! that I should utter such a word!”
 And going with his wife into the town—
 Eyes dimmed with tears, voice choked with grief—he cried:
 “Come hither, townsmen! hearken unto me!
 A wretch! inhuman! savage as a fiend!
 I offer here my wife for sale, and yet
 I live! Here is a female slave! Who buys?
 Make haste and speak.” “The female slave is mine!”
 (So spake an ancient Brahman to the king.)
 “Money I have in heaps, and I will pay
 You well for her. My wife is delicate;
 Her household duties are beyond her strength;
 I want a slave, and therefore I will give
 A price proportioned to the woman’s skill
 And temper; nor will I o’erlook her youth
 And beauty. What you think is fair and right,
 That will I pay.” Struck dumb with grief, the king
 Stood mute, nor answered aught. And then the priest,
 Tying the price in the king’s garment—hem—
 His bark—cloth garment—roughly grasped the queen,
 And dragged her off. But when the loving child
 Beheld his mother led away, he seized
 Her by her garment. And the queen exclaimed:
 “If only for a moment, noble sir!
 Oh! let me go! that I may gaze once more
 Upon my child, whom I shall never see,
 And never touch again! My child, behold
 Thy mother, now a slave! And thou—a prince!
 Oh, touch me not! My lot of servitude
 Forbids that thou should’st touch me.” But the child,
 His eyes bedewed with tears, ran after her,
 Calling her “Mother!” As the boy came near,
 The Brahman spurned him with his foot; but he
 Still following close would not be torn from her,
 Calling her “Mother!” “Oh, my lord! I pray,
 Be gracious to me!” said the queen. “Oh, buy
 My son with me; divide us not! For I
 Without him shall be nought of use to you.
 Be gracious, O my lord!” Then said the priest:
 “Here! take the money! give the boy to me!

The saints, who know the scriptures, have ordained
 The right and lawful sum. Take it!" He tied
 The money in the king's bark dress, and led
 Them both away—the mother and the child—
 Together bound. But when the king beheld
 Himself bereft of both his wife and son,
 He burst forth: "Ah! my wife! whom neither sun,
 Nor moon, nor air have ever seen I who hast
 Been kept from vulgar gaze! Alas I a slave
 Hast thou become! Alas! thou, too, my son!—
 A scion of the noble dynasty,
 Sprung from the sun! disgrace has seized on thee,
 And—shame upon me!—thou too art a slave!
 Ye have become a sacrifice; ye, through my fault,
 Have fallen. Would that I were dead!" Thus spoke
 The king. Meanwhile the Brahman hastily
 Entered the grove wherein his dwelling stood,
 And vanished with his slaves. Then met the king
 The Brahman Visvamitra. "Prince!" he said,
 Pay me the offering!" Harischandra gave
 The money gained by the shameful sale
 Of wife and child. And when the priest beheld
 The money, overcome with wrath, he said:
 "How canst thou mock me with this paltry sum!
 Base Kshatriya! And thinkest thou that this
 Suffices for a sacrificial gift
 Such as I would accept? But if thy mind
 Thus far misleads thee, thou shalt feel my power—
 Power transcendant, gained by penances,
 And scripture meditation. Yes! the power
 Of my pure Brahmanhood shall show itself
 On thee." "More will I give thee," said the king,
 "But wait, most noble saint! Nought have I left!
 Even my wife and child are sold." Replied
 The Brahman: "Hold! be silent! Further time
 Than the remaining fourth part of to-day
 I grant thee not." Enraged, he turned away,
 Departing with the money. And the king,
 Immersed in grief and fear, with face cast down,
 Cried out: "If there be any one of you
 Who wants a slave, let him make haste and speak
 While day remains." Then Dharma, putting on
 The form of a Cha.n.dala, hastily
 Came forward, taking pity on the king.
 His countenance was fearful,—black, with tusks
 Projecting; savage in his words; his smell
 Was foul and horrible; a crowd of dogs
 Came after him. "Tell me thy price," he said;
 "Be quick; and whether it be large or small
 I care not, so I have thee as my slave:"
 The king, beholding such a loathsome form,

Of mien revolting—"What art thou?" he said.
