

VIRTUE'S TRIUMPH

OR

THE MAIÂ BHÂRATA

BY

RAI BAHADUR P. ANUNDA CHARLU,

Bachelor of Laws, (Madras.)

*A Member of the Madras High Court Bar
and*

President, Seventh Indian National Congress.



FIRST EDITION.

(33)

Madras :

PRINTED BY G. RAMASAWMY CHETTY & CO.,
ESPLANADE ROAD, MADRAS.

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TO THE MEMORY
OF
MY FATHER
WHO EARLY IMBUED MY MIND
WITH THE TEACHINGS OF
THE MAHÂ BHÂRATA.

PREFACE.



HIS volume is no competitor of Baboo Pratab Chander Roy's monumental work. Our aims and our methods are dissimilar. While he has laboured to present the public with an elaborate and literal translation of the entire Mahâ Bhârata with *all* its numerous episodes, my desire has been merely to bring out what may be read as historical novels of the present day are read. I have therefore merely narrated the main story and such sub-stories only as are inseparably connected with it, and I have taken

some latitude in the matter of detail and description.

The ponderosity of the epic has long been an obstacle to its main and subsidiary morals enjoying a wide circulation except among purely orthodox scholars; and the primary motive which prompted this work was the melancholy discovery, made by me more than once, that my own countrymen, glorying in considerable English culture and scholarship, have betrayed regrettable ignorance of even its salient characters and points.

As regards the diction and language which I have chosen to employ in telling the story, I have used my best judgment; and, whether I have or have not come up to the ideal of the fastidious critic or of men to the manner born, I shall be quite content, if I am held to have at least made the meaning clear.

Without diminishing my own responsibility for the undertaking, I may state that the

manuscript has been submitted to the judgment of not a few of my discriminating European and Native friends, and that I am emboldened to print and publish it, by their frank and encouraging advice.

While I regret that the untimely death of my most valued friend—the well known professor P. Ranganadam Mudaliar, M. A.,—deprived me of his promised inestimable revision and approval of most of the chapters, I must place on record my acknowledgements to my apprentice K. Kristnama Chariar, B. A. B. L., who has taken pains to pass more than half the proofs through the press when distance from Madras and the distractions of pressing professional duties menaced to put a spoke in my wheel.

I shall be wanting in fairness if I omit to record my warm thanks to the printers who have taken up this work far more as a labour of love than as a mere profitable enterprise.

The alacrity and appreciativeness they have shown in the face of disarming difficulties cannot be too highly praised.

P. ANUNDA CHARLU.

LAKE SIDE,
POONAMALLEE ROAD, }
MADRAS.

VIRTUE'S TRIUMPH

OR

THE MAHĀ BHĀRATA.

CHAPTER I.

THE HUNT.



IT was summer—the season when the Âryan Kings of yore went on a hunt. One such King—known to fame—started on such an excursion, once upon a time. He rode a fiery steed, attended by a troop of gallant huntsmen. For long he lighted on no game, and he grew impatient and lost his temper. Vexed and irritable, he put his horse to a brisk trot, and before long distanced his followers. The sun

was overhead, yet his wistful eyes descried no prey. The vertical rays beat on his feverish head, but their heat was as nothing to the ardour that burned within him. On a sudden he caught sight of a dim object, looming ahead before him and it seemed to move. He clapped his spurs, and away flew his hunter at a tearing gallop as if instinct with sympathy for the rider. Soon within an arrow-shot of that object, the royal sportsman let fly his angry shafts at what looked like a pair of deer. The effect was instantaneous and fatal. He drew a long breath of relief, and a satisfied glee lighted up his face. But, alas!, his joy was destined to be short-lived; for, before many minutes were over, he was startled by a dread curse hurled at him in a human voice and in death-agony. It was the voice of a Rishi who had been consorting with his spouse in the form of deer and who received the king's fatal dart. Deer were indeed fit and traditional objects of

game; but what angered the Rishi was the occasion chosen. It was plainly an occasion when no harm should be done. Provoked by this consideration, the Rishi cursed the monarch that he should never more know sexual pleasure on pain of his head going forthwith into a thousand splinters. When the awful curse and the dread cause that led to it came home to him, the king's conscience smote him sore and he hoped for very shame that the earth would gape and swallow him up.

The prospect of endless celibacy had indeed no terror for him, nor was death in any grim form. The remembrance of his guilt as a cowardly, cold-blooded and infamous deed was more than he could bear, and it threatened to embitter the rest of his earthly days. This was harrowing enough. But there was yet another, no less agonising. It was the idea that he must die without male issue, which meant that he must leave unfulfilled an

inviolable duty which lay on every good Âryan—the duty of begetting sons to continue the line and to offer to his manes and those of his ancestors, the oblations on which their spiritual welfare depended. A prey to these thoughts which unmanned him, he awaited the arrival of his followers, whom he had left behind. His attendants were soon at his side, and they noticed with a start how ~~won-~~ begone was his countenance and how void of all lustre were his eyes. His sad tale was soon told and they stood mute, for they knew not how to comfort him. The monarch spoke at last, and begged them to go back to the capital, and convey to his kith and kin his firm resolve to withdraw from the haunts of men and spend the rest of his days in penance and in acts of piety. The news sped, and it soon brought the King's consorts and kinsmen around him. So loved was he by his subjects, that hundreds of them were

at the spot as well. Earnest and untiring were their efforts to dissuade the monarch from his resolve to renounce the duties of married life; and stress was rightly laid on the inviolable law that he was bound to beget children before he forsook the haunts of men, and that a failure in this regard, entailed the penalty of an abode in hell not only on ~~himself~~ himself, but also on his blameless forefathers. It was further pointed out to him, that under the sacred law true renouncement of the world's joys consisted in its emanating from contentment and resignation and not when it sprung from sorrow and disgust. At last he seemed moved into a listening mood: but he saw not how, in the face of the Rishi's curse, he could beget children and thereby discharge a house-holder's duties. He slowly and sadly disclosed his dilemma, but presently hope came to him from the cheering words of his senior wife. She told him how, as a maiden,

living under her paternal roof, she was ordered to attend upon a holy Rishi, and how that Rishi, pleased with her diligence and devotion, taught her, prophetically almost, certain words of mystic power (Mantra) whereby she could invoke any deity or angel to impregnate her with his own spirit and bless her with a son who shall possess his might and worth. Buoyed up by this revelation and resolved nevertheless to bid adieu to all the luxury and pageantry inseparable from sovereignty, the monarch finally declared that the affairs of the State should be in future conducted by a regency and that he, with his two wives to render him service, would lead the life of retirement in mountain retreats. This arrangement was, though reluctantly, assented to by his kinsmen, ministers, and subjects. The government was thenceforward carried on provisionally by a hitherto superseded sightless elder brother of his, with the active

and powerful help of a heroic uncle and a sage-like half-brother, while the self-exiled king lived the life of a penitent amid a mountain-range of a hundred peaks. In a few years, time healed the wound in his heart, and the harrowing memory of the past gradually faded away. Bethinking himself of the uncertainty of life and of the dire results of dying childless, he called upon his senior wife to employ the mantronic power she possessed and invoke successively the god of justice, the god of wind, and the god of thunder to bless her with sons like unto them. The husband's order was obeyed, and she was blessed with sons like unto the gods solicited. She imparted the mantra to her co-wife, and this latter gave birth to two sons by invoking two of the Zodiacal powers. While these things were happening in the mountains, the blind regent was beginning to experience the insidious promptings of

ambition. In his mind, which had all along despaired of the crown ever reverting to him or his progeny, hopes were slowly germinating and expanding. His gross nature forbade all faith in the efficacy of the mantra in the possession of his brother's wife, and he sanguinely looked forward to the chances of his own offspring, now in their mother's womb, indisputably succeeding to the throne in the near future. But to the discomfiture of his hopes he received tidings that his brother had already been blessed with no less than five sons, born under the most propitious conjunction of stars. He himself duly became the patriarch of a numerous progeny sometime after ; but he felt that, so long as his brother's children were alive, he should despair of all chances for his own children. He sounded his advisers on the legal aspect of the question, and they confirmed him in his despondency. Still he looked to the chapter

of accidents for a possible deliverance, and placed no small reliance on the fact that he and his sons were for the nonce in the security of a fortified city and of actual possession, whereas his nephews were, as it were, within the jaws of the wild and ravenous denizens of the woods and the caves. Year after year went by, and the two sets of youth were growing up in their respective abodes. The hitherto-dreary heart of the royal ascetic was becoming sensitive to the softening influence of filial affection, and this opened the door for other tender passions. His austerities relaxed somewhat, and he began insensibly to relish, with pleasure, the converse and the company of his wives. The spring, which had heretofore left him unaffected, began now to produce on him its exhilarating effects. It seemed to come with unusually verdant foliage and fragrant flowers. The soft Southern breeze

had a soothing influence, hitherto unknown. The cuckoo and the parrot poured forth their vocal treasures with all the charm of untasted novelty. The beetle's gladsome buzz and the peacock's gladdening colors awakened unwonted joys. In short, nature seemed to the royal recluse to wear, for the first time, her choicest vesture, and to stimulate—in a degree never before—the musical wealth and the variegated plumage of the feathered creation. It was a union of renovated charms, even to persons that enjoyed them many a time before. What wonder then that it had a special fascination for the heart which was for years seared into blankness and utter forgetfulness of its functions but which was now fast succumbing to inevitable reaction? Alone with his junior wife, mad with joy, and madder with desire, he caught her startled and dutifully-struggling figure in a

passionate embrace, and away went his head into a thousand splinters ! The kingly ascetic was now a clod of earth, and the joyousness of his wives now turned into the widows' bitterness of grief. A film rose before their eyes and blinded them to the charms around. The Rishis in the neighbourhood, who had been the associates of the now-departed, were soon on the spot, and with their help the funeral rites were duly performed. The junior wife, looking upon herself as the proximate cause of the misery that befel, mounted her husband's funeral pyre and bore him company to the celestial abode. The senior widow survived for the sake of the infants and extended to them a mother's solicitude and care. When a few days had elapsed, the Rishis took the forlorn lads and their widowed mother to the capital and gave them over to the then holder of the sceptre.

Now, the King who went on his last

chase, who earned the dire curse, and who succumbed to its dread fulfilment, as above narrated, was the Rajah Pându—the representative of the illustrious lunar race a century before the birth of Kali Yuga.

The lads, brought fatherless into that city, were the Pândavâs whose virtues, trials, and achievements form the noble theme of one of India's Grand Old Epics, the Mahâ Bhârata. The vicarious holder of the lunar sceptre at the time was Dhṛitarâshṭra, whose claim to the throne as the senior of the Rajah Pându was set aside owing to the disability of his being blind. Henceforward the sons of Pându and of Dhṛitarâshṭra were brought up together, equal consideration being shown to all of them, to all outward seeming.

In those days, it was not thought the privilege of the scions of illustrious or royal families to loll in the lap of luxury and to convert their youth into a period of

self-indulgent idleness. To mature into sturdy growth what of mental vigour, of muscular strength and of personal valour there was in them, was accepted as a paramount duty, incumbent alike on the patrician and the plebeian. All the princes therefore were placed under suitable instructors in the Vedâs and S'astras, while the services of Kṛipa and Drona, who were the foremost in the age as teachers in archery were engaged to make them proficient in the military art. Despite all this equal treatment, the sons of Dhṛitarâshṭra looked upon their cousins as intruders, and out of intense jealousy towards them, subjected them to a succession of acts of cold-blooded cruelty and of peril, under the thinly-disguised pretence of frolic and play.

CHAPTER II.

TOURNAMENT.



EARS elapsed. Once upon a day, the sun was yet partially hidden, and his mellow rays were just lining the lofty towers of the lunar capital, when thousands of its inhabitants were surging forward with visible signs of impatience as if they were hurrying to witness some sight conjured up by the wand of the magician. A little later, the sun burst forth in all his glory, as if to prefigure the brilliant position which a youth, who was reputed to have been born under his auspices was unexpectedly to achieve

before dusk. Before the sun had been an hour above the horizon, thousands of the citizens were admiringly crowding round a magnificent arena, fitted up, pursuant to royal orders issued overnight, for a public display, by the princes, of the warlike attainments, in which they had gained high excellence. It was a vast plain, levelled, enclosed, and superbly decorated with transplanted trees of luxuriant foliage, with cunningly constructed arbours and wreaths of flowers, gorgeous in color and sweet in odour. There were likewise countless flags and festoons which waved to the gentle breeze, as if to moderate the heat and sultriness that would necessarily result from the expected crush of sight-seers. There was also an excellent array of seats, arranged not only to meet the requirements of the stronger sex, but also to provide suitable accommodation for the ladies

of the royal household, who were to be present. The wondering crowds had hardly time to hurry back to their homes and hasten through their morning meal, when processional music gave uproarious signal that the royal party was moving towards the amphitheatre, in which stirring feats were looked forward to on the part of the rising hope of the lunar race. The blind regent and his advisers soon took their seats. The ladies of the royal family were in the places appointed for them. The noise and bustle, incident to the gathering of vast masses of eager spectators, subsided. The royal pupils marched into the lists, guided by their instructor, Drona, obedient to his behests, confident in their looks, and respectful towards the august assemblage which had met to judge of their performance. Pre-eminently among these shone Duryodhana, Bhîma and Arjuna, of whom the first was the eldest son

of Dhritarâshtra and the second and third were the second and third sons of the late King Pându. Duryodhana plumed himself on his strength of physique and skill in the mace-fight, and he fondly believed that he was more than a match for his cousin Bhîma who was noted for like strength and like skill. He, therefore, burned with an intense desire to show his fancied superiority. After less important pupils had exhibited their skill, the scene was enlivened by a single combat between these Titans in muscular strength—these two rival aspirants to supremacy in the battle with the mace. For a while, their marvellous feats of strength and of skill were admiringly witnessed; and during the rapid movements accompanying their varying attitudes, the sound of their footfall seemed to shake the earth to its very centre. The struggle went on, but it soon threatened to grow serious. The

instructor took alarm, and parted the combatants on the pretext that it was time that Arjuna should step forward to display his wonderful deftness with the bow and the arrow. Now burst on the gaze of the myriad-eyed assembly the third of the Pândavâs, at once the observed of all observers, and destined, before long, to signalize himself as the foremost warrior of the age. His appearance on the arena called forth reiterated peals of applause, such applause as struck awe and terror into the minds of every one present, chiefly into the mind of Dhṛitarâshṭra, who trembled at this (to him unaccountable) commotion. Being blind, he was unable to comprehend the meaning of the uproar, till it was explained to him. As yet Dhṛitarâshṭra had not added to his physical blindness, the far more deplorable blindness of seeing no merit except in his own sons; and he therefore participated in the pleasure with

which the public greeted a member of his dynasty.

Quiet was soon restored, and Arjuna began to gladden all beholders by his unparalleled adroitness in archery. A succession of marvellous displays of swiftness and dexterity evoked deafening cheers from the wondering spectators; but all of a sudden their wondering joy was rudely disturbed by the sight of darts that flew with winged flames, of shafts that poured forth floods of rain, of arrows that careered and dropped with the crash of massive rocks. As the amazed crowds were looking on in breathless suspense, something like a thin film of mist dimly arose around them. It gradually deepened into gloom, and it finally enveloped them in a dense darkness. All objects were lost to the eye of sense, and all hearts throbbed feverishly. Suddenly a javelin shot across their eyes, dazzling with a thousand

rays like the god of day, and the thick masses of darkness dispersed on all sides as if a necromancer were at work. Renowned heroes there present knew indeed that these were Arjuna's weapons clothed in mystic potency, derived from the superhuman powers whom he invoked, such as the god of fire, of rain, of the mountain, of darkness and of day. But to many of even these, there was ground for marvel in degree, if not in kind. To the spectators at large, however, they were novel both in degree and in kind; for, generations of peace and plenty had led to their having no notion of such displays, except from nursery tales. The words of cheering and of blessing were loud and deafening; and it seemed as if the crowds that witnessed the scene were beside themselves with joy, and their hearts had no place for more than the single feeling—an enthusiastic love for Arjuna. It was no longer

thought discreet to work upon the public enthusiasm, which, was now at white heat. The instructor Drôna made a sign, and Arjuna desisted.

There was a lull ; and when everybody was regaining his equanimity, there came, on the ears of all, valorous words of challenge, hurled in thundering accents and inspired by boundless confidence. The voice rang in every ear, but none could tell whose it was, and whence it came. The assembly was soon undeceived, when a middle-aged warrior, of whom little or nothing was yet known, proudly stalked in, and stood before the amazed concourse in a defiant attitude. In sonorous tones he boasted of his own matchless attainments, and haughtily questioned the wisdom of the widespread admiration bestowed on Arjuna. This was Karna, whose parentage was unknown, who was spoken of as born under solar

auspices, and who had been picked up as a waif on the river-side by a childless charioteer and brought up by him in affection as his own child. The early promise, which he gave of martial greatness, had led to his being admitted within the palace, and the special quality he had as yet developed was inordinate pride and a consequent contempt for others. It was under the impulse of this unfortunate feeling that he rushed forward, envious of the praise elicited by Arjuna. The latter became livid with rage and awaited his instructor's leave to pounce upon the boastful intruder. The leave was granted; then ensued a contest as terrific as it was marvellous. Each invoked the gods for accession of power, and each seemed to receive a ready and equal response. Fright was on every face: every one stood in tongue-tied astonishment. The contest grew intensely warm. In the combatants,

emulation was visibly giving place to mutual hatred, which menaced grave consequences. The assembly instinctively fell into two parties, and it is worthy of note that Duryodhana with his numerous brothers, backed up the redoubtable, but boastful, Karna.

At this juncture Kṛipa's voice was heard parleying with Karna in terms deeply tinged with contempt. He insisted that, before the contest proceeded further, Karna must show how it became one of unknown birth as he was to tilt with one that was kingly. Karna had no family credentials to exhibit. He knew not his parents; all he could learn was (as we have said) that in his infancy he had been picked up by a charioteer and was by him affectionately brought up. He was indeed spoken of as the Sun's son, but that seemed to be a mere metaphor, and afforded no clue. He was touched to the

quick, and he hung his head. At this critical moment, Duryodhana, who always had an eye to his own interest, realising the value of Karna as a friend under eternal obligations to himself, opportunely stepped forth and made answer. He protested that Karna must have had a noble extraction just as a lion could not have been begotten by a stag and that, if such were not the case, greatness arose as much from heroism as from noble extraction or ample revenue. He pointed out that Karna had the former quality in an eminent degree. "If" said he, "that is not enough, I will at this very instant secure to Karna the revenues of the tributary kingdom of Anga, and thereby elevate him to an equality with Kings." Speaking thus, he besought his father and his counsellors to bestow on Karna the coronet in question. This was assented to, and Karna became at once enrolled in the ranks of

the noble. Karna wept with joy at this timely display of unexampled bounty ; and became from that moment a sworn friend and devoted adherent of Duryodhana.

By this time the shades of night were beginning to fall, and every one who had come to be amused and regaled went home, distracted by conflicting emotions and wondering what the events of the day might lead to. The day of tournament, which was meant for a gala day, threatened to become the ill-omened beginning of ever-increasing jealousy on the part of Duryodhana towards the heroic and noble-hearted sons of Pându.

CHAPTER III.

DEBUT.



TWO days went by. The good people of the capital of Pâñchâla were startled from their sense of security. A report reached the ears of the King Drupada, and it spread through the town like wild-fire. It vaguely told of a formidable band of hitherto-unknown warriors on their way to his capital, with what object none could tell. The troops, instantly called out, burned to give battle to the daring foe. To allay the panic that seized the city the King took his place at the head of the army, with a heart free from

all traces of fear ; for he was a warrior of no mean order, having been taught and trained with no less than the famous Drona himself. He had not long to wait before he learnt that the threatening band was none other than the youths of the lunar race, a report of whose doings at the tournament at Hastinâpura was beginning to spread far and near. At the tidings, the veteran warrior curled his lips in contempt and blushed for the disproportionately vast preparations he had made to meet such mere tyros in war. Duryodhana and his brothers were fired by the prospect of acquiring marked distinction as budding military geniuses. But to them, it only proved an occasion for discomfiture. Exaggerating their own merits, and jealous lest their cousins might carry off the prize, they straightway plunged into the battlefield, glorying in visions of assured victory. They were soon brought to a sense of their

insignificance, and they had to beat an ignominious retreat. The sons of Pându, who had discreetly bided their time, now advanced with the intrepid Arjuna in the forefront. An obstinate struggle ensued, in the course of which Arjuna's bow was rent in twain by the mighty Drupada. This roused the wrath of the valiant youth, and, like a lightning-flash, he leaped into the enemy's chariot and took the awe-struck King into captivity. This done, Arjuna was speeding away from the battle-field, followed by his brothers and laden with the royal burden.

This expedition—be it noted—was not a wanton raid by lawless or unbridled youths. How it came about is soon told. When, on the day after the tournament, Drona's pupils went to him for leave-taking and for offering such final presents as he might name, it struck him that the opportunity arrived for the gratification of a feeling of vengeance

which he had long brooded over. While a youth, he and the present King of Pâñchâla were fellow students and, as youths generally do, the Prince made to Drona a liberal offer of riches on his ascending the throne. The promise, given in the ingenuous youth, was swallowed in equal guilelessness. Years rolled by, and Drupada ascended the mighty throne of his fore-fathers. Drona, in his turn, married and became the father of a sole and therefore over-fondled son. Recalling the promises of Drupada, Drona went to him for help with a confiding heart. Unlike the excellent Krishna, whose liberality to his whilom school-friend Kuchéla in like circumstances surpassed all expectations, Drupada, under the giddy influence of power and pelf, slighted the great teacher-of-archery and sent him away with a drooping heart. From the time of this insult, Drona was harbouring thoughts of sweet revenge, and, when now

he took an accurate measure of the rare skill and prowess of Arjuna, he felt sure that, through his means, successful vengeance was within his reach. Not to outrage others with an enviable preference of Arjuna, but albeit being certain that he alone of all his numerous pupils would ultimately accomplish his purpose, he declared that he would count himself adequately rewarded, if his pupils would fetch into his presence the King of Pâñchâla a conquered captive. When, in fulfilment of the task assigned, Arjuna thus led Drupada as a prisoner before his eyes, Drona, avenged by the defeat and arrest of his insulter took to himself half his kingdom and let go the object of his long-standing wrath to govern the remaining moiety after addressing to him a few derisive words. Drupada ~~departed~~, the royal youths were no longer in pupilage. The good Pândavâs thenceforward freely moved amongst the

people, always intent upon deeds of wide-spread kindness. They were the subject of everybody's talk and their valour and achievements made them general favourites, while, over and above their martial successes, their righteousness, their suavity and their condescension won for them golden opinions. While Bhîma and Arjuna stood foremost in military glory, Yudhishtîra endeared himself to everybody as one, well versed in the principles of state-craft. The unqualified praise which was thus showered on the sons of Pându reached the ears of Dhṛitarâshṭra and he too was profoundly touched. As a preliminary step to calling him to his legitimate place in the kingdom, he could not help nominating Yudhishtîra as a Yuva Rajah or heir-apparent. Yudhishtîra with his brothers formed a rare combination of political and moral wisdom with martial skill and muscular strength. This installation gave

univereal satisfaction and no voice was heard
which struck a discordant note.

CHAPTER IV.

SHADOWS.



It was the witching hour of night. The balm of refreshing sleep has to all appearance fallen on every citizen of the lunar capital. Well might this be the case so far as every righteous being was concerned. There were however two persons who were engaged in an altercation by no means conducive to that sweet repose which had fallen on the laborious student, the vigilant councillor, the anxious merchant, the self-contented philosopher and the plodding tiller of the soil under the benign rule

of Yudhishthira, who now virtually held sway. Those two persons were a fond father and a fondled son—Dhritarâshtra and Duryodhana. The cause of this altercation is as follows:—

In the nomination of Yudhishthira as Yuva Rajah, Duryodhana saw a distinct denial of his own hopes for all time to come. He feared that, before long, Yudhishthira would absorb peoples' affections, and, as a full-blown monarch, consign his branch of the family to a secondary place in the kingdom. This was gall and wormwood to him, and he began seriously to take it to heart. Night and day he brooded over the fate that doomed him to a comparative insignificance. In this feeling of bitter disappointment he was not alone. The blow that fell on him was not without its effect on his immediate brother Dussasana, whose

position was thereby proportionately lowered in the State. The two were constantly thrown together and their common misfortune made them unite their intense hatred against their worthier cousins. But they needed sympathy and co-operation. Karna—the hero that was under eternal obligations to Duryodhana as already explained—was a willing and devoted co-adjutor; but he was a fitter champion in the field of battle than a suitable accomplice for purposes of secret conspiracy. The apt instrument was, however, not far to seek. To be slighted by the paternal is the fore-runner of being petted, soothed and taken in hand by the maternal kinsmen. Such was the result in the present instance. Duryodhana's maternal uncle Sakuni—whose name has become a by-word for everything mean, low, cowardly and unrighteous—came to the help of his sor-

rowing nephews. Thus was formed an unscrupulous quartette whose power for evil proved the source of all the deeds of wickedness which eventuated in the extermination of Duryodhana and his brothers, roots and branch. This vile knot of wicked four plotted together and hit upon a hopeful scheme. They well knew that the weakness of Dhritarâshtra lay in his excessive fondness as a parent, and they were sanguine that he was liable to be insidiously operated upon. Taking advantage of this circumstance, they resolved to get him to agree to send the Pândavâs away from the capital into an unsuspected exile. To carry out this vile purpose, Duryodhana sought his father's presence and poured forth the sorrows of his heart in terms as bitter as they were painful to hear. Hence the altercation to which we have alluded. With tearful eyes and in a tremulous voice

Duryodhana delivered himself as follows :—

“ O father what a false step have you taken. I have always been in dread of the Pândavâs ; and as if to aggravate it you have advanced Yudhishtîra to the position of a Yuva Rajah. The people therefore, out of love for Yudhishtîra, care for none of us. They openly argue in all assembling places that, being a blind man, you never succeeded to the throne and are incompetent to hold sway. Therefore they give out that they would put Yudhishtîra on the throne, as he carries a ripe head over young shoulders and as he has further the help of remarkably warlike brothers. If he becomes king, he will indeed keep you and your children in affluence and comfort. So people say. They assume that none of your advisers would make any objection. I cannot bear to hear, without agony, reports such as these ; you must therefore contrive to send the Pândavâs out of this town.”

Dhṛitarashtra, after patiently listening to this plaintive tale of his son, replied as follows:—"The foremost duty of a ruler is to attend to the affairs of the kingdom in person; though I am well versed in the Vedas and Shastras and other kinds of kindred knowledge and though I am not wanting in physical strength, yet by reason of being sightless I lost my claim to the crown. Everybody knows how, on becoming king, my brother—the late Pându—conquered several countries and secured for the lunar dynasty a brilliant position and an extended empire; how he brought home vast treasures in the shape of tribute and made our authority acknowledged as the paramount power in the land. Yudhishtira and his brothers have excelled even their father by their sterling qualities, and they command universal esteem. Such being the case how could I avoid investing them with the authority,

which is justly theirs, and how can I desire them to quit the kingdom." To these representations the son answered as follows :—"If, on the score of my uncle Pându having held sway over the ancestrally-derived kingdom, his son Yudhishthira is to carry on the rule, it follows that his line of heirs would come to the throne after him ; and the result would be that the right of sovereignty would never fall to me and my posterity. I cannot submit to live under other's orders or be dependent on them. I beg of you to avert such a catastrophe. If you have a mind to make your children happy, dismiss from your thought the idea that the late Pându was, and his sons are, affectionate to you. To diminish the influence of Yudhishthira on the minds of the people, I have been making large presents and organising extensive charities for the benefit of various classes of people with a view to buy them off or humour them.

There are nevertheless hundreds of wicked men who continue devotedly partial to the sons of Pându. I therefore pray that you will manage to send the Pândavâs and their mother Kunti, together with their friends, advisers and servants, to take their abode in Vâranâvatha. Arrange to keep them there, till we shall have regained the popular esteem and secured the throne to our branch. When this would be accomplished I should not object to their return." "My son," Dhṛitarashtra rejoined "I have all along guessed some such to be your view. Your proposal is terrific and cruel. I cannot lightly promise to carry out your wishes. I cannot make bold to turn the Pândavâs adrift. Let me take counsel of such as have long been the pillars of the kingdom. It is least likely, I must confess, that they would assent to the proposal." "O My father" the son cried, "Bethink yourself that at present, the power is in your hands and that

your councillors are bound to bow to your behests. I have no doubt that the members of our family would be neutral between the Pândavâs and ourselves. Add to this that Drona's son Aswathama is my bosom friend and he will not part with me. When he stays, it is certain that affection for him will keep his father Drona and his uncle Kṛipa with us. We have to fear Vidura alone, as he has had always a leaning towards the Pândavâs ; but what harm can one individual do. I therefore entreat you, father, to remove the cause of my sleep-less nights and peaceless days." Plied with dints of persuasion such as this, the fond father yielded at last. Encouraged by his father's willingness to serve him, Duryodhana set up his courtiers to eulogise the beauties and comforts of Vâranâvatha in the hearing of Yudhishtira and his brothers. In these ways he prepared their minds to receive without suspicion the

proposal that they should, for a time, live at Vâranâvatha in the ease and comfort that attend freedom from the arduous affairs of the State. Out of sympathy with his son, the king became a consummate dissembler and, as if out of pity, proposed to his nephews that they might enjoy a long holiday in the neighbouring town of Vâranâvatha.

CHAPTER V.

PLOTTING.



