

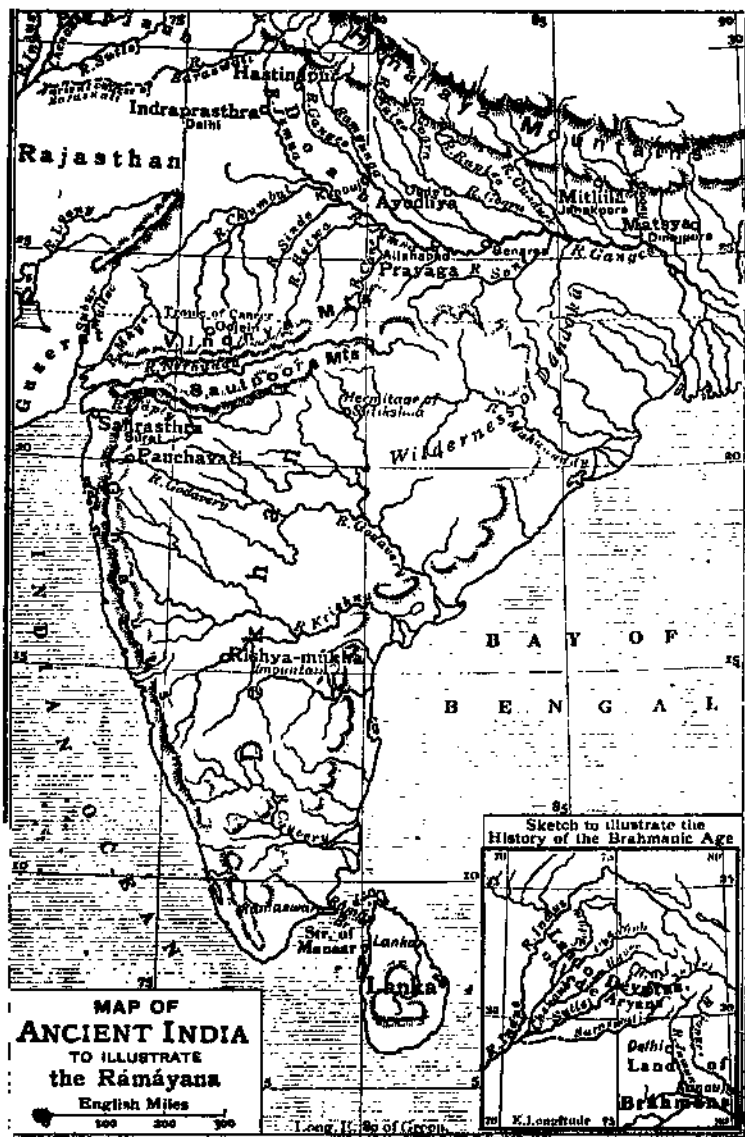
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THE
RAMAYANA



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Longmans' Indian Classics

THE
RAMAYANA

Being the Story of the Great Epic
told in English

BY

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in Longmans' Indian Classics*

WITH A MAP

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BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, MADRAS
LONDON AND NEW YORK

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1921

PREFACE.

ENGLISH is a difficult language to learn. Even those European races whose own speech has much in common with it find its mastery a task which comparatively few of them are ever able perfectly to complete. For the Indian school-boy whose mother-tongue is, in most cases, so completely unrelated philologically to English, the task of mastering the strange language with its extraordinary idioms, its arbitrary rules of spelling, its grammatical irregularities and its amazing peculiarities of pronunciation, must always be extremely difficult. It is to be feared that this difficulty is not often mitigated by the type of English books set as readers for Indian schools. Too often these books, while excellent as far as matter and style are concerned, deal with purely English or Western subjects, in which the interest of the pupils can be but artificial. In such a task as the Indian boys are set anything which helps to arrest their attention or to amuse them is of use as lightening their labours. One of the most important aids that can be offered to them is to furnish them with reading books of local interest, dealing with life in India or with the history of the country. The boy who is taught English from a book which describes his own land and the scenes of daily life that he sees around him will pick up the language far quicker than the boy who tries to learn it by reading of lands that he has never seen and of manners and customs so different from his own that the teacher has to explain the meaning of nearly every passage.

It is with this need in view—that the Indian school-boy should be taught English as far as possible from books dealing with Indian subjects—that the present volume is placed on the market. In the great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, Hindu boys have a rich literature of their own. These famous poems are, however, in Sanskrit which to the modern Indian school-boy is very much what Latin and Greek have been for so many generations to English school-boys.

Sanskrit is a classical and dead language, and few Indian boys to-day ever master it sufficiently to read the epics in the original. Portions of the great poems have been translated into the various vernaculars, and the main stories and the names and characters of the chief actors in the drama of the epics are known to almost every Hindu boy from his earliest years. Volumes for school use giving, in English prose or verse, selections from the epics have appeared from time to time and have deservedly won much popularity among Indians young and old. But, strangely enough, until now there seems to have been no effort to place before Indian school-boys and girls the complete story of the poems told in English. To meet this long-felt want this volume and the *Mahabharata*, uniform with it, are published. In simple English it tells the story of Rama and Sita. Great care has been taken to adhere as closely as possible to the Sanskrit text and to tell the beautiful tale of Rama's self-sacrifice and filial obedience and of Sita's wifely devotion just as it is told in the original.

Probably few of the Indian teachers, and certainly none of their pupils, know much about the origin, dates and development of the epics. To each volume there has, therefore, been added an introduction giving the history of the poem and analysing its contents. These introductions are more for the use of the teachers than of the boys, to enable them to tell their pupils all that is known of the authorship, history and purposes of the epics. With the help of the information and criticisms contained in the introduction it is hoped that the teacher will be able to make his class more readily appreciate what they are reading and realize the epic's beauty as literature, the great moral lessons that the story teaches and the conditions of life prevailing in Vedic India.

The map at the beginning of this volume is reproduced by permission from Mr. Talboys Wheeler's 'History of India', to which work the author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness.

FOREWORD.

The Ramayana ("the poem relating to Rama") differs from its great sister epic, the Mahabharata, in being an epic poem and nothing else. In the Mahabharata the history of the Pandavas forms a small epic nucleus—rather more than a fifth—around which has collected a mass of legends, stories of the gods, episodes and philosophical discourses making the poem a cyclopædia of Hindu religion and mythology. The Ramayana relates the history of the great Hindu legendary hero in connected narration. Such episodes and discourses as occur are for the most part relevant and carry the story on. This intrinsic difference in the two poems is reflected in their respective lengths. While the Mahabharata consists of 220,000 lines divided into eighteen books, the Ramayana is only 48,000 lines long, divided into seven books.

While the main traditions of both poems are Vedic, "they appear to belong to totally different periods," writes Mr. Talboys Wheeler. "The story of the War of Bharata refers to the very dawn of Hindu history, when the Aryan invaders had only reached the upper courses of the Ganges and Jumna, and when the plains of Hindustan were an unknown land..... The main tradition of the Ramayana refers, on the other hand, to a comparatively recent period of Aryan conquest, when an Aryan Empire had been established in Oudh and when Vedic rites and institutions had advanced from the Punjab, or "land of the five rivers" into the very heart of Hindustan." In the Mahabharata the chief actors are the princes of the Lunar Race of kings of Delhi, while in the Ramayana, Rama and his family represent the Solar Race of Ayodhya. Thus the two epics give the legends of

what were probably successively the two most important kingdoms of early Aryan days, that on the eastern and that on the western borders of the Middleland (Madhyadesa) of Northern India.

Popular tradition ascribes the authorship of the Ramayana to the Sage Valmiki. Unlike the Mahabharata the main portion of the epic appears to be by one hand, and students of the poem are inclined to believe that popular tradition is correct and that Valmiki composed the original epic. Who this poet and sage was it is impossible to say ; nor is it possible to fix his date even approximately. He lived perhaps in the later Vedic and Brahmanic ages. He plays an important part in the Ramayana. He welcomes Rama to his hermitage and at the end of the epic he gives its shelter to the banished Sita. There her twin sons are born and it is Valmiki who undertakes the education of the lads.

But, though Valmiki is regarded as the author of the original epic, no less than three versions of the text are accepted in different parts of India. There is the text attributed to Valmiki most generally read in Northern and Southern India ; there is the Gauda or Bengal version in Hindi by Tulsī Das (1532-1623) ; and there is the version known as the Adhyatma Ramayana, popularly ascribed to Vyasa, the reputed compiler of the Mahabharata. This last is chiefly recognised in Western India and Kashmir. About a third of the matter in each version is not included in the other two ; and even in the parts common to all three there are material differences. An explanation for this extraordinary variation may be found in the suggestion that the epic was originally composed in a popular dialect and that the different translators of it into Sanskrit were responsible for the omissions and additions. Another explanation offered is that the epic, handed down orally for centuries, in different parts of the country and in different languages was bound to become much changed in style and contents. In the Mahabharata itself a version of Rama's story appears as an episode, but

whether that was copied from Valmiki's poem or afforded him his subject, or whether it was incorporated in the longer epic as a tradition then long current, it is impossible to say. As a poetical work the Ramayana is superior to the Mahabharata. Its language and thoughts are more truly artistic and the versification is more smooth and finished. The refinement of his work has earned Valmiki the name of *Adi-kavi* 'first poet'. As one writer puts it, "In style the Ramayana is by no means a simple popular epic in which the story and not the form is the main thing. On the contrary, both in the use of poetic figures and in the style of its descriptions it approximates to the later artificial epics (*kavya*) of which it is the fore-runner."

The epic is based on the traditionary history of the Solar Race of Kings of Ayodhya. The names of Ikshwaku, Dasaratha and Rama occur in the Rig Veda, and the story must have been sung and related for centuries before Valmiki wrote it out. It is believed that in its original written form the Ramayana consisted of five books only (II-VI). Book VII is considered to be an addition, as is also most of book II. Some parts of the latter formed, however, the beginning of the original poem. Even in the five original books there are believed to be many interpolations. In its earliest form the Ramayana is believed to be older than the Mahabharata and to have been composed about 500 B.C. The latter parts are thought to have been added during the second century B.C. or even possibly a good deal later. One student of the poem dated its composition in the fourth century A.D. ; but there seems no doubt that the whole of the epic is far earlier than that. Sir W. W. Hunter held that the main traditions in the story "refer to a period which has been loosely assigned to about 1000 B.C. But the poem could not have been put together in its present shape many centuries, if any, before our era. Part of it may be earlier than the Mahabharata, but the compilation as a whole apparently belongs to a later date."

The Original
Form and Prob-
able Date of
the Ramayana.

But long before 500 B.C. or whenever the epic was first put into writing by Valmiki, many centuries probably before writing was invented, the main story of Rama's life and the heroic legends which had grown up around it, had been related by fathers to their sons, generation after generation, and had been chanted year after year by the royal minstrels at the Hindu courts of Northern India. It has been suggested that the events at Ayodhya related in the epic belong to about 1000 B.C. They may well be far older. But, whatever their age, it is certain that they had become the commonplaces of heroic tradition in Hindustan centuries before they were, or could be, put into writing. From the Vedic hymns we learn that the Aryan chieftains were accompanied into battle by minstrels who chanted their praises and sang songs of triumph in celebration of their victories. This is the beginning of all epic poetry in all lands. The Icelandic Sagas were sung by the skalds or Scandinavian minstrels long before they were composed in writing. The Greek 'singers' chanted the triumph of princes and chiefs long before these became immortalised in the verse of Homer. No doubt it has been the same in every land. The Hindu court minstrels and poets sang the legendary adventures of Rama and Yudhishtira before the princes and their followers from the earliest days of the establishment of Aryan kingdoms in Northern India. Slowly in their hands the legends took definite shape. The details became exact; the characters of the actors became fixed. The story of Rama and his banishment, based without doubt on actual facts connected with the ancient kingdom of Kosala, became so definite that it grew to be the common property of the Hindu peoples, repeated from mouth to mouth. In every peasant hut, round every village fire just as much as in the palace courtyard and the city bazaars, the stories of their Aryan forefathers were related, repeated and sung till they took a definite shape. When at last writing was invented, the history of Rama was a definite story with definite characters.

The Beginning
of Epic Poetry
in India.

Dasaratha, the Maharaja of Kosala, is loved by his subjects and his kingdom is prosperous ; but he is childless. By the advice of the Brahmans he performs an *aswamedha* to win the favour of the gods. His prayers are heard and four sons are born to him. The eldest queen Kausalya becomes the mother of Rama ; Kaikeyi bears Bharata and Sumitra gives birth to twins, Lakshmana and Satrugna. The four boys grow up happily together. They are all fine children ; but Rama is the most beautiful and remarkable of them and is early recognised by the Brahmans as an incarnation of Vishnu. When he is of age, Rama is married to Sita, daughter of Raja Janaka of Mithila. Soon after the marriage Dasaratha decides, in accordance with the usual Hindu custom, to instal Rama as Yuvaraja. At the time Bharata is staying at the court of his grandfather ; but Kaikeyi, persuaded to the act of treachery by an old woman who had been her nurse, claims the banishment of Rama and the throne for her son on the ground that Dasaratha had once promised that he would grant her any two boons that she might choose to ask. The Maharaja tries to escape from the fulfilment of his promise, but Kaikeyi will not yield. Rama is sent for and, on hearing the news, declares that obedience to his father is far more to him than the crown, and he goes at once into banishment. With him go Sita and Lakshmana. Within a few days Dasaratha dies of grief. The ministers assemble in council and decide that Bharata shall succeed. The boy is sent for, but the messengers are told to hide the truth from him. When he reaches Ayodhya and learns what his mother has done, he is broken-hearted. He reproaches Kaikeyi bitterly and, declaring that he will not accept the throne, he goes to the jungle of Chitrakuta to bring Rama back. The meeting between the two brothers is most affectionate, but Rama refuses to return, as he would then disobey his father. Bharata has to accept his decision but he declares that he will only reign as regent for Rama. Up to this point the story has been of a matter-of-fact nature,

The Story of
the Epic. Part
I: The Banish-
ment.

just such a story of zenana intrigue and family affection as might occur at any court in India. But from this point the whole character of the story changes.

After Bharata's return to Ayodhya, Rama, Sita and Lakshmana leave Chitrakuta and go southward. After many wanderings they finally settle at Panchavati, the modern Nasik, where they build themselves a hut.

Part II: The Expedition to Lanka.
In the neighbouring forest the two rakshasa chiefs are Khara and Dushana, brothers of Ravana, the Demon King of Lanka. One day their sister Surpanakha visits the hut and, falling in love with Rama, tries to persuade him to desert Sita. On his refusal she attacks the latter, but is driven off by Lakshmana who cuts off her nose and ears. Surpanakha appeals to her brothers who advance on Rama with a large army but are killed with all their troops. Surpanakha then returns to Lanka and appeals to Ravana. By describing the beauty of Sita, she rouses the passion of her brother who decides to revenge himself on Rama by carrying off his wife. In the magic car accompanied by one of his ministers he starts for the wilderness of Dandaka. When they reach the forest, Ravana orders Maricha to assume the form of a golden deer and graze before the hut. Sita sees the animal and begs Rama to shoot it. Rama is lured far into the woods by Maricha and finally shoots him, learning too late the trick that has been played on him. As he dies, Maricha mimics the voice of Rama crying for help. Sita hears, as she thinks, the voice of Rama in distress and begs Lakshmana to go to his brother's aid. As soon as Sita is alone, Ravana comes out of his hiding place and approaches her in the form of a Sanyasi. Sita receives him with respect. Ravana then tells Sita who he is and asks her to become his chief queen. She angrily refuses; and Ravana then carries her off by force to Lanka, on the journey fighting Jatayus, the chief of the vultures. On their return to the hut Rama and Lakshmana search for Sita, but only learn who has carried her off when they find the dying Jatayus. They travel

southward, and by the advice of a friendly demon they go to the mountain where lives Sugriva, the monkey chieftain. He and his counsellors, of whom the chief is Hanuman, receive the princes kindly and an alliance is made. Sugriva has been banished by his brother Bali, and the first result of the alliance is that Rama assists him against Bali and restores him to the throne. When the rains are over, Sugriva gathers his armies which include many regiments of bears. The chief army is sent due south under the command of Hanuman. When they reach the coast, Hanuman leaps over the Straits of Manaar and finds Sita imprisoned in the palace at Lanka. After comforting her with the news of the preparations for her rescue, he destroys some of the gardens of the palace, kills many rakshasas and burns part of the city of Lanka before he leaps back to carry the good news of Sita's safety to Rama. The whole forces of Sugriva then march to the coast. By the advice of Varuna the God of oceans, a bridge is built from India to Ceylon over which the army passes. The city of Lanka is besieged, and after a desperate series of battles in which magical weapons and devices play a leading part, the demons are utterly defeated and Ravana, his giant brother and his sons are killed. The period of exile is now nearly over, and, after reconciliation with Sita, Rama hastens back to Ayodhya. There he is welcomed with affection by Bharata and is installed as Maharaja.

At this point the original Ramayana is believed to have ended. But in the epic as we have it there is a sequel to the story. For some time Rama and Sita live in great happiness. But after a while Rama's suspicions are aroused and by the taunts of the people and the suggestion of a minister he is made to believe that he has done wrong to take Sita back, and he decides to banish her. Sita is taken to the opposite bank of the Ganges and abandoned there near the hermitage of Valmiki. The sage and his wife give her refuge, and there she becomes the mother of twin sons who are named Lava and Kusa and are educated by Valmiki. Some years later Rama prepares to perform an *aswamedha*. When the horse

is sent out, it is seized by the lads who defeat the armies sent against them. At last Rama himself goes to rescue the horse, and recognises them at once as his sons. He is then reconciled with Sita and they all return happily to Ayodhya.

It will be noticed that the Ramayana is divided into two distinct parts (a) the story of Rama's banishment and restoration; (b) the story of his expedition to Lanka. The first is undoubtedly based on historical traditions of Vedic times. Ikshwaku, Dasaratha and Rama are kings whose names occur in the Rig Veda, though they are not connected there. The story is a simple one, bearing on it every sign of being more or less true to life. Such a palace intrigue as that of Kaikeyi has probably occurred many times in Hindu history. The story forms a romance very real and matter-of-fact, full of human interest and with no details of an incredible nature. The second part is quite different. It is no longer a tale of mortal men and women. The actors in it live in an atmosphere of magic. The physical laws of nature are defied. Bridges are built over oceans with rocks that float. Magic cars fly through the heaven. Monkeys and bears talk and conduct themselves as if they were men. Mountain tops are carried across India; and giants capable of eating thousands of human beings at a meal appear on the stage. The expedition into Lanka is full of wildly fantastic and marvellous incidents which have been the subject of several theories by scholars, though in the result there has been no general agreement.

There are four chief theories: (a) the expedition is a poetic representation of the spread of Aryan rule and civilisation over South India; (b) the demons of Lanka were Buddhists and Rama leads the struggle of Brahmanism against the heretics; (c) the story is mythological, Rama being Indra and Sita the tilled earth; (d) the story was not part of the original epic but was borrowed from the Troy legend in Greek poetry.

In regard to (a) it is to be noted that in the poem Rama

does not conquer Southern India or Ceylon, nor does he make any effort to do so. Allied with Sugriva, he makes an expedition to Lanka with the one object of rescuing Sita and punishing Ravana. As soon as he has done this, he hurries north to his own kingdom where he continues to reign for many years in peace. As to (b) the theory is plausible, but it demands altogether too late a date for the composition of the epic. The Buddhists were not expelled from India till many centuries after the beginning of the Christian era, and even the period of the Brahman revival, when Buddhism began to suffer as a heresy, would put the composition of the epic in the second or third century A.D.

As to (c), perhaps the most generally accepted theory, Sir W. W. Hunter writes : "The second great Hindu epic recounts the advance of the Aryans into Southern India.... The personages and episodes of the Ramayana have an abstract or mythological character which contrasts with the matter-of-fact stories of the Mahabharata. The heroine Sita is literally 'the field furrow', to whom the Vedic hymns and early Aryan ritual paid divine honours. She represents Aryan husbandry and has to be defended against the raids of the aborigines by the hero Rama, an incarnation of the Aryan deity Vishnu..... Rama is regarded by Weber as the analogue of Balarama (plough-bearer). From this abstract point of view the Ramayana exhibits the progress of Aryan plough husbandry among the mountains and forests of Central and Southern India and the perils of the agricultural settlers from the non-ploughing nomadic cultivators and hunting tribes."

As to (d) the only argument in support of it appears to be the fact that a popular version of Rama's banishment, the 'Dasaratha-jataka' in Pali, omits the expedition to Lanka. From this it has been argued that the expedition did not form part of the original poem. From the time of the Greek invasion of the Panjab by Alexander the Troy legend may have been known in Northern India, but it is most unlikely that the Ramayana owes anything to that source. Prob-

ably the truth is to be found in the theory that would find most general acceptance among educated Hindus to-day, that the story of Lanka represents the eternal struggle between the principles of good and evil. Vishnu, born into the world as Rama, has the mission of delivering the world from evil. The south as an unknown land is chosen as the home of the forces of evil, the rakshasas or evil spirits of the Vedic faith. In the south there lived the wild Dravidian races with whom the men of Brahman India had but the slightest acquaintance. In the epic they are called Vanara. This word means simply "wild man" (*vana*-wilderness and *nara*-man). Thus the monkey hosts would be the wild dark-skinned tribes pressed into the service of the conqueror of the spirits of evil. Their uncouth ways, their physique and even in some tribes their features would explain the comparison of them to the monkeys of the forests of Malabar and Madras till the legend grew that Rama had been really assisted by an army of animals, not men. This view, that the epic chronicles in an allegorical setting the rescue of the universe from evil, is the general Hindu belief, which also declares that the incarnation, of Vishnu as Rama was in the *Treta Yuga*, which was earlier than the *Dwapara Yuga*, in which Vishnu appeared on this earth as Krishna.

Viewed as a literary work, the Ramayana does not tell so good a story as the Mahabharata and the characters are not so strongly drawn as in the larger epic. But the chief characters have long been assured an immortal place in the world's literature. The character of Rama is without question one of the most beautiful ever drawn. He is to-day, what for countless centuries he has been, the Hindu ideal of noble manhood, and with such art and grace and skill has the ancient Hindu poet painted him that he is not an ideal for India only, but for all the world, for all who read of his tenderness, his loyalty and filial obedience. From the first golden hours of his childhood when the casual foreign reader is captured by the lovely child playing his pretty tricks,

The chief characters of the Epic.

stealing the curds from his father's plate and setting the whole palace in an uproar by his insistent demand for the moon as a plaything, to the last when we see him ruling his kingdom in peace and prosperity, Rama compels admiration and homage. A winning child, he grows to be the perfect man, brave, tender-hearted, unselfish and forgiving. There is no scene in literature more touching or beautiful than that where without a thought for himself Rama sacrifices his rights to the throne rather than permit his father to be untrue to his promise. Never for a moment is the sweetness of his nature clouded by feelings of bitterness towards poor weak Dasaratha or his treacherous step-mother. Indeed his farewell to her and his generous pleading with Bharata that he shall be reconciled with his mother when the period of exile is over are too perfect to be credible till one recollects that Rama is God, not man. One forgets that as one reads, because it is as man that the poet describes him, and as such Rama reaches the highest point of human nobility. He is the ideal son, the ideal husband and the ideal man. The beauty of the character becomes slightly dimmed at times in later stages of the story, and his conscientious harshness to Sita after his return to Oudh is repellent. But one feels that the fault lies in the chronicler and not in the hero whose life he is relating. One feels that the facts could not have been so harsh as they are represented, that Rama whom all must love and admire could never have treated anyone, much less his wife, with unkindness.

For so perfect a man, Sita is a fitting wife, for she is the ideal woman. In all literature it would be impossible to find a more beautiful female character than hers. Her adoring love for her husband, her wifely devotion in sharing the hardships of his jungle life, her purity and nobility of nature, her unflinching loyalty, her superb courage in her defiance of Ravana, her spotless chastity and her patience and gentleness under injustice and suffering combine to paint as noble a woman's character as the human race has ever known and revered. Sita

is the perfect wife, the perfect daughter and the perfect woman.

The characters of Rama and Sita stand out by themselves in the poem and overwhelm and dwarf, as no doubt the poet meant them to dwarf, all the other actors. For the most part one may say that the other characters are vaguely drawn and gain their interest not so much from their personality as from their association with the fortunes of Rama and Sita. Dasaratha, for example, is drawn as the typical Hindu monarch of the Aryan "golden age". He gave his people justice and peace and the kingdom flourished. These general statements are too impersonal to give any idea of the man himself. It is not until the last tragic hours of his life that we seem to see him as he really lived, a kind-hearted and upright, if weak and somewhat self-indulgent man. There is nothing heroic or specially pleasing in the picture of the king whose weakness is only relieved by his genuine love for Rama.

A stronger character, but still one that remains throughout rather vague and shadowy, is that of Bharata. Everyone who reads the epic must like him. Throughout he plays a secondary part to Rama; but whenever he comes to the front, as at the time of his return to Ayodhya on his father's death, he is a lovable, manly, just and generous man whose brotherly loyalty to the banished Rama is surely one of the most beautiful incidents in human history.

Another rather vague but beautiful character is that of Lakshmana, Rama's half-brother, who follows him to exile. Lakshmana is not represented as having the strength of nature of his brother. For example, he is ready to counsel Rama to defy his father and seize the throne, and again when he thinks that Bharata is coming to kill them, he advises an immediate resort to force. He has not the self-control and the loyal generosity of Rama, but he is a true brother whose devotion to Rama and Sita never wavers even in the face of death.

The female characters in the Ramayana are, for the

most part, as vaguely drawn as the male ones. For example, there is Kausalya, Rama's mother. As a literary character, she cannot compare for a moment with Kunti or Gandhari. She is the tender loving mother, but she is vague and weak even in her affection; as when she counsels the terrible crime of parricide in the first agonies of her disappointment at Dasaratha's decision to make Bharata Yuvaraja. One cannot imagine Gandhari giving such wicked advice to Duryodhana when his father installed Yudhishtira as heir apparent.

As a literary character Kaikeyi is disappointing. She begins vaguely, if well enough, as a younger Rani who is on the best of terms with her sister queens and takes a sincere mother's pleasure in watching her own little son play with his brothers. The character is not emphasised in any way. Then suddenly, at the bidding of a servant, she becomes a human fiend callously watching the mental and moral agonies of her husband and treating Rama with icy cruelty. One feels an unreality about her as of an actor playing a part for which he was unfitted. The impression of unreality is deepened by the fact that the tigress mood of cruel greed for power and glory does not last; she is represented as being as pleased as any one at Rama's return from the banishment to which she sent him. Kaikeyi is neither one thing nor the other and is an unconvincing villainess.

In the expedition to Lanka two characters deserve mention. The first is the delightful monkey-chief Hanuman whose tricks and courageous feats of arms are the joy and admiration of all Hindus young and old. It is small wonder that this is so. Hanuman is generous, good-natured, resourceful, brave, and full of shrewd common sense and humour. Quite apart from the miraculous semi-divine nature of the monkey leader, permitting him to leap over sixty miles of sea, to carry the tops of mountains across India, at will to swell himself out to the size of a mountain or make himself as small as a man's thumb, and to set fire to the city of Lanka with his tail lengthened for the purpose, Hanuman's

character is most attractive. He is general, man of the world, minister and friend ; and the Lanka expedition pivots on him and his mastery of ways and means.

Ravana as the monarch of Lanka does not fulfil the religious ideas in all lands of Satan, Ahriman, the Spirit of Evil, for whose overthrow Vishnu has taken form on earth as Rama. He is represented as an ordinary barbaric king, cruel and sensual but affectionate to his family, reverent to his aged mother and as even sacrificing to the gods who on occasion show him or his favour. Like most of the characters in the epic, that of Ravana is unconvincing. There is a blending of the human and divine which is more than confusing. He has magic cars and weapons, his ten heads grow again when they are cut off, yet he is represented as sacrificing everything for a very human passion, as taking pleasure in human food and human music and dancing and living in a palace like any other mortal king. He is even described as of Brahman descent, and he dies at last as a mere mortal warrior. As the Personification of Evil on earth he is a poorly drawn character, inconsistent and vague. But there is little doubt that that is the orthodox interpretation to put on his part in the Ramayana. He is human evil come to a head ; the world has got into an intolerable condition of suffering and vice and divine interference is needed to rescue it and to inaugurate a new era of peace and virtue.

If the story is not so good and the characters are not so powerfully drawn as in the Mahabharata, the moral lessons taught by the Ramayana are more direct and emphatic and the whole poem is more didactic. It would probably be impossible to exaggerate the moral effect of the two epics on the Hindu peoples for two thousand years or more, but more particularly the influence of the Ramayana. First, you have the ideal man and the ideal woman, those living standards of truth, filial obedience, wifely devotion and honour to which all Hindus would wish to aspire. Then every step of the story teaches a lesson.

The Moral
Lessons taught
by the Rama-
yana.

In every line almost the conduct of Rama sets an example for all time. The charming home life of the palace, mirroring on a grand scale the home life of each humble peasant hut through all the countless ages, is the beginning of a tale the spell of which upon the Hindu mind can never be broken. In the Ramayana are portrayed the perfect father and mother, the perfect son and brother, the perfect husband and wife. The example of Rama is something apart in its divine perfection. But Lakshmana and Bharata teach the reader how to be perfect brothers. Sita is the eternal ideal of Hindu womanhood. Dasaratha sets the example to all kings. Even the ministers and counsellors, the palace attendants and servants are types, each in their way setting a standard of the ideal in each grade of the national life. It is not too much to say that the people in the Ramayana for the past twenty centuries have actually had more to do with the formation of Hindu character than any other agency literary or personal. While it has thus standardised the ideal in every rank of life for the Hindu, the epic teaches the great broad lessons of life, that duty and honour are greater than personal happiness, that faith must be kept at all costs, that obedience to parents is the first and greatest of a son's duties, that in the end the patient humility which made Rama bow to the harsh circumstances of fate without a murmur reaps its reward, that loyalty to one's duty is a far more splendid life than one of mere worldly glory. All these are lessons which emerge from the story itself. The epic, as a whole, enforces the greater lesson that evil and injustice can never finally win in the struggle with good ; that when vice and cruelty become intolerable help is at hand ; that suffering humanity can confidently throw itself on the mercy of an all-loving and all-powerful God.

THE RAMAYANA.

Many hundreds of years ago there was a large and powerful kingdom in India called Kosala. It included all that fertile district which we know to-day as the province of Oudh in the United Provinces. On the east this kingdom stretched to Patna, on the west to the Panjab, and on the south to Berar. Through it flowed the Ganges and the Jumna and their tributaries, and this made the land very fruitful. Harvests never failed and the cattle were plentiful and healthy. The capital of this prosperous country was the stately city of Ayodhya built on the banks of the Gogra river (then called the Sarayu) where now stands Fyzabad. Even to-day, outside the limits of the modern town, the walls of this ancient city can be traced for miles, but those ruins give only a slight idea of how great and splendid Ayodhya was long ago. It was surrounded by high walls wide enough for a chariot to drive along the top. It was thirty miles round those walls, and from the north to the south or from the east to the west across the city was more than nine miles. All round the walls was a deep and wide moat filled with water. There were four great gates into the city. Each was made of seasoned wood and was strengthened with thick iron bars and stoutly bolted and locked. Over each gate was a guard-house where the soldiers of the Maharaja kept watch and where weapons of all kinds were stored. At intervals all round the thirty miles of wall were built turrets and watch towers where night and day the king's bowmen were stationed to guard the city from attack.

Within the city all was splendour and peace. The roads were wide and smooth. On each side were rows of trees to shade them, and every day the roads were watered, so that there was no dust and they were always pleasant to travel over. In the city were many fine houses with large courtyards and pretty gardens. On all sides were to be seen the pinnacles and domes of palaces and richly carved temples approached by broad and stately steps. Here and there paths led from the highways to pleasant gardens full of birds and flowers and shady groves of trees laden with delicious fruits. In these gardens were tanks made of stone. Some of these were as large as lakes. The water was covered with white and pink lotuses over which all through the sunny day swarms of bees flew to feast on the honey. In the shade of the trees growing on the banks silvery fish swam in the clear water or half leapt into the sunshine to catch the flies on the surface. Water-fowl of all kinds,—swans, ducks, geese, cranes, herons and the brilliant red and blue king-fishers—haunted these tanks, around which the people lingered to talk in the cool of the evenings while the happy children played. Fair and stately was Ayodhya like Amaravati, the home of Indra. Its streets were bright with garlands and gay with coloured banners. The air was perfumed with flowers and with the incense burning in the temples. All day long the city echoed with the sweet music of the vina and flute, the ringing sound of bowstrings drawn by the king's archers and the solemn chanting of Vedic hymns.

Many thousands of the Maharaja's subjects lived in Ayodhya and they were all healthy and happy. The rains never failed; the finest rice and wheat were plentiful; the cows gave the richest of milk. So the people were always well-fed and contented. Ayodhya was a prosperous and a busy city. The bazaars were bright and crowded. The shops of the merchants were filled with jewels and goods and cloths from every land. There were no idlers in Ayodhya. Everybody had something to do;

The Content-
ment of the Peo-
ple of Ayodhya.

each man worked at his craft or trade and fulfilled the duties of his caste. The Brahmins tended the sacred fires, studied the Vedas and taught in the temple schools. The Brahmanas went out at dawn to collect the alms of the faithful. The Kshatriyas, defenders of the kingdom, were ever busy in the practice of arms, drilling daily in the presence of their king. The Vaishyas enriched the country by their trade. The Sudras found their happiness in serving the Brahmins. In the bazaars clever craftsmen plied their trades. There were many jewellers and goldsmiths, carvers, carpenters, gilders, potters and metal workers. Others found employment as painters, tanners, oilmen, flower and betel-nut sellers, syces, charioteers and cowherds. Around the palaces and temples gathered minstrels, singers and dancing girls. In that happy city each person was busy and contented, doing some task for which his caste fitted him. Nobody was poor, homeless or friendless. In all Ayodhya there were no misers or thieves, no liars or tale-bearers, no rogues or vagabonds. Each home was happy and peaceful. Husbands were kind and faithful; wives were loving and devoted; sons and daughters were reverent and obedient. Happily the married people lived their lives, bringing up their children to be loyal subjects of the king. In the streets the maimed, the crippled and diseased were never seen. Each caste lived its own life strictly according to the rules of religion. There was no intermarriage, and in all Ayodhya there was not a Chandela either by birth or as a punishment.

In the centre of the city was the stately palace of the Maharaja, surrounded by lovely gardens. The royal park was enclosed by very high and strong walls with two high arched gateways, one on each side. Within the gardens were many temples and treasure houses filled with the royal jewels and gold. In the centre of the palace stood the great durbar hall with the throne of the Maharaja raised on pillars of gold inlaid with jewels. Around the palace day and night stood soldiers guarding each doorway. Here in splendour

The Maharaja
of Kosala.

THE RAMAYANA

and peace lived the great and good Maharaja Dasaratha. Son of Maharaja Aja, prince of the royal line of Ikshwaku. Dasaratha worthily upheld the honour and traditions of his noble ancestors. A wise and just ruler, a great soldier, a student of the Vedas, he was loved by his subjects and feared by his foes. Around him he had gathered a band of eight trusty counsellors, the chief of whom was named Sumantra. Sagacious and prudent men they were, skilled in all matters of statecraft and in the art of government. The sages Vasishtha and Vamadeva were the priests of the royal family. Assisted by these loyal servants, Dasaratha governed his wide dominions as a father rules his family. He rejoiced in the happiness of his people; he shared in their sorrows. From every quarter of the kingdom reports were made to him by trustworthy agents. The lives of his subjects were known to him as a man knows the lives of his children.

But, though he was the ruler of this happy kingdom and lived in such splendour and luxury, Dasaratha was not happy. He had three queens whom he loved dearly, Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra; but no son had been born to him. This was a great grief

The Maharaja resolves to perform the Aswamedha.

to Dasaratha and each day he prayed in the temple that he might be blessed with an heir. But the years passed and the prayers remained unanswered. He was victorious in war; his people were loyal and contented; the kingdom grew richer and richer. But the Maharaja in his splendid palace could find no comfort in all this prosperity, for he had no son to succeed to his throne. At last one day, almost despairing that the gods would hear him, he sent for Vasishtha, Vamadeva and all the learned Brahmins of Ayodhya and told them that he had decided to perform the greatest of all sacrifices, the *aswamedha*. The priests said that the decision of the Maharaja was wise, that the gods would surely hear his prayers; and they began to make preparations for the great ceremony. Soon all was bustle and stir in the palace, and in the temples the Brah-

mans were offering prayers daily for the success of the sacrifice.

When the chief minister Sumantra heard of the Maharaja's plan, he told him that it had been predicted in the ancient books that he would perform the *aswamedha*. "In the books, O Maharaja," he said, "it was written also that the sacrifice would be offered by Sringa the famous rishi who lives at the court of the Raja of Anga. It is he who must use the sacred knife. Therefore, O King of kings, go now to Anga and bring hither that holy man Sringa that the prophecy may be fulfilled. Thus will the sacrifice succeed and a son be born to you." So Dasaratha took the advice of the Dewan. With a great retinue and escorted by the chieftains of the kingdom, he went to the capital of Anga. There he was welcomed and hospitably entertained for eight days by the Raja Lomapada. When the Raja heard the reason of the visit, he sent for Sringa and asked him to help Dasaratha. So Sringa went back with the Maharaja to Ayodhya : and when the spring was come, on the night of the full moon, a milk white horse with no blemish or spot on him was let loose to wander where he would for a year accompanied by a Brahman.

Now when a year had passed and the spring had come again, the horse was brought back to Ayodhya, and all the preparations for the sacrifice were completed. Splendid pavilions

The Performance of the *Aswamedha*.

of houses were made ready for the Brahmans. Lakhs of maunds of the finest grain and foodstuffs were provided. The city was gay with flags and flowers and happy laughing crowds filled the streets. All the kings of the land had been invited to the ceremony. Among those who came guarded by soldiers in glittering armour and attended by courtiers in gold and jewels were the Rajas of Mithila, Kasi, Anga, Magadha, Sindhu and Saurashtra. The Rajas of the Deccan with hundreds of state elephants and countless chariots came also. Never had Ayodhya been the scene of

so splendid a pageant. Soldiers in burnished mail marched through the festooned streets. Bands played and banners fluttered from every housetop and each night the city was lighted up till the crowded streets were a blaze of light. Feasts of the daintiest and most costly food were served to thousands of Brahmans on dishes of gold and silver by Kshatriyas dressed in splendid robes blazing with jewels and gold. Many lakhs of treasure were spent by Dasaratha in entertaining his royal guests and their suites.

On the northern bank of the Sarayu river a great space of level grassy land had been marked out as the place of sacrifice. There in the sacred enclosure were set up twenty-one sacrificial posts. Each post was more than thirty feet high and inlaid with gold. Round them were wound finely woven cloths and garlands of flowers. To each post was tied a bird or animal. These posts were fixed in pits arranged regularly in rows in the form of the divine bird Garuda. The pits that marked the wings were lined with gold bricks. To the centre post marking the head of the bird the milk white horse was tied. Then the Brahmans lighted the sacrificial fire and poured on it the consecrated ghee till the flames blazed up many feet high. Amid the solemn chanting of the Vedic hymns the horse was led round the fire. Finally, when the mantras had been said, the rishi Sringa took the sacrificial knife and with one blow killed the horse. Then portions of its body were cut away and placed on the fire by the priests as ordered in the sacred books. Many ceremonies were carried out, and all night the Maharaja and his queens watched by the body of the horse. On the morrow there was a great feast. Dasaratha prepared banquets for the rajas and princes, and to the Brahmans he gave great quantities of gold and jewels and cattle. To all his subjects he gave gifts of money. The bands played; the people danced and sang. All was joy and merriment. Thus amid public rejoicing and great splendour the sacrifice of the *aswamedha* was completed.

The gods were pleased with Dasaratha for his piety and the splendid sacrifice that he had performed. His prayers were granted, and in the course of time he was made happy by the birth of four sons. Rani Kausalya became the mother of the first-born. Kaikeyi bore him the second. Sumitra gave birth to twins. Great was the joy of the people of Kosala when they learned of the happiness of their Maharaja. Happy laughing crowds filled the streets and gardens. Thousands flocked into the city from the country districts. The city was decorated with flags and flowers and at night each house was lighted up. Round the palace thronged the people to shout their loyal greetings to their ruler who showed himself to them on the palace balcony smiling and proud. All day and night the sounds of music and singing were heard; and in the temples, where the incense hung in thick fragrant wreaths around the sacred fires blazing high with ghee, the Brahmans offered up prayers of thanksgiving for the happiness that had come to the kingdom.

Eleven days after their birth the princes were named. In the palace a splendid ceremony took place over which the chief priest Vasishta presided. To the eldest son was given the name of Rama, that is 'Delight of the people'. To the second was given that of Bharata, 'Supporter of the kingdom'. The twins were called Lakshmana 'Fair to look on' and Satrughna, 'Destroyer of his foes'. Then throughout the kingdom a holiday was proclaimed. In the palace grounds feasts were spread for the Brahmans, and to his subjects in Ayodhya and all over the country Dasaratha gave thousands of maunds of grain and sweetmeats and gifts of gold. The busy life of the city stopped. The shops were closed, the bazaars were empty. All the people ate and drank, danced and sang. Great crowds collected round the palace and the baby princes were brought on to the balcony by the royal nurses and shown to the cheering people by the Diwan Sumantra. When the Maharaja came among his people, the shout of welcome was like thunder. Never

had there been so happy a kingdom as Kosala, so proud and glad a sovereign and so loyal a people.

The four babies were very lovely and the joy of their father and mothers. But the most beautiful

The Child- of all was Rama. As he lay in his white
hood of Rama. silk cot he looked as sweet and delicate as a
flower, like a blue lotus floating in the sun-

shine on the pure water of the Ganges. He would lie smiling up at the sweet face of his mother bending over him as if he knew quite well how much she loved him. Sometimes he would lift up his little foot and solemnly twist his dimpled leg till he could put his toe in his mouth, as if to taste what it was in its shapely beauty which made all those who came to see him, ministers and servants, kiss it in reverence. One day as Dasaratha stood with Vasishtha watching him, the priest said: "Maharaja, he is no earthly child. He is the Lord Vishnu come among us. See how wonderful is his satin skin, how delicate its tint. See his glossy curling hair, the fine shape of his head, the high forehead, the noble brow radiant with the signs of divinity. His smiling face is like the moon in glory. His large dark eyes, his lips red as the heart of the pomegranate, his high nose, his graceful neck, the long delicate hands, the colour and shape of the nails, his feet bearing the sacred marks of the chakra, the lotus and mace,—surely are they all the marks of the Lord. He is Vishnu come among us." And the happy Maharaja bent lovingly over his son who smiled at him with grave tender eyes as if to tell him that the wise priest spoke the truth.

When the little princes had grown big enough to run about and play baby games, they were a great delight and amusement to their parents. The merriest and most winning of all was Rama. He was full of fun and baby mischief. Sometimes, if his father or Kausalya called him, he would run away with roguish laughter. If he were chased, he would run as fast as his small legs would move. Then when his mother gave up trying to catch him, he would

come back of his own accord and clasp her feet with his tiny fingers, or cling with chubby arms to his father's knee. Sometimes he would snatch a handful of curds from the Maharaja's dish, and running off, would eat it at a distance, laughing all the time at his own naughtiness. As he learned to speak, his mother would ask him which was his nose, his mouth, his ears, his eyes, his toes and so on, and he would solemnly touch each part named. Sometimes one of the princesses who came to see the Rani would pretend that she was his mother. But little Rama wriggled out of her encircling arms and ran to his mother and climbed on her lap and put his soft arms round her neck, as if to tell her that no one could take her place in his small heart.

One evening, as Kausalya sat by his cradle singing him to sleep with a soft lullaby, the full moon rose and shone into the palace room. Little Rama lay for some minutes staring at its splendour. To him it seemed some lovely ball of silver hung in the air and he longed to play with it. He stretched his dimpled hands upwards to seize it. At first Kausalya did not understand what he wanted. She bent over him to kiss him, but he tried to push her away with his tiny hands. She thought that he was ill and tried to soothe him. But Rama still stretched his arms out towards the moon. At last Kausalya saw that it was the moon to which he pointed. Then she stroked his hair and told him, what of course he could not understand, that the moon was very far away and that she could not catch it for him, but that he could have jewels as bright as it with which to play. But, when she brought him the jewels, Rama threw them down and began to cry. Kausalya tried to pacify him, but he cried so much that soon his lovely eyes were red and swollen. Hearing his cries, the royal nurses came and the Rani's maids of honour, but no one could comfort him. One of them tried to give him milk, thinking that he was hungry; but Rama pushed her away. Another sang gentle cradle songs to lull him to sleep; but the little prince still wept. A third woman said that the

goddess Susti was angry and that offerings of fruit and rice must be made to her. A fourth maid suggested that an evil spirit was troubling the child and that the holy men must come and chant *mantras* by the cradle. All these means were tried, but Rama still cried. Then, in despair, Kausalya sent word to the Maharaja who came quickly; but Rama paid no attention to his father's soothing words. The Maharaja sent for the dewan and Sumantra came hastily to the palace. When he heard that Rama was crying for the moon, he told a servant to bring him a mirror. Holding the glass so that the moon was reflected in it, he gave the mirror to Rama. When the little prince saw the moon in the mirror in his hands, he stopped crying and turned the glass backwards and forwards delightedly. When he had played hide and seek with the moon thus for a while, he fell to sleep contentedly.