 "Men call me a Cha.n.dala," he replied.
 I dwell in this same city—in a part
 Of evil fame. As of a murderer
 Condemned to death, such is my infamy.
 My calling is a robber of the dead."
 "I will not be a slave," exclaimed the king,
 "To thee, a base Cha.n.dala. Better far
 That I should perish by the fiery curse."
 The words were scarcely uttered, when the saint
 Returned, his countenance with rage
 Distorted; and he thus addressed the king:
 "The sum is fair; why dost thou not accept
 The offer? Then indeed thou mightest pay
 The gift thou owest for the sacrifice."
 "O son of Kusika!" replied the king,
 "Consider this, I pray!—my noble race!
 Truly am I descended from the sun!
 How can I then become, though sore in want,
 Lowest of creatures—a Cha.n.dala's slave?"
 "Delay no more," the Brahman said, "but pay
 The gift at once, and sell thyself a slave
 To the Cha.n.dala—or assuredly
 I curse thee." "Saintly priest, be merciful!"
 The king entreated; and, immersed in care,
 He seized the Brahman's feet, exclaiming thus:
 "What am I but a slave, o'erwhelmed with grief!
 Fear holds me! Saintly priest, be merciful!
 Protect me, mighty saint! Save me, I pray,
 From this most horrible Cha.n.dala. Sir!
 Most noble saint! hereafter shall thy will
 Be all the object of my life! To serve
 Thy lightest wish shall be my highest joy!
 Thus will I make the offering—I will be
 Thy *slave!*" Replied the Brahman: "If thou art
 My slave, then will I sell thee as a slave
 To the Cha.n.dala." Then, filled with delight,
 Paying the money, the Svapaka bound
 His lately-purchased slave, and striking him,
 Led him away. Parted from all his friends;
 In utmost grief; in the Cha.n.dala's house
 Abiding—morning, noon, and eventide,
 And night, the king thus made lament:
 "Alas! my tender wife, overwhelmed with pain,
 Looking upon her son in misery,
 Bewails her lot. But yet she says: 'The king
 Will surely ransom us, for he has gained
 By now more money than the Brahman paid
 For us;' and all the time she little knows
 My fate—worse than her own. For I have passed
 From woe to woe—kingdom and friends—my wife,

My son, have passed from me, and now the state
 Of a Cha.n.dala holds me." While he dwelt
 A slave in the Cha.n.dala's house, the forms
 Of those he loved were still before his eyes—
 Were ever in his mind. Meanwhile the king,
 Obedient to his master's will, became
 A robber of the dead; and night and day
 He watched for plunder. "One part of the spoil
 Is for the king, three for thy master, two
 For thee. Go to the city's southern part,
 Where is the dwelling of the dead, there wait."
 Obeying the Cha.n.dala, to the place
 Of burial he went;—an awful place,
 Filled full of fearful sounds and loathsome sights—
 Of evil smells, and smoke, and locks of hair
 Fallen from the dead; while troops of fiends and ghouls,
 Vampires and demons, wandered to and fro.
 Vultures and jackals prowled, and spirit forms'
 Of evil hovered o'er. The ground was strewn
 With heaps of bones; and wailing, sharp and shrill,
 Re-echoed from the mourners of the dead.
 The bodies on the funeral piles, half burnt,
 Crackled and hissed; showing their shining teeth,
 They grinned, as if in sport; while all the time
 The howl of demons and the wail of fiends
 Were mingled with the roar of flames—a sound
 Of fearful import, such as ushers in
 The day of doom. The sights, and sounds, and smells—
 The heaps of ashes, and the piles of bones,
 Blackened with filth—the smoke, the shouts,
 The yells—struck fear on fear into the heart.
 The burial-place resembled nought but hell.
 Such was the place appointed for the king.
 "Priests! Brahmans! Counsellors! how have I fallen
 From all my royal state! Alas! my queen!
 Alas! my son! Oh! miserable fate!