ON the ensuing day the Sun rose on Hastinâpura in his wonted brilliance. Nature wore her usual face of cheerful verdure and luxuriance. The lotus flower in the mores of the fort and in the ponds of the city opened its petals and gave forth its sweet and soothing smells as if in return for the welcome warmth by which it profited. But the citizens rose from their beds by no means refreshed, and they felt an unaccountable presentiment of evil. The coming event that beforehand cast its shadow over their

hearts was the public announcement that the Pândavâs were to bid them farewell, avowedly for a time—possibly for ever. It came to pass therefore that when it was bruited abroad that Yudhishtîra and his party were bidding adieu to Hastinâpura, the entire city was in deep sorrow and thousands of the folk followed the good Pândavâs, unwilling to stay behind. They were so accustomed to the good offices and the loving kindness of the sons of Pându that they did not consider themselves happy or safe, away from them. Yudhishtîra however, by affectionate words and with promises of speedy return, induced them to stop. The report of the approach of the Pândavâs sped like the wind before them, and the good people of Vâranâvatha poured out in tens of thousands to meet them. They greeted the princes in right royal style; and the joyous reception accorded

by them was only equalled in intensity by the profound sorrow with which the people of Hastinâpura had torn themselves away. Deeply moved by the flattering manner in which they were welcomed, the princes lived agreeable and beneficent lives among the people. When Duryodhana was told how widely esteemed the departing princes were, how sadly and reluctantly the people of the town agreed to stay behind and how enthusiastically they were received at their new abode, he became extremely depressed in spirits. He felt that, though out of sight, the Pândavâs would not be out of the minds of the people ; and that, present or absent, they were equally objects of unbounded popularity. He therefore resolved that all traces of them must be effaced. To achieve this in open hostility was out of the question. The only alternative that promised any chance of

success was to dispose of them by behaving like the wolf in the sheep's clothing. He therefore dissembled friendship to them, all the while cherishing the diabolical thought of causing them to be annihilated. To hire ruffians to accomplish this purpose as a deed of midnight murder was again out of the question. None, ever so hardened or daring, could possess the nerve to near them even in their sleep; and if any such breathed, access to the apartments of Yudishthira and his brothers was impossible in the face of the faithful sentinels and devoted adherents that guarded the passage. Banishing from his mind therefore all ideas of assassins and deadly weapons, he looked to the use of fire. He despatched a messenger to Purochana, an infernal architect, and instigated him to erect at Vâranâvatha a palatial edifice, attractive by its grandeur, seductive by its superlative beauty, and destructive by the

combustible matter with which he wished its walls and foundations to be amply charged. This fascinating edifice of destruction was brought into existence with marvellous rapidity. Solicited by its builder and captivated by its attractiveness, Yudhishtira, his brothers and his mother moved into it. Yudhishtira, however was too clear-sighted and too clear-headed to be easily deluded. He pondered over the seemingly enigmatical words that Vidura had whispered in his ear at parting, and he rightly guessed that he and his party were not sent to Vâranâvatha, out of pure love or with the best of intentions. The forebodings of evil which Vidura's words implied were strongly confirmed by the impressions Yudhishtira himself received of the building. He soon concluded that the building was the result of incendiary ideas, and, breaking his suspicion to his mother and brothers, he was always on

the alert. To remove all shade of doubt, Vidura sent him a confidential messenger, giving the fullest disclosure of the homicidal aims of Duryodhana. By the help of a trusted workman, also provided by Vidura, a subterranean passage out of the building was secretly contrived, and the princes were ready to depart in time to escape being consumed in flames. According to his plan the architect set fire to the building at the appointed hour, but, thanks to the good offices of Vidura, the Pândâvas had opportunely left it empty. The day dawned; the building was in ashes; and it became soon rumoured at Hastinâpura that the Pândâvas were no more. Duryodhana unblushingly chuckled over the success of his designs, and the knot of miscreants who made common cause with him gave him their open sympathy. But the whole town was in deep mourning, as if a great calamity had fallen

upon it. The leading advisers of Dhṛitarâshṭra were beside themselves with sorrow. Their indignation at the perpetrators of the crime was openly expressed. Vidura, though aware of the secret of the Pândavâs' escape from danger, simulated ignorance and shared the general grief. So unexpected was the dreadful act and so cold-blooded was the conduct of his son that even Dhṛitarâshṭra gave way to lamentation. It must, however, be said that he had not as yet become so far depraved by his love to his children, as to refuse even sympathy with those that (he saw) were inhumanly dealt with. He therefore sincerely grieved, and ordered the funerals of the Pândavâs on a scale suitable for their dignity. While these events were happening at Hastinâpura, the fugitive Pândavâs were plunging deeper and deeper into jungles as pathless as they were infested with wild beasts. On more than one

occasion they came in contact with ferocious cannibals whom, by the exertion of preternatural strength, Bhîma put to death. The circumstances under which he met with one of them are worthy to be noted. After a long and fatiguing journey, the wandering party were smitten with an unquenchable thirst. Bhîma of Herculean strength wandered away in search of water. The rest of the party, overcome by exhaustion, spread their garments on the hard surface and with their arms for pillows fell into a slumber. Bhîma returned and saw them sleep. He would not wake them up, as he hoped that after a sound repose, they might rise greatly refreshed. As he was watching them, he fell into a train of reflections. He deplored that Yudhishthira who was fit to rule the world, had to lie like the poorest man on the hard ground; he mourned that Kunti who had been the beloved daughter of king

Bhôja, who was the widow of the famous Pându and who was the mother of heroic sons was doomed to stretch herself on the repulsive floor, notwithstanding that her sons were living and were righteous and powerful. He mourned over the fates of his brothers who drowned their miseries in sleep. His blood began to boil in his veins at the thought that, for no fault of their own but mainly on account of their many virtues, they were practically banished by the wicked Dhṛitarâshṭra and his unworthy sons, after every manner of attempt was made on their lives. Compared with the haunts of such cruel and sinful kinsmen, the forest (he said to himself) was quite a paradise. Thus embittered by the recollections of treachery to which he and his brothers were victims, and overpowered by tender emotions awakened in him by the unconscious sleep which his mother and brothers were enjoy-

ing, he vigilantly kept guard. Hidimba, a man-eater who slept in a neighbouring cave, scented man in the vicinity and despatched his sister to seize and make a dish of the persons who dared to intrude on his solitude. The sister approaches, takes a full view of the stalwart figure of the noble Bhîma and becomes enamoured of him. Her cruel brother, exasperated at the delay, rushes upon the field. A struggle ensues and Bhîma lays him dead on the ground. After a close interrogation the giant's sister is found worthy of friendship and confidence, and Bhîma, in response to her entreaty, takes her to wife with the approbation of his mother and brothers. For months together they lived in the forest which was now rid of its tyrannical master; and, when a son was born of the union between Bhîma and the cannibal's sister, the Pândavâs moved away into other places, bidding farewell

to the new born infant and its mother. After a journey of severe trials the Pândavâs arrived at last at a village on the skirts of a dense forest. Here, by their several acts of friendliness and by their having killed a cannibal that made periodical inroads into their village, they became passionately loved. Here they lived in the disguise of Brahmans and were virtually the guests of the people who were only too cheerful to have them in their midst.

CHAPTER VI.

WEDDING.



Village, unknown to fame, and on the skirts of a hill-range had a succession of quiet days and quieter nights. When a man-eating giant by name Baka, whom the neighbouring jungle had sheltered till recently and who had been making periodical raids upon them was put to the sleep that knows no break, the sparse population of the place enjoyed slumbers that knew no cares. This village of uneventful tenor of life showed, one fine morning, a strikingly lively spectacle, as throngs of travellers

sought there a brief halt to cook a hasty meal. Their numbers and their eagerness to resume their journey, stimulated the curiosity of certain sojourners in the village, and the upshot was that those sojourners themselves at once joined the party. These sojourners were the Pândavâs who were forced to live in obscurity, and the village in question was the one in which we last left them. The reason of their resolve to join the travellers was as follows :—

They heard from the latter that king Drupada had a daughter by name Droupadi, and he announced her Swayamvara (choice of a husband) under the following circumstances. When he was set free after being captured by Arjuna and insulted by Drona, as narrated in a previous chapter, two vows he took were to beget a daughter who might wed his captor and a son who could slay Drona. His prayers to the gods,

backed up with unexampled austerities, were heard, and the sacrifices he performed blessed him with such a daughter and such a son. In due time, that daughter grew up into a lovely maiden; but, to the unspeakable grief of Drupada, the sad tidings reached him that Arjuna with his mother and brothers had been by that time burnt down. Drupada was disconsolate, but he was soon assured that such a cruel doom could not have overtaken the righteous princes and that, if the news of a pretended Swayamvara of his daughter were published throughout the length and breadth of the country, the Pândavâs would emerge out of the obscurity in which, it was assumed, they would be living. This scheme had the intended effect. Arjuna and his brothers, learning of the Swyamvara from the travellers, joined them in their march to Drupada's capital. On their arrival there

they took up lodgings in an out-of-the-way alley and lived an unobtrusive life till the day arrived for the choice of a bridegroom. Grand were the preparations made at Pân-châlâ for the reception of the numerous princes that were expected to come. On the day appointed and for some days previous, myriads of people poured into the town to witness the splendour and take part in the feasts and rejoicings, incident to the occasion. The town resounded with the continuous rumbling of thousands of chariot-wheels, and the city, with the divers ensigns and the diversified dresses, impressing the eye on every side, looked quite like an epitome of the gorgeous East. The orb of day rose in its utmost effulgence as if in it were concentrated the united brilliance of all the twelve suns, hallowed in Vedic pages and as if the author of the solar race of Aryan line of kings was

not slow to rejoice at the prospect of a prince of the lunar dynasty achieving a matrimonial exploit which could well compare with a similar triumph of the hero of the Ramayana. The grounds, chosen for bringing together the assemblage of royal personages who were coming to compete for the hand of the bride, were appropriately selected and excellently decorated. There were, all around, avenues of trees that cast a thick and friendly shade, as if to welcome the gathering spectators. There were wells in the vicinity, furnished with flights of steps reaching to clear and sparkling waters. There were seats carefully graded to accomodate the royal guests according to their rank. There was the mammoth pavilion under which was lit the bridal fire and in which was a galaxy of the princes, the priest, the bride and a host of brahmans whose benedictions were earnestly sought for.

The appointed hour arrived, but it was a good while before the bustle and uproar subsided. When silence was partly restored, Drushtadyumna, a brother of the bride, stepped forward and thus addressed the assemblage:—“Princes” he said “you have been invited to compete for the hand of my sister. The condition to be fulfilled is to take up the mighty bow, laid near the bridal fire, to bend it and with five arrows to bring down the imitation-fish fluttering aloft yonder there. You must however remember that, when you take the aim you should fix your eyes—not on the object itself—but on its reflection in the sheet of water below. Whoever fulfils this condition will forth-with receive round his neck the gay garland, gracing my sister’s hands.” Upon the most, this announcement had a supremely dispiriting effect. Some even of martial renown thought it discreet to abstain from making the attempt. There

were however a few* who, in their ungovernable love to possess themselves of the bride and too proud of themselves, were foolhardy enough to venture forth. Two or three—among them Karna—neared the bow; but failed to bend it. The best of the royal princes falling short of ultimate success, a youth emerged out of the crowd of brahmans, and, with steps as confident as dignified, advanced towards the bow. He looked a brahman, and divers were the thoughts that occurred to the observers. Some were moved to a contemptuous smile that the work which defied the disciplined powers of well-known heroes should be undertaken by a youngster of the priestly order; and they set it down to conceit such as betokened ignorance to take a proper view of one's abilities. Others who were more considerate took it for granted that, unless the new candidate felt conscious of his superior skill

in archery, he would not make the trial. They were impressed strongly in his favor, by reason of his robust frame, brightness of his face, the dignity of his bearing, and his obvious piety. They, like Droupadi, whose heart was instinctively drawn to him and who already inwardly prayed for his success, half-wished that he should come off triumphant. In the midst of these conflicting emotions regarding him, the aspirant approached the mighty bow, made his obeisance to the guru and the elders that were present there, reverently went round the bow, and, lifting up and bending it with admirable ease, let fly the five arrows which in an instant brought down the imitation-fish, which had quivered in the air. Every one present was stunned with astonishment. The thunders of applause were ineffable. The words of self-glorifying gratulation, that issued forth from the crowds of the elated

brahmans, was deafening, and there was a universal awe at what seemed to illustrate the marvellous powers of the sacerdotal caste. Everybody wondered if the successful hero was really a mere brahman—many conjecturing that he might be some god or angel that assumed the human shape to win this bride of superlative beauty. The youth was no other than Arjuna in the brahman guise. Taking advantage of the tumultuous rejoicing, Yudishthira left the place unperceived, followed by his two last brothers. The hero of the day stood before the assemblage the *cynosure* of every eye. Droupadi, who had impatiently awaited the beck of her brother, moved forward, gracefully but trembling with emotion, and placed the wreath jessamine round Arjuna's neck. This roused of the ire and wounded the pride of the royal assemblage. Recovering from the confusion and the wonder, which had for a time over-

taken them, the more pugnacious of them raised a chorus of protest. What business, they asked, had Drupada thus studiously to bring them together and humiliate them. They had, they said, nothing to complain of their successful rival as he only obtained the girl by fulfilling the condition prescribed; but they imagined they had a just grievance against the king of Pâñchâla on the ground that, after they had all come, he imposed an all-but-impossible ordeal. Persuaded by this species of false arguments, they threw down the gauntlet to King Drupada. Drupada, being the host, naturally stood silent, and a great commotion seemed imminent. At this juncture Arjuna came to the front and quieted all fears by accepting the task of restoring peace and quiet. By his side stood Bhîma, in all the consciousness of his indomitable strength. A struggle ensued between the noble pair on the one hand and the

querulous princes on the other. The single combat between Arjuna and Karna, was particularly worthy of note. After an obstinate fight for a time Karna confessed himself beaten and retired, wondering the while, who his opponent might be. The voice of bravado was silenced. The strife was nearly at an end. The mal-contents only wanted an excuse to retire gracefully, and they found one in the words of a personage who henceforward befriended the Pandavas and proved their steadfast guide and the bulwark of their conquering might. This was Kristna, divinely wise—one too who was not a stranger to the lunar race. He was sprung in the branch of one Yadu, who was the eldest son of a former representative of the lunar dynasty, but from whom his irate father diverted the crown generations back, in a fit of selfish rage. This exclusion from the right of primogeniture did not, however, make

Yadu and his descendants utter strangers to the ruling branch. Matrimonial alliances were kept up, and the connecting link between them at this time of the story was Kunti, who was on the one hand the mother of the Pândavâs and on the other the paternal aunt of Kristna. Kristna's exploits in the field of battle were unquestionably vast in number and magnitude ; but, without in the least losing the fame of a matchless warrior of his age, he manifested a preferential aptitude for the direction of affairs as a counsellor. It was in this latter character that, come there pre-determined to befriend him, he figured when Arjuna non-plussed his unsuccessful competitors by his unequivocal victory. Prompted by his secret (yet natural) affection for the Pândavâs, he placed the matter in a clear light and argued that the fault was no more Drupada's than their own ; for they had

themselves elected to appear on the scene without caring to know the precise conditions that were in prospect. As if fresh light was thrown on the subject by these words of Kristna, the mal-contents seemed satisfied and retired—not however without having been taught a sharp lesson for their fool-hardiness. The assembled crowds dispersed, saying to one another that all was well that ended well and that, under Providence, true merit met with its adequate reward. Arjuna however took leave of the King and went to his obscure lodging in company with his brother Bhima and the newly acquired bride. Here they were soon visited by Kristna, and that day were laid the foundations for a lasting, visible friendship between that personage and the Pândâvas, Arjuna in particular. The king of Pânchâla, who would not recall his word though he knew naught of the successful hero,

began to feel unhappy when his darling daughter went out of sight. Under the irresistible impulse of nature, he yearned to know who they were, among whom his daughter was thenceforth to be. With the instinctive fondness of a parent, he besought his son to follow Arjuna without exciting suspicion, and to gather what information he could regarding the persons, with whom he became thus newly allied. • In obedience to his father's directions, Drushtadhyumna watched their movements and eagerly drank in every syllable they uttered. Feeling reassured by their language, which implied an intimate familiarity with the military art, he returned to his father and assured him that the new alliance was evidently a highly creditable one, in as much as the members of the family to which his sister became transferred, spoke mostly of arms and feats of archery such as evidenced a noble royal

extraction. Gratified by his account, the king openly sent an invitation to his new allies. No longer did they think it needful to conceal their identity. They threw the mask away, and, seating themselves in chariots suitable for kingly personages with their mother and the newly acquired bride, alighted soon at Drupada's palace. They lost not a moment in announcing themselves to be the Pândavâs, and everybody that heard it was in ecstacies of joy. The rapturous tidings were widely published, and the whole town was electrified by mingled feelings of sincere pleasure and solemn wonder. An early day was fixed for the marriage-festivities, and, under the direction and sanction of the law-giver Vyasa and of their mother, Kunti, the five Pândavâs wedded Droupadi in succession. With the king of Pâñchâla becoming by this event a tower of strength, and, with Kristna

as their guide, philosopher and friend, a turn had come in the fortunes of the Pândavâs, which soon lifted them, from the position of friendless fugitives, to an altitude of political greatness amounting to unqualified supremacy in the land.

CHAPTER VII.

COMPROMISE.



HE miraculous escape, the illustrious exploits and the enviable good fortune of the Pândavâs were not long in reaching the ears of Duryodhana. He was beside himself with fury and grief, and his jealousy rose in proportion. The dread of the Pândavâs unaccountably lurked and lingered in his mind, notwithstanding their presumed death, and it now blazed out thousandfold. A prey to voiceless despondency, he held secret counsel with his reckless brother Dusyasana, his sworn partisan Karna and his wily uncle Sakuni.

The wicked trio, whose advice he sought, actuated him to work upon the parental weakness of Dritharashtra and instigate him to part the Pândavâs and the king of Pâncâlâ. Duryodhana distinctly realized to himself how the Pândavâs became powerfully allied to Drupada and how, acting under the orders of Kristna, all the heroes of the Yadavas would in all likelihood prove fiery partisans of his virtuous cousins. These considerations made him conclude that the sole method of rendering the Pândavâs powerless was to break up the powerful confideracy, giving no immediate cause for its use. In the meanwhile, Vidura, who had all along secretly felt seere of the deliverance of the Pândavâs from what seemed certain destruction, was gratified beyond measure with their splendid success at Drupada's Court. He lost no time in approaching Dritharashtra with the glad news. Dritharashtra was now

quite a different man to what he had been. The insidious attempt of Duryodhana and his clique to poison his mind had had its full effect, and the latter was rendered callous to all wholesome influences and to the attractions of virtue. His love for his children has now become the ruling passion, and all his deeds and words received their character from that dominant sentiment. Vidura's high-souled counsel proved distasteful, and, as is always the case with men of depraved minds, Dhritarashtra became an arch-hypocrite. He therefore seemed gratified with the tidings that the Pândavâs were safe and were eminently distinguishing themselves; but when he was alone he deeply sighed at the thought that the Pândavâs had for ever shattered all chances of his branch holding the lunar sceptre. While in this frame of mind, his son found him and played upon a sympathetic chord. Long was the

appeal and pathetic was the eloquence that the son applied to the fast degenerating mind of the father. Finally the father and the son agreed in the conclusion that the only policy open to them was to effect a separation between the Pândavâs and their recent allies. Dhṛitharâshṭra, however, could not make bold to determine how to proceed. He was conscious that he wielded power, only by sufferance, and that any precipitate action on his part would at once disgust Vidura and others whose sagacity and heroism sustained the majesty of authority in the kingdom. He felt that, should he alienate them, it would inevitably augment Yudhishṭhira's chances in asserting his legitimate rights. Though therefore he was extremely anxious to meet his son's wishes, he had discretion enough to think that he should not act without consulting these pillars of the

realm. He spoke to his son in terms of sympathy, but took time to consider how he would act. Before long, Dhṛitha-râshṭra called into his presence his chief advisers. A conclave of these sagacious men was never convened for purposes of greater moment. The problem before it was to reconcile vile ambition with indisputable claims. It was also to disarm anger justly provoked, and bring men of unflagging virtue into harmony with others, dominated by ever-increasing jealousy and fiendish hatred. The task was seemingly a hopeless one. It was like an attempt to make light and darkness or right and wrong stand together. Great though the problem was, far greater were the talent and wisdom that the council-chamber contained. Pre-eminent among those present was Bhishma whose very name imports unswerving and terrible resolu-

teness of purpose. He was now indeed in the vale of years. But he had seen three generations of lunar sovereigns and marked his career with countless deeds of matchless valour. Early in life, he gave proof of unexampled self-sacrifice by taking a vow of life-long celibacy and abdicating the throne in favour of his future step-brothers, and thereby compassing a marriage between his love-lorn father and a lady, whose parents demanded a condition to that effect. Ever since he grew to man's estate, he proved a tower of strength; and while his victories put the enemy to flight in the past, recollections of them now operated to instil terror into the minds of foes who, at rash moments, might meditate an invasion into the territories, subject to lunar sway. His fame as green as ever, his heroism unabated, his name still acting like a spell to dissolve hostile troops from without, he was nevertheless

doomed to sorrow and dismay, at sight of internecine feuds with which Duryodhana and his partisans threatened the peace of the royal household, bringing, in their wake, usurpation, tarnished fame, and wholesale and widespread bloodshed among the God's noble creatures on earth. As yet, his voice in the council was happily potent as the voice of one of the two oldest members of the lunar race, and his advice had been substantially accepted. It now remained to be seen how far the deference, shown to him hitherto, would prevail in the present juncture. The other old member of the lunar dynasty was Bahlika, who was the junior uncle of Bishma on the father's side. He uniformly echoed Bishma's views and was thus a valuable colleague in the cause of justice. Next to these was Vidura, whose signal and opportune services in the cause of persecuted virtue and outraged innocence have

already been noted on more than one occasion. He had not indeed cared to figure in the military line; so much so that he never was once in the battle-field. The sphere of his sterling efforts was, beyond doubt, the council chamber, and there he was absolutely without an equal. Justice was his load star, and truth was the orbit in which he moved, with planetary certitude and precision. His advice was always without bias. Not caring for others' smiles and frowns, but caring only for the approbation of the still, small unerring voice within, he never once minced matters, when outspokenness was imperative, in the interests of the state, or of the purity of the lunar escutcheon. He too like Bhishma noticed with an aching heart how the beginnings of a domestic rupture were betraying themselves and how the breach was widening day by day, threatening to terminate in

an open and deplorable fratricidal war. He too was as yet held in esteem however, and his sound advice had up till now been therefore assented to, however unpalatable it was and howsoever it ran counter to Dhṛitharâshṭra's conceptions of his son's advancement. These, in strictness, were the colossal pillars on which the lunar kingdom rested, and it must be said to their eternal credit that they read alike the signs of the times, that they always held counsel together, and made it the sacred mission of their lives to alleviate the virulence, if not to root out the seat, of the gangrene that was corroding into the royal household. Droṇa, Kṛipā and Aswatthama have also been, for some time, admitted into the ranks of councillors; and it must be said to their credit as well that they generally agreed in the advice given by Vidura and Bhishma. Dhṛitharâshṭra's son was soon

there with his infamous co-conspirators. The stern exigencies of the moment dismissed all reserve, and every one felt bound to speak out his mind boldly. Bhishma opened the debate by reminding Dhṛitharâshṭra how, by reason of his visual disability, the crown had passed away from him; how his younger brother Pându had therefore succeeded to the throne; how at his death Yudhisthira became the next successor; and how, solely on the score of the minority of that prince he (Dhṛitharâshṭra) held the reins of Government in his hands. Adverting to these facts, he pointed out that Dhṛitharâshṭra and his sons had no manner of claim to the kingdom and that his only chance lay in the extreme probability that, in case the leading men in Hastinâpura advised it, Yudhisthira would agree to a partition of the kingdom to avoid war and bloodshed. He

emphasised the wisdom of acting on this policy without loss of time and before the Pândavâs would be driven to abdicate the attitude of deference which they as yet maintained towards a section, at least, of Dhṛitharâshṭra's advisers. Droṇa, Kṛipa and Aswatthama spoke in like strain, while Vidura concurred in the expediency of this course, though he did not hesitate to avow that, in strictness, it practically robbed the Pândavâs of half of their inheritance to favour the sons of Dhṛitharâshṭra. The greed of Duryodhana was not satisfied with this advice. He had unbounded faith in his own muscular strength and in his skill in wielding the mace. He regarded himself as Bhima's equal, if not his superior. Next he viewed in Karna a fitting match for Arjuna, and he believed that the remaining three Pândavâs could not but be overwhelmed by his own brothers

who were thirty three times their number. Thus Pândavâs, by themselves, had not, in his view, the remotest chance of conquering him and his brothers, even if these latter stood by themselves. Add to this, however, that on his side were others *viz* Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, and Aswatthama, to whom there were no parallels on the other side and who had every motive to cast their lots with him. He did not lose sight of the fact that Drupada would fight for the Pândavâs; but, even if he did, the balance of strength was, he thought, immeasurably on his own side. Having regard to this enormous preponderance of advantage, he was against the policy of conciliation or of compromise.

Apart from these considerations, he secretly cherished the hope that, before long, there might be dis-union among the Pândavâs themselves by reason of

their having one wife between them. Should enough of time be allowed to elapse, such a disunion, he fancied, must inevitably ensue, and it must bring in its wake the defection of Drupada. To allow time for this consummation and to take steps to kindle and foster conjugal jealousy in the meantime seemed, for these reasons, the most eligible course in the eye of Duryodhana. He would attach no importance to the fact that puissant Kṛistna was a devoted friend of the Pândavâs; for he fondly hoped that, as Kṛistna's elder brother Bala Rama was in the same degree *his* friend, he might neutralize Kṛistna's endeavours and counsel the Yâdavâs to keep aloof from both sides.

Karna stood up for the policy of immediate aggression, urging that as yet the Pândavâs and Drupada were alone allied, and a march at once on Pâñchâlâ would lead to the over-

throw of both of them, beyond all chances of redemption. A goodly knot of conceited youth, who had in recent years acquired undue weight and voice in the politics of the State, concurred with Duryodhana and Karna who both agreed in their opposition to a partition of the kingdom. Protracted and vehement therefore was the altercation that ensued, and each of the four traditional methods of dealing with an enemy was duly weighed and powerfully urged.

Dritharâshtra, after lending a listening ear to these various representations, felt that there was much in the plausible views of his son and Karna; but, he was too sensible of Sree Kristna as a potent factor on the other side, and he thought it prudent to speak as if influenced by the opinion of his elderly councilors. As though he would lose no time in making amends for his past neglect, he announced his readiness to submit to a division

of the kingdom between his sons and his nephews, secretly trusting to the potentialities of the future for opportunities to suppress the Pândavâs altogether.

Vidura who was deputed to convey this message of love repaired to Pâncchâla to bring the Pândavâs back to Hastinâpura. The proposal with which he was entrusted was placed before the Pândavâs and their allies and well-wishers, Drupada and Kṛistna. Acceptance of the proffered terms seemed to all to be on the whole the most merciful, if not altogether the most eligible, course, having regard to the interests of peace and humanity. Forgetting and forgiving the many acts of unprecedented cruelty and treachery practised towards them, the Pândavâs took leave of Drupada and were on their way to Hastinâpura.

When the report of their return reached Hastinâpura, there was quite a furor of joy

among the people of the town. They *en masse* went forward to welcome the coming princes, and it was at once clear that, by their brief period of absence, the Pândavâs materially gained rather than lost in popularity. Amid acclamations of the people, they entered the city and were soon prostrating themselves before their uncle and the other elderly personages at the royal court. A partition was forthwith effected, and the historic capital of the lunar race was retained by Dritharâshṭra.

This led to the Pândavâs founding the city of Indraprasta as their chief city for their newly formed kingdom. It was built by the angelic architect, Visvakarma, in obedience to the wishes of Kṛistna. It was a town in every way worthy to be the favoured capital of the noble band of heroic virtue. It was advantageously situated on the banks of the Jumna. It was furnished with battlements and with

devises and mechanisms best suited for arresting the progress of the advancing enemy. It was surrounded by a deep and impassable moat, floating a profusion of the lotus and the lily which, opening their petals alternating with the day and the night, were like unto hosts of guards keeping vigilant watch by turns with their unclosed eyes. There were numbers of gardens replete with the Malli, the Katakî and the Sampangi conveying through the soft breeze their rich and odorous treasures. The sumptuous edifices, built along the banks of the river, warranted men, who were inclined to indulge in hyperbole, in saying that their tops rose to penetrate the regions of Indra and their inverted reflections in the adjoining waters dived down as so many flights of steps to the depths of Pâthâla, to gladden the subjects of the great Bli. Its situation amid groves of ancient and umbrageous trees secured a wealth of shade which helped to

moderate the noon-day heat.. It became the centre of attraction to multitudes of good and righteous men of the four castes. In a word, it at once rose in fame and importance, so as to challenge a favourable comparison with the best cities in the land of Bharata, and its inhabitants walked in the path of rectitude under the magnetic influence of their rulers.

In such a city of unrivalled splendour and charms and over the expanding territories brought under its sway, the Pândavâs were righteously striving to increase their usefulness and exert their imperial suzerainty. Here they were constantly attended by their purohit Dhoumya and were repeatedly visited by Vyasa whose advice was inestimable to them. To avoid any occasion for differences and agreeably to the advice of the lawgiver Vyasa, Droupadi was the wife of each Pândavâ for a year by turns. So sacredly and firmly were the Pândavâs resolved to

observe this compact that each of them took an inviolable oath that, except when it was his turn, he would regard Droupadi as his brother's wife and would not so much as approach the apartments where she might chance to be. Should any of them act in breach of that oath, they vowed that he should undergo the penalty of leaving the kingdom on a protracted pilgrimage. Rigidly adhering to these good resolutions and striving to increase the happiness of their subjects, the Pândavâs acquired a world-wide fame for righteous men and exemplary rulers.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ZENITH.



ON a lovely evening, when the Sun had half sunk below the horizon, when the Zephyr was blowing softly, spreading far and wide the flowery fragrance coming from the adjoining gardens and from the moat and the ponds in and round a well-fortified palace, an adolescent youth of heroic bearing was having a stroll in front of the royal residence, refreshed by the gentle breeze and regaled by the rich odours which it brought. He suddenly checks himself; he starts at what looked like a spectre. It is soon within his ken, and

his ears catch an affrighted shriek in which the words "Robber" and "flying" are alone discernible. The youth rushes into the nearest rooms. The weapons ready to hand are seized at once. A chase follows and is followed by property rescued and flung to the mourning owner. The grateful recipient is in ecstasy and his earnest blessing is won.