When the princes were in their second year, they began to talk. The first words they learned were 'pita' and 'mata', but they could not say them, properly. They called their father and mother 'pa' and 'ma'. Rama could not pronounce the letter 'r', so when he was asked his name he would say 'Ama'. For hours the Ranis would sit and watch the four little boys at their play. Sometimes they would make them hold each other's hands and dance in a circle, while the Ranis clapped their hands and sang. Rama was a sturdy little fellow and loved to follow his father about. Sometimes Dasaratha would send him on small errands. For instance, he would tell him to fetch his sandals. Then little Rama would walk off as seriously as if everything depended on his carrying out his orders well, and he would bring back the slippers to the Maharaja with such a grave look on his face as would make the Maharaja and everyone laugh. As he grew bigger, the Maharaja would take him sometimes into the durbar hall when the council met. Rama would sit gravely on his father's knee and silently watch the ministers and soldiers, listening as seriously to the

The Infancy
of the Princes.
Their ears are
pierced.

speeches as if he understood all that was being said. Nor was he at all pleased when the Rani, who could not bear to have him out of her sight, sent a maid servant to take him back to the zenana.

When Rama and his brothers were three, their ears were bored. This was the occasion for a splendid ceremony at which all the court and hundreds of Brahmans were present. Their infancy had now ended and the princes were old enough to have playmates of their own age, the sons of the nobles and ministers. Many hours they romped with their comrades in the palace corridors or the shady gardens, racing, tumbling, wrestling, playing at ball games or at hide and seek. Sometimes the game would take a more serious form. The little boys would solemnly play at being Brahmans offering sacrifices, imitating the actions of Vasishtha and the royal family priests. First, they made figures of clay to represent the gods. Then they rolled pieces of clay into imitations of grains of rice and fruits and offered these to the gods, bending their little heads in reverence. When the clay gods made no movement to take the offerings, the children would try to force the pieces of clay into their mouths. Then, when they were tired of the game, they would get angry with their clay gods and smash them to pieces. As they grew bigger, the boys had the run of the palace and chased each other round and round the cool corridors and up and down the steps. Sometimes they would run into the great durbar hall and even play there around the gold throne. To them the palace was full of marvels. At first the mirrors in the pillars were a mystery to them. They saw little boys just like themselves playing and they called to them to come and play; or they would feel jealous and ask their mothers not to kiss these new little boys who were so unkind that they would not play.

When the princes were five, their education began. The Maharaja appointed Vasishtha to be their tutor, and they began their lessons just as all little Hindu boys begin. First, at
 The Educa-
 — of the Sans-
 of the priest, they worshipped

goddess of learning, placing before her image fresh flowers and leaves of the bale fruit. Then Vasishtha took a piece of chalk and wrote the vowels on the stone floor and taught the children those letters. In this way they learned in time the alphabet and then they began to spell out easy sentences. Each day they went to the house of Vasishtha for their lessons. The four boys were dressed in different colours by their mothers. Rama wore yellow clothes, Bharata green, Lakshmana purple, and Satrugna red. Though there were hundreds of servants in the palace, the Maharaja ordered each boy to carry his ink bottle in his hand and to hang over his shoulder the little bag containing his books, his reed pens and white palm leaves for writing. Every morning at sunrise the four lads left the palace and walked to their tutor's house, meeting other boys on the road who were going there also. The princes always arrived in time, but some of the others were lazy boys and stopped to play in the roads. When Vasishtha began the lesson and saw that some boy was absent, he would often tell Rama and his brothers to go out and catch the truant. The little princes took these duties seriously and would arrest the runaway and drag him in before Vasishtha like policemen bringing a dacoit before a Magistrate. Then the bad boy would have to stand in the corner for an hour, or lose his share of the delicious sweets which Vasishtha gave the boys when the lessons were over. Rama and his brothers were good boys. They listened to all Vasishtha said and they tried to learn quickly. Soon they could read quite well and were trusted by Vasishtha to teach smaller boys their letters. When they had mastered reading, they began grammar and Rama got on very well. In a year or two he had learned to read in several languages and knew something of singing, playing on musical instruments, dancing, painting, and something about the stars and the mathematical sciences. When they grew older, Dasaratha would send sometimes for his sons and would examine them before the Council; asking them questions to see how much they had learned.

At first the princes were shy and nervous ; but they answered well and all the ministers and chiefs were surprised at the progress the boys were making. At these examinations Rama did best, for he was the most intelligent of the four and learned quickest.

So the years of their childhood passed and soon the boys were big enough to be taught the use of arms.

The Young Princes are invested with the Sacred Thread. They learned to ride and to drill and to do all military exercises. They were as eager as all boys are to play at being soldiers.

When lessons were finished, they and their school-fellows would have mock battles. All the boys were divided into two sides. Rama generally commanded one of the little armies. Then they would fight and chase each other and the side that was defeated had to carry the conquerors thirty or forty yards. When Rama's side was beaten, he had to carry the victorious leader just as all the other boys had to carry one of their school-mates. Sometimes the boys would play at holding durbar and pretend that Rama was their Maharaja. Some of the boys would be his ministers and others would be the citizens. One lad would hold an umbrella over Rama, while another would fan him with the *chamara*. They had mock trials. They would seize a boy and bring him before the Maharaja and make a charge against him. Rama listened very gravely to all the evidence and to all the speeches and, then he would decide the case and, if he found the prisoner guilty, he would order him to be punished.

When they reached their twelfth year they were invested with the sacred thread. The barber shaved their heads and they were dressed in red silk and went to the house of Vasishtha. There the ceremony took place and round each lad's neck was hung the sacred thread made of the skin of an antelope. Then they were taught the *gayatri* and the duties of their new life. For that day they became, as is ordered by the sacred books, brahmacharis. Armed with little bags and baskets, they returned to the palace and begged alms from their family. Rama went first to his mother who gave him a dole

of rice and many jewels. Then he begged of all the family. The other boys did the same. Then, in turn, they visited the houses of the ministers and the great chiefs. Everywhere they got food and many rich gifts, all of which they gave to Vasishtha. Thus they entered upon their young manhood.

Having taken the thread, the princes began the study of the Vedas and entered seriously upon the duties of their lives. They practised archery and were taught swordsmanship. They learned to fight from horseback, on elephants and in cars. They became skilful with arrows, spears, swords and maces. They grew strong and tall and were brave and manly. No boys of their age excelled them for strength. At assaults-at-arms they were always the victors, and in single combats no chief's son could stand against them. But Rama was the strongest and bravest of all the four. He was as conspicuous among them as a flag on a tower. But, though he was so strong, he was always gentle and kind and was eager to protect the weak and to show mercy to a vanquished foe. The brothers were all fond of each other, but Lakshmana loved Rama very dearly. He was never happy when they were parted, and he was always eager to do something to please him, to wait on him and serve him in some way.

One day on the archery ground, when the princes and their boy friends were shooting with bows, Rama took up a big bow that belonged to one of the boys. He fitted an arrow on the string and then he bent the bow so much that he broke it in two. When the boy saw Rama break his bow, he was very surprised and told him that he ought to go to Mithila and try to bend the great bow there. Rama asked what bow that was. "In the palace of the Raja Janaka of Mithila," said his friend, "is the bow of Siva which the Raja and his family worship each day. No one has ever been able to bend it. Raja Janaka has a very beautiful daughter, named Sita, and he has said that he will give her in marriage to the man who can bend the great bow." The story interested Rama

Rama hears
of the great
bow of Siva at
Mithila.

very much and he thought a great deal about the bow and the lovely princess who would become the wife of him who could bend it. He said nothing to his brothers or his mother ; but he practised constantly with the stoutest bows and tried in every way to grow very strong, hoping that some day he could go to Mithila and try to bend the bow of Siva.

About this time the Maharaja began to think about arranging the marriages of his sons. It happened that one day he was discussing the matter with his two priests and the ministers in the council hall when a servant came to say that the great sage Visvamisra was at the palace gate and wished to see the Maharaja. When he heard this news, the Maharaja rose at once and with his two priests went to meet the visitor. Visvamisra was a famous sage who had been a Kshatriya and a great soldier. After some years he retired from the world and lived a rishi's life on the Himalayas, becoming a Brahman. Now he dwelt in a hermitage on the southern bank of the Ganges. Dasaratha worshipped the sage and said : " Rishi, your arrival is as pleasing to me as a draught of amrita, as is the fall of rain to trees in the hot season, or as the birth of a son to a childless man. Tell me, holy one, what reason has caused you to come. Tell me what you wish. I shall have great joy in granting any request that you make." Then Visvamisra, accepting the worship of the Maharaja and the argha, said : " Maharaja, I have come to ask you to help me. In my hermitage we are much troubled by rakshasas who hate the Brahmans and take pleasure in spoiling our sacrifices by pouring flesh and blood upon the *homa*. Chief among these fiends are Maricha and Suvahu. They are the leaders of the rakshasas in the army of the Raja Ravana, who has ordered them to destroy all the sacrifices. Therefore I have come to ask you to send your son Rama to the hermitage to kill the rakshasas. These demons will not be able to resist the attack of so gallant and skilful an hero. With the help of the brave boy we shall be freed from our foes."

When the Maharaja heard these words, he was very sad and anxious. He had given his word, but he had no idea that Viswamitra would ask for Rama. "Sage, the request is a great surprise to me. Rama is still a mere boy. Though he is skilled in all warlike exercises, he is only sixteen. What chance has such a lad of living in a fight with those demons? To you I will give a large army of my finest soldiers to protect you, but I cannot let you take Rama."

Then Viswamitra was very angry. "Maharaja", he said, "you promised that you would grant any request which I made. You cannot break your word. I understand your natural fatherly fears for your son; but he will come to no harm. I promise you that I will so protect him that he will defeat and kill the rakshasas. Have no fear."

So the Maharaja agreed sadly that Rama must go. The boy was called and worshipped the sage. After some days, when preparations had been made for the journey, Rama, and Lakshmana who begged that he might go with his brother, bade their parents farewell and went away with Viswamitra.

It was the season of autumn. The blue sky was as free from clouds as the mind of the good man is from evil thoughts. Abundant rain had fallen and the sun-baked earth had become green and beautiful. The winds that had blown so fiercely through the wet months had died down: over the sunlit land blew a cool and gentle breeze. The rivers that had been brown with the mud collected from their banks by the wild rush of the waters were now flowing quietly, pure and clear in the sunshine. On the lakes and tanks the pink, white and purple lotuses were in full blossom. The lads and Viswamitra walked by the bank of the Sarayu towards the place where it flows into the Ganges. On each side of the stream stretched for miles the fields of rice and wheat ripening to harvest. As they went along Viswamitra taught the boys of the creation of the world and the origins of plants and beasts as revealed in the sacred books. When the evening came, they ate their simple meal

The Journey of
Rama, Laksh-
mana and the
Sage.

by the river side and then lay down to sleep on grass beds.

When dawn came, Visvamitra woke the princes who bathed and said the holy gayatri. After they had eaten they went on down the river bank till they came to the junction of the Sarayu and Ganges. Here was a hermitage of some size where many Brahmans lived a life of prayer and penance. The rishis received Visvamitra with respect and hospitably entertained him and the princes. After a night's rest the travellers crossed the river at its junction with the Ganges. There was some danger, for the current was rapid where the two rivers foamed and tumbled into each other. But, as they stood in the boat, the boys were not frightened but quietly saluted and made their prayers to the two rivers. When they reached the other bank, they entered a dense dark jungle where the thick leaves and the matted undergrowth made it hard to see or to walk.

Now this jungle was called the wilderness of Taraka because in it lived a terrible female demon known by that name. The forest echoed with the roaring of wild beasts and the screams of fierce birds of prey. Taraka was the mother of Maricha and she was very cruel and blood-thirsty. When they had entered the wood, Visvamitra said to Rama : "Taraka is the terror of this country. For the sake of the Brahmans whose sacrifices she destroys you must kill her. Do not think of the act as if it were the murder of a woman. You are a Kshatriya prince and to you must we all look for protection. It is the duty of a prince to preserve the people from such demons. Rid the land of a curse. Such an act is not cruel : it is your duty. "Rishi", Rama said, "I have come with you, at my father's command, to do what you bid me." Then to Lakshmana he said "Brother, give me my weapons quickly. I am ashamed to kill this rakshasi, for she is a female, but I will rob her of her strength and her power for evil". Then, taking his bow, he twanged the string till the forest resounded with the noise. When Taraka heard it, she was very angry and she rushed out of her

Rama kills
the Rakshasi
called Taraka.

hair. As she came towards Rama, she shouted in a terrible voice and threw a shower of stones at him. But Rama was not frightened. He shot two sharp broad-headed arrows at her and cut off her arms. Lakshmana also shot arrows which cut off her ears and nose. Yelling with pain, the demon fled back into the dense jungle. From a distance she threw a magical shower of stones on the princes; but they stood their ground. Then Visvamitra, angry because Rama had spared the demon, said: "Your wish to spare Taraka is very wrong. She is the foe of the Brahmans and destroys their sacrifices. If you do not at once kill her, I shall be very angry. It will also be dangerous, for we must spend the night in this wood and once the evening comes it is difficult to kill rakshasas." Thus ordered, Rama took an arrow with a head shaped like a crescent and as sharp as a razor. As Taraka, bleeding from her wounds, rushed once more at him, he fired at her. It struck her in the heart and, vomiting blood, she fell down and died. Then Visvamitra took Rama in his arms and kissed his head and blessed him for his act. That night the three slept in the wilderness of Taraka and when the dawn came they started for the hermitage of Visvamitra.

Having passed through the wilderness they walked for many miles by the river side till they saw before them the gently sloping sides of a hill clothed to the top with the thick foliage of trees. At the foot of this hill was a shady wood of great trees, the paths carpetted with soft velvety grass like the thick silken mats on a palace floor. Beneath the trees wandered herds of mild-eyed deer and in the boughs above them sang and whistled melodious birds. In this lovely wood on the bank of the sacred river was the hermitage of Visvamitra. When they reached the huts, the young princes were greeted with great kindness by the Brahmans. The boys thought that it was one of the most beautiful places they had ever seen, and Visvamitra told them its story. The hermitage had once been the home of Vishnu who for

The legend of
the hermitage
of Visvamitra.

a time had lived there the holy life of a rishi as an example to mankind. While he was thus honouring the holy spot, Bali, the mighty Raja of the Asuras, made war on the gods and defeated the armies of Indra. The Lord of Heaven with the other gods came to Vishnu and prayed that he would help them to punish Bali. Vishnu granted this prayer and was born into the world in the form of a dwarf. Thus disguised he went to the Court of Bali and begged him to give him as much land as he could step over in three strides. Bali contemptuously agreed to do so. Then the dwarf was transformed into the Lord Vishnu himself who in one stride covered the earth. In the second he covered the heavens. Then, having nowhere else to stride, Vishnu placed his foot on the head of Bali. He was bound hand and foot by Vishnu's command and with his legions was sent to the nether regions, while Indra and the gods were restored to power.

After Rama and Lakshmana had stayed a few days in the hermitage, preparations were made for a great sacrifice that the rakshasas were certain to try to destroy. The altar was spread with kusa grass and the fragrant wood, the flowers, the ladles and all were made ready. On the seventh day after the boys' arrival the sacrifice was begun. Soon the rakshasas were heard approaching through the trees. To Rama Viswamitra had given many splendid weapons which had been specially blessed ; and he had taught him two potent mantras with which he could summon divine help if he were ever overwhelmed by enemies. Thus armed, Rama and Lakshmana took their place beside the altar and awaited the attack of the demons. In a minute the terrible Maricha and Suvahu with their band of devils rushed out of the wood whirling great maces and showing their big yellow teeth, their eyes blazing with rage. When they saw that the only protection the Brahmans had were two slim boys, they laughed loud and long. Then they came to the altar and tried to defile the sacrifice by throwing on it bloody pieces of foul meat and the bones of unclean animals. But Rama defied them ; and, hurling a spear at

Maricha, he wounded him so severely that he fled down the river and never stopped till he had reached the ocean. Then, turning on Suvahu, Rama shot him in the breast with a razor-sharp arrow. With a groan the demon fell to the ground and died. Seeing their leaders fall, the rakshasas lost courage. Rama and Lakshmana fired such a shower of arrows at them that most of them died. Those who fled went away wounded, dragging their dead comrades after them. The victory was complete and the Brahmans thanked and praised the two princes for their courage and skill. Then Visvamitra told the boys that the Raja Janaka was about to perform a great sacrifice and that he was going with some of his followers to Mithila to witness the ceremony. "You", he said, "shall both come with us. In Raja Janaka's palace you will see Siva's mighty bow which no man can bend." Rama and his brother were very excited at the prospect of the journey and that night they could hardly sleep for thinking of Mithila and the great bow.

When dawn came Visvamitra and the Brahmans with the two boys started for Mithila. As they walked Viswámitra told them stories of the gods. He told them a wonderful legend of the foundation of the city of Kanauj; and then he told them how the Ganges in its first descent from the Himalayas had been caught and imprisoned by Siva on his head. When the river was liberated, it foamed down on the earth in wide tumbling tumultuous torrents or trickled down in a gentle winding stream. Sometimes the waters were tossed up in columns of spray and sometimes they flowed beneath the earth in caverns and tunnels. Then the holy water flowed out into a great stream peopled by fish of all kinds and many kinds of water-fowl. Men learned the holy birth of the river and hastened to bathe in its waters, that thus they might be free from the taint of sin. Thus has the river always been regarded as sacred.

Then Viswamitra told the princes how the amrita had been

The Stories
of the descent
of the Ganges
and the produc-
tion of Amrita
from the Ocean.

churned from the ocean by the gods and demons. "In ancient days", he said, "there was a war between the gods and the demons, and Indra's army was defeated. Then Indra and the gods went to Brahma for help; but Brahma said that Vishnu could help them. So the gods went to the home of Vishnu in the sea of milk and begged for help. Vishnu promised to help them and told them how to defeat the demons by a trick. He told them to ally themselves with their late enemies and to throw all the plants and herbs used for medicine into the sea of milk. Then they were to take the Mandara mountain as a churning stick and the serpent Vasuka as a churning rope and churn the sea to make amrita. This sacred liquor would render them invincible. But Vishnu said, "Have no fear. The demons shall not share in the magic draught. They shall help in the work of churning, but you alone shall drink the amrita. Thus you will overcome them."

So the gods did as Vishnu ordered. They sent a message to the demons, inviting them to come to the ocean to churn it. The demons came and together they set to work. As they churned, many wonderful things happened. From the waves arose Varuni the goddess of wine and feasting. Her long hair was loosened; her eyes were bright and sparkling; her cheeks were flushed with wine. Before her the demons bowed in joyful welcome. Next came from the water the lovely Apsaras, those radiant nymphs who became the attendants on the gods in Indra's dwelling. Then from the waves arose the peerless Lakshmi, radiant with beauty and youth. On her head was a crown of gold gleaming with precious stones. On her shapely arms and graceful neck were bands of gold set with lustrous pearls. Her glossy black hair was bedecked with flowers and in her ears were gems which added to the beauty of her skin the colour of molten gold. Last of all appeared the physician of the gods. In his hand he held the golden cup filled with amrita. When the demons saw it, they all wanted to snatch it. But, while they were struggling to get at it, Vishnu played a trick on them. He assumed the

form of a very lovely girl and, as the demons quarrelled, he stole the cup. While the demons searched for the cup, Vishnu gave it to Indra and the gods who drank up the magic liquid. Thus they were able to conquer the demons and regain their power.

Thus beguiling the way with legends, Viswamitra led the princes and his followers to the city of Visala where the Raja welcomed them kindly. There they spent the night. The next day they walked on to Mithila.

Rama breaks
the great Bow
of Siva.

When they reached the city they went straight to the palace of the Raja. As they passed through the streets, the people wondered much at the rare beauty of Rama and Lakshmana. The young heroes looked so noble that the news spread in the city that two gods escorted by a band of holy men were coming. Then from every house the women flocked out to gaze on the lovely lads and a great crowd followed Rama and his companions to the gates of the palace. When the Raja heard that Viswamitra had come to see him, he hastened out to show respect to the great sage. Then, when he had spoken to him, seeing the princes, he asked who they were. When he heard that they were the sons of Maharaja Dasaratha and they had to come to see the great bow, Raja Janaka welcomed them with great kindness. The next day the Raja ordered the great bow to be brought into the hall of the palace that the two princes might see it. It was so large that it was kept in a box mounted on eight wheels which it took many men to drag along. When the lid of the box was removed, the great bow was lifted out by several of the strongest men and placed before Janaka. Then the Raja told the princes the legend of the weapon and how long it had been a treasure of his family. For years no one had been able to lift the bow by himself and no one had been able to bend it even when it was held up for him by several men. "I have proclaimed that I will give my daughter Sita in marriage to the prince who can bend the bow. But, though many have come here to try, no one has ever been

able to bend the bow." When Rama saw the bow, his heart beat fast and he was very excited. A voice seemed to whisper to him that he could lift the bow if he tried. Half-frightened at his own boldness, he laid hold of the bow and tried to lift it. To his surprise and to the amazement of Janaka and all who stood round Rama raised the bow from the ground with one hand. Terrified by what they believed a miracle, all were speechless except the Raja who cried : " The boy is a god. Bring him an arrow." Then an arrow was brought and Rama fitted the arrow on the string and bent the great bow with such strength that with a loud noise which echoed through the palace the bow broke in two. Then all the people bowed before Rama crying : " It is the mighty Siva come among us. No one but he could have bent and broken the bow. Have not all the princes of the earth failed even to lift it ?" Many remained kneeling before Rama as if he were the god. Even Lakshmana looked at his brother with reverence. Janaka was amazed and said : " His deed is wonderful. Heaven be praised that I am to have so beautiful and noble a son-in-law. Great sage, you see it is the will of heaven that my family shall be united with that of the ruler of Kosala. If it seems good to you, send messengers mounted on swift horses to Ayodhya that they may tell the Maharaja all that has happened and to invite him to the city that the marriage of Prince Rama and my daughter Sita may be celebrated."

Visvamitra approved the Raja's proposal and the fleetest horses in the Raja's stables were saddled. In three days the news reached Dasaratha. He summoned the chief counsellors, Vasishtha and the Brahmans and told them all that had occurred at Mithila, and they all approved of the marriage. So the messengers were entertained hospitably and dismissed the next day with the intimation that the Maharaja and his court would come for the marriage. Great was the delight of Kausalya when she heard of Rama's triumph, and as soon as the news became known in the city there were public rejoicings. For days the palace was busy with

The Marriage
of the Four
Princes is ar-
ranged.

preparations for the journey. When all was ready, Dasaratha with his two sons Bharata and Satrughna, his ministers, priests and soldiers set out for Mithila. He was four days on the road and when he approached the city vast crowds came to welcome him, singing songs and beating drums before him. The streets were gay with flags and flowers and at the palace-gate Raja Janaka awaited his guests. "Happy am I", he said as he greeted Dasaratha, "this day, for great honour has come to my family by this marriage." Afterwards the two kings talked over the matter and Janaka proposed that Sita's sister Urmila should be married to Lakshmana and that the two daughters of his brother Khusadwaja should marry Bharata and Satrughna. This was arranged and preparations were hastened on.

When the day of marriage arrived, Dasaratha first performed a great sraddha to his ancestors, giving costly gifts to the Brahmans. Then he went to the palace in state with his sons and courtiers. When he arrived at the great gate, where stood the Raja, he said: "Raja, peace be on you and your royal house! I and my sons have come to perform the nuptial ceremonies. Therefore introduce us into your house." Then Janaka replied: "What porter have I put to guard my gate? Who asks leave to enter his own house? My daughters await you at the altar. Blessed is the day when my palace is gladdened by your illustrious presence."

Then the two kings and their courtiers and ministers walked through the corridors lined with soldiers in glittering armour to the chamber of the gods where the fire burned bright on the altar. There Vasishta and the priests of Raja Janaka had prepared everything. The room was decorated with fragrant flowers. Around the altar stood vessels of gold and silver full of water from the sacred streams, pots of flowers and incense, the sacrificial vessels with the shells, the ladles and spoons for pouring the *homa* on the fire, and fruit, milk, honey and rice in vessels of gold. On the floor was spread kusa grass. On the altar the fire blazed high and

The Marriage
of Rama and his
Brothers.

the *homa*, consecrated by mantras, was placed by the flame.

Rama took his place by the altar and Janaka led Sita, whose hair, arms and sari shone with a blaze of jewels, to the sacred fire. Placing her face to face with Rama, the Raja said: "This is my daughter Sita. Take her hand in yours, son of mighty Dasaratha. To you she will always be a loving and true wife. She will follow you as your own shadow. Protect her and cherish her. Speak none but gentle words to her and do not be angry because of any small faults." Then Rama took the hand of the lovely Sita and vowed to be a true and kind husband to her. In like manner Raja Janaka invited Lakshmana to take the hand of the princess Urmila and the two other princes to take the hands of his two nieces. Then Janaka sprinkled the brides and bridegrooms with the consecrated water from golden vessels and the trumpets sounded. The four princes led their wives three times round the sacred fire, and all the other marriage rites were carried out.

When the marriage ceremonies were completed, the princes led their brides into the inner apartments of the palace and each one seated his wife on his left side. Then the mothers of the princesses tied the cloths of the young couples together and raised the veils of the brides, on whom the princes looked for the first time. Then Rama and his brothers put garlands of flowers round the necks of the girls and they, in turn, put wreaths around their husbands' necks.

The day after the wedding Visvanitra bade farewell to the Maharaja and to Raja Janaka and went to the northern mountains. Then Dasaratha took leave of the Raja, and he and his four sons and their brides with many attendants started to return to Ayodhya. To each bride Raja Janaka gave many presents of jewels and ornaments, silk and linen garments of many colours, with horses, cows and elephants. But Sita's dowry was the greatest. Her father gave her many chests of gold,

The Journey
back to Ayodh-
ya. They meet
Rama, the son
of Jamadagni.

many hundreds of splendid chariots, thousands of horses of the rarest breeds with bejewelled saddles and saddle-cloths embroidered with gold thread. There were thousands of elephants with gold chains on their legs, and with saddle-cloths of gold and splendid howdahs. There were thousands of strong young male slaves and as many women slaves as beautiful as Apsaras and adorned with gold ornaments. There were hundreds of bales of coloured silks, embroidered brocades and the finest cloths. There were splendid jewels—diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, topazes, sard and onyx stones without number, and gold and silver vessels and thousands of maunds of grain and the finest sweetmeats and preserves.

Thus in great splendour the procession left the city of Mithila. Dasaratha rode ahead, with his ministers, Vasishta and his sons. The brides were carried in litters surrounded by soldiers. Behind them stretched for miles wagon-loads of treasure, horses, cattle and elephants. After they had travelled for some hours Dasaratha was alarmed by evil omens. Birds of prey gathered together on his right hand and the deer came out of the forest and surrounded him. Turning to Vasishta, he asked him what these signs meant. "The birds," said the priest, "are a warning that something terrible is approaching; but the fact that the timid deer come so close to you is a sign that you have nothing to fear. As they spoke, a fierce wind began to blow, the sky was darkened and the earth shook. A storm of dust blew down on the travellers obscuring everything. The great forest trees waved and trembled in the storm. Then in front of them Dasaratha saw a terrible, grim figure approaching. He was a gigantic being carrying a mace on his shoulder and with a huge bow in his hand. He looked as stern as Yama. When he appeared Vasishta recognised him. It was Rama the son of Jamadagni, who was angry because Rama had broken the great bow of Siva. He stood in their road looking as fierce as Siva himself. He had slain many Kahatriyas in days of old, and Vasishta feared that he had come to do battle

with Dasaratha and his sons. Striding up to Rama, the son of Jamadagni said : " I have heard with anger that you have broken the bow of Siva made by Visvakarma. But he made another bow and gave it to Vishnu. With that bow have I fought and destroyed many thousands of Kshatriyas. Here it is. Take it now, and, if you are able to draw it, I will fight you." Taking the bow from him, Rama fitted an arrow on the string and said : " You are a Brahman ; therefore I will not shoot at you." Then without any effort he bent the mighty weapon and sent the arrow far into the sky. Whereupon the son of Jamadagni bowed low before Rama and worshipped him, saying : " Lord Vishnu has come among us". And he went his way to the Mahendra Mountain.

When the Maharaja's procession approached the city of Ayodhya, the people gathered in thousands to greet their ruler and his children. The streets were bright with coloured banners and garlands. Before the horses of Dasaratha and the princes the women and children strewed flowers ; while the litters of the brides were hailed with cries of welcome and the bolder of the spectators pushed their way into the escort of soldiers hoping to catch a glimpse of lovely faces through the cracks of the closed doors. As the Maharaja rode towards the palace the cheers were as loud as thunder and the joyful sound of trumpets and drums filled the air. When the royal gateway was reached, the litters of the brides were taken within the courtyard to the inner door where Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra waited to welcome and kiss their daughters-in-law. Holding their brides' hands, Rama and his brothers knelt before their mothers. The Ranis embraced their sons and their wives and then all went to the temples, where they worshipped the gods and prayed for blessings on the marriages. The palace was filled with members of the Court, and their wives and the women guests assembled in the zenana to greet the beautiful Sita and her sister and cousins and to offer presents according to their rank. In the evening there was a great feast. Lighted up

The Brides
arrive and are
welcomed in
Ayodhya.

with coloured lights, the palace looked like a home of the fairies. Around the palace were many dancers, singers and musicians, to all of whom the happy Maharaja made generous presents. Thousands of Brahmans were fed and the palace gardens were thrown open to the people who made merry, dancing, singing and cheering till late at night.

Soon after the marriages of the princes the Rani Kaikeyi's

Prince Bharata goes to live in the palace of his grandfather at Girivraja.

brother Yudhajit, prince of Girivraja, came to Ayodhya to visit his sister and brother-in-law. Maharaja Dasaratha thought that it would be good if Bharata were to live for a while at the court of his grandfather. So he told his son to prepare to go back with his uncle.

Bharata's mother was very glad that the boy should go. When the day came for Yudhajit to leave, the two princes Bharata and Satrughna bade their parents and brothers farewell and started for Girivraja. The boys were glad to see something of the world and Dasaratha gave them some excellent advice and made arrangements for their education while they were away. They were to continue their military exercise and to learn singing, dancing and painting. After a pleasant journey of several days through forests, across rivers and up and down mountains, they arrived at Girivraja. Their grandfather the Raja Aswapati was very glad to see the lads. The city was decorated with garlands of wild flowers and with flags, and the streets were watered with perfumed water and all the people of the town in holiday dress, with bands of dancing girls and musicians, welcomed the two princes.

In Girivraja Bharata and Satrughna lived very happily. The old Raja appointed tutors to superintend their studies. They read the Vedas, Vedangas and Sastras and were taught the sciences and mechanical arts. They were instructed carefully in the etiquette of court life and the duties of kings. In writing, composition, grammar and knowledge of the stars the lads excelled; and they were taught all military arts and became skilful car-

drivers and could ride the fiercest elephants and the wildest horses.

It was about this time that the question of appointing one of the four princes Yuvaraja arose. The Maharaja loved all his sons, but for Rama he had the greatest affection. In all ways Rama was a good lad. He was intelligent and studious, prudent and wise beyond his years, generous, brave, kind-hearted, pious and virtuous. Not only had he all these good qualities, but he was the eldest of the four sons. For some time Dasaratha had wished to appoint him to share in the burden of government. While he was thinking over the matter, the chiefs and the people consulted together whether they should approach the Maharaja and suggest that Rama be appointed Yuvaraja. At last, having decided to petition the king on the matter, the ministers and counsellors and the chief people went to the palace. Approaching the Maharaja as he sat in durbar, they said: "Maharaja, we your people beg that you will now declare which of your sons is to be your heir. You have reigned for many years and the burden of ruling grows heavier as you grow older. We consider that our beloved prince Rama is in all ways best fitted to succeed you and to carry on the government in accordance with your splendid example. We therefore beg you to proclaim him Yuvaraja that he may assist you in ruling. Thus he will learn the art of governing and will be able to take your place, when you desire to retire to spend your last days in religious duties in preparation for your entry into heaven."

Dasaratha agreed with all that the ministers said. But he pretended to be angry. "What fault," he asked severely, "have you to find with me that you wish to make Rama king while I am still alive? Have I been unjust? Have I deprived any man of his rights?"

The ministers assured him of their loyalty and their contentment with his rule; but they said that they all loved Rama so much that they wished to see him recognised as

heir to the throne. So the Maharaja summoned a council of all the chiefs and great men of the kingdom to discuss the installation of Rama; and the officers of the army, the citizens of Ayodhya and many people from the country districts of Kosala were present in the council hall.

Then the Maharaja solemnly addressed his subjects. "It is a great joy to me," he said, "to hear your praise of my beloved son. He is very dear to me and I have noticed with pleasure how excellent is his character and how earnestly he has studied to fit himself for his future duties. It has long been in my mind to proclaim him Yuvaraja, but I had waited to discover the wishes of my people. Now that you have asked me to do so, let there be no further delay. As you all know, this kingdom was won and guarded by the courage of my illustrious ancestors, who cared for their subjects as a father watches over his sons. I have done my best in all ways to walk in the path of duty trodden by them. I have tried to rule justly and have always respected the rights of my subjects. But I have reigned a long time and increasing years make the burden of government heavy. In a few years I shall desire rest from my labours. Therefore it is well that Rama should learn at once the duties of a king, so that he may be ready to relieve me of the cares of state as soon as I seek to retire."

Then all the chiefs and people rejoiced and thanked the Maharaja. Speaking on their behalf, the chief minister said: "We, your loving subjects, pray for your long life and that you may feel strong enough to rule for many years yet. Under your just and wise rule we have enjoyed complete happiness and prosperity. If we ask you to declare Prince Rama your heir, it is not because we are discontented and desire that he should replace you, but because we wish that he should learn the duties of a sovereign under so upright and able a tutor. In him we see a worthy successor to you. The young prince appears to be possessed of every virtue. He gives promise of being the greatest of all the princes of the royal house of Ikshwaku. He is as wise as a sage,

as brave as the heroes of old. He excels in learning and his piety and respect for the Brahmins are beyond praise. In the art of war and the use of weapons he is so skilful that without question he will add to the glories of your house by his conquests. He has a kind heart and he is ever anxious for the welfare of the people. Their joys are his joys and their sorrows his sorrows, Noble-minded, truthful, always reverent to the aged, just to all, courteous to the lowliest and never angry without a good cause, all your subjects love and admire the magnanimous young prince and pray that he may live long to be a blessing to the kingdom."

Dasaratha replied thanking the people for their loyalty and devotion. Then summoning Vasistha and Vamadeva, he asked : "Will it not be well that the ceremony should take place in this month of Chitra when the forests are bright with flowers ? If so, give orders for the necessary preparations to be made." So the two priests called the servants of the Maharaja and said : "Bring gold and jewels, incense and parched rice, honey, clarified butter and all necessary for the sacrifice. Make garlands of white flowers and lay them all, with the insignia of royalty, in the *homa* chamber. Let food in great quantities be prepared, with curds and milk sufficient for thousands of Brahmins. Fill golden pots with water from the sacred rivers. To-morrow at sunrise the Brahmins will spread the rice on the earth and ask heaven's blessings on the prince's installation. Let the throne for the young prince be prepared : let banners be hung in the streets and let the main roads be well watered. Bid the musicians and the most beautiful dancing girls gather in the main court of the palace. Make proclamation to the people that warrior and peasant, priest and minister are commanded by the Maharaja to come to witness the ceremony of installation of Prince Rama as Yuvaraja."

Then Dasaratha bade Sumantra bring Rama to him, and presently the young prince came and knelt before his father.

The Maharaja raised him, taking his two hands and drawing him to him. Clasping him in his arms and kissing him on the forehead, he bade attendants bring a throne and set it for Rama by his side. Then, when it had been brought, he said : " Dear son, all men owe three debts in their lives. First, there is the debt to the gods. That must be paid by sacrifice and ceremonies. Then there is the debt to the risbis. Last, there is the debt to one's ancestors. In my long life I have earnestly tried to pay the first. By the study of the Vedas and Sastras I have paid the second. The last I have paid by your birth. You are my eldest son and you are very dear to me. Not only is this so, but you are much beloved by my subjects who are all anxious that I should name you as my heir and let you share in the task of ruling. You have always been so good a son that I am sure that you will be unwilling at first to accept a position that may seem lacking in loyalty and respect for me. Do not hesitate. It is my wish that you should share my throne. It has always been the custom of our house that, when a Maharaja grew old, he should be upheld in the burden of ruling by his son. In this way the heir learns the art of ruling, so that at last the old king can retire into the forest and spend the remainder of his life in religious devotions. My astrologers tell me that there is an evil conjunction of the planets around my star. But to-morrow at least there is an auspicious phase of the moon. Therefore it is my wish that to-morrow you should be installed as Yuvaraja. To-night you must fast, lying sleepless on a bed of Kusa grass with a stone for your pillow. Go now, my son, and tell your mother and may heaven bless you always." Once more Dasaratha took Rama in his arms and kissed him. Then the lad went to his mother's room. There he found the Rani in prayer to Vishnu with the youngest Rani, Sumitra, Sita and Lakshmana attending her. When she saw her son, Kausalya took him in her arms. Then Rama burst out with his news. " Mother, I am to be Yuvaraja. Father sent for me and put me on a throne at his side and told me that he wished me to

be Yuvaraja and all the people have come to say that they wish it. So to-morrow I am to be installed." Then his mother kissed him and cried with joy. "Rama," she said, "my prayers have been answered. I have prayed to the Lord Vishnu that you might find favour in the eyes of the Maharaja. God bless you, dear son, and may He grant you a long life of usefulness to the kingdom." Then in affectionate high spirits Rama said to Lakshmana: "You, dear brother, must share the raj with me. You are like my second self. Without you the joy and grandeur of the throne will not be complete." Then, kissing his mother's feet, Rama went back to his palace, accompanied by Sita, to make preparations for the ceremony.

Later in the day the Maharaja sent Vasishtha to Rama and the priest instructed Rama in his duties and the fast that he should preserve till the morrow. Then, in accordance with these orders the young prince bathed and went to the temple and spent the night there in worship and prayer. But the citizens of Ayodhya made holiday. The news spread rapidly and the streets became crowded with a joyful multitude. When Vasishtha went to Rama's palace he was surrounded by people who cried: "Long live Dasaratha! God bless Prince Rama, our new ruler!" When the night came the city was illuminated. Lamps were hung on the houses, the trees and the temples, and the people gave themselves up to dancing and song. Many did not go to sleep at all, but kept up their festivities all through the night. When the dawn came, the servants of the city swept and watered the roads. The route by which Rama would come to the palace for the ceremony was strewn with flowers. The trees and the house-fronts were decorated with flags and garlands, and silken banners hung from all the chief buildings, the temples, the palaces of the ministers and nobles and from the courts of justice and the council hall. As the sun rose, the bands of musicians and lovely dancing girls in bright silks and glittering with jewels and gold orna-

The news causes great rejoicing among the people of Ayodhya.

ments took possession of the streets. Knots of people gathered at the door-ways and in the courtyards of the temples and in front of the Maharaja's palace to talk of the good news that their beloved Rama was to become crown prince that day. Even the children, overhearing the talk of their elders, were glad that the good kind young prince was to rule over them and said to each other, "The handsome Rama is going to be made our king to-day." The news had been carried into the country for miles from the city; and before the first signs of dawn the roads leading into Ayodhya were crowded with peasants, farmers and herdsmen with their wives and children hastening to the city to witness the ceremony. As they arrived, they formed little camps at the road-side or in the bazars and market-place, and all chattered happily of the great event and rejoiced at the choice that their good Maharaja had made of a successor.

While the streets of the city were filled all night with laughing merry crowds, tragic and dreadful events had been taking place within the palace of Dasaratha. When, at his orders, Rama had gone to the room of Kausalya to tell her the news of his appointment as crown prince, the tidings spread quickly throughout the palace. Among the first to hear the news was an old woman named Manthara who had nursed the Rani Kaikeyi when she was a child and had come with her to Ayodhya on her marriage. This woman who was now old had never been good-looking. Now she had grown to be really ugly. Her arms were long and thin, her fingers were swollen and coarse, her neck was short, her chest was narrow and she was hunch-backed. Her nature was as cruel and jealous as her form was ill-favoured. All that could be said for her was that she was really fond of her royal mistress; and it was the woman's obvious loyalty to Kaikeyi that had made her father the Raja send Manthara as an attendant with his daughter on her marriage. Manthara was no one's favourite, not even Kaikeyi's; but because of her devoted

Manthara, the old nurse of Kaikeyi, tries to arouse the jealousy of the Rani.

and long service she had continued to live on in the palace after she had ceased to be able to do any work. This woman heard the news and she was very angry. First of all, she loved Kaikeyi and therefore very naturally wished the Rani's boy to be Yuvaraja. Then she was devoted to Bharata, as such old nurses will become to the children of those whom they have nursed in their childhood. But, most of all, she disliked Rama. He had been much petted as an infant and she had grudged him all the attentions that she thought ought to have been lavished on her child's child. More than once Rama, quick as children are to know who are friendly to them or not, had shown temper to her; on one occasion he had even kicked her in childish fury. This insult Manthara had never forgiven, and now when she heard that the boy whom she hated was to be installed as Yuvaraja and thus take the throne from Kaikeyi's son, her rage was great. For a while she sat by herself thinking out her plans, her old-lined face looking very evil as the cruel thought of revenge filled her mind. Then she went to the room of Kaikeyi. The Rani was lying on a couch half-asleep. As the oldest of her servants, Manthara could always enter her room without ceremony. So she went in hastily and spoke quite harshly to Kaikeyi. "What are you doing, sleeping here while the future of your son is being ruined? Foolish woman, have you no ambition, no mother's love that you sleep here? Are you, a princess of the royal house of Girivraja, so lacking in pride that you are willing to allow your son's claim to the throne to be passed over? The Maharaja loads you with jewels and pretty words, but he regards you only as his lesser wife. Do you not see how cunningly he and Kausalya have arranged it all? He has sent Bharata away with your brother that he shall be well out of the way, and now he has arranged to instal Rama as Yuvaraja. Are you willing to bear such treatment as that?"

Kaikeyi was accustomed to the old woman's bad temper.

Manthara
provokes Rani
Kaikeyi's jea-
lous anger.

Manthara was always complaining against all the pretty slave girls in the palace and trying to make mischief. But this was quite a new kind of mischief and Kaikeyi sat up and stared at the old nurse, as if she found it hard to believe her ears. "Why, Manthara, I am glad to hear the news and you should be also. Rama is the eldest of the sons. He and Bharata are as fond of each other as if they were both my sons. Why then should I be jealous of what is really Rama's right?"

"Right! right! I see that you are already adopting the language of the slave. For slaves you will be, you and your son. Make no mistake about it. Kausalya as elder wife will rule you and all the palace; and Rama will be Bharata's master and the master of Bharata's wife. Is this what you wish to see happen? I would rather that you had died on my knees when I nursed you than you should live to humble yourself thus and not have courage to strike a blow for your child's happiness. Surely has there never been any woman so feeble and foolish as you."

These were new thoughts for Kaikeyi and she still stared with surprise at the wicked angry face of the nurse. "Why do you hate Rama and wish him to lose what is after all his right?" she asked. "Is there anyone with a better nature than he has? He treats me always with the same affection and respect as if I were his mother. When he is Maharaja, he will treat his brothers as affectionately as he does now. If Bharata is to be Yuvaraja, it could only be with Rama's consent."

These reasonable words only made Manthara more angry and more scornful. "Are you mad", she cried, "that you are glad when you should be weeping? I tell you, kings have no friends. This precious Rama, whom you praise so, once he gains the power that he and his mother have plotted to secure for him, will soon get rid of Bharata whom he will fear as a rival. See how cleverly it has all been arranged.

Bharata and Satrugna are sent off to Girivraja. Lakshmana, Rama's favourite brother, is kept here. Is that not proof of the fate awaiting Bharata ? I tell you he will be driven out of the city when Rama becomes ruler. You will be nothing, merely Kausalya's slave. Bharata will be Rama's slave. Those whom you favour will be of no importance ; only Kausalya's word will be of weight in the palace. Rama and his people will be the masters ; Bharata and you will be slaves. And it can only end in one way. Do you think that Rama will allow a rival to live under his roof ? No, he will order Bharata into banishment as soon as he has the power. That is certain. Will you still sit idle and make no effort to save your son from disgrace and banishment ? Go to the Maharaja and persuade him to give the raj to Bharata and to send Rama into banishment. If you do not try, you must be very mean-spirited. Most women would die rather than see another wife's son become king."

The brutal words had roused Kaikeyi. She had never troubled to be jealous of Kausalya before. Now all that was bad in a vain and self-indulgent nature was roused by Manthara's bitter words. Perhaps it was true, perhaps Rama was only playing a part and would turn against her and her son as soon as he had the power. She rose from her couch. "Tell me, Manthara, what I am to do ? How can I possibly persuade the Maharaja to disinherit Rama and make Bharata Yuvaraja ?"