 We have been torn asunder by the power
 Of Visvamitra." Thoughts like these possessed
 His inmost mind; while foul, unshorn, unwashed,
 He served his master. Running here and there,
 Armed with a jagged club, he sought the dead,
 From whom he gained his wages. So he lived,
 Degraded from his caste. Old knotted rags
 Served as his dress; his face and arms and feet
 With dust and ashes from the funeral piles
 Begrimed; his hands defiled with putrid flesh
 From contact with the bodies of the dead.
 So neither day nor night he ceased from toil.
 And twelve months passed—twelve weary months, which seemed
 To his grief-stricken mind a hundred years;
 And then at last, worn out, the best of kings

Lay down to rest; and as upon his couch
 All motionless in sleep he lay, he saw
 A wondrous vision. By the power divine
 He seemed to wear another form,—a form
 Both new and strange,—and in that form to pay
 The vow. Twelve years of expiation passed
 With difficulty. Then within himself
 King Harischandra thought: “So too will I,
 When I am freed from hence, perform my vows
 With generous freedom.” Forthwith he was born
 As a Pukkasa; while a place was found
 For him among the dead, and funeral rites
 Were ordered as his task. Thus seven years
 Were passed; then to the burying—place was brought
 A Brahman seeking sepulture: in life
 He had been poor, but honest; and the king,
 Though he knew this—the dead man's poverty
 And his uprightness—pressed his friends to pay
 The funeral dues. “Enforce thy right,” they said,
 “And do this evil deed; yet know thou this:
 Once upon earth there was a mighty king
 Named Harischandra; though he but disturbed
 A Brahman's sleep, through that offence he lost
 His merit, and by Visvamitra's curse
 Became a base Pukkasa.” “Yet the king
 Spared not the dead man's friends, but still required
 His fee. Therefore they cursed him in their rage—
 “Go!—go!—thou most degraded of mankind—
 Go to the lowest hell!” Then in his dream
 The king beheld the messengers of death.
 Fearful to look at, armed with heavy chains,
 They seized him, and they bound him hand and foot,
 And bore him off. And then, in fear and pain,
 Headlong he fell into the bath of oil
 In Naraka. There, torn with instruments
 Sharp-edged as razors, fed on putrid blood,
 He saw himself. For seven years in hell—
 Now burnt from day to day, now tossed and torn,
 Now cut by knives, and now by icy winds
 Frozen and numbed—a dead Pukkasa's fate
 He underwent. Each day in Naraka,
 A hundred years of mortal reckoning—
 So count the demons who inhabit hell.
 Then he beheld himself cast up to earth,
 His spirit entering a filthy dog;
 Feeding on things all foul and horrible—
 Consumed by cold. A month thus passed away.
 His spirit changed its dwelling, and he saw
 Himself an ass; and after that an ox,
 A cow, a goat, a sheep, a bird, a worm.
 So day by day he saw his spirit change

Its outward shape. A multitude of forms—
Some moving, others rooted to the ground—
Received his soul. And when the hundred years
Were passed and gone, he saw himself again
Re-occupy his pristine human form—
Once more a king. And then he seemed to lose
His kingdom, casting it away in games
Of chance. Turned from his home a wanderer
Into the forest with his wife and child:
Devoured by a ravening beast, but raised
To life again on earth, he sore bewailed
His wife: “Alas! why hast thou left me thus?
Alas! O Saivya! where hast thou gone?”
Then in his dream he seemed to see his wife
And son lamenting: “What hast thou to do
With gambling? Oh protect us, mighty king!”
The vision faded, and he saw no more
The cherished forms. And then the dream returned
By power divine. And Harischandra stood
In heaven, and he beheld his wife on earth,
With flowing hair, dragged forcibly along—
Stripped of her clothes: the cry came to his ear,
“Protect us, king of men!” Then, snatched away,
The demons hurried him before the judge;
And Harischandra seemed to hear the words:
“Go forth! return once more to earth! Thy grief
Is well nigh past and ended; joy ere long
Shall come to thee. The sorrows that remain
Endure.” The king, then driven from the sky
By Yama's messengers, falling through space—
Senseless in fear and terror, filled with pain
Yet more exceeding—thought within himself,
“How shall I suffer all these torments sore!—
The changes manifold of form—the pain
In Naraka.” Then Harischandra sought
Aid from the gods: “O mighty lords,” he said,
“Protect me! O protect my wife and child!