All this was the work of a few minutes; for the youth who played the noble part was Arjuna, who was taking air out of the palace in Indraprasta and who acted on the instant on waking up to the fact that a Brahmin was robbed, and the robber was in flight. Returning home he discovered that the apartments whence he brought out the bow and arrows were those in which Yudhishtira and Droupadi were together. Out of regard for his vow, he asked his brother's leave to go on his pilgrimage of penance. It was vainly pressed upon him that the

vow was not broken in the spirit, and that the righteousness of the object atoned for the unintended offence. But Arjuna refused to admit the force of the argument. After some discussion he obtained the permission of his brothers to go forth on a sacred journey. Accompanied by a number of learned Brahmins he set out on his expiatory tour, not without a pleasurable, secret hope that he might visit Dwaraka and secure the hand of Krishna's maiden sister, Subhadra, of whose superlative beauty and amiable disposition he had heard eloquent accounts. Visiting various places and rivers sacred by tradition, and numerous kingdoms known to fame, Arjuna was led by his longing for Subhadra to Krishna's capital. He was sure that Krishna would be agreeable to his view; but he was not as certain that Krishna's elder brother Balarama, who had a notorious partiality for Duryodhana, would

consent to the match. Secretly informed of Arjuna's arrival in the vicinity, his devoted friend Kṛistna paid him a private visit. Learning his wishes to wed Subhadra, he suggested a hopeful contrivance. He explained how Balarama was peculiarly partial to ascetics and how, if Arjuna assumed that character, he could find ready admittance to the royal house. This plan was only too cheerfully assented to. When the day broke, Arjuna looked the perfect specimen of a Yogi. The news of the arrival of such a sacred personage in the neighbourhood instantly reached the ears of Balarama and he made haste to give him hearty welcome. The pretended despiser of the world's pleasures received the utmost attention, and was finally solicited by Balarama to be the honored guest of the Yādâvas for a few months. Arjuna acquiesced, and was soon in the garden

of the palace, seated in a profoundly devotional attitude under the shade of an umbrageous tree. It was the custom, in those frank and reverential days of austere and unbending virtue, to appoint maiden girls of the house to render services to men of holiness; and Subhadra was accordingly deputed to attend on the pretended Sanyasi. When Arjuna saw her with his own eyes, he was struck by her superb beauty and he said to himself that it was a beauty which excelled by far the reports that had travelled of it. A few anxious days elapse. Subhadra's attentions are assiduous and unintermitting; and she soon falls into familiar converse with the disguised Arjuna. During one of such occasions, profoundly touched by the impassioned language of Subhadra in her inquiries after Arjuna, he awakes to a warm response in her heart to his ardent

love, and he throws the mask away. The native bashfulness of the maiden instantly asserts itself, and she withdraws and makes herself scarce. Kṛistna had however anticipated such a hitch, and he had instructed his wives Rukmani and Sathia to be on the alert so that Arjuna might not starve. A few anxious weeks thus rolled on, and a day of popular and general festivity arrived. Agreeably to the custom on such an occasion, the entire population of the town seek a neighbouring Isle to disport themselves: The town is virtually empty, and the time is opportune for celebrating the marriage between Arjuna and Subhadra in private and for them to quit the city. These objects were gained with the secret help of Kṛistna and the newly wedded pair were instantly on the highway to Indraprastha. The sentinels rush in, but fail to resist the flight of the happy

couple. The alarm is given, and Balarama hears it. He waxes wroth at this evident impudence of Arjuna, and he and his friends talk of a chase. Kṛistna's guidance is sought and he pleads for acquiescence in what was on all hands past cure. The marriage knot, he said, was beyond untying and the pair were, without doubt, worthy of each other. No sooner was it clear that Kṛistna was averse to hostile measures than everybody fell in with his view of the situation. The offence was condoned, and messages of friendship sped to the Pândavâs. Before a week was over, an auspicious day was fixed for festivities in honor of the marriage and they went off with a joy as universal as it was genuine. This new bond of connection had a deep political import. It united the Pândavâs with the Yâdavâs as a like event had won for them a powerful

ally in Pânchalâ's ruler. This triple alliance was without an example in strength and splendour. Kristna was from hence an all-but constant companion of Arjuna; and they spent several pleasant hours together. On one of such occasions, they received from a Brahmin the proposal that a neighbouring jungle, peopled by cannibals and known as the Khandava, needed clearing and subjugation. For this task Arjuna received from his informant a mighty bow, famed as Gandiva, a pair of quivers that would furnish a never-ending supply of arrows, and a war-chariot, proof against all kinds of weapons. Kristna too received from the same source his world-famed disc and a mace of unassailable strength. The mighty pair went forth to battle and their recently won weapons, added to their native heroism, secured an unqualified success after an obstinate strug-

gle. After this masterly achievement, the friends blithely went home, the fame of the deed spreading far and wide. An architect, who vied with the builder for angels in high structural skill, escaped in consequence of Arjuna's mercy in the recent struggle. He stood before his deliverer and begged to render a tribute of gratitude such as he would name. Arjuna referred him to Kristna, and the latter desired the great builder to construct a hall, worthy of a place in Indraprastha and of acceptance by Yudhishthira. Assenting to the proposal the architect cheerfully set about his work. He soon produced a hall, the like of which the world never saw and may never see. The materials employed were rare and beyond all price. The workmanship was admirable. The ceiling shone like an expanse of gold, bespangled with brilliants that vied for splendour with the stars of heaven. The

pillars were massive and were resplendent as if set with precious stones. There were specimens of optical illusions of marvellous kinds. The eye was deluded by the view of a watery sheet, where there was none. There was again the impression of *terra firma* lent to liquid expanse. The grounds that encircled the edifice were laid out with unrivalled taste and skill. There were on these grounds unnumbered water-springs and floral and horticultural rarities. There were, besides, many a mechanical contrivance which attracted vast multitudes of sight-seers day after day. Such were the splendid additions which the grateful architect made to the already splendid city. Days seemed to come and go to the Pândavâs, bringing nothing but unalloyed happiness. While in the enjoyment of what seemed to them the summum bonum of human felicity, the sage Narada paid an

unexpected visit. He incited them to a high exploit of religious import and regal ambition. He explained to them how the great Pându had established himself as the emblem of paramount power in the land and how, if they were worthy of such a father, they should aspire to a similar dignity. This, he said, was due to the memory of their great ancestors and was for sooth expected of them as a proof of piety and of laudable ambition alike. Deeply moved by these words of counsel, Yudhishthira took advice from his brothers and friends and resolved to perform the politico-religious ceremonial known as the Rajasuya. A few words would explain the nature of this ceremonial. It is, at the first blush, one with spiritual aims. But it entails on such as undertook it, a Dik Vijia or the antecedent task of a triumphal tour through all known countries near and far. Its avowed ob-

ject was to invite the different Rajahs of the country to attend at the ceremonial. But as the offer of presents was expected on such an occasion, and such an act betokened subordination to the author of the ceremonial, to conquer such as declined to respond to the call became an evident duty. It became thus in effect a career of ambition, with universal sovereignty as its unmistakable goal. Before determining on the point Yudhishtira despatched a messenger to Krishna to come and finally advise on this seemingly perilous step. Krishna arriving and concurring, Yudhishtira's four brothers marched in the directions of the four points of the compass, at the head of vast armies. Rulers of several kingdoms submitted with a good grace and offered rich presents, promising more when they visited Indraprastha on the occasion of the ceremonial. Others again who were blind to their inferiority

to the Pândavâs, were brought, after a brief period of resistance, to a sense of their comparative insignificance. Thus did the brothers of Yudhishthira penetrate into regions never before visited by an Indian prince. Welcomed or conquering everywhere, the brothers succeeded in getting Yudhishthira virtually acknowledged as the Lord paramount in the land and came home laden with treasures as untold as they were various. Grand preparations then began for the approaching ceremonial. The wisest of sages, the holiest of Brahmins, and the bravest of Kings were in attendance; while Bhîshma, Drona and other warriors of Hastinâpura, following Duryodhana and his brothers, were likewise there in response to the invitation sent to them. There was, too, Sisupâla, a relative of the Pândavâs but an insolent dispenser of Kṛistna. Amid the galaxy of noble personages, shone with unrivalled lustre Sri

Kṛistna, divinely great. The question was soon raised in the assembly as to who should receive the foremost honor and be thereby chosen the protector of the ceremony. The pious Bhîshma at once named the redoubtable Kṛistna, and Sahadeva, acting on the advice and obedient to Yudhishthira's orders, gave the betel and nut to him. This course roused the wrath of the doomed Sisupala. He broke forth into invectives against Bhîshma for advising and Kṛistna for accepting the highest honors of the day. This soon caused a great commotion, and for a moment it seemed as if the peaceful close of the ceremonial would be seriously endangered. When Sisupâla's impudence reached the full measure of guiltiness, Kṛistna laid him dead on the ground with one stroke and it instantly restored perfect tranquillity. The ceremonial then went smoothly on and reached its last stage to the satisfaction of every one. It

fell to the lot of very few to attempt such a ceremonial, and it was the good fortune of fewer still to be crowned with so complete a success. The day of the ceremonial proved the day on which the Pândavâs established their undisputed supremacy over the kingdoms of the land. But alas! it was also the day on which the malignant feelings of Duryodhana reached the climax. It would be an injustice to him to suggest that his feeling of hatred towards the Pândavâs was ever dead in him. It was dormant. It was rankling in his bosom. Now he could no longer control it. The gaieties of the occasion were gall and wormwood to him. What was the Zenith of glory to the Pândavâs proved to him a source of unutterable anguish. The wheel of fortune which, in its revolution had taken up the Pândavâs, in pathless jungles and homeless wanderings had now advanced them to the

highest point of felicity. The cup of bitter misery, which the Pândavâs had drunk to the very dregs, became now one of bliss full to the brim. The next revolution of that wheel of fortune and the very overflowing of that cup of bliss presaged harm, and the fates seem to have grimly ordained, as a fiery ordeal of virtue, that the good Pândavâs should for a time succumb to cruel wrongs at the hands of the implacable Duryodhana and his unscrupulous confederates.

CHAPTER IX.

CABAL.



THE ceremonial ended. The feast was over. The guests dispersed. The air rang with the praise of Yudhishtira. All hearts swelled with generous satisfaction. There were but two souls which relished not this wide-spread gladness. They were the souls of Duryodhana and his brother Dussasana. They could not bear to see themselves thus cast into the shade. They seemed indeed pleased when they took leave of the Pândavâs; but they inwardly vowed not to rest till they robbed and humbled them. This wicked desire har-

rowed Duryodhana's heart night and day. Luxuries had lost all charm for him. Food he loathed. Convivial joyousness forsook him. To fret, to pine away and to be uncertain-tempered—this became his altered nature. His friends took alarm. They besought him in vain to divulge the cause of this startling change. But he was moody ; he was reticent.

The news reached his fond father's ears ; and he ordered the son into his presence. There were also come his loyal friend Karna and his maternal uncle Sakuni. A few words from Duryodhana sufficed to make it manifest that this world, wide as it was, was not, in Duryodhana's view, wide enough to hold him and Yudhishtira as reigning monarchs. It was clear as noon-day that Dhṛitharâshṭra must either despair of his son's happiness and life or help him in compassing the spoliation and ruin of his nephews. No other alternative seemed

open, and the father was deeply distressed. He pointed out that Duryodhana was now without the shadow of an excuse for complaint, for the ancestrally-derived and historic crown of the lunar race was, beyond all cavil, secured for him and his progeny. He enlarged, by way of contrast, on the short-lived character of such kingdoms as the one newly founded by the Pândavâs, resting as they must on the special personal merits of the founders, and doomed, after them, to crumble under the very weight of their rapidly-piled-up greatness. He called attention to the fact that the Pândavâs bore him no sort of ill-will but were on the contrary dealing with him with the utmost cordiality, notwithstanding that he richly deserved their merciless hate. He finally explained that, while no direct harm need be feared from the Pândavâs, the indirect gain of possessing such powerful kinsmen on terms of good

understanding was incalculable, as it would cow down and deter all those that were either inimical to, or envious of him.

This reasoning, so cogent, so well-put and so calculated to administer comfort and carry conviction to a mind amenable to wholesome impressions, produced on Duryodhana only a contrary effect. His singular faculty of looking away at things interpreted this into meaning that, after all, the long-standing prestige of the lunar race counted for nothing in securing for him the meed of imperial sway, that in his generation at least, he must occupy a comparatively secondary place in the world's esteem and that his own safety rested, not so much on any abiding strength in his kingdom, as on the voluntary forbearance of the Pândavâs on the one hand and the dread their enemies had of their intercession on the other. The historic crown of the lunar race which encircled his brow bore no

comparison with the brilliant renown that the Pândavâs had won. The list of glorious deeds, of which that crown was the emblem, paled before the illumined catalogue of the unparalleled exploits which the Pândavâs achieved. The gorgeous hall, which has been handed down as the Durbar Hall in the historic capital, was homeliness itself compared with the sabha which was the grateful gift to them from the superhuman architect, Maya. The heaps of gold and of precious stones, which had been gathered during generations of lunar greatness, were but like hillocks by the side of the Himalayan piles of variegated stores which the sons of Pându earned from all the quarters of the then-known globe. The politico-religious ceremony at which he was present shone with a lustre which surpassed in grandeur even the poetical accounts of similar ceremonies of the ages past. By reason of these, the Pândavâ-

vâs were admired, feared or loved for their own sake, while, if he was at all secure from aggressions, it was due only to the dread inspired by his cousins.

Unable to reason down Duryodhana's mind, harrowed by thoughts such as these, the fond father yielded at last. There only remained the method to be discussed which should be adopted. Of the four traditional methods, the first three were summarily discarded for obvious reasons. On the fourth method, namely an appeal to arms, the debate lingered a while, for Karna was there and stood up for it. Karna however stood alone in this advocacy. He was without doubt a considerable warrior and had indeed good reason to be proud as such. But he was too haughty to be alive to similar merits in others. In him the talent of egotism was devolped to its utmost perfection, while the bump of reverence was conspicuous by its entire absence,

His heroic outbursts were, for this reason, too often like bluster, and his view of men and things proved, in too many cases, to be erring, ill-judged and miscalculating. Dhritarâshtra, Sakuni and Duryodhana, who were keenly alive to the advantage that Pândavâs would enjoy in the battle field, calmly discounted the confidence of Karma and eschewed war as a means in the case in question. Then there was a silence for a while, and it was a period of agonising and irritating suspense. But it was soon broken by Sakuni, who, being a consummate dicer of the day, proposed to wreck the Pândavâs, literally, at the hazard of the die. At this suggestion Duryodhana's heart bounded with instant and uncontrollable joy, as he knew that Yudhishthiara was known to be addicted to the game of dice and that, as a scrupulous observer of the code of honor obtaining among royal personages, he would too surely accept the

invitation to join in such a diversion ; for in those days it was a traditional rule of etiquette that no king should decline such a challenge—a rule dictated perhaps by a desire to provide a bloodless, though discreditable, alternative for war as a means of gratifying grasping greed of power and territory.

Though Duryodhana felt his strength in the double weakness of Yudhishthira, he found that the proposal was too horrible even to his too fond parent. Duryodhana nevertheless made up his mind. He knew the nature of his father too well to be scared by the first ebullition of disapproval on the latter's part. When it had spent itself, he plied his parent with assiduity and ultimately extorted the requisite sanction. Appearances had however to be kept up and suspicions should be allayed. With this view Duryodhana professed to have been prompted by a desire to build a hall in imitation of the

one at Yudhishthira's capital. The best skill was employed and the most precious materials were procured. Before many months were over, a gorgeous hall was brought into existence, and a day was fixed for a banquet by way of return-compliment to the Pândavâs.

Perspicacious men shook their heads in doubt and apprehended some treachery ; and, when Vidura was assigned the task of fetching the Pândavâs, suspicions of evil were confirmed. Vidura openly avowed his fears. These needed quieting and the royal dissembler did this by promising to interpose opportunely to avert any catastrophe that might threaten. A more painful task was never cast on such a good and righteous man. He was in a dilemma, the worst of its kind. His allegiance to his royal master dictated acceptance of the proffered assurances, while, his ever watchful sense of righteousness and his bitter experiences in the past

filled his mind with horrible forebodings. After a period of indecision he calmly made up his mind how to act. He proceeded to Indraprasta and discharged the claims of his loyalty and of his conscience at once—the former were delivering the message and pointing out how it demanded implicit obedience, and the latter by portraying in appropriate language the hazardousness of the step and the magnitude of the evil of which it would, too surely, be the occasion and source. Placing both sides of the question before Yudhishtira, he left the latter free to choose and take on his own shoulders the entire responsibility of the course that he might elect.

It became now Yudhishtira's turn to be seriously embarrassed for a time. It was however for a time only. His trust in Providence was too profound to make him doubt that anything disastrous would be allowed to befall him: and he could not persuade himself that,

despite assurances to the contrary, any hard measure of injury was meditated against him. Even if there were the design of any such harm, he thought he might well hope that Bhîshma and other noble souls at Hastinâpura would frustrate it. His unflagging piety and his unquestioning faith in the integrity of his elderly kinsmen therefore determined his choice. In obedience to the summons and in company of Vidura, Yudhishthira with his brothers and Droupadi freely walked into the dismal den of human-shaped beasts of prey. They were received by Duryodhana and his party with open arms and suspiciously profuse expressions of heartfelt affection. Those arms were the coils of the treacherous serpent and these expressions were its expectorated venom topped with honey.

CHAPTER X.

TREACHERY.



Succession of banquets lulled all suspicion, and it seemed as if Duryodhana had contentedly accepted the inevitable and had settled down into a cheerful and cordial relative. While thus the most distrustful minds had been beguiled, the day arrived when the storm that had been silently gathering was to burst.

On that day, the princes rose from a sumptuous banquet. A hilarious laugh rang in one another's ear. Vivacity reigned supreme. Repartees and goodhumoured jokes went

round. Generous impulses were uppermost, and there was not the faintest streak of that lightning flash which heralds a coming thunder-clap or a thunder-bolt.

Under the pretext of whiling away time, Yudhishtira was drawn into the vortex of danger, prepared for him in the shape of a game of dice. The villain Sakhuni took the place of Duryodhana as pre-arranged. The gambling began, and the chances from the first went against the unsuspecting Yudhishtira. The betting was high and heavy, and the more Yudhishtira lost, the more did he grow obstinate and reckless. He was goaded to desperation. He chafed madly under accumulated defeats; and still he played as if possessed. He staked at last his kingdom, the liberty of his brothers, the liberty of himself, and, sad to say, the liberty of his wife at last. He could no further go, as he had no

mortal thing to wager, and he looked the very picture of unutterable misery, hurled as he was from the pinnacle of unexampled greatness into depths of degradation the most profound. Duryodhana fetched a deep sigh of relief, and his eyes sparkled with unseemly glee. Sympathetically a responsive smile lighted up the features of his heartless partisans and they had, for the fallen virtue, nothing but looks of deep disdain and words of lofty scorn. The vile miscreants of whom Duryodhana was the central figure were in ecstasies at their inglorious triumph and as a consequence proceeded to unheard-of excesses. Now that the Pândavâs were bound hand and foot by the sense of their position as Duryodhana's conquered slaves, indignities of the most appalling kind were heaped upon them with impunity. They were insulted in the most offensive terms, and orders

were given to denude them of their garments, as no longer belonging to them. The instant the command was given, the Pândavâs took the hint and put away their costly apparel and valuable ornaments and stood resignedly in the scantiest clothing, necessary so cover shame. This imper-
turable placidity was provoking in the extreme, as nothing disappoints one's enemies so much as philosophic resignation and the entire absence of an exhibition of temper in their victim. Duryodhana had yet his worst to do, and this he resolved to try to his eternal infamy. He bethought himself of the fact that Droupadi was then in the Zenana, and the fiat went forth to drag her before the assembly as his bond-woman. His servants durst not move and they involuntarily stood transfixed. Great as was their dread of their master, their anticipated dread of Droupadi's indignant

eye was greater. But Duryodhana was giddy with a new spirit—the spirit that paralyses one's faculties and makes one blind to future retribution. He cared not for the resentment of the Pândavâs, now no longer mighty. He had too short a memory for the downright defeat which he and his brothers met with at the hands of Droupadi's father against whom, as has already been narrated, they marched at the close of their pupilage under Drôna. For the nonce he feared none and he was prepared to dare all. He therefore turned his eyes towards his fool-hardy brother, Dussâsana, and this was signal for him to fly at once to execute the abominable mission. In a few moments, the audacious youth was before the gathering, with Droupadi's hallowed locks in his unholy grip. At a glance, she grasped the situation, and feelingly appealed to the men present for justice and for help.

None ventured to move—even for uttering one word of solace. This was cowardice and impotence too despicable even to her feminine nature, and it roused her indomitable fortitude — a fortitude accessible to virtuous women alone and in the face of danger and of crime alone. With her eyes darting fire, she burst forth in indignant reproaches of Duryodhana and his partners in guilt and exhorted them to repent and be saved. This only incited Duryodhana to a further baseness of deeper dye, and this was an order to strip her naked before the gaze of every one present. Dussasana pounced upon Droupadi and laid hold of her clothes. One garment after another, gave way, and it seemed as if, nothing would check the deed of horror and of shame. Vidura loudly denounced the deed of wickedness. But none else spoke a word. Even Bhishma, Drona

Kṛipā, and Asvathama—be it said to their everlasting shame—sat unblushingly, only averting their eyes from the scene before them. Hopeless of human help, powerless to protect herself, those hands of hers which clung to the last fold of her clothes she lifted in prayer to the divine Krishna myriads of miles away. Her prayers were heard. Under the instant behest of that saviour of such as absolutely trusted in Him the folds multiplied apace and ended not. Dussasana quailed before their accumulating heap, with dismay and utter want of nerve. He struggles on but he staggers as if alarmed by some dread phantom, and faints and falls flat as a blasted tree. In the meantime the irate Bhîma, unmindful of being metaphorically bound hand and foot, seizes hold of his fatal mace, to avenge Droupadi's unparalleled wrong. But he was checked by the disapproving wink of

Yudhishtira and he vented his wrath by thundering forth a pledge that he would smite Dussasana in the field of battle and drink of his heart's blood with the gusto of his mother's milk. He turns his fiery eyes on Duryodhana and vows that he would lay him low with a fell blow and spurn his haughty head with his left foot. These awful vows filled every one with fright and every one saw, looming before his mind, as an accomplished fact, a vivid picture of the battlefield marked by the incidents such as Bhîma threatened to bring about. Dussasana timidly opens his eyes and in faltering accents tells how Krishna appeared before him in world-filling proportions and with eyes like luminous fire and looks that scorched like lightning. The dread news of what had happened sped to Dhritarâshtra and to his wife Ghandari. They hurried to the spot and strove to make amends for what

had occurred. The king felt how inhumanly Droupadi was wronged and he humbly besought her forgiveness for himself and for his unworthy progeny. The tender heart of Droupadi relented, and the monarch offered to grant her such boons as she would choose to ask. Her first request was that the five Pândavâs should be forthwith freed from the bonds of thralldom and she next asked for the restoration of the kingdom foully filched from them. These favours were readily granted, and the Pândavâs and Droupadi soon took their departure to Indraprasta, every one doubting in his heart of hearts whether the Pândavâs would forget the outrages and bury their hatchets and whether Duryodhana would cease further plotting.

CHAPTER XI.

EXILE.



A day of tempest has for its characteristic concomitants a lowering sky, gathering clouds, blinding forks of lightning, deafening peals of thunder, huge trees dropping their leafy crests, their branches swaying from side to side, and bubbles rising and bursting momentarily on the floods that flow at every turn. The day on which the Pândavâs left Hastinâpura, disenthralled and reinstated by Dhṛitarâshṭra, was not such a day to any but Duryodhana. To that abject slave of the Green-eyed monster it was indeed such a day. The

symptoms which external nature failed to show were discernible in his individual nature, in the shape of a sad face, dark thoughts, scowling looks, howling complaints, a diminished head, a dis-consolate oscillation of arms and hollow hopes that rose and fell almost every instant. In former days there were reasons for jealousy. That stage is now long past. It is now the occasion for envy in the superlative degree and for vigorous steps to ward off just and inexorable revenge, feared for unexampled wrongs recently perpetrated. In the face of those wrongs, the peace, now prevailing was but a hollow peace. While the wrongs he had inflicted on former occasions were cruel enough to exasperate, the climax was reached when the last iniquity was practised. While the previous offences were against the Pândavâs' property, prosperity, prospects and life, the last deed was an unmitigable outrage against their honor. Dur-

yodhana rightly guessed that this basest guilt would never—could never—be condoned ; and he conjectured, equally rightly, that, chafing under it, Bhîma and Arjuna would some day avenge it in a terrific manner. He took for granted that the gulf between him and his cousins, which had been growing wider, no longer admitted of being bridged over ; and that he was as it were standing on the crater of a hidden volcano. In human affairs, none could tell when things arrived at this pass, what the future might not have in store. In this view, Duryodhana was resolved to take time by the forelock, and avert all possible danger to himself. With this purpose, he secretly sought his father's presence and set forth his idea of the situation. The father could not deny the force of his son's reasoning, and once again acquiesced in a resort to dice as a means of deliverance for his fondled son.

The son was, however, aware that, if, as before, the kingdom was won merely as a stake, his father might once again be induced to restore it. He was therefore too wily to allow any such loophole through which there might be an escape from his elaborate efforts on this second occasion. He hit upon a plan, which might render Yudhishthira's own righteousness to stand as an obstacle to restitution. He therefore proposed to Yudhishthira an inviolable pledge that whoever was beaten should spend twelve years in jungles and a life of undiscovered incognito in human haunts for a further year. This was, so to speak, a personal penalty, and no sagacity, ingenuity or liberality could neutralize it. Most unluckily it was agreed to, and Yudhishthira lost again. It may seem strange to mundane wisdom that Yudhishthira should be so foolish as to act contrary to the saying that "Once bitten, first to fly." But let

us worldly-wise men reverentially own that occasionally fates ordain what our best prudence cannot defeat. Be the cause what it might, the fact remains that Yudhishtira played again and played himself and his brothers out of the kingdom. They were doomed to find their homes amid beasts of prey for a dozen years and to hide themselves from prying eyes for no less than a twelve-month. Again did Duryodhana make unfair use of his vantage ground as a victor, and again did the pledges of Bhîma go forth with redoubled emphasis. This time, however, further vows were taken. Bhîma thundered forth that he would with his own hand kill all Dhṛtharâshṭras' sons while Arjuna and his younger brothers swore that they would slay Karna and Sakuni respectively. The virtuous Pândavâs then left Hastinâpura, shorn of all glory, and moved away into forests. The earliest visit they received was

from their devoted well-wisher Kṛistna. He deplored his inability to have been at the spot to prevent what had occurred, and after spending a few days with the Pândavâs, took leave of them, promising to be on the alert to render help; should occasion need it. Another visit, certainly not to him, but to his neighbourhood deserves next mention, and it was that of Duryodhana. He opined indeed that the exiles would never survive the dangers and the privations that loomed before them; and his father and partisans shared this same opinion, though men like Bhishma, Vidura and Drona could not bring themselves to acquiesce in such a view. Though thus overweeningly confident, Duryodhana was not wanting in diligence in watching their movements. Some of his efforts, direct and indirect, may be shortly noticed. Partly with a view to dog them, and partly to vex them by obtruding

on their eyes the sharp contrast between their fallen fortunes and his own grandeur, Duryodana made an effort to encamp in the vicinity of their jungly refuge in all his gorgeous splendour in company with Karna and his other partisan warriors under the pretext of clearing the forest for the protection of his cows and cowherds. But it was decreed that he should be taught a sharp lesson for his attempts at a career of impudent mockery. This occurred as follows:—There was a ford adjacent to Yudhishtira's lodging where one higher than Duryodana used to disport himself. In the pride of his earthly power, Duryodhana encroached on that ford in defiance of its accustomed angelic frequenter Chitraratha by name. He scorned remonstrances that were addressed to him and thereby drew down on his head Chitraratha's terrible wrath. Warning was given to Duryodhana even at this

stage, but he would not mind it. A combat ensued, and in it Karna and others had ignominiously to flee, while Duryodhana was taken captive and was being carried away. Duryodhana's men, in their despair, hastened to Yudhishtira who was known to be in the neighbourhood and sought for help. Bhîma would not raise a little finger to rescue this impersonation of evil, who he thought was being providentially punished for his cruel crimes. But Yudhishtira took a higher and nobler view. He held that, whatever differences might exist between Duryodhana and his brothers on the one hand and the Pândavâs on the other, they should not operate when an outside foe had to be faced. He pithily put it thus, "We may be five *against* the hundred in disputes between ourselves, but we should be five *and* a hundred as against outsiders." Holding this opinion, Yudhishtira ordered Arjuna

to release Duryodhana, and this Arjuna went forth to do. It so happened that Chithraratha was an old acquaintance of Arjuna, and told him that his motive in carrying away Duryodhana was by way of retribution for the many wrongs the latter perpetrated against the Pândavâs. Flattering as this would be for others in the position of Arjuna, to him it had no importance as against his brother's mandate. This being made clear, Chitharatha let go Duryodhana whom Arjuna respectfully conducted into the presence of Yudhishtîra. This latter received him with brotherly kindness, advised him in gentle terms against such foolhardy adventures and affectionately parted with him. This was at once a bitter pill and a sharp lesson to Duryodhana and he bore it in mind during the remainder of the Pândavâs' sojourn in the forests. The lesson thus taught to Duryodhana did not

extend its influence to his audacious partisans. One of those was Jayadratha the ruler of Sindh and a king that wedded the only sister of Duryodhana, by name Dussala. He ventured on an expedition of annoyance. He was on the look out for an occasion when Pândavâs would be away from their jungly residence and put in appearance during their absence. Droupadi, who was there, offered the duties of hospitality to the kinsman. But the villain had harboured wolfish motives. Assured of the safe distance of her protectors, he ventured upon outrages on her modesty and honor. Her spirited remonstrances for a time kept him at bay, but he soon overpowered her and was bearing away her struggling person when the custodians of her honor were providentially at hand and pursued this burgler into the house of hospitality. The impudent trespasser was soon a captive, and would have been unhesitatingly

beheaded, had not Yudhishtira desired him to be brought alive. Reluctantly they produced him before their generous brother, and they were obliged to forego thier ideas of vengeance, when their humane brother told them that he wished to spare their only cousin the miseries of joyless widowhood. To obey the behests of their eldest brother was the fixed resolve of their lives, and they therefore let the culprit go. The liberated prince was however a wretch of an ungrateful type and he began forthwith to think of revenge. By untiring prayers, to god Siva he won the boon that he would one day be the master of the situation and achieve victory over the Pândavâs; but that for this result to follow, Arjuna must be away. The reason of this reserve in the boon is that by most austerey praying to the self-same Siva, Arjuna had already secured a miraculous arrow which was that Diety's

weapon and which possessed the power to shatter the world in a twinkling of the eye. The acquisition of this rare weapon made Arjuna sought after by the god of thunder and rain, and at the latter's request Arjuna went to the celestial regions, and dealt desolation and death among certain demons, who were unconquerable but with that superhuman javelin of heavenly gift. As a reward for these exceptional services he received an ever resplendent diadem, the possession whereof honoured him universally with the epithet "The crowned." Amid these unexampled glories, he fell a victim to a curse which at the intercession of Indra proved a blessing in the end. A celestial courtesan by name Oorwasi fell in love with this unparalleled hero of mortal frame. He repulsed her on the ground that she was the object of Indra's affections and was therefore, in a sense, *in loco matris*. This resistance

angered her and she pronounced on Arjuna the dread curse that he shall become a hermaphrodite. Indra became soon aware of it and got the author of the curse to relent and vouchsafe that her malediction should take effect when Arjuna liked and last only so long as he liked. Having regard to the life of incognito that awaited him at no distance of time, this was a misfortune only to outward seeming. The curse was in abeyance in the immediate present and was turned to account as will be noticed in a later stage of this narrative.