"I will tell you, Rani. It is easy enough. Do you not remember when Dasaratha went to the south to fight the Daityas and was seriously wounded and carried out of the battle, dying. By your careful nursing you saved his life then, and he promised you that at any time he would grant you two wishes whatever they were. Remind him now of that promise. He cannot deny it ; nor as a Kshatriya and a man of honour can he refuse to grant you any boon for which you ask. Go to him now and ask for two boons, the throne for Bharata and the banishment of Rama for fourteen years.

Manthara
tells the Rani
how to win the
throne for Bharata.

During those years the people will have become fond of their ruler ; and, when Rama returns, Bharata will be so strong that he will not be able to wrest the raj from him. It is certain that Dasaratha will soon come to see you, to tell you that he has decided to instal Rama as Yuvaraja. With loving words he will try to persuade you to consent to Bharata's ruin. Take off your fine robes ; throw your jewels on the floor ; untie your hair and let it hang dishevelled around your face. Go to the slave girls' room and lie on the floor when the Maharaja comes. He will be very alarmed and will ask you why you are lying there. Of his wives you are the dearest to him and he will be sad to see you angry and unhappy. At first he will try to comfort you with jewels and sweet words ; but you must take no presents and refuse to be comforted. Then, when Dasaratha is wild with love for you and grief at your anger, ask for the two boons. Remind him of his promise and swear that, unless he keeps his word, you will take poison."

Excited by the wicked words of the nurse, Kaikeyi went to a dark and small room where the humblest of the palace maid-servants sat when they were not working. There she pulled off the wonderful pearl necklace and the other jewels she wore and threw them on the floor. She untied her hair and let it fall in a tangled mass around her head, so that she looked like a widow ; and instead of her beautiful silk dress she put on a cheap sari, such as a kitchen maid would wear. Soon after she had made these preparations Dasaratha came, as the cunning Manthara expected, to Kaikeyi's part of the palace. He was anxious to tell the Rani the news. He knew that woman-like Kaikeyi would for a time grudge the throne to Rama : but he felt certain, so happily had his Ranis and their children lived together, that she would agree that he acted justly. The wing of the palace tenanted by Kaikeyi and the garden around it were among the most beautiful parts of the royal home. On the terrace stately peacocks strutted. In the trees sweet

The Maharaja comes to see Kaikeyi and tries to comfort her.

voiced birds sang and from bough to bough brilliant-plumaged parrots flashed in the sunlight. In the rooms bright with ferns and flowers lovely slave girls played on the vina or did needle-work. The deep cool verandahs were supported by pillars of gold and ivory. In front of the garden steps stretched a tank of marble filled with crystal-clear water in which gold and silver fish swam around. Fronting on this pleasant view was the room of Kaikeyi, shaded by silk curtains, the furniture of carved and gilded wood, velvet soft mats under the foot and the ceiling painted to represent the night sky lighted by a silvery full moon. When the Maharaja entered, he was surprised to find the room empty. There was no beautiful Kaikeyi to welcome him with a smile as usual. At first he thought that the Rani had perhaps gone to see Kausalya and tell her how glad she was to hear the news of the installation. Then, as all the slave girls timidly stood silent, Dasaratha asked the door-keeper where the Rani was. Joining his hands humbly, the terrified man replied : " Lord of my life, king of kings, the Rani is very angry and has gone to the slave girls' room." Surprised and anxious, Dasaratha went to the room. There he found Kaikeyi lying on the floor, dressed in a coarse dress, her jewels scattered around, and her long hair in a tangled mass. In great distress the Maharaja tried to raise her, gathering her hair up and stroking it and her head while he spoke words of tenderness to her, " Beloved, why are you lying here ?" he asked. " Why have you thrown your jewels on the floor and why are you wearing a sweeper woman's dress ? What has happened ? If you are ill, tell me that I may send for all the most skilful doctors. Has any one vexed or insulted you ? If they have, tell me that they may be punished at once. If you are unhappy I am unhappy. To see you in this state breaks my heart. Tell me what is the matter. Surely you are not angry with me. Never have I willingly vexed you or denied you your lightest wish. If I can take away your grief, tell me. Any wish of yours I will grant. I will do anything you command. I will kill the innocent or pardon the guilty to please you. You

are dearer to me than my life. Tell me only what you wish and it shall be done at once." Speaking these wild words of love, Dasaratha took the Rani in his arms and kissed her tear-stained face and called her by many endearing names.

Then at last Kaikeyi spoke. Seeing that Dasaratha was overwhelmed with his love for her, she said :
 Kaikeyi demands the throne for Bharata.
 "I am not ill nor has anyone insulted me. But my heart is tortured with a desire that I beg you to grant. If you will not, I shall surely die. Promise me solemnly that you will grant my request and I will cease to lie weeping here". Distracted with anxiety and love, the Maharaja replied : "Beloved, you are dearer to me than life itself. Tell me what you wish and it shall be done. I promise to do anything to please you. Do you hear that?" he asked eagerly, as he stroked her hair, "I promise you all you wish before I know. Anything, everything, any favour I will grant you."

Then, her heart hardened against her husband by the wicked words of Manthara, Kaikeyi replied : "Before the gods you swear, you pledge your honour?" "I swear it", replied the poor infatuated Maharaja. Then, putting her arms round his neck, Kaikeyi said in the gentlest voice : "You remember the war in the south when you were nearly killed and how I saved you and nursed you back to life. At that time you promised me two boons. At any time, you said, I could ask two favours and you would grant them, whatever they were. I ask them now. The first is that Bharata be installed as Yuvaraja instead of Rama; the second is that Rama be banished for fourteen years to the woods."

As she spoke these cruel words, the arms of the Maharaja relaxed their grasp around her. With a look of blank astonishment he half pushed her away. Then, as she demanded Rama's banishment, with a groan of horror he tottered backward and fell in a swoon.

Kaikeyi was frightened when he fell, but it was for a selfish reason. "He must not die until I have

Dasaratha reproaches Kaikeyi and begs her to withdraw her request.

got my way. Once Bharata is installed, it will not matter how soon he dies," she said to herself, as with water and sweet-smelling herbs she restored him to consciousness.

When at last the Maharaja opened his eyes, he did not at first remember what had happened. Then, as he saw Kaikeyi in the sweeper's dress and the jewels lying about, he recalled everything. With a look of horror and hatred in his eyes, he pushed her away. For a few moments he did not speak; he looked at her in a terrified way as an antelope gazes fearfully at a tigress. Then at last he found his tongue. "Heartless and wicked woman, what evil spirit has seized on you that you seek to ruin my family and drive me in sorrow to the grave? What wrong has Rama ever done to you? Has he not always treated you with as much respect and affection as his own mother? Why then by trickery and deceit have you plotted to get me into your power that you may work his ruin? You are as fair as the sunlight and you are of the noblest blood, yet how cleverly you have hidden from me your true nature. Like some poisonous serpent, your skin is lovely to look on but your heart is full of death. Why should I banish Rama? Why should I turn against my dearest son who is the joy of my life and has never given me the slightest ground for anger or sorrow? What fault is there in him? He is truthful, pious and good to the Brahmans. He is as brave as he is dutiful and obedient to me. With all else I could part but not with Rama. Kaikeyi, have you no pity? It cannot be true. I must be dreaming. You who are so beautiful cannot cherish such wicked wishes. Have pity on an old man! I have not long to live and I cannot live without Rama. Tell me that you were only jesting. Bharata is very dear to me and he is so good and so fond of Rama that I am sure that he would never accept the throne if Rama is driven into the woods. Your wish is madness which will bring ruin on us all. Jewels and

wealth in any quantity I will give you, but this wish is wicked. Never speak to me again on the matter, I command you."

In the frenzy of his grief Dasaratha had knelt to the Rani; but, as he bade her never to speak to him again on the matter, he had risen and faced her sternly. But Kaikeyi was neither ashamed at his rebuke nor sorry for the pain she was inflicting on an affectionate husband.

Kaikeyi
insists on the
promise being
fulfilled.

Vain and arrogant, accustomed all her life to have her own way, such a woman has no mercy, shame or honour left when she wants money or power. "I am not mad or wicked," she replied coldly. "I wish Bharata to succeed you. As a Sovereign you are famous for your righteousness and truthfulness. As a Kshatriya you have never broken a promise. You promised me two boons when I saved your life. You swore again here to give me anything I asked. I now call on you to fulfil your promise. Is it not disgraceful that you should humble yourself before me in order that you may prevail on me to release you from your promise? It is true, as you say, that a wife must obey her husband. But a man's honour is above all things, and I will not obey you if by so doing I lead you into dishonour. Grant me my two requests. You cannot break your promise."

Enraged at her insolence, Dasaratha angrily cried: "Be silent, cruel and hard-hearted woman. Why should I send Rama into exile to please you? For the sake of power and the glories of the throne you will persecute me to death. Shame on me as an old doting fool that I should have ever put myself into your power. For such a weak fool as I am there can be no happiness here or in heaven. Bharata cannot have the raj while Rama lives. That is the law. Not only is your wish wicked and unnatural, but it is contrary to law. Either withdraw your request or you must kill me."

Trembling with rage Kaikeyi replied bitterly: "Have you no regard for honour? What will men say of you if, after making two promises, you now refuse to keep them?

You will become infamous to all men as one who broke his word to the woman who saved his life. If you instal Rama, I shall poison myself. You know what the Puranas say of a liar and of one who breaks his word."

For some minutes Dasaratha remained silent. It was a new experience for him, this rebellion of his pretty wife. Being a weak man, he took refuge first in entreaties and then in threats and angry orders. Then he tried entreaties and coaxing words once more. To see himself thus defied stupefied him.

Lamentations
of the Maharaja.
Persistence and
triumph of Rāhi.

For a time he stared at Kaikeyi, then he broke out again. "It was an evil hour when you became my wife. It was an evil hour when in my foolish love for you I came to your rooms, as a mouse enters a trap. As on the ocean bed there are many worthless shells as well as priceless pearls, so among my illustrious ancestors I am but a worthless shell among gems. Great has been the fame of my house, stainless its honour, and it is fated that I must disgrace it. Never has a father sent his son into exile to please the spiteful ambition of a wife. Every wife is bound to serve her husband. What sort of a man then is it who promises his wife favours for doing her duty? I tell you, Kaikeyi, I would rather go to hell for breaking my promise than send Rama into exile. Whatever may be the consequences, I shall instal Rama to-morrow morning."

He paused exhausted with his outburst. Then after a minute he went on. "But I fear that Rama may hear of my promise. He is so good a son that he would go at once into exile of his own accord rather than allow me for his sake to break my word. O Kaikeyi, have mercy on us. Release me from a promise that was never meant to include such ruin and sorrow for my family. How can I bear to see my beloved Rama degraded and an outcast? How can I allow my plans for the kingdom, approved by my ministers and formed at the request of my people, to be upset? What will the chiefs say when they learn that, persecuted by you, I

have given the raj to Bharata and sent my eldest son into exile ? How am I to face Kausalya ? How can I survive the sight of Rama departing for the woods and the sad figure of his weeping wife ? It will kill me ; then you as a widow will rule the kingdom with your son. Why should I sacrifice Rama to please you ? You bewitched me with your kisses ; but your love has turned into death for me, as a man who drinks deep of sweet wine which has been poisoned or who is tempted to sit on a soft looking carpet spread over a deep and dreadful pit. How contemptible have I become ! All good men will scorn me as they would a drunken Brahman, me who for love of a woman has sent a beloved son to die in the jungle. If Rama would only refuse to go ! But he will not. At my command he will go to the jungle without one word of complaint, and then I shall die despised by all men. Having murdered me, you will rule the kingdom. I do not believe that Bharata would wish it. But if he is glad to see his brother banished, then I wish no funeral rites for me to be performed by him. Alas ! how can Rama bear such exile ? He who has been used to ride in chariots and on elephants, to have to walk on foot through the thorns and over the stones. Accustomed to the best of food cooked by skilful cooks, how can he live on the fruits of the jungle ? Having always slept on silk-spread couches in a palace, how can he lie on the hard ground with no bed except the grass of the forest ? Kaikeyi, I implore you, do not bring ruin on us all. See, I, the Maharaja, kneel to you. Be merciful to me. I wish I could die this night and that all who know of my foolish promise could be struck dumb that Rama might never hear of my promise and might become Yuvaraja as I have arranged that he shall."

Thus Dasaratha raved and implored. But Kaikeyi saw that she had only to persist and that he would yield. Unmoved by the sight of the Maharaja on his knees to her, she replied, "Three times I have asked you to fulfil your promise. If you break your word, I shall take poison in your presence." Then Dasaratha said angrily : "You are

grown hateful to me, you beautiful but cruel woman. I tell you, I disown you. You are my wife no longer, and, if Bharata approves of your conduct, I disown him, though he is my lawful son."

When dawn came, Vasishta and his assistant priests were making preparations for the ceremony in the place of sacrifice. All night the people had worked at the decoration of the city and the first rays of sunshine shone on roads bright with flags and garlands and on gaily dressed crowds hastening to take up vantage posts from which to view the procession of the crown prince. Within the sacred enclosure had been set up the golden throne with the white umbrella fixed over it. The bejewelled handled chamaras of white ox hair, the sacred tiger's skin; the scimitar, the bow, the State elephants, the chariots drawn by four horses, all were ready. Ranged by the altar on which the priests were lighting the sacrificial fire were the golden vases filled with the water of the Ganges and other holy streams, the dishes of parched grain, the limes, the ghee, the honey, the milk, the curds, the kusa grass and all needed for the sacrifice. Gathered in the precincts of the temple were many Brahmans and the Rajas who paid tribute to the Maharaja, the royal musicians and bands of dancing girls and the servants of the raj in the royal liveries. When the sun had risen far above the horizon, Vasishta said to Sumantra, "It is well that the Maharaja be now awakened. Go to the palace and ask for his command to summon Rama that the installation may take place before the moon enters the mansion of Pushya." So Sumantra hastened to the palace. Around the gates stood the Maharaja's body-guard; but at the sight of the chief minister they stood respectfully aside to let him pass. Knowing nothing of the scene between the Maharaja and Kaikeyi, Sumantra made his way to the royal apartments. Standing outside the curtain that hung over the doorway, he greeted his sovereign with the following words:

Preparations
for the installa-
tion. Suman-
tra sent to sum-
mon Rama.

"As the bleak greyness of the ocean is turned to glittering gold by the sun, so by his blessed presence a great king spreads happiness among his subjects. As the charioteer of Indra awakened him on the day when the god went forth to conquer the Daityas, so do I wake you, great Maharaja. The god of day has risen from his ocean bed. Do you now, mighty monarch, arise to make your subjects happy at the sight of you. May good fortune attend you and your family on this day. All is ready for the installation of Prince Rama. As a flock without a shepherd, as an army without a leader, as the night without the moon, as a herd of cattle without the herdsman, so is the land in which the Maharaja does not appear."

Wearied and sad, these words of loyal greeting were like swords stabbing into the heart of the unhappy king. He remained silent. But Kaikeyi, who was with him, had no pity for the weak and broken man. "Sumantra," she said, "Go and bring Rama here. The Maharaja wishes to speak to him on an important matter." Expecting the Maharaja to speak the minister hesitated. At last he asked "Have I the permission of the Maharaja?" Then, urged by the heartless Kaikeyi, the poor king said: "Yes, Sumantra, go and bring Rama, as the Rani has ordered you."

Receiving this order, Sumantra hastened out of the palace, informing the inquisitive chieftains and counsellors who were awaiting the appearance of the Maharaja that he had the royal command to fetch Rama for the ceremony. Rama goes to the palace for installation. Mounting his car, he was driven rapidly to the palace of Rama which stood at some distance from the Maharaja's palace in the midst of lovely gardens. At the gates and around the walls stood the prince's bodyguard of young warriors in armour, wearing ear-rings and armed with swords and bows. At the entrance to the inner apartments stood the zenana guard of old men in red uniforms carrying staves. To the chief of these the minister said, "Tell Prince Rama that Sumantra wishes to see him." Then Rama, hearing that

his father's messenger had come, gave orders for him to be brought in. Rama was sitting on a carved couch of sandal-wood. By his side stood Sita fanning him with a fan of peacock's feathers. "The Maharaja and the Rani Kaikeyi," said Sumantra, "wish to see you at once." Then the happy prince said to his wife :—"My father has consulted with the Rani as to my installation. All is arranged. This day I shall be installed as Yuvaraja. I will go at once in procession." Then the faithful Sita busied herself in preparing the jewels and robes for Rama and, when he was about to start, she followed him to the door of the zenana calling down heaven's blessings on him.

Then the procession was formed. Rama took his place in a car of gold lined with tigers' skins and drawn by four powerful horses, the coats of which shone like satin. Behind him stood his brother Lakshmana with a jewelled chamara in his hand. Before the car marched a body of palace troops in scarlet and gold. Behind the car came other cars, first that of Sumantra and then those of the officials of Rama's household. Behind these came regiments of cavalry and many elephants with howdahs and trappings of gold and silver. When Rama was seen by the people a great shout of welcome was raised. Around the car marched the Brahmans and the court minstrels chanting the praise of the young prince and foretelling the glories of his reign. The musicians filled the air with triumphant strains and the cheers of the crowd were like the murmuring of the sea. The verandahs and the house-tops were filled with beautiful women in silks and jewels who threw flowers on the head of Rama, calling down the blessings of the gods on him and Sita. In the blaze of morning sunlight it was a splendid sight, a scene of joy and national exultation that the favourite of the kingdom was passing to the palace to assume the position that was his not only by birth but by merit.

When the Maharaja's palace was reached Rama descended from the car and mounted a horse which had been led behind. On this splendid creature with its glittering golden

saddlery the young man looked godlike as he rode into the courtyard of the palace and so on through the first three courts, each lined with archers in armour, to the main gate of the Maharaja's apartments where Rama dismounted and went on foot through the corridors, preceded by Sumantra, to the interview with his father.

When Rama, followed by Lakshmana, Sumantra and the other chief counsellors, entered the presence, they bowed before the Maharaja who sat with the Rani Kaikeyi on a couch of ivory and gold, his face haggard with grief and weariness. For a moment, as he bent to kiss his father's hand, Rama did not see the sadness of his face. With the tears streaming from his eyes, Dasaratha could only murmur over his kneeling son, "Oh, Rama, Rama!" When he rose and saw his father's sorrowful face and the tears flowing, Rama was amazed. Never had he seen his father look sad like this and on this day of all days he had least expected sadness when all had seemed so bright. With his head sunk on his breast Dasaratha could no longer control himself, but sobbed aloud, hiding his face in his hands. Then Rama, turning to Kaikeyi, asked: "What have I done, mother, to vex my father? Why does he weep thus?" Unashamed of the misery she was causing, the merciless Kaikeyi replied: "You have not vexed the Maharaja, Rama, nor is there any reason for him to be sad. But he has something on his mind that he hesitates to tell you because he is afraid of your anger. But it is necessary that you should know it. So I made him send for you. Many years ago, when he went to the south to fight the Daityas, he was seriously wounded in battle. I saved his life then and he promised me that whatever I asked he would give it me, that I could have two boons at any time I liked. Yesterday, before he knew what I would ask, he swore again that he would grant me anything. But now he is sorry and wishes to break his word like a man of low caste. I have asked that Bharata shall be installed as the Yuvaraja instead of you

Rama cheer-
fully accepts
banishment.

and that you may be sent into exile in the forest of Dandaka for fourteen years. If you have any respect for your father's honour and wish him to abide by his oath, you will consent to leave the city for fourteen years and will let Bharata govern the raj."

At these cruel words Dasaratha buried his face in his hands groaning like one in pain ; but they had no effect on Rama. His face had betrayed surprise only as Kaikeyi had told him his doom. But there was no sadness or anger in his face or in his voice when he said : " I had come here, as I believed, for the ceremony of installation as Yuvaraja. But my father must keep his promise. Therefore I will gladly give the kingdom to Bharata and go to the woods, since that is the will of my father. But why is he sad ? Whatever he as my father and king commands that I will always gladly do. Send messengers mounted on swift horses to Girivraja to bring Bharata back and I will go at once to the jungle and stay there for fourteen years."

The poor old Maharaja said nothing ; but the merciless Kaikeyi, not touched by the exquisite nobility of Rama's self-sacrifice, said : " That is well. Go then at once, for until you go your father will neither bathe nor eat."

" I will only delay", said Rama, " while I bid my mother and Sita good-bye. Then I will leave the city this day." He knelt at the feet of the Maharaja who had thrown himself at full length on the couch weeping bitterly. Then he knelt at the feet of Kaikeyi, and so he went out from the room followed by Lakshmana and the others, who were all weeping. Rama alone showed no grief. Even the loss of the throne and the prospect of the weary years of exile could not deprive the young prince of his dignity and self-control. As he walked quietly out of the room, he showed neither grief nor anger.

When Rama left the presence of the Maharaja, he went straight to his mother's room. The old men who stood on guard saluted him crying : " Long life to the Yuvaraja ! May he defeat his foes and bring glory to the

Rama breaks
the bad news
to his mother.

kingdom!" In the servants' quarter the Rani's maids and all the palace attendants who had known him since he was a tiny child gathered to greet him with loyal expressions of joy that he was to rule over them. Some of them ran quickly to Kausalya to give her the good news that Rama was coming. All through the night the Rani had prayed for her son. Now since dawn she had been worshipping Vishnu, performing all the ceremonies of thanksgiving and joy. When Rama entered her room, Kausalya in a silk robe was fanning the sacrificial fire by which were collected the curds, rice, ghee, sweetmeats, parched grain, garlands of white flowers, the fragrant sacrificial wood and the jars of holy water. Seeing Rama, she rose to greet him joyfully and, as he knelt at her feet, she raised him and took him in her arms kissing him many times, saying "May you live long, dear son, and prove worthy of your great good fortune. May you be as wise as the ancient sages and as famous as your ancestors. Long have I prayed for this day when you will become Yuvaraja."

Then, kissing her hands, Rama said very gently: "Mother, do not be sad at the news I bring. You have not heard that the Maharaja has decided to make Bharata Yuvaraja and to banish me for fourteen years to the forest of Dandaka." With wide-staring terrified eyes Kausalya looked at her son for a second, then she fell to the ground in a swoon. Rama caught her as she fell and, putting her on a couch, he stroked her hair and kissed her face. After a few minutes Kausalya came to; and then she began to cry, saying amid her sobs: "O Rama, Rama, if you had never been born, I should have been spared this dreadful sorrow. A barren woman has only the grief of being childless; she cannot know the sorrow of losing a son. O Rama, I am the elder queen, yet even while you are here, see how I have been treated! When you are gone what humiliations will be mine! My grief will surely kill me. You have not known of these things but for some time past I have been neglected by the Maharaja, and I have had to bear much insolence from the servants of

Kaikeyi. Think then what my position will be when Bharata is Yuvaraja. I shall be despised even by my own servants. My life will be intolerable. How can I hold my head up in the presence of the proud and cruel Kaikeyi? I cannot bear the loss of you and the humiliations and miseries of my life. You also think what you, used to palace life, will suffer wandering in the jungle weary and hungry. My heart is so filled with grief that I wonder it does not burst as a river breaks its banks during the rainy season. What is life any more to me? Why does not Yama claim me? In a moment all my joys are turned to sorrows. My son, I must follow you into the woods as a cow follows her calf."

And then her mood changed and she asked angrily :

Kausalya begs Rama to rebel and seize the Throne.

"But why should you go? You must not, you shall not go. The Maharaja has been fooled by a clever and wicked woman. He has become Kaikeyi's slave. Save him from his own follies and his own sins. To send you who have done no wrong, who have always been a dutiful son, to exile is a sin. You cannot obey such an order. Your father is mad; he has sunk into second childhood. It is not too late. The people do not yet know. Seize the government. Dethrone the Maharaja. No one will oppose you. If, driven to it by Kaikeyi, he attempts to fight you, kill him without pity. The slave of a woman, in his dotage, he will disgrace himself in the eyes of all men. It is for the good of the kingdom that he should not live."

"Mother, you must not speak so. However old and doting a father, still he must be obeyed," said Rama gently. But Lakshmana now angrily interfered, burning with indignation at the treatment of the brother whom he loved so much. "Mother, you are right. You have said what I feel. What sort of father is it who would treat his son so cruelly? The throne belongs to Rama by right. I am ready to fight for him, to give my life for him. Let those who wish to rob him of his rights fight with me. If I can I will kill them before they shall take from him what is his."

"Rama, you hear what your brother says," said Kausalya. "Be strong and demand your rights. It is not right or dutiful of you to go into exile at the command of my rival and leave me to be insulted and to spend my days weeping over your fate. If you wish to do your duty as a son, listen to me. If your father has a right to your respect and obedience, according to the Sastras I have even a greater right. I order you not to go to the jungle. If you desert me, I shall starve myself to death and for the sin of causing my death you will never go to heaven."

"Mother dear," said Rama very gently, "what you ask is impossible. I must obey my father. To rebel against him would be a dreadful sin. Tell me that you allow me to go to the jungle. To disobey a father is a disgrace past all expression." Then turning to Lakshmana, he said: "Dear brother, I feel as much sympathy with our mother as you feel; but I love truth and honour even more than I love my mother. Those who love honour must obey their fathers. I have told our father that I will gladly obey him and go to the woods. I cannot break my word."

Again and again Kausalya begged her son to have pity on her and refuse to go into exile or else to take her with him, but Rama was firm. "It cannot be, mother. We must each obey the Maharaja. He is my father, and he is your husband. You cannot separate yourself from him or leave his house while he lives. You must grieve at the sorrows that have come to us; but do not hate Kaikeyi and Bharata whom I love dearly. Do not blame him, for he is not to be blamed for becoming Yuvaraja; nor should you blame Kaikeyi for wishing her son to be king or the Maharaja for giving the throne to my brother rather than break his word. Try to forgive them all and to live happily here till I return." Saying this, he kissed his mother's hands and went away to his palace. But Kausalya could not be patient as he was. She lay weeping on her bed surrounded by frightened maid-servants. She dreaded the years of insult and humiliation when her life would be made wretched by the arrogance of Kaikeyi and her servants.

When he left his mother's apartments, Rama went back to his own palace. But this time there were no dancers and bands. Slowly and silently the royal procession made its way back to the palace where, surrounded by her maids, Sita awaited Rama's return. But she had not expected him back for hours and, as from the window she watched the car coming and noticed no sign of public rejoicing, she feared that the Maharaja had suddenly died or some other misfortune had occurred. When with sad face and drooping head Rama entered the room and saw his lovely wife waiting to greet him on his triumph, he lost all control of himself and, sinking on the couch, hid his face in his hands. Putting her arms around his neck, the terrified Sita asked : "Rama, what has happened ? Why have you returned so soon and why are you unhappy ? Why have you come back without the white umbrella and the chamara and all the other signs of sovereignty ? Where are the minstrels to chant your praises ? Has the installation been postponed ? Is the Maharaja ill or what has happened ?"

Then Rama told her of Dasaratha's promise to Kaikeyi and that Bharata was to be Yuvaraja and he was to be banished for fourteen years. "To part with you, sweet wife, is harder than losing the throne. But I must leave you. It is the command of the Maharaja that I depart this day. For you the years of my exile will be sad, but you must face them bravely. Living like a widow, devoting your time to prayer and fasting, you must attend always to the wants of my mother who is bowed down with grief. To all the others of the family you must pay honour according to their rank. Regard Bharata and Satrugna as your own brothers and be ever obedient to the orders of Bharata who is to be your king. Never praise me in his presence, for kings cannot bear to hear the praise of any one but themselves."

Kneeling at his feet, Sita looked more and more amazed as she listened to Rama. At last she said : "What strange

words are these that you speak, my beloved lord ? Do you think that I shall live here without you ? A wife must always share the fortunes of her husband. If you must go now to the woods, I ought to go first to prepare the path, to tear away the thorns and smoothe the ground for your dear feet. A wife is her husband's shadow. Where he goes she must go. At your side I can live in the forest of Dandaka as happily as I live here or in my father's palace. With you it will be joy to me to wander in the honey-scented wood. I am not frightened. It will be a pleasure to me to go away with you, for I long to see something of the world. It will be a pleasure to me to roam through the country and see the forests full of flowers and birds, to climb the hills and to sail on the lakes and rivers with you. I shall not be a trouble but a help to you, for I can comfort you and make you forget the unjust way in which your father has treated you. But if you leave me here, then I shall soon die."

Tenderly kissing his wife and thanking her for her devotion,

Rama tries
to frighten Sita
by telling her
of the dangers
and hardships
of the life.

Rama tried to persuade her that it was impossible for him to take her with him into exile. "It is true that the woods are very beautiful ; and the lakes and rivers, the birds and the flowers are pleasing to the traveller who sees them in comfort ; but the life we must lead would be rough and dangerous. You are young and delicate, a princess who has always been accustomed to the luxuries of palace life. You have never been out in the heat of the day, how then will you bear the burning sun of the wilderness ? Here you have scores of servants to wait on you ; but in the jungle you will have none. Your lovely feet, used to the soft carpets of these rooms, can never bear the stones and thorns of the jungle pathways. In the heat your strength would melt away as butter melts under the noonday sun. Then there are terrible dangers in the woods. We shall have to cross rivers full of snakes, crocodiles and sharks. In the dense jungle the roaring of the tigers and the trumpeting of the *most* elephants are terrible sounds. When you hear them,

you will almost die of fear. With your tender feet torn by sharp thorns, you will have to walk through thick undergrowth in which lie hidden venomous snakes, the bite of whose cruel teeth will kill you in a few minutes. We shall often be hungry. How are we to get food? Sometimes for days we may have to live on grass seed and bitter roots and fruits. It may be that even these we shall not be able to get always. Perhaps for days we may have no food at all. At times we shall be thirsty, for there will be no water. You whose dresses have always been of the softest silk would have to wear the coarsest garments, made of the bark and fibres of trees or of the skins of deer and other animals. Our only bed will be a layer of grass on the hard earth or perhaps the bare ground. You will not be able to sleep at night, for insects of all kinds, mosquitoes, flies and those that creep on the ground, ants, scorpions and beetles, will bite you. Hideous reptiles and fierce birds of prey will attack you. In the forest are also terrible blood-thirsty rakshasas who love human flesh and will eat up a man at a single meal. Your lovely glossy hair will become tangled, coarse and discoloured, for in the wood you cannot care for it or put scented oil on it. You must leave behind all your girl friends and companions. In the forest you will be dreadfully lonely. How can you bear the solitude? How can you face such hardships? You will become worn and weary; heat and cold, hunger and thirst will make you old before your time. Your delicate body cannot bear such privations. What pleasure can you have in such a life and how can I bear to see you growing weaker and thinner each day? It is because I know the hardships of the life that I refuse to take you with me. You are dearer to me than my own life and to see you suffering for my sake would be torture to me. You must obey me and stop here. However far away I may go, you know that I shall always be thinking of you. We shall love each other when we are parted as much as if we were together. Think how we shall long to see each other again. Our love will be increased by parting. Be patient and obey me."

Throwing her arms round him, with her lovely eyes full of tears, Sita said, "My beloved, I cannot let you go without me. Do not be cruel and order me to do what will kill me. I love you so that no hardship at your side can be so dreadful as to live without you. The terrors of the woods with you near me do not frighten me.

You will defend me from the tigers and other fierce beasts. The grass seeds, the bitter roots and fruits will be as *amrita* and honey to me when eaten by your side. I would rather be hungry with you than have the best of food without you. As for the coarse garments, I shall not mind wearing them. Indeed I shall be glad to, for thus I can show my love for you as Parvati wore jungle dress for the sake of her Lord Siva. A bed of grass at your side will be softer to me than the richest silken palace bed. Without you I do not care for life; with you not even Indra could terrify me. The perfect wife never can leave her husband; she follows him through good and evil fortune. By following you I shall be faultless. The husband must ever be the wife's chief god. Let me go with you. Do not the Vedas teach that the woman who follows her husband as a shadow in this life will be always with him in heaven? Thus I must go with you and share your sorrows as well as your joys. Do not say no. The jungle with all its terrors is a greater joy to me with you than all the luxuries and pleasures of this palace without you.

Still Rama did not speak. His eyes told Sita how much touched he was at her devotion, but he could not get himself to say that she might go with him. He bowed his head, and did not reply. Then Sita grew angry. "What! am I married to a man without any spirit? Shame on my father who gave me as wife to such a weakling! Those who praise Rama for his courage and his self-reliance in the face of danger speak falsely. He has not the courage to protect his wife from the dangers of the woods. Truly the Maharaja is wise in not giving him the raj, for he would not know how to defend

Sita declares that life at his side, however hard, will be happiness for her.

Rama consents at last to Sita's request.

the kingdom. Having married me, he now wishes to desert me. Where am I to go, what am I to do for fourteen years ?” Then, seeing the tears come to Rama’s eyes at her hard words, Sita once more threw her slender arms around him and said : “When have I ever vexed you, beloved ? Forgive me now for those words, but I am crazy at the thought of losing you. I can bear any pain, any want or poverty ; but I cannot bear separation from you. I entreat you, take me with you. I cannot live without you, Rama.”

As she said these words, she fell weeping at her husband’s feet. Rama could no longer resist her appeal. Taking her hands and drawing her into his arms and kissing her tear-stained face, he said :—“Beloved, you have blamed me unjustly. It is because I love you so dearly that I dread to expose you to all the hardships of the jungle life. To part from you is terrible to me ; I do not desire heaven without you. But when I thought of the dangers and sufferings of the jungle life, I felt that I could not expose you to such hardships. But now I see that you are resolved to face anything rather than be parted from me. Therefore I will take you with me.” Then Lakshmana begged Rama that he also might go into exile with them ; and, when Rama knew that his brother really loved him enough to face the jungle life gladly for his sake, he willingly gave him leave to come. Then the three made preparations, giving their jewels and ornaments to the Brahmans and, taking off their shoes like devotees, they walked bare-footed to take leave of the Maharaja.

The people of Ayodhya were amazed when they heard that Rama had to go into exile and that Bharata would be Yuvaraja. At first the crowds which had collected for the installation could not believe their ears when the rumour of Rama’s misfortunes spread throughout the city. Great had been their joy at the news that the prayer of the people had been granted and that the prince whom they loved so much was to be installed

Rama, Sita and Lakshmana go to the palace to bid the Maharaja farewell.

as their ruler. Now the grief was as great as the joy had been. The flags and the garlands were torn down and around the palace gate-way a crowd of gloomy people gathered. Even the women left their houses and joined in the lamentations, in their excitement and grief forgetting to hide their faces. When the people saw Rama, Lakshmana and Sita coming, a general groan of misery was raised. The women wept bitterly; but the men were angry and said, "What sort of man is this Maharaja of ours? Is he a man at all, has he a man's heart, that he can send his eldest son who has never done any on the least wrong into the wilderness? He must be possessed by devils to treat his own flesh and blood in this way." Others said: "We will not live under such a ruler. If he chooses to do such injustice, let us leave our homes and follow Rama into the woods. Let the Maharaja rule a deserted city." Others said: "Why do you blame the Maharaja? He has been fooled by the lovely Kaikeyi who has tempted him with her beauty and coaxed him with sweet words till she has succeeded in getting Rama banished. Perhaps Prince Bharata shared in his mother's plot and that is why he stays in Girivraja because he is ashamed. If he longed to have the raj, why did he not ask Rama for it? Then he would have got it without bringing sorrow to us all, for Rama is so generous that he would have given up his right to the throne to please his brother and Kaikeyi." But most of the people uttered reproaches against the Maharaja for his weakness in allowing himself to be enslaved by his wife. They called him a doting old fool who was unworthy to rule any longer.

Through this weeping and angry crowd Rama, Sita and Lakshmana walked to the palace. Rama came first, then Sita close behind him and Lakshmana last. When they reached the palace gate, the soldiers sorrowfully saluted the prince, and Rama sent word for Sumantra who came to greet him and then went to tell the Maharaja that they had come. When they got near to the apartments of Dasaratha, they heard him moaning and weeping and bitterly reproaching

The farewell
interview with
the Maharaja.

Kaikeyi who would not leave him by himself till Rama had gone lest he might be persuaded to change his mind. When the Maharaja heard that his son had arrived, he gave orders that Kausalya, Sumitra and all the women of the palace should come to him, for he did not wish to bid Rama farewell alone. Quickly Kausalya and all the women came to the room and they filled the palace with their wailing and sobs. Then Rama, Sita and Lakshmana entered the presence of Dasaratha. When the Maharaja saw his son, he rose to take him in his arms ; but so great was his grief and shame that he fell to the ground in a swoon. Rama and Lakshmana ran to him and lifted him up and placed him on a couch ; while the women moaned and sobbed. When Dasaratha opened his eyes, he gazed with love on Rama who said "Dear father, do not grieve so. We have come to ask your leave to go into the woods. Sita and Lakshmana wished to go with me. Please give them permission to go."

Putting his arms around his knee'ing son. Dasaratha replied : "Rama, I have been beguiled by Kaikeyi and have made her promises which she is now shamefully misusing. Disobey my command and declare yourse'f Yuvaraja, as is your right."

The Maharaja
tells Rama to
seize the throne.

But Rama, with joined hands, answered : "My Lord and father, I pray God that you may have many years to live. I will go to the forest and stay there for fourteen years. I do not desire the raj. When the years have passed, I will return and embrace your feet. A son must obey his father in all things. In all the kingdom who will obey their fathers if I am now disobedient to you, I who am their prince and should set them an example of filial duty ?

Then, seeing that he could not persuade Rama, Dasaratha said : "At least, dear son, do not go to-day. Let me have the comfort of having you near me for one day longer. Spend this night with your mother and me ; then, if you please, go to-morrow. O Rama, Rama, how I grieve to lose you. I have been deceived and betrayed by a woman who pretended

to love me. All these years she has hidden her cruel nature and her hatred of you that burned in her heart as a fire smoulders under a layer of ashes."

But Rama replied : "Dear father, it cannot be. I wish to go to the forest at once, as I have promised. Give the raj with its people and wealth and rich corn-lands to Bharata. My Lord, the promise given by you to Kaikeyi must be strictly fulfilled. Obeying your command as it was given, I must live for fourteen years in the woods. With all my heart I desire that your word should be fulfilled and that your honour and good faith be preserved stainless and perfect. O my Lord and father, weep no more, I pray you. Do not grieve for me, because it is no misery for me to go into exile in obedience to your commands and to protect your honour. I have said to Kaikeyi, 'I will go' and I will keep my word. In the woods we shall live a happy and free life, for the forest is full of deer and musical with the songs of birds. We shall live happily there ; and, when the fourteen years have passed, you shall see us again and your promise will have been fulfilled."

When he had spoken, the women all wept bitterly. Only the heartless Kaikeyi was unmoved. Even Sumantra was crying. But Dasaratha was overcome with anger. His hands trembled : he shook his head backwards and forwards, grinding his teeth and clenching his fists while he uttered curses on Kaikeyi. Then this fit of rage passed and once more he wrung his hands, his head sank on his breast and his anguish found expression in moans and tears.

Distressed at his master's grief, Sumantra turned on Kaikeyi and rebuked her with bitter words. "Treacherous and black-hearted woman, you have turned against him who has been a loving husband to you, who for years has showered kindness on you. You are killing him with sorrow and you are ruining his family. You whose duty it is humbly to submit to his will have arrogantly imposed your will on him and are forcing him to do injustice and what is contrary to

Sumantra
reproaches
Kaikeyi.

law, human and divine. The raj belongs to the eldest son ; but you wish to set the law aside. Deceived by your cunning words, the Maharaja has pledged his word. Very well, let it be so. Let Bharata be the ruler of the land ; but we shall not stay here. Where Rama goes we will go. No Brahman will live here. The city will be deserted ; the people will follow Rama to the jungle and build another capital there. What joy will it be for Bharata to rule over a city deserted by all the Brahmins and every good and loyal citizen ? Your treachery and wickedness are so great that I wonder the earth does not open and swallow you up in punishment for your sin. Rani, be warned and listen. Obey your Lord as all women should. A husband is a god to his wife. Repent of your cruelty. Let Rama be installed as is just and proper. He is the eldest son and he is beloved by the people and is virtuous and wise. Be warned ! If you drive Rama into the woods, all the world will despise you and curse your memory.

But Kaikeyi sat still, unmoved by appeals or reproaches. Then the Maharaja said, "Sumantra, you have spoken well. Give orders to the army, to all four ranks, cavalry, infantry, elephants and cars, to prepare to accompany Rama. Let him be escorted by all the musicians, dancing-girls, merchants and artisans. Bid the citizens pack up and go with my servants, my huntsmen, chariotteers and archers. If Rama must go to the woods, it shall be as a king. Hunting the tigers, deer and elephants, camping at night on the banks of broad rivers, eating venison, fruit and wild honey, he can pass the fourteen years forgetful of the royal state of which he has been cheated. Send all the grain in my store houses and the gold from my treasures that my dear son may live as a king in the jungle."

When Kaikeyi heard these words, she became afraid and angrily she turned on Dasaratha. "You have promised to give Bharata the raj," she said, "if you strip the kingdom of its wealth and allow the people to desert their homes, it is no fulfilment of your promise. Do you think that I shall be

content to see my son ruling over a ruined land stripped of its wealth, as stale wine loses its strength?" "Vile woman", retorted Dasaratha, "you have brought misery enough on me and mine. Do not mock me in my sorrow. There was a day when you pretended to love Rama."

"That has nothing to do with your promise. It is right that he should go to the forest, just as one of your ancestors sent his eldest son Azamanja."

"Ajamanja", replied Dasaratha, "was a wicked prince. He persecuted his father's subjects. He seized the children in the street and threw them into the river Sarayu. But Rama is not wicked. What has he ever done that is wrong? Whom has he ever injured? To dismiss such a son would stain even the glory of Indra. If Rama must go, then I also and my people will follow him; you and Bharata can rule over an empty city."

But, kissing his father's feet, Rama said: "Be'loved king and father, what use will armies or followers be to me in the woods where I have vowed to live the life of a rishi feeding on the forest fruits and honey? When a man has parted with his elephant, what use has he for the grass rope that tethered it? In the life I must lead I have no use for soldiers or the luxuries of palace life. Give me the coarse garments woven from tree fibre, the spade with which to dig up the roots and the leathern basket in which to store them."

Hearing these humble words the cruel Kaikeyi rejoiced, and calling her servants, bade them bring her the coarse clothes that she had had prepared. When these were brought, she said to Rama: "Here are your clothes. Put them on." Smiling gently and not resenting her cruelty, the young prince took off his fine linen robe and his ornaments, even the wedding ring given him by Sita's father, and put on the coarse cloth of a rishi. At her bidding her servants brought other dresses, and Lakshmana took off his fine clothes and put on the bark dress. But when the coarse garments

Rama refuses to accept the army or to allow the people to come with him.

prepared for her were offered to Sita, she shrank back in horror. Used to rich silk and the softest linen, the poor girl was frightened and ashamed when Kaikeyi triumphantly handed her the coarse robe. "How can I wear such clothes?" she piteously asked. Then all the women cried and Dasaratha angrily said to Kaikeyi: "Have you no shame and no pity left in you? But see here! You asked only for the exile of Rama. Why then do you give bark garments to Lakshmana and Sita? To fulfil my promise, Rama must wear the clothes of a devotee. But Sita and Lakshmana go with him of their own accord. They are not bound to obey you."

At this moment Vasishta arrived and, hearing the last words, he reproached Kaikeyi bitterly. "I will not call you 'rani' any longer, for you deserve no title of honour but only words of contempt and abhorrence. You have disgraced your own royal race and you seek to bring ruin and misery on the kingdom of your husband. You have hidden your cruel and wicked nature under a fair exterior all these years, and thus have been able to deceive the Maharaja. But your greed will gain you no reward. If Rama and Sita go to the woods, we shall all go. Even your own son, I believe, will be ashamed of you and go with Satrughna into the jungle to attend on his elder brother. You will rule over a deserted land, for we all love Rama and those who stay here will hate you for your cruelty. Wherever Rama is, there will be the centre of the kingdom. You cannot make Sita wear those rags, for her exile is not part of the Maharaja's promise to you."

The Maharaja bade the servants remove the coarse clothes and he comforted the weeping Sita. Then he gave orders for the royal chariot to be prepared to take Rama, Sita and Lakshmana in all honour to the jungle. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana now took leave of Kausalya. Amid her tears the Rani begged Rama to be careful. "Sita is so delicate and Lakshmana is only a boy. Guard them from all harm in the jungle and take care of yourself. You are the joy of my life;

Rama, Sita
and Lakshmana

my grief seems more than I can bear. All the days I shall pray for you that you may return safely." Then the poor Rani was choked with sobs and could say no more.

"Dear mother", replied Rama, "you know how great is my love for my brother, and Sita is my shadow. For the safety of both of them I will answer with my life. For me fear nothing and do not sorrow over my fate, but spend all your time in trying to comfort my father. I hope that I may be allowed to fulfil my promise and to return here."

Then Kausalya kissed them all and blessed them. "I know", she said to Lakshmana, "that you will do all you can for Rama and protect Sita". To Sita she said "Wicked women may reward their husbands' love and kindness by ingratitude and disloyalty in the day of trouble; but a good woman worships her husband and regards him as sacred, whatever his fortunes may be. Though Rama is going to the woods clothed in mean clothes, he is just as dear to you. He is your god in poverty and in prosperity."

