

### XIII.

#### THE MAN WHO WISHED TO BE PERFECT.

ONCE on a time a religious mendicant came to a king who had no issue, and said to him, "As you are anxious to have a son, I can give to the queen a drug, by swallowing which she will give birth to twin sons; but I will give the medicine on this condition, that of those twins you will give one to me, and keep the other yourself." The king thought the condition somewhat hard, but as he was anxious to have a son to bear his name, and inherit his wealth and kingdom, he at last agreed to the terms. Accordingly the queen swallowed the drug, and in due time gave birth to two sons. The twin brothers became one year old, two years old, three years old, four years old, five years old, and still the mendicant did not appear to claim his share; the king and queen therefore thought that the mendicant, who was old, was dead, and dismissed all fears from their minds. But the mendicant was not dead, but living; he was counting the years carefully. The

young princes were put under tutors, and made rapid progress in learning, as well as in the arts of riding and shooting with the bow; and as they were uncommonly handsome, they were admired by all the people. When the princes were sixteen years old the mendicant made his appearance at the palace gate, and demanded the fulfilment of the king's promise. The heart of the king and of the queen were dried up within them. They had thought that the mendicant was no more in the land of the living; but what was their surprise when they saw him standing at the gate in flesh and blood, and demanding one of the young princes for himself. The king and queen were plunged into a sea of grief. There was nothing for it, however, but to part with one of the princes; for the mendicant might by his curse turn into ashes, not only both the princes, but also the king, queen, palace, and the whole of the kingdom to boot. But which one was to be given away? The one was as dear as the other. A fearful struggle arose in the heart of the king and queen. As for the young princes, each of them said, "I'll go," "I'll go." The younger one said to the elder, "You are older, if only by a few minutes; you are the pride of my father; you remain at home, I'll go with the mendicant." The elder said to the younger, "You are younger than I am; you are the joy of my mother; you remain at home, I'll go with the mendicant." After a great deal of yea and nay, after a great deal of

mourning and lamentation, after the queen had wetted her clothes with her tears, the elder prince was let go with the mendicant. But before the prince left his father's roof he planted with his own hands a tree in the courtyard of the palace, and said to his parents and brother, "This tree is my life. When you see the tree green and fresh, then know that it is well with me; when you see the tree fade in some parts, then know that I am in an ill case; and when you see the whole tree fade, then know that I am dead and gone." Then kissing and embracing the king and queen and his brother, he followed the mendicant.

As the mendicant and the prince were wending their way towards the forest they saw some dog's whelps on the road-side. One of the whelps said to its dam—"Mother, I wish to go with that handsome young man, who must be a prince." The dam said—"Go;" and the prince gladly took the puppy as his companion. They had not gone far when upon a tree on the roadside they saw a hawk and its young ones. One of the young ones said to its dam—"Mother, I wish to go with that handsome young man who must be the son of a king." The hawk said—"Go," and the prince gladly took the young hawk as his companion. So the mendicant, the prince with the puppy and the young hawk went on their journey. At last they went into the depth of the forest far away from the houses of men, where they stopped before a hut thatched with leaves. That was the

mendicant's cell. The mendicant said to the prince—  
“ You are to live in this hut with me. Your chief work will be to cull flowers from the forest for my devotions. You can go on every side except the north. If you go towards the north evil will betide you. You can eat whatever fruit or root you like ; and for your drink, you will get it from the brook.” The prince disliked neither the place nor his work. At dawn he used to cull flowers in the forest and give them to the mendicant ; after which the mendicant went away somewhere the whole day and did not return till sun-down ; so the prince had the whole day to himself. He used to walk about in the forest with his two companions—the puppy and the young hawk. He used to shoot arrows at the deer, of which there was a great number ; and thus made the best of his time. One day as he pierced a stag with an arrow, the wounded stag ran towards the north, and the prince, not thinking of the mendicant's behest, followed the stag, which entered into a fine-looking house that stood close by. The prince entered, but instead of finding the deer he saw a young woman of matchless beauty sitting near the door with a dice-table set before her. The prince was rooted to the spot while he admired the heaven-born beauty of the lady. “ Come in, stranger,” said the lady, “ chance has brought you here, but don't go away without having with me a game of dice.” The prince gladly agreed to the proposal. As it was a game of risk they

agreed that if the prince lost the game he should give his young hawk to the lady; and that if the lady lost it, she should give to the prince a young hawk just like that of the prince. The lady won the game; she therefore took the prince's young hawk and kept it in a hole covered with a plank. The prince offered to play a second time, and the lady agreeing to it, they fell to it again, on the condition that if the lady won the game she should take the prince's puppy, and if she lost it she should give to the prince a puppy just like that of the prince. The lady won again, and stowed away the puppy in another hole with a plank upon it. The prince offered to play a third time, and the wager was that, if the prince lost the game, he should give himself up to the lady to be done to by her anything she pleased; and that if he won, the lady should give him a young man exactly like himself. The lady won the game a third time; she therefore caught hold of the prince and put him in a hole covered over with a plank. Now, the beautiful lady was not a woman at all; she was a Rakshasi who lived upon human flesh, and her mouth watered at the sight of the tender body of the young prince. But as she had had her food that day she reserved the prince for the meal of the following day.