O mighty Dharma, thee I worship! Thee,
O Krish.na, the Creator! Faultless ones,
Both far and near, before you now I come,
A suppliant. On thee, O lord of prayer,
I call! on thee, O Indra too! to thee
O ancient one! I pray—immutable!”
The vision fled, the king arose from sleep.
His tangled hair, his body black and grimed,
Recalled to him his state—the plunderer
Of dead men's clothes. His recollection gone,
He thought not of his sorrowing wife and child,
For reason failed. The loss of kingdom, wealth,
And friends, his dwelling—place among the tombs,
Had overthrown his senses, and destroyed

His mind. Then to the burying—place the queen
 Came, bearing the dead body of her son—
 Pale and distracted. “My beloved son!
 My child!” she kept exclaiming, while she threw
 Dust on her head. “Alas! alas! O king!
 O that thou could'st behold thy child,” she said—
 “Thy child now lying dead upon the earth,
 Killed by a serpent's bite. Alas! my son!
 So lovely! so delightful!” Then the king,
 Rearing the sounds of mourning, went in haste
 To rob the dead: nor did he recognize
 His wife, in that sad mourner, changed by grief
 As if into another. And the queen
 Knew not the form that stood before her, clothed
 In rags, with matted hair, withered and foul.
 Then recollection dawned upon the king,
 Seeing the dead child's princely form, the thought
 Of his own son came o'er him. “Ah! my child!
 What evil chance,” he said, “has brought thee here!
 A child of princely race thou seemest. He, my son,
 Long lost to me through my accursed fate,
 Would have been even such as thou in age.”
 Then raised the queen her voice, and thus she spoke:
 “Alas! has some unexpiated crime
 Brought upon us, my child! this endless woe.
 My absent lord! since thou did'st not console
 My grief in times gone by, how can the pain
 I suffer now assuage? Did'st thou not lose
 Thy kingdom? did'st thou not desert thy friends?
 Did'st thou not sell thy wife and child?” The king
 Heard her lament, and as he heard, the wail
 Fell from his eyes,—he recognized again
 His wife and son—and saying but the words,
 “Ah! Saivya! Ah! my beloved child!”
 He fainting fell to earth. Then, too, the queen,
 Hearing her husband's voice, o'ercome with grief,
 Insensate fell. Returning consciousness
 Brought to them both affliction's heaviest weight
 And mutual lamentations. “Ah! my son!”
 Thus mourned the king, “my inmost heart is torn,
 When I behold thy form so delicate:
 My child! embracing thee in tend'rest love,
 Words of affection I will speak, that rise
 Unbidden to my lips. Alas! thy limbs
 Will be defiled by my embrace; the dust
 That clings about my garments will pollute
 Thy lovely form! Alas! my child, thou had'st
 An evil father! He who should have kept
 All dangers from thee, he it was who sold
 Thee as a slave! and yet in heart and mind
 First of all things I love thee. Ah! my child!

Thy father's realm—my heaped-up wealth—all this
 By lawful right was thine inheritance,
 And now thou liest slain! Ah me! the tears
 Rise to my eyes in blinding force: thy form,
 In grace and beauty like the lotus flower,
 Fades from my sight.” He spoke, and faltering
 With grief embraced his son. The queen exclaimed:
 “This is indeed my lord—I know his voice!
 I know his form! this is the mighty king.
 The wisest of all beings. But how changed!
 What fate is this? Ah what a dreadful place
 For him, the lord of men. This grief yet more
 Is added to the mourning for my son—
 My husband's fate—for as a slave he serves
 A base Cha.n.dala. Cursed be that god,
 Or demon foul, through whom a godlike king
 Has fallen to this degraded state; the lot
 Of a Svapaka. Ah! most noble prince,
 My mind is filled with grief, when I recall
 Thy regal state, thy past magnificence.