When the Pândavâs were thus living their forest lives, an event was happening in Dwaraka, dramatic in its elements and political in its significance. Krishna's brother, Balarâma, had a daughter by name Sasirekha, now in all the glory of blooming youth. Arjuna had by Subhadra a son by name Abhimanyu, a fine valourous youth, well-

read in all the Vedic and martial lore of the day. This young couple were thrown into each other's company from childhood upwards, and they became mutually dear and affectionate. The Pândavâs were at the time in the sunshine of their glory, and a widespread opinion of the public, acquiesced in by Balarâma, prevailed that these young cousins were an excellent match for each other. The youthful pair heard of this popular predilection with pleasure and satisfaction, and had grown up in the firm faith that the union of their lives was as good as an accomplished fact. When the Pândavâs were hurled from their pinnacle of greatness and sent adrift penniless, homeless, and friendless, a change came over the ideas of Balarâma, who had always a secret partiality for Duryodhana and who now found an excuse for promising his daughter to the son of that ruler of Hastinâpura. This caused

much anxiety in the Yadava family circle at Dwaraka. When at her marriageable age Balarâma's sister Subhadra had been carried off by Arjuna against her brother's will as narrated in a previous chapter, Kṛishna was able to get him round by pointing to Arjuna's magnificent status as being all that could be desired. That argument was not open to him at the present juncture. The representations of both Kṛishna and Subhadra failed to win back Balarâma. They pressed repeatedly and in vain that, alike by public voice and in accordance with an immemorial usage, Abhimanyu had acquired a claim to the hand of his maternal uncle's daughter, and it would be cruel that his own kith and kin should discard him for what must surely be a transitory want of position and opulence. Above all it was urged that circumstances had all along favoured to bring about the union of their hearts and that it was meet that

it should be sanctified by the union of their hands. Balârâma was nevertheless inexorable, and Subhadra took it to heart and became a prey to secret and desponding grief.

Weeks elapsed and the wedding day was finally fixed. When Abhimanyu heard of it he was in a towering passion, and his first thought was to carry off Sasirekha by a *coup de main*. But his mother softened him and counselled recourse to pacific means, as she did not wish to add to the enemies, the Pândavâs already had. Thus quieted, both the mother and the son quitted Dwaraka in sorrow and disgust. Abhimanyu was however stricken with a resistless longing to see Sasirekha face to face, and learn from her lips whether she resigned herself to the dictates of her father or was resolved to follow the promptings of her own affections. Upon the result of such an interview, he thought he might decide upon the course of action which he

should pursue. While Subhadra went to Krishna to bid him a sad adieu, he strove to take his chance by sauntering into the pleasure grounds attached to the palace, and before long, fortune favored him.

The threatened exit of Abhimanyu and his mother from the palace shot an arrow into the heart of Sasirekha, and the hope she had been cherishing of her father veering round to her view of her happiness was dashed to pieces. Life seemed a burden to her and the walls and doors of her home were like those of a prison-building. Solitude was oppressive and the confined air of her apartments—fittingly ventilated as they were—seemed sickening. To escape from her accustomed surroundings and as if to flee from her own thoughts, she had betaken herself to the pleasure-grounds of the palace, with a bevy of her choice companions, and her sweetly-garrulous parrot on her lovely wrist.

The breeze was the softest. The chirrup of birds was ceaseless. The fragrance of blossoming flowers was sweetly-odourous. Her companions were striving their utmost to put her in lively spirits. But in spite of the union of these varied charms, Sasirekha's heart was desolate. The weight of sorrow that was sitting at her heart was not without its outward symptoms, in the shape of a dejected face, languishing limbs and languid voice. Such was the state in which Abhimanyu caught sight of her, pale as moon amid a cluster of attendants, emulous of stars. It was at once clear to him that Sasirekha was herself no less unhappy and disconsolate than himself, and it enraptured his soul. At other times his heart would bleed to see her in the slightest degree sad, but now her unhappiness was necessary for his joy, which rose in proportion to her misery. He is in an instant by her side with a beaming countenance and her

maids desperse, as summer clouds. When he puts his hand in hers and peers wistfully into her eyes she becomes deeply moved, and her eloquent looks and elegant smile speak of a love which was raging within her, defiant of all check and utterance. Her hand is instantly in a masterful grip and her soft and supple figure insensibly follows the lead of the being who is to her a guiding influence. In a moment they are both at the garden gate; but there she checks herself and begs of her lover to win her in broad daylight and not spirit her away, as it were, under cover of night. He respects her wish and applauds her loyalty and relaxes his hold of her lovely palm. She hurries back to her companions and with them to the palace which seemed, amid her present rosy ideas, a comely haunt and not an unwelcome home of a few hours ago; while Abhimanyu rejoined his mother with a satisfied mind.

They wandered into a neighbouring jungle which chanced to be the domain of Bhîma's cannibal son Ghatothkacha. The scent of approaching humanity angered and appetised him, and he attacked Abhimanyu in all the fierceness of his nature. He had however an opponent calling his utmost efforts into play. The youths, all ignorant of their mutual cousinship, battled against each other, neither of them giving way and neither of them gaining ground. Subhadra was looking on in breathless silence, but, like a true warrior's mother, with an intrepid heart. The contest went on for hours in unabated obstinacy, and none could tell when or how it might end. It became midnight and still they battled on. Time was flying and, as if in the interest of poetic justice, the combatants were parted by Saint Narada—a personage who, despite his reputation for mischievous meddling and

for setting people by the ears, not unoften appeared on the world's stage for purposes of good. He revealed them to each other, and they joyously flew into each other's arms, asking each other's excuse for the unintentional collision. They lost no time in bringing together their respective mothers, and for a brief while, there was nothing but rapture. It was already beyond midnight. Something bold and effectual must be forthwith done or the marriage on the morrow would not be thwarted and Abhimanyu might lose the beautiful Sasirekha. His cannibal cousin who, like Rishis of great spiritual power, was master of the occult art of assuming fancy-shapes or passing invisibly into any recess in spite of heavy bolts and bars to barricade access, announced his plan. Soliciting Subhadra and his cousin to remain with his mother in his safe retreat, Ghatotkacha was up into the sky at one bound and flew to

Dwaraka on the wings of the wind. He merrily laughed at the grand preparations that were being made, while the great bustle which pervaded the city tickled his fancy. Assuming an æreal form, he enters unperceived the guarded boudoir of Sasirekha, and his brotherly eyes seek her out, sleeping in her couch but with a face betraying lingering traces of a ruffled mind, not yet at peace. On his back, spacious as Atlas, he lifts up the couch with its sleeping beauty undisturbed and wends his way to his abode with the sacred burden sitting upon him as lightly as a moon-beam. In a few moments he deposits his seraphic treasure at the feet of mother, aunt and cousin and, with their leave, betakes himself to Dwaraka to simulate the form and take the place of Sasirekha. The day dawns. Duryodhana with his son, kinsmen and friends enters the city, with flourish of trumpets and amid sonorous heralds who

proclaim him, his greatness and his riches. Insolence and self-satisfaction at his fancied success to the utter discomfiture of Krishna, the Pândavâs' stead-fast friend, were commingled in his haughty visage. At the propitious hour, the pretended girl coyly submitted to be decked out in all the glory of bridal apparel and brilliant jewellery and conducted to the hy-menial *pandal* in the plenitude of a maiden's bashfulness. A *parda* intercepts the gaze of the assembled gathering, and the preliminary rites are gone through without a hitch and with unalloyed pleasure. As was the wont in those days among the royal folk, the bride-groom, all impatient, peeps over the screen at a certain stage of the ceremonial, to catch a glimpse of his future wife, and lo and behold! his eyes are assailed by the form of a ferocious lion, in all its panoply of fearful fangs, plenteous mane and pointed

claws, crouching to take a bound. Affrighted, the youngster staggers back, and the whole gathering is thrown into a commotion. The boy timidly opens his eyes and speaks in uncertain accents, but others who look behind the curtain, contradict him, as nothing was visible to them but a lovely figure in sweet sixteen. The bustle subsides into an ill-concealed titter, and the shamefaced bridegroom once again peeps over the screen, but only to witness the features of a savage tiger. Again does the youngster stand aghast, and again is he reassured by persons who see only the maidenly Sasirekha on the bridal seat. A few more attempts of the kind take place but with no better results. This set the people there to think and they were at their wits' end to solve the problem. All of a sudden they find a flood of stones descending on them from over their heads, and they fear to look up. A clarion voice is heard in the sky, challeng-

ing the heroes, there present, to go out into the open and gird up their lions for a battle such as they never knew. The call to war removes the doubt and suspense that puzzled and weighed, and Duryodhana, his brothers and his warriors are in a moment in battle-array under the canopy of heaven. Ghatothkacha is before them, with his superhuman battalions, and a war ensued which ended in a complete retreat of Duryodhana's party. Duryodhana and his men fled, and Balarâma and his friends concluded that Ghatothkacha had carried off Sasirekha for his consin's sake and reappeared to humble them and get rid of the interpolated bridegroom. Message sped to Krishna, who had sullenly kept away from the marriage-house, as his well-meant advice had been rejected. He arrives and counsels the acceptance of Abhimanyu as the bridegroom. This is readily and cheerfully agreed to, and Ghatothkacha prostrates himself be-

fore Balarâma, Kṛishna and other elders. They are soon at his jungly residence. With tears of joy they are met by Subhadra and Hidimbi, while Balarâma and Kṛishna are not slow to raise their sister's somewhat down-cast spirits by assurances of perfect cordiality and approval of her conduct and resolution. On a fresh day fixed for the purpose, the marriage of Sasirekha and Abhimanyu was celebrated in all the splendour and joy inseparable from the exalted rank of the parties concerned. This event was to Duryodhana's friends a further proof of his powerlessness against the Pândavâs, who had the peerless help of Kṛistna. To others this might be a lesson, inculcating humility and affording a foretaste of what would happen in case Duryodhana maintained a defiant attitude against the Pândavâs when they came (as it was assumed they would) out of the fiery ordeal they were then passing through. But

to him, it was only fresh fuel to the flame of hatred that was burning within him, though it did not lack to his mind the patent meaning, that it brought to the Pândavâs no inconsiderable accession of political strength, which, in the near future and in all human probability, would be sorely in request.

In a checkered life such as we described and devoted to the practice of piety and devotion which must mark such righteous and good men as the Pândavâs, the period of sojourn in the mountains and the woods was passed. Yudhisthira was further honoured by Vyasa and many other reverend sages with their visits, and he felt, in their company and in conversing with them, much that was elevating, instructive and entertaining. Yudhisthira felt, in years thus spent, charms that more than counterbalanced the absence of those gaieties and splendours which cities and palaces

bring within reach, but which for his own part he never relished or cared for. He had indeed to come face to face with some few cannibals and ravenous beasts, but he had the satisfaction to note that they were far more endurable than Duryodhana, in that they were without his malice aforethought and without his cold-blooded unrighteousness, though by nature they had his fierceness and rapacity. In these and kindred modes, the stipulated forest life was accomplished, with a twelvemonth of exceptional hardship still remaining.

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CHAPTER XII.

INCOGNITO.



THE final day of their wanderings arrived at last, and for a moment made them joyous. They pleasantly looked back on the many trials, privations and dangers they had encountered. They put up prayers to God Almighty for the infinite mercy which helped them to go unhurt through a period of countless vicissitudes. But they were not long in this buoyant state of feeling. They had immediately to look in the face of what yet remained of their pledge. The happiness engendered by the retrospect was feather in the balance, weighed against the almost

impossible prospect which frowned upon them. Perilous as had been their life for the last twelve years, the twelve-month, yet to expire of their pledge, seemed infinitely more perilous. The force muscle, the daring courage, and the superior intelligence, which had enabled them till now to overcome the difficulties they encountered, were no longer of any avail. They were, on the contrary, obstacles in their way, being too tell-tale to conceal.

For a while these considerations utterly non-plussed them. Long and anxious were the deliberations and the mutual questionings as to their future procedure. In the course of their discussions they ran over the names of kingdoms which they had known or heard of. They at last hit upon the kingdom of Virâta whose ruler was in feud with Duryodhana, and which therefore Duryodhana's men were not likely safely

to enter. Counting upon this safe-guard, but putting their trust in the mercy of Providence all the same, they resolved to spend the year of secrecy in Virâta's capital. But how and in what capacity were they to pass? This was a hard problem. But they soon solved it. Yudhisthira agreed to pass for an ascetic and serve the king as a pleasant storyteller and a gaming companion. It was confidently felt that his gentle disposition and imperturbable patience would enable him to remain in the king's good graces. It was rightly hoped that in the character he was going to assume, he would attract little attention and his incognito would be perfectly safe. Bhîma agreed to become the king's cook. In that capacity his superior powers of endurance would be specially valuable, and he believed that his culinary skill would put inquisitive people off the scent, in as much as no members of royal

blood were generally expected to possess this proficiency. Arjuna bethought himself of the curse of the angelic nymph Oorvasi and proposed to utilise the same during the year of secrecy by turning dancing-master to the young ladies in the royal household. He felt sure that in that character he could not be identified, and, as his business lay in the zenana and its neighbourhood, he could successfully escape prying eyes. Nakula and Sahadeva undertook to take charge of the king's horses and kine. They assumed that the king's stables and cowsheds were certainly not the places where persons of royal extraction could be sought for or suspected to be.

The case of Droupadi gave them not a little trouble. Her sublime beauty, her keen sensitiveness and her deficiency in any of the menial works that a woman could perform, seemed insuperable obstacles to her escaping

danger and detection. It would not do to leave her to shift for herself or to stay outside the sphere of her husbands' protecting surveillance. A hopeful idea however struck them. In those days respectable women filled the place of lady-companions to the Queen and other inmates of the royal zanana. Women so engaged were treated with considerable regard, and they were permitted to spend their lives mainly in the practice of piety, while they had also the privilege of keeping ghosha—even from the king. The task that generally awaited them was to hand flowers to the queen and to break the dull monotony that fell to the lot of the ladies of the zenana. It was rightly guessed that her good looks, far from being an impediment, would win for her a ready acceptance at the hands of the queen. Her excellent behaviour and her sense of dignity would ensure for her considerate treatment. Above all, her admittance

into the zenana was an effectual safe-guard against her discovery.

Thus therefore the plan was matured, and they betook themselves to king Virâta, each separately. They were received and taken in service as they had anticipated, and thus the lordly Pândavâs and the lady-like Droupadi began to live in disguise and under assumed names, impatient for the close of the anxious year. The year, however, did not pass without its troubles. The queen had a brother, by name Kîchaka, who by his extraordinary strength and heroism acquired the surname of the "Cœur de Lion." He was a tower of strength to Raja Virâta, and the safety of the country from inroads of enemies was mainly due to his presence. It was he that kept Duryodhana at bay, and it was also he to whom the king owed his position as the ruler of an independent kingdom. His authority in the realm was therefore

supreme, and his wish was paramount. Hearing of Droupadi's superior beauty and contriving to seek the presence of his sister unawares, he had the evidence of his own eyes in confirmation of the accounts he had received. He was at once smitten with a desire to possess her, and he soon worked upon the weak mind of his sister to put Droupadi in his way. To her infinite surprise Droupadi received from her mistress orders to bring a drink from Kîchaka, and she very justly and very indignantly declined the mission. But she was soon called to a sense of her dependent position, and she found that resistance was utterly useless. All undaunted, however, putting her faith in the timely interposition of Providence and in the capability of her husbands to strike if occasion arose, she submitted to the orders. Though she did not at first suspect that it was anything more than an arbitrary behest, she soon found that her

mistress was in the plot and that the task assigned to her was but a pretext to bring her within the reach of Kîchaka. When she appeared before him, his infatuation was manifest, and, forgetting alike his own dignity and royal promises to her, he tried to be rude to her. Her unswerving chastity revolted at once. She spurned his advances and hurried straightway to lodge her complaint before the king. This she did, but the king was in a dilemma. He was indeed not insensible to Droupadi's demand for justice and protection; but his fear of Kîchaka was overpowering. He therefore treated her with scant courtesy and made an idle promise, petulantly expressed, to make an enquiry. Enraged at this wavering conduct of the king, she went back to the palace with mingled feelings of sorrow and disgust. She soon found a chance and mentioned to Bhîma what had happened; and they hit upon a

plan to chastise the offender and, if necessary, to get rid of him for ever. Bhîma advised his wife to pretend a compliance with the desire of Kîchaka and make an appointment with him on a moonless night. Bhîma promised to take her place on the occasion under cover of darkness, and make short work of him in the struggle that must ensue.

The persistent overtures of Kîchaka met with a seeming disposition to yield on the part of Droupadi, and the hour and place were named and agreed upon. Bhîma was at the rendezvous, longing to avenge the wrongs of his wife. Kîchaka clandestinely hied himself to the trysting place at the appointed hour, giddy with joy and giddier with liquor. He soon found that his caresses met with a terrible check from a brawny arm. Clouded as his intellect was, he woke up to the dread reality in an instant. He guessed that a plot was laid for him, and he manfully prepared for

the contest. A single combat ensued, at the end of which Kîchaka was prostrate on the ground. Life became extinct in him under the death-dealing blows of the infuriated Bhîma. But there was neither cry nor call for help. Both the combatants found it necessary to fight in secrecy. While Bhîma was anxious about his incognito, Kîchaka was shamed into silence by the nature of the purpose with which he had come. Thus in the witching hour of night and without rousing the least suspicion, Bhîma did the deed of darkness and withdrew. At the dawn of day the corpse of the mighty Kîchaka was discovered, and the report went abroad that some divine angel had struck down the powerful hero as by a stroke of lightning. From that moment forward, Droupadi was dreaded as being under superhuman power, and her life during the rest of the year flowed smoothly on.

CHAPTER XIII.

ESPIONAGE.



WHEN the Pândavâs remained thus concealed in the realms of Virâta, Duryodhana was not idle. He knew how necessary it was to discover their whereabouts and, by identifying them, condemn them to a Sisyphean doom. His men went forth in all directions and roamed throughout all the kingdoms into which they could make an entry. But unsuccessful and hopeless, they regained the presence of their royal master. In tones of despondency they related the sad tale of their fruitless, though arduous, search, and, as if to lessen the effect of their cheerless

account, they conveyed the tidings of Kîcha-ka's mysterious death. Dussasana in his shortsighted impetuosity of temper scouted the very idea of the Pândavâs being still alive and declared it as his opinion that they must have been long dead and buried under ground or devoured by wild beasts. In this view he thought that no further anxiety need be entertained and that his brother might henceforward sleep with an easy heart. But Bhishma, Drona, and Kripa could not bring themselves to accept this solution. These shrewd men rightly guessed that the righteous Pândavâs could never be forsaken by God and that therefore they were sure to announce themselves before long to demand the restoration of their dominions. The fiery Karna waxed valiant in words. He too dissented from the view of Dussasana ; but he wished to prepare for war, which he felt sure, was inevitable.

After calmly pondering over the matter for a while, Duryodhana came to the conclusion that the the Pândavâs must be alive and that the death of such a gigantic hero as Kîchaka must have been caused by no less a person than Bhîma, chiefly because the destroyer of Kîchaka was nameless. He therefore proposed to march upon the capital of Virâta. There was however, he said, one difficulty to get over. He feared that, if the whole of his army advanced at once, the rajah would march with all his forces against him, and that it was not improbable that the Pândavâs would not force themselves forward except that there was an unavoidable emergency. He therefore suggested a manoeuvre. He suggested that two expeditions should be organised and that, when one of them had marched in the first instance so as to draw forth the whole of the enemy's troops, the other should attack the town in an opposite

direction. As a consequence of such a stratagem he hoped that the Pândavâs would come to the succour on the unprotected side of the city, as he knew that their sense of gratitude would override all considerations of self. These tactics were assented to by the council.

Under the command of one Susarma, a warrior who owed a grudge to Virâta for having defeated and disgraced him with the (now absent) help of Kîchaka, the first expeditionary force was soon within measurable distance of the city to its south. The tidings of the enemy's approach made the king rapidly advance with all his available troops to do battle. The contest raged long and furiously and it penetrated far into the night. When the shades of night had fallen, Yudhisthira, Bhîma, Nakula and Sahadava placed themselves in the back ground to rush for help if it became necessary. The

troops of Virâta began soon after to be giving way. He was himself taken captive, and his defeat seemed imminent. No time was to be lost. Feelings of gratitude and self-interest alike induced Yudhisthira to goad Bhîma to the succour of Virâta. It was a crisis. The risk was terrible. But the double duty was no less stern. Bhîma dared and (thanks to Heaven) he snatched a dazzling victory. Like a flash of lightning which in a second blasts and disappears, like a hawk which swoops down and carries its victim off into the lofty sky in a twinkling of the eye, like a sword-blade which, flying from the scabbard at a sudden burst of wrath, smites sharp and re-enters the sheath, so did Bhîma enter the thick of the fight, rescue the king and rush back into the obscurity which must needs envelope him a few hours more. The enemy's troops took to heels in fright and confusion, and, in their anxiety to put a

good distance between themselves and their pursuers, not one of them had the presence of mind or the stoutness of heart to look round to spy out the Pândavâs. Virâta was full of gratitude for this timely succour; and, not being in any hurry to return to the city and not suspecting any further danger to it, he ordered a halt for the night.

At dawn Duryodhana, all ignorant of the fate that had befallen Susarma, was in the vicinity of Virâta's capital, at the head of his choicest warriors. The rays of the morning sun were hardly gilding the towers of the city when king Duryodhana with the flower of his army was within a few furlongs of its walls. The herds of Virâta's cows were temptingly within reach as the first prize, and they were seized. The cowherds hurried into the capital and sounded the alarm. There was consternation everywhere. But neither was

the king nor army at hand. The town was literally empty of fighting men, and none was there, manful enough to undertake its defence. The heir-apparent, a youth of tender years and the best carpetknight going, received the message while in the Zenana, and, as is the wont with persons in such a situation, boasted of his prowess but regretted that there was not a charioteer worthy of the occasion to aid him. Arjuna mentally reckoned up and felt sure that the period of incognito terminated with the day previous and that the fitting time had arrived for giving his cousins, a foretaste of what they might expect, in case war became necessary to recover their dominion. He set up Droupadi to sing his praise in the skill of conducting war-chariots and succeeded in getting himself chosen for the task. A gorgeous and well-equipped war-car was got ready, and amid the affectionate good wishes of the ladies of the Zenana and the vocifer-

ous blessings of the thronging population of the town, the rash youth issued forth with Arjuna, still disguised as a eunuch occupying the seat of the driver. The glow of prospective victory lighted up his face and there was not about him the least symptom of fear. With a heart equally light and eager to give the most signal proof of his being the first warrior of the age, the simulated eunuch drove the chariot faster than wind.

In a marvellously short time, the chariot was within sight of the opposing hosts; but the heart of the foolhardy youngster sank within him as he heard the foe. For the first time, he realised the stern reality of his position, as soon as he had within his ken the world-famed heroes like Bhishma, Drona, and Karna. A violent trembling seized him and profuse perspiration overspread his frame. His tongue was parched with ever-increasing fear, and his weapons insensibly dropped

from his hold. What he espied, though from a safe distance, was itself too much for him, and he felt no shame to avow his terror. Ready to faint, he begged that before it was too late the chariot might turn back. The heroic Arjuna smiled in silent contempt at the idea of a retreat and drove resolutely on. The youth was however beside himself with fright, and after in vain trying the dauntless charioteer with threats, with solicitations and with tempting promises of reward, he leaped out of the chariot and fled towards the capital. Finding that nothing else would instill courage into the royal youth, Arjuna announced himself. After a brief of hesitation, but feeling assured of the identity of Arjuna, the prince exchanged seats with him, and with a confidence that the world-wide fame of Arjuna was calculated to inspire, the royal youngster played the charioteer with marvellous aptitude. Taking hold of his gigantic bow that was hidden

amid the foliage of a spreading tree in the neighbourhood and giving expression to his characteristic outburst of heroic exclamation—an exclamation which cowed down the stoutest-hearted mortal—Arjuna dropping his disguise as a serpent casts off its slough, took the warrior's seat in the car and marched intrepidly on against what seemed overwhelming odds.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNVEILED.



LEAR-sighted men in the enemy's camp—men like Bhishma and Drona—watched the first bold advance, the halt, the flight, the exchange of seats between the warrior and the charioteer, and the renewed march; and they were not slow to conclude that no less than the hero whose name was a synonym for Victory was approaching. For a few minutes the mind of Drona was unnerved by the appalling thought that, impelled by gratitude, Arjuna was perhaps prematurely plunging into daylight and imperilling his chance of keeping the pledge

he and his brothers had taken. A secret exchange of looks with Bhishma re-assured him, and there was soon a general relief in the hearts of all well-ordered minds. Various however were the conjectures which were indulged. Some ridiculed the self-deluding audacity of a single person making bold to advance against Duryodhana's overwhelming troops. They were inclined, in their pride, to commend the discretion of the retreating young man far more than to admire the valour of the advancing hero. Duryodhana and his party became soon alive to the gravity of the occasion. They saw clearly enough that it was Arjuna himself whom they were to face, and a Council of war was forthwith held. There was much wrangling and acrimonious altercation. Bhishma and Drôna suggested reconciliation, while Karna and his like held the language of swagger and insisted upon doing

battle. Duryodhana, always ingenious in the advancement of his own interests, hit (as he fancied) upon a plausible method of cutting the Gordian-knot. He said that if the hero that was advancing against them was in reality Arjuna, there was room for congratulating themselves far more than for entertaining fear or cherishing ideas of compromise. He imagined that the year of incognito had not expired and that Arjuna made himself seen too soon. He therefore held that the primary object of the expedition was gained and that there was an occasion neither for disputation nor for war but for conveying to Arjuna the unwelcome news that he and his brothers should once again betake themselves to the forest, in pursuance of the conditions of their pledge. Computations were immediately made, and it was soon clear that the year of enforced concealment had ended with the preceding

day. This conclusion was confirmed by Bhishma to whom the question was finally referred. Duryodhana had therefore no alternative but to do battle or make peace. He was sincerely counselled to take the latter course. Victory on the part of the Pandavas was confidently foretold, and reverential reliance was placed on the fact that, for the past thirteen years of unprecedented peril and risk, they were evidently under Providential protection. Duryodhana's greed of power and of dominion made him deaf to these words of wisdom. Stimulated by Karna and his other infamous partisans, he would listen to no proposal other than war. Thereupon Bhishma, Drôna and Kripa counselled united effort—not, they said, to insure success but to escape a total overthrow. The battle soon began and Arjuna, mainly by his adroit manœuvring and also perhaps owing to the design of Bhishma

and other good men, gave battle to one at a time, and came off successful. The occasion was noteworthy for the fact that his superiority to Karna became unmistakably demonstrated, and the generous warriors in Duryodhana's camp were pleased with it. Foiled in his efforts and sorely disappointed in his hopes, Duryodhana returned to Hastinâpura, while Arjuna, gratified with the result, went back into the town re-metamorphosed into a hermaphrodite, and enjoining the prince not to reveal his indentity till next day. He and his brothers consulted together after dusk, and when the night had worn away, the sun did not break out from darkness in greater glory than did the sons of Pându emerge from their enforced obscurity. The plan which they had contrived to adopt to unveil themselves had in it a dramatic element. At dawn the Pândavâs, decked in royal robes, took their seats in the king's

durbar hall. Yudhishthira occupied the place reserved for the king, while Bhîma and Arjuna sat on either side of him, with Nakula and Sahadeva further down. The king enters, and laughs at what looked like a farcical joke. The monarch waits, and still the Pândavâs do not rise. The smile fades on the monarch's face at this excess of daring, and his eye-brows begin to knit in anger. Arjuna in the meanwhile steps forward and announces the startling facts. The revelation fills the king's mind with dismay and joy—dismay at the thought that, in his ignorance, he might have slighted and wronged the noble Pândavâs, and joy at his rare good fortune to have afforded a safe asylum to the righteous refugees from their malignant foes. The Pândavâs lost no time to avow that they had no ground for complaint and that their minds had no place for any sentiments other than those of

unmixed pleasure and unalloyed gratitude. From the day they so announced themselves the Pândavâs were treated with the dignity appropriate to their rank and reputation. Fervent congratulations to the Pândavâs and unanimous censure of their enemies were the only audible sounds, and straightway a matrimonial alliance was agreed upon between the two families as a means of uniting them by an indissoluble bond. The king had a beautiful daughter by name Oottara, and Arjuna had a valourous son by name Abhimanyu. The proposal that this youthful couple should wed each other was accepted as soon as made. Tidings sped to Kṛishna and Drupada of the projected union, and they hurried to the capital of Virâta no less to felicitate the Pândavâs on their safe escape from the dangers they had had to undergo than to partake of the festivities that would mark the wedding days.