Joining her hands and kneeling before Kausalya, Sita said: "Beloved Rani, I will do all that you command. I know the duty of a woman to her Lord, and I could no more fail in it than the moon could lose its light. As a lute can make no music if it has no strings, as a chariot cannot move without wheels, so must a woman's life be all misery if she lose her husband. A daughter's, a sister's or a mother's love is great, but it is as nothing compared with that of a wife, for in her husband's happiness she finds her happiness, in devotion to him she finds her life's work. To a good wife her husband is like a god." Then Rama bade farewell to all the women and servants present and said. "I beg your forgiveness if I have ever offended any of you in the least way". At these touching words the women cried aloud and filled the palace with their wailing. Then Rama, his wife and his brother kissed the feet of the Maharaja and left the royal apartments.

Rama, Sita
and Lakshman
are driven off by
Sumantra.

When they reached the outer gate, they found the Maharaja's chariot awaiting them. In this they took their seats and Sumantra drove off rapidly. But the crowds of sorrowful people round the gates waited to see Rama. The air was filled with weeping and wailing and with the sound of many voices calling down blessings on the princes and Sita. So dense was the crowd that Sumantra found it hard to drive and the people called out continually "Drive slowly that we may see Rama". But Rama told Sumantra to drive quickly, for he was so sad that he could not bear to speak to the people. And as they drove from the palace Dasaratha hastened down the stairs and out on to the road crying, "I must see my beloved son once more". Then so great was his grief that he fell down in a swoon. Rama heard the cries of those who went to the help of the Maharaja. He turned and saw his father and Kausalya and he heard them calling to Sumantra to rein in the horses. But he ordered Sumantra, who did not know whom to obey, to drive on quickly, saying: "Tell my father that you did not hear him bidding you to stop. My grief is so great that I cannot bear to see my father again. Therefore I am compelled to order you to tell this falsehood."

When Dasaratha saw that he was too late and that he would not see his son again, he stood in the road with Kausalya watching the chariot as it disappeared in a cloud of dust. At last he could see it no more and with a groan he sank to the ground in great misery.

Kausalya stood at Dasaratha's side. A little distance behind him was Kaikeyi. When he saw her he broke out into the bitterest reproaches. "Wretched woman", he cried, "why do you follow me about? Is it because you fear that

The Maharaja disowns Kaikeyi and orders her out of his presence.

I shall be able to escape from some of the misery which you have inflicted on me? Do not come near me. Do not touch me. Go where you like, but never come into my presence again. I know now that you are a cruel

and treacherous deceiver. You are no longer my wife or my friend. You are my deadly enemy who has brought ruin and disgrace to me and to my family. In your greed for power and glory you have abandoned virtue ; now I abandon you. Before all present here I renounce with contempt the hand I took in front of the sacred fire. If Bharata is glad to have the throne which you have gained for him by cunning and cruelty, then he is no son of mine. I disown him as I disown you now. He may make what funeral offerings he pleases ; but none shall ever be allowed near my body."

So fierce was his anger that Kaikeyi shrank from him in fear. Kausalya helped him to his feet and brushed the dust from his robe. Leaning on the weeping Rani, he gazed along the road leading from the palace gates. Wringing his hands and beating his breast, he reproached himself in the bitterest words for his cruelty to his son. "See !" he cried, "the road still bears the marks of the hoofs of the horses which took him from me, but where is my son ? Of him there is no sign left. He who has always slept on beds spread with silken sheets, whose head has rested every night on soft pillows perfumed with delicious scents, will sleep this night beneath a tree, the hard earth for his bed, a stone for his pillow. At dawn he will rise covered with dust and dirt like a buffalo after rolling in a muddy pool. Shame on her who has brought such misery on me ! I cannot live without Rama."

Supported by Kausalya and the Counsellors, the broken-hearted Maharaja re-entered the palace, as a man enters his home after he has burned the body of a dear relative.

When he reached the foot of the stairs, Dasaratha was too weak to climb them. His attendants brought a golden palanquin, in which they placed him, "Take me", he said : "to the rooms of Kausalya, the mother of Rama, for nowhere else can I find peace till I die." So he was carried to the apartments of Kausalya and there he lay on a couch. Soon he sank into a delirium during which

The Maharaja is carried to the apartments of the Rani Kausalya.

he talked always of Rama and cursed himself for his treatment of the young prince. During the night he grew weaker, and, when he recovered his reason for a time about midnight, his sight was failing. He called to his wife, saying : "Dear Kausalya, are you here ? Touch me, for I cannot see you. My eyes have gone after Rama".

Patiently Kausalya had sat by his side all through his de'irium. Now she took his hands and tried to console him. But she was so unhappy that she could find no comforting words to say to him ; she could only ming'le her tears with his. "Who would ever have believed that Kaikeyi would be so wicked ?" she moaned : "I loved her and Rama loved her ; but she has turned on us all like a venomous serpent. Dear husband, I am so frightened of her now that Rama has gone ; what protection is there for me ? Better for me if my son had become a beggar in the city or had been condemned to hard labour, for then at least I cou'd have seen him sometimes and he cou'd have protected me. But now he has been driven into the jungle to be torn into pieces by wild beasts or to be eaten by Rakshasas. How can we hope that he and Lakshmana and the delicate Sita will survive the dangers of the wood ? How can they live for years like the jungle beasts on the fruits of the forest ? Perhaps the day may come when we shall see them again : but when will it be ? When will this city be decorated with flags to welcome them back ? When will Ayodhya be filled with joy at the sight of the two heroes as beautiful as the full moon shining on the sea ? When will sweetmeats be thrown to the happy crowd and the daughters of the Brahmans go about the city with fruits and flowers ? Dasaratha, I am like a cow which has lost her calf, for that tigress Kaikeyi has robbed me of Rama."

Rama had ordered Sumantra to drive fast, and they soon outdistanced most of the crowd pressing round the chariot as it passed through the streets of Ayodhya. But some of the richer citizens followed on horseback or in cars. When evening came, Sumantra stopped on the bank of the

Rama's first
night in the
jungle.

river Tamasa where there was a pleasant place for an encampment. The tired horses were unyoked and, after drinking deep at the water's edge, rolled backward and forward on the grass in their joy at being free and then plunged in the river. A camp was formed and those citizens who had followed Rama saluted him and then fixed their sleeping place at some little distance. Rama said that he would fast; but Lakshmana gathered fruit for Sita who was tired and sleepy. At sunset Sumantra tethered and fed the horses; and, when they had said their prayers, they all lay down on beds of leaves and slept peacefully.

Before dawn Rama woke and, seeing that the people were all asleep, he said to Lakshmana: "These good people are devoted to us and wish us to return. We must not let them come any farther. It will be best for their own sakes to deceive them. Let us wake Sita and Sumantra and be off quickly before they wake."

Lakshmana agreed that it would be best. Sumantra was waked, the horses were harnessed and they all got in. Then Rama said to Sumantra: "Turn round and drive a little way towards Ayodhya. The people will see the horses' footmarks and, thinking that we have returned, will quickly follow us." So Sumantra drove some miles towards the city and then, turning again, took another road through the forest and at last came again to the bank of the Tamasa.

When the citizens woke and found that Rama was gone, they were much troubled. They traced the car-wheel marks and horses' hoofs going towards Ayodhya, and, just as Rama had thought, they were delighted and started off in pursuit. After a time they lost the traces. Then they were very sad, but they decided that they must return to their homes, so they drove to Ayodhya. They found it as silent as a city of the dead, so grieved were the people at Rama's banishment. The bazaars were almost empty and many of the shops were closed, for no business was being done. The beautiful gardens were deserted and the music in the temple courtyards was hushed. The people were perplexed and saddened by

what had happened. They loved all the young princes ; but Rama was the favourite and, as he was the eldest son, they considered that he ought to be Yuvaraja.

When they had crossed the Tamasa, Rama and his companions drove through the beautiful country of Kosala. It was a green and beautiful land rich in crops of wheat, barley and rye. The pretty villages were surrounded by groves of mango and peepul trees, the cottage gardens were filled with fruit trees and flowers of every colour ; and the people were prosperous and happy. Rama and Sita had never seen greener or better cultivated farm land. Then they came to the noble Ganges flowing broad and clear. On its banks the neat villages were half-hidden in clumps of trees ; here and there the blue smoke curled above the leaves from the altars of rishis. In one part the great river flowed fast and noisily, washing its banks with sparkling wavelets. In other places it spread itself out into many channels separated by islands covered with flowering shrubs, the nesting place of every kind of water-fowl. In some side-channels the stream flowed so slowly that the water was beautiful with pink and white lotuses. In the wide shallows and on the shining wet sands cranes, ducks, herons and wild geese fed and sported. Before the great river bringing wealth to the farmers, whose banks are green with noble trees, and beautiful with shady groves filled with flowers and birds, whose pure waters wash away men's sin and spread fertility over the fields, Rama and his companions stood for a time with hands joined in worship. Then they drove on towards the city of Sringavera on the border of Kosala and the Bhil country. When they were close to the city Rama said to Sumantra : "See ! there is a fine tree beneath which we can take shelter for the night." So they drove to the tree and formed their camp there.

As soon as Guha the Raja of the Bhils heard that Rama had come to his country, he drove out of his city to greet him. Guha was a brave and famous soldier, friendly to the Maharaja

and his family. When Rama saw the Raja surrounded by all his kinsmen and chiefs riding towards him, he and Lakshmana advanced to welcome him. Hearing why Rama had come, Guha was very grieved, and he embraced Rama. Bowing to his feet and with joined hands raised to his head, he said: "Prince, if you will look on my city as your home and live here, I shall be very glad. Tell me what I can do for you. I shall think myself the most fortunate of men if I can persuade you to remain as my guest." Then he called his servants and they brought the *Argha* and many baskets of food, sweetmeats and delicacies, and Guha said: "All these and more like them are at your command in Srīngavera. My kingdom is yours. I and my family and my retainers are your servants. Food, houses, fodder for your horses, everything that you need we can supply."

Rama was much touched and, embracing Guha, said: "I thank you very much for your welcome. I hope that all is well with your kingdom. I cannot stay here as your guest, for I have become a devotee and for fourteen years must live as the rishis live. These gifts of welcome I accept gladly, though I cannot eat the food myself: but I must go out into the jungle in fulfilment of my promise. I shall be glad of some food for my father's horses." Then Guha ordered his attendants to feed the horses, and he and Rama talked till sunset when, putting his garments like a rope over his left shoulder and under his right arm, Rama made his prayers to the setting sun and drank some water which Lakshmana brought him. Then they ate their meals and spread their beds beneath the Ingudi tree. Finding that he could not persuade them to be his guests, Guha posted soldiers around the camp to guard them during the night and went back to his palace. When the dawn came and the woods echoed

Rama orders
Sumantra to
return to
Ayodhya.

with the shrill cry of the peacocks, Rama rose and made arrangements to cross the Ganges. Guha supplied an excellent boat with oars and helm and the princes put in it all that they possessed, weapons, clothes and utensils. Then Rama

said : "Sumantra, you must now turn back. You have done your duty ; you have driven us to the frontier of the kingdom. We will walk the rest of our journey to the forest. Drive back to the city and tell my father nothing but pleasant news of our journey."

Sumantra was greatly distressed and said that he did not wish to leave them. But Rama spoke very kindly to him saying : "Among all my father's subjects there is none to whom I am more attached than I am to you. Now therefore I trust you to do your best to comfort my father. As he has never caused me distress, so I pray you not to distress him. Whatever he may order because of his affection for Kaikeyi, perform at once ; the will of kings must not be resisted. Do your best to divert my father's thoughts from his grief about me. Persuade him even not to think of me. Give him my affectionate and respectful greetings. Salute also Vasishta and all the learned men of Ayodhya, the Counsellors and Chiefs. To my dear mother give my devoted salutations and say that I bow at the feet of Kaikeyi and Sumitra. Bowing down and embracing his feet, say this to my father from me : "Raja of rajas, you must not grieve for me, Lakshmana, or Sita. We would gladly spend our whole lives in the forest at the bidding of our father in a good cause. None of us ought to be pitied. We have left Ayodhya willingly at your command and shall live in the forest for the sake of your promise. After fourteen years we shall return. It is my prayer that the mother of Bharata, your beloved wife, may enjoy happiness and govern the kingdom with her son." Having spoken thus to my father in my name, tell my mother, Kaikeyi and Sumitra that we are well and that we bow at their feet. When Bharata is installed as Yuvaraja, say to him for me : "Be kind and devoted to your mother and do not forget to be gentle and affectionate to Sumitra and my mother."

When Rama had finished speaking, Lakshmana, enraged with Kaikeyi, gave Sumantra a very angry message for the Maharaja. But Rama said : "Sumantra, you must not repeat such disrespectful words to my father. Both because

he is our father and because he is our king, he must be addressed respectfully and with humble devotion. Do not deliver Lakshmana's message."

Still Sumantra was unwilling to leave them and begged that he might stay with them for the fourteen years and drive them back to Ayodhya. But Rama, Lakshmana and Sita cross the Ganges. Rama said : "I am touched by your devotion to me. But you are a faithful and valued servant of my father and you must return to Ayodhya. My father needs you and your return will be a proof that we have really gone to the jungle. Then everything will be more peaceful and easier. If Kaikeyi sees you return, she will be sure that I have gone into exile. Unless she is certain of it, she will give the Maharaja no peace. Go therefore and deliver the messages as I have given them to you." Then, embracing Rama's feet and saluting Lakshmana, Sita and Guha, Sumantra drove away sorrowfully.

When the car was out of sight, Rama said to Guha : "Raja, we must go now to the woods in accordance with my promise ; but first I will mat my hair and tie it up in the *jata* of the devotee. Let them bring me juice of the fig tree." The juice was brought and Rama tied his own and Lakshmana's hair in a knot. With matted and knotted hair the two lads looked like two youthful sages. Then walking to the river where the boat awaited them, Rama bade Guha good-bye, "May all be well with you, Raja", he said. "These are troublous times and you must be careful to drill your army and to arm your men well for the protection of your kingdom". Then, placing Sita in the boat, the young princes bade farewell, and were quickly rowed into the stream. When they had reached the middle of the river, Sita joining her hands, prayed to mother Ganga : "By order of his father Rama goes to the forest for fourteen years. Oh, kind Ganga, grant that we may return in safety to Ayodhya. Oh, beautiful and generous Mother who spreads fertility over the land and gives life to all, I kneel to you, I worship you. Grant me my prayer that we may return and that Rama may have the

throne. Then in gratitude I will make many gifts to the Brahmans and I will offer you a hundred jars of wine and maunds of rice mixed with flesh. I will make offerings to the gods who inhabit your banks and I will worship at all the sacred places."

When the boat reached the southern bank of the river, they saluted the sacred river once more and then entered the forest. Lakshmana went first, then Sita and last of all Rama. For the first time Sita had to face the terrors of

and enter the woods.

the jungle, and, armed with their bows, the princes walked through the forest with Sita thus safe between them. After they had walked some miles they came to a large banyan under the shade of which they sat. Near by was a lake covered with pink and white lotuses, the haunt of geese, ducks and all kinds of water-fowl. They drank the clear water and rested for a time. Then Lakshmana shot a deer and they lighted a fire and cooked the meat. When they had made offerings to the gods, they ate their supper and prepared to rest beneath the tree for the night. Then Rama said to Lakshmana: "This is our first night in the woods. We are real rishis now. Do not be miserable. We shall be happy enough and we must both forget ourselves and think of Sita, for we must protect her and do all we can to lighten her sufferings. Help me now to gather grass for beds." Then the two collected grass and spread beds beneath the banyan. Sita was soon asleep, but the brothers talked long by the fire. Rama became sad and gloomy: "We have many years of this rough life before us," he said. "It is hard to think that our father is content to sleep in his palace in comfort, while we have no shelter but this tree. Who ever heard of a man who, to please a woman, was willing to banish an obedient and beloved son? I fear that there will be trouble in Ayodhya. Proud of her triumph and drunk with her new power, Kaikeyi may perhaps insult Kausalya and your mother. One of us ought to be in Ayodhya to protect them. I think that you had better

return. I can protect Sita. I must accept my banishment, but you can go back and protect our mothers from insult."

Poor Rama was so overcome with the thought of his mother's lonely position that he began to cry. But Lakshmana comforted him. "Do not cry", he said, "That will not help your mother. It is your duty to make the best of your lot and to be cheerful always. Only weak minds find comfort in tears. When sinking in the mire of sorrow, little minds give way to grief like an old crippled elephant sinking in a muddy pool. If Sita sees you sad, it will be far harder for her to bear the privations of this life. I do not wish to leave you, not even to see my mother. Do not speak again of it, for nothing will make me return to Ayodhya without you." Then Rama embraced his brother and said: "You are right. I will grieve no more. It is useless and cowardly."

At dawn they started out through the woods towards Prayaga where the Ganges and the Jumna meet and where stood the hermitage of the sage Bharadwaja. In the afternoon they heard the distant murmuring sound of the two rivers as they flow together and Rama said: "See, Lakshmana, there is the smoke curling up from the sacred fire at Prayaga. In that clump of trees over which the smoke hangs is the home of Bharadwaja." When it was almost sunset they reached the junction of the rivers, and there they saw Bharadwaja and his disciples praying before the sacred fire. When Bharadwaja saw them, Rama advanced and, bowing respectfully, told his story. Then the sage, greeting him kindly, told his attendants to bring water and the *argha* and soon a meal of rice, fruits and vegetables was prepared and set before them. Bharadwaja asked Rama where he wished to go and advised him to stay there, for it was a healthy spot and was holy because of the meeting of the two sacred rivers. But Rama said: "Hearing that we are here, many people will come from Kosala to see us. It will be better for us to choose a lonelier place where we can go and come unobserved. Specially I desire this for Sita's sake."

They arrive at the hermitage of Bharadwaja at Prayaga.

Then Bharadwaja told them that at a short distance there was a mountain named Chitrakuta on the slopes of which they could make their home. "Many sages", he said "live there. If you do not care to live here, you cannot do better than go to Chitrakuta. It is a beautiful spot." So it was arranged, and Rama, Lakshmana and Sita spent the night at the hermitage and in the morning they bade Bharadwaja farewell. "Go in peace, my children, to Chitrakuta," he said. "There your eyes will be gladdened with the sight of rivers and springs, hills and valleys, green slopes and cool cascades. It is a beautiful, leafy and sheltered hill surrounded by rivers and rich woodlands. A few miles from here you will come to a village. Then a short walk will bring you to the bank of the Jumna. There you must make a raft and cross the river. But you must be careful, for the stream is swift and full of crocodiles. On the farther bank you will see a large banyan. Then, before you will stretch a dark forest. Through that a path will lead you to Chitrakuta."

Then, embracing the feet of the sage, they started off.

Arrival at
Chitrakuta.
They build
themselves a hut
and settle down.

When they reached the Jumna, the princes collected wood and made a raft, lashing dried bamboo laths across the tree trunks. Then they placed Sita and all their belongings on it and the brothers got poles and punted the raft across. When they were in the middle of the stream, Sita prayed to the goddess Jumna that Rama might be able to fulfil his vow and return to Ayodhya in safety. When they had crossed, they saw on the bank the great fig tree and Sita bowed before it and with joined hands asked that its blessings might rest on Rama. Then they walked down the river bank, Lakshmana first, Sita next and Rama last. The path led across water meadows covered with wild flowers and shrubs and climbing plants. Lakshmana gathered many flowers and brought them to Sita who was quite happy in her new free surroundings. At sunset they made beds on the river bank.

At dawn the next day they started for Chitrakuta. When

they came in view of the hill, they were delighted with the country around. From its foot the woodlands spread out as fruitful and green as gardens. There were trees covered with flowers and trees laden with fruit. On some of them hung honeycombs covered with bees. There were many deer and birds of all kinds. Soon they came to the hermitage of Valmiki. With joined hands they advanced and saluted him, bowing to his feet. Rama told him all that had happened and Valmiki welcomed them to Chitrakuta. Then Rama and Lakshmana set to work and gathered wood and branches of trees and they built a hut on the slope of the hill. When it was finished, Rama told his brother to shoot a deer that they might offer venison to the gods of the neighbourhood who would bless their new home. Lakshmana shot a fine deer and skinned and dressed it; and Rama offered the meat to the gods according to the Sastras and prayed for life and health for them in their new home. When the sacrifice was completed, the princes and Sita took up their residence in the hut. They found Chitrakuta a pleasant place girdled with pure streams and with woods filled with deer and birds and with abundance of fruit for food. In this beautiful woodland scenery they forgot the hardships of their exile and lived happily.

Having bade farewell to Raja Guha, Sumantra drove back to Ayodhya sad at heart. The sorrow of the people at Rama's exile was renewed when they saw the empty chariot. Sumantra drew his cloth across his face as he dived through the silent melancholy crowd. When he reached the palace, he drove into the courtyard and, passing through the five courts, made his way to the apartments of Dasaratha. The palace servants and the soldiers on guard saluted him sadly; while the sight of him returning without Rama made the women of the court very sorrowful and they wept bitterly. Sumantra found the Maharaja sitting with Kausalya. He was thin and wasted with grief; and when he heard the dutiful words of Rama's message, he

Sumantra
gives Rama's
message. Kau-
salya reproaches
the Maharaja.

wept bitterly. Sumantra begged him not to weep, assuring him that the two princes and Sita were well and that he would see them again. But the unhappy king shook his head and sobbed pitifully, saying that he would never live to see Rama.

When Sumantra had left the room, Kausalya reproached Dasaratha. "We can talk freely," she said, "for Kaikeyi is not here. It is right that you should weep, and be ashamed, for what father has ever before banished his son after having promised to instal him as Yuvaraja? If you had promised Kaikeyi the throne or anything else that she chose to ask for, why did you promise it to Rama? You have banished your son from fear of breaking your promise, but you have broken the promise to instal Rama that you gave to your ministers and the people at the council. The slave of a woman in your old age, you must have broken your promise whatever you did. By giving Rama the throne you would have broken your promise to Kaikeyi, but by banishing him you have broken your promise to your people and your counsellors. What you have done is a great sin. I thank God that Kaikeyi did not ask for Rama's death, for then you must have ordered him to be killed. Think of your folly in putting yourself in the power of such a woman. If Rama lives to return, I cannot expect Bharata to give the throne to him. Nor would Rama's pride allow him to accept it. What Brahman will eat the finest food that has been left by others? What elder brother will accept a throne which has been filled by a younger brother? A tiger will not eat the carcass of an animal caught by another tiger. The offerings, the ghee, the kusa grass and the sacrificial posts are never used a second time. So Rama will never care for a throne that is like stale wine at a feast or the remains of the *homa* at a sacrifice. Do you think that you can treat Rama in this way? He is as proud as you are; he will no more bear disrespect than a fierce tiger will allow its tail to be pulled."

The poor Maharaja did not try to defend himself against, her reproaches. "Kausalya," he said, "I
 Dasaratha asks Kausalya to forgive. Her repentance for her cruel words. humbly beg you to forgive me. I know your heart is broken, but do not rub salt into my wounds. My heart is also breaking with grief for my son, and your words are like stabs of a knife. Forgive me, try to forgive me for my weakness and the wrong that I have done you. I pray you to spare me your reproaches. Do not torture me who am bowed to the earth with sorrow and shame. You have a right to abuse me, but spare me the pain of listening to your bitter words."

Now Kausalya was a good wife ; and when she looked into her husband's worn face and heard his touching words of appeal, she forgot her own grief and with joined hands knelt before Dasaratha saying :—"Dear lord, forgive me. The violence of my sorrow has made me say harsh and improper words. The woman to whom her husband makes an appeal with joined hands and who does not relent is cursed both in this world and the next. Forgive the fault of a broken-hearted woman. You are the master and god both of Rama and me. I know what is right. I know that in banishing Rama you have acted from a high sense of duty and a love of truth. I know that all your life you have done your duty and spoken the truth. I spoke bitterly because I am so unhappy ; for the moment I have forgotten my duty as a wife. For the time I was mad with sorrow. Such sorrow as mine is really intolerable. The pain of a burn or a wound with a knife can be borne ; but such grief as mine is too hard to bear. Grief crushes the patience even of the greatest rishi. The five days since Rama left have seemed to me like years. My sorrow for my lost son increases daily as the waters of the Ganges in the rainy season."

As evening advanced the Maharaja grew weaker. He slept from time to time, but it was troubled
 The death of the Maharaja. sleep in which he talked continually of Rama. Sumitra sat with Kausalya at the bedside. About midnight Dasaratha woke weeping and terrified. He

felt that he was dying and his eyes were dim with weakness. "Kausalya", he said in a feeble voice, "I am dying of grief for Rama. I cannot see you. Touch me and speak to me. Ah! if my dear son could come to me and touch me and receive the raj, perhaps I should not die yet. I cannot see you. My eyes have gone already and the messengers of Yama are dragging me away. What greater punishment could be given me than to be dying here without seeing Rama? Sorrow is burning up my heart's blood as the sun dries up a shallow pond in the hot season. Happy are those who see to-day the face of my beloved son; happy will be those who live to see him return from exile. Kausalya, forgive me for the wrong I have done you. I am dying. My life is flickering out like the light of a lamp in which there is no oil". In a few minutes he became unconscious and his eyes were fixed in death. When the Rani saw that he was dead, they fainted and until the morning no one knew what had happened.

When the dawn came, the court minstrels and the Brahmans gathered in the outer court to sing the praises of the Maharaja, as was the daily custom. Clapping their hands in time with their songs, they chanted their prayers for God's blessings on Dasaratha and their hymns of praise for his justice and his wisdom. The sound of their voices filled all the silent corridors and courtyard of the palace. On the roof and in the trees of the palace gardens the birds woke and swelled the chorus of song with their musical notes. Then, as the eastern sky lightened, men servants carried into the palace water in jars of gold and silver; while the women prepared the early food, and other maid-servants decorated the palace rooms with flowers and brought in the garlands and the fragrant paste for the tilak marks. All was bustle and life while the master of the palace lay stiff and cold on his couch with his two queens unconscious on the floor. When the sun rose, the ministers gathered in the courtyard and every one waited for Dasaratha to show himself on his balcony as was his custom. For a few minutes there was

Scene in the palace at dawn. Funeral ceremonies postponed by the ministers.

growing anxiety, then of a sudden the piteous cries of weeping women filled the air. The maid-servants had entered the Maharaja's room to wake him. At first they did not realise what had happened. Then they saw the Ranis lying on the floor, their eyes swollen with crying, and, going close to the Maharaja, they saw that his eyes were fixed and that his jaw had fallen. Their cries of terror and grief roused the Ranis who, on seeing that Dasaratha was dead, began to sob wildly. In a moment the palace was filled with weeping and wailing. Kaikeyi and her maids came to the death chamber and all the women wept and screamed and beat their breasts. The ministers now hastened to the scene and gently removed the distressed and devoted Kausalya who in a fit of passionate grief had thrown herself on the body of the Maharaja, clinging to it and reproaching Kaikeyi in the bitterest terms for her cruelty. As all the four sons were away from Ayodhya, no funeral ceremonies could be performed, and the ministers, after consultation with Vasishta and the Brahmans, took steps to preserve the body by having it placed in a tank of oil, while all the Ranis and the palace-women beat their breasts and dishevelled their hair, weeping and crying, "Our lord is dead ! our lord is dead !" In the city the news was received with sincere sorrow and a vast crowd gathered around the palace gates, for Dasaratha had been a just and good ruler and was much beloved by his subjects.

When they had made arrangements for the preservation of the Maharaja's body, Sumantra, Vasishta and the other counsellors summoned the chieftains and the Brahmans of the kingdom to meet in the council hall to decide upon the succession. Vasishta presided over the assembly and Sumantra sat on his right hand. After relating the circumstances of Dasaratha's death, Vasishta asked for the opinions of the chiefs, and their leader said : "A great sorrow has fallen on the kingdom. Worn out with grief at the loss of his son, Dasaratha has died. None of us expected that he would die and the shock is great. The position is

The Accession Council is held and the throne is given to Bharata.

difficult. Our ruler is dead, but there is none to succeed him. His four sons are away from the city, Rama and Lakshmana in the forest and Bharata and Sātrughna in Girivraja. It has been rightly decided that the funeral ceremonies cannot be performed till some of the sons return. We must lose no time therefore in appointing a successor. But, apart from the question of the funeral, a land without a ruler soon falls into anarchy. No man's wealth is safe. The farmer fears to plant crops which he may never be allowed to reap. The sons and wives of the dead king are under no control and indulge in intrigue and plots dangerous to the peace of the kingdom. The subjects of the realm are not secure in life or limb. No councils are held. There is no authority in the land and robbers infest the roads and highways, breaking into men's houses because they do not fear punishment. When the State has no head, religious rites and ceremonies are neglected, and those public festivals of which the king is the central figure are not held. The public are timid and fear to resort for recreation to public gardens, while a general feeling of uncertainty and apprehension checks trade and thus impoverishes the State. At your bidding, Vasishta, we have come here and beg that you will tell us what you think ought to be done and which of the Maharaja's sons is entitled to the throne; for a kingdom without a raja is like a river without water, a forest without trees or cows without a herdsman."

"As you say", Vasishta replied, "it is most undesirable that a kingdom should remain a day without a ruler. Bharata, to whom the Maharaja gave the throne, is with Prince Sātrughna in Girivraja. It will be best that messengers mounted on swift horses be sent to bring the princes here." All present agreeing, messengers were chosen then and there by Vasishta and in the presence of the counsellors he gave them the following instructions. "With all possible speed go to Girivraja, being careful to exhibit no signs of mourning. Say to Prince Bharata, 'Vasishta and the counsellors send you greetings and beg that you will return at once to Ayodhya'.

Do not tell him that Rama has been exiled and that his father is dead and that all this misery has been brought about by the ambitions of his mother the Rani Kaikeyi."

Thus instructed, the messengers mounted swift horses. Going by way of the river Malini, they crossed t' e Ganges at Hastinapura and, travelling through the Panchala country, reached Girivraja.

Now Bharata and Satrugna had been living happily in the palace of their grandfather Raja Aswathathi and knew nothing of what had happened at Ayodhya. But on the night before the messengers arrived from Ayodhya Bharata had a terrifying dream and he woke in great

Prince Bharata dreams a terrible dream.

distress. His brother and his attendants tried in every way to comfort him and with jest, and dance and song to divert his thoughts from his melancholy forebodings. But nothing could soothe the young prince's alarm. He told them that the dream was dreadful and that he was sure that something very terrible had already happened or was going to happen. "I saw my father", he said, "floating in a tank of oil head downwards. The city of Ayodhya was all in mourning. The streets were silent, the bazaars were empty and the people were collected in groups outside the houses weeping. Then I saw my father again. Women dressed in black placed him on a seat of black wood. The Maharaja was dressed in black adorned with garlands of red flowers. He was carried to a chariot drawn by asses which drove away towards the south. All the time a woman in blood-red garments jeered at my father and foul-featured rakshisi seized him as a bird of prey grabs its victim. I am sure that either my father, Rama or I are about to die. When in a dream men are seen riding in vehicles drawn by asses, the smoke will soon curl upwards from their funeral piles."

At dawn the next morning the messengers rode their tired horses across the bridge that spanned the wide moat surrounding Girivraja. Presenting themselves at the palace-gate, they asked for an immediate audience of the Raja.

Bharata's return to Ayodhya.

Hearing that messengers weary with having ridden in hot haste had arrived from his son-in-law's capital, Aswapathi ordered them to be brought to him at once. The messengers embraced the feet of the Raja and told him that they had come to take Bharata back to his home. Then the Raja sent for his grandson before whom the messengers bowed low saying : "From your mighty father's kingdom we have come to bid you return to Ayodhya". Then Bharata, suspecting nothing, asked : "Is my father well ? Are Rama and Lakshmana well ? Are my mothers well ?" Obeying their instructions, the messengers answered cunningly : "Prince, all are well whose welfare you desire." Much comforted by the good news, Bharata embraced the feet of the Raja saying : "These messengers bid me return at once to Ayodhya. I desire to obey my father. Give me permission to go. When you are pleased to send for me, I will return". The Raja embraced Bharata and kissing his head, replied : "Beloved child, I wish that you would go at once in obedience to your father's command. Happy is my daughter to have so excellent a son. Give her my blessings. To your father give my salutations and to his minister Sumantra, to Vasishta and to all the counsellors, chiefs and Brahmans. I shall rejoice when I see you again". Then he embraced him once more and embraced Satrughna and he gave them many presents, trained elephants, much gold, woollen cloths richly dyed, deer skins and other garments and some large dogs bred in the palace of Girivraja and as strong and fierce as tigers. He also ordered some of his counsellors to escort the princes on their journey.

Bharata was still so frightened by his dream that he took no pleasure in these beautiful presents. He and Satrughna mounted the splendid car of the Raja drawn by four horses and, accompanied by the messengers and the counsellors of Aswapati and surrounded by Kaikeya soldiers, they set out for Kosala. Behind them were driven the elephants and cattle and all the presents of the Raja loaded in wagons. Travelling as fast as they could, they were seven days on

the journey. All this time Bharata could not forget his dream. On the eighth day they came in sight of Ayodhya, and Bharata said "See! dear brother, there is Ayodhya. Yet the sight does not delight me. I fear that some ill has befallen it."

When they drove into the gates, the few people gathered there greeted them respectfully; but there were no crowds or cheering. The streets were deserted and the busy life of the city, the sound of drums and flutes and temple hymns, was hushed. Then Bharata said to his brother: "My heart is full of fear. Here are all the signs of public mourning. Look! the doors of the houses are open; the houses themselves have not been cleaned; no smoke of sacrifice rises from the temple courts. I hear no music and I smell no incense. The temples and the shops where garlands are bought are deserted. All is silent and mournful. Even in the bazaar no trade is being done. These are the marks of public grief for a dead king. I dread to hear bad news."

Thus it was with heavy hearts that the lads entered the palace. First they went to the apartments of Dasaratha to embrace his feet; but when they could not find him, Bharata went to his mother's room. Kaikeyi, who had been eagerly expecting him, clasped him in her arms and kissed his head. "Dear son," she said, "it is such a joy to see you. How many days have you been on the journey? Are you tired by travelling so quickly? Is your grandfather well and happy, and your uncle? Tell me all that you have done and seen in Girivraja."

Then Bharata replied: "It is seven days since we left Girivraja. My grandfather and uncle are both well and send you salutations. The Raja gave us many presents. These are all on the road, for the cattle were weary and could not keep up with us. But, mother, what has happened? The city looks mournful. The palace is changed and I cannot find my father. Where is he? Is he in the apartments of my chief mother Kausalya?"

Bharata's interview with his mother.

Now Kaikeyi was not at all sorry that the Maharaja was dead and she answered quite cheerfully : "Why, have they not told you ? What must happen to all of us some day has happened to your father. He is dead."

When Bharata heard the news, he fell to the ground in great distress. Sobbing bitterly, he covered his face with his robe. Kaikeyi put her arms round him and lifted him up. "Why, dear Bharata, you must not cry so. Every one must die some day." But Bharata could not be comforted.

"I was so glad when my grandfather gave me permission to come home, for I believed that my father had sent for me, perhaps to be present at the installation of Rama or at the performance of some great sacrifice. But now———oh ! my heart is broken at the thought that I shall never see my father again. From what disease did he die, mother ? Why did he die so suddenly ? How I envy Rama and those who were near him and were able to perform the last duties to his memory. If he were alive, how affectionately he would greet me now. How he would kiss my head and take me in his arms and stroke my hair and face with his hands. But tell me, mother, where is Rama who is now my master and king ?"

Kaikeyi was disappointed to hear her son speak in this way of Rama ; but she still hoped that he would be glad to hear what she had done for him. So she said quite gaily : "Rama has vowed to live in the jungle for many years. He, Sita and Lakshmana have gone to the wilderness of Dandaka."

Bharata was surprised and alarmed. "Why, mother, the jungle ? Why have they gone to the jungle ? What has Rama done wrong ? Has he robbed a Brahman or killed any one unjustly or stolen anyone's wife ? What has he done that he should be compelled to go to the woods ?"

Kaikeyi was now much alarmed, for she saw that Bharata would not approve of what she had done. But pretending not to be anxious she said : "Rama has not injured any Brahman or committed any other crime. But, when I heard that the Maharaja had decided to instal him as Yuvaraja, I

asked him to give you the raj and to send Rama into exile. Many years ago I saved your father's life and he promised me then that at any time he would grant me two wishes whatever they were. So I asked him for the throne and Rama's exile and he granted my request. Now he is dead and the throne is yours. This is no time for sorrow, Bharata. You are now Maharaja. When you have performed the funeral rites, you will be installed by Vasishtha and the counsellors.

When Bharata knew what had happened, he was overwhelmed with grief and shame. "Oh! mother, mother, how could you do it? How could you be so cruel? I do not want the raj. It is Rama's, not mine. How will a throne help me when I am bowed down with grief and shame? I have lost a dear father and a brother who was like a second father? How will royal splendour comfort me in my sorrow? By your ambitious talk you rub salt into my wounds. You have killed my father and exiled dear Rama to wander as a sanyasi in the woods. Were you born to ruin us all? My father loved you and lavished kindnesses on you, yet you have killed him. Mother, when I think that all these evils have come from your greed for power, I feel that I almost hate you. Why should you kill my father with grief? Why should you exile Rama? Good and kind, he has always acted respectfully towards you, treating you as a son should treat his mother. From Kausalya you have always had the affection of a sister. How can I govern the kingdom without Rama and Lakshmana? Rama is far more clever than I am. The Maharaja trusted Rama and relied on him. Besides, the eldest son always succeeds to the throne. This is the rule in all royal families and particularly in the house of Ikshwaku. I will go to the jungle. I will bring Rama back from Dandaka, for the people love him and want him."

With these words the lad threw himself on the ground and sobbed so violently that the gold necklace he wore burst and its ornaments were scattered on the floor.

While this scene had been taking place, Satrughna had learned the whole sad story from the servants and his grief was as great as Bharata's. Indignantly he denounced Kaikeyi for her cruelty and declared that Bharata would never accept the raj gained by such wicked means. While he was uttering these angry words, it happened that Manthara appeared at the eastern gate of the palace. The ugly old woman was decked out with costly gold ornaments and many jewels and was dressed in the costliest silk. On her thin ankles were golden anklets covered with little bells which tinkled as she walked as if she were a dancing girl. One of the servants said to Satrughna, "See, Rajkumar ! there is the wicked witch of a woman who has worked all this evil. It is she who has killed the Maharaja and sent Rama into exile." Satrughna was so angry that he forgot that she was a woman and, ordering her to be brought to him, he seized her by the neck. He threw her down on the ground and dragged her along the corridor towards Kaikeyi's rooms. The terrified nurse screamed loudly and all the women servants ran out at the noise, and some of them begged the young prince not to kill the old woman. But he was so angry that he was like a mad man ; and he dragged her along until her clothes were all torn and her jewels and trinkets were scattered over the floor. When he reached the Rani's rooms, he dragged the screaming woman into the presence of Kaikeyi and immediately began to reproach the Rani and curse Manthara. Kaikeyi was frightened and fled to Bharata, begging him to protect her and the nurse.

Then Bharata said : "Satrughna, leave her alone. Remember she is a woman and women must never be killed. If you kill her, Rama will never speak to you or me again." In obedience to his brother Satrughna let Manthara go. Cringing with terror, the old woman crept to Kaikeyi's side and crouched at her feet for protection.

Then the weeping princes went to the apartments of Kausalya. They found the Rani weak and ill with grief. When they embraced her feet, Bharata and Kausalya said to Bharata: "Why do you come here to make my grief more bitter with the sight of you? The throne that you have coveted so much is yours now, won for you by the cruelty and wickedness of your mother. Go and enjoy your power and leave me alone with my sorrow."

Poor Bharata wept more bitterly at these unjust words. "O mother", he sobbed, "I do not want the throne. It belongs to Rama whom I love dearly. I am innocent of all this wickedness. I have told my mother that I will go to the woods and bring Rama back. Believe me, please do believe me. If I have consented to the exile of Rama, may I be cursed with disease, poverty and old age. If I do not tell you the truth, may the guilt of traitors, of rajas who rob their subjects of their harvests, of cowards in battle, of those who pervert the Sastras, of the unjust judge,—may the guilt of all these fall on me. May I die childless! May I be taken prisoner as I am fleeing in battle! May I be robbed of all my wealth! May I wander about with a skull in my hand covered in filthy rags, begging my food! May I support my family by selling wine, flesh or poison!"

When Kausalya heard these vehement words, she knew that she had done Bharata a great injustice. She raised him from her feet and, taking him in her arms, clasped him to her breast, sobbing bitterly.

Afterwards Bharata saw Vasishta, and the chief priest said: "Grieve I know you must for a kind father and dearly loved brother, but the wise man is he who can control himself, however great are the sorrows and misfortunes that come on him. Wisest and greatest of all is the man who fulfils his duties while he is in full sorrow. You have a duty to do. Restrain your grief and perform the funeral rites of your father."

Preparations
for the funeral
of Dasaratha.

"That duty", replied Bharata, "should fall on the eldest son. I cannot accept the throne, while Rama lives; but it is a duty of affection which I can undertake for him. Lead me then to where my father's body lies." Then he was taken to the tank of oil by Vasishta and all the counsellors and to his amazement he saw that his dream was fulfilled.

When he saw his father's body, poor Bharata wept more bitterly than ever. "Bharata", said Vasishta, "do not weep for the Maharaja. He is not to be pitied, for he has gone to heaven. If you and those dear to him grieve too much for him, you will compel him to leave his happiness, because he will wish to come down to comfort you. Do not weep any more but do your duty."

Then orders were given and the bier was prepared and all the things necessary for the funeral were brought to the palace; and Bharata spent the night in prayer by the body. When the dawn came, the minstrels and Brahmans gathered in the court-yard to sing the praise of the new king. The kettle drums sounded and the air was filled with the noise of conchs and trumpets and the shrill notes of the flute. But Bharata sent his servants into the courtyard to command the musicians and singers to stop, saying "Tell them that I am not the Maharaja."

When the sun had risen, Bharata and Vasishta took their places on the jewelled carpet beneath the royal canopy in the council hall; and there gathered around them all the chiefs and counsellors and many citizens who cheered Bharata as if he were Maharaja. Then Vasishta rose and told the council that, though Bharata declared that he could not accept the throne while Rama was alive, he would perform the funeral rites. "All is now ready", he said, "for the ceremony. Arise, Bharata, and perform the rites according to the rules. The priests of your father have brought here the sacred fire. The temple servants have gone to the burning ghat with the wagon-loads of fragrant wood for the funeral pile. They have taken jars of ghee and oil and rich wine.

The funeral procession from the palace.

The garlands of flowers, the perfumed ointment, the attar, the incense are prepared. The litter is ready. Let the body of your father be placed on it and let the procession start."

Meanwhile the corpse had been reverently removed from the tank and had been robed in the finest cloths according to the precepts of the Sastras. Then the two princes, aided by Vasishtha and Sumantra, placed the body on the jewelled litter and threw garlands over it and sprinkled it with incense. The procession was formed and the Brahmans and the people walked before the bier crying: "Lord Maharaja, where have you gone? where have you gone?" The royal servants bore the litter, and Bharata and Satrugghna walked immediately behind it. In front went first of all the minstrels and court musicians chanting hymns in praise of the dead monarch. Then came the Ranis and the women of the palace with their hair dishevelled, filling the air with their screams and groans. Then came the bier with the two princes supporting it. Over it were carried the insignia of royalty, the white umbrella and the jewelled chamaras. Behind was carried the sacred fire flaming high, tended by the Brahmans who fed it with ghee. After them came many chariots filled with gold and jewels which the royal servants scattered among the crowd as funeral gifts of the Maharaja. Last of all followed great multitudes of the citizens of Ayodhya and people from the surrounding districts eager to pay their last respects to Dasaratha.

The funeral pile had been built of sweet smelling woods on the bank of the Sarayu in a lonely spot covered with thick grass. The body was lifted on to the pile. Then the Brahmans placed the sacrificial vessels on the pile and they poured ghee on the wood, repeating mantras. When the vessels, the ladles and the rings of the posts of sacrifice had been placed on the pile and consecrated, the priests took a purified beast consecrated by the proper formulas and they slew it and threw it on the pile. Then they threw boiled rice on all sides of the royal body and they

The scene at
the burning
ghat. The sa-
crifice.

dug a shallow ditch in the ground around the pile, and within this place of sacrifice they offered a cow and her calf and scattered ghee, oil and flesh on all sides.

When these ceremonies were completed, Bharata set fire to the pile. Fed with ghee and oil the flames roared high and furiously. In a few minutes the whole pile was a blazing mass and the cries of the Rānis and their women mingled with the groans and lamentations of the citizens crying, "O protector of the poor, dear lord, why have you left your faithful people forlorn?" Bharata was overwhelmed with grief. He could hardly perform his duty of walking round the burning pile. He bowed at the feet of the burning body; but his limbs would not support him and he fell helpless on his face on the earth. They lifted him up tenderly and, when he saw the flames licking red round his father's body, he threw his arms up and cried: "Dear father, since you have gone to heaven and Rama is in the forest, I have no wish to live. I will enter the fire. I will burn by your side rather than return to the desolate city, fatherless and brotherless."

Vasishta took him kindly by the arms and rebuked him, saying "Control yourself. This life is all vanity. We cannot escape the pain and suffering, and the pleasures are illusion. What is destined for each of us must come to pass: it is therefore idle to grieve. Every creature born must die; all who die will be born again. To rebel against fate is futile and foolish".