 No kingly ensigns go before thee now,
 No captive kings, brought down to slavery,
 Humbly precede thee, casting in the way
 Their garments, lest the dust should soil thy feet.
 But now! O king! alas, thyself a slave,
 Thou livest in this fearful place, begrimed
 With filth; thy sacred cord concealed, thy hair
 Tangled and long, plunder of dead men's clothes
 Thy livelihood. Ah! king! and is thy life
 Spent in this awful wise?” So spake the queen,
 And falling on his neck, embraced her lord:
 While she, sprung from a king herself, bewailed
 Her sorrows endless. “King! I pray thee speak!
 Is this a dream? If it be real and true,
 Then justice, truth, and righteousness have fled
 And gone from earth: nor aught avails mankind,
 Of sacrifice, or reverence, to gods
 Or priests! 'Tis vain to follow innocence
 If thou, most perfect, purest of mankind,
 Art brought to such a depth of infamy.”
 Then spoke the king, and told his sorrowing wife
 How he had fallen to this wretched state,—
 The state of a Cha.n.dala. She, in turn,
 Weeping, with many sighs, poured out her tale,
 Telling him how the serpent's bite had killed
 Their child. “Beloved one! I suffer not
 These evils,” said the king, “by mine own will—
 Thou seest what I endure; my evil fate
 Depends not on myself. I am a slave,
 And if I fly from the Cha.n.dala's bonds,
 The fiery torment in the depths of hell

Will overtake me, and I shall become
 A slave again. My doom is fixed! lo! hell
 Is my abode hereafter; and in forms,
 Creeping and loathsome, shall my soul abide.
 Yet from this miserable life on earth
 There is one only refuge. He! my son!
 My hope! my stay! is dead; drowned by the sea
 Of my misfortunes. But I am a slave!
 I am dependent on another's will!
 Can I give up my wife? Yes! even so!
 For know thou this: one who is steeped in woe
 Cares not for evil chances; not the state
 Of the most loathsome beast, nor yet the wood
 Of sword-leaved plants, nor even hell's dread stream,
 Could add the smallest fraction to the pain
 I have already borne. My son is dead!
 Who then will make atonement for my sins?
 Yet listen to my words, beloved one,
 If I have offered sacrifice, and paid
 Due reverence to the saints; if I have given
 Alms to the needy—may we meet again
 Hereafter, in the world to come, and find
 The refuge for our woes denied us here.
 Let us together follow in the path
 By which our son has gone. Our hopeless fate
 Can never alter here. Whatever words
 I may have uttered, thoughtlessly, in jest,
 These, when I pray for pardon, shall receive
 Fullest forgiveness. Thou must not despise
 Thy lord: nor pride thee on thy queenly state
 Now passed and gone.” The prince's wife replied:
 “I am prepared to tread that path with thee,
 O king, most saintly! and with thee that world
 To enter.” While she spoke these words, the king
 Made up the funeral pile, and placed thereon
 His son, himself ascending with his wife.
 And then, in meditation wrapt, he thought
 Upon Narayana, the lord supreme,
 And Vasudeva, lord of deities,
 Siva, and Brahma the eternal god,
 And Krish.na clothed in glory. As the king
 Was meditating, all the gods from heaven
 Came down headed by Dharma. And they said:
 “Hear us, O king! hear us, O lord! The gods—
 Even the mighty gods have come to earth,
 And at their head is Dharma. Gods, and saints,
 And heroes—yea, and Visvamitra too,
 The sage implacable,—all summon thee—
 Ascend! to heaven: receive the due reward,
 That thou hast gained. O king! slay not thyself!
 I, perfect Righteousness, I summon thee

To enter now the heaven that thou hast gained
 By thy transcendant virtues, self-control,
 Patience, and truth." Then Indra spoke, and said:—
 "O Harischandra! King, most eminent!