For a week or more the whole melancholy past was consigned to oblivion, and the rejoicings of the present chased away all the shadows that the past and the future had a tendency to cast. In due time the marriage festivities were over, and the minds of every one were recalled to a thought of the steps that remained to be taken. Two things seemed imminent. In the first place it was desirable to bespeak friendly kings for help as a provision against war. In the next place Yudhishthira and his friends must deliberate and resolve how they should act to avoid the odium of being aggressors in declaring hostilities. The Pândavâs felt the awkwardness of moot- ing a subject which must needs lead to some bitter talk. The ice had nevertheless to be broken, and Kṛishna took the initiative. He detailed how Duryodhana deeply wronged the Pândavâs, and how the latter, bound hand and foot by their inviolable vow, stood

their trials right manfully. He gave it [as his opinion that a messenger should be despatched forthwith to make a demand for the restoration of the kingdom. The cause of Duryodhana was not without an advocate in that assembly. Balarâmâ, Krishna's elder brother, though he agreed in the proposal to ask for the restitution, stood up in defence of Duryodhana. He held that Duryodhana was not in the least to blame, and pleaded that, while the latter, not being an adept, nominated Sakuni as his proxy, Yudhishtira with open eyes entered upon and lost the game. He was therefore of opinion that it was no use assuming the *role* of injured innocence, but that the person, to be deputed to go to Duryodhana, must submit the case in respectful and suppliant language. At this glossing over the crimes of Duryodhana and the far more provoking reproach of

Yudhishtira, Satyaki, another of Krishna's valiant brothers, waxed wroth and scouted the idea of taking up the attitude of undignified humility. Such was his devotion to truth and such his outspokenness that he could not tolerate injustice even from his eldest brother. He eulogised Yudhishtira's unsuspecting frankness and pointed out how Yudhishtira was reluctant to enter into the game and how, with a sinister object, he was, against his will, seduced into the play, fraudulently planned against him. He concluded with deprecating in vehement terms all attempts at casting any slur on Yudhishtira, than whom, he warmly protested, few could be more righteous. He declared himself in the plainest manner possible in favour of war, alleging as his reason, that wicked men were not likely to value aright gentleness of behaviour and courteous language. He however did not dissent from the sugges-

tion that a demand might be made in the first instance, but would insist that the ambassador should be instructed to discard all obsequiousness and hold the language of dignified independence, befitting the assertion of a right. In this view Drupada heartily concurred, avowing his belief that Duryodhana having an overweening confidence in his strength and in such as helped him, was not likely to give up the ill-gotten kingdom. And that therefore war seemed to him inevitable. He said that he found by long experience, that gentle words never won wicked minds and that conciliatory conduct was invariably construed into poverty of spirit and was treated with mockery. Bhîshma and Drona had eaten Duryodhana's salt and he held that they would be powerless effectually to thwart his wishes; while the king Dhritarâshtra devoured by his inordinate love for his children, would act on the

advice of such unworthy wretches as Karna and Sakuni. Putting these facts together, he observed that war would unavoidably have to be waged and that therefore early steps should be taken to bespeak the help of such Rajahs as were likely to fight on the side of the Pândavâs, regard being had for the etiquette among neutral kings to promise aid to the first applicant that asks for it. In the meantime, he added, he did not object to a formal demand being made and would name his own family priest to be deputed for the purpose. Krishna closed the discussion by signifying his approval of Drupada's view and suggesting that his advice should be followed. The question having been thus solved for the time, he proposed to leave for his home, laying on Drupada the burden of conducting the negotiations and sending messages to friendly kings by way of precaution to solicit help in war. Expectant of an early communication

of the result to him, he took his departure from Virâta's capital. Other Rajahs that had come for the wedding followed suit, being anxious to go and prepare for war in case one should happen. Drupada's sage family priest Dhowmya, was soon on his way to Hastinâpura with instructions to advance the claim, while swift-footed runners were hurrying in hosts towards hundreds of royal courts to solicit military succour. While these latter were successfully discharging their function, the former, was manfully fulfilling his mission before Dhṛitarâshṭra at Hastinâpura.

CHAPTER XV.

OLIVE BRANCH.



THE brahmin bearer of message from Yudhisht'hira was announced. Dhritarâshtra hurried to the durbar hall. The news sped to his advisers and the kings and chiefs that had come to help his son in the imminent war, and they were soon by his side. Before the galaxy of heroes thus brought together, Drupada's priest appeared and received the honors due to his rank as a brahmin and to his office as Yudhisht'hira's ambassador. He rendered appropriate greetings and awaited permission to speak. The leave was granted and his language to Dhritarâshtra was as follows :—

“Pāndu was your brother. His sons have at least equal claim with your sons to the ancestral estate and wealth. You and your sons have grasped it all. Once indeed they contentedly accepted less than their due, possibly because they were confident that by their peerless heroism, they might augment what you grudgingly gave. They did verily find a mighty kingdom, but of this your son robbed them by the use of loaded dice. Your son then plighted his word that he would restore their kingdom, in case they survived twelve years’ exile and a twelve months’ life of incognito. This they have fulfilled under God’s Providence, and they ask through me that your son’s pledge should be redeemed. They are willing to forget and forgive the harrowing past with its catalogue of the cruel wrongs and the deeds of shame which were perpetrated against them. They are ready, for the sake of peace and for

avoiding bloodshed, to let alone their vows of vengeance. They are not for war, if they can help it. Fancy not that they are afear'd of your heroes or your hosts of troops. The sole reason for their pacific attitude is that their hearts bleed for humanity. Their elderly kinsmen challenge their veneration far more than the appealing voice of the Nemesis excites their wrath. Mark my words; do not let slip this rare opportunity. It offers an alternative for certain death. Realise to yourselves the all-concerning conflagration that Yudhishtira's wrath and Arjuna, and Bhîma's fiery temper will too surely light up under the unerring guidance of the divine Krishna." At these intrepid words a thrill of terror passed through the listeners, one and all. The assembly seemed petrified and all present sat motionless and voiceless as a group of statues.

A few moments elapse, and the weighty

accents of the brave Bhîshma rouse them from the stupor and bewilderment that possessed them. He spoke in full approval of every syllable that was uttered, adding his own testimony to the superior chances of the Pândavâs in the battle field. Pointedly noticing the firm resolve of Krishna that the Pândavâs shall win, he counselled the acceptance of the proffered terms of peace. Karṇa, as usual, held the language of swagger and was scornfully answered by Bhîshma, who reminded him, among others, of the latest castigation he had received on the plains of Virâta's capital. The ring of boldness that marked the demand had an overpowering effect on the monarch's mind, which was already paralysed by the news of the Phoenix-like re-appearance of the Pândavâs whom he had condemned in his imagination to either certain death or to endless expatriation. Perplexed, alarmed and powerless to come to any

definite resolve, he made gushingly kind enquiries after the welfare of the Pândavâs, shed a plentiful shower of crocodile tears for the hard fate that had befallen them, and bade farewell to the messenger with effusive promises of speedily taking advice of his sage counsellors and sending to his nephews a welcome reply. This indecision on the part of the king was, strangely enough not without hope to either party. While to Vidura, Bhîshma and Drôna it gave proof of a mind still amenable to sound and wholesome influences, it gladdened the hearts of Duryôdhana and his partisans as it showed that, after all, the shock that the monarch received did not eventuate in craven fear and instant submission. Dhṛitarâshṭra became anxious and moody ; and his ears were alternately assailed by well-meant and salutary advice of his sagacious counsellors and by the insidious accents of his wicked son and his wicked

co-adjutors in evildoing. The more he reflected, the greater did he become perturbed. He could not finally make up his mind ; but time was flying and he shuddered at the risk he was running by delaying the promised response. He had no welcome news to forward and he hit upon adopting the Fabian policy as the best makeshift.

He knew not how to frame an errand, which might be true to the ear but false to the hope. An errand, provokingly dubious in its import, could only be listened to, if at least the bearer were one who stood high in Yudhishthira's esteem and whose established character for righteousness might command a heading and disarm virtuous anger. Vidura, without doubt, best answered this description. But he had already been used and disappointed far too often to be hopefully asked again.

The next best man was Sanjaya who was

destined from this moment to play an important part in the events that followed. He was not of high birth, but his morals were of lofty attitude. He was not a warrior, but like Vidura he was an adviser of the finest quality. Next to Vidura, he became from now the consoler of Dhṛitarâshṭra in his sorrowing vaticinations of the coming doom; and he too, like Vidura, never hesitated to speak unpalatable truths. Sending for this emblem of exemplary character, Dhṛitarâshṭra poured out his mind to him. Be it said to the credit of Dhṛitarâshṭra in this instance, that, under the earnest words of Sanjaya, his mental vision grasped the terrible situation and fairly realised the fate, which awaited his children and children's children, when the conquering Pândavâs would take the field, buoyed up by the unremitting and priceless guidance of Krishna. He felt certain that the only chance of rescuing his progeny from an

unerring death was to make peace. Thus far he was wise. But when he came to act, his fatuity prevailed and he had nothing more than a vague and hollow message to send to the Pândavâs that they should not think of war but resolve to go over to Hastinâpura and live in harmony with his sons. With this vague and hollow message Sanjaya was sadly disappointed and he long resisted the request to be its bearer. His remonstrances proving useless, he started for Upaplavya where Yudhishtîra took up his residence. The arrival of such a good and just man was viewed as a hopeful sign, and no time was lost before giving him audience. The assembly that met was worthy of the envoy that was to be heard. There was Yudhishtîra with his heroic brothers. There was Kṛishna than whom none could counsel more soundly. There were Drupada and Virâta, two noble rulers who were allied to the Pândavâs by ties of

deep attachment as much as by marriage connections and who bowed under the weighty experience of four score years. There was Satyaki, a brother of Kṛishna, and a no less fervent advocate of Yudhishtira's cause. There was Abhimanyu, the valiant son of the valiant Arjuna—one who was already eclipsing the fame of even his father. There were the sons of the Pândavâs begotten on Droupadi who for their age were prodigies of heroism. There were further all the leading kings and chiefs who had come to lay down their lives in the cause of the Pândavâs which, in their view, was the cause of virtue, of justice and of outraged innocence. In this constellation of noble worthies, it is a fact deserving of special notice, there was none who in the slightest degree faltered in his faith in the goodness of the Pândavâs and in his conviction that the Kouravas were unmitigated villains. None of them was burdened

with the inconvenient shackles of loyalty. None of them felt that he was forced to fight as he could not help it. Each of them freely made his choice and each one of them rejoiced in the thought that in responding to the solicitation of the Pândavâs for aid he felt that he was as much on the side of virtue and morality as he acted in consonance with the demands of military etiquette. Conscious of the bad cause that he came in, conscious also of the hollowness of the message which he was compelled to bring, Sanjaya was stunned at the character of the auditors he was doomed to address. It was an essentially bad bargain and he racked his ingenuity to make the best of it. He however looked for some forbearance from the reputation he enjoyed for an upright person and he sat resigned. According to the prevailing etiquette Yudhishthira was to initiate the conversation, and this was done with enquiries

as to the welfare of Dhṛitarâshṭra, his children and his advisers. Sanjaya ingeniously made capital out of questions on this head. He remarked that, if Dhṛitarâshṭra and his children should reap the fruits of their vile deeds, they should be the most miserable of men and that, if they were yet whole and healthy (as they undoubtedly were) it was due to Yudhisṭhira, keeping his righteous indignation under subjection, in spite of grave provocation. He hoped, he said, that he (Yudhisṭhira) would continue forbearing and forgiving and enable them to live during the natural terms of their lives. He observed that, in case Duryodhana and his brothers and partisans were made the victims of the revenge which they richly deserved, their days should have been long ago numbered. But, he went on to say, that a resolution on the part of Yudhisṭhira to wage war would virtually undo the work of mercy which to

his eternal credit he (Yudhishtira) had self-denyingly persevered in. Seeing that so much was seemingly acquiesced in, he ventured upon a bolder flight and hazarded the remark that even, if Duryodhana wickedly scouted at peace and gave just grounds for war Yudhishtira should decline to fight in view to the perpetuation of his resolve, so long persisted in, of not taking the field. These remarks he closed with the still bolder observation that should Yudhishtira wage war by reason of being driven to it by Duryodhana he would have to encounter no ordinary heroes and that while his final triumph was a matter of doubt there would be in the meantime, hecatombs of human slaughter from which guilt Yudhishtira himself would not be altogether clear. Yudhishtira was betraying signs of impatience at the latter part of this speech. But when Sanjaya added that in any event Yudhishtira should

prefer herbs and roots of the forest to food besmeared with blood, his forbearance was swept away and he burst out in an indignant strain.

CHAPTER XVI.

RESOLUTE RESPONSE.



THOUGH indignant, Yudhishthira kept his temper and spoke thus :—

Listen, my friend Sanjaya ; you are a good and righteous man, you have known us ever since our infancy. You have had ample opportunities of observing and judging of us for so many years. I ask you to say if you ever caught us tripping or acting unworthily. None is fitter to arrive at a correct estimate as between us (Pandu's sons) and Duryodhana and his party. For a just apportionment of blame among us, I confidently appeal to your good sense and your unbiassed judgment. Leaving our res-

pective merits for your verdict, I shall proceed to consider your proposal. It is nothing more and nothing less than this, that as I showed forbearance in the past I should do so in the future. Forbearance is no doubt a noble virtue and it is eminently suited to my taste. But even virtue becomes a vice when misplaced as would be my compassion for human life if I continued to look on, with folded arms, when wickedness is becoming more and more rampant. All that glitters is not gold; nor is every cream-colored liquid, milk. Between virtue which is real and its semblance there is a clear, though nice, distinction, which all may not perceive, but which earnest minds are nevertheless sure to discern. The time is come for the exercise of a judicious discrimination, and I wish it done. For my own part I can, with a safe conscience, submit to be strictly scrutinised. Though you have come here deputed by Dhri-

tarâshtra, you should, for your own good name, speak impartially between us. You have laid considerable stress on the advantages of pacific conduct and you have urged upon me, with re-iterated emphasis, not to entertain ideas of hostility. I ask you to say whether anything like a threat to fly to arms has fallen from my lips or has been betrayed by my manner. Nevertheless it behoves you to note that no peace can be ensured if forbearance is to be all on one side. Surely it is hard lines to let alone the authors of unprecedented wrongs or rather to leave them to pursue their unchecked career of wickedness and read a homily of grace and resignation to those alone who have grievously suffered and are still suffering from that wickedness. I am no madman to embark on war, if, without war, our just dues were within reach. Be certain of this however, that we are determined to have our legitimate rights

and that so long as there is reasonable hope of accomplishing our purpose by pacific means, so long shall we not dream of recourse to violence. But why take on myself the responsibility of deciding the matter while Sree Krishna is here? His matchless wisdom shall dictate and we shall bow to his mandate and guidance." All eyes, as well as those of Sanjaya, were now turned towards Krishna, and he delivered himself in bold and ringing accents as follows:—

"From the words that have fallen from Yudhishtira's lips it is clear that he means to have his just rights. To this resolve I for one cannot object. The only question then which remains is this:—is he to achieve his object by pacific or by hostile means. By nature, by habit and by choice, Yudhishtira is opposed to the shedding of human blood. But it will be too hazardous for Duryodhana to build any hope on this disposition of Yudhishtira.

thira and deny his claims. For Yudhishtira has made it manifest that, if driven to it as the only remaining course, he would not flinch from the inevitable duty. He alone of all the brothers has been slow to visit on Duryodhana and his partisans the wages of their sin. But for his boundless and (according to many) misplaced lenity, there would have been a holocaust of lovable and revered human lives. He has now evidently come to regard the situation as one in which he has to consult not merely his own personal views. He has obviously seen that on the attitude he resolves to maintain will depend the fortunes and the rights of his brothers. He has, despite the expressed wishes of his powerful and outraged brothers, acted too much till now on his own individual sentiments. He is conscious that he has been wronging them in having done so hitherto. It is no longer a question between him individually and his cousins. He

has realised the joint and inalienable rights of his brothers, and resolved never more to stand forward except as their spokesman. Let your masters note this altered view of the situation and give up the game of making capital from Yudhishtîra's personal predilections. I have sounded his brothers and I am perfectly clear that they are, one and all, resolute to extort their just rights with the tacit assent of Yudhishtîra. Alive to these circumstances, the only conclusion, I am bound to announce, as the referee of the question on the tapis is that, unless Dhritarâshtra would so far overcome his partiality to his sons as to restore to the Pândavâs the kingdom dastardly filched from them absolute are the chances of war. Let Duryodhana and his confederates in vice lay this to heart as a grim truth and take warning. If they would not, then their days are numbered. Let them crowd, into the few days they have yet to live, all such wordly

pleasures as are still untasted by them. Let them at once invite their dearest friends and nearest kinsmen and feast and rejoice to their hearts' content. Above all, if the next world has a place in any corner of their hearts let them hasten to make all the charitable gifts they might wish, and wait with their lives in the hollow of their hands; for, the Pândavâs would march against them without losing time. The true character of Yudhishthira's warmth his misguided foes have still to realise. It is like fire, generated in water. How then could they dream of quenching it, once it is ablaze? Contrast the Pândavâs and the Kouravas. Yudhishthira is like a tree of rectitude whereof Vedas and Ethics and myself are the roots, Arjuna is the mighty trunk, Bhîma is the giant branch, and the junior brothers are the blossoms and fruits. Duryodhana is like the tree of turpitude, of which Dhritarâshtra is the root, Karṇa is the

knotty trunk, Sakuni is the overshadowing branch, Dussasana and his brothers are its flowers and fruits. Judge between these two and decide for yourself as to who is bound to win and who is doomed to perish. Many a ray of intelligence penetrate through Duryodhana's dense mind and check him in his career of obstinate evil-doing." Sanjaya stood tongue-tied and crest-fallen. To sooth him as well as to give notice of another chance to Dhritarâshtra, Krishna promised to go to Hastinâpura on a mission of grace. Before taking his departure Sanjaya met each brother apart and learned what each had to say. Firm and decisive were indeed the words they each uttered; but pacific was their manifest intention on the score of a horror to shed human blood in the furtherance of even their indefeasible rights. Bhîma avowed that, while it would gladden his heart to have the chance of redeeming his

declared pledges, he was nevertheless willing to forego his desire for revenge, if Duryodhana would keep his compact. Arjuna, too, spoke in a like strain but not altogether under hostile impulses. He wished it to be announced to Dhṛitarâshṭra and his son and his nefarious co-adjutors that the war, when waged would be one of virtue, with Sree-Kṛishna as the trusted guide, that success under such auspices was sure and that, should the result be otherwise, it would not break his heart but only prove that vice was mightier than virtue—a consequence which he would neither postulate nor predict. Nakula and Sahadeva held forth in equal confidence in the justice of their cause and hoped that their fool-hardy enemies would, for once, open their eyes to the sword of Damocles hanging over their devoted heads. Fraught with these several, yet unanimous, deliverances on the part, these angered yet sober

men, who had full cause for declaring instant war, Sanjaya hurried back to Hastinâpura. He arrived of an evening. But Dhritarâshṭra who had been on the tenter-hooks of painful expectancy ordered him into his immediate presence to learn the result of his diplomacy. Sanjaya perceived the advantage of solitary audience, and, unencumbered by any inconvenient considerations of enforced decency on any score of compromising his master, he portrayed the situation in all its terrors and the declared attitude of Yudhisṭhira and his brothers, in appropriate and trenchant terms. Realising the effect of his words on the dotard-usurper, Sanjaya launched into the sort of language which ought to be expected from such an unbiassed and sensible man. When Sanjaya ended his graphic description of the catastrophe that would too surely overwhelm his children in case war ensued, Dhritarâshṭra

was roused to an adequate sense of the danger into which he and his progeny were insanely drifting from mad ambition and blind selfishness and he became a prey to an unquenchable sorrow. Dismissing Sanjaya, he sought comfort from converse with philosophic men whom he at once summoned; but their words consoled him not.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT SIXES AND SEVENS.



HE left Dhṛitarâshṭra in a hopelessly disconsolate state of mind. The stern realities that loomed before his mental vision were so far overpowering that even the solaces of philosophy, expounded and pressed on him by even adepts in the task, failed to impart quiet to his disordered, dismayed and depressed spirits. After a long night of unrelieved and acute mental agony, he ordered his son into his presence, the first thing in the morning, with a fixed resolve to counsel him to unconditional surrender. That son was made of sterner stuff and of undevout tendencies, indurated

and persistent. He scoffed at the idea of fear from the Pândavâs and laughed at his father's symptoms of alarm. He flatly contradicted his fond parent in his predictions of reverses, should war ensue, and launched into an elaborate description of his preponderating strength as compared with all that the Pândavâs could boast of. The son accomplished his task with a readiness sophistry, which took the father aback to such a degree as to resuscitate his faith in his son's plausibilities and he determined to let matters alone. But when Dhritarâshtra took his place in the Durbar Hall later on and heard Sanjaya vividly detail the utterances and the threats of the Pândavâs and Sree Krishna, his sense of security was again shaken and the sage advice of Vidura, Bhîshma, Drôna and the like began again to tell. He clung indeed to the hope that, humanly speaking, his son's ultimate triumph might be fairly predicated.

But his apprehensions arose from the convictions that Sree Kṛishna was a potent factor against him. The upshot of the consultation was vacillation and a condition of stupor. That Sree Kṛishna had promised to go to Hastinâpura with a mission of grace sufficed to dissipate the fear that war might be declared without notice. Here in Oopaplavia there was much uneasiness. Weeks elapsed and there was no sign of any message from Dhṛitarâshṭra. Calling to mind Sree Kṛishna's plight-ed word to Sanjaya, but mainly to give Dhṛitarâshṭra a final chance, Yudhisṭhira sought the presence of that emblem of divine wisdom. With a heart bleeding for humanity and with eyes brimful of tears of sorrow for his kindred, Yudhisṭhira appeared before Sree Kṛishna and thus unbosomed himself "O Kṛishna I am not sure" says he "whether my cousins have resolved to brave us and court death and disaster. I should assume that they are woe-

fully unalive to the doom that would inevitably overtake them in fitting themselves against us, guided and directed as we are by your supreme counsel. I have a lingering doubt that they might wait in expectation of your promised visit to their capital. My feelings revolt from the sure effects to them of their wicked game, and it is my earnest wish to give them the last chance of escaping the certain peril into which they seem to rush in a reckless and impious spirit. While reminding you of your promise to Sanjaya, I shudder at the thought of forcing you into a position of risk and indignity on our account. I am sure that it is your resolute purpose to make your devout suppliants to become ascendant in the end. But at the same time I cannot persuade myself that, out of regard for our interests, we should drive one so noble as you to the discreditable predicament of facing danger and belittlement at the hands of my

unrighteous foes. I have thus poured fourth my sorrows before you with a view to seek a way out of existing dilemma rather than to induce you to take up an inconvenient and unworthy position for our benefit. You have always been our guide, philosopher and friend and you know that we have been ever and entirely in your hands. Advise us as you deem best and we shall accept your word as law, even if we were as a consequence to go back to the forest and spend the rest of our lives without murmur and without regret. I have set forth my perplexity and I await your decision."

After patiently listening to this outpouring of Yudhishtira's disquietude, Sree Krishna spoke as follows:—"I note a lurking idea in you that things might mend, should I go to Dhritarâshtra on the promised mission of grace and do my uttermost to avert the catastrophe of a fratricidal war. But at the same time you

have an ill-concealed fear that harm might betide me from your misguided foes. As a common relation, it behoves me to save your cousins from the consequences of their sins, by accepting the role of a peace-maker between you. Such a thought has already been in my mind owing to the promise I had given to Sanjaya and I have myself been thinking of proposing the course to you. As to the apprehension that an injury might be meditated against me when I do so, have no anxiety on that point. By plotting against me, your foes would only seal their own doom. They dare not touch a hair of my head, without incurring the penalty of instant destruction for their pains. I shall go to advise them and I shall return unscathed after discharging the expected function of humane and friendly intercession. I bar further discussion on the subject, and I shall start on the morrow for Hastinâpura. To re-assure him-

self before he went forth as their plenipotentiary Sree Krishna has a separate interview with each one concerned. Lest Duryodhana might flatly refuse the restoration sought, Yudhishtira specified a minimum. He named four well-known cities as what would be acceptable to him together with a fifth, which he would leave Duryodhana to select. This alternative of a minimum demand was due—be it noted—solely to avoid bloodshed and a fratricidal contest. To this overture all his brothers were opposed; but they were perhaps silent under the conviction that even a readiness to accept such a trifle would be of no avail, as Duryodhana was sure that he was safe against them only so long as they were without a recognised foothold as a base of operations for conquest and acquisition of territory. Thus therefore, all the brothers agreed that Sree Krishna should do his utmost in bringing about a pacific

settlement with the enemy. There was one in the household who was stoutly opposed to the course. To that person recovery of the kingdom is of secondary importance as compared with the chastisement of the inveterate sinners. That person was Droupadi and she was loud in her wail. She had, without doubt, suffered the very brunt of unparalleled outrages and she could not bring herself to accept even an abject surrender on the part of such offenders as a reason for immunity from the pains and penalties of their cold-blooded and audacious offences. She called in question the wisdom of the maudlin sentimentalism of her husbands and charged them with having valued self and others' lives above the claims of their own honor. Speaking in this strain and being in the melting mood that belongs to the fine sensibilities of a chaste woman who would far sooner die ten thousand deaths than see the authors of

outrages on her honor walk the world unchastised and in safety, she strongly appealed to Sree Krishna and entreated him to desist. She wound up by pointing out that after shielding her from shame and disgrace when her husbands were not free to act, he was bound to see that the offenders met with condign punishment, when those husbands regained their liberty of action; for, so far as the foes were concerned their guilt was complete, though, in spite of all they had done, they were foiled by you. It is to me a matter for profound grief that the recovery of their kingdom and avoidance of bloodshed have the foremost place in the minds of my natural protectors and that their inhuman conduct towards their honored wife has been put aside as secondary and subordinate. The question of recovering the kingdom and the question of punishing for having insulted me are perfectly distinct from each other. The

abandonment of the latter in favour of the former is 'an abandonment of sense and all notion of justice. I have been rejoicing that the villains who plotted against my honor are fairly on the path of ruin and that the punitive consequences they richly deserved are soon to overtake them. But your mission of grace seems to clog the way and blast my hopes. You have been like a brother to me. You saved me from the brink of ruin, when I prayerfully appealed to you in the hour of danger. Are you then going to spare the lives of the very friends who rendered your intercession imperative. Let my husbands make peace and not blush for doing so. Help them in that object of theirs, if you please. My mind is made up. I shall end my life the very day my husbands receive their solicited trifle. Let the world know the story of my death and wreak against the culprits that dire revenge which my husbands are too

emasculated by mis-placed lenity to visit on the declared foes of virtue. I shall only wait till I hear of your success as a peace-maker."

With these flaming words, Droupadi was about to withdraw, when Sree Krishna, prompted by his illimitable mercy, asked her to stay and gave her his inward assurance that there was not the least chance of the enemy coming round and that their utter annihilation was a matter of absolute certainty. At these words Droupadi smiled amid her gushing tears, and Sree Krishna went to take his seat in the chariot that was waiting to bear him to the lunar capital.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISSION OF GRACE.