Thus rebuked, Bharata wiped away his tears and with Satrugna and all the royal mourners entered the sacred Sarayu. Having bathed, they poured water with the palms of their hands in memory of their father and to refresh his soul in heaven. Then the procession reformed and returned to Ayodhya, where the people collected in the streets and wept and wailed and the shops were closed and the life of the city suspended. Respectfully saluted by the sad crowds, the unhappy Bharata, surrounded by his kinsmen, entered the palace of his father.

For ten days Bharata lay on a mat of kusa grass mourning for his father ; and on the tenth day he purified himself according to the Sastras. On the twelfth day he performed the *Śraddha*, offering cakes and other food to the soul of his father and giving meals to many Brahmans. Also he gave to the Brahmans as funeral gifts many cows and goats, many slaves male and female, and gold, silver, horses and chariots. On the morning of the thirteenth day Bharata with Satrugna and the Brahmans went to the burning ghat. Having purified himself by bathing, he walked to the place where his father's body had been burned, strewn with ashes and burnt bones. Overcome with grief, he knelt amid them and gave way to his misery, weeping bitterly and asking his father to bless and comfort him. Then at the command of Vasishta, he and Satrugna collected the bones and threw them into the river. So ended the funeral rites of the Maharaja Dasaratha.

On the morning of the fourteenth day, when the period of mourning was over, a council was held in the durbar hall of the palace. When all the counsellors and rajas had assembled, the chief of them rose and appealed to Bharata to accept the throne. "Our venerated sovereign Dasaratha", he said, "commanded Prince Rama to go into exile and named you as his heir. We pray that you will now become our king, for it is a calamity for a land to have no ruler as is the case in Kosala to-day. Illustrious descendant of the royal house of Ikshwaku, all preparations have been made for your coronation and the people expect you to assume the royal duties. Be pleased then to cause yourself to be installed and become the protector and blessing of the kingdom."

Having walked round the jars set ready for the installation, Bharata replied : "Counsellors and rajas, it is not right for you to address me thus. It is the custom in the house of Ikshwaku that the eldest son should succeed to the throne. My elder brother Rama is your rightful sovereign and I ought

to take his place in the woods for fourteen years. I cannot accept the raj, for I have no claim to it. Let the army be ordered to prepare to accompany me to the forest whence I will bring back my brother. Taking with me all the sacrificial vessels and the sacred articles necessary for the ceremony, I will go to the jungle and there instal Rama and he shall be your raja. Let men skilful at road-making go first to explore the forest and mark out a road : let them be followed by workmen to construct a road and to make the rough places smooth."

When they heard the noble resolution of Bharata, the counsellors and all the people were filled with joy and admiration at his goodness. "May the gods", they cried, "rain blessings on you who are so loyal to your elder brother".

Tears of joy fell from Bharata's eyes and he thanked the council and dismissed it : and forthwith orders were given to prepare the road to Dandaka.

Then an army of workmen and labourers of all kinds led by guides was sent out of Ayodhya to make a great road through the jungle. The guides acted as pioneers, for they knew the best tracks through the forest where the road could be most easily constructed. With them were the men to dig the ground and the woodcutters, carpenters and grass-cutters. Then there followed the skilled engineers and road-levellers. With them went mechanics of all sorts, carpenters, wheelwrights and builders, and also cooks and confectioners to prepare the food for the workers, and sweepers to keep the camps clean. The work was done very quickly and soon a road was cut. Some hewed down the trees with axes, others with bill-hooks cut away the brushwood and high jungle weeds. Others planted trees where there was no shade ; while the engineers drained marshes and ponds, turned streams from their course and removed all obstructions. Others levelled the ground, burning down the clumps of long grass and light jungle and filled up pits and ravines. Others constructed bridges or cut a way through rocky defiles. In

The construction of the road to the jungle

places where there were rivers near at hand canals were constructed by the roadside into which the water flowed through little channels dug from the river bank. Where there were no rivers wells were dug, roofed over and surrounded with benches for tired travellers. At fixed distances houses and huts were built for the accommodation of the army at night ; for Bharata, the royal family and the ministers stately palaces were erected. When the road was finished, it was an excellent broad highway decorated for miles with banners and bordered with flowering trees, in the boughs of which the birds sang.

When the road was ready, all was life and bustle in Ayodhya. The people were pleased at Bharata's decision and the officers and soldiers were glad to march to fetch back Rama. Even the women were eager that the prince should be brought home and urged their husbands and brothers to make haste over their preparations. Quickly horses, bullock-carts and chariots were prepared ; the elephants, horses and camels were harnessed, and the wagons were loaded with quantities of provisions for the vast multitude on their journey. When all was ready, Bharata mounted his chariot and as soon as the crowd saw him the minstrels began to sing his praises and the kettledrums were sounded and the air was filled with the shrill sound of the flute and conch welcoming the prince. But Bharata ordered the music to stop saying : "I am not the Maharaja." Then he ordered the soldiers to march and, with his counsellors and the Brahmans and the three Ranis all in splendid chariots, he set forth. There were many elephants with gilded saddle-cloths and trappings of silver and thousands of archers in chariots and a great army of infantry. Crowds of the citizens followed the prince and among them went all the tradesmen and artificers needed for the daily needs of so great a host. There were potters, jewellers, garland-sellers, weavers, goldsmiths, snake-catchers, tanners, carpenters, workers in glass and ivory, doctors, tailors, dancing men and women, fishermen, wine merchants, dealers in drugs, perfumers, tent-makers, cooks, confectioners, bakers, farriers, and many hundreds

of poor Brahmans, self-controlled and contented students of the Vedas. All this mighty army of people in holiday dress in cars, on horse back, on elephants or on foot, travelled through the forest by the fine new road. This had been made for only some of the distance to the Ganges. When they reached the end of it, the journey was over rough and difficult country till they came to Sringavera, the capital of Raja Guha, ruler of the Bhil country. Then the order was given for the army to encamp on the northern bank of the river.

Now Raja Guha was living on the southern bank of the river and, when he saw the vast concourse arrive, he was alarmed. Calling his officers together, he said: "I do not know what is the meaning of the arrival of this vast army like an ocean overflowing its bounds. I cannot imagine why the foolish prince Bharata comes here. I fear that it may be from jealousy of his brother and that he intends to kill Rama. This I could not permit, for Rama is my friend. Therefore we must make preparations for battle. Order your troops to line up on the river bank here to oppose a crossing, for until I know why Bharata has come, I shall not allow him to cross. Let the stoutest men-at-arms man the river defences, and let my sailors, fully armed in their five hundred boats, await my orders. Meanwhile I will cross the river and see Bharata."

Having given these orders, Guha took servants with presents of honey, fish and meat and crossed to the northern bank. When Sumantra saw him approaching, he said to Bharata: "It is Raja Guha. He is a loyal friend of Rama and he will know where your brother is. Therefore let the Raja be admitted to your presence". Then Guha was introduced and bowing low he said: "This is a wild jungle country and the arrival of this splendid army surprises me. Still I will gladly do what I can to show you hospitality. I have roots and fruits stored and much flesh, meat and fish and all that is to be found in the forest. I invite you to stay this night on the bank here, and in the morning with

The interview
between Raja
Guha and Bharata.

all the provisions that I can supply you can cross the river."

Bharata replied : "Your kindness, Raja, is indeed great since you are anxious to entertain so many guests. Tell me by which road we can reach the hermitage of Bharadwaja. This country of yours is rough and difficult. It is covered with thickets and dense forests and on this side of the Ganges it is all marshland and flooded. The roads are full of holes, infested with snakes and covered with thorny shrubs and trees."

"To-morrow," replied Guha. "I will send trusty guides to show you the easiest road. I myself will come some way with you. But tell me, what is the reason of this great army ? Are you seeking out Rama in anger to kill him ?"

Then Bharata was amazed and said : "Raja, may the day never come when I shall cause sorrow or harm to Rama. You need have no fear. He is my elder brother and I honour him as if he were my father. I am going to find Rama and bring him back to Ayodhya. The throne is his, not mine. This army is to do him honour."

Then Guha was very pleased and said : "Great and noble prince, may the happiness that you deserve await you ! Surely among all mankind there cannot be your equal, since you wish to give up a throne which you have inherited without any treachery or scheming of your own. For this noble deed your name will be famous throughout the whole world."

Then Guha sent word to his officers to prepare boats so that the army might cross the river in the morning. - At the request of Bharata he stayed in the camp for the night, and Bharata asked him : "Where did Rama, Lakshmana and Sita stay here ? What did Rama say, what did he eat, and where did he sleep ? I am eager to know all about his visit." Then Guha told them all that had occurred when Rama halted at Sringeri and how Lakshmana kept watch all night over Rama and Sita. When Bharata, Satrugna and the Rasis heard the touching story, they all wept aloud.

When the dawn came, Guha's fleet of five hundred boats, all decorated with flags and bells and furnished with strong rowers, came across the river. On the biggest boat a pavilion of white silk like a temple in shape had been set up and on the deck were musicians. To it Guha escorted Bharata, his brother, the Ranis and the ministers. Other boats were set apart for Vasishta and the Brahmans and others for the woman attendants of the Ranis. When these had all started, the royal luggage boats were loaded.

Meanwhile there was all the noise and bustle of striking camp. The burning of the huts and shelters of the troops, the shouts of the men, the cries of syces and mahuts, the orders of officers, the splashing as elephants and horses plunged into the stream and the grunting exclamations of the sweating porters as they carried the heavy baggage to the boats, made a great uproar by the dusty river-bank. When the fleet of boats, led by that in which were the princes, had reached the opposite bank, they returned for more passengers. But even thus the numbers were so great that the boats could not take them over quick enough. Some men crossed on rafts, some astride of jars and pots, while many of the soldiers swam across. With great shouting and blows the mahuts drove their elephants into the stream and the great beasts crossed safely.

It was many hours before the whole army had crossed, and then they marched towards the hermitage of Bharadwaja at Prayaga. When they were still some distance from it, Bharata ordered the troops to halt. Then he laid aside his arms and ornaments and put on silk robes, and accompanied by Vasishta, the Brahmans and the counsellors went to pay his respects to the famous sage. At a short distance from the hermitage, the Brahmans and counsellors stopped. Bharata and Vasishta went forward alone and saluted Bharadwaja, who rose from his seat and ordered his attendants to bring the *argha* and water to wash their feet and juicy fruit for their

They reach
the hermitage
of Bharadwaja
who prepares a
great entertain-
ment for all.

refreshment. After courteous enquiries had been exchanged as to each other's welfare, Bharadwaja, alarmed at the arrival of so great a force, asked why Bharata had come, fearing that he intended to kill Rama. When he learned that Bharata was searching for his brother to bow at his feet and take him back to reign in Ayodhya, Bharadwaja was very glad. "Rama, Sita and Lakshmana," he said, "live on the slopes of the famous hill of Chitrakuta. To-morrow you can march there, but to-day be my guests, you and all your kinsmen, counsellors and soldiers." Then, at the bidding of the sage, Bharata ordered his troops and followers to come to the hermitage for a great feast. Meanwhile the sage entered the homa chamber where the sacred fire burned, and, having cleansed his mouth, he invoked Visvakarma, the architect of the gods. He prayed that Visvakarma might come to his aid and prepare all that was needed for the entertainment of his guests. He prayed also to Indra and all the gods to prepare him a splendid banquet. He prayed that the rivers might flow some with wine and sweet liquors and some with cool water sweet as the juice of sugarcane. He prayed that the gods might send the Gandharvas, the divine musicians, with all their instruments, and lovely Apsaras, nymphs of paradise, to enchant the guests. He prayed that a grove as beautiful as that of Kuvera should be planted for the feast and that the leaves of the trees should be jewels and the fruits lovely maidens. For every kind of delicious food and all sorts of intoxicating liquor he prayed and that garlands for the guests might grow on the trees.

So holy was Bharadwaja and so great was the power he had gained by his penances that his prayers were granted. Flowers fell in showers from the sky; fragrant breezes blew and strains of divine music were heard; while the lovely Apsaras danced before him. Then in a moment the country around the hermitage was changed. For many miles the jungle was changed into a level plain covered with rich soft grass. The meadow flowers were sapphires and onyxes and

The magic
banquet is set
out in the wood.

the trees that grew there were loaded with the most delicious fruits. By the will of the gods a shady forest arose on the plain through which flowed rivers some of crystal clear water cool as if it had come from the snowy peaks of the Himalayas, others of wine, fruit sherbets and divine liquors. Beneath the trees rose shelters for the guests, houses of white, each with four rooms. There were also stables for the elephants and horses, and through this forest town ran broad and level streets spanned by arches of stone. For Bharata was provided a palace white as the clouds of summer. The gates were decorated with garlands and sprinkled with perfumes: the rooms were furnished with carved couches and every kind of cushioned seat, and the floors were covered with carpets soft as velvet.

In this palace was set out a splendid feast. There were quantities of the most delicious meats and fish, fruits and vegetables and sweet-meats of every kind. Wines and liquors of exquisite flavour were stored in countless jars. The dishes were of gold and silver and on the couches were silken robes for the guests. In the central hall was a throne with the white umbrella over it and attendants standing on each side with the chamaras. Bharata would not seat himself on it, but walked round it, bowing to it in honour of Rama. From one of the attendants he took the chamara and sat in one of the seats set apart for the counsellors. Then the counsellors, the priests and the general commanding the army and all his officers took their seats in order of their rank.

First of all Vasishta and the Brahmans feasted. When they had finished, Bharata and the counsellors ate. At the command of Bharadwaja the rivers of wine flowed at the feet of Bharata; they were so clear that one could see the bed of the stream glistening white like marble. On the banks of these rivers were magic houses of great beauty enchanting to the eye. In these houses were thousands of the loveliest women adorned with gold and jewels and coral. While the princes feasted, the Gandharvas played exquisite music and

Bharata and
the counsellors
are feasted.

the Apsaras danced bewitchingly. Even from the forest trees hung musical instruments on which the soft breezes played entrancing airs : and the clusters of fruit on the trees turned into beautiful maidens who encouraged the guests to drink the delicious wines and eat the juicy meat set before them.

While Bharata and the counsellors feasted in this splendour, a lavish entertainment had been pro-

The feasting
of the army
and the people.

vided for the soldiers and their wives, the servants and followers of the army. Even the animals had not been forgotten ; the richest of fodder and grain had been provided for elephants, horses, oxen, goats and sheep. For every man there were clean garments, new shoes, mirrors, combs, and toothpicks and all the vessels necessary for washing, and scents and sandalwood powder. Each man was waited on by eight lovely girls who continually poured the liquid honey and other liquors into the drinking vessels at his side. Other maidens danced, others with garlands round their necks played and sang for the delight of the feasters. After a time the soldiers and syces became like men bewitched. They cried out : "We will not go to Dandaka, nor will we return to Ayodhya. We will stay always in this paradise. God bless Bharata for bringing us here !"

By the side of the men were wells filled with *payasa* made of milk, rice, sugar and spice : and cows stood ready to give the richest milk. There were trees dropping honey and ponds of wine bordered with sweetmeats and the choicest cakes. There were thousands of dishes of burnished metal adorned with flowers and leaves and filled with all kinds of meats, venison, peacocks, partridges, mutton and pork, each with its proper sauce, either boiled in clean pots or roasted on ivory spits. Plates and vessels were provided for all, and there were lakes of milk and curds and mountains of sugar and betel-nut. Fed by the maidens the men feasted and drank till they grew so merry that they ran about in crowds and danced, laughed and sang. Round their necks

they hung the garlands given them by the damsels and they shouted their songs till they were so drunk that they could sing no longer, and the elephant drivers could not see their elephants nor the grooms their horses.

Thus the night was spent in feasting and merriment as perfect as the night spent by Indra in his garden of Nandavana. When at last the tired revellers slept, Bharadwaja gave the order and the maidens, the dancers, the musicians, the palaces and everything disappeared as if they had been a dream. The level plain was rough jungle once more; stones and thorny scrub took the place of the luxuriant turf. At dawn all woke as if from a delightful dream. With joined hands Bharata bowed before the sage thanking him: "Great and divine sage, I and my army and even the very cattle have been entertained most generously and have lost all sense of fatigue or pain. I thank you for the lavish feast and the comfortable lodging that you provided. Now with your permission I will go to Chitrakuta and beg that you will direct me."

Then Bharadwaja showed Bharata the road and, when the army had saluted the sage, they crossed the Jumna as they had crossed the Ganges. When they reached the south bank, the troops were drawn up for the march. At the head of their companies were the captains in their shining chariots. Elephants carrying golden howdahs and decorated with flags moved forward in stately fashion at the command of their mahuts. Carts and wagons of all shapes and sizes guarded by the infantry brought up the rear. The Ranis with Kausalya at their head were conveyed in litters. Before them was carried the splendid litter of Bharata surrounded by the counsellors. When the army entered the jungle, spreading out over the land as clouds from the south in the rainy season cover the mountains, great alarm was created among the wild beasts and birds by the sight of the banners flying and by the noise. Tigers and bears, wild boars, buffaloes and antelopes fled before them into the deep

Bharata crosses the Jumna and arrives at Chitrakuta.

of the jungle. The birds rose from the trees and circled above them in screaming throngs. The army covered the country like a widespreading sea or as the clouds cover the sky in the rainy season.

After they had marched for some time Bharata, pointing ahead, said to Vasishtha: "There surely is Chitrakuta and the river that glitters in the woods around it must be the Mandakini. That forest in the distance that looks like a blue cloud grows at the base of the hill. This country is very beautiful. See how the flowering trees grow almost to the top of the mountain, carpeting the slopes with blossoms as the inky-black clouds pour their welcome rain on the parched earth in the hot season. See how the deer run before us as the scudding clouds fly before the strong autumn winds. Even the soldiers are enchanted by the beauty of this land. See how they pick the flowers to make garlands for themselves. The dense dark forest is becoming peopled like Ayodhya. Its terrors are gone. The bamboos and peepuls, blown by the wind, whisper a welcome in their rustling leaves. Shaded from the fierce sun, we can march here on the rich turf in comfort. See how the peacocks in gorgeous plumage run ahead of us, while the boughs above are alive with happy chattering birds. Chitrakuta is indeed a lovely spot, a fitting home for holy men, for it is a paradise on earth. Order the army to halt here in this pleasant shade. Then search can be made for Rama and Lakshmana."

In obedience to his command parties of soldiers explored the forest. One of them saw smoke at a distance ascending from among the trees and returned to report to Bharata. Then Bharata said to Vasishtha, "Satrughna, Sumantra, Raja Guha and I will go and see if it is Rama's home from which the smoke ascends."

When the army of Bharata was approaching Chitrakuta, Rama and Sita were wandering in the woods. "Why should we regret our banishment and our loss of the throne," Rama said, "when we have so beautiful a forest as this

Rama and Sita
wander in the
woods of Chitra-
kuta.

in which to wander? What would be more delightful than this green hill clothed with noble trees, in the branches of which birds sing all day long? Its sloping glades are filled with mild-eyed deer and every kind of bird and butterfly. It is a perfect retreat. See how bright green the grass is there where a spring of water bubbles up. See how the streams trickle down the hill-side, sometimes gurgling softly over the stones, at others rushing in a torrent over the edge of some rock and falling in a cascade of foam on the rocky ledge below. Who would not be happy in such freshness standing on the hill-side with the fragrant breezes blowing from the valley? If I had to live here all my life with you and Lakshmana, I should never be unhappy. On this hill covered with flowers and fruit, the air filled with the joyous notes of birds, I would always be happy with you, beloved. Truly has it been said by the sages that Nature never does betray the heart that loves her. In the woods one gets relief from the cares of State. The peace of the woods is as sweet as amrita. See, where the foliage parts how the rocks of the hill gleam like jewels. Purple, blue, yellow, white, they glisten on the hill-side. Here grow all the herbs needed for the sacrifice or for medicine. Some parts of the hill with their gnarled and hollowed rocks roofed in with foliage seems like the halls of palaces. In other places the turf is so smooth and the flowers so plentiful that the hill-side seems to be a natural garden. Here and there the scenery is stern and gloomy and the dense dark forest terrifies by its loneliness. Between the sunlit peak of the mountain and its woody base are all the charms of the earth. There are spots here, nooks by the banks of the streams covered with lotuses and yellow and white water lilies where the Apsaras might find delight and where the gods themselves might dwell contentedly. In its beauty and fruitfulness Chitrakuta rivals the garden of Kuvera and the home of Indra. Happy ought to be our years spent in such a spot."

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Then, descending the hill, they walked on the bank of the Mandakini, and Rama drew his wife's attention to its beauties. "See here, the river, the haunt of water-fowl, winds among its islands. They wander by the river Mandakini.

In the shallows the deer drink. See, here the water is muddied by the feet of the last herd. In this sacred stream bathe holy men with matted hair and clothing of tree fibre. With leather thong passed over their left shoulder and under the right arm, they lift their hands in prayer to the sun. Hear the music in the trees! How sweetly the leaves rustle in the wind! See how the wind has carpetted the banks of the river with the fallen blossoms. See those shallows bright with snow white and rose pink birds. Sweet wife, to wander in your company by this river is more delightful to me than living in a palace. Let us bathe in the water sanctified by the holy men who have purified themselves here. See, here is a lovely pool full of red and white lotuses. We shall grow to love this place so much that the mountain at last will seem to us to be Ayodhya, the river, the holy Sarayu, and the birds and beasts our father's subjects. Our dear and faithful brother Lakshmana adds to our happiness. Performing the duties of religion and living on honey, fruits and roots, why should I wish for the throne? Here one's body is never wearied, one's mind is always joyful in these charming woodlands filled with friendly creatures."

Farther along the river bank was a delightful dell ending in a cave, the sides of which glittered with the precious metals which abounded in the hill-side. - The dell was shaded with tall trees full of blossoms, on the boughs of which birds sang gaily. In this lovely spot Rama and Sita rested awhile, sitting on the smooth stones at the entrance of the cave. The spot was peaceful and lovely, and as they sat there they felt very happy. Full of affection, Rama clasped his wife in his arms saying: "See, Sita, that green soft vine loaded with blossom that climbs around that tree. You are the vine

Rama and Sita rest in a cave. Sita is frightened by monkeys.

and I am the tree to which you cling." They both laughed and were like happy children, forgetting the sorrow of their exile.

In the river-bed, scoured out by the mountain stream, was a red clay which, dried and powdered, made a red dye. Rama took some on his finger and made the *tilak* on the forehead of his wife, and Sita looked very beautiful with her soft skin thus adorned. Then they wandered on, and suddenly they disturbed a troop of large monkeys which fled up the trees and chattered angrily at them from the boughs. Sita was so frightened that she flung herself into the arms of Rama and buried her face in his breast. Rama soothed her and stroked her hair and told her that the monkeys would not hurt her. Soon they all clambered away to other trees; and then Sita laughed to see that she had imprinted her *tilak* mark on Rama's breast. They wandered on down the river bank and came to a grove of asoka trees. Sita was delighted to see the flowers and clapped her little hands with pleasure. The happy Rama gathered quantities of blossoms and Sita made garlands and hung one on Rama's and one on her own neck. Then she made loops of flowers for their ears and tied more flowers in their hair, and they wandered on as happy as Siva in the woods of Hima'aya with his beloved wife Parvati. At last they found their way back to the hut. There Lakshmana was waiting for them. He had been shooting and had killed some antelopes. When the meat had been dressed, Rama and Sita offered sacrifice of it to the gods and Pitris. Then Rama and Lakshmana ate, and afterwards, when they had finished, Sita took her meal.

While they were eating their meal, there was a great tumult in the forest below them. It was the approach of Bharata's army approaching and the noise that the elephants and the other wild beasts made as they fled, crashing through the trees and undergrowth at the approach of the soldiers, startled the princes and Sita. "What can

The approach
of Bharata,
Lakshmana
climbs a tree.

this uproar be?" Rama asked Lakshmana. "See! the elephants, deer, and buffaloes are running off in all directions. Perhaps some Raja is coming to hunt."

Lakshmana climbed a tree and, looking all round, saw a large army coming from the north, elephants, cars, cavalry and infantry. He called out to Rama: "An army is coming through the forest. I believe that it is the army of Bharata. He is jealous of you even in the jungle and he is coming to kill us both; so that he may reign without a rival. I see his flag on the leading chariot. Let us get ready our bows and kill him. Then all the soldiers will hail you as Yuvaraja, and you can return to Ayodhya in peace."

But the ever gentle Rama replied: "What harm has Bharata done us and what reason have we to fear him that you wish to kill him? I have promised to live here and and I have no wish to have the throne. I must keep my father's promise. Perhaps Bharata has come out of affection or perhaps he has come to surrender the raj to me. It is wrong of you to speak so cruelly of him."

Lakshmana was much ashamed and said: "Perhaps our father has come to see us." Rama knew that his brother was ashamed of his unkindness and he spoke to him kindly. "Perhaps it is our father who has come to take us home. I see the royal elephant leading the army, but I cannot see the white umbrella of the Maharaja."

Then, as has been related, the army halted, and Bharata, Satrughna, Sumantra and Guha walked towards the place where the smoke curled above the trees. Soon they came to an opening where stood the hut built of the branches of trees and roofed with palm leaves. Over the doorway hung a large golden bow and a quiver of keen-pointed arrows; beneath were hanging two sharp swords and two shields. On the side of the hut was the sacred enclosure. On the altar there the fire blazed high, and beside the altar sat Rama on an antelope's skin dressed as a devotee with his hair matted. Beside him

Rama learns
that his father
is dead

were Sita and Lakshmana. When they saw Bharata, they rose; and Bharata said to his companions: "See what my mother's ambitions have caused. Rama, attended in Ayodhya by faithful subjects, is here the companion of wild beasts. He who had hundreds of robes wears now the humble dress of bark. He whose head was once adorned with flowers and scented now wears his hair matted. He whose body was formerly perfumed with costly sandalwood is now covered with the dust of the forest. All this misery he bears because of me."

Running forward, he took Rama into his arms and clasped him close. "Brother", Rama asked, "where is our father and why have you come to this forest?" Looking at Rama with great affection, Bharata said: "Dear brother, having banished you to please my mother, our father has died of grief. I have come to ask you to accept the throne. But first you must perform the rites of water for your father. Satrughna and I have already offered water. Rama, our father loved you more than all of us. From grief for you and his longing to see you he has gone to the mansions of Indra."

The news of the death of his father overwhelmed Rama as the thunderbolt, cast by Indra, overwhelmed the Danavas. He sank to the ground like a tree cut with an axe. For some minutes he lay unconscious, while Sita and his brothers sprinkled water on him. When he recovered, he wept bitterly, saying: "What happiness can I hope for in Ayodhya again now that the best of fathers and the wisest of rulers is dead? Happy were you and Satrughna, Bharata, to be able to perform the funeral ceremonies. If I live through my exile and return, how sorrowful will be my home coming with no kind father to cheer and welcome me. Sita, you have lost a father as tender as your own father. Oh! Lakshmana, we are fatherless, fatherless! How can we bear this load of sorrow?"

For a time they all wept together. Then Lakshmana said: "Let us go to the river and there make the offering

of water." So the brothers went through the woods to the banks of the beautiful Mandakini and walking into the holy stream they sprinkled water saying: "Dhṛata, may this be thine". Filling his joined palms and turning his face towards the South, the quarter sacred to Yama, Rama said: "Raja of Rajas, may this pure clear crystal water given to you by me quench your thirst in the world of spirits." When they came out of the water, they prepared the funeral cakes, making them of the pulp of the fig tree and of such other materials as could be procured in the forest. These they put on the sacred kusa grass, saying: "Maharaja, eat, we pray you, of these cakes, for that which is food for us should be offered to you who are as our god". Then hand in hand the brothers returned to the hut.

Soon afterwards the counsellors headed by Sumantra approached the hut. When Rama saw them, he was much affected and he took each of his father's ministers in his arms and embraced him. Then Vasishtha and the Ranis came.

When Kausalya saw the funeral cakes laid on the kusa grass, she broke out into loud lamentations, saying: "See the coarse cakes that my son has prepared as his funeral offerings. How can Dasaratha, Indra's equal on earth, care to eat of the pulp of the fig tree? What humiliation he suffers, how wretched is my dear son's lot in life when he is compelled to offer such cakes to his father. Dasaratha shares in our misery, for it is truly written that the food of a man is the food of his god."

Then the Ranis wept to see Rama in such a condition. He knelt to embrace their feet and they embraced him and stroked his head. Then in the same way Lakshmana greeted them and Sita bowed before her mothers-in-law. The Ranis embraced her and grieved over the fact that her life in the jungle had made her thin. Meanwhile Rama embraced the feet of Vasishtha, as Indra embraces the feet of Vrihaspati.

Now when the night had passed, Bharata, Satrughna, the Rani, the counsellors, the Brahmins and the chiefs of the army gathered round the hut, and Bharata once more tried to persuade Rama to return. "My mother", he said, "regrets deeply what she has done.

Like a bridge swept away by a stream in flood the succession to the throne has been for a moment interrupted by the flood of her ambition. Now I give the raj back to you to whom it belongs. Forgive my mother who has wronged you and undo the harm and evil wrought by her anger and ambition. By taking the throne you will be helping our father to escape from the sin of his treatment of you. Humbly with bowed head I pray you to grant my wish. Forgive my mother and show pity to us all, as God shows pity to all his creatures. But, if you will not listen to me and refuse to leave the forest, then I shall live here also."

"Bharata", replied Rama gently but firmly, "in fulfilment of his solemn promise to your mother, our father gave you the raj and ordered me into exile. You must help the Maharaja to fulfil his promise. That is your duty. In that way you save your father from sin and you please your mother. Return now with Satrughna to Ayodhya and comfort the people, while with Sita and Lakshmana I live the forest life. You must be a ruler of men, while I shall be a ruler of wild beasts. Go back to our fair city and let me return to the wilderness of Dandaka. The white umbrella shall shade your head from the sun, while mine shall be shaded by the trees. Satrughna will devote himself to you and the faithful Lakshmana will stay by my side."

Among the Brahman followers of Vasishta there was one Javali, a famous logician in the service of the late Maharaja. He now came forward and, addressing Rama, said:—"Illustrious prince, may good fortune ever attend you. A learned prince and one who has assumed the sacred dress of a rishi cannot judge matters as a common man would."

Speech of the
Brahman logi-
cian Javali.

Having obeyed your father and come to the forest, you have already fulfilled your duty. He is now dead and his commands are no longer binding on you. It is disgraceful that you should live an idle and useless life merely because of high notions of honour and in fulfilment of a promise to a dead man. It is not proper that you should despise the raj. Bharata, to whom it was given, begs you to take it. Kaikeyi, for whose sake the great wrong was done you, regrets her cruelty and asks you to return. Accept the throne and make your people happy. It is not right that you should continue to obey your dead father. Wise men disapprove of such conduct, which is dictated by a silly idea. Your father has no right to expect you to obey him. His soul has left the body we know and now inhabits another body. How can he who inhabits another body have any claim to your obedience? A man is born alone and dies alone. His parents are like an inn in which a traveller lives for a time and then goes away. He is foolish who sets much store by a temporary home. As a traveller sleeps the night beneath a mango tree and next morning goes on his way, so the parents, the home and the property of each of us are but our wayside inn. What reason then can there be for you to give up your inheritance and its glories, to turn away from the smooth easy well-watered road to follow a jungle pathway full of sharp stones and thorns? Instal yourself as sovereign in Ayodhya. The people anxiously await you. The power and pleasure of the throne are rightfully yours. Take pleasure in your life of royal grandeur as the gods enjoy their celestial abode. Dasaratha is dead and has nothing to do with you or you with him. He is one person and you are another. A father is only an animal. We are all nothing but animals. Man is produced by his father and mother as animals are produced. We know this life, but we know nothing of the life to come. It is better therefore to take pleasure in this life and not to bother about the future. This life is the only life we have, and you act foolishly in foregoing the pleasures of a king because of a promise."

"Those who snatch at wealth and happiness in this world
 are wise men. Those who deny themselves
 here for the sake of a future which does not
 exist are sheer fools. They torture and deny
 themselves and at death are utterly des-
 troyed. It is true that men offer funeral
 cakes to their dead relatives, but this is mere waste of good
 food. How can the food be eaten by the dead ? How can
 a father eat the cakes offered by his son ? If the soul is im-
 mortal, the moment it leaves one body it must enter another.
 How can it eat the cake when it has become some one else ?
 The idea is absurd. If you argue that the cake offered to
 the dead and then given to the cows satisfies the hunger of
 the dead, then why should not a cake given to a cow after
 it had been offered to the spirit of a friend living in a distant
 country satisfy the hunger of that absent friend ? The learned
 have compiled the so-called sacred writings which order
 men to make offerings and sacrifices and by self-denial to
 win reward hereafter ; but that is all folly. There is nothing
 but this world. This is all we have and we are fools if we
 do not try to be happy while we can. Rama, be wise !
 What we can perceive by our senses, what we can taste,
 see and feel, that only is real and worthy of pursuit.
 Of material things we have the proof of our senses ; of
 spiritual things we have no proof, we know nothing.
 Follow the example of the wise and make the most of
 this life. Kings and heroes have died leaving their children
 and wives to mourn them ; but what do we know of them
 now ? Who knows whether they have become Gandharvas
 or Yakshas ? We do not know what they are or where they
 have gone. Their names and their lineage are recorded,
 and those who love their memory believe that they are
 living where they hope that they are living. The whole
 universe is in disorder, for the wicked are often happy and
 prosperous and the good are often miserable. Everything
 that exists, men, animals, birds, trees will pass away. This
 world is a mere chaos, a confusion in which the wise are tho-

Javali preaches
 the Doctrine—
 "Let us Eat and
 Drink, for To-
 morrow we Die".

who struggle to grasp as much happiness as they can. Do not waste your youth in the forest but take the throne and live your days in luxury and pleasure."

When Javali had ended his cunning speech, Rama replied angrily to him. "I think that your arguments are false and disgraceful", he said.
Rama's in-
dignant reply. "Accustomed all my life to obey my father, I could no more disobey him now than a well-trained horse will leave the road or a good wife will desert her husband. I obey my father now that he is dead just as I obeyed him while he lived. If I did otherwise, I should consider that I was sinful and unprincipled. Your cunning words affect me no more than a mountain is moved by the wind. Your subtle lies are like heady wine, tasting sweet but poisoning the blood and robbing a man of his wits. You say that this life is all we have, that if we do not snatch pleasure here we are fools, because there is no happiness after death. If that were so, why do men condemn the vicious and selfish pleasure-seeker? He should not be blamed, if that most contemptible of human weaknesses, the love of pleasure is, as you declare, a mark of wisdom. Why do the learned rishis deny themselves everything, living on roots and wild jungle fruits? If you refuse to accept any but direct proof, then a woman ought to be regarded as a widow the moment her husband goes on a journey. All that astronomy and the other sciences teach us must also be rejected, for most of their laws are based on inference. Did not Indra, the sovereign of the gods, obtain his heavenly kingdom by the performance of a hundred sacrifices? Kusika, the son of Atri, is another proof. He and other famous sages have won glory and power by offering sacrifices and by mortification of the flesh, which you say are useless. Even if your arguments were not as false and worthless as I believe them to be, I should still obey my father, though he is dead. The throne was given by him to Bharata. Let my brother govern the kingdom in accordance with the command of our father."

When the counsellors, officers and people heard Rama speak thus, they were filled with admiration for his obedience to the will of his father. Then, as it was late in the day, the meeting came to an end and all those present returned to their quarters.

On the morrow Bharata and his counsellors once more approached Rama and begged him to accept the raj. "Javali", replied Rama, "praises both the good man and the bad man, the pure and the impure, the noble-hearted and the self-seeker. According to him there is no difference between virtue and vice except that the virtuous man is a fool and is wasting his time in trying to be virtuous. He confuses right and wrong; he declares that anything is right that gives you worldly enjoyment. If I were deceived by his false argument and confused good and evil, I should be despised and condemned by all, and by my example I should corrupt the whole kingdom. A people always follow the example of their ruler and my subjects would have no rule but their passions. Truthfulness and mercy are the eternal duties of a king; by his example he leads all his subjects on the path of virtue and truth. The truthful man is dear to the gods and respected by the rishis: his fame spreads throughout the whole world. I regret, Javali, that my father showed favour to a man of such a low mind, an atheist who in denying god has lost all sympathy with virtue. To my mind an atheist like you is no better than a thief; but you are worse, for you deny god altogether. No virtuous raja who desires the good of his subjects will permit an atheist to remain in his presence. The Brahmans, living lives of devotion in contemplation of the joys of heaven, offer peace offerings and burnt sacrifice. The sages who are loved and revered by all men are those who are good themselves and eager to reach goodness, who are charitable and kind to all who do no man wrong and live in self-denial and prayer."

Convinced by the earnest eloquence of Rama, Javali said: "At heart I am no atheist. I have only adopted the

arguments of the godless in my anxiety to persuade you to accept the throne. Pardon me. All that you have said is true."

Then Vasishtha tried to persuade Rama. "Javali has employed on purpose", he said, "the arguments of the selfish man of the world. He has believed that any weapons ought to be used to break down your resolution. You are the eldest son of Dasaratha and heir to the throne. Have mercy on your subjects then and accept the raj. It is right that you should listen to our appeal. In the house of Ikshwaku the eldest son always succeeds: a younger son cannot be anointed raja while the elder lives. You do wrong to break this ancient custom. There are three persons whom every man ought to obey, his father, his mother and his teacher. A father creates, a mother nourishes, but a teacher instructs. He then is entitled to implicit obedience. I was your father's teacher and now I am yours. If you obey me, you need have no fear that you will be breaking the Sastras. Then there is your mother. It is right for you to obey her. You cannot do wrong by obeying her; nor in listening to the request of Bharata will you act untruthfully or unjustly."

"The debt of a child to his parents", replied Rama, "can never be paid in full. The tenderness of a father and mother in rearing a child, in clothing, feeding and guarding it from all harm, in educating it and teaching it good, can never be repaid. Of the parents the father is the greater. Therefore a son must obey his father always."

When Bharata heard his brother's words, he was in despair and said to Sumantra: "Spread at once kusa grass on this spot. I will sit at the door of Rama's hut till he will listen to me. As a Brahman, robbed of his money, lies before the door of his debtor without food or water, so I will sit here until Rama is willing to return with me to Ayodhya."

Vasishtha's effort to persuade Rama.

Bharata threatens to sit in 'dharna' on Rama.

Then Rama rebuked his brother, saying : "Tell me what evil am I doing, what wrong have you suffered at my hands, that you threaten to sit in *dharna* against me. It is just and right for Brahmans to sit in *dharna* against debtors ; but it is not according to the law for one prince to threaten another prince in this way. Recall this unjust order and return at once to Ayodhya."

Turning to his counsellors, officers and all assembled there, Bharata said : "You are the people of Kosala. Why do you not beseech Rama to return ?" Then the spokesmen of the people said : "We understand how Rama feels and we sympathise with your appeal. But Rama is here to fulfil his father's word. This is so sacred a duty that we cannot hastily interfere in the case of a son so engaged."

"Rise, dear brother", Rama said to Bharata, "and touch me and also touch water that you may be purified of the guilt of sitting down to starve out your brother."

Then Bharata rose and touched water and said : "Counsellors, ministers and people, I do not wish for the throne, nor did I ask my mother to get it for me, nor was I the cause of Rama's exile. If any of his sons must fulfil my father's word and reside for fourteen years in the forest, let me be the chosen one." But Rama said : "Whatever contracts were made by my father while alive, whether by sale, purchase or pledge, cannot be varied by me or Bharata. In the same way my father's promise can only be fulfilled in the way he gave it. No one can take my place in the forest and I do not wish that any one should. What my father ordered was right. I am grateful to you, Bharata, for your generosity in resigning the raj and your devotion to me touches me much. All I can say is that when my term of exile is completed, I will return and rule the kingdom with your help. Then my father's promise to Kaikeyi will have been faithfully fulfilled."

When the Brahmins and counsellors heard these noble words, they were full of admiration and said to Bharata : "Out of respect for your father's memory, you must obey your brother. All those who love your father must wish that his memory should be freed of all debt. He has died through grief at losing Rama and it is necessary that all his promises should be faithfully kept."

Then Bharata took a pair of new shoes adorned with gold and, turning to Rama, he said : "Put these on for a minute. By their means everything can be settled." Rama put on the shoes and then, taking them off, handed them back to Bharata who, bowing low before them, said : "As long as you live in the forest, I will wear my hair matted, dress like a rishi and live on fruits and roots. Until you return I will live outside the city and govern the land for you through your shoes. If you do not return within five days of the completion of the fourteenth year, I shall enter the fire."

Then Rama embraced his brothers and bowed at the feet of the Rānis and Vasishtha and bade them all farewell. The army started to march back to Kosala and Bharata, putting the shoes on his head, mounted his chariot with Satrugna, preceded by Vasishtha and all his counsellors. After once more visiting Bharadwaja, they all returned to Ayodhya. The people had hoped that Rama would return with his brother. When they saw Bharata entering the city alone, they were disappointed and gloomy ; silent crowds watched the procession. The bright happy days of Ayodhya seemed to have ended. The people were listless and depressed and the busy life of the bazaars seemed diminished. In these days of gloom the city was like a stream that has been dried up by the burning heat, or the smokeless quivering flame of a sacrificial fire when the sacrifices have been consumed, or the ocean when the roar of the waves has been hushed by

Bharata declares that he will rule the land through the shoes Rama has worn.

Bharata returns to Ayodhya and retires to Nandigrama as a rishi.

a calm, or a necklace stripped of its precious stones, or a climbing plant, once loaded with flowers and buzzed round by bees, when scorched up in a jungle fire, or a bowstring that drops from the bow when cut with a swifter arrow, or the clear light of the sun when obscured by a dark cloud in the rainy season.

When Bharata arrived at the palace he said : "I will now go to Nandigrama and will live there till Rama returns." All approved of this resolution and forthwith he set out for Nandigrama. When he arrived there, he said to his attendants. "Bring the State umbrella and place it over these shoes, for by them is justice established in the kingdom." Thus honouring Rama the forlorn Bharata governed through the shoes at Nandigrama. Assuming the dress of a rishi and having his hair matted, faithfully he kept his word, holding the umbrella over the shoes at durbar, while Satrughna fanned them with the chamara. All the affairs of the country were transacted under the authority of the shoes. All the tributes from chiefs and all the presents brought were laid first before the shoes and were then disposed of as was necessary for the good of the State.

In the neighbourhood of Chitrakuta lived many sages.

Rama leaves
Chitrakuta. He
visits the her-
mitage of Atri.

These holy men were much troubled by rakshasas. Soon after Bharata had returned to Ayodhya, one of them came to Rama and told him that they all intended to go away. "These rakshasas feed on human flesh", he said, "and can at will change their form. Their leader in this district is Khara, younger brother of their great Raja Ravana who holds his court at Lanka. Khara is a great fighter, fearless and cruel and a cannibal who has no respect for age or sex. These vile rakshasas terrify us by their hideous appearance, annoy us by throwing unclean things at us and in other ways continually molest us. During the time of sacrifice they play tricks on us, throwing the sacred implements about and polluting the offerings with blood. Themselves wretches without faith, they shriek in the cl...

of the Brahmans at their devotions, scatter the kusa grass and the flowers and in all ways spoil the sacrifice. We are so pestered by these fiends that we are going away to a forest abounding in fruit. We think that, when you are alone, Khara will attack you. It will be well that you should move elsewhere."

Then the sages left Chitrakuta and after a time Rama decided to go away also. He, Sita and Lakshmana travelled towards the south till they reached the hermitage of Atri. The sage and his devout wife Anasuya received them kindly. The gentle and aged Anasuya was very tender to Sita and praised her for her devotion in following her husband into exile. "The wife", she said, "who loves her husband whether he is in a palace or in the jungle, whether he be rich or poor, will gain a great reward hereafter. A good woman regards her husband as her god as well as her greatest friend. For the unfaithful woman and for her who is disobedient, arrogant, and tries to rule her husband, there is nothing but dishonour in this world and punishment in the next." "I know," Sita replied, "that a wife must worship her husband, however wicked or poor he be. My mother taught me that 'a woman has no greater religious duty than that of honouring her husband'. How much more then ought she to revere him when, as in my case, the husband is kind, unselfish and noble-hearted?"

Anasuya was very pleased with Sita's words. She kissed her head and said: "I give you my blessing, my child. Learn from me the secret of perpetual beauty, namely, piety and faith in your husband." At Anasuya's request Sita told her of her birth and marriage and, when sunset came, the old lady said: "The star-spangled night has come; the birds are flocking to their roosting places in the trees; the rishis in wet garments are returning from their bath; from the altar rises the soft blue smoke of the sacrifice; the green leaves are turning black in the twilight and in the jungle are heard the cries of the wild beasts prowling in search of food. Go now and attend to Rama's food."