 In virtue! lo! before you Indra stands—
 For I am he. The everlasting world
 Thou hast attained: together with thy wife,
 And son, ascend to heaven;—to that third heav'n—
 So difficult to be attained by men—
 The heav'n that thou hast won." Then Indra rained
 Life-giving am.rit from the sky, and flowers
 That blossomed in the heavenly courts: while sounds
 Of music filled the air, and round him stood
 The gods, a vast assembly. Then the son
 Of Harischandra rose, restored to life,
 And health, his mind and senses whole, his form
 More beautiful than ever: and the king
 Embraced his wife and son, with perfect joy
 Filled to o'erflowing, crowned with heavenly wreaths.
 Then Indra said: "Thou, with thy wife, and son,
 Shalt dwell in bliss supreme: bliss that thyself
 Hast purchased, by thy virtues and thy toils."
 Then spoke the king: "Hear me! most holy gods!
 Unbidden by my master, will I not
 To heaven itself ascend." Then Dharma spoke:
 "I am thy master. I assumed the form
 Of a Cha.n.dala. All thy pain and woe
 Was brought upon thee by my magic power,
 And thou wast made a slave! I have beheld
 Thy truth, and thy uprightness. Saintly king!
 The highest place that heaven accords to men,
 Whose virtue has been tried and proved:—to that
 Ascend!" But Harischandra answering, said:
 "Receive, most mighty lord! my words of praise
 And thanksgiving. I offer them to thee
 Full of affection. Lo! my people stand
 With grieving hearts, longing for my return.
 Can I ascend to heav'n while they on earth
 Lament for me? If they have ever slain,
 Brahmans, or teachers of the holy law,—
 If lust or avarice have ruled their hearts,—
 Then may my labours and my toils atone,
 For these their sins. I may not leave my friends.
 For neither here, nor in the world to come,
 Can there be peace to one who casts aside
 The friend whose love is pure and true—the friend
 Who serves him from the heart. Return!
 Return! to heaven! O Indra! If thou grant
 My friends to rise with me, to heav'n will I
 Ascend; if not, with them will I descend
 To Naraka." "O king! thy prayer is heard!

Thy people's sins are pardoned: even for them,
Hard though it be, thy toils and pains have gained
A place in heaven." Thus mighty Indra spoke.
Replied the king: "Indra! I will not leave
My kinsmen. By his kinsmen's help a king
His kingdom rules; by them he offers up
The kingly sacrifice, and for himself
Lays up a store of meritorious deeds.
So have my kinsmen too enabled me
To work whate'er I may of righteousness.
My actions virtuous, my granted prayers,
Truly I owe to them, for by their aid
Have these been possible. May the reward
Thou grantest me, I pray, be shared with them.
My kinsmen, though I should ascend to heaven,
I will not leave." "So be it!" Indra said;
"So be it!" said the Brahman; Dharma, too,
Gave his assent; and then, in countless hosts,
Appeared the heavenly chariots. Indra said:
"Men of Ayodhya, ascend to heaven."
The saintly Brahman, having heard with joy
The words of Indra, poured the sacred oil
Upon the prince, and with the perfect ones,
The sages, and the gods, anointed him
"Son of the mighty king." Then all the throng—
The king, his wife, his son, his followers—
Filled with rejoicing and delight, ascend
To heaven, surrounding, as they go, the king
Borne in his chariot. He, too, filled with joy—
The mighty father, who eternal bliss
Both for his people and himself had gained,
Once more in form and mien a king—reposed,
Resting from all his toils, his faithful friends
Surrounding him with a protecting wall.
And Indra spoke and said: "Upon this earth
Great Harischandra's equal has not been
Nor shall be. Whosoe'er may hear his life,
His toils, his sorrows, and in sympathy
For him lament, transcendant happiness
Shall he attain, and all his heart's desire
Shall be accomplished. Is his prayer a wife,
Or son, or kingdom, he shall gain them all,
E'en heaven itself. And he who imitates
The truth, and steadfastness, of that great king,
Like him shall enter everlasting rest.