THE report had spread for some hours that Sree Krishna was to leave for Hastinâpura as a friendly mediator. A vast concourse of people gathered together, lining the entire highway to witness him as he passed. Amid joyous greetings from myriad voices, he moved slowly on, till he left the precincts of the city. Then, proceeding by easy marches, halting at the several abodes of Rishis on the way, receiving their homage, and bespeaking their helpful presence at Dhritarâshtra's Durbar, he drove apace. He was soon in the vicinity of the lunar capital; and the news sped to the

blind holder of the sceptre. The monarch was not slow to order the council to assemble and to place the tidings before them as a matter for joy. In his obtuseness, he proposed that the finest residence, the most skilful cooks and the most valuable clothes, ornaments and other products of superior art should be placed at the disposal of the coming guest, to gain his affections to his side. Bhîshma laughed in contempt at this betrayal of want of discrimination on the part of the foolish King and told him unreservedly that none of these gewgaws would win Sree Krishna but that a wise resolve to take his advice and make peace with the Pândavâs by giving to these latter their kingdom, which he was coming to ask for, could alone conciliate and please him. Drôna and Kripa and Vidura spoke in similar terms. Dhritarâshtra's face fell, upon receiving these ill-concealed rebuffs; but, all the same, he secretly gloated over the

idea that had taken possession of him, and desired that Dussasana's palatial edifice should be prepared and assigned as his lodging and every article and form of luxury should be there accumulated, regardless of cost. He next directed that Bhîshma, Drôna and other aged and respected personages should, with Dussasana, form the deputation to go forward and accord a loyal and hearty reception to the august visitor. After entrance into the city and in order to gratify the wishes of the many thousands of spectators who seemed to long to have a full and close view of him, Sree Krishna alighted from his chariot and slowly walked on foot, attended by Satyaki and Krita Verma who had accompanied him and the members of the deputation that had advanced to greet and welcome him. The crowds on either side pressed towards him, with their forward heads smiling faces and joyous eyes, and, when the

guards of the passage tried to force them back, Sree Kṛishna desired them to abstain and gave the eager on-lookers the fullest chance they obviously longed for. Women from the upper flats and from the windows of the magnificent edifices on either side of the roads pointed to him, admired him and sang the many songs that had long been current in honor of the gallantries of his youth and the exploits of his manhood as well as the strains which celebrated his triumphs of diplomacy. Thus universally esteemed, Sree Kṛishna entered the gorgeous portals of Dhṛitarâshṭra's Durbar Hall. Every one present rose to honor him, and it is worthy of note that Duryodhana, Karna and Sakuni who had pledged themselves to keep their seats and to deny him homage found themselves standing as if galvanised by an electric shock. Sree Kṛishna, Satyaki and Kṛita Verma having taken the seats appoint-

ed for them, the rest followed suit. After the bustle had subsided, the usual enquiries of mutual welfare were gone through, and allusion was made to the lodgings arranged and the banquet prepared for him. Sree Krishna, not wishing to speak out his mind at once, excused himself from accepting the invitation on the ground that he would think of hospitalities after his business was accomplished. When this was called in question as an untenable ground, he came out with the truth that he did not care to partake of a fare which was offered by an enemy. "If" he went on to say "you ask how you are my foes, let me tell you that as you bear ill-will to the Pândavâs and as I consider those righteous men as my life, you are conspirers against my life." This avowal led to some bitterness of altercation with Duryodhana, but Sree Krishna was inexorable and minded him not. After a while, the first formal visit was over,

and Sree Krishna wended his way to Vidura's house. As he went along, Bhîshma, Drôna and other honored men solicited the privilege of entertaining him in their respective abodes, but, telling them that he took their will for the deed, he passed on Vidura's house. There he met Kunti the mother of the Pândavâs and his respected aunt. Hearty and pathetic were the words that each of them uttered to the other and before many minutes elapsed, these two and Vidura formed a consultative trio of the finest touch. Long and earnest was the deliberation among them and they agreed in the conclusion that no good would come of the proposed mediation, as Duryodhana, Dussâsana, Karṇa, and Sakuni, were the dominant party in the blind monarch's court and as Bhîshma, Drôna and other elders only enjoyed little more than a seeming recognition, and had long ceased to be determining factors or directing minds. The

task proposed had however to be gone through, and therefore Sree Kṛishna went to the Royal Durbar at the appointed hour. There was no lack of effusive consideration to him to all outward seeming and within a few minutes of his arrival there, quite a host of universally-respected Rishis announced themselves and were received and seated with appropriate honors. Sree Kṛishna was glad of this accession of moral strength, all right thinking men were full of hope that a mediation, opened by no less than the foremost diplomatist of the age and aided by such a cluster of godly men, would bear fruit. After some little preliminary converse and addressing Dhṛitarâshṭra, Sree Kṛishna spoke as follows :—

“ I have nothing to tell you which you do not know. I have nevertheless, come to fulfil the duty of a common kinsman of you and the Pândavâs. Your sons and Pândavâs

could defy the world by presenting the spectacle of families united by indissoluble bonds of mutual goodwill and you ought to look upon your sons and nephews in the light of that prospect and policy. The lunar race is immemorially famed for justice, unswerving honesty, for truthfulness, for benevolent affections, for prosperity and clemency. Why detract from this historic character at present. You advisedly made Yudhishtira the Yuva Rajah, in recognition of his merits and claims. When your work of justice was intercepted by malignant conspiracy against their very lives and when they outlived the murderous efforts and rose like the phoenix from the very ashes, reappearing in glory and greatness, you again took them in hand and gave them a share in the kingdom, though every impartial man must regard the allotment as less than their due. Deference to the opinion of elders made them

accept the left-handed gift with perfect content; and by the force of muscle and matchless heroism they extended their territory and built up a kingdom of their own, without in the least trenching upon your or your son's rights. Your own sons co-operated in their celebration of the Râja Sâya ceremonial and thereby impressed the outside world that between your progeny and the Pândavâs there were no differences and that therē was on the contrary, an unqualified solidarity. Envy or jealousy (whichever you may call it) supervened, and the evil genius of Sakuni prompted the plot of duping the unsuspecting Yudhishtira by means of loded dice. From the first consequences of that deception, you yourself rescued the Pândavâs, but, later on, you were outwitted by your wily son and brother-in-law in a manner that Yudhishtira's own rectitude of conduct might effectually debar you from repeating your

corrective interposition. I can understand—and the world can understand—your utter powerlessness to retard the consequent mischief or mend it. Thus for your active, though ineffectual endeavour to arrest the course of evil-doing must be greatly acknowledged. As for the events that followed I am bound to admit, they were beyond your control and they occurred in spite of you. The untold miseries and unmerited hardships and privations which became the lot of the Pândavâs in consequence are easily imagined and do not need elaborate specifying. Let by-gones be by-gones, and in view to promote the cause of peace, I pass over the enormities aimed at the honor of Droupadi, the model wife of model men—enormities that were providentially warded off. In a like spirit, I pass over the inviolable obligation of Bhîma's and Arjuna's pledges on this distinct and independent cause, distinct and independ-

ent obviously from the fraud whereby the Pândavâs were robbed of their earthly all. Putting in the back ground this imperative obligation, I have come with the single object of inducing you to make peace with the Pândavâs and thereby enabling you to forget and forgive the wrongs done to them through the attempted and partially-perpetrated outrage against their honored spouse of peerless chastity. Do what I will, the record of the past-misdoing on the part of your sons and their parasitical partisans must command prominent notice. But I have been commissioned not to urge them; and the security of your kith and kin lies in discreetly taking the Pândavâs at their word, when they have, in a generous and humane spirit, promised to forego all ideas of revenge, provided they got back their dominion as the result of their having successfully fulfilled their pledges as to forest life and incognito.

You have absolutely no excuse to keep them at arm's length any longer and you will only accelerate the inevitable doom of your sons, kinsmen and friends by hesitancy at this crisis. I charge you once again to take the Pândavâs at their word. When they are under the domination of generous impulses and when they are prepared to turn a deaf ear to the clement call of just, and warrantable punitive vengeance. Let go this opportunity and you lose all possible chance. Let me re-iterate that I have come empowered to say that if the fraudulently wrenched kingdom were restored, the waters of the Lethe would be allowed to obliterate misdemeanours of the past, and it is to your abiding interest to clutch at the proffered means of rescue from the yawning abyss. Suppressing features of minor differences, I have set forth the case of the Pândavâs in its salient aspects, in the hope that these latter might influence your

judgment ; and I have done so in the firm faith that in case the Pândavâs regain their kingdom without bloodshed, they might override all motives of just revenge on personal and independent grounds. It is most imperative for you to take advantage of the present situation. Belittle its benefits and you forfeit all claim to commiseration, and you effectually seal the doom of your progeny, kinsmen and friends. This chance of reprieve once lost, may never recur and repentance at a future date may not be of the least avail to you." There was nothing but unqualified and universal admiration respecting this unbiassed statement of the case on behalf of the Pândavâs, and the Rishis that were present were not slow to add the might of their approbation and to urge on Dhṛitarâshṭra and Duryodhana the superlative wisdom of complying with the proposal. The dotard-parent pretended

compliance ; but his obstinate son showed no such signs. On the contrary, he read between the lines and felt sure that, amid all Sree Krishna's seemingly unprovoking exposition, there was a transparent indictment against him. This touched him to the quick as his guilty conscience must lead him to such a result. But he would not venture to argue the point, as he must feel convinced that he could urge no sound reasoning to bolster him up. He therefore kept stolid silence and bethought himself of an infamous and tortuous course. He realised more clearly than theretofore that Sree Krishna was the tangible bulwork of strength to the Pândavâs ; and false alike to the accepted code of dealing with ambassadors and to his own sense of propriety, he suddenly withdrew from the Durbar and was soon joined by his mermedans to consult as to placing Sree Krishna under arrest and incarceration. He concluded, not

altogether without reflection that, without his clear-headed guidance, the Pândavâs were liable to defeat and subjugation. The scheme he had organised under this wild conjecture in conjunction with Karna and Dussâsana, and Sakuni was however soon shattered to the winds of the heaven, by a timely discovery.

The attempt to bind and incarcerate Sree Krishna, in defiance of his universally-acknowledged supremacy and in breach of the recognised code of honor, regarding the treatment of an ambassador was no sooner attempted than suspected Krita Varma went out of the Durbar Hall to command the battalions which had accompanied Sree Krishna and which were in waiting outside to pounce if need arose. Sâtyaki was by the divine ambassador's side to parry insidious bows at the latter. Sree Krishna, who had become aware of the fatuous design of Duryodhana

and his partisans, smiled the smile of scorn at this display of audacious fool-hardiness of the foe-men, and addressed Dhṛitarâshṭra in intrepid and contemptuous terms as follows :

“ Out of regard for you I have undertaken this mediation, and, out of compassion for your numerous and misguided offspring, I have used the language which might conciliate and not provoke. In view to promote the chances of peace, I have left unsaid the atrocities of your guilts, and I hoped that thereby I could gain over your wayward son and the evil geniuses who had led him astray. The effect of my moderation and reticence, seems to be a design on my own liberty. This is the crowning deed of your son's heinousness and daring, and I wish that I possessed the freedom to smash him as I had done Sisu-pâla. Ready and willing to do so and facilitate the task of my beloved Pândavâs, I feel incumbered by the role of an ambassador

which I bear just at present. It is a thousand pities that the scheme of your son and partisans is yet embryonic; for if they burst into abrupt action against me, I should be warranted in crushing them at once on the ground of evident self-defence. At the present stage of the plot I can only ask you whether you would call your sons and their ill-intentioned colleagues to a sense of the wreck and ruin they are courting or whether I should take their punishment into my own hands. Let such gross natures as are encouraged by the paucity of the retinue and the troops that I have brought with me, behold what I am. Hardly had these words been spoken, when the wondering assembly saw him present himself in his world-filling proportions. Alarmed by the portentous spectacle, devout men were struck with reverential awe, and sinful souls quailed at the dread sight. From every pore of the rapidly-developing dimensions,

leaped out hordes innumerable, and it seemed as if the final doomsday was at hand. Pious as well as impious ones, began to shudder with fear, while Sree Kṛishna vouchsafed to Dhṛitarâshṭra the gift of sight. That monarch, no longer physically blind, lost heart completely and fervently prayed that the preter-natural demonstration of all-conquering potency should be withdrawn. Sree Kṛishna cherished the idea of employing only human agencies to lighten the earth's burden of multitudinous sinners, and he readily granted the entreaty to spare the Kowravas from instantly stamping them off the surface of the globe. Having thus given signal proof of his unapproachable supremacy, he resumed his unalarming human shape and asked Dhṛitarâshṭra's leave to depart. That hypocritical monarch tried to excuse himself as powerless for controlling overpoweringly discordant elements; but Sree Kṛishna in his

knowledge of the exact truth, summarily and incredulously polished him off. Amid universal regret and wide-spread dismay as to the disastrous results of his having been set at naught, he retraced his steps to incite the Pàndavàs to wage their righteous war and to exterminate the brood of self opinionated sinners, of whom the world had become too full owing to the influence of the approaching Kàli age.

CHAPTER XIX.

“RUBICON CROSSED.”



BEFORE taking his departure, Sree Krishna opened the eyes of Karna to his sonship to Kunti and thereby to Râja Pându. He likewise tried to convince Aswathâma of the Pândavâ victory as the inevitable result of the coming war ; but the heartlessness of the one and the misguided loyalty of the other barred all hope of their abandoning the side of vice. Regrettable as was the failure of Sree Krishna's mission in the interests of the lunar race, one salutary effect of it would be the effectual riddance of a swarm of inveterate sinners and their co-adjuters from the

face of the earth. Grati¹fied with this counter-
vailing advantage to mankind at large,
Sree Krishna personally, was not sorry for
the turn affairs had taken, as they tended
towards undoubted extirpation of evil-doers.
With a placid countenance and unruffled
equanimity, he met Kunti to learn what
messages she would want him to convey
to her sons at Oopaplavia. Her utteran-
ces were characteristic of the heroic mother
of heroic sons. She enlarged on the history
of one Dussalâ, the courageous mother of a
demoralised son, who was in low spirits at
the prospect of war, but who, on listening to
his mother's energising words, recognised that
true Kshatrias should not hesitate to wage
war on the mere ground of shedding the
blood of kinsmen and their confederates in
evil-doing. She therefore charged Sree
Krishna to impress on Yudhisht^hira the imper-
ative duty of relentless chastisement of even

the nearest and dearest, when they unscrupulously offend against justice and morality. To Bhîma she sent word that the time had come for exerting all his muscular force without giving weight to any sentimental weakness born of unmerited clemency. To Arjuna she conveyed the message that, when he was begotten the unseen gods had declared in voice which could not be mistaken, that he was destined to crush the Kowrava hosts and come out triumphant. To the sons of Mâdri—Nakula and Sahâdava—she counselled the wisdom of falling in with the decision of their elders and acting in unison with their plans. To Sree Kṛishna himself she avowed that her faith in him was unshaken and that she was sure he would be the bulwark of strength to her sons and their guide in treading the path of unequivocal virtue and undying glory. Above all, she declared her earnest wish that Droupadi who had suffered from unprece-

dented wrongs and who was eminently entitled to advise, should be consulted and readily accepted by her sons as the final arbiter of the course to be pursued. Sree Krishna left Hastinâpura with an unqualified promise to faithfully communicate the several messages with which he was entrusted. His arrival and final word sounded the tocsin of war on the part of the Pândavâs ; while his displeased departure from Hastinâpura and tidings of the views of Kunti he was to convey, instilled terror in the minds of the Kowrava ranks, and they concluded that war was no longer a matter of doubt. Duryodhana was however unmoved. He had a faltering faith in Bhîshma's and Drôna's impartiality and he was inwardly anxious to constitute Karna as the commander of all his forces at once. This was manifest to all. But he yielded to the fear that Bhîshma and Drôna and a host of other capable warriors would be alienated from him

and forsake him, if he carried out his unarticulated idea. He therefore thought it descreet to propose to Bhîshma the office of the Generalissimo. Bhîshma, whose single but overshadowing weakness was to subordinate all other considerations to the passion for displaying his personal heroism, felt vastly flattered with this proof of recognition, and in the plenitude of his gratitude he declared the pledge that, he would kill a hundred choice warriors each day and that he would force Sree Kṛishna himself who had promised not to seize a weapon, to rush weapon-armed in breach of his plighted word. When the Pândavâs heard of the appointment of Bhîshma as the leader of the Kowrava forces, they held a conference and installed as the general of their army and by a unanimous voice, Drista Dyumnâ the valiant brother of the grossly insulted Droupadi. This selection was made at the suggestion of Sree Kṛishna

and in a sense this was the happening of the unexpected ; for every body had thought that Arjuna or Satyaki was the fittest to guide the forces as against the veteran Bhîshma. Trammels of office carry certain responsibilities which militate against the holder being ubiquitous ; and to checkmate Drôna and Aswaththâmâ on the other side both these accomplished archers would be unreservedly needed. Sree Kṛishna also remembered that, when both Duryodhana and Arjuna sought his aid on one and the same day at Dwârakâ and when he offered them a choice between his highly-disciplined legions as one allotment and himself, unarmed and pledged to absolute martial inactivity, as their counterfoes, the materialistic son of the blind Dhritârâshtra chose the former. None but Arjuna was equal to overcome those legions, and he expected that Arjuna would be fully occupied against the obstinate fight they would give

him. He therefore opined that his compeer Satyaki at least must be free to help Bhîma, Abhimanyu and other budding warriors on the side of the Pândavâs in neutralising the efforts of the brahmin-archers already named in the Kowrava forces. It is here worthy of note that Sree Krishna's nomination was assented to without a word of altercation or explanation—a feature not to be dreamt of amid the conflicting elements with which the Kowrava ranks abounded. So soon as Bhîshma took office and proceeded to exercise its first function of assigning their respective places to the several warriors, the voice of discord at once burst out. Karna felt hurt at the position given him by Bhîshma as too subordinate for his exalted abilities and fore-swore putting himself or his battalions into the field, so long as Bhîshma's generalship lasted. To Duryodhana this was a serious grievance, but he was powerless either way.

Bhîshma convinced of Karna's over-rating himself and be-littling the foe, minded this not; and therefore Karna's help was lost to Duryodhana's army for the first ten days of the war that ensued. Vidura also had resolved to take no part in the war, but on a different ground and from far loftier motives. His righteous nature revolted from the unrighteous war, and he did not regard his allegiance to Dhritarâshtra to involve on unconditional abdication of all principles of justice and humanity—a noble example which the worldly-minded and glory-loving unbrahmanical Drôna, Kripa and Aswaththama were sadly incapable of imitating—possessing as they did ample fortunes which took them out of the necessity to meanly serve and work for their bread. Unhappily it came to pass that almost every warrior who joined Duryodhana, his unprincipled brothers and his sworn adherents, was stricken with an incurable obli-

quity of judgment and each of them surrendered his soul to the unholy war which remains to be described. Certain conversations that took place in Duryodhana's camp and the camp of Yudhishtira deserve notice here as prospective deliverances of capable men on either side. In answer to a question from Duryodhana to Bhîshma, Drôna and Karṇa as to the number of days which each would take to vanquish the Pândavâ forces, Bhîshma and Drôna mentioned thirty days each, while the self-opinionated Karṇa named five days as amply sufficient. Hearing of these announcements, when Yudhishtira interrogated Arjuna in a like spirit of anxious enquiry, the latter smiled a smile of ineffable contempt that in a twinkle of the eye he would annihilate the entire enemy—army and all—by means of the weapon which he had obtained from Siva and by the use of which he had blasted the countless and immemorially un-

vanquished foes of Jupiter himself at his request. Barring that weapon as usable as only the means of ultimate resort, Arjuna made it clear to Yudhishtira and his assembled kinsmen and friends that, with Sree Krishna as their guide, philosopher and friend, victory to their cause must, for sooth, be a divinely-ordained event. This pronouncement dissipated the lingering doubts of Yudhishtira as to the final result, and he was emboldened in the war which he had already declared.

CHAPTER XX.

MORAL TRIUMPHS.



IN the initial day of the great and memorable war of virtue against vice, the contending armies stood drawn up in battle-array in the ample plains of Kuru Kshêtra. Amid his heroic brothers, kinsmen and friends, whose faces were lighted up with the glow of martial ambition, Arjuna, with the brightness of his countenance enhanced by the Indra-given diadem of preternatural brilliance sat in his war-car, decked in gold, decorated with the banner displaying the dread device of the stately Hanumân, monkey-god personified as a peerless devotee and of superhuman strength, and drawn by cream-colored cour-

sers twice four in number. The divine Sree Krishna graced the charioteer's seat, whip and reins in hand, in proof of his boundless devotion to the cause of the redoubtable hero. That car of celestial beauty was conducted round in order that its gallant occupant might have a wide survey and bestow a kind word or a kindly glance on his warriors by way of cheering them up. It arrived at last at a vantage ground whence he could have a full view of the assembled hordes and take note of the particular spots where the tougher customers might be located. Above and beyond all, the towering personalities of the aged Bhîshma, the venerable Drôna, the hoary Kripa and the youthful Aswaththama caught his eye. From them his now-disconsolate eyes wandered to the mass of kindred who had unluckily made common cause with the wicked Duryodhana and were there, ready to lay down their lives. The

spectacle awakened in him a sensation of intense reverence and of uncontrollable pity. Such was their complete mastery over him, that his bow and arrows dropped unconsciously from his self-relaxed grasp and he recoiled from what now struck him as a task of endless courage not unmingled with elements of sacrilege and savagery. The sunshine of assured glory, which erewhile illumined his face, gave place to lowering clouds of suspense and the intrepid fortitude which had, a few moments back, dominated his swelling heart now melted into a boundless tenderness for humanity. Horrified by spectacle and abominating to immolate kinsmen and depopulate the Earth, Arjuna, in a tremulous voice, spoke to Sree Krishna thus :—

“I had indeed girded up my loins from a satisfied sense of outraged justice and from the resistless call of duty to chastise the cul-

prits. But when I have come face to face with the objects of our wrath the thought has possessed me that in order to reach the true wrong-doers, I must victimise good and revered men who had unhappily cast lots with the authors of guilt. This disarming thought has generated in me an ever increasing train of intensely altruistic reflections. As a result, my whole emotional nature is up in arms and all other ideas and feelings have sunk before it. When I view the hapless mass of lives before me, prepared to be cut down, the prospect makes me shudder at the task which I am called upon to perform. It looks too much as if our own selfishness is at the bottom of the position I have taken up? Is it not after all to cheer and profit my own kith and kin, the sorrowing remnant of the ruthless ravages on the battlefield? A few morsels of savoury herbs and a few mouthfuls of any stream would suffice to

feed our bodies, and why for the sake of this perishable frame, shoot dead so many of God's creatures. I have no mind to fight and I shall retire, come what may." This deliverance did not take Sree Kṛishna by surprise. By intimate association with him and by the light of the sentiments which had often fallen from his lips in their mutual converse, he had long known the bent of Arjuna's mind and his high emotional sensitiveness. He was looking for the day when he would be called upon emphatically to enunciate the sublimest truths, a knowledge of which would clear his moral vision from the illusions of his obtrusive sentimental nature. Profoundly touched by the mental depression which had been wrought in Arjuna by his nervous dread of giving pain, Sree Kṛishna unfolded to him the entire body of the divine teaching which has since been deferentially received, under the name of the Bhagavatgîta,

and which all schools of Aryan thinkers and theologians have accepted as revelation. This is not the place even for a summary of his long, exhaustive and luminous exposition of ethics and philosophy. But it is enough to recognise the fact that Sree Krishna took it as the long-looked for occasion for over-throwing the ascendancy of sentimentalism over Arjuna's intellect. As a first step towards attenuating the arbitrary dominion of emotional nature over Arjuna, he reminded him of the perishable character of the body as distinguished from the immortal soul, of the hourly liability of the former to be terminated by any of the many diseases to which flesh is heir. Having regard to this distinction he impressed on Arjuna that the annihilation of the corporeal frame was at best not a matter for any serious regret, but that when such a result is worked out in the way of a deserved punishment for undoubted guilt,

there ought to be no compunction at all. As for the soul, while it receives the wages of sin, might at the same time be released from earthly bondage and secure for itself the beatific enjoyments, which are promised for the warriors who died in the battle field. Albeit that his horror of the enormity of the objective harm he thought he was perpetrating was thus abated, Arjuna still insisted on regarding the work before him as seeming to be by selfishness and as a derogation from greatness in a subjective view. Sree Krishna replied that if Arjuna would only judicially examine his heart he would find out his own mistake, inasmuch as he must feel sure that he was only face to face with an inviolable duty, as the mundane yet sentient instrument in the hand of God. As for any objection that he would far rather leave the punitive task to some one else, he was reminded that, in divine economy for the governance of the

world, the function has been assigned to earthly agents, and in the Aryan land, to the sovereign classes, and that he could no more abdicate the duty than other Kshatrias; for if all the members of the class suddenly took into their heads to claim the freedom which he claimed for himself, no result would ensue short of immediate chaos, disorder and confusion with their attendant sins of commission and omission including failures of religious rites and obsequial obligations entailed by the Aryan system of Faith to which he acknowledged allegiance. He also made it clear to Arjuna that all sinners were God-forsaken and that they virtually cease to live before they cease to exist. The proper rule of conduct for each man during the limited span of earthly life is to resolve to fulfil duty as he finds it instead of embarking on a sea of doubt and speculation on a weary and unfruitful search of what was proper to do, re-

gardless of the chart and compass available to him amid his environments. Take my word that improper motive you have none. I am convinced that desire for the fruits of your deeds, you do not in the least cherish. Your position therefore is in perfect accord with the sublimest philosophy. God invariably co-operates with his ostensible vicegerants on earth, provided these latter suppress the self and discharge their evident functions, piously eschewing all ideas of securing personal gain thereby. That personal advantage might follow as a consequence is nothing to the point; for the deed is estimated by the motive which prompted it—not by the happening of something, without being wished for. Look upon yourself as the chosen instrument in the hand of God and as working, without a thought for personal gain either as a motive or as an outcome. Dispel all doubts and behold me who am the unknow-

able divinity and note how, in this instance, I work with you." At this last sentence Arjuna looks up and his eyes are dazzled by the fiery effulgence and the unconditioned manifestation of the Architect of the universe, growing fuller and fuller in its proportions and ready to wield the all-destroying Chakra of Vishnu among the hostile hordes. Awe-struck and dumb-founded, Arjuna witnesses the divine co-operation and stands aghast his limbs palsied, his intellect paralysed, his heart throbbing with the prayerful wish that Sree Krishna should resume his amiable visage and human frame and that wish which his tongue fails to command the voice wherewith to articulate is perceived however, and the omnipotent form gradually diminishes and before many minutes, the kindly features and the suave words of Sree Krishna are seen and heard, Arjuna has conquered his sentimental hallucination and without another word takes

up his Gândiva to do battle in the discharge of a what he has come to recognise as nothing more and nothing less than a pious and a divinely ordained duty, a duty which he must regard as inviolable and which he could not, with impunity leave unfulfilled.

While all this was going on between Sree Krishna, and Arjuna, Yudhishtira was achieving similar moral triumphs in his own peculiar way. When the warriors on either side were about to take out their shafts from the quivers Yudhishtira alights from his chariot, and with the unfurled white flag in his grasp, walks towards the enemy, bare-footed and unarmed. All eyes are riveted on him and few divine the motive of his conduct. Checking his steps when mid-way between the two armies he declares, in a ringing and sonorous voice, that he had waged war in an unfaltering faith in the righteousness of his cause. "If" he cried out "any on either side had

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any the least doubt in the purity of his intentions, he is even now at liberty to change sides according to the dictates of his conscience." Having made this announcement and giving his hearers time to think, he went up to the chariots of Bhîshma, Drôna, Kṛipa and other respected elders and sought their blessings or curses as the case might be for the course he had resolved upon. The generous chords in the hearts of these good men were touched by this genuine entreaty of Yudhishtîra and nothing but a chorus of blessing was the irresistible outcome. He returned to his chariot, with a satisfied heart and received with open arms Yuyutsa, a son of Dhṛitarâshṭra by a Vaisya wife who with his battalions seceded at once from the unrighteous cause of his half-brother in response to Yudhishtîra's holy appeal.

CHAPTER XXI.

BHÎSHMA'S GENERALSHIP.