On the morrow Atri and the other sages told the princes that the forest was infested by rakshasas and wild beasts of whom the devotees were much afraid. They begged them to destroy them. Rama promised to do so, and, armed with their bows, he and Lakshmana, taking Sita with them, entered the great forest of Dandaka. After walking for some time they came to a group of huts inhabited by Brahmins. The courtyard of each was clean and neat and deer wandered around the huts and birds fluttered down for the grain. The settlement was surrounded by fine trees growing in groves and bearing delicious fruits. The wood was filled with flowers. Here and there the trees parted to encircle pools covered with lotuses and water-lilies. The Brahmins welcomed the three and brought them water and fruit and flowers. At the hermitage the princes and Sita stayed the night. At sunrise they bade the rishis farewell and went into the densest part of the forest which was full of large deer, bears and other wild animals. Here and there the foliage opened out into glades where there were lakes covered with ducks and many kinds of waterfowl. In the forest trees the monkeys chattered unendingly and birds filled the air with their sweet songs.

When they had walked some way in the dense wood they came to the lair of Viradha, one of the fiercest of the man-eating rakshasas. He was sitting at the mouth of a cave on a tiger's skin. His hideous face was smeared with blood and raw fat, and he was constantly howling like a wild beast. His body was huge and his arms were long and hairy ; his stomach protruded ; his eyes were deep-set and glowed red like fire ; and his cavernous mouth was armed with great yellow pointed teeth. Before his den were the carcasses of tigers, wolves and deer and a huge elephant's head spitted on iron spikes. When Viradha saw the princes and Sita, he jumped up and ran towards them. Seizing Sita in his arms, he cried out : "What are you doing here, you dwarf,

The Forest of
Dandaka.

Fight with
the rakshasas
Viradha.

clad like rishis, yet carrying bows and arrows? I am Viradha, son of Kala, the rakshasa lord of this forest of Dandaka. When I am hungry, I eat the sages who live in the forest. Ah! ha! I have a tender morsel in this woman. I shall enjoy my meal. But tell me who you are and where you are going."

"We are brothers, Kshatriyas", Rama replied, "and we have come to live in the forest".

Then the rakshasa was very angry. "No one can live here", he said, "without my permission. I am lord of the forest and because of my many prayers and penances in the past, Brahma has given me a boon, namely, that I cannot be killed by mortal weapons. It is therefore useless for you to try to fight me. I shall not eat this beautiful woman. She shall be my wife, and you two must go away or I will kill you and drink your blood."

Hearing these dreadful words, Sita screamed piteously. Mad with rage and indignation, Rama cried out: "See, Lakshmana, what misery Kaikeyi's ambitions have inflicted on us. Neither the death of my father nor the loss of the throne is such agony to me as to see Sita in the clutches of this hideous wretch."

"Quick!" Lakshmana cried; "we must rescue her. Do not waste time in lamentation, but let us kill the fiend." Then, taking arrows from his quiver and shouting defiance at Viradha, he fired seven shafts at him with so deadly an aim that the rakshasa, streaming with blood, released Sita and fell on the ground moaning. But only for a moment he lay there. Then he sprang up and hurled a javelin at Lakshmana. But the prince received it on his stout shield and it fell harmless to the earth. Brandishing a huge spear, Viradha now advanced. The princes fired a shower of arrows; but, though they wounded the rakshasa, no mortal weapon could kill him. Before the princes could draw their swords, Viradha struck at them with his mighty spear. Warding off the blows with their shields, they dragged their swords from their sheaths and together they rushed at Viradha,

hacking at him with all their might. The blood streamed from his wounds and the furious rakshasa seized Rama and Lakshmana one in each hand and threw them over his shoulders as if they had been children. Then, uttering a yell of rage, he fled back to his lair. Jumping up, the brothers ran after Viradha and Rama struck off one arm and Lakshmana the other, and weak with loss of blood the rakshasa fell down. Then Rama and Lakshmana beat him with their fists and kicked him. Lifting him up, they dashed him to the ground again and again till they were tired, but they could not kill him. Then Rama said : "This creature, because of his past devotions, cannot be killed by us. Let us bury him alive." Lakshmana wished to burn him, but Rama said : "No, let us bury him". So they dug a deep pit by Viradha's side and, when it was deep enough, they rolled Viradha's bleeding body into it and threw earth over it till the rakshasa was suffocated.

For a time the forest echoed with the yells of the dying ogre. But, when at last Viradha was dead, there arose from the grave a form of angelic beauty. This being was carried up to heaven. As he ascended with joined hands, he spoke to Rama : "By the blessing of the gods may you have happiness and success in this world into which you have been born for the good of mankind. In my rakshasa form I knew who you were. I abused you and attacked you that you might grow angry and kill me. I am a Gandharva named Kosharee and I used to sing in the court of Kuvera. One day he became angry with me and cursed me, saying : "Go to the earth and become a rakshasa in the forest of Dandaka. You must live there till the Lord Vishnu in his incarnation as Prince Rama of the royal house of Ikshwaku kills you, when you will resume your proper form. I thank you for liberating me and I return to my master Kuvera."

The sage
Sarabhangha
burns himself
to death.

When Viradha had thus ascended, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita wandered on till they came to the hermitage of the great sage Sarabhangha. As they approached it they saw a wonderful sight. In a chariot bright as the sun and drawn by a team of shining horses Indra passed through the sky followed by all the gods. His garments were glowing and his ornaments shone like the sun. Over his head was a golden umbrella and on each side of him stood a lovely Apsara fanning him with a golden chamara. Indra came to visit Sarabhangha. The princes and Sita were lost in wonder at the glowing car and the divine steeds and the attendants of Indra. These were fierce young warriors of twenty-five years of age, broad-chested and strong-armed. They carried swords of burnished steel, were dressed in robes the colour of topaz and were adorned with jewelled ear-rings and necklaces of gold.

When Indra left the hermitage, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita approached Sarabhangha and kissed his feet. The sage made them welcome and gave them food. Rama enquired why Indra had come and Sarabhangha said: "He came to take me to Brahma's heaven. But knowing, beloved guest, that you were not far off, I would not go to heaven till I had seen you. Having seen you, I will now depart. To you I give all the powers and merits that I have gained by penance and prayer."

"Great Sage," said Rama. "I am grateful, but I return to you all the powers that you have acquired. Depart now in peace; but first tell me where I can live."

"There is," Sarabhangha replied, "a sage Sutikshna in this forest. He will tell you where you should go. Now I will cast off this body of mine as a snake sloughs its skin." Then he prepared a funeral pile and poured ghee on it. When the flames blazed high, he entered the fire and was entirely consumed skin, hair, flesh and bone. When the body was ash, from the clear flame there rose a youth beautiful as the God of Love, and in this form Sarabhangha went to heaven.

When Sarabhanga had ascended to heaven, all the sages and sanyasis of the neighbourhood came to

All the Sanyasis come to Rama and ask for protection against the rakshasas. Rama and, bowing low, greeted him. There were men who observed a vow of poverty and had no belongings. There were those who lived on raw food and those who lived only on leaves. There were those who stood

in water up to their necks, those who slept on the bare ground, those who did not sleep at all, those who stood always on one leg and those who spent all their life repeating the Vedas. Others among these rishis worshipped the gods with fire surrounding them and with their heads exposed to the mid-day sun. Some only ate during four months in the year; some hung by their heels from the branches of trees like bats; some starved themselves and some stood on their heads or only on the point of one of their great toes. These men hailed Rama as their protector and lord. "Mighty son of the house of Ikshwaku", they said, "the raja who takes a sixth of the harvest, yet does not protect his people is an unjust man. The king who does not care for his subjects as he would care for his own life or for the lives of his children is hated by all men. The raja who governs justly and who punishes the wrong-doer becomes famous and is loved by all. You are our raja and we appeal to you to protect us from the rakshasas. The sages who lived near the Pampa river, those on the banks of the Mandakini and those in the woods around Chitrakuta have been eaten by the rakshasas. We live in daily fear. Protect us from these demons".

"It is not proper," Rama replied, "that you should make appeals to me who am your servant and proud to obey you. I have come to the forest at my father's command to fulfil his word and to stop the persecutions of these rakshasas". Having promised to make war against the demons, Rama started out for the hermitage of Sutikshna.

After walking a long way and crossing many rivers, they reached Sutekshna's hermitage. The sage was covered with dust and his hair was matted. He had starved so much that his body was mere skin and bone. Sutekshna embraced Rama and made him welcome. He told him to make his home there, that he himself had only waited to ascend to heaven till Rama arrived, and that the hermitage was now his. So Rama decided to live there while he made war against the rakshasas. The next day at dawn he, Lakshmana and Sita went to visit the other hermitages in the neighbourhood. Sita did not wish Rama to fight the rakshasas and, as they walked, she reproached him for having promised to make war against them. "Beloved lord", she said, "even the best men may sometimes mistake wrong for right. He is wise who conquers the first wrong impulse. You are truthful and lead a pure and noble life; but you have allowed the vice of anger to take possession of your heart. You came to the forest as a devotee; but now you have promised to kill the rakshasas. I do not think it is right that you should do this. When the bow of the Kshatriya and the sacrificial fire of the Brahman are allied, their power and pride rapidly increase. A devotee should not be proud but live a humble unselfish life. If you tell me that it is the duty of a Kshatriya to punish the wicked and protect the good and the oppressed, I answer that that is the duty of a Kshatriya who is a raja, not of one who is a devotee. When you have returned to Ayodhya and recovered the throne, draw your bow then against the rakshasas. While you are a devotee, you ought not to wish to injure any creature. There was once a rishi who prayed so much and became so holy that Indra was jealous. He visited the sage in the form of a warrior and entrusted to him a very wonderful sword. The rishi was so afraid of losing the precious weapon that he carried it about with him always. At last the temptation to use so fine a weapon was too strong for him, and he ceased to pray and meditate and

could think only of war and the glories of a soldier's life. Thus his devotions in the past were all wasted and he died unhappy and disgraced. These rakshasas have not harmed you, yet you seek to kill them. I am sure that this is not right. In this forest of Dandaka you ought to spend your life in prayer and in performing the duties of a rishi. Happiness never comes from a selfish pride in one's power. Beloved, forgive my boldness. I am only a woman and I do not understand the rules of duty as you do."

"Dear wife, your advice is good and is given to me because you love me; but I cannot listen to it. You agree that a Kshatriya must carry a bow that all those in distress may not call on him for help in vain. These sages are persecuted by cruel rakshasas and they have sought my protection. How can I be deaf to their appeal when I have strength to protect them? I can surrender my life or even you and Lakshmana, but I cannot break my word. I have promised these Brahmins that I will protect them and I must do so. You have spoken from affection. I am pleased, not angry at your frankness. Your advice is a proof of your love and your words are noble and make me love you more."

Having spoken thus, Rama took up his weapons and went into the jungle followed by Sita. Behind her walked Lakshmana also armed. They wandered on the slopes of mountains, crossed many rivers and saw many lakes covered with lotuses and crowded with waterfowl. In the jungle they met deer, buffaloes, hogs and elephants. From hermitage to hermitage they went. In one they lived two months, in another a year, in a third four or five months, in a fourth a fortnight. Thus ten years of exile passed away and the princes and Sita lived happily in the woods with the sages, protecting them from the rakshasas with whom Rama and Lakshmana had many fights. At the end of ten years they returned to the hermitage of the sage Sutikshna. After a time they started out again to visit the sage Agastya close to the Vindhya

Ten years
are spent in
visits to the
various hermit-
ages of the
sages.

mountains. They walked through the forest to the southward and after a long journey arrived at the hermitage of the brother of Agastya. It stood in a clump of trees loaded with fruit and flowers. The air was filled with the acrid scent of the pepper trees. At the door of the hermitage were bundles of wood and kusa grass heaped up ready for the sacrifice. From the altar the black resinous smoke rose in a murky column, the leaves of the trees around being blackened and greasy with the smoke of the homa. At one time this lovely glade had been the haunt of two cruel rakshasas, Vatapi and Ilwala, who had destroyed many Brahmans until by the divine fire of his anger Agastya had consumed them. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana spent the night at the hermitage. The next morning they walked on through the forest bright with flowers and musical with the songs of birds. Here and there they disturbed elephants feeding on the new leaves of the trees. In the boughs monkeys chattered and played, leaping from tree to tree. It was a pleasant journey and they were scarcely tired when at last they saw the hermitage in a lovely glade. "See, Lakshmana", said Rama, pointing to it, "there is the home of the sage whose holiness is so great that he has been able to perform many miracles and whose aid even the gods sought against the Danavas. In this beautiful spot let us spend the rest of the period of exile with this most holy man. Go into the house and tell the sage that we have arrived."

When Agastya heard that Rama had come, he said to his disciples: "Long have I desired to see Rama. Blessed am I that he has come. Bring him and his wife and brother to me." Then, surrounded by his disciples, in his deer skin and with hair matted, Agastya welcomed his guests. Rama kissed his feet and Agastya kissed the prince's head. When he had welcomed Sita and Lakshmana, he told his followers to prepare food, to offer some on the altar and then give the remainder to Rama. "He must eat according to the rules of the Vanaprasthas," said the sage, "for Rama is our Lord

Vishnu, Raja of the world, the lord of all, who comes among us on earth in the form of a great and noble-hearted warrior. To him all honour must be paid. Beloved guest, enter your servant's home. You are the refuge and lord of all. I worship you as lord of the universe."

After Rama, Sita and Lakshmana had eaten and were refreshed, Agastya sent his attendants to fetch presents for Rama. First, he gave him a bow that had been used by Vishnu and two quivers of arrows that were never empty. "Accept this bow, Rama," he said, "the work of Visvakarma, adorned with gold and diamonds and these two quivers which are always full. With these weapons Vishnu slew many Asuras and won great honour among the gods. Here also is a golden-hilted sword with blade so sharp that nothing can resist it. Here also is armour, a coat of mail given to me by Indra. With these weapons and clad in this armour you can conquer the world."

Then Agastya told Rama how glad he was to see him and how pleased he was that he had brought Sita and Lakshmana. "You are all tired with the walk here. You must rest here a while. Sita is very weary. A princess accustomed to palace life, she has come to live in the forest and has had the courage to face all the hardships of the jungle life out of love for her husband. How different she is from most women. They fawn on a husband while he is prosperous and desert him when he is poor. No wise man relies on them; for their moods change as quickly as the lightning flashes, their tongues are as sharp as the keenest knife, their affection dies out as quickly as it is given, they are as fickle as the winds and sea; and their kisses are deadly poison to a man's life. From all this evil nature Sita is free. Happy are you, Rama, to have so true and noble a wife."

Agastya gives
Rama a magical
bow, arrows,
armour and a
scimitar.

Rama told Agastya that he wished to live near him, and the sage said: "At a short distance from here on the bank of the Godavery is a place called Panchavati. It is a lovely spot shaded with trees loaded with fruit and flowers, and the great river provides pure water pleasantly cool in the hot season." So Rama, Sita and Lakshmana bade Agastya farewell and started out for Panchavati. As they walked they saw an immense vulture on the road in front of them. When they were near him, he said to Rama: "I know who you are. You are the sons of Dasaratha. I knew him and guarded him. I am Jatayus and my father is Garuda and my eldest brother is Sanapati. I wish to help you and protect you from the dangers of the jungle. When you and Lakshmana are away, I will guard Sita." Rama thanked Jatayus and Sita and Lakshmana welcomed his help and they all went on together to Panchavati. When they arrived there, they chose a lovely shaded spot near the river bank. Behind it was a lake bright with lilies and far in the distance were the misty blue shapes of the Vindhya mountains covered with foliage, the home of peacocks and other beautiful birds. Here they set to work to build a hut. First they made a floor of earth a foot or two high. Then they set up stout bamboo posts and made walls of bamboo lattice work weaving them closely like screens. On these walls they plastered earth and on the roof they fastened branches of bamboos and other trees and tied them together with strong withies. Then they put on a thatch of leaves and grass. Inside, the house was divided into four rooms. When their home was finished, the princes went to the Godavery and bathed. Then they gathered water lilies from the stream and some of the fruits that grew on the trees and they made offerings to the God of dwellings, praying that their new home might be blessed and that they might live there happily. Then they entered their new home and there they lived in peace and contentment till more than thirteen years of the period of exile had passed.

The thirteenth year had passed, and once more the cold season had begun. At dawn when the princes went to bathe in the Godavery it was so cold that Lakshmana almost dropped the lota from his shivering hand. He did not like the cold as much as Rama did and he was inclined to grumble,

The cold season in India is described by Lakshmana.

"The cold season that you like so much has come again," he said to his brother, "when the farmer reaps the harvest of his toil; the crowning season of the year when the earth yields her fruits. Men are stiff with cold, but the fields are golden with crops. Men fear to bathe in the icy water, while they huddle gladly round the fire. It is the time when offerings of new corn are made to the Gods and ancestors, when the bazaars of cities are filled with corn and fruit and all the good things of the earth. Now is the season when warlike Rajas march out to battle. The mountains are covered with snow. The weather at midday is delightful and men and animals like to sit in the sunshine and warm themselves gratefully. At this season the sun's heat is mild and pleasant; the days are short and cool; the forest trees are stripped of their leaves and on the mountains snow falls. At night men cannot sleep in the open, for there are frosts which whiten the hard ground. The west wind brings the frost and blows bitterly in the early morning. When the sun rises, the fields of barley and wheat are shrouded with mist which hangs also in low clouds over the rice fields in which paddy birds and cranes are already busy feeding. In the rice fields the cattle drink with their eyes half-shut through fear of the sharp blades of the corn. Through the thick morning mist the sun looks like the moon on a rainy night with a halo round it. For the first few hours it gives little heat, but at midday it shines with a comforting warmth. At dawn the wild elephant, putting his trunk into the water to drink, draws it back quickly because of the cold. The waterfowl on the banks of the lake fear to plunge into the icy water. Over the rivers hangs a thick fog through which

come the cries of the cranes standing on the wet sand at the water-edge. For hours after dark from the branches of the trees hang drops of dew sparkling like jewels in the sunshine which is not hot enough to dry them up. If we are cold here, Bharata is cold also in Ayodhya. Full of grief for you, he denies himself the comfort of palace life. Having refused the throne and the pleasures of a king, he lives in the woods like a rishi on fruit and roots. At this hour he must be going to bathe in the Sarayu. He also will face bravely the bitter cold of the river water and pray in the woods for your return. It is strange that Bharata should be so gentle and devoted to you. Men, they say, often obey their mothers rather than their fathers; but Bharata does not. Why is Kaikeyi, whose husband was so good and whose son is so good, so cruel?"

But Rama reproved him. "It is not right," he said, "for you to speak unkindly of our middle mother. You do right to praise Bharata, for no brother could have been more tender and loving. But I could not listen to him, for I was resolved to live in the jungle for the fixed time and so fulfil my father's word. Happy will be the day when we can once more see Bharata and Satrugna."

Talking thus, the princes reached the river and bathed and afterwards made their usual offerings to the Gods. Thus their life passed in the wilderness of Dandaka. For a time Jatayus the vulture stayed with them; but after a while it went away to its mountain home promising to return soon.

One day a rakshasi came to the hermitage. This was Surpanakha, sister of the great Ravana, King of Lanka, and of the rakshasa chiefs Khara and Dushana who had been appointed by Ravana to rule all the country of Dandaka.

Now Surpanakha had a cruel and wicked nature and she was very ugly. She was squint-eyed, her hair was coarse and red, her body was bony and deformed, and her voice was like the scream of a bird of prey. At the door of the hut sat Rama and he looked very noble and

Surpanakha,
the sister of
Ravana, falls in
love with Rama.

handsome, though he wore only deer skins and his soft hair was matted. Surpanakha thought that she had never seen anyone so beautiful before and she fell in love with him at once. But she knew that Rama would turn from her in disgust if he saw her as she really was. She had the power to transform herself into any shape she pleased ; so, as she approached the hermitage, she made herself into a most lovely girl, her glossy hair ornamented with flowers and with gold bangles tinkling around her slender ankles and wrists. Then, approaching Rama, she asked him why he had come with his wife to the rakshasa-haunted forest "I see that you are armed," she said, "so perhaps the rishis who live on the banks of the Godavery have asked you to come here and defend them."

"I am the son of the Maharaja Dasaratha and my name is Rama. Over there are my wife Sita and my brother Lakshmana. At the command of my father I have come to the woods to live in exile for fourteen years. And what are you, lovely maiden, doing in these thick woods?"

"I am a rakshasi and my name is Surpanakha. I can assume any form I choose. My brother is Ravana, King of Lanka, and I have four other brothers, Vibhishana the Virtuous, Kumbhakarna the Sleepy, Khara and Dushana. Directly I saw you, I wished to have you as my husband. I can go where I please, travelling as quick as thought. Come with me and we will always be happy and wander where we will."

Rama looked at Sita to tell her not to be frightened, for he knew that in a few minutes Surpanakha would change into her real form and in her jealous anger perhaps try to seize and eat Sita. Then speaking very gently, he said with a smile. "Beautiful maid, I am grateful to you for your kindness ; but, as you see, I am already married and you would be angry if you had to be the lesser wife. But there is my brother Lakshmana, handsome and young. He is a suitable husband for you."

Surpanakha
tries to eat Sita
and is wounded
by Lakshmana.

Turning from Rama, the Rakshasi walked from the hut door to where Lakshmana was sitting. "Beautiful youth," she said, "your brother tells me that you will become my husband and live happily with me in the forest. Come with me, for I feel love for you and desire to marry you." "Lovely maid," Lakshmana said, "you cannot want a slave like me as your husband. I am the slave of my brother. He is handsome, strong and a great warrior. You must marry him, and he will love you so much that he will desert his present wife."

Surpanakha really thought that Lakshmana was serious and, going back to where Rama still sat, she cried: "You must come away with me. Never mind this wife of yours." When for answer Rama only smiled, Surpanakha suddenly said, "If you prefer Sita to me, I will eat her before your eyes; then I shall have no rival." Saying this, she rushed at the terrified Sita with a dreadful scream of rage, her eyes blazing with hate like burning coals. Rama sprang up, crying to Lakshmana: "It is never wise to jest with anyone who is cruel and wicked. Defend Sita from this fiend." Snatching up his sword that lay on the grass at his side, Lakshmana rushed at Surpanakha and with quick blows cut off first her nose and then her ears. Thus disfigured and with the blood streaming down her face, the rakshasi fled back into the wood from which she had come. Re-assuming her demon shape but still disfigured and bleeding, Surpanakha returned to the palace of her brother Khara who was surrounded by many rakshasas.

When Khara saw his sister bleeding and disfigured he was very angry. "Tell me", he said, who has dared to wound you? Who is there among men who is so reckless as to play with a venomous serpent? What foul has fastened the rope of death round his neck? I cannot believe that any man has had the courage thus to provoke me. Surely this outrage must have been committed by one of the gods or

Khara sends fourteen rakshasas to bring Rama, Sita and Lakshmana to him.

great sages. Whoever it be, even it be Indra himself, I will take a dreadful vengeance for this. I will drink their blood as a crane drinks milk. None can resist me in my wrath."

"It is no god or sage who has thus disfigured me", replied his sister. "In the forest of Dandaka live two brothers Rama and Lakshmana. They are young and beautiful. They are broad-shouldered and strong with fine eyes and complexions like the sun for glory. I cannot say whether they are Devatas or Danavas; but they claim to be of royal birth. They are dressed like the rishis in deer skins and feed on the forest products. With them is a beautiful young woman. I long to drink the frothing blood of her and the two brothers."

When he heard this, Khara called fourteen of the strongest of the rakshasas and gave them orders to go to the forest of Dandaka and seize Rama, Lakshmana and Sita and bring them to him instantly. Guided by the furious Surpanakha, the fourteen soon reached the hermitage; but by that time Rama and Lakshmana had armed themselves. Like dark clouds driven onward by the wind, the rakshasas flew at the hut; but Rama met them with a rain of arrows bright as the sun and fledged with golden feathers. Their hearts were pierced and they fell down dead. They were as powerless against the weapons of Rama as an elephant is in a forest fire.

When she saw her brothers's warriors lying dead, Surpanakha gave a yell of rage and fled back to Khara. Hearing that his men had been killed. Khara's rage was terrible. "Do not weep, my sister. You shall be terribly avenged," he cried. "This day I will send these insolent men to their doom. They shall enter the gloomy realms of Yama. You shall drink their frothing blood." Then, calling his brother Dushana, he said: "Gather our armies together. Summon to my banner the fourteen thousand rakshasas who are as fierce as tigers and as dark as the ink-black thunder clouds. Order my chariot to be

The rakshasa
army marches
to attack Rama.

prepared and send me my bows, arrows, sword, spears and iron club. I will lead the children of *Ulastya* against these reckless men and kill them without mercy."

Then four horses white as the moon's light were harnessed to the car of Khara which was as bright as the snow on the top of Meru with the sun shining on it. It was a vast chariot as large as a house, sparkling with gold and jewels, decked with banners and hung with a hundred bells. Its sides were painted with pictures of fishes, flowers, trees, rocks, birds and stars. Khara and Dushana mounted this car and the noise of the mighty army that followed was like the sound of a stormy ocean.

As the army marched towards Dandaka dreadful omens were seen on all sides. From a cloud the colour of an ass, blood rained on the rakshasas. The white horses of Khara's chariot stopped of their own accord, then stumbled and fell. A huge vulture perched on the golden standard of Khara's chariot. Birds of prey, wolves and jackals screamed and howled around them. The sky was blood red and a sceptre without a head appeared near the sun. A violent wind blew and the dust arose in great clouds shutting out the sun's light. The trees swayed and shook in the tempest. The flowers were blown to pieces, and meteors fell to earth in fire and flame. These dreadful omens terrified the rakshasas; but Khara, though his sword fell from his trembling left hand and his eyes were bedimmed with tears, would not turn back. "These signs which you think so terrifying", he said to his troops, "seem to me of no importance. I am too strong to be frightened by such trifles. With my keen arrows I can shoot even the stars from the sky. Even with Yama himself will I fight. Until I have pierced the hearts of these men Rama and Lakshmana with my arrows and my sister has gratified the longing of her heart by drinking their blood, I will not return. I do not fear even the wrath of Indra, sovereign of the gods, mounted on his wild elephant *Airavata*. Then why should I fear to march on these two men?" Encouraged by his boastful words the rakshasas rushed onward.

Meanwhile in their hermitage the brothers saw the frightful omens in the sky and Rama said : "These omens foretell the doom of the rakshasas. My hands itch to fit the arrows to my bow, for the frightened cries of the forest birds and the trembling of my right arm warn me that a terrible battle is going to take place. I hear the roaring of the rakshasas and the beating of their drums. Clad in the armour Agastya gave me, I will overcome them. Protect Sita. Taking your bow and arrows, lead her quickly to the hill yonder. There you will find a cave the entrance of which is hidden by trees. From the cave she can watch the fight at a safe distance. Do not stop to argue about helping me but go quickly."

So Lakshmana took Sita and hid her in the cave. Then Rama put on the armour bright as the glowing flame and he looked like a pillar of fire blazing in the darkness of the forest now overshadowed by lowering clouds. He stood in front of the hermitage awaiting the attack, and the gods, Gandharvas and Siddhas watching from the sky, said : "May victory come to the valiant Rama ! May he conquer the night-prowling sons of Pulastya as Vishnu wielding the sharp *chakra* conquered the Asuras."

When the army of the rakshasas was in front of the hermitage and they saw the godlike figure in shining armour, they ceased the roaring and screaming which had echoed through the forest. So noble was the figure of Rama and so terrible was the anger that blazed in his eyes that he resembled Yama himself at the end of a Yuga. Eager though they were to fight, the rakshasas were terrified for the moment. Khara who was in the centre of the army sent Dushana forward to enquire why the troops had stopped, though there were no difficulties in the road, and no rivers to cross. Going forward, Dushana saw Rama standing there in glittering mail, and all the troops recoiling in fear from him. He returned to Khara and told him, "Order me", he said, "to fight him and I will quickly send him to the realms of Yama."

Khara ordered his chariot to be driven towards Rama, as Rahu rushes on the God of day. At the sight of their leader charging, the rakshasas rushed forward with roars and yells, waving their spears, swords and bows. The glitter of their golden ornaments, the noise of their chariots and the gleaming of their armour were terrifying. They charged down on Rama, as dark clouds are swept by wind across the sky at sunrise. Khara fired arrows at Rama and the rakshasas poured a shower of iron clubs, javelins, darts, swords and battle-axes upon the dauntless hero. But Rama never wavered or faltered. Surrounded by the hideous, gibbering, shrieking rakshasas as the clouds surround the king of mountains with streams of rain, he was wounded many times, but drew his magic bow continually. From it flew a rain of arrows sharp as razors winged with the feathers of kingfishers and ornamented with gold. All round him the rakshasas were dropping dead. Each arrow did deadly work. Some killed the charioteers, the horses and elephants, cut down the standards of the cars and lopped off the limbs of their occupants. Others flying among the foot-soldiers cut them down in scores. Pierced by his fatal shafts, the dying rakshasas uttered dreadful screams. The slaughter caused by Rama was like a fierce fire in a jungle at the end of the dry season. After desperate fighting the rakshasas retreated for a time. A second attack was led by Dushana, wild with rage at the slaughter in his ranks. Some of the rakshasas brandished tree trunks, others poles; others were armed with spears and clubs and nooses of strong rope. Arrows, stones and faggots of wood were shot and hurled at Rama who resisted all attacks and with his inexhaustible quivers killed all who came within his reach. The ground was littered with dead and dying rakshasas. It was strewn with heads and arms and legs, with horses, elephants and overturned chariots, with torn flags and broken swords and spears. After a time the rakshasas retreated before the fierce rain of Rama's arrows.

For the third time the rakshasas rushed forward rallied by Khara and Dushana. Though he was bleeding from many wounds, Rama stood undismayed to check the charge of the remnant of his enemies. On they charged hurling their spears, clubs and stones at him. He

Third charge
of the rakshasas.
Dushana is killed.

never quailed before the murderous shower, but stood firm, as undisturbed as a bull is by the large drops of autumnal rain. From his bow flew the deadly arrows and no rakshasa lived to come within a few yards of him. In a few moments the terrified remnant of the rakshasas fled. Then Rama split the bow that Dushana held and killed the horses of his chariot. With another arrow he beheaded his charioteer and then he wounded Dushana with three deadly shafts. Leaping from the chariot, Dushana grasped a huge club covered with iron spikes smeared and stained with the blood of foes, a terrible weapon. Whirling this round, Dushana rushed at Rama; but, drawing his great bow, Rama shot two arrows cutting off the rakshasa's hands. The great club crashed to the ground and, moaning in his agony, the rakshasa fell like an Himalayan elephant whose tusks have been cut off. Drawing his sword, with one stroke of it Rama cut off Dushana's head.

Seeing his brother killed, Khara, roaring like a hungry tiger, rushed at Rama, firing gleaming arrows as deadly as angry snakes. Rama warded them off with his own shafts as the foot-rope stops an elephant. Reckless as a grasshopper leaping into a fire, Khara

Fight between
Rama and
Khara who is
killed.

now drove his chariot furiously upon Rama. But before he could reach him Rama had killed the charioteer and the horses and smashed the car. Then, snatching up an enormous club, Khara hurled it at Rama as Indra hurls his flaming thunderbolt; but Rama warded off the blow with his shield. Then, smiling triumphantly, Rama cried: "You vile rakshasa, you have now done your worst and your boasts are idle. Your roars of rage will not terrify me. You wished,

to avenge your sister. Now you have all these dead (and he pointed to the ground littered with corpses) to avenge. You have broken your promise to your sister and you can do nothing for these dead followers. Your turn has now come, braggart and liar. I will seize you as Garuda seized the Amrita. The earth shall drink up your blood gushing from your throat. Your vile carcass shall roll in the dust and become food for carrion birds. Henceforward these woods shall be free of your accursed brood and the sages will be able to wander in the forest without fear. Persecutor of the Brahmans, vile fiend, foul with the guilt of countless crimes, to-day your hour has come."

Fitting a long shining arrow to his bowstring, Rama pierced Khara to the heart and the rakshasa fell to the ground and died in a pool of blood. Then, in the sky were heard the strains of heavenly music and a shower of flowers fell on Rama's head. Loud were the praise and blessings of Gods and sages at the news of the victory. When he saw that Khara was dead, Rama told Lakshmana to bring Sita out of the cave, and she ran to her husband and clasped him in her arms.

A few of the rakshasas escaped from the battle and one of these fled to Lanka and told Raja Ravana what had happened. When the rakshasa king

News of the defeat of rakshasas reaches Ravana who is advised to abduct Sita.

heard that his two brothers were dead and that his great army had been destroyed by Rama, he was very angry and swore a great oath that he would be avenged. "I will go myself," he cried, "and kill both these insolent young princes." But the rakshasa who had brought the bad news said: "Raja, if you had been on the battlefield you would know that neither you nor all the rakshasas in the world can conquer Rama. It is no more possible to defeat him than it is for sinners to reach heaven. But there is a way in which you can be revenged and finally destroy him. He has a wife named Sita, a very lovely woman whose grace and goodness are famous. Fairest of all mortals is she and

to her Rama is devoted. If by some trick you could carry her off, Rama would lose heart and would fight no more. Then you could easily crush him."

This advice seemed to Ravana to be wise, and he said: "Let orders be given to the army to prepare. To-morrow I will start for Dandaka and will bring Sita to this city." Then, ordering his chariot which was drawn by asses and was as splendid as the sun, he went to the house of Maricha, his chief minister, to ask his advice. When Maricha heard of the plan to abduct Sita, he told Ravana that he must not try to carry it out. "Such advice is not the advice of a friend, for you will be seeking your own destruction if you attempt it. You might as well try to pull out the poison fangs from the jaw of a serpent. Ravana, this Prince Rama, even when a boy, was a famous warrior. To-day he is like a mighty maddened elephant whose tusks are fully grown. He is like a fierce tiger killing the frightened rakshasas as the tiger kills timid deer. Ravana, do not attack this prince whose arrows pierce the stoutest armour and whose sword blade is sharper than the teeth of wild beasts. I know that you grieve at your brothers' deaths; but take my advice. Stay here and live contentedly in your palace with your wives and do not interfere with the wife of Rama." And Ravana took the advice of his minister and stayed in Lanka.

Surpanakha had been hiding in the forest while the battle raged between Rama and her brothers. When she saw that Khara and Dushana were dead, she gave a dreadful scream which echoed through the sky, and fled back to Lanka. Disfigured and bleeding, she presented herself in a pitiable state before her brother. Ravana was sitting on a throne of gold bright as the sun and as glowing as flame, surrounded by his ministers. He had ten heads and twenty arms. His eyes were red like copper and his teeth were white as the new moon. He was so tall that he looked like a mountain, and his ten faces were each as terrible as the face of Yama. King of the rakshasas, he looked a king, for his body was noble and

Description of
Raja Ravana.

smooth as polished onyx and his ears were adorned with splendid ear-rings. On his great breast he bore scars of his battles, wounds he had received from the thunderbolts of Indra, from the tusks of Airavata and the *chakra* of Vishnu. Ravana was wicked and cruel and broke all laws. He stole men's wives; he murdered Brahmins; he spoiled sacrifices and prevented the fulfilment of vows. It was he who went to Bhagavati, the splendid capital of Vasuki, and stole the wife of the snake prince Takshaka. He conquered Kuvera on the Kailasa mountain and took away his magic chariot. In his wicked rage he destroyed the celestial forests of Chitra, Nalina and Nandana and laid waste the gardens of the gods. But wicked as he was, he had gained the favour of Brahma by his self-punishments and penances continued for years in the forest. For days at a time he had tortured his body with fire, starvation and unnatural attitudes till Brahma had pardoned his sins and had granted him the boon that he could not be killed by gods or demons. Only a man or wild beast could kill him. By Brahma's favour he had other privileges also. He could move at will through the air and he could assume any shape of man or beast that he wished.

When Surpanakha stood before her brother's splendid throne, her eyes flashed with anger and contempt. "What! are you, our king, content", she screamed, "to stay here amid this splendour drugged by the pleasures of your life, while danger threatens your kingdom and death claims your nearest and dearest? The selfish king who thinks of nothing but his own pleasures may be the ruler of vast territories, he may be the most powerful monarch on the earth, yet he will be hated by his subjects, even as men loathe a fire in which a corpse has been burned. The king who neglects the business of his kingdom will soon lose that kingdom and his own life as well. The king who does not trouble to receive reports from his ministers in the different parts of his dominions and who cannot

Sarpanakha's
angry appeal to
her brother to
avenge her.

control his greedy desire for pleasure is despised by all. Wise men shun such a king as elephants avoid the swampy edge of a river. You sit here in splendour surrounded by your courtiers. Do you know that your brothers Khara and Dushana are dead? Do you know that your army has been defeated, that fourteen thousand brave rakshasas have been killed by one man? Do you know that this man who is named Rama has become the protector of the rishis and has sworn to destroy the rakshasas? He has already driven us out of the forest of Dandaka. Unless you rouse yourself, he will destroy us all.

The eyes of Ravana flashed with rage as he listened to Surpanakha his sister's appeal. "Who then is this Rama advises Ravana who has declared war upon me?" he to abduct Sita. asked angrily. "Tell me who he is and where I can find him, for I will certainly destroy him."

"He is the eldest son of the Maharaja Dasaratha. He is as hero as handsome and long-armed as a god. His beauty is as great as that of Kama. He wears the dress of a rishi, but he is a great and an invincible warrior. He carries a magic bow and he shoots arrows as deadly as venomous serpents. He slew the army of rakshasas before my eyes, as reapers cut a field of corn. He has a wife named Sita. Her complexion is the colour of heated gold. Her face is lovely as Lakshmi. She is more beautiful and graceful than all women. So fair is she that Indra himself might envy the man who has her love. I wished to bring this lovely creature to you to be your wife. It was because I tried to seize her that I was wounded in the way you see. Rama's brother Lakshmana cut off my nose and ears. Once you have seen Sita, you will have no peace of mind till she is yours. Brother, you are king of the rakshasas. Do not sit idly here in your splendour, living a selfish life of pleasure. Avenge the deaths of your brothers and your soldiers by killing Rama and Lakshmana. Then you can seize Sita and make her your wife."

Ravana was roused by Surpanakha's words. He wished to avenge his brothers, but most of all he desired to possess this wonderful Sita who, every one said, was so lovely. He summoned his minister Maricha and repeated to him all that Surpanakha had said. "This news distresses me and I need your advice," he said. "This contemptible Kshatriya man Rama, disgraced and expelled by his father, has massacred my army. The worthless fellow has disfigured my sister, cutting off her nose and ears, and he has killed my brothers. Bleeding and angry, Surpanakha has come straight from the forest of Dandaka. There she has seen the wife of this Rama and she tells me that Sita is as lovely as Lakshmi herself. I wish to avenge my brothers; but, most of all, I desire to seize this lovely woman, for by so doing I can best punish this insolent mortal. You must help me to do this. Change yourself into a golden-coated deer covered with silver spots and go to the hermitage of this Rama. When Sita sees you, she will be sure to ask Rama, and Lakshmana to catch you. Then you will run away, tempting them to follow you far into the forest. When Sita is alone and unprotected, I will come and carry her off through the air."

When Maricha heard these words, he was much alarmed.

He tried to persuade Ravana to think no more of Sita. "This illustrious Kshatriya," he said, "is not contemptible or worthless. He is noble-hearted and famous. He was not disowned by his father or disgraced. Brave and kind to the poor, he has always been the friend of the Brahmans and Rishis. Of all mortal princes he is to-day the most renowned and beloved. His wife is the most faithful and noblest of women, as pure as she is beautiful. Even if you could seize her, she would never consent to be your wife. Your plan is madness. If you carry off Sita, you will certainly pay for your sin with your life. You cannot conquer Rama. When he was only a

Maricha warns Ravana of the danger of a war with Rama.

lad, I fought with him at the hermitage of Visvamitra where he had come to protect the Brahmans. Huge and fierce as I was, he faced me without fear and he hurled a spear at me with such violence that I fled down the river to the sea. Had Rama wished to kill me then, he could have done so. If he could fight so bravely when no more than a child, how can we fight him now? Raja, you have deceived yourself. If you try to carry off Sita, you will bring ruin on your kingdom. Lanka will be destroyed. Your soldiers will be slaughtered; your wives will be made captive. You will lose your wealth, your honour and your life. I beg you to forget Sita. Think no more of this mad plan.

But Ravana would not listen to his wise minister. His sister's words had so inflamed his imagination that he could think of nothing but Sita. As a sick man, eager to die, refuses medicine, he refused to take the advice of Maricha. "You should be ashamed to speak such cowardly and foolish words, Maricha," he said. "You cannot frighten me with your tales of this wonderful Rama. You might as well try to get a crop by throwing seed on salt. If you fear Rama, I do not. I am determined to carry off Sita and so revenge myself on the murderer of Khara and Dushana. It is not proper for the servant of a king to oppose his wishes. It is his duty to speak humbly and obey his master's commands. I did not ask you, Maricha, to tell me whether you thought my plan wise or foolish. I sent for you that you might help me to carry it out. Assuming the form of a lovely deer with a silver spotted coat of golden fur, you will feed and play about in front of Sita. When you have lured away her protectors, you can make your escape. As reward I will give you part of my kingdom and much wealth."

Maricha did not try to argue any more. "It was my duty to warn you, my master," he said. "Now I will obey you, though I know that it will cost me my life and that you will bring ruin on yourself."

Ravana was too fascinated at the thought of Sita to be saddened by his minister's gloomy words. "That is right," he said joyfully. "When you tried to oppose my will, I thought that you were not my faithful minister but some demon who had assumed his shape. Come, we will go at once." Then, calling his servants, he ordered his magic car, drawn by asses with rakshasas' heads, to be made ready. Mounting in it with Maricha, they were quickly carried from Lanka across the sea to the wilderness of Dandaka. When they reached the hermitage surrounded by plantain trees, they alighted at some distance from it and Ravana ordered Maricha to change into a deer. At once the unfortunate Maricha became the loveliest deer ever seen, with a bright golden coat speckled with silvery spots, large eyes blue as the water lily and with delicately branching horns. Thus disguised, the rakshasa approached the hut, apparently innocently grazing. Soon Sita, who was gathering flowers in the wood, came close to where the deer was feeding. When she saw it, she clapped her hands with pleasure. Calling to Rama, she said: "Come quickly. Here is a lovely deer. Catch it for me, or shoot it that I may lie on its beautiful skin." Rama hurried out of the hut; but Maricha galloped off a little way, as he had been ordered to do by Ravana. Going back to the hut for his bow, Rama called to Lakshmana, "There is a lovely deer which Sita wants me to catch or kill. I may have to chase it some distance. Take care of Sita while I am away. It may be some time before I return." In answer to his brother's call Lakshmana came out and just caught sight of the deer as it was galloping slowly down the distant glade. It was so beautiful that he was at once suspicious. "Is it wise, dear brother", he asked anxiously, "for you to go into the woods alone after it? The rakshasas often change themselves into the shapes of animals to lure those whom they hate to death. I have never seen a deer so beautiful. Perhaps it is a rakshasa sent by Ravana to kill you. Many are those who have met their deaths in the forest. If I were you, I would not pursue it."

But Sita was eager to have the lovely skin and she kept on asking Rama to get it for her. So he only laughed at his brother's fears and, hanging his bow over his shoulder, he walked away rapidly into the jungle.

Down the glade, Rama followed the deer which allowed him to get almost near enough to shoot and then ran off again deeper into the jungle. For miles Rama followed the lovely animal till he despaired almost of getting the skin on which Sita had set her heart. At last when Maricha knew that he had lured Rama far enough from the hut, he gave him a chance. In a moment Rama had shot him through the heart. As the deer fell, Maricha escaped from its body and Rama saw beside the golden-coated deer the rakshasa grinding his great teeth in his death agony. But Maricha had still work to do for Ravana and with his dying breath he mimicked Rama's voice, crying out loudly "O Sita, save me! Lakshmana, save me!" Rama was now very frightened, for he saw the trick that had been played on him and he feared for Sita's safety. He knew that the rakshasa had been sent to lure Lakshmana and him from Sita, so that she would be alone and unprotected. With sinking heart he picked up the deer's body and ran back in the direction of the hut.

Meanwhile Sita had heard, as she thought, the voice of Rama calling for help. Running quickly to Lakshmana, she said: "Lakshmana, I have heard Rama's voice crying out in the

Sita hears
Rama's cry as
he calls for help

to go to help
him.

sounded like the cry of some one in agony or dying. Go quickly to his aid. I fear that you were right and that the deer was a rakshasa and that now the demons have seized Rama. Go, please go quickly."

Lakshmana had not heard the voice and he was not very much alarmed for his brother's safety. As he did not wish to leave Sita alone, he tried to reason with her. "Do not

be frightened", he said. "Rama cannot be conquered by any one in the three worlds. No rakshasa will be able to kill him."

But Sita was beside herself with terror and, when Lakshmana answered so calmly, she began to suspect him most unjustly. "You are Rama's enemy", she cried, "if you do not run at once to help him. His danger must be pleasant to you, or you would not stand here so quietly. Is it because you hope to be my husband that you wish to leave Rama to die. Not an hour will I survive Rama, so if you have had such hopes, banish them from your mind and go to his rescue."

Sita's unjust words gave Lakshmana great pain, but he answered her very gently. "If I thought Rama was in any danger, I would not lose a minute in going to him, though it is my duty to guard you. But he is not in danger. The voice you heard was that of some rakshasa, a trick to lure me away also, so that you will be alone and unprotected. I promised Rama to guard you and I dare not leave you. It is not likely that Rama would cry so." But Sita would not listen to reason. She was frightened and her fear made her suspect poor Lakshmana. His very devotion to her made her more suspicious. "I see it all," she cried. "You pretend that you must protect me for his sake, but all the time you want me yourself. Treacherous brother, I will never be yours. No other man shall call me wife. If Rama dies, I go to the flames also. Did you follow us into the forest only to betray Rama's trust in you?"