Meantime there was great weeping in the house of the prince's father. His brother used every day to look at the tree planted in the courtyard by his own

hand. Hitherto he had found the leaves of a living green colour ; but suddenly he found some leaves fading. He gave the alarm to the king and queen, and told them how the leaves were fading. They concluded that the life of the elder prince must be in great danger. The younger prince therefore resolved to go to the help of his brother, but before going he planted a tree in the courtyard of the palace, similar to the one his brother had planted, and which was to be the index of the manner of his life. He chose the swiftest steed in the king's stables, and galloped towards the forest. In the way he saw a dog with a puppy, and the puppy thinking that the rider was the same that had taken away his fellow-cub—for the two princes were exactly like each other—said, "As you have taken away my brother, take me also with you." The younger prince understanding that his brother had taken away a puppy, he took up that cub as a companion. Further on, a young hawk, which was perched on a tree on the roadside, said to the prince, "You have taken away my brother, take me also, I beseech you;" on which the younger prince readily took it up. With these companions he went into the heart of the forest, where he saw a hut which he supposed to be the mendicant's. But neither the mendicant nor his brother was there. Not knowing what to do or where to go, he dismounted from his horse, allowed it to graze, while he himself sat inside the house. At sunset the mendicant returned to

his hut, and seeing the younger prince said—"I am glad to see you, I told your brother never to go towards the north, for evil in that case would betide him; but it seems that, disobeying my orders, he has gone to the north and has fallen into the toils of a Rakshasi who lives there. There is no hope of rescuing him; perhaps he has already been devoured." The younger prince forthwith went towards the north, where he saw a stag which he pierced with an arrow. The stag ran into a house which stood by, and the younger prince followed it. He was not a little astonished when instead of seeing a stag he saw a woman of exquisite beauty. He immediately concluded from what he had heard from the mendicant that the pretended woman was none other than the Rakshasi in whose power his brother was. The lady asked him to play a game of dice with her. He complied with the request, and on the same conditions on which the elder prince had played. The younger prince won; on which the lady produced the young hawk from the hole and gave it to the prince. The joy of the two hawks on meeting each other was great. The lady and the prince played a second time, and the prince won again. The lady therefore brought to the prince the young puppy lying in the hole. They played a third time and the prince won a third time. The lady demurred to producing a young man exactly like the prince, pretending that it was impossible to get one, but on the prince insisting upon the fulfilment of the

condition his brother was produced. The joy of the two brothers on meeting each other was great. The Rakshasi said to the princes, "Don't kill me, and I will tell you a secret which will save the life of the elder prince." She then told them that the mendicant was a worshipper of the goddess Kali, who had a temple not far off; that he belonged to that sect of Hindus who seek perfection from intercourse with the spirits of departed men; that he had already sacrificed at the altar of Kali six human victims whose skulls could be seen in niches inside her temple; that he would become perfect when the seventh victim was sacrificed; and that the elder prince was intended for the seventh victim. The Rakshasi then told the prince to go immediately to the temple to find out the truth of what she had said. To the temple they accordingly went. When the elder prince went inside the temple, the skulls in the niches laughed a ghastly laugh. Horror-struck at the sight and sound, he inquired the cause of the laughter; and the skulls told him that they were glad because they were about to get another added to their number. One of the skulls, as spokesman of the rest, said—"Young prince, in a few days the mendicant's devotions will be completed, and you will be brought into this temple and your head will be cut off, and you will keep company with us. But there is one way by which you can escape that fate and do us good." "Oh, do tell me," said the prince, "what that way is, and I promise

to do you all the good I can." The skull replied—"When the mendicant brings you into this temple to offer you up as a sacrifice, before cutting off your head he will tell you to prostrate yourself before Mother Kali, and while you prostrate yourself he will cut off your head. But take our advice, when he tells you to bow down before Kali, you tell him that as a prince you never bowed down to any one, that you never knew what bowing down was, and that the mendicant should show it to you by himself doing it in your presence. And when he bows down to show you how it is done, you take up your sword and separate his head from his body. And when you do that we shall all be restored to life, as the mendicant's vows will be unfulfilled." The elder prince thanked the skulls for their advice, and went into the hut of the mendicant along with his younger brother.

In the course of a few days the mendicant's devotions were completed. On the following day he told the prince to go along with him to the temple of Kali, for what reason he did not mention; but the prince knew it was to offer him up as a victim to the goddess. The younger prince also went with them, but he was not allowed to go inside the temple. The mendicant then stood in the presence of Kali and said to the prince—"Bow down to the goddess." The prince replied, "I have not, as a prince, bowed to any one; I do not know how to perform the act of prostration. Please show me

the way first, and I'll gladly do it." The mendicant then prostrated himself before the goddess; and while he was doing so the prince at one stroke of his sword separated his head from his body. Immediately the skulls in the niches of the temple laughed aloud, and the goddess herself became propitious to the prince and gave him that virtue of perfection which the mendicant had sought to obtain. The skulls were again united to their respective bodies and became living men, and the two princes returned to their country.

Here my story endeth,  
The Natiya-thorn withereth, &c.