THE war commenced and it lasted eighteen days. The first ten of these days Bhîshma was the commander and the period of his generalship was marked by the destruction of several thousands of the enemy's troops. But it must be noted, in his special praise, that during his tenure of office, no deed was done or tolerated which might bear the faintest semblance of injustice or of a breach of military etiquette of those days. Some events have however to be noticed as illustrating his superior martial skill and in some degree warranting the confidence with which Duryodhana had dared the mighty Pândavâs. The

first day of battle closed with the repulse of the Pândavâs, solely owing to Bhîshma's unexampled heroism. This result told heavily on Yudhishthira's peace of mind and he called a council when the troops retired to their camp. To Arjuna and Krishna he freely opened his mind and he sincerely repented of the step he had taken in waging war. They re-assured him, and besought him not to judge finally by the events of the initial day of battle. On the morrow the troops were again in the field. The fortunes were on this day with the Pândavâs, and they went back to their camp in high spirits. The battle on the third day likewise proved the superiority of the Pândavâs, but a circumstance occurred which deserves notice. About mid-day Bhîshma was so completely the master of the situation that even Arjuna became daft. Krishna saw at a glance how the troops of the Pândavâs were dispersing and how the heroes

on their side were powerless to retard the advancing march of Bhîshma. Something extraordinary had to be done to arrest the further progress of the enemy. In his immensity of sympathy with the Pândavâs, the invincible Kṛishna snatched up his world-shattering Chakra and leaped out of the chariot to dash against the enemy and stem the advancing tide. This step had the desired effect. The appearance of Kṛishna in the warlike attitude, against which they had been assured, was to the opposite hosts terrific for the very reason that it was unexpected; and every one was awe-struck and unnerved. The tide rolled back and the hitherto elated heroes seemed petrified. Bhîshma, nothing daunted, stood in his warlike attitude though reverently. All this was the work of a few seconds, and Arjuna at once woke up to a sense of the infamy implied in his being unequal to the task and in his needing Kṛishna's

breach of his pledge not to take the field. With the swiftness of a lightning-flash he sprang out of the chariot and arrested Krishna's further advance ; urging most pathetically, how Krishna's conduct would doom him to unmerited discredit. Gained over by Arjuna's persuasions and re-assured that Arujuna would now rise to the occasion, Krishna retraced his steps and took his post at the driver's seat. Arjuna, stimulated by the gravity of the moment, proved a veritable god of terror to the opposing warriors and their forces. The enemy was at once beaten and the day was as a consequence declared in favor of the Pândavâs. Fortunes were equally with the Pândavâs on the five ensuing days. The eighth and ninth days were however marked with certain events that cannot be silently passed over—the former of them for the widely lamented death of Elavanta, the son of Arjuna by a Naga

maiden, and the latter by Kṛistna once again rushing whip in hand, to humble Bhîshma angered by the demoralised helplessness of Pândavâs, forces. Again did Arjuna beseech Krishna to spare him the disgrace and Krishna, always tender to a devoted follower, desisted from his purpose—a course that only tended to rouse Arjuna to do his utmost and thereby beat back the advancing wave of the enemy's forces. Yudhishtira saw indeed that day after day, success was on his side but at the same time he noticed with regret that his troops were getting rapidly thinned and that there appeared no prospect of Bhîshma's fall. The continuance of war in the face of these odds did not seem to inspire Yudhishtira with hope of a speedy triumph, and he became perplexed. On the night of the ninth day of battle, he held a council of war and gave vent to his despondency. The truth was realised that, so long as Bhîsh-

ma fought, there was little chance of his vanquishment and that the only tactics that promised success were to compel him to turn away from the enemy in heroic disdain. This was possible only by making the woman-faced Sikhandi to oppose him with Arjuna at his elbow to take advantage of Bhîshma's passive attitude and to disable him. While this plan was maturing in the camp of the Pândavâs, stirring things were happening in Bhîshma's pavilion. Angels of grace, who often held communion with him, paid him a visit and exhorted him to help the wicked no longer and to resolve to shuffle off his mortal coil. They expostulated that he had been in this sinful world quite long enough and that he should forthwith withdraw and thereby make it possible for virtue to triumph and the career of retribution to be retarded no longer. The veteran warrior's thoughts now rose above earthly glory and yearn-

ed for the placid happiness of a soul, steeped in devotion and unruffled piety. All ignorant of this mighty change in the frame of Bhîshma's mind, the Pândavâs elaborated the stratagem they had resolved on and Bhîshma fell. Disabled to do battle, but not slain, Bhîshma survived the whole campaign to have life and intelligence enough, for days after its close, to instruct Yudhishthira in the principles of state craft and of holy and lovable life. The fall of Bhîshma was a signal for the cessation of the combat for the day and both the opposing troops retired to their camps as if a common calamity had befallen them. The pall of sorrow had fallen on every one and the heroes on either side buried, for the moment their mutual animosities. They sought the presence of the disabled hero of four score years, and rendered their humble obeisance. They united in a common grief and they earnestly

sought his parting advice for the remainder of their lives. Bhîshma saw his opportunity and earnestly exhorted the contending parties to make peace, bury their hatchets and live in harmony. The advice was however distasteful to Duryodhana and his infamous brethren, as these had still centered their hope in Karna who had not yet taken the field and who (they were sanguine) would still lead them on to victory. Karna himself was soon in the presence of the disabled hero, and the sorrowing crowd of warriors withdrew to permit an interview between these two warriors, apparently alienated from each other. It was no time for any other than the stern language of truth and Karna did not hesitate to pay a well-merited compliment to the unapproachable heroism of the fallen veteran. The latter too was resolved to speak out his mind in right earnest. In the fond hope that he might counsel Karna

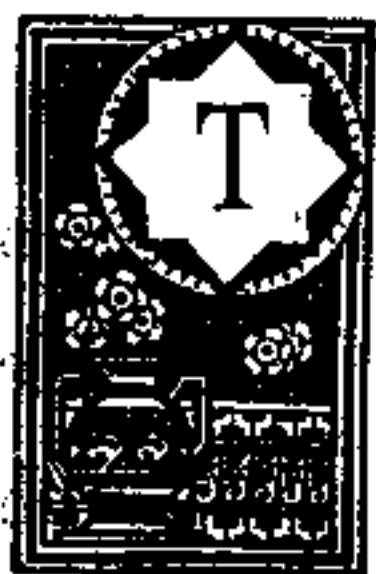
to accept terms of peace, he made capital out of the compliment paid to him a moment before, and explained how his fall might well be taken as fair proof, that the Pândavâs possessed divine help and that they were destined finally to come off triumphant. He emphasised how discretion was the better part of valour, and how the realities of the situation suggested that the most prudent course at the time was to come to terms with the enemy. He went further and offered his kindly offices to bring out a reconciliation, provided of course that his addressee—Karna—who was regarded by Duryodhana as his bulwark—was so disposed. Karna's noble nature was uppermost and he delivered himself in undisguised frankness. He recounted the numerous and signal benefits he had received at the hands of Duryodhana and pointed out how he was looked upon as the plank wherewith his master had for years hoped to tide over the ebbs

and flows that his hatred of the Pândavâs made him look forward to. In equal outspokenness he confessed himself to be the main instigator of the untold wrongs that were perpetrated by Duryodhana against the Pândavâs and craved Bhîshma not to tempt him from what he held to be, after all, an inadequate tribute of loyalty which his benefactor deserved at his hands. In a similar strain of candour he avowed his conviction that he would meet with certain death in the field of battle by the sacred weapons of Arjuna, helped as the latter was by Krishna of whose divine greatness he had absolutely no doubt. He further dwelt with enthusiasm, on the solid merits of Yudhishtîra and on the latter's rare fitness to wield universal sceptre, and begged that Bhîshma would urge nothing that would debar such an exalted personage as Yudhishtîra from triumphing over his enemies and holding over mankind his fault-

less sway of matchless beneficence. These protestations of Karna made it clear to Bhîshma that his advice was unawailing, whether it was because Karna still cherished the secret hope of vanquishing Arjuna or whether he was, in his mistaken view of the claims of loyalty, determined to persist in his master's insane game against the Pândavâs. He mentally lamented the further duration of the fratricidal war and bade adieu to Karna in words of sorrowing kindness.

CHAPTER XXII.

DRÔNA'S PLEDGE.



HE fall of Bhîshma ought to be a death-blow to the hopes of Duryodhana. But there was in him a feature which in the eyes of Duryodhana robbed him of the weight assigned to him by universal assent. While he was on the one hand looked upon as the foremost hero of the age, he was on the other hand assumed to be a stead-fast friend of justice and therefore with a leaning on the side of the Pândavâs. He was set down, perhaps not uncharitably, to have fought (except at fits and starts) in a half-hearted spirit. He was without doubt full of sympathy with the virtuous Pândavâs; and well

might Duryodhana suspect that he willingly succumbed to the fell-blow which laid him low. Thus discounted, his defeat failed of its legitimate effect. Duryodhana still hoped that Karna would float him on to victory and fortune, and Karna had yet to take the field. Buoyed up with this expectation, Duryodhana was inclined to install that hero to be the Generalissimo of his forces. He became, however alive to the fact, that such a step would mean a slur on Drôna and would alienate him, his brother-in-law Kripa and his son Aswaththâma. Furthermore he felt pretty certain that Arjuna was absolutely invincible and that some course other than war was a necessary alternative to bring the Pândavâs within his power once again. He was convinced that if a little finger of Yudhishthira was hurt, his brothers would prove furious and that they would, in the twinkling of an eye, crush all his forces.

Finally he realised that, even if Arjuna and his brothers fell short of accomplishing such a purpose, the redoubtable Krishna would take the field and smash him, his warriors and his troops and place Kunti at least on the conquered throne. Distracted by these conflicting thoughts, he was constrained to take counsel of Karna. Reckless as the latter usually was, his advice on this occasion was, thoroughly sagacious. He fully grasped the force of circumstances and counselled that it would be expedient to call upon Drôna to take the command. Drôna was accordingly solicited and he cheerfully agreed. Though Duryodhana concealed his reluctance thus to overlook (as he thought) the superior claims of Karna, he had made up his mind to change his policy during the tenure by Drôna of the office of generalship. He therefore approached Drôna with simulated alacrity, and the new general was overcome

by feelings of gratitude at what seemed to him an unforeseen display of appreciation on the part of Duryodhana. In his ecstasy of joy, Drôna desired Duryodhana to ask for any favor he pleased. Duryodhana, always alive to his advantage, made the inexplicable request that Yudhishthira should be captured alive and brought to him absolutely unhurt. For a moment, this took Drôna by surprise and filled his mind with pleasurable feelings towards Duryodhana as it bore eloquent, though unconscious, testimony to the universal loveliness of Yudhishthira. Being questioned as to his motive in making such a request, he gave a reply as disappointing as it was disgusting; for Duryodhana at once disclosed the cloven foot. His explanation was this, viz., that doubting his success in the field of battle, he modified his tactics and deluded himself with the hope that in case Yudhishthira was seized and

brought before him, he would wheedle him into another game of dice and gain an easy conquest once again. He fancied that Yudhishtira might be once more made to stake his liberty and kingdom, lose all and retire into the forest. He rightly concluded that Yudhishtira's defeat, if such mishap ever occurred, would carry with it the unconditional submission of one and all of his brothers. The announcement of his policy showed how Duryodhana surpassed himself in cold blooded villany, and Drôna dryly made the promise, that in case Arjuna was not nigh to afford protection he would take Yudhishtira captive.

Fancying that his trusty Karna would keep Arjuna amply engaged, Duryodhana was content with this qualified pledge and caused it to be published to all his forces as an incentive fearlessly to continue the war. The news of this fearful pledge on the part of Drôna was not long in reaching the ears of Yudhishtira.

thira and he betook himself to Arjuna for comfort and encouragement. Arjuna smiled the smile of contempt at the impotent threat and buoyed up the spirits of his brother by reminding him of the indomitable prowess of his warriors and above all, the ever vigilant moral support of the omnipotent Krishna. Enlivened by this language of encouragement Yudhishtira resolved to take the field, nothing daunted. The day dawned, and the contending forces were in the scene of combat. The warriors on both sides were in a state of elation. The unbroken succession of triumphs during the previous nine days had not faded from the minds of the followers of the Pândavâs, and the culmination of their victory in the fall of Bhîshma, the day before, helped to put them in the best of spirits. There were indeed the forebodings of a possible accomplishment of Drônâ's menace to seize and carry away Yudhishtira.

But it was yet a bare possibility—one too, which seemed far too remote when the victors over Bhîshma were at hand to frustrate it. As to Karna who was from this day to be an accession of active strength to Duryodhana, the general opinion went against him, despite his loud boasts, for every one, who had any memory for the few instances when he was opposed to Arjuna, remembered how he invariably showed to disadvantage. On the other hand Duryodhana and his confidants had an unbounded faith in him. It was well-known that he had with him a Jove-given weapon which was destined to prove fatal to any being against whom it might be employed. He had too, a second and serpent-shaped weapon which was ordained to produce a like result. Apart from other considerations, the possession of these by themselves sufficed to invest Karna with a mystic importance, and it made him esteemed as more than a match

to Arjuna. The contending warriors met, and for a greater part of the day, the issue of the battle was more than doubtful. Fortune was fickle, seeming to be now on the one side and now on the other.

About the close of the day Duryodhana's heroes were gaining ground, and, while Arjuna was absorbed in his work of dealing death and confusion in the enemy's forces, an opening offered itself to Drôna to make an effort against the liberty of Yudhishtira. Yudhishtira became disarmed; he took to flight; Drôna was at his heels; every instant brought him nearer and nearer to him. There was a general consternation and the fearful news flew from voice to voice till it reached Arjuna's ears. He was, in an instant, wedging himself between his pursued brother and the obstinate pursuer. This step, as sudden as it was rapid, took everything by storm, and Drôna stood aghast. This almost spectral

appearance of Arjuna filled every one with the almost superstitious fear that the Pândavâs were under Providential protection. Duryodhana's forces began to disperse on all sides as summer-clouds before a violent gale, while Pândavâs were in the high tide of victory. It became dusk and Drôna discreetly ordered that fighting should cease for the day. The troops of the Pândavâs were elated in their spirits and Duryodhana and his followers were crest-fallen and depressed. Recovering from the effects of discomfiture, Duryodhana, who had always suspected even Drôna of a partiality towards the Pândavâs and had not therefore expected the hearty co-operation of that warrior, sought his presence to take him to task for what he imagined to be his wilful neglect. Drôna was not a little hurt at this unmerited censure. He was vexed that Duryodhana should forget that his successive capture of Yudhishtira was made

conditional on Arjuna's absence and that if anything snatched victory from his grasp, it was the happening of that very contingency. This touched him to the quick, and he did not hesitate to remind the prince of it. Duryodhana was thus silenced and became a prey to despondency, chiefly as that day's bitter experience showed how Karna was incompetent to keep Arjuna out of the way. At this juncture Susarma came to his help, with a proposal that he would form a separate battalion of his forces and cause a diversion so as to draw Arjuna away. Duryodhana was aware that Susarma and his brothers had a grudge against Arjuna and that they were likely to earnestly strive to make good their promise. He gladly accepted the offer and fondly hoped that Yudhishtira would remain unprotected against the attempts of Drôna. Arjuna was not unalive to the dilemma, in which he was placed. He saw at one glance

that, challenged by Susarma, it was not open to him to decline, the call, while his absence from the neighbourhood of Yudhishtira imperilled the latter's freedom. He placed the merits of the case before Yudhishtira and sought his leave to pick up the gauntlet commending his safety to a sympathetic hero of the Pâñchâla family by name Satyagith. Yudhishtira—ever ready to recognise the claims of rectitude—cheerfully agreed to Arjuna's departure in compliance with the demands of military honor. When the forces met, the premeditated challenge was put forward, and Arjuna accepted it most unhesitatingly. Arjuna however provided for the worst. Without in the least betraying a want of confidence in the valiant protector whom he had arranged, he counselled Yudhishtira to flee from the field of battle, in case the worst happened to his protecting hero. Thus led into the preconcerted diver-

sion, Arjuna was fairly away. The battle between Duryodhana's and Yudhishtira's armies raged fiercely, and the heroes on both sides fought most valiantly. Duryodhana's forces had, after an obstinate fight, the upper-hand. Satyagith was slain, Drôna was warm in the pursuit of Yudhishtira with the fixed resolve to capture him. As on the day before every one feared the seizure of Yudhishtira. Yudhishtira was still fleeing and Drôna was nevertheless chasing him, bent upon making good his pledge. The heroes on the side of the Pândavâs were transfixed, unnerved and awestruck at the preternatural valour of Drôna. The fates were nevertheless with Yudhishtira; for Arjuna having dispersed the forces that had kept him engaged all day, was opportunely at hand to rush for his brother's succour. In an instant, Arjuna realised the gravity of the situation and plunged in the thick of the fight. The mighty

teacher, Drôna, and his no less mighty pupil, Arjuna, were at once suddenly face to face and the result was as could be anticipated. Scales were at once turned and Drôna was powerless. At sight of this event Duryodhana's troops lost heart and retreated despite the efforts of Duryodhana's other warriors. By this time the sun sank below the horizon, and Drôna ordered that the battle should be ended for the day. Drôna's second day of generalship also showed that fortunes were on the side of the righteous Yudhishtira and nothing short of ignominy was the lot of Duryodhana's forces. The Pândavâs returned to their camp full of joy, while Duryodhana was in deep despair. He was forced to admit to himself that reliance on Karna on the first day and on Susarma on the second day of Drôna's generalship were unavailing, and he looked around for a fresh manœuvre. To allay the perplexity of his mind, the leaders of the

troops of Kṛishna appeared before him and spoke as follows :—" You" they said, accepted " us as a counterpoise for Kṛishna whom Arjuna chose. We offer ourselves to justify your choice by challenging Arjuna to fight us, apart from the main army. Once he is drawn into an engagement with us, we shall take good care that he does not get away from us." Duryodhana was only too ready to agree to this hopeful proposal and he cherished the prospect of Yudhishtira's capture. The third day of battle began and Arjuna was challenged by Kṛishna's troops as pre-arranged. Again did Arjuna feel the awkwardness of his position and he sought Yudhishtira's leave. The latter was by nature too unselfish to overstep the strict bounds of martial etiquette, and he freely gave his leave relying—neither on this man nor on that—but on all his warriors generally. The hope was however secretly cherished that Arjuna might, as on

the two previous days, be at hand at the critical moment. Arjuna having been thus led away, Drôna arranged his forces in a form that none had anticipated.

The heroes on the side of Yudhishtîra were taken aback and none dared to commence the onslaught. Arjuna's son Abhimanyu was there and keenly felt the humiliation. He offered to lead the forlorn hope and break through the enemy's phalanx. He made his way into the enemy's forces like a flash of lightning. • He bore down all opposition. He astonished everyone. But fates had ordained that he was to be alone and without help. The warriors on the side of the Pândavâs indeed followed closely in his footsteps in gushing enthusiasm, but the King of Scinde was in their way, and it was foredoomed that his interposition should effectually lead to victory on a day when Arjuna was not there. Abhimanyu was amid

overwhelming numbers. His eager followers were successfully kept out, and they were powerless to render any help. Arjuna's heroic son realised his situation and repulsed every assault on him.

Drôna, Karna, Aswaththma, Kripa and other famous heroes on Duryodhana's side repeatedly gave him battle by turns and fled before the conquering heroism of the lad. So stunned were the warriors on the side of Duryodhana that a council of war was hurriedly called and the infamous resolution was come to by these famous heroes to depart from the established rules of warfare in meeting the immediate exigency. Regardless of the principles of a just war, they clubbed together and overpowered Arjuna's son by their combined efforts. From behind, Karna burst asunder the bow of the lad, while other warriors took advantage of his disarmed condition to overbear him. After exhibiting

superhuman efforts; he fell a prey to the unholy conspiracy and was inhumanly slain. In his moment of danger, he sounded his couch-shell as a token of alarm for his loving heroic father, but Providence ordained he heard it not. The fall of the hero created a reaction in the feelings of the enemy. To avert immediate danger Duryodhana's warriors showed the sort of firmness which a murderer shows when he is doing the deed of darkness. Like the murderer who for the moment forgets the thought of retributive justice, they too forgot the dread vengeance that Arjuna would soon hurl on their devoted heads. No sooner had the lad been laid dead on the field than they woke up to a sense of the dastardly part they combined in playing. This revulsion of feeling in the minds of Duryodhana's ranks appalled them and they possessed no nerve for further action and the battle of the day was abruptly closed.

The Pândavâs retired to their camps like living corpses, while Duryodhana and his forces went back with their hearts far more unnerved by the prospect of the morrow than exhilarated by the success of the day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“ARJUNA’S VOW.”



FTER an obstinate struggle Arjuna put his opponents to hopeless flight and bent his course towards his camp. He had not the faintest idea of the fearful misery that had befallen him in the shape of his son's death and he was not a little puzzled by the ill-omens that he met as he passed along. A strange feeling of uneasiness crept on him, and his worst fears were that Yudhishtira had possibly been apprehended. This thought was harrowing enough, and he divulged his misgivings to Krishna. On this point Krishna re-assured Arjuna, but the latter did not feel

the assurance a sufficient solace. The fall of his beloved and heroic son was never so much as dreamt by him, and the thought did not for an instant occur. A prey to unaccountable doubts, and smitten with an undefinable dread of something terrible having happened, he hastened to the camp. There was no rejoicing, no music and no signs of happiness as usual. His surmises were unavailing, and his enquiries met with no encouraging response. His dear son did not as usual come forward to welcome him, and yet he was far from suspecting that son's fall. He hurriedly gained the presence of his brothers and woke to the fact that his noble son Abhimanyu was not in their midst. A vague suspicion crept into his mind, and the awful news was soon broken to him. He fainted at the dread revelation, and it was sometime before he regained his senses. Slowly recovering his shattered wits, he

sought information, and the astounding tidings of his son's decease were timidly yet explicitly conveyed to him. His worst fears being thus confirmed, he fell into a swoon once again, and after a period of utter prostration, he looked up in unspeakable sorrow and unutterable anger. Being told that when the lad had broken through the enemy's phalanx and when his uncles were endeavouring to enter through the gap, the King of Scinde was an insuperable stumbling block in their way, his brows knit and his face lowered in inexpressible wrath. With determined looks and in a resolute voice, he unhesitatingly announced his terrible vow that, before sunset the next day, he would hurl the head of the Scindian King to the ground. As if to make the vow inviolable, he sealed it with an oath, that, in case he failed in this purpose, he would enter fire with his world-renowned bow and quivers. Having an-

nounced this terrible resolve, he took up and strung his famous bow and blew his awe-inspiring-couch. In taking the vow however, he had not forgotten due caution and limitations; for he felt as a self-possessed hero would do, that an exception should be made in case the person doomed sought refuge at the hands of Yudhishtira, of Krishna or of himself or fled from the field in disgrace or cowardice. Even subject to these reservations, the vow was terrible enough. Having thus relieved his heart and persuading himself that his son had, after all, died a death of glory, Arjuna retired to his cheerless apartments. It was to him a sleepless night, and he was panting for the break of day to give effect to his dread resolve. His wife Subhadra was beside herself with unutterable woe, and Krishna had no small trouble to assuage his sister's sorrow and administer solace to her mourning heart. The news of

Arjuna's resolve reached the ears of the King of Scinde. It fell on him as a thunderbolt. His heart sank within him. His tongue clove to the roof. His spirits ebbed away. He was seized with a fearful trembling and he sweated profusely. With legs that seemed scarcely to support him, he dragged himself into the presence of Duryodhana, and gave vent to his laments in piteous language as follows:—

"Am I the only person to whom the death of Abhimanyu could be traced? Why should the fiery indignation of Arjuna make me its sole object? Now that he has sworn to slay me, I am perfectly sure that nothing could hinder the execution of his dread purpose—no matter who appeared in my defence. I am certain indeed, that Drôna, Karṇa, Salya, Kṛipā, and other mighty heroes in our camp could make head against Arjuna, if they chose. They could even snatch one, from

the hands of the God of terror; but what hope have I that they would care to do so. Rather than look to being saved in the field of battle, I think the proper course for me is to flee to some region unknown and hide myself from Arjuna's wrath. Be so good as to give me leave." At these words of fear Duryodhana said as follows:—What a shame that you make this cowardly proposal? You yourself have recounted the names and commended the prowess of the heroes on my side. How could you persuade yourself, that all these would resign you to the tender mercies of Arjuna. Put faith in us and stay with us. We shall teach Arjuna a lesson he has not yet been taught, and we shall, in the act of successfully saving you from his impotent wrath, bring Arjuna to a sense of his own littleness, and consign him to the flames, which, thanks to his own foolhardiness, he has of his own free will condemned himself to.

Be of good cheer, and render us the invaluable service of remaining passively in the field and thereby advancing our interest far better than by the exercise of active energy." Others spoke in a similar strain of encouragement. His drooping spirits revived, and he consented to stay. The fourth day of battle began, and the contending forces stood opposed to each other. Drôna deeply pondered over the course he should take and finally determined on what may be styled a fabian policy. In this view he put the King of Scinde in the utmost rear, and surrounded him with a powerful battalion and many a mighty warrior. He took his post at the front and arranged that the best heroes on his side should wait at intervals with their respective troops to give battle to Arjuna along his path, with such obstinacy as would naturally delay him in his march. Upon a reasonable estimate of the capabilities of these heroes and

a probable computation of the time each of them could consume in impeding Arjuna, he hoped that, though they could not triumph over the irate father of the cruelly sacrificed son, they might retard his passage so as to make it impossible for him to reach his prey before sunset. Arjuna grasped the situation at a glance; and felt that he was impaled on the horns of a terrible dilemma. If Drôna took his stand near the King of Scinde, half his fears would be at an end; for he could keep an eye upon him and debar him from making an attempt on the liberties of Yudhishtira, at the same time that he was marching to accomplish his mission of the day. But Drôna had been wily enough to take his position at the forefront, so as to delay the progress, as far as he could and then be free to pounce on Yudhishtira, under circumstances which absolutely forbade the possibility of Arjuna retracing his footsteps to succour his

threatened brother. Grant that Arjuna made such an attempt, it would still serve Drôna's purpose; for it meant so much loss of time to Arjuna and his falling proportionately back from the main object of the day's labours. Arjuna was taken aback but for a second, and he at once made his plan. He picked out from among the heroes on his side the two best Bhîma and Sathiaki, and appointed them to be the gaurdian angels of Yudhishtîra. Exhorting them to be ever on the alert and never to depart from Yudhishtîra's side, be the need what it might, he went forward with a heart, as reverent as it was dauntless. He made an effort to make a breach in the enemy's forces, but he was met by Drôna at the very passage. He tried to provoke that hero into a warm struggle, but the latter was imperturbably cool and deliberately unroused. This was to his mind the first confirmation of the suspicion that Drôna had determined

on the fabian policy, and it was likewise a warning to him of what was in store for him along the line of his march. He soon made his resolve to put forth nothing but his best efforts and use nothing but his most efficacious weapons. His further progress is easily described; for it was marked by nothing short of stubborn endeavours to detain him and as brilliant efforts to frustate them. The length of the track he had to traverse and the obdurate resistance he encountered took even Arjuna nearly the whole day. But about midday Yudhishtira began to lose courage at the thought that Arjuna had gone single-handed. With a sorrowing heart, he addressed himself to Sathiaki and begged of him to proceed to reinforce Arjuna. In vain did Sathiaki entreat Yudhishtira to quiet his fears about the safety of Krishna-protected and heroic Arjuna, and leave him alone to stay in obedience to his teachers orders.

Yudhishtira, in his overflowing affection for his brother, was proof against all persuasion. Sathiaki agreed, having solicited Bhîma to redouble his vigilance in defence of Yudhishtira. Taking the latter's leave and receiving his blessing, Sathiaki went forward with a swelling heart. He was not shackled by any inconvenient reverence towards Drôna, and his wish to be by the side of Arjuna was intense. Goaded by this double reason, he sprang upon Drôna with the swiftness of lightning and at one effort passed him. With an impatience worthy of his devotion to the good of his instructor, he advanced, as it were, by leaps and bounds, and he was soon within sight of Arjuna. The strain that his nerves had undergone kept up his vigour till now, and when he descried that Arjuna was absolutely unhurt and conquering Sathiaki felt easy in mind and the effects of the fatigue he had undergone began to be-

tray themselves. At this juncture he was pounced upon by Balnihka. When Arjuna saw this unequal combat between his wearied pupil and the fresh hero of the lunar race, he took off the up-lifted hand of the latter by an unerring arrow. Sathiaki was safe, and he stood by Arjuna's side, reverently and gratefully. By this time Yudhishtira was again in low spirits and besought Bhîma likewise to proceed in aid of Arjuna. Bhîma like Sathiaki protested in vain. He too took leave of his affectionate brother, unable to withstand the entreaties of Yudhishtira, and advanced with a heart that showed a determination to crush all opposition. His Herculean strength triumphed over all barriers, and, after teaching Karna and other warriors sharp lessons, he too was soon at Arjuna's side. Drôna was so dispirited by the successful triumphs of the three warriors whom he was unable to check, that the thought of capturing Yudhishtira

thira was fairly out of his mind. This result was further strengthened by the strictures which Duryodhana visited him with at the triumphant entry of each of the three belligerent heroes. The sun was setting and Arjuna was nevertheless not within reach of his prey. On a sudden a patch of cloud seemed to obscure the solar brilliance. Duryodhana and his friends mistook it for the night's pall, and in their impatience to mock at Arjuna and see him in flames, prominently exhibited the Scindian King. Arjuna felt that his mission failed. He was weakly dropping his bow and arrows. But the sky soon cleared and revealed the sun's setting brilliance. Arjuna saw his chance and with a fell shaft lopped off the insolent head of the King of Scinde. The vow was fulfilled and the news sped with the rapidity of wind. Duryodhana's forces fled irretrievably and the Pândavâs were instantly on the high tide of victory—a re-

sult due to no accidental patch of cloud, but to the divine Kṛishna's Chakra, which by his so willing it, came across the orb of day and created a simulated night to put the foe off his guard and to advance the righteous resolve of the devout believer in his boundless mercy.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DRÔNA'S FALL.



THE troops retired to their respective camps, the Pândavâs saying their prayers to the divinity that brought them success and Duryodhana harrowed by the recollection of the latest of the crushing defeats which he had met with. Arjuna, Sathiaki and Bhîma were presently prostrating themselves before Yudhishtîra and were heartily congratulated on their marvellous feats. Yudhishtîra's heart overflowed with thankfulness towards Kṛishṇa to whose protecting benignity he reverently and rightly attributed the whole of his success. Krishna in his

turn assured Yudhishtira that the true source of all his triumphs was Duryodhana's own sins and self-immolating crimes, and the righteous indignation of Yudhishtira himself. In the opposite camp Duryodhana was drowned by feelings of self-reproach, remorse and envy. It was never in his nature to trace his reverses to his own wickedness. He was always unreasoning enough to impute the result of his sins to some one other than himself and to something other than the course of retribution. It was easy for such a mind to persuade itself that Drôna had played false out of bias in favor of his favourite pupil Arjuna. Possessed by this demon of distrust, Duryodhana sought the presence of Drôna and vehemently accused him of marked disloyalty and culpable and wilful neglect. The reverses of the day were already galling enough to Drôna, and he was beside himself with fury at Duryodhana add-

ing insult to injury. Thus provoked, Drôna addressed Duryodhana as follows :—

“How strange that you should hold such language? You talk as if Arjuna's all-conquering heroism has come upon you as a surprise. Have I not repeatedly told you that so long as Arjuna was against us, your success was, to say the least, problematical? What man with any stuff in him on your side, who had not spoken to you in like terms? With the almost unanimous testimony of your heroes for the matchless brilliancy of Arjuna's powers, with the many tastes you have had of his stupendous talents and which it is needless now to enumerate, it is a wonder to me that you cherish foolish hopes of ultimate success. Your sins have foredoomed you and your forces to disgrace and death. The memory of them rob your heroes of nerve and heart, while it lends vigour—if such extraneous

supplement were wanted—to the firm hand and fearless heart of the Pândavâs and their heroes. Those shafts of Arjuna, which have been the death of your forces are but the dice-pieces of Sakhuni recoiling on you in another and more destructive form. They must accomplish their fell purposes of Nemesis. None can thwart them. None can ward them off. If I had any lingering doubt about the final triumph of the Pândavâs over you and yours, that doubt was dispelled by the fall of Bhîshma at the hands of Arjuna. From that day, there was nothing but blank despair in my heart, and I have all along bemoaned the lamentable fate that befell me—a brahmin and a theretofore conquering archer—to fight the battle of unrighteousness and of unredeemed repulses. O foolish youngster, there is plain-speaking for you to ponder over. For Heaven's sake do not add fuel to the flames that are devouring my heart at the

thought that my lot should be cast with the foes of virtue and the authors of grave moral wrongs. Now take note of my last words. I am not the only hero on your side. I own, as I have done all along, that, as against Arjuna, I am utterly powerless. Assemble your other more boastful heroes and give battle to Arjuna, and leaving me—a cowardly and disloyal brahmin—to myself to weep over the reverses that I had to share by taking sides with embodiments of vice. For my part I shall devote the rest of my vigour to the contemplation of the God of righteousness and to pray for forgiveness for having hitherto been an active instrument in the hands of cruel wrong-doers.” These were terrible words of truth and anger, and Duryodhaná gave no answer to them. He became greatly alarmed and he looked the picture of misery. This softened Drôna and he began to relent. A moment’s reflection, and his grosser nature

was again uppermost; for he soon remembered that among those that fought on the side of the Pândavâs were the Pâñchâla heroes and their forces—a section against whom he had vowed an implacable vengeance. At this thought, Drôna looked up with eyes darting fire and burst out as follows:—“Listen, Duryodhana to my vow. Before I put away my armour to-morrow I shall end the lives of the Pâñchâlas on the side of the enemy. If any escape me, tell my son, after me, that I enjoin him to complete the work.” This spirited language alleviated Duryodhana’s sorrow and cheered him with the thought that the effect of his indiscreet words had well-nigh vanished. Duryodhana withdrew, asking forgiveness of Drôna for the rash words he had spoken and expressing gratitude for the high-mindedness with which Drôna overlooked his offence and promised mighty deeds of valour. Though Duryodhana seemed

gratified, it was nevertheless not the case. The promise did not come up to his expectation, which were always pitched far too high for any hero to satisfy. Duryodhana was nevertheless, in some measure pleased. His hopes were always centered in Karna and he looked for unqualified triumph to the days when that hero would be commander of all his forces and become responsible for the result of each day's battle. This involved the death of Drôna, and Duryodhana—to do him justice—contemplated the event with a placid heart, as he was long contemplating it, as a necessary preliminary to his entering upon an unbroken career of success. But he has wished that, as Bhîshma had done before him, Drôna too should aid in thinning the enemy's troops to numbers that would be manageable to his other heroes while Karna mainly devoted himself to the destruction of the Pândavâs—Arjuna in

particular. With this declared policy to guide the battle that was to ensue, the two armies were in the field. Each of the warriors on either side fought at his best, but there was equal loss of great men on both sides. Drôna slew Drupada and Virâta two of the most powerful and devoted relatives of the Pândavâs, while Karna after narrowly escaping death at the hands of Ghatôthgha—Bhîma's cannibal son—put him to death. By the weapons of Bhîma fell the venerable Balnihka and his heroic son Sômadatta. Karna, Duryodhana and Sakhuni conspired together to compass the death of Sathiaki by unfair war, in the hope that such an event would tell heavily on Arjuna and Krishna and might so far unnerve them as to afford an opening for scoring an easy victory. But they mistook their man, and they miscalculated their chances of escaping the vigilant eye of Arjuna. They ignomini-

ously failed in their iniquitous project and only found that as a consequence Arjuna's indignation was so roused that Drôna was, the instant victim. The fall of the commander was a signal for a tumultuous retreat on the part of Duryodhana's troops. Exasperated by the fate that befell his father, Aswaththâma collected the dispersing forces and entered on a career of instantaneous vengeance. He proved more than a match to the enemy and would have carried everything before him, except that the day was closing and the counsel against the war, without a duly appointed commander, prevailed. Thus ended the career of Drôna—one of the greatest archers of the age. The office of the general became vacant and the troops retired to their camp.