The tears streamed down her cheeks and she beat her breast in her agony of fear and indignation. "I know well," said Lakshmana gently, "how terrified you are, dear sister, and for that reason and because as my elder brother's wife you are as god to me, I cannot speak unkindly to you or prove to you how unjust are your suspicions. Your words are like the stabs of a knife. But I forgive you because you are mad with terror at the thought of losing Rama and you are a woman, and women cannot reason calmly and often cause quarrels between brothers. Now I will go and seek

Rama. I dread thus to disobey him and I fear that evil will come of it. But you order me to go and I do so, praying that when I return I may see you re-united to him." The weeping Sita thanked him over and over again and cried: "If I lose him, I lose all. If he dies, I die, for without him I do not wish to live." Lakshmana tried to comfort her, but she beat her breast and wept continually. So, taking his bow and arrows, Lakshmana bowed at her feet and ran into the forest to search for Rama.

No sooner was Sita alone than Ravana, who had been hiding at a distance, assumed the form of a begging Brahman and approached the hut. He wore a thin reddish brown cloth; his matted hair was tied in a tuft on the top of his head: he carried an umbrella, shoes and a trident, and belted round him were a leather bag for his provisions and an alms dish. Seeing as she thought a poor Brahman, Sita went to the door of the hut and bade him welcome. Entering the house, Ravana thanked her for her kindness. He asked her who she was, so beautiful and young, living all alone in the woods. Sita very simply told him the story of their banishment from Kosala. "Sit and rest here," she said, "till my husband returns. He will be glad to see you, for he is kind-hearted and loves the Brahmins."

Ravana thought that he had never seen anyone so lovely. She brought him a seat. But Ravana knew that there was no time to be lost now that he was alone with Sita. With his eyes flaming with admiration, he came close to her. "Lovely queen of women," he said, "I am not a Brahman. I have assumed this form that I might get close to you. I am Ravana, the persecutor of the world, of whom gods and men are afraid. It was I who ordered my brother Khara to rule this forest. Kuvera is my brother; Pulastya, the son of Brahma, was my grandfather. By the favour of Brahma I can assume any form I choose and travel where I will as quick as the winds blow. I had heard of your beauty.

Those who told me how fair you were told me the truth. Never have I seen such beauty. Many wives have I but none of them can compare with you. Sita, be my wife. Come with me to my palace in Lan' and you shall be my chief rani. My island home is the fairest spot on earth. There grow the loveliest flowers, the trees are tall and shade groves full of sweet-voiced birds. It is a fairyland in the midst of which is my city built on a mountain with seven peaks surrounded by a deep moat. Within the palace walls are beautiful buildings and gardens so fair that you have never seen any like them. This city of mine is as famous throughout the three worlds as Amaravati, the home of Indra. Come with me and you shall be queen of all and walk with me in the enchanted groves. Chief of all my queens you shall be and thousands of lovely handmaids shall wait on you."

When she heard these words, Sita was too angry and indignant to be frightened. "Do not come near me, wretch," she said. "I am the daughter of Raja Janaka and the beloved wife of Rama. To me my husband is as god. Where he goes I go. I have no life but his life. As a true wife, I am faithful to my vows and as devoted to Rama as Sachi is to Indra. As a lioness follows the lion, so I follow Rama. Go, miserable creature. Go quickly, for Rama will surely kill you if he finds you here. You are hateful to me, as contemptible as a jackal. Compared with Rama you are as a fox is to a lion or a crow to an eagle."

Furious at her contemptuous words, Ravana cried: "You dare to defy me, Sita. I have come to carry you away, and I will do so. You do not know my power. Who is Rama that he can oppose me? So great is my strength that I could kill Yama himself in battle. You think that you can defy me as a Brahman, see me then as I really am." Saying which, Ravana assumed his own form. Terrible as Yama, vast as a mountain he stood before the shrinking Sita. His red eyes glowed like flame. His huge limbs

were clothed in blood red garments. His shoulders were like those of a bull. The knotted muscles of his arms were as thick as tree trunks. From his black hair sparks of fire streamed. When Sita saw this awful form, she fell fainting to the ground. Fearing that she would die of terror, Ravana tried once more to persuade her. "Do not fear me, lovely woman. I do not wish to hurt you. I love you and want to win your love. Why do you waste it on Rama who is only an exile dressed in beggar's dress? I am a husband worthy of your beauty. Forget Rama and come with me. If you will love me, never will I do anything to vex you. I will be your slave and will do all in my power to please you. If you wish it, you shall mourn Rama for a year, and for that time I will never speak of my love."

Mad with fright, Sita crouched in the corner of the hut trembling and crying. To Ravana's appeal she made no answer, so he seized her by the hair and carried her towards where his car waited. Sita cried: "Rama, Lakshmana, save me!" But there was no one to help her and Ravana lifted her into the car and, mounting it himself, drove off through the air swift as the wind. By this time Sita was as one dead with fear and she lay in the car moaning, her hair dishevelled, her cheeks wet with tears and her breath coming in panting sobs. Eager to get safely to Lanka and heedless of the ruin he was bringing on himself, Ravana urged on his magic steeds till the car passing through the sky made a noise like thunder.

Many miles away on the top of a mountain was sleeping the king of the vultures Jatayus. He was awakened by the cries of Sita and the thunderous noise of the chariot as it passed through the sky. Rousing himself, he flew in the direction of the sounds and soon he saw the chariot and Ravana urging on the asses. Flying faster, Jatayus got in front of the car and stopped it. "What are you doing, you ten-headed monster", he cried. "I am Jatayus, chief of the vultures. You are Ravana, the famous Raja of the

Ravana carries off Sita.
His fight with Jatayus.

Rakshasas, who have conquered even the gods in battle. I know your strength and I am old now. But, though I have lost much of my strength, you shall not commit this crime. Rama is my friend. Sita is his faithful wife. Give her up. What you do is not only a crime but it is madness, for Rama will surely kill you, if I am not strong enough to do so. Instantly let Sita go, or, old as I am, I will tear you to pieces, as fruit is plucked from a tree. As a Sudra is not allowed to touch the Vedas, so you shall not carry away Sita."

Springing from his car, his eyes flaming with anger, Ravana rushed on the bird and a desperate struggle ensued. Ravana shot a cloud of arrows at Jatayus; but, wheeling round him, Jatayus got on his back and tore his head and shoulders. Then he killed the asses and destroyed the car. No sooner had he done this than Ravana sprang from the car with Sita in his arms. But Jatayus at once pounced on him and dug his talons into his back, tearing him with his claws and beak till Ravana was almost exhausted with loss of blood. But he was the stronger of the two, and, putting Sita on the ground, Ravana leapt on Jatayus and beat him with his fists till the bird was exhausted. Then he cut off his wings and feet with his sword and left him dying on the ground. When Sita saw her protector fallen and bleeding, she cried out more than ever, clinging for protection to the trees, to anything and everything. But Ravana knew no mercy and, seizing her by the hair, he flew away with her into the air.

The black-skinned Ravana held Sita tightly as he flew with her towards Lanka. Like lightning flashing round a black cloud, her fair body, clothed in yellow silk aglitter with golden ornaments, glowed like burnished gold against the black skin of the demon. Her face in his arms seemed like the moon rising from behind a black cloud. She cried out continually: "Rama, Rama, where are you that you allow your wife to be carried off by this fiend? If you do not kill him for his sin, you will be disgraced before all men.

Sita throws
her jewels down
among the mon-
keys.

And Lakshmana, where are you? If I have wounded you by my bitter words when I sent you to find Rama, forgive me and rescue me now from this wretch's clutches."

To Ravana she spoke words of burning hatred: "You are proud of your strength and call yourself a hero who can fight even Yama. Yet you have acted as a mean coward. If you wanted me, why did you not challenge Rama to fight you? A hero takes nothing from any man unless he can win it in fair fight. If you had fought with Rama and beaten him, then I should have considered you a hero and I could not have refused to be your wife. If you are a hero and you love me so much, why do you not wait and fight him? If you defeat him, carry me where you please. Coward, you dare not face him. But do not hope to escape by your meanness. Rama will seek you out and kill you. Your doom is approaching. Very soon you will die and go to the mansions of Yama. There your body will float in the river Bytarani and be torn in pieces by the dogs of Yama."

While Sita was filling the air with her cries and reproaches, they flew over the mountain named Rishya-mukha, and Sita saw five monkeys sitting on it. She thought that, if she threw down her ornaments, perhaps they would reach Rama and he would know where she had been taken. So, she loosened her jewels and veil and threw them down, unknown to Ravana. They dropped like falling stars to the earth. Looking up, the five monkeys saw Sita: but they did not know who she was. "See!" they said, "it is the wicked demon king Ravana carrying away the beautiful wife of some mortal. Hark! she calls for help on Rama and Lakshmana. She throws down to us her jewels and veil that we may keep them and give them to those who will come in search of her." So the good monkeys scampered down to where the jewels fell and they picked them up and hid them in a safe place.

Flying faster and faster, Ravana soon approached the sea. He carried Sita across the straits and then across the ~~the~~ ^{an} island of Lanka to where in the centre stood his splendid palace. Into the inner rooms he carried her and, calling women-attendants, he gave strict orders that they were to guard her night and day. No man was to be allowed to enter her apartments except himself. But she was to be treated like a queen. Everything that her heart could desire was to be brought her, jewels and ornaments, the loveliest dresses and scents and delicate food and sweetmeats. No one was ever to speak an unkind word to her and all were to be her slaves, to wait upon her hand and foot.

Then Ravana went back to his rooms and he sent for eight of his bravest rakshasas. To them he told the story of the abduction of Sita and how he hated Rama for his destruction of his brothers and the rakshasa army. He told them to go to Dandaka and become spies on Rama and his brother. "Follow them wherever they go and try to kill them. But be sure to bring me news if they are coming to attack me".

When Ravana had sent the spies to Dandaka, he believed that he was safe from any attack by Rama.

Ravana tries
once more to
persuade Sita.

Then he went back to the palace where Sita was imprisoned and found her sitting surrounded by the rakshasi women like a deer surrounded by tigers. She held her head down, looked at no one and nothing wept continuously. By gentle and soothing words Ravana tried to comfort her. "Why do you weep, fairest of women? I do not wish to hurt you; I wish to make you queen of this splendid palace. If I have seemed cruel because I carried you away from the hut, forgive me. It is because I love you so that I have brought you here. Think no more of Rama. You will never see him again. Miles of sea roll between him and you. Neither he nor anyone will be able to cross that sea or take you from this palace. Even the gods fear to attack me,

so Rama, who is only a man, will naturally fear to do so. I have thousands of brave soldiers, and in all the three worlds there is no one who could defy my power. It is useless for you to mourn for Rama. Forget him and take me as your husband. You are young and lovely and it is wrong to waste your youth in weeping. All the splendours of my palace are for you. My wives shall be your slaves. You shall be chief Rani of the golden city of Lanka. All that you can desire shall be yours. In this wonderful palace built by Visvakarma, the architect of the gods, more splendid than the palace of Indra, are jewels and gold and costly dresses and wealth untold. Of all this you shall be owner. Here are the loveliest pleasure gardens, chief of which is the Asoka garden. There you shall wander as you please attended by countless servants. In my magic car Pushpaka you can go where you please. All the wealth of my treasures I will pour at your feet, and I myself will be the chief of your slaves if you will accept me for your husband."

Sita looked with angry contempt at Ravana as he made his appeal. "Coward", she said, "you say you love me, but you had not the courage to try to carry me off when Rama or Lakshmana were near. Such mean and treacherous love I do not value. Had you faced

Sita's angry
reply. Ravana
gives orders for
her custody.

Rama and fought for me with him, you would have been killed. You think you are safe now, because by your cunning tricks you have put the sea between him and you. But Rama will cross seas however rough and wide to kill you. He will kill you with his deadly arrows and your body will be food for vultures and jackals. Rama will kill all the rakhasas. Your whole family will be destroyed, so that there shall be none to offer the funeral cakes. Rama will come: of that I am certain. But even if he does not, I will never be your wife. I would rather die than yield to you."

Ravana was very angry at these words; but he did not threaten Sita, for he wished her to grow happy in her ne

surroundings. So he left her; and, calling his women gave them orders that in four ways they were to try to coax Sita to yield. First of all, they were to lead her to the lovely Asoka garden where amid the birds and flowers her heart might grow softened towards him. Then first by kind and soothing words, secondly by giving her lovely clothes and jewels and the most delicate food and sweetmeats, thirdly by praising him and speaking slightly of Rama, and fourthly by threats, if gentle treatment proved useless, they were to try to make her yield. All this the women did day and night, but Sita did not listen to what they said! She would not touch the rich dishes that were set before her, and she refused to wear the dresses or jewels. All the time she sat crying and thinking of Rama till she became thin and ill. Her beauty wasted away and her lovely eyes were dull and heavy with tears.

When he saw the trick that had been played on him, Rama ran towards the hut. After he had run a long way, he met Lakshmana who told him all that had happened. "Dear brother," said the frightened Rama, "you should not have left Sita, however cruel her words and unjust her suspicions. Women are so foolish: you should not have obeyed her." Then they ran on in great alarm. When they reached the hut and found it empty, Rama was in despair. His bow dropped from his hands and he sank fainting to the ground. After a few minutes his senses returned. Then the brothers ran in every direction, calling "Sita, Sita"; but the desolate forest only echoed their cries and they could find no trace of her. When night came, they had to give up the search, and together they sat in the hut in great misery and fear. When the dawn came, they started out again. After walking for many miles, they came to the place where Jatayus lay dying. Here the trees were broken and the grass trampled down and there were signs of the fierce struggle of the previous day. Presently they found the chief of vultures mutilated and bleeding from many wounds. Rama

Rama's search
for Sita. He
hears of her from
Jatayus.

went up to him and asked the bird who had wounded him thus and whether he had seen Sita. "Ravana, the rakshasa raja," replied Jatayus, "has carried away your wife. I saw him and stopped his chariot and killed the asses. Then we fought and, as I am old, Ravana defeated me. Now I am dying and I cannot see you."

In a little while the good vulture was dead. Rama and Lakshmana collected wood and built a funeral pile. On it they laid the body of Jatayus and, producing fire by rubbing sticks together, they burnt it with all proper ceremonies. Then they bathed in the Godavari and sprinkled water for the soul of Jatayus. Afterwards they gave up the search for Sita, for they knew now that Sita had been carried away to the south. They returned to the hut and spent the night lamenting and making plans for a journey towards Lanka.

At dawn they left the hut and went towards the south.

Rama and Lakshmana start for the south and meet the rakshasa Kabandha who advises them.

When they had walked many miles, they saw a huge rakshasa who looked like a black mountain, so tall and big was he. When he saw the princes, he cried out angrily: "I am Kabandha. What madness brings you here? I am glad to see you, for I am hungry."

Then he stretched out his arms and seized Rama in one hand and Lakshmana in the other. But, drawing their swords, they each cut off the arm that held them. Crying out, Kabandha fell on the ground. As he lay wounded there, he asked: "Who are you and whose sons are you?" When Rama told him, Kabandha was very glad and told him his story. He had been a Gandharva and had been cursed by a sage. In consequence he had been changed into a rakshasa and had been condemned to be one till released by Rama. Now the dying rakshasa was very grateful and he begged Rama to tell him how he could serve him. When Rama had told him about Ravana, Kabandha replied: "While I am still a rakshasa, I cannot tell you all; but, when I am dead, burn my body. From the ashes I shall rise in my real shape; then I will tell you what you

must do to rescue Sita." In a few minutes he was dead. Rama and Lakshmana dug a pit and filled it with leaves and wood. Then with great difficulty they rolled the vast body into it and set fire to the wood. As soon as the body was consumed, Kabandha came from the flames in his real form as a Gandharva. "In the middle of the Southern Ocean", he said, "in the island of Lanka lives Ravana. His palace is very splendid and surrounded by many walls. His army numbers thousands of fierce rakshasas. He is very powerful. If you wish to conquer him, you must follow my advice. Some miles to the north of this place is a lake called Pampa. On its edge is the Rishya-mukha mountain, on which lives Sugriva the chief of the monkeys. By his help you will defeat Ravana. You must make an alliance with Sugriva. He has had a quarrel with his brother Bali who has wronged him and robbed him of his throne. With four faithful ministers he has taken refuge on the mountain top. If you help him in his fight with his brother, he will help you to rescue Sita." Then Kabandha bade them farewell and ascended in a chariot to the heaven of Vishnu.

After walking some miles to the north, the princes came to the lake Pampa. It was a mile round and the water was transparent and covered with pink and white lotuses. On its surface ducks, geese and every sort of waterfowl of radiant plumage swam and played; while swarms of bright-winged bees hovered over the flowers. The banks of the lake were shadowed by trees, some full of fruit and others bright with flowers that scented the air. In the woods around grew asokas and flowering trees of every colour. The glades, carpetted with thick rich grass, echoed with the cries of peacock and koil. Flocks of screaming parrots flashed like clouds of scarlet, gold and green from tree to tree. When Rama saw the lovely spot he was very sad, for it made him think of Sita. He sat down on the bank of the lake and gave way to his grief. "See, Lakshmana," he cried; "how lovely the lake is. The water is so clear

Rama and
Lakshmana go
to Pampa and
meet Sugriva.

that one can see the shining sandy bottom. See how the great trees hang over the water shading the opening lotus buds from the fierce heat of the sun. The trees are so tall that their tops seem to reach as high as mountains. How sad the beauties of this spot make me feel. All is peace and happiness here. Why alone should I have reason to grieve? Hark how the happy koils sing and how the wind sighs through the gently swaying boughs. The air is sweet with the scent of flowers around which the murmuring bees cluster. Look at that splendid cassia over there. With its boughs glowing with the yellow blossoms, it looks like some giant clad in gleaming gold. The sight of all this loveliness of nature, this jungle happiness, wakes in my heart the flame of sorrow as I mourn for Sita. The birds and beasts have their mates. Hear how joyfully the birds sing. See how the peacocks dance before their hens and spread their jewelled tails in the sunshine. How am I to live, what am I to do, if I cannot find Sita?"

Lakshmana did his best to comfort his brother. "It is unmanly and foolish", he said, "to sit here weeping. We have to get to Lanka and punish Ravana. Only the weak and timid despair. Grieve no more, dear brother, but let us make plans for our journey." Rama took his brother's hand and thanked him for his wise words, and they sat at the lake edge and discussed how they could rescue Sita and conquer the demon king.

When the night came, the brothers lay down to sleep beneath a great fig tree. At dawn, when they had washed in the lake and said their prayers, Rama and Lakshmana walked towards the mountain Rishya-mukha where lived Sugriva. When they were still some distance off, Sugriva and his counsellors who were sitting on the walls of the fort high up the mountain side saw them. Sugriva feared that they were spies sent by Bali. But his chief counsellor, Hanuman, said: "There is no reason to fear them. They are the sons of a Raja and with their help you will be revenged on your brother." Saying this, he went down the mountain

and greeted Rama and Lakshmana and brought them up to Sugriva who asked them who they were and why they had come. Rama told him their story and how they were advised by Kabandha to seek the help of Sugriva. Then all the monkeys were very pleased, and Hanuman brought wood and, rubbing sticks together, lighted a fire. Standing with the flame between them, in the presence of all the monkeys Rama and Sugriva swore to be friends and allies. Then with hands clasped they walked slowly round the fire. When this ceremony was completed, Sugriva said: "Some days ago while sitting here, we saw a woman being carried through the air by Ravana. As she passed over the mountain she threw down her ornaments and we have kept them here." Then he sent for the jewels, and when Rama saw them he was overwhelmed with grief, pressing them to his heart and weeping bitterly. But Sugriva comforted him, saying: "Do not be sad. Now that we are allies, we will help you, and very soon we will rescue Sita."

When Rama had recovered from his grief, he asked Sugriva to tell him the story of his quarrel with Bali. "My elder brother," replied Sugriva, "was Raja of Kishkindhya and he had fierce battle with an Asura in the plain outside the city. The Asura fled into a cave. Bali told me to guard the entrance for a month while he entered it in pursuit of the demon. The month passed away, but Bali never returned. At the end of four weeks blood ran out of the entrance of the cave. Believing that Bali had been killed, I returned to Kishkindhya where the monkeys proclaimed me as raja. Some time later Bali, who had killed the Asura, returned and was very angry. He drove me off the throne, stole my wife Ruma and would have killed me, but I fled here. Even now he seeks to kill me and I live in terror of his plots."

"Have no more fear," said Rama. "I will rid you of your enemy. Let us go at once to Kishkindhya. Put on

Sugriva tells
the story of his
quarrel with
Bali.

your armour and challenge Bali to fight. As soon as he comes out to fight you, I will kill him."

At these words Sugriva and the monkeys were very glad.

The fight between Sugriva and Bali who is killed by Rama.

Sugriva prepared at once for battle and with Rama and Lakshmana set out for Kishkindhya. When they reached the city, the princes hid themselves in the forest near by the walls. Sugriva went boldly forward and in a loud voice called on Bali to come out and fight. When the Raja heard his brother's voice, he was furious and, putting on his armour, swore that he would kill Sugriva. But his wife Tara was frightened by the bold tones of Sugriva's challenge and begged Bali not to go out alone. Bali would not listen, but taking his sword, went to the gate of the city. When he saw Sugriva, he began to abuse him and Sugriva abused him in return, crying out: "You have persecuted me long enough. I am protected by Vishnu now and I swear that you shall die this day." Then Bali rushed at him and they hacked and struck at each other till it seemed both would be killed. After a time Bali got the best of it and with a mighty blow struck Sugriva to the earth and sat on his breast. Mockingly he asked him: "Where is your protector Vishnu now? Why do you not call him to your aid?" Seeing that Sugriva had been beaten, Rama ran to his aid and, shooting an arrow at Bali, pierced him through the heart killing him instantly. Then Sugriva sprang to his feet and Rama ran up, and he thanked him for saving his life.

When the news of Bali's death became known in the city, the unhappy Tara ran out with her hair dishevelled, weeping bitterly. With her came her son Angada and many servants, counsellors and citizens. She threw herself on the body of Bali and begged him to speak to her. "Beloved", she moaned, "you would not listen to me and now you are dead. Why did you treat your brother so cruelly? Why have you left me and the

The Funeral Ceremonies for Bali. Sugriva becomes Raja.

son so dear to you? Oh, speak to me again. I cannot bear to live. Shame on me that I have survived you. Shame on the woman who becomes a widow. Birds of prey and wild beasts, be good to me and destroy me that I may not be disgraced by outliving my husband." But Rama spoke kindly to Tara and comforted her, saying that it was wrong to rail against fate. Then the body of Bali was carried into the city and preparations were made for the funeral. The body was sprinkled with sandal and other perfumes and clothed in costly embroidered cloth and placed on a litter hung with garlands. Monkeys carried the litter on their shoulders and behind it walked Sugriva and the chief counsellors, while monkeys in front threw money to the crowd right and left, while the women of the monkeys headed by Tara weeping bitterly walked last of all. When they reached the burning place, the corpse was bathed and placed on the funeral pile and Angada set fire to it. When the body had been consumed, they all bathed in the neighbouring lake and made offerings of water to the soul of Bali.

Then the monkey counsellors, recognising that Sugriva had been wronged by his brother, asked him to be their raja. So Sugriva was proclaimed and he chose Angada as Yuvaraja. His wife was restored to him and he took Tara as his wife also. At this time it was the rainy season, so Sugriva consulted with Rama and it was agreed that they would wait till the dry weather and then go in search of Sita.

When the rainy season was ended, Sugriva summoned his armies, and from all quarters, from the mountains, the plains, the palm groves and the dense forests, monkeys in their thousands flocked into Kishkindhya. For days the roads leading to the city were clouded with dust as the monkey regiments marched up. Many wore helmets and armour and carried maces, swords and spears. Other great apes, long in arm and strong as tigers, depended

Hanuman starts for the sea at the head of the army of monkeys and bears.

in battle on their fearful teeth and sharpened nails. There were golden-coated monkeys from the Western Ghats, black ones from the Orissan coast ; tawny ones from the Vindhya forests, and white ones from the snowy Himalayas. At the head of each contingent marched their chiefs. There was wise old Kesari, father of Hanuman ; fierce Gavaksha, hero of many fights ; the famous black warrior Nila ; Gavaya shining like gold ; Danimukha and Dwivid famed for their strength and speed. With the monkeys came a vast army of bears led by their old Raja Jambavat with the great bear lord Dhumra as Commander-in-chief. These troops camped around the city, covering the whole plain. When they had all arrived, a great review was held in the presence of Rama, before whom they marched saluting him and crying " Long live Rama ! Victory to Rama ! "

Then the regiments were divided into four armies. Chief of these was that under the command of Hanuman who was ordered to march to the south coast and explore the island of Lanka. With him as second in command went Angada.

When he was about to march away, Hanuman asked Rama to give him some token so that, if he found Sita, he could prove to her that he came from him. Rama gave him the ring bearing his name that his father-in-law Raja Janaka had given him on his wedding day. Then the army marched off ; but for many weeks they could hear no news of Sita. Day after day they searched. They marched over mountains, through tangled jungle, across scorching deserts where there was no shade, water or food. At last wearied with their fruitless quest, the monkeys grew mutinous and despaired of success. But after a month they came to a mountain where lived a vulture chief, Sampati, elder brother of Jatayus. He told Hanuman that he had seen Ravana carrying off Sita and that there was no doubt that he had taken her to Lanka and was hiding her in his palace there. Then Hanuman and his troops were very glad and they marched to the sea-coast. Most of the monkeys had never seen the sea before, and when they looked out over the waste of water

and heard the roar of the waves they were frightened and became rebellious again. But Hanuman decided to cross the sea himself to spy out the land. He alone could leap the distance. He hoped to see Sita and then return to make preparations for the whole army to cross over.

Having encamped on the coast, Hanuman went up to the top of the mountain of Mandara. At will he could make himself the size of a mountain or as small as a man's thumb nail. When he reached the top of Mandara, he swelled himself to a vast size and roared with triumph till the thunder of his voice made the hills tremble and lashed the sea into great waves. The colour of his body was of the brightest gold. His face was as red as the rubies of Badakshan. His huge arms encircled the mountain and his tail was so long that its end could not be seen. Then, with another roar, he extended his arms and, with ears erect and head thrown back, he raised himself from Mandara and sprang to the south. In one leap he had passed over the sixty miles of sea and he alighted on the mountain Subala in Lanka. Then he made himself quite small again, for he did not want Ravana and the rakshasas to know that he had come. But his landing on Subala shook the whole island as if an earthquake had occurred. In his palace Ravana noticed the trembling of the earth and he summoned his counsellors and consulted them as to what had happened. Most of them said that it was an earthquake, but one wise rakshasa named Obindhya was frightened and said: "I believe this is due to Sita. Ever since you brought her here, evil omens have occurred. I advise you to send her back to her husband. Nothing but disaster can come of her presence in Lanka." Ravana's brother Vibhishana also begged Ravana to send her away. But Ravana was very angry and dismissed the counsellors, saying that nothing would make him part with Sita.

Hanuman
leaps across the
sea to Lanka.

Description of
the city of
Lanka.

Seated on Subala, Hanuman looked down on the city of Lanka. It lay amid a vast forest, the magic trees of which bore fruit and flowers at the same time. A mass of crimson, gold and purple blossoms, their bright boughs bent beneath the weight of ripe fruits. In the swaying tree tops sweet-voiced birds made music. Here and there the sunlight flashed on placid pools glowing with lotus blooms, while water-birds splashed and played in sparkling fountains. The city was built on the middle peak of the Trikuta mountain. It was a hundred miles long and thirty miles wide and it was surrounded by many walls and moats, one within the other. First of all there was a deep and wide moat. Within the circle of that was another belt of dense forest filled with wild beasts and birds of every kind. At the inner border of this jungle was a wall of iron with four gates north, south, east and west. Each of these gates was guarded by hundreds of rakshasas and before each gate was a bridge leading to it over the moat. On each bridge were engines of war throwing huge stones, so that any one who approached would be struck, thrown into the water and drowned. Within the iron wall, at a little distance, was one of stone, and within this there were five other walls. One was of brass, one of white metal, one of copper, one of silver, and the innermost was of gold. Within these seven walls the city itself was laid out in a square divided by four great broad roads, intersected by many cross roads. The houses were large and stately and even the stables were lofty and grand. There were many pleasure gardens filled with flowers and lakes and ponds covered with lilies and lotuses. From the domes and turrets of buildings banners waved. On the walls were stone towers for the royal musicians, and on every side were majestic halls and shrines and many richly carved temples. In the centre of the city, proudly towering above the other buildings, stood the palace of Ravana. The beautiful handiwork of the celestial builder Visvakarma, its snowy mass rose like a cloud into the sky, gleaming with

jems and gold, the courtyards inlaid with turquoise, the stairs and porticoes of crystal.

Hanuman gazed at Lanka till sunset. Then, assuming the shape of a cat, he crept into the city and wandered about observing everything. Though the gates were so closely guarded, everybody was allowed to enter, but the rakshasa soldier warned strangers that if they were spies or foes, though they could come in, they would never be allowed to go again. The streets were smooth and well watered and were adorned with garlands, jewels and marble of various colours. Many of the jewels were loosely set, but it was death to pick one up. In each quarter of the city were bazaars where everything could be bought by day or night. Hanuman crept about the streets and went into many houses. There he saw rakshasas asleep. Some were very ugly and deformed, while others were beautiful. Some had long and ungainly arms and legs and terribly deformed bodies. Some were fat, others were as thin as skeletons. Some were dwarfs, others were as tall as trees. Some had only one ear, others had only one eye. Some were monsters to look at, with huge protruding stomachs, crooked limbs and gaping mouths filled with long yellow fangs. Others had handsome faces and were clothed in splendid dresses. Some had two legs, some three, some four. Some had the heads of serpents, others those of asses, horses and elephants.

By this time it was night and the streets were deserted. As he wandered along, Hanuman saw before him suddenly the form of a woman. She was large and hideous and her long black hair streamed behind her like that of a witch. In her right hand she held a sword and in her left a basin in which she collected the blood of those whom she killed. This was Uggra Chunda, the guardian goddess of Lanka. With her blood-stained sword she barred the road, for she knew that the cat was no

Hanuman,
disguised as a
cat, wanders
about the city.

Hanuman
meets and fights
Uggra, the Ge-
nius of Lanka.

cat but an enemy who had come into the city thus disguised. With eyes flaming with anger, she cried : " Who are you ? What has brought you within the walls of this city ? You are here for no good purpose, or you would not prowl along the streets at such an hour."

Hanuman was not at all frightened. Quickly he changed himself back into his own form. " Who are you", he asked, " who speaks to me so angrily ? Why do you bar my way?"

" I am the city's guardian," Uggra answered ; "and I watch all night to destroy the enemies of Ravana. You have no right to be here and now you must die."

At this she rushed at Hanuman, raising her sword to strike off his head, at the same time kicking at him. But the monkey leapt aside, thus avoiding both blows, and struck Uggra so hard that she fell senseless to the ground. He did not want to kill the monster because she was a female ; but he stood over her till she came to her senses. When she saw the golden-coloured body of Hanuman, she cried out : " Spare me, mighty one. I know you now. You are the messenger of Rama and you have come to seek for Sita. Long ago Brahma warned me. ' Beware the hour,' he said, ' when you meet Hanuman. Then will the day of terror and defeat have come for Ravana'. I see now that ruin will fall on us all because of Sita. Go where you will. I will oppose you no more."

Then Hanuman once more assumed the form of a cat, and he wandered on down a broad and noble street bordered with trees laden with fresh-blown flowers. In the moonlight the city looked a fairyland. On all sides, snowy, pink-tinted and black crystal palaces rose cloud-like into the sky. Through the windows came the sounds of tabor and flute, of song and laughter. The soft tones of women's voices blended with the tinkling of the bells on their anklets and girdles. In one palace rakshasa minstrels were singing the praises of their king. In another the sound of dance and song mingled with the chanting of

Hanuman
explores the city
and the palaces.

priests singing hymns to their gods in a neighbouring shrine. Here and there Hanuman met bands of savage rakshasas armed with swords and clubs. Some were dwarfs and some giants, fiends of every shape and colour. But none of them noticed the cat as it stealthily crept past.

When he reached the palace gates, Hanuman found them guarded by rakshasas of grisly shape and face. Far beyond the walls rose Ravana's palace built on the mountain peak and towering above all the other buildings. On the bank of the lotus-covered moat paced sentinels. Around the gates were war elephants, cars and horses. In between these Hanuman crept on and sprang through the gate. Within the first building he entered was a vast hall. The roof was supported by crystal pillars festooned with leaves and blossoms. The stone-work was carved with the royal arms of Ravana. Here were gathered a crowd of courtiers, for whose entertainment nautch girls of lovely form with tinkling anklets danced and the wild music of drum, shell and tabor rose into the night. It was not there, Hanuman knew, that he would find Sita. So he crept on. He went through many rooms, through garden and grove, visiting house after house, leaping on terrace, dome and battlement. He went into the palace of Prahasta and into the courtyard of Kumbhakarna's home which rose a cloudy pile high in the air. Through grove and terrace he went, exploring the gardens of each rakshasa lord till he came to the palace of Ravana.

At the gates were male and female demons of every size armed with swords, spears and maces. War elephants, huge as Airavat, trained to be the terror of the battle-field, were chained there. On the turrets waved broad banners. Within the walls all was splendour. On every side jewels and gold blazed dazzlingly. Through the palace windows, the frames of which were carved in turquoise and lazulite, light streamed and the sound of music floated out on the night air. Each chamber that Hanuman entered seemed fairer and richer in ornamentation than the last. There were

The Palace of
Ravana.

spacious halls, porches and anterooms stored with arms. It was a home as glorious as the mansions of Indra. Upon the polished floors were strewn fresh buds and blossoms white and red. In the gardens surrounding the gigantic pile, which gleamed pale and cloud-like in the moonlight, were lovely lakes where golden lilies and lotuses of pink and blue floated on the quiet silvery water.

The inner gate of the palace was of gold set with diamonds and other gems. The pillars on each side were of black crystal. The gate was guarded by hundred of rakshasas armed with spears and swords. Over the gateway was the chamber for the musicians who played day and night. Close at hand were the stables of the royal elephants and horses and houses for the chariots. There were arsenals for the weapons, halls for dancing, and theatres, kitchens, store-houses and wine-cellars. As he examined all these, Hanuman said to himself:—"This Ravana must have been a very good man in his past life to have all this wealth now." Within the palace itself all was splendour. The walls blazed with jewels and gold. On the columns and walls were the figures of animals and birds of all kinds. There were birds carved out of turquoise; tigers and leopards of onyx and chrysolite. Serpents of burnished gold twisted their supple folds round columns. On one wall, carved in black crystal, were galloping horses. On another elephants were represented standing beside a silver stream from which they had taken and wound round their trunks wreaths of lilies. On another wall was sculptured Lakshmi herself in all her beauty with a lotus in her hand standing beside a flower clad pool.

Hanuman wandered on through hall after hall, room after room, till he smelt a sweet scent. As he went on, it became stronger and stronger till he saw before him the private apartments of Ravana. These were surrounded by a golden wall set with jewels. The gates were of crystal bright as diamonds and trusty guards stood before them with drawn swords. Within

Hanuman
reaches the
private apart-
ments of
Ravana.

were lovely gardens with shady trees and ponds covered with lotuses. In the middle of this pleasure ground was the sleeping room of the demon king. The walls were of gold set with gems and the floor was of black crystal. On the floor the softest carpets were spread. The bed was of gold beautifully carved by Visvakarma. The pillars supporting it and the steps up to it were of black crystal. The bedding was soft and fleecy and white as new milk. At the four corners were placed golden pots of water. Over it hung jewelled lamps in which burned perfumed oil. Close by was a crystal throne covered with a silken cloth embroidered with threads of gold. At each corner of the throne were lamps of gold and at one side was the royal umbrella and the jewelled *chamaras*. Hanuman made himself as small as a thumb nail and leapt upon the throne. From there he was on a level with the royal couch and he could see Ravana sleeping dressed in a yellow silk robe, his great arms covered with golden bracelets, his breath coming through his ten mouths like the hissing of serpents. Round his neck were strings of pearl and ten crowns of gold were on his ten heads and upon his twenty hands were gems of dazzling brightness. Close to him lay his chief queen Mandodari and in the great chamber slept Ravana's other wives, their maids and women attendants. Among all these sleeping women Hanuman looked carefully, but nowhere could he see Sita.

Leaping down from the throne, Hanuman wandered on.

He searched every part of the royal apartments, each chamber, hall and corridor, but nowhere could he find Sita. By this time it was past midnight and, going out into the garden he sat on a wall, gazing over the sleeping palace. He was tired and felt very sad, for he feared that Sita was dead. Then he heard night birds calling in the Asoka garden. So he jumped down from the wall and crept through the royal gardens till he came to the gate leading into the lovely Asoka grove. This was locked but he leapt

Hanuman finds
Sita in the
Asoka garden.

over it easily. Creeping silently on, he climbed into a large silk cotton tree where he was quite hidden and from which he could look all over the garden. Then to his joy he saw Sita. She was sitting on the grass surrounded by rakshasa women, like a frightened deer surrounded by tigresses. She was pale and thin and her face was smeared with dust. Her long hair was tied in a single knot and she wore only one plain white cloth and no jewels or ornaments. But the dust and the plain clothes could not hide her wondrous beauty which glowed like a live coal beneath a layer of white ashes. Suddenly, as Hanuman watched her, she cried out the name of Rāma in a low moaning voice several times. Some of the rakshasa women mocked her. Others told her kindly that it was useless to call for Rāma, for she would never see him again. Then Sita burst into tears and sat rocking herself to and fro. Hanuman was filled with rage at this sight. He climbed down from the tree and was just going to approach her when the bells chimed the third quarter of the night and in their chambers the musicians on the city walls began to play.

When the bells ceased to strike, Hanuman was again preparing to creep up to Sita, when at the gate of the garden appeared many lamps and torches. Awakened by the music, Ravana had thought of Sita and had ordered Mandodari and all the women to follow him to the Asoka garden. Some carried lamps, some torches, others held the chamaras, the golden betel box or carried pots of water. When Hanuman saw Ravana, he hid himself in the tree again, so that he might hear all that passed. When Sita saw Ravana, she started up in terror, like an antelope at the sight of a tiger. Then she sat down with her face turned away from him. Approaching her, Ravana said: "Why do you turn from me, beautiful one? Why do you fear me who am your slave? Why do you torture yourself with grief and shed tears for no reason? Dry your tears and look kindly on me. Have no fear of discovery. No giant and

Ravana comes
to the garden
to visit Sita.

no man is near. Let these women wash you and dress your hair and bring you beautiful robes and ornaments of gold. Let us sit here together in this lovely garden and drink and be merry, while musicians play to us and dancing girls delight us with their graceful movements. Be the chief of my queens. I am your slave. My only wish is to make you happy and to give you all that you may desire."

But the weeping Sita kept her face averted and said : "Lord of Lanka, why have you done this great wrong to Rama ? Throughout the world you are famous for your wealth, strength and courage. How can you disgrace your name by such wickedness as to steal another man's wife ? Send me back to Rama and beg him to forgive you. My husband is my wealth and my life. Nothing that you can give me will make me happy if I have not him. Send me back and save yourself from ruin."

"How can you compare me, Sita", asked Ravana angrily, "with that poor dethroned wanderer Rama ? Here I live in this palace of gold and jewels ; while he lives in a hut of leaves. I have a large army of fierce soldiers, with thousands of war elephants, chariots and swift horses : while Rama has no friends. Even my servants wear clothes fit to be worn by the servants of the gods ; while Rama wears deer skins or dress of bark fibre. My women and slaves wear splendid ornaments and live on food as delicate as that served to Indra ; while Rama lives on fruits and roots. The splendours of my palace are such as Rama has never heard of. How can you prefer him to me who can do so much for you ? Weep no more for him. Probably he is dead by now, devoured by some beast or bird of prey. But, even if he be alive, he cannot rescue you. Never will he be able to enter Lanka. I do not fear him. Thousands of Ramas will never be able to carry you away. Forget him and be my wife."

When she heard these scornful words, Sita turned her eyes alight with anger towards Ravana. "I tell you, sinful

Ravana speaks
scornfully of
Rama. Sita's
angry reply.

king, you have not long to live. The day will soon come when your golden Lanka will be a heap of ashes and your soldiers lie dead before the broken walls, killed by the arrows of Rama. You boast of your bravery, but you are a coward at heart, or you would not have carried me off by stealth. Between you and Rama there is as much difference as there is between a mouse and a lion, a hedgehog and an elephant, a star and the full moon, the river Caramnasa and the Ganges, or a Chandala and the Brahman Vrihaspati, teacher of the gods. You can boast while you think that Rama is far off. When he comes here, you and all your family will die. Then you will remember my words and repent when it is too late."

These words infuriated Ravana. He gnashed his teeth and his eyes rolled with rage. "If it were not a sin to kill a woman, Sita, I would cut you to pieces at this moment. You speak to me and threaten me as if you were my master. Do not forget that I can kill you if I please. But I do not wish to take your life. I want you to be my wife, and I will give you two months to think it over. If then you refuse, I will eat you."

"Kill me now if you please", replied Sita, "for if you wait for years, I will never become your wife."

Mad with fury, Ravana drew his sword and crying, "How dare you defy me? I will kill you now," rushed at Sita to strike off her head. But Mandodari caught him in her arms. "Dear Lord", she said, "do not commit this horrible sin. Be patient. The Sastras teach that to kill a woman is a terrible crime. This woman is sad and lonely. Why do you persecute her? Perhaps she may grow happier. But, if she refuses to be your wife, you ought not to compel her, for she belongs to another."

At these words Ravana put up his sword and turned away. But he gave orders to the rakshasa women guarding Sita that they were to try to persuade her to be his wife. If within two months she would not consent, they were to cut her to pieces and to bring him her flesh for his morning

meal. Then with Mandodari and all the women he left the garden.

When Ravana had gone, all the rakshasa women stood round Sita and told her to yield to Ravana, but Sita did not listen. She turned away her face and cried. Presently some of them grew angry and said: "Let us torture her or let us eat her". Sita was very frightened:

But one of the women named Trijata interfered. "Be warned by me," she said. "Do not lay hands on her. Last night I dreamed that Rama will come and destroy the city." Then all the women left Sita and crowded around Trijata to hear her dream and Sita was left alone. When they had heard it, they were all so frightened that they ran out of the grove.

As soon as Hanuman saw that Sita was alone, he climbed down and went towards her saying Rama's name several times very softly. At the sound Sita looked up and saw nothing but a very small monkey. She thought that her ears had deceived her and she bowed her head and went on crying. Then Hanuman went up close to her and said: "Princess, I am not what you think I am. I am the devoted servant of Rama. My name is Hanuman and my father was Vayu the wind-god. I have been sent by Rama to find you." Then he handed her the ring which Rama had given him. When Sita saw this, she kissed it and cried bitterly. First she placed it on her head and then she held it to her heart.

But when Hanuman told her that Rama would come with a great army and rescue her, Sita stopped crying and was very glad. She asked Hanuman to tell her all that had happened since Ravana had carried her off, and the good monkey told her everything. Then he said: "But it is not necessary to wait for Rama. Be pleased to climb on my shoulder and I will leap with you over the sea." Sita could not help laughing at the idea. "How could so small a monkey carry me or leap so far? she asked. In answer Hanuman

increased his size till he became as big as a mountain, and then he reduced himself to the same size as before. Sita clapped her hands in wonder and delight and said : "I see that you could carry me, but I cannot come with you, for I will not willingly allow any one to touch me but Rama. Besides, if you carry me away, every one will say that Rama is a coward and is unable to punish Ravana. Go, dear Hanuman, quickly to Rama. Tell him that he must come within two months or the rakshasas will eat me." Then she gave him the only jewel which she had left to take to Rama, and she put on Rama's ring in its place. Having blessed Hanuman, she begged him to go back at dawn.

When Hanuman left the Asoka grove, he thought he would like to do some mischief before he left Lanka. Near by he saw a beautiful grove of mango trees where Ravana loved to wander. Under the trees were shady seats, painted pavilions and pleasure-houses of stone. Swelling himself to an enormous size, Hanuman ran into the grove and began to destroy it. He tore up the trees, broke down the branches, scattered the ripe fruit, trampled down the boughs. Leaping from tree to tree, he smashed them down with his weight till the garden looked as if a terrific hurricane had blown over it. Using a tree trunk as a club, he broke the pavilions to pieces, knocked down the stone-houses and threw the stones in all directions. He leaped about roaring and screaming ; and his yells and the crashing and snapping of the tree trunks made such a terrible din, that the rakshasa guards woke up and ran into the grove. When they saw Hanuman jumping about and tearing trees up by the roots, they ran away and told Ravana that a huge golden monkey was in the city destroying the gardens. Ravana was very angry and he sent hundreds of rakshasas to the grove and told them to catch the monkey and bring it before him bound hand and foot. But when the soldiers with their bows and swords ran into the garden, Hanuman pulled down a crystal pillar at the gate and, using

Hanuman
destroys the
mango grove
and kills the
rakshasa guards

it as a club, whirled it about battering and belabouring the demons till they were all killed. Then he smashed the heads of nearly all the guards of the grove; only one or two escaped and ran back to tell Ravana what had happened.