CHAPTER XXV.

KARNA'S CAREER.



LIKE the fall of Bhîshma, the death of Drôna should have impressed Duryodhana and his advisers with the utter hopelessness of their cause. But, as after the death of the former, they felt now too that Karna was yet to be tried. There would be for unbiassed minds, an important difference between the two occasions. In the former case, Karna had not so much as taken the field, and it was pardonable to indulge in the hope that, should he appear in the battle-ground he might work wonders. But since the fall of Bhîshma this special ground for hope should disappear; for

Karna not only took part in the fight but also carried it on under circumstances which called for his best efforts. Dozens of such instances did really occur; and the result only showed that, as opposed to Arjuna, Karna was nowhere. But in the mind of Duryodhana, sanguine and pre-disposed in his favor, accidents assumed the importance of causes, and in this view there was here ample room for his going grievously astray. It was with him an article of implicit faith that Drôna had been fighting in a half-hearted manner and had invariably exhibited a strong leaning towards the Pândavâs—towards Arjuna in particular. Such a delusion must necessarily afford an apology for Karna's slender performance. Karna had indeed no independence of action, when the command was held by Drôna. This was reason enough to a too partial mind and this consideration was thrown into the scale in extenuation of Karna's uniform failure.

With the death of Drôna this drawback was at an end, and it had, strange as it may seem to others, only augmented the hope of Duryodhana in Karna. Whether this complacency about Karna had or had not a plausible warrant, one thing must be expected as a matter of course, viz., that Karna weighted with the heavy load of untrammelled responsibility had to be put to the test, and Duryodhana firmly resolved to make the trial. For such a trial, it may be that his strength has lost in extension but it had a distinct advantage in volume and intensity. This was not all. There was yet with Karna the serpent-shaped arrow which was pre-ordained to kill any mortal whom it might reach. Of whatever other purpose this weapon might fall short, it certainly must prove fatal to Arjuna at least, as Karna who reserved it expressly for him was quite sure to employ it against him. It was rightly assumed that if Arjuna fell,

the event must inevitably involve the death of his sorrowing brothers. Humanly speaking, this was good enough reasoning. But the vital fact that was lost sight of was that there might yet be a special target other than Arjuna needing the use of this weapon, even as the Sakti which had to be wielded against Bhîma's cannibal son Gatôthgacha. Without looking to the chapter of accidents for any such special occasion for neutralising the serpent arrow, there was yet the circumstance that Krishna was determined to save Arjuna at all hazards, and he would therefore put his favourite out of harm's way. But the fundamental error in all the calculations of Duryodhana consisted in his persistent incapacity to realise that—

“There is a divinity which shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them as we may.”

It had however been his life-long error and he could never wake up to his danger and

the hoplessness of the game he was playing, so long as there was any straw whereat he could clutch. It has been shown that several such straws floated before him on the surface of the tide that was drifting him on towards eternity, but this one had for him all the significance of a life-boat. He therefore resolved to ask Karna to take the command of the forces and achieve that success which untoward circumstances rendered it difficult hitherto to attain. As was already remarked, loyalty to a generous master was with Karna an all-engrossing passion ; and he cheerfully accepted the offer, unmindful of the many and serious countervailing considerations that would be transparent to minds not clouded by hazy and crude conceptions of the duty of allegiance. In the appointment of Karna for the command of the forces every one acquiesced, and the night passed off without the usual effects of a terrible disaster. The day

dawned and Karna appeared on the battle-field at the head of Duryodhana's forces with a confident smile playing on his lips and with a heart swelling at the prospect of victory over Arjuna. Every one in the field caught, from his resolute face, a spirit of indomitable courage, and it seemed as if the forces were destined to carry by storm everything before them. For the moment the death of Bhîshma and of Drôna were altogether forgotten, and if thoughts of those heroes crossed the mind of the troops at all, it was only to augment their hope that there was now none on the side of Duryodhana who might have the shadow of a leaning towards the Pândavâs. Yudhishthira on the other hand surveyed the scene before him and spoke to Arjuna as follows:—"Behold" he said, "the army of Duryodhana is indeed thinned in number but presents the appearance of a solid mass of adamant impenetrable alike to man and god. You

are aware that Karna is the plank wherewith Duryodhana has all along hoped to float himself on to victory, and the time has come for you to shatter it to pieces. Call to mind the privations we suffered for twelve long years in pathless jungles, the terrible hardships we had to encounter in the thirteenth year in secret and without the power openly to avenge them. Remember too that all our unselfish efforts to make up with and live in peace with Duryodhana have ended in vain. Realise the fact that these privations, hardships and failures are wholly due to the villainous Karna who stands before you, and that therefore a sharp lesson to him at the earliest opportunity is sternly necessary. At these words Arjuna smiled the heroic smile and arranged his forces. War music on both sides was loud and cheering and the brave words of defiance from the troops were deafening. Heroes tilted against heroes and the troops grappled

with each other. The twang of the bowstring, the clash of arms, the clatter of hoofs and the crash of chariots were the sounds that alternated with the words of heroism and of terror. Fortune was inconstant during the greater part of the day. A little before dusk Arjuna was deeply engaged against the valiant troops whom Duryodhana had accepted as counterpoise to Krishna. Despite mighty efforts of Bhîma, Sathiaki and other warriors on the side of the Pândavâs, Karna was gaining ground. Before his energetic efforts the troops of the Pândavâs were betraying signs of alarm. A few moments more, a retreat would have followed. But the redoubtable Arjuna was opportunely at hand. He had repulsed the battalion that had kept him engaged and was free to face Karna. His appearance amid the thick of the fight buoyed up the drooping spirits of his troops. There was a mighty plunge, and the day was won.

By this time the sun had gone below the horizon, the battle ceased. The Pândavâs and their army went back to their camps with music playing and their hearts joyous. Karna retired crest-fallen and disappointed. As for Duryodhana he began to despond. He mentally ran over the catalogue of Arjuna's many heroic deeds and half-suspected that after all his hopes in Karna were misplaced. His warriors too shared his despondency. Karna was indeed equally dis-spirited but only for a time. His was valour that knew no discretion. The immediate effects of his discomfiture having worn away, he persuaded himself that man to man, he was more than a match for Arjuna, but that it was the wily Kṛishna who managed to place him at a disadvantage. By this kind of fallacious reasoning he managed to revive his hopes and look about to administer comfort to the warriors on his side.

One thing which he thought necessary

for this purpose was to secure for himself a charioteer equal in skill and tact to Krishna, and after casting about for a while his choice fell on Salya. But Salya was of the kingly order and as such he was of a status superior to Karna. The latter therefore felt that it might be taken as an insult that a proposal of the kind should be made to Salya, and he secretly broached his wish to Duryodhana. Whatever Duryodhana's other shortcomings, he possessed pre-eminently the knack of making a request in a manner to ensure compliance and he made the trial with complete success. Fortified in this respect, Karna took the field without the shadow of a doubt mingling in his hope of unqualified victory. The appearance of two such heroes as Karna and Salya in one chariot gladdened all beholders on the side of Duryodhana; and this circumstance was, by itself, sufficient to raise the drooping spirits of his troops. The

battle began and raged fiercely. As on the day previous, Arjuna was drawn away by Nârâyana Gôpaulan, and Karna was the master of the situation. He carried everything before him. He bore down all opposition. No opponent that made bold to cross his path stood his ground for more than a few minutes. Bhîma, Nakula and Pândavâ heroes came in for their share of defeat in their turn, while Yudhishthira was bathed in blood and forced to flee ignominiously to his tent. Yudhishthira's dread of Karna which was always great, became hundred fold greater now and he rued the day on which he had resolved to draw the sword against the possessor of such a mighty warrior as Karna. In the meantime Arjuna triumphed over the Nârâyana Gôpaulas and rushed into the battle ground. At a glance he grasped the situation. He saw not Yudhishthira, and a moment's enquiry opened his eyes to the stern realities

of the occasion. He could not feel assured that the wounds which drove Yudhishthira from the field were slight or far from fatal. Such a thought unnerved him, and he could not make up his mind to stem the advancing tide of the enemy. Compared with the safety of Yudhishthira, the fear of losing the day was mere nothing in his view. Leaving Bhîma, Sathiaki and other warriors to do their utmost in the field, he besought Krishna to hurry the chariot to Yudhishthira's camp. Swift as were his horses, his mind ran swifter. His heart throbbed feverishly, and the drops of perspiration stood big on his forehead. The chariot halts. He leaps out of it. He rushes head-long to hug his brother. He finds the latter safe and out of danger. The sight has an instantaneous effect. Unmixed joy lights up his face ; and for a moment all sorrows are forgotten and the fortunes of the battle that was raging were clean of mind.

These proofs of unalloyed happiness create a momentary delusion. Yudhishthira assumes that it betokened the death of Karna, and he showers on Arjuna superlative praise. He pronounces a high panygeric on Karna, only to enhance Arjuna's merit in triumphing over that warrior, as he thought. Not content with mere eulogy, he begs of Arjuna to detail the manner in which he laid low his redoubtable foe. Arjuna felt his awkwardness, and blushingly confessed that Karna was still alive and was as yet far from beaten. This produced in Yudhishthira's agonised mind a sudden reaction which made him forget himself for an instant. He burst out in cruel raillery at Arjuna and accused him of pusillanimous cowardice, taunting him with fleeing from before Karna under a false pretext. This sneer was harrowing enough; but Yudhishthira did not stop here. He rated Arjuna with having dragged him into the

war by his bravado and bringing shame and ignominy, not only on him and his kith and kin but also on Krishna for siding with him. Heaping outrage upon outrage in this strain he wound up by the remark that instead of thus turning tail, Arjuna should have put his bow and arrows in the hands of Krishna and made him break his pledge of rendering passive help. This was too much for Arjuna to bear, and for a moment, the unholy thought flitted across his fancy to dash his brother's brains to pieces for this ill-merited insult. His wonted wisdom, however, re-asserted itself and under the advice of Krishna, his roused spirit began to cool. But it was not to sink into a mere placid temper. The tide of indignation that was thus turned away from Yudhishtira made head way towards Karna and Arjuna's pledge went forth in thundering accents that he would either kill Karna before the sunset or he would enter flames

with his bow and arrows. With the sound of his vow still trembling on his livid lips and his brother's blessings sent affectionately after him, he jumped into his chariot, and it rolled away into the field of battle under the guidance of Krishna. Arjuna's reappearance gladdened all souls, and while the satisfied smile that played on his lips betokened Yudhishtira's safety, his resolute face gave proof of his determination to put an end to Karna before the day was over. Enlivened by the thought that Yudhishtira was out of danger and emboldened by the majestic presence of irate Arjuna, Pândavâ troops marched in overwhelming force. Karna was taken aback by this sudden overbearing advance, and he made no ordinary efforts to rally his retreating forces. He soon found he had another and graver duty to face. Arjuna was within a stone's throw of him, and his arrows were already whizzing about his startled ears.

The approach of Arjuna sent Bhîma into a fervour of joy and as a result it raised his spirits to a giddy height. Under this whirlwind of ecstasy he rushed forward as if to seize any prey that he might light upon, and the fates had ordained that Dussâsana should be the victim. The sight of this latter at once turned the excess of pleasure in Bhîma's mind into an excess of hate. At once the thought flashed across his mind that this second of the king's sons was one of the active agents in doing him injury and that it was his unhallowed hand that dragged Droupadi into the durbar and attempted to strip her on the day he and his brothers were sent in exile. The thought maddened him. His swoop upon the object of his hate was like that of a falcon and its suddenness unnerved the youth marked out for dire revenge. There was however a hard struggle ; but a retrospect of the past energised the one and enervated the other.

In a few moments Bhîma gained the ascendant and he thought himself of his unredeemed vow, to cut open Dussâsana's heart and drink his life-blood to sate his sweet revenge for unexampled wrongs. He drew his poniard and brandished it before the terrified eyes of his prey. With a pleasure, almost demoniacal he challenged him to name any one hero of his side, who might come to his rescue, announcing to him his dread resolve to give practical effect to his vow. He looks round and none dare move to save the prostrate prince. Yielding to the strong, though venial impulse imparted to him by the injuries and the vow he had been long brooding over, he plunges the weapon into the victim's heart and drinks of the gushing blood, with the gusto that belongs to a mother's milk. Having thus accomplished his pledge so far as one of the leading princes was concerned and giddied by the raw blood that he drank, he rushed

upon the enemy's troops, with the firm resolve to be down upon Duryodhana and send him to keep his brother company. By this time Arjuna was face to face before Karna and Bhîma had much to do to keep watch there. Here was crisis of the most momentous nature. The heroes that stood opposed were each the pillar on his side, and it became the duty of every unbiassed friend of Duryodhana to avert it, knowing, as he must that taken all in all Arjuna was the superior. It was no occasion for flattery or mincing matters. Plain unvarnished truth was the one thing—the only thing—that the juncture demanded; and Drôna's son Aswaththâma was ready to discharge the office. He went up to Duryodhana, took his hand in affection, and urged upon his mind how sure it was that the hero who had triumphed over the mighty Bhîshma and the no less mighty Drôna was destined to foil Karna and how

having regard to this fact and the devotion of Kṛishna to the cause of the Pândavâs, ultimate victory of Arjuna was a matter of absolute certainty. This sober reflection, he said, must prompt the wisdom to avert the impending struggle between Arjuna and Karna and open negotiations with Yudhishtira. He assured Duryodhana that his words would weigh with both Arjuna and Yudhishtira and that he verily believed that Kṛishna would be nothing loathe to the step proposed. He exhorted the heir-apparent to cast away all false-pride and false dignity and yield to the stern necessity for coming to terms. Duryodhana was in no mood to prize the sage advice. He had all along laid great store by Karna, and the time was at hand (as he fancied) for the fruition of his cherished hopes. The cruel death of his immediate brother at the hands of the outraged Bhîma was not yet many hours old and stirred him up to an unrelenting hate. To his

usual answers to proposals of peace, he now added the fresh argument, supplied by the almost inhuman manner in which Dussâsana's doom was sealed. Turning away from the friendly counsel of Aswaththâma, Duryodhana waived his hand to his forces to march upon the enemy. By this time Arjuna and Karna stood opposed and parleyed each other. The former charged upon him and the latter acknowledged that he (Karna) was the chief instigator in respect of the many wrongs perpetrated against the Pândavâs ; but the effect of the parley between the injurer and the injured was singularly identical. While Arjuna thought it an argument for merciless revenge, Karna imagined that the final consummation of the task he had been so far engaged in yet remained and that he must strive to accomplish it by slaying Arjuna. The contest was most obstinate and each was at his best. During the protracted struggle between the

two both the troops and other warriors on either side stood aghast as passive spectators. Karna did not lose sight of the fatal serpent-shaped shaft and hurled it at Arjuna. By a dexterous movement of the chariot Krishna baffled its murderous effect, and it only carried off the jewelled crown on the head of Arjuna. Thus did the centre of all Karna's hopes mis-carry and his heart gave way. A few moments more, and Arjuna got the better of him and slew him. This dire event was a death-blow not only to the hero whom it laid low but also to the obstinate hopes of Duryodhana. Karna's fall came upon the prince as a thunder-bolt and it had upon him but the one effect of the departed hero's name being, for the rest of the day, the subject of his pitiful and loud exclamations. The gravity of this occurrence was however too great to allow of the battle being further continued and orders were issued to desist.

Both retired from the field. One party was beside itself with ecstasy and the other with deep sorrow. The heroes on the side of the Pândavâs were soon at Yudhishtîra's tent exchanging mutual congratulations and passed the night in rapturous rejoicings. Duryodhana and his friends on the other hand dragged themselves to their camp in blank despair and bewailing their fates somewhat in the cheerless and desponding manner in which the Pândavâs had left Hastinâpura on the day of their cruel exile.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FINALE.



NE would think that the fall of Karna must have impressed Duryodhana with the utter fatuity of his ambition. But this was not to be. Any one that understood him must have noticed that he was a man of unconquerable will. It took no account of adverse fortune, and it had an exhaustless resource to encourage hope. Even in his faults—the greatest of his faults—he commanded melancholy admiration. By nature his mind was far too exalted in its aim and purpose ; and it scouted the idea of accommodating itself to unpropitious circumstances. The series of reverses,

consisting in the rapid disappearance of hopeful heroes and in the equally rapid thinning of troops, made him all the more resolute in his purpose, and his mind revolted from the idea of reconciliation, in proportion to his failure. He was far too sensible of the wrongs he had inflicted, and far too sensitive to the humiliation of making peace when his conduct was sure to be traced to fear. When, therefore, a few hours before dawn he called together the remnant of the leading warriors yet remaining to him and when the oldest of them—Kripa—proposed terms of peace, his indomitable pride asserted itself in the most unmistakable manner. He announced that he had yet troops and heroes enough to buoy him up and that he was resolved to try the last hazard and to drink (if necessary) his cup of bitterness to the last drop. The cruel death, to which his brother Dussâsana was consigned the day previous, profoundly touched

him, and he was of opinion that, in the face of that event, any inclination on his part to make up with the enemy would be set down for a sure sign of cowardice. Peace at such a price was, in his view, not worth purchasing, and he could not bring himself to accept humiliation in exchange for a glorious death in the battle ground. Kṛipā's advice therefore fell flat on him, and he showed symptoms of a desire to elect a new commander and continue the war. Younger counsellors were not wanting however who applauded him for this resolve. Salya was therefore chosen the general of the forces; and the troops appeared on the field at the expected hour on the morrow. Despite his serious losses, he had yet not less than four famous warriors in the persons of Salya, Kṛipā, Aswaththâma and Kritavarma. The battle began, and Yudhishtira was the most prominent figure of the day. He fought right valiantly, and he

earned undying fame by killing Salya, while Sahâdêva put an end to Sakhuni whose infernal advice and no less infernal dice were the source of all Duryodhana's fatuous hopes and fearful miseries. Unlike on the other days of the campaign, the fall of the general did not lead to a cessation of the day's battle. Duryodhana's mind was in a frenzy, and his troops were ready to obey his bidding. This exasperated Arjuna and Bhîma and they set themselves to the work of mowing down the enemy's forces. There was a general rout, and disorder was everywhere. The warriors were far asunder, and Duryodhana was left practically alone to carry on the battle. He woke up to the solitude he was reduced to and he fled. The darkness of night mercifully set in, and he made his escape. Kripa, Aswaththâma, and Kritavarma equally fled from the field and equally escaped. The Pândavâs found vacant space before them; and they

retired to their camp as their presence was no longer needed in the field where there was none to oppose. Duryodhana was not long in meeting the three surviving heroes above noted, and he deeply regretted his retreat while yet they were alive. But it was too late. He told them of his resolve to bide his time still to gain against his foes, and, taking leave of them for the nonce, hid himself in hopes of a brighter prospect. The Pândavâs, under Kṛishna's guidance, sought him out and when they shamed him out of his concealment by their mockery of his pusillanimity, he emerged into their presence. Even in this extremity, the Pândavâs and Duryodhana gave proof of their characteristic turns of mind. Yudhishthira proposed that Duryodhana might elect any one of the Pândavâ brothers for a match, and win back the kingdom by success in a single combat with the one so to be chosen. Duryodhana, ever lofty in his aim,

despised to gain back the sceptre except by a contest that might bear testimony to his unabated sense of high martial glory. He felt that the choice of Bhîma alone was compatible with such a sense of dignity, and he unhesitatingly made that choice. The single combat was commenced and it proceeded till Bhîma dealt a fell blow on his thigh in fulfillment of one of his vows. His disabled frame was laid low on mother-earth, and Bhîma kicked his head with his left leg in completion of his last remaining pledge. After a few words of altercation and some little outburst of presumptuous cursing even in his death-gurgle, Duryodhana closed his eyes never more to open them. The Pândavâs could dream of no further harm. They and their friend Krishna left the camp to disport themselves for very joy. While these were thus away, their remaining warriors and troops who in the camp resigned themselves to a sleep that knew

no cares for the night or the morrow. The fury of fell vengeance was however unsuspectedly at work. Aswaththâma took to heart the pitiful *finale* of the vaulting ambition of his patron, and, in a fit of frenzied vindictiveness, planned a murderous attack on the unoffending slumberers. A ruthless midnight massacre followed, and none but Droupadi, the five Pândavâs and Kṛishna lived to see the light as the day dawned. The author of this dastardly ruffianism was soon divined, and he was hotly pursued. His arrest and disgrace were accomplished before long, and this blotted out the last vestige of hostile behaviour. It only remained for the Pândavâs to march upon and seize the capital.

This Yudhishthira was resolved to do most considerately and he accomplished it without in the least creating an impression that he cared not for his aged uncle—Dhṛitarâshtra. Now that he has reached the goal towards

which he has striven, his thoughts were, perforce, thrown back on the events that marked his path to the throne. A feeling of revulsion followed, strongly tinged with remorse for the streams of blood through which he had to wade and the remains of kith and kin, over which he had to trample. He became a prey to a settled melancholy, which reflection only deepened and consolatory language only aggravated. His unexampled success brought none of its joyous fruits and it seemed as if he would go mad with sorrow and repentance. He looked round and missed all, except Vidura, of the personages he was accustomed to revere. He surveyed the ranks of his future subjects and he sighed at the spectacle which showed innumerable gaps that were created by the death of many, near and dear to him. This thick veil of gloom that fell on him absorbed the springs of serene joyousness which unqualified triumph over iniquitous

miscreants must needs unlock, and it was long—very long—before he survived its effects and before he turned his thoughts to accept the crown and wield the sceptre.

The assurances of Vyâsa, Nârada and other Rishis, and the re-iterated words of approbation on the parts of the lingering Bhîshma and the now satisfied Dhritarashtra, restored his equilibrium; but it was not, till after Kunti and Droupadi on the one hand and Duryodhana's mother Gândhâri and her daughters-in-law on the other hand survived the first excesses of sorrow and settled down into a non-complaining and harmonious household, that any traces of serene cheerfulness became noticable in him. He lost no time in appointing his brothers and Yuyutsa to several functions in the governmental machinery, and it was not before a year or more of doubt and dissatisfaction that he undertook the ceremonial known as a horse sacrifice—a ceremoni-

al which, like Râja Sûya Yâga, had a religio-political significance calling for an expedition of conquering career in pursuit of the consecrated steed, and of accepting or enforcing allegiance from the rulers of every land which it might choose to pass through and on which it might be arrested and stopped. It was long before Yudhishtîra agreed to it, as his repugnance to shed further blood made him start at the very mention of it. Keenly alive to his eminent fitness for imperial supremacy, but, bringing into prominent relief, its superlative urgency as a rite of indispensable expiation for the myriads of lives lost and the rivers of blood shed in the late historic and fratricidal war, its performance was persistently accentuated and forced on him. Yudhishtîra finally assented to the proposal and commissioned the constitutionally-humane Arjuna to go forth in charge of the sanctified colt of noble breed, but to promise to do his very

utmost to conciliate before shooting the first arrow. Arjuna, being himself of the melting temperament, was thus rendered doubly cautious, and it must be said to his credit that his exertions and success in this respect were, on the whole, highly creditable to him. Upon the accomplishment of this grand ceremonial, Yudhishtira became trebly annointed—first by coronation-ceremony when he wore the historic crown of the lunar dynasty of monarchs—secondly when his head was consecrated by the encircling wreath of the author of the Aswamêdha sacrifice—and thirdly and lastly by the imperial diadem which that sacrifice was the means of securing to him. But these were not the glories he valued most. What his mind was set upon and what his every effort was directed to was to render his reign a memorable epoch for unmixed happiness of the ruled and the unalloyed beneficence of the ruler. That he

achieved that sublime ambition of his, is placed beyond all doubt by the fact that he was accepted as an epoch-maker and an era was named after him—an era which continued during the rest of the Yuga and for several centuries of the Kali Age. Here, we shall leave the righteous Pândavâs, in the zenith of their earthly glory and in the plenary enjoyment of the serene pleasure, belonging to a central and paramount authority which controls without destroying the autonomy or absorbing the integrity of the several tributary states, welded into the only form of imperial Government, possible, then or ever, in the continental India, diversified, as it is, in permanent natural conditions by inevitable differences arising from mutual distances and from necessarily varying facilities for progress and culture.

FINIS:



ERRATA.

PAGE.	LINE.	FOR.	READ.
58	19	Swyamvara	Swayamvara
59	19	dispiriting	dispiriting
134	7	Pandavās	the Pandavās
136	21	in loco maternis	in loco parentis
188	12	all-concerning	all-consuming
192	4	attitude	altitude
205	11	warmth	wrath
207	21	part these	part of these
211	9	readiness sophistry	readiness of sophistry
213	2	fitting	pitting
214	3	existing dilemma	the existing dilemma
216	2	has	had
217	4	is	was
218	12	It is to me a matter, &c.	[matter, &c. "It is to me," she said, "a
	16	their	the
219	13	friends	fiends
220	8	enemy	enemies
226	6	passed on	passed on to
227	10-11	all right thinking	and all right thinking
	21	your sons and Pandavas	your sons and they
229	12	jealousy	jealousy
	15	loaded	loaded
230	4	for	far
	6	greatfully	gratefully
231	3	back ground	back-ground
	6	you	them
232	6	word. When	word when
	9-10	punitive	punitive
	15	misdemeanours	the misdemeanours
233	18	might	weight
234	14-15	bulwork	bulwark
	19	mermedans	myrmidons
235	13-14	suspected	suspected.
236	21	incumbered	encumbered
237	2-3	partians	partisans
	14	what I am	what I am."
238	21	elements	elements
239	7	self opinionated	self-opinionated
240	14	co-adjutors	co-adjutors
242	2	unscrupulously	unscrupulously
243	4	persued	pursued
244	9	pleniture	plenitude
245	16-17	Counterfoes	Counterpoise
246	17-18	foreswore	forswore
247	10	on	an
252	7	Courage	Carnage
	15	spectacle	the spectacle

ERRATA.—(Continued).

PAGE.	LINE.	FOR.	READ.
255	13	soul, of the	soul, and of the
256	3	sin, might	sin, it might
	11	be by	be prompted by
259	7	weild	wield
259	14	frame and that	frame. That
	20	heard, Arjuna	heard. Arjunā
260	2	of a what	of what
	18	be	he
261	16	wife who	wife, who
270	12	out	about
271	17	weild	wield
272	3	unawailing	unavailing
274	10	, however alive	, however, alive
276	3	ecstasy	ecstasy
281	6	in	on
	21	successive	successful
283	2	decline, the call,	decline the call,
292	3	dreamt by	dreamt of by
299	9	best Bhīma	best, Bhīma
301	19-20	conquering Sathiaki	conquering, Sathiaki
302	2	Balnihka	Bhoorisrava
303	4-5	belligerant	belligerent
307	21	rob	robs
308	16	a theretofore	theretofore a
309	11	with embodiments	with the embodiments
311	16	he has	he had
312	12	Balnihka	Bahlīka
320	16	necessary.	necessary."
322	15	that man to man,	that, man to man,
324	8	Pāṇḍavā heroes	other Pāṇḍavā heroes
325	21	that was raging were clean of mind	that is raging are clean out of mind
329	21	energised the one and enervated the other	enervated the one and ener- gised the other
341	20	troops who	troops
344	16	noticable	noticeable
	18	machinary	machinery
346	8	annointed	anointed
347	11	distroying	destroying

NOTE.—Neither the printers nor the gentleman who corrected the proof is answerable for these errata which are due partly to hastily-copied MS and to the "strike order" having been, by mistake amid other engrossing avocations, inscribed on the anti-penultimate, instead of on the final proof in respect of certain forms.