When Ravana heard that all his soldiers had been killed, he sent for Jambumali, the son of the Commander-in-chief, and told him to go into the garden and not to return until he had killed the blood-thirsty monkey. So Jambumali put on a red robe and over it a coat of mail and a helmet on his head and golden ornaments on his arms and a string of pearls round his neck. Then, armed with a huge sword and iron club, he drove in his chariot to the grove. Hanuman was sitting on the wall, and he leapt about when Jambumali shot at him, so that Jambumali could not aim properly and the arrows only wounded him slightly. Then he jumped down from the wall and, picking up a tree trunk, threw it at Jambumali with such force that it killed him and smashed his chariot to pieces and only one of his attendants escaped to tell Ravana. When the demon king heard that Jambumali was dead, he was dismayed and his eyes flashed with rage. Then seven mighty rakshasa chiefs came before him and begged that they might be allowed to go and kill the monkey. Ravana gave them leave, and, buckling on their armour, they seized their sharp swords and stout shields and hastened out. But when they reached the grove, Hanuman rushed at them and, bounding about, struck at them with his open hands, tearing their faces with his sharp nails. Then he threw tree after tree upon them till they were buried under the weight. When he heard that they were all dead, in great alarm Ravana ordered his son Aksha with five trusty chiefs to try to conquer Hanuman. But, no sooner had they entered the grove than Hanuman beat them to death with the crystal pillar or crushed them under the weight of the trees he threw at them.

Hanuman's
fight with
Jambumali,
with seven
rakshasa chiefs
and with Aksha,
the son of
Ravana.

When Ravana heard that his son was dead, he was filled with grief. He sent for his famous and favourite son Indrajit, who had once conquered Indra, the sovereign of the gods. "My son, it is impossible that you can be conquered. Go and kill this wicked monkey." Then, in obedience to his father's command, Indrajit armed himself for battle, and, mounting his chariot drawn by four tigers, he went forth, at the head of many soldiers to fight the monkey. When Hanuman saw him, he howled at him in a voice like thunder, and Indrajit shouted a challenge in reply and began to rain arrows on Hanuman. Seizing the crystal pillar, Hanuman defended himself, but he received many wounds. Then, leaping at Indrajit, he aimed a terrific blow at him. It missed Indrajit, but it killed his charioteer and smashed the car. Indrajit leaped into another car; but Hanuman chased him round and round the garden dealing him such blows that at last Indrajit was wearied out and said to himself: "This monkey must be a god." Then he seized a magic noose which Brahma had given him and which never failed to capture the enemy. This he threw over Hanuman. Now the monkey knew that he could have broken the rope, but he would not do so because he did not wish to anger Brahma. So, when he felt the noose tightening, he stopped still. Then a great shout of triumph went up from Indrajit and his followers.

They began to abuse him and to beat him with sticks and to pelt him with mangoes, stones or anything handy. Indrajit told him to get up and follow them to the council hall of Ravana. But Hanuman said: "How can I rise and go before your raja when I am bound hand and foot? Tell your servants to take me up on their shoulders and carry me, for I cannot walk bound as I am."

Then a powerful rakshasa stepped forward and tried to lift Hanuman, but he could not move him an inch. One after another the demon soldiers tried, but no one could lift

and allows
himself to be
caught.

Hanuman
plays tricks on
the rakshasas.

him: Indrajit was very angry at this and ordered a hundred soldiers to lift him all together. Hanuman lessened his weight so that the rakshasas could lift him. But when they got him shoulder-high, he increased his weight till he was as heavy as a mountain, and all the demons fell beneath him and were crushed to death. Then, when nobody could be found to try to lift him, Hanuman told them to undo the ropes on his feet and he would walk to the council-hall. So they did so; and he rose and walked towards Ravana's court, with rakshasa guards holding the ends of the ropes that bound his body. By this time great crowds had assembled and the citizens of Lanka abused Hanuman and beat him with sticks and hit him in the face and pulled his hair and tail. Some threw ashes and dirt at him. But Hanuman only laughed at their anger and walked on slowly till they reached the council-hall of Ravana. There sat the Raja on a crystal throne inlaid with jewels and covered with a gold-embroidered cloth, surrounded by all his counsellors.

When he saw Hanuman, Ravana scowled at him and asked him fiercely what he had to say before he was put to death. But Hanuman only laughed at these angry words and told him that, if he did not send Sita back and kneel at the feet of Rama for forgiveness, he and all his people would be killed and the city destroyed as the mango garden had been. Then Ravana was furious and ordered Hanuman's head to be struck off at once. But his brother Vibhishana rose and said: "It is ordered by the Sastras that an envoy must never be killed. He may be mutilated, whipped or his head may be shaved. Those are the three punishments proper for an envoy. Do not kill this monkey, but punish him in any of the three ways and then send him back to those who have sent him."

Ravana was very angry, but he agreed that his brother was right. "What you say is true, Vibhishana. Therefore I will not kill him, but I cannot allow him to go unpunished.

Hanuman
sets fire to
Lanka with his
tail.

The tail is the chief ornament of a monkey. Let this wretched monkey's tail be burned off". Then he gave orders to his rakshasas to bring old cloths and soaking them in oil and ghee, wrap them round Hanuman's tail. The demons brought many cloths: but Hanuman swelled out his tail to such a size and length that all the cloths in Lanka would scarcely cover it. Then when the cloths had been soaked in grease they lighted them.

In a moment Hanuman's tail was flaming fiercely: but he felt no pain, for he was protected by the power of Rama. Ravana and all the rakshasas laughed when the flames blazed up. But in a minute Hanuman had reduced his body to such a small size that he could escape through the loop of the noose that bound him. Leaping out of the council-hall and swelling himself out again to a gigantic size, he jumped on to a wall and tore down a big pillar from one of the houses. The rakshasas rushed out after him, but whirling the pillar round his head, he killed all who came within his reach. Then leaping from wall to wall, he lashed his burning tail about in all directions till he had set all the streets in Lanka on fire.

The rakshasas chased him, but he could leap faster than they could run and wherever he went he lashed his tail about till houses were alight in every quarter of the city. Utter confusion and terror reigned and, while the people ran about trying to save their houses, Hanuman leaped into the gardens and dipped his tail into the lake and put the fire out. Then he leaped into the Asoka grove to tell Sita all that had happened and, when he had comforted her, he leaped out of the city.

In one leap Hanuman reached the sea-shore. Then he gave a mighty roar that could be heard by Angada and all the monkeys and bears encamped on the opposite shore. Running up to the top of Subala, he leaped from it back on to the mainland as he had come. When they saw him safe among them again, the monkeys

Hanuman
and the monkey
army return to
Rama and
Sugriva.

and bears rejoiced greatly. Hanuman told them all that had happened, how he had found Sita, and revenged himself upon Ravana. Then the army set out in the highest spirits to take the good news to Rama and Sugriva. On their march they came to the honey-wood of Sugriva, guarded by his uncle the great monkey Dadhi-mukha. The monkeys and bears were so happy at the good news that they broke into the garden and drank the honey till they were all drunk. They climbed the trees and leaped from bough to bough or hung from the branches by their tails. They scampered about, played games and pelted each other with mangoes and other fruit and made a terrible noise. Then Dadhi-mukha and his servants shouting loudly came with sticks to turn them out. But the merry monkeys seized Dadhi-mukha and beat him and rolled him on the ground and they treated all his servants in the same way. At last Dadhi-mukha fled to Kishkindhya and, throwing himself at the feet of his nephew, told him that the monkeys had drunk all the honey. But Sugriva was not angry, for he said: "Angada would never have allowed them to drink the honey, if they were not returning with good news." So he comforted his uncle and told him to go back and send on the army quickly to the city. When the monkeys had slept off their drunkenness, they marched on to Kishkindhya.

All the way they shouted out the name of Rama and they were all very merry. When they reached the city, Hanuman and Angada went before Sugriva and Rama and told them all that had happened. "Unless the army enters Lanka within a month from this day", Hanuman said, "Sita will have killed herself to escape from Ravana." Then he gave Sita's ring to Rama who eagerly took it and pressed it to his heart and praised Hanuman for all he had done.

When all the preparations had been made, a huge army of monkeys and bears started for the coast. The armies start from Kishkindhya for the sea coast. Sugriva commanded the monkeys and Jambavat led the bears. Hanuman carried Rama on his shoulders and Angada carried Lakshmana in the centre of the troops who marched in the form of a square. The chiefs marched at the head of their divisions. All the monkeys and bears were in high spirits and, as they marched, continually cried out: "Death to Ravana and his demons", "Long live Rama and Sita". With song and jest the army marched south spreading over the whole country amid the clouds of dust raised by their feet. The forests echoed with the cries of the troops, the shrill notes of shells and flutes and the beating of drums. Such an army had never been seen before and the birds and beasts of the jungle fled from their homes in surprise and fear. The monkeys crossed mountains, forded or swam rivers and marched over desolate wastes of sand and scrub without noticing the difficulties of the road. Scampering, running and leaping, soon they covered the ground to the coast. Not a single leaf, fruit or root did they leave in any of the forests through which they passed. By day and night they marched till they reached the coast where they camped on the beach in huts made of leaves and began to consider how they should reach Lanka.

Meanwhile there was great alarm in Lanka owing to the destruction caused by Hanuman. "If this one monkey can do so much damage, what will happen to us when the whole army of monkeys come here?" the demons asked each other. Many of the counsellors advised Ravana to send back Sita quickly to her husband, but he would not listen to them. Many ill-omens occurred in the city, and at last Ravana's mother Nikasha became very distressed. She begged her son Vibhishana to advise Ravana to send Sita away. So Vibhi-

Ravana's
brother
Vibhishana
joins Rama as
an ally.

shana went to the council-hall and before all the counsellors spoke severely to his brother. "Is it nothing to you that ruin threatens us all because of this sin of yours in stealing another's wife? Are there not other women in the world beside Sita that you should sacrifice your kingdom and the lives of all of us for a whim? Every day ill-omens multiply and it is clear that destruction threatens the city." But Ravana would not listen and abused his brother and told him to leave Lanka and go where he liked. Angrily Vibhishana left the council-hall. He bade his wife Sarama farewell, telling her to be kind to Sita and serve her as a slave. Then he left Lanka and on his magic steed he passed with four rakshasa chiefs over the sea and presented himself at the camp of the monkeys. When Hanuman saw the pious brother of Ravana, he welcomed him and took him to Rama. As soon as Rama had heard Vibhishana's story, he comforted him. He ordered pots of sea water to be brought and a fire of sacred wood to be lighted. Standing with the flames between them, he made an alliance with Vibhishana and, pouring the water over his head, declared him to be Raja of Lanka in the place of his brother.

The monkeys and bears were astonished at the sea and its rolling waves and no one could tell how they were to cross its watery wastes. Then a council of war was called by Rama and it was decided to make an appeal to the God of the Ocean. So Rama spent the night lying on kusa grass spread on the beach. He offered sacrifices and prayed to Varuna, regent of the waters. From the sea at dawn rose the God attended by huge sea serpents with eyes glowing like flames. He entered the council and ordered them to build a bridge over the sea. "In your army", he said, "is a monkey-chief named Nala. He is the son of Visvakarma and whatever stone he touches will float on the water." When he had spoken, Varuna disappeared beneath the ocean and Sugriva summoned Nala and ordered him to build a bridge. When the mon-

A bridge of stones is built across the sea.

keys heard the good news they shouted out "Death to Ravana! Let us build this bridge"; and soon all was tumult and excitement. Hundreds of monkeys rushed up the mountains and collected stones, trunks and branches of trees. They dragged and rolled and hauled them down on to the beach and piled them up in heaps. Then Nala began to build the bridge and, as he used the materials, the monkeys brought him more and more. Shouting and laughing at their work, the merry soldiers toiled till the bridge stretched miles out to sea. Calling "Rama, Rama!" they ran backwards and forwards to where Nala was laying the foundations; and, when some miles had been laid, hundreds of them stood in a row some yards apart throwing the stone and logs from one to the other to save time. At last the bridge reached so far out to sea that the monkeys could see Lanka, and they yelled and screamed defiance against Ravana till their noise was heard in the city. When the news reached Ravana that Rama was building a bridge and that the stones floated on the sea as if they were planks, he was very troubled and, summoning his counsellors, asked them what was to be done. But they comforted him, declaring that there was no cause for alarm. Even if Rama could cross the sea, they said, he would fall in battle before the city walls. Yet day by day the bridge grew longer and longer. Upon the stones the monkeys laid logs and branches and threw earth on the top till at last on the last day of the month the bridge reached to the shore of Lanka, and all across the sea there stretched a smooth causeway for the armies to pass over.

Then Rama worshipped Siva and he made an image in his honour and poured water over it. He was going to throw it into the sea when the gods came down and told him to set up the image on an island in the midst of the sea. So Rama set up the image on the island in a shrine which remains there to this day. The place is called Rameswaram. Then with thunderous shouts of "Victory to Rama!" the armies of monkeys and

The Army
crosses.
Ravana sends
two spies to
visit Rama and
report to him.

bears crossed the sea. The sound of their war cries reached Ravana sitting in his palace and he sent to ask what the uproar was. When he was told that a vast host of monkeys and bears had crossed the sea and were encamped around the base of Subala mountain, he summoned two of his ministers named Suka and Sarana and told them to assume the form of monkeys and go into Rama's camp and find out how large the army was and the names of the chiefs. Changing themselves into monkeys, the two ministers went to the camp, but they were at once caught as spies and were taken before Rama. When he heard why they had been sent, he said : "Go through the camp and count the troops, and find out all you wish about the generals. Then go back to your master and tell him that we have come to destroy Lanka and to kill him and all his kinsmen, so that there will not be one left alive to offer the cake and water to his departed spirit." So Suka and Sarana were taken all over the camp and saw everything and they were surprised at the fierceness and strength of the monkeys and bears and their eagerness for battle. Then the spies were released and they returned to Ravana and told him all they had seen.

Ravana was seated in his council hall on a jewelled throne. Ten golden crowns thickly adorned with pearls were on his ten heads and hundreds of gigantic demons stood around him. Over his head hung a canopy with fringes of large pearls. He was eating betel-leaf, in his hand was a cup of wine, while before him lovely nautch girls danced. When Suka and Sarana had told him all that they had seen, they gave Rama's message. At this Ravana's eyes flashed with rage ; he bit his lips and gnashed his teeth. "If all the world were in arms against me," he cried, "I will never surrender Sita." Then he rose and, going to the roof of his palace he saw the armies of monkeys and bears encamped around the city. Suka and Sarana pointed out the different divisions and told him the names of the generals. When he saw his brother's flag flying beside that of Rama, Ravana was filled with rage and cursed Vibhishana.

Once more Suka advised him to restore Sita and to make peace with Rama. But Ravana was furious and said: "You have been for years a faithful servant or I would have killed you as you spoke. Go now from Lanka. Never let me see you again." So Suka fled from the city and passed the rest of his life in the woods.

Now after Suka fled many ill-omens occurred, and were reported to Ravana. Showers of blood and flesh fell from the clouds. The images of the gods tumbled from their pedestals. A terrible figure, its head shaved, its body the colour of ebony, with yellow eyes and a string of skulls round its neck wandered through the city, and showed itself at every door. Dogs and asses howled and brayed in the streets. Fires broke out without cause and earthquakes rocked the city nearly every hour. But nothing would persuade Ravana to repent. He summoned his counsellors and Prahasta his chief general, and ordered them to make preparations to defend the city, to pay the soldiers what was due to them and to collect all the supplies necessary for the war. While the trumpets were sounding for the troops to assemble, Ravana's mother Nikasha entered the hall. The demon king rose, and welcomed her with all honour and gave her seat, bowing down before her with joined hands. Nikasha said: "Beloved son, do you wish to ruin the kingdom for the sake of a woman? I implore you, before it is too late, restore Sita and make a treaty of peace with Rama."

While she was speaking, her father Maliavat came into the hall, and the old man spoke gravely to Ravana. "My son, listen to your mother while there is yet time. Since the birth of Rama the fortunes of the rakshasas have changed. To-day the Brahmans perform their sacrifices safely. Undisturbed, they repeat the Vedic hymns which rakshasas fear to hear. The smoke of the homa rises high into the sky. What power have we left? Our deadly foe is now at our gates. What chance is there of victory? My advice to you is to

restore Sita and make peace with Rama. If you do not, he will kill us all."

Then Ravana rose from his seat and cursed and swore, abusing the old man and reproaching his mother for her weakness. The whole court were alarmed and rose in terror at his violent language, and his weeping mother and her father hastened from the hall with bowed heads.

At dawn the next day Rama, Sugriva and all the generals

held a council of war, and Rama said: "Act as you think best in attacking the city, but we must lose no time." Then Sugriva ordered the army to get under arms and all the monkeys and bears shouted "Victory to Rama," "Victory to Sugriva". They marched up to the walls of Lanka, but they could not cross the moat. So the order was given to fill it up that they could reach and scale the walls. With much shouting and cheering the monkeys set to work. They ran about gathering wood and stones. Some went to the beach and brought baskets of sand. Others climbed the hills and rolled great boulders down to their companions who carried them to the moat and rolled them in amid great splashing and laughter. Others tore up trees and dragged them to the walls, throwing them leaves and all, into the water. On the city walls the rakshasa guards saw what the monkeys were doing and they shot at them and killed and wounded some. But the clever generals ordered a shelter to be built over the workers so that the arrows could not hit them, and after that the monkeys went on filling up the moat unmolested. They worked till parts of the ditch were nearly filled. Meanwhile the rakshasas had hastened to tell Ravana what the monkeys were doing. With all his ministers and his chief generals Ravana went on to the roof of his palace and surveyed the army of Rama. When the monkeys saw the ten-headed Raja of the rakshasas, they gave a great shout of derision. Ravana was furious with anger and ordered his troops to march out of the gate and stop the monkeys from filling up the moat.

While he was giving his orders, Rama saw him, and taking his bow, he shot eleven sharp arrows at him. The first arrow shot down the royal umbrella that was being held over him. With the other ten Rama shot away the ten crowns from Ravana's ten heads. Then Ravana was very ashamed and hastily withdrew from the roof and in a great rage ordered his generals to bring him the heads of Rama, Sugriva, Lakshmana and his brother Vibhishana.

Then the rakshasa trumpets sounded and the drums beat and the demons assembled within the walls. At a given signal the gates were thrown open and the rakshasas poured out upon the monkey army, beating their drums and screaming and yelling. Armed with swords, tridents, axes, bows, spears or maces, they rushed out on the besiegers, some riding on tigers, some on camels, some on elephants, asses, wolves, hogs and hyaenas. At the sound of the war drums Sugriva had marshalled his troops and all the monkeys took their places ready for battle. Some brandished trees that they had torn up by the roots. Some carried huge rocks; while others had swords and spears. But most of them depended on their teeth and nails sharpened to points like swords. Each division was drawn up in accordance with colour; there were black monkeys, white monkeys, blue, green, yellow and red monkeys. Rank upon rank these fierce apes in their thousands stood ready for battle. They sounded their shells and beat their drums and sang their war songs, while over them fluttered their flags and banners of every colour. As they advanced to their positions, they cried out: "Rama, Rama, Victory to Rama!" Some leaped, some danced in their eagerness for the fight. At the head of their divisions were the chiefs, Hanuman leading a great army of golden-coated monkeys. Over all in the centre of the army were Raja Sugriva and Raja Jambavat by whom stood Rama and Lakshmana.

The first battle
begins.

When the rakshasas ran out of the gates, the monkeys rushed forward wildly to attack them. Some hurled trees and rocks; others rushed at the demons and seized them with their teeth, tearing the flesh off their faces and arms. A desperate battle was fought. The demons rained arrows and spears on the monkeys or struck them down with axe or mace: the monkeys hurled rocks and trees at the demons. As they charged on their foes, the monkeys cried "Rama, Rama". The demons replied with angry shouts of defiance, and the trumpeting of the elephants and the roaring of the tigers and other beasts the demons rode made a dreadful din of battle. Thousands of monkeys were killed by the demons; thousands of demons by the monkeys. At each charge the cries of "Rama, Rama" echoed through the air. By each tree some demon was crushed to death, by each rock some enemy was overthrown. Some of the monkeys sprang on their foes and tore them to pieces with their teeth and nails. The rakshasas fought savagely stabbing and hacking at the monkeys, piercing them with their arrows and felling them with their clubs till the field ran with blood. Covered with blood elephants, tigers, buffaloes and other animals ran madly about without riders and attacked the fighters. Rivers of blood flowed on the plain. Heaped up, the dead demons and apes lay together. It was a savage hardly contested fight; but at last the rakshasa troops drove the yelling fighting monkeys back and back towards the sea. At last, seeing that the fight was going against them, Sugriva drove forward in his chariot to rally his wavering troops. He charged the car of Indrajit who was directing the fight beneath the walls. Across the moat Sugriva hurled a huge tree trunk which, smashing Indrajit's car to pieces, killed his horses and his charioteer. Then Indrajit fled within the city. But Sugriva's effort came too late. Disheartened by their losses, the monkeys broke and fled to their camp. A fourth of the monkey army was left on the battlefield.

When Indrajit fled into the city, he decided to sacrifice to Agni, god of fire, before fighting again. Dressing himself in red clothes and adorning himself with garlands of red flowers, he lit the sacrificial fire with branches of sacred trees. Then he sacrificed a black goat. Catching its blood in an iron pot, he offered it as *homa* to Agni and the sacrifice burned propitiously. Then of a sudden there appeared in the flame a golden chariot drawn by four fleet horses and stored with all kinds of weapons. Indrajit rejoiced, for he knew that, seated in this chariot, he would not be seen by the enemy. Mounting into this magic car, he led the rakshasa troops out of the gates again. As he could not be seen, he killed many of the monkeys and fired arrows at Rama and Lakshmana wounding them and they did not know who had shot the arrows. At last Indrajit took the magic noose that had been given him by Brahma and which was made of serpents. He threw it over Rama and Lakshmana, binding them tightly so that they could not escape. Then there was great consternation in the monkey army. But the gods saw how great was the difficulty of Rama and they sent Vayu to him to advise him to summon Garuda, since he was Vishnu and Garuda was his bird. Then Rama thought of the sacred bird, and presently he appeared soaring high over the battle. When the serpents smelt the great bird, they uncoiled themselves and freed the two princes. Seeing that Rama was free again, Garuda rose in the air and flew away. When the monkeys saw Rama free, they charged again and in spite of Indrajit's arrows, they killed so many of the enemy that the rakshasas fled within the city walls.

Now when he saw the monkeys gathering again for the assault and learned that even Indrajit could not kill or capture Rama, Ravana ordered the heralds to summon the army and announced that he would lead it himself. Great were the shouts of triumph among the rakshasas when they heard the news. Mandodari tried

Ravana leads
an army against
Rama.

to persuade Ravana not to go, but he would not listen to her. At the head of a great army he drove out of the gates of Lanka. As he passed through, thousands of drums and shells sounded a welcome on the walls and the shouts of the rakshasa soldiers were like thunder. On his ten heads he wore crowns of gold studded with the richest gems. His twenty eyes flamed in their deep sockets like the fire in furnaces. His teeth were like knives. His twenty arms were large and thick as the branches of trees. His chest was like the side of a hill and the colour of his body was blue black. In his twenty hands he carried the following weapons: A sword, a shield, bow and arrow, a battle-axe, a trident, a battering ram, a noose, a wooden club, a short lance, a spear, a bludgeon with an iron head, a mace, a fork, a two-edged sword, a poignard, a dagger, a javelin, a tremendous scourge, a circle and a mace the head of which was studded with nails and sharp spikes. Crowds of rakshasas followed him, cavalry and infantry, elephants and chariots, without number. Then a terrible battle raged. The demons shot arrows in clouds and the monkeys hurled rocks and trees. The monkeys fought the rakshasas also hand to hand. They charged on the demons and, wresting their bows from them, wrestled with and threw them, strangling them with their strong hands. As it charged forward, Ravana's car left a wake of dead and dying monkeys behind it. At every blow of his great mace or sword monkeys fell. After a few minutes the monkey regiments broke and fled. Seeing that they were panic-stricken, Hanuman seized a huge rock and hurled it at the advancing car. Ravana sprang from the chariot in time to save himself. Then he raised his club and struck Hanuman in the face. Maddened with pain, the monkey-chief picked up another large stone. But before he could throw it, Ravana had mounted another car and had driven off towards Rama. In that part of the battle-field Angada, his eyes red with fury, waving a tree above his head, was rallying his troops. Like trees levelled by a hurricane the giants fell before him and the earth ran with blood.

The flight of the monkeys was checked, and around Ravana, Rama, Lakshmana and Angada a ferocious struggle raged. Ravana fought Lakshmana and both were soon bleeding from arrow wounds. Then, pressing forward to where Rama stood, the demon king challenged him in words of angry abuse. For some time they fought desperately, neither getting the advantage until Rama fired a crescent-shaped arrow which cut off the ten crowns of Ravana. Humiliated and ashamed, the demon raja ordered his charioteer to drive back to the city, and the whole rakshasa army retreated.

When Ravana reached his palace, he was much distressed.

Ravana's
giant brother
Kumbhakarna
is waked.

He and his rakshasas had fought as hard as they could and they had killed a great many monkeys. Still they had been obliged to withdraw and he himself had been humiliated by Rama. When Ravana thought of the power and might of Rama, he was very sad, though he was too brave to be afraid. He sent for his ministers and told them to double the guards on the walls of the city, that the enemy was determined and that Rama would not rest till he had destroyed Lanka. Then he gave orders for his brother Kumbhakarna to be waked from his long sleep. Now Kumbhakarna was a giant immensely big and fierce who slept for six months at a time and then woke up for one day when he ate a great deal and was very strong. He had been asleep for many months now and Ravana said: "My brother, when he wakes after his long sleep, is invincible. Perhaps he can help us against this Rama. Go now and wake him. Do not be afraid. If he will not wake when you call to him, then beat him, for he must wake and help us in the battle or we shall all be destroyed."

In obedience to these orders, the rakshasas cooked great quantities of meat, and they took it with many garlands, incense and perfumes to the palace where Kumbhakarna slept. By his bedside they piled up heaps of venison, fat buffaloes roasted whole and great quantities of boar's flesh. They lit

a fire and threw incense on it and leapt around it, singing and dancing and calling "Kumbhakarna, Kumbhakarna"; but the giant never stirred. Then they beat drums and blew conchs and shouted so loudly that their voices sounded like thunder; but he slept on peacefully. After this fearful din they began to shake him and to roll him about. It took dozens of them to move him even an inch; but he did not wake. Then they beat him with clubs and hammers, raining blows on his shaggy breast and sides, but still he would not open his eyes. When they were quite tired of beating him, they got elephants and made them walk over his body and kneel on him. Then at last, when he felt his limbs passed down by the weight of the huge animals he began to stir. First he shook himself to free his body from the pressure, and the great beasts were thrown to the ground as if they had been mice. Finally he woke up and roared out so loudly that the whole palace trembled as if there were an earthquake.

Kumbhakarna roared with rage when he sat up and looked around him. In a voice like thunder he asked

Kumbhakarna
eats a gigantic
meal and is
killed by Rama.

who had dared to wake him. Then the rakshasas with joined hands told him that Ravana had sent them to wake him. "Great Yuvaraja," they said, "you sleep so long that you know nothing of the dangers that threaten the kingdom. Before the walls is a great army of monkeys and bears. Though many have been killed, more and more come on, so that it is feared that the city will be taken." Then Kumbhakarna said: "First give me food and afterwards I will kill all these impertinent creatures." So they brought him his food and spread before him a great table. First he ate maunds of rice and vegetables. Then he ate scores of roasted hogs and deers, and many fat buffaloes. This vast meal he washed down with a thousand pots of wine. When he had thus satisfied his hunger and thirst, he went to his brother. Ravana told him all that had happened, how he had stolen Sita and how Rama had come to get her back.

Kumbhakarna told his brother that he had acted foolishly in provoking the hostility of Rama. "Still we must fight him now," he said, "I will go out now and devour these monkeys." Then his huge car was prepared and, as he strode towards it, his body and fearful head showed above the great walls of the city. When the monkeys saw this awful monster coming out against them, they were very frightened. But encouraged by the shouts of Angada, of Hanuman and the other monkey chieftains, they hurled a shower of rocks and tree trunks at the giant as he advanced. These struck him all over the body, but he did not seem to feel the blows. Fierce as the flames which devour a forest in the dry season, Kumbhakarna charged the monkeys whom he trampled to death in scores under his great feet. In a minute the ground was crimson with blood. The monkeys were terrified and fled in all directions. Wild with fright, some of them ran to the shore and escaped on to the bridge they had built across the sea. Others climbed trees. Others rushed up the mountain side or hid in caves and woods. Then the drums and trumpets sounded and Angada, abusing the monkeys for their cowardice, succeeded at last in rallying them. Ashamed of themselves, they reformed and picking up rocks and trees, they charged again. The dreadful battle was renewed; but all their attacks left the giant unmoved. Whirling his awful club round his head, he killed scores at every blow, snatching handfuls and eating them. Hanuman and Nila hurled huge rocks at him, but all in vain. Five monkey chiefs charged at him and struck his huge body with rocks and trees, with their hands and feet. With one blow of his fist Kumbhakarna killed Nila and with his mace he smashed the skull of Gavaksha. Throwing out his great arms, he gathered up a crowd of struggling monkeys, dragging them to him and then snatching them up and filling his vast mouth with them. But he could not swallow them as fast as he stuffed them in. Some of them managed to escape by squeezing themselves through his nostrils; other wriggled out through his ears. When they saw

their comrades being eaten, the other monkeys fled in terror.

Raja Sugriva gallantly tried to retrieve the fight; but Kumbhakarna hurled a huge rock at his car, killing the horses, smashing the car to fragments and wounding Sugriva.

Seizing the monkey king, Kumbhakarna, wearied of slaughter, retreated with him within the gates of Lanka. But no sooner were they within the walls and Kumbhakarna relaxed his hold of him than Sugriva managed to escape and, in spite of blows from the pursuing rakshasas, leapt over the walls. Mad with hate and fury, Kumbhakarna came charging out again. Once more he killed all within his reach, stuffing his mouth full of the bloody bodies. He was so blinded with rage that he hit out wildly killing friend as well as foe. Then Rama faced the monster. Fiercely the arrows flew from his bow, but they could not stop the giant's charge or wound his huge limbs. At last Rama shot a dart that bore the Wind God's name. This tore off Kumbhakarna's right arm. The vast mace fell to the ground, crushing monkeys beneath it. With his left hand the giant seized a tree trunk and rushed at Rama. From his quiver Rama took an arrow given him by Indra. The deadly missile struck Kumbhakarna on the left shoulder tearing away the left arm. While he staggered helpless, with the blood pouring from his wounds, Rama fired two crescent-headed arrows which cut off his legs. The dying monster cursed Rama as he sat on the ground amid his victims. Then drawing his bow to the utmost Rama fired a shaft swift as the wind. Through the neck-piece of his helmet, through skin, flesh and bone the razor-sharp steel passed, and the great-head, lopped from the trunk, rolled on the bloodstained earth. Then from all the monkeys and bears arose a cry of triumph, and the sky echoed with cries of "Victory to Rama."

When Ravana heard that his enormous brother had been killed by Rama, he gave way to grief cursing his fate and declaring that all was lost. But Indrajit said: "This is no time to sit lamenting. Now that Kumbhakarna is dead, our enemies will be encouraged and they will break down the gates with rocks and tree trunks. I will go out against them." Then he ordered a sacrificial pit to be prepared and all things to be made ready for the *homa*. He took a black goat and slaughtered it and offered up the blood, and the fire burned favourably. Agni himself appeared to accept the sacrifice and when the rites were completed and his weapons had been charmed with mantras, once more the magic car came forth from the flames. Indrajit mounted it and, becoming invisible, he charged out on the monkeys and slew them by hundreds with his arrows. The monkeys broke and fled, for they did not know whence the arrows were coming in clouds. Even Rama and Lakshmana were wounded and fell on the ground as if dead, overcome by the magic of Indrajit's shafts. When the monkeys had all fled and the field was piled with their dead bodies, Indrajit drove back in triumph to the city.

When the night came, there was much sorrow in Rama's camp over the slaughter of the monkeys. Hanuman and Vibhishana took torches, and went out to the battlefield and they found that the monkeys had been torn to pieces by Indrajit's arrows. Some were without heads, others without legs, others without arms. The wounded were dying of thirst and the dead were piled in heaps, so many that they could not be numbered. Then Sushena, the physician of the army, said to Hanuman: "Go to the northern mountain Gandhamadana and gather four different sorts of herbs that grow there. The first will restore the dead to life. The second will drive away all pain. The third will

Indrajit performs another sacrifice and routs the monkeys.

Hanuman fetches magic herbs from Gandhamadana and restores the monkeys to life.

mend broken limbs and the fourth will heal all the arrow-wounds. If you bring these herbs before sunrise the whole army will recover. If you cannot return before sunrise, then nothing can heal them and we shall be defeated." So Hanuman ran up to the top of the Subala mountain and, swelling his body to an immense size, he leapt into the air. Flying over the sea to the mainland, he passed over mountains, forests, rivers and cities until he came to the Himalaya mountains. He alighted on the ridge where the medicinal herbs grew between Kailasa and Rishava. There he searched for the herbs, but he could not find them. So, as the time was getting short, he put forth all his strength and rooted up the ridge with all the trees, wild beasts and snakes on it and he flew back with it to Lanka. Then Sushena was able to find the herbs; and, when Rama and Lakshmana and all the monkeys smelled the herbs, they revived and were soon strong and well again. Then Rama praised Hanuman for his good work and the great monkey carried the mountain top back to the Himalayas.

When the sun rose and the rakshasas on the walls saw the monkey army marshalled for battle and no dead on the ground, they were amazed. They hastened to Ravana and said: "The dead rakshasas lie on the battlefield, but all the dead monkeys have disappeared and in their place are thousands of strong-armed ones yelling for battle."

Ravana was greatly troubled and puzzled. "What is the good of fighting any more?" he asked his counsellors. "The rakshasas who are killed lie on the field and never return to Lanka. But all Rama's monkeys are restored to life and ready for battle again. There is no profit for me in such a war. Shut the gates of the city. We will remain within the walls." So the gates were shut and the rakshasas watched from the walls and shot arrows at the monkeys who tried to go on filling up the moat. When Rama knew that Ravana had shut himself up in Lanka,

In despair
Ravana shuts
himself up in
Lanka.

he held a council and it was decided that Hanuman and other monkey chiefs should go at night into the city and set it on fire. So when the night came, Hanuman and other chiefs leapt over the high walls and ran about the city setting fire to the houses. This went on night after night till Ravana saw that he must fight the monkeys. So he sent out another huge army under the command of the two sons of Kumbhakarna. But the monkeys beat back the demons and the two young chiefs were killed by Sugriva and Hanuman. Then Ravana sent out another army under the son of Khara, but he was killed by an arrow of Rama and his soldiers were stoned and beaten so severely that they took to flight.

When Ravana heard that his nephews were dead, he sent for Indrajit and consulted with him as to what was to be done. Indrajit took an oath that he would go to the plain and fight with Rama till one of them were killed. His mother Mandodari implored him not to go, but he said that she need not fear for him, that he would kill Rama and return in triumph. Then he drove out of the city; and, in the presence of many rakshasas and in sight of the monkeys, he performed another sacrifice to Agni. But when Lakshmana saw what he was doing, he gathered thousands of monkeys and shot arrows in clouds on the rakshasas and the monkeys charged in on the place of sacrifice and spoiled the sacrifice. Then Indrajit faced Lakshmana and they abused one another. Indrajit ordered his charioteer to charge Lakshmana, but he was met by a shower of stones and tree trunks. While the progress of the car was checked, Hanuman hurled a huge rock at it which smashed it to atoms and killed the driver. Forced to dismount, Indrajit faced Lakshmana. They fought desperately until they were both wounded and streaming with blood. At last Lakshmana took an arrow given to him by the sage Agastya and, when he had uttered mantras over it, he fired it at Indrajit. It struck him on the neck and cut off his head. Then Lakshmana and all

Lakshmana
kills Indrajit.

the monkeys roared out in triumph and cried "Victory to Rama" till the skies rang with their shouting. And the terrified rakshasas picked up the body of the dead prince and fled with it within the gates.

When Ravana heard the news that his son was dead, he was in despair. For a long time he gave way to grief, beating his breast and crying :
Ravana comes out once more to fight.
 "My son, my son ! No one is left to perform the funeral rites for me." Neither Mandodari nor any of his people could comfort him. After a time, he grew calmer, and the wish for vengeance possessed him. Grinding his teeth and with eyes flashing with rage and hate, he cried : "This cursed Rama and his brother must die. I will slaughter these monkeys and leave their bodies for the dogs, kites and vultures. Order my car ; bring me my great bow and order the army to prepare." When the news spread through the city that Ravana was going out to avenge his son, the streets were soon crowded with rakshasa warriors brandishing swords, spears, axes or clubs, eager for battle. Ravana mounted his war car of gold drawn by eight splendid horses. Shouts of joy and the sounds of drum and shells greeted him as he drove through the streets. But when he passed through the gates, there were many ill-omens. The walls and earth shook as in an earthquake. A vulture flew down and flapped its wing against his banner. Drops of blood fell on the car and the horses stopped suddenly, trembling violently. But nothing could dismay Ravana who ordered his charioteer to lash the horses to a gallop.

When they heard the thunder of the approaching car, the monkeys charged to meet it, hurling rocks and trees. But, drawing his clanging bow, the demon king slew the monkeys in scores. Some he shot through the heart. The heads of some he shot off. Some fell blinded and mangled at his chariot wheel. The plain was soon heaped with dying and dead. The monkeys fled before the now blood-stained car. Encouraged by Ravana's presence, the rakshasas

fought savagely and forced back the monkeys till Ravana approached Rama and Lakshmana. Shouting angry defiance at the brothers, Ravana rained on them arrows in clouds. Rama and Lakshmana shot shaft after shaft at the demon king; but they glanced off his armour or wounded him only slightly. Then a shaft from Ravana struck Lakshmana on the head and rendered him unconscious for a time. Red-eyed with fury, Ravana followed up his success by firing magic arrows. With deadly speed these hissed and flew, some beaked like the vulture and kite, others having the heads of tiger, wolf or snake. Almost overwhelmed at times by this storm of arrows, Rama shot at his foe shafts of fire sacred to the God of Wind. These weapons flashed like lightning and shooting stars as they sped towards Ravana whose car was soon ablaze. Then, wild with fury, he hurled clubs, spears, pikes and javelins at Rama and those around him. Close to Rama was Vibhishana. Rushing forward, he killed his brother's horses with his mace. Leaping down, the demon king ran towards his brother, hurling an enormous spear at him. Lakshmana covered Vibhishana with his shield and saved his life. Turning with fury on Lakshmana, Ravana seized a magic dart forged by Maya and hurled it at Lakshmana. It struck the young prince in the breast and pinned him to the ground, and none of the monkeys nor Rama himself could draw the spear from the wound or raise Lakshmana. Then, furious with rage, Rama fought fiercely with Ravana and at last drove him back into Lanka. But Lakshmana lay on the ground and no one could help him or heal his wound.

When the night came, Rama and all were much troubled about Lakshmana and the physician Sushena asked Hanuman to go once more to the mountain Gandhamadana to bring herbs before sunrise that would cure Lakshmana.

Hanuman goes
to get herbs for
Lakshmana.
His adventures.

A rakshasa spy approached the group around the young prince and heard the arrangement and

quickly told his master. Then Ravana sent for his uncle Kalanemi who was a great wizard. "If you can kill this Hanuman," he said, "I will give you half my kingdom"; and he told him where Hanuman was going. So Kalanemi set out at once for Gandhamadana. When he reached the mountain, he turned himself into a rishi and created a magic hermitage on the mountain side. Fruits and flowers sprang up at his command to form a lovely garden and birds sang in the trees; the whole scene was one of peace and holiness. Meanwhile Hanuman flew from the camp towards the north. When he reached the mountain, he saw the hermitage. Kalanemi was seated, like a rishi, on a deer skin absorbed in meditation with rosaries round his neck, his body smeared with ashes and his eyes closed. Presently the hermit opened his eyes. When he saw Hanuman, he welcomed him kindly and conducted him within the hut. Hanuman would take neither food nor drink, but he was persuaded to bathe in a pond near by. Directly he dipped his foot in the water, it was seized by a crocodile. Hanuman leaped out of the water and killed the reptile. Then from the body rose a beautiful Apsara who told him that she had angered a sage by her pride and had been cursed by him to live as a crocodile until delivered by Hanuman. In her gratitude at her deliverance she warned Hanuman against Kalanemi. Then she ascended to heaven. Meanwhile Kalanemi, feeling sure that Hanuman had been killed by the crocodile, was sitting in his hut joyfully thinking of the wealth that Ravana would give him. Suddenly Hanuman appeared in the doorway. "False and lying hermit", he cried, "I know you: it is useless to disguise yourself any longer". He seized him by the leg and, whirling him round his head two or three times, he threw him into the air with such force that Kalanemi never stopped till he fell on the floor of Ravana's council-hall.

When Hanuman had hurled Kalanemi away, he searched for the herbs. But he could not find them. So he wrenched up the whole mountain ridge and carried it back to Lanka. Sushena found the herbs and ground the fragrant leaves into a paste. This he put to Lakshmana's nose and, when the prince smelt the divinely sweet scent, he was healed immediately. When the dawn came, Ravana sent more rakshasas out against Rama, but they were all killed. In despair he made ready once more to go himself. But first he sent for Sukra, the preceptor of the rakshasas, and asked his help. Sukra taught him certain mantras and told him to offer sacrifice in a secret place, repeating the mantras, when certain weapons would come out of the fire that would render him invincible. But Sukra warned him that he must not speak during the sacrifice, or all would be in vain. Then Ravana went into the inner apartments of the palace and ordered all the gates to be shut and double guards to be put at each gate. Into the innermost chamber he had all the sacrificial utensils and materials brought. Then he ordered a large pit to be dug in the floor that he might carry out the sacrifice in secret.

The servants of Sarana, Vibhishana's wife, who acted as spies, hastened out of the city and told Vibhishana that Ravana was about to offer a sacrifice that would make him invincible. Vibhishana consulted with Rama and Sugriva, and it was decided to interrupt the sacrifice. A large army of monkeys was sent to the gates and they battered them with tree trunks and hurled huge rocks at them till the bolts and bars were smashed and the gates were broken from the hinges. Then the rakshasas poured out and a terrible battle took place in the gateway till dead and dying monkeys and rakshasas were piled up in heaps as high as the walls of Lanka. In the thick of the fight Hanuman and some monkey chiefs leaped over the fighters and rushed into the city. The rakshasa guards tried to drive them back; but Hanuman, armed with a tree trunk, killed hundreds and he and

the other monkeys forced their way to the palace. More and more monkeys climbed over the heaps of the dead at the gate and followed Hanuman till the streets of Lanka were filled with monkeys fighting desperately with the demons.

When Hanuman, Angada and the other monkey chiefs reached the palace, they killed all the guards at the doors and they broke in the doors and wrenched off the locks. For some minutes there was bitter fighting and hundreds of the bodyguard were killed. By this time other monkeys had fought their way to the palace, and, leading them on, Hanuman rushed into the inner apartments where Ravana had just begun his sacrifice. They hurled stones at him and threw the furniture about and beat the servants. But Ravana went on with the ceremony. Then Angada rushed into the women apartments and, seizing Mandodari by the hair, dragged her screaming into the chamber where Ravana was defending himself against the monkeys and trying to go on with his sacrifice. Then Mandodari cried out: "Help me, my lord, help me! See how these monkey fiends drag me by the hair and beat and ill-treat me. Are you too much of a coward to defend your wife as Rama defends his? How can you go on sacrificing while I am being treated so?"

When he heard his wife's piteous appeal, Ravana could bear it no more. Throwing aside the sacred vessels, he turned from the fire and drawing his sword he hit at Angada and Hanuman and, cursing them, drove them back. But when they saw that the sacrifice was spoiled, the monkeys yelled with laughter and ran out of the room and out of the palace and back to the gate. Then the trumpets and conchs sounded and the monkeys retreated taking with them their dead and wounded. Meanwhile Ravana, seeing that the sacrifice had failed, was in despair and gnashed his teeth and tore his robes. The miserable Mandodari fell weeping at his feet, begging him to forgive her and to

make peace with Rama. But Ravana swore a great oath that he would never yield and that he was ready to die rather than give Sita back.

Then Ravana prepared for battle. Glittering with gems were the ten crowns. In his hands he carried terrible weapons and he was clad in golden armour. He mounted his chariot and ordered his troops to gather round him. As he drove from the palace, he met Surpanakha and he thought "All my woes have come from her", and he turned away his face. Surpanakha was furious and she cursed him, saying: "As without reason you have turned your face from me, you shall not return from the battle." But her brother mocked at her and drove forth from the city. When he put himself at the head of the rakshasa army, the drums beat, the trumpets sounded and with deafening screams and roars the demons rushed on the monkeys. Angada, Hanuman, Nila and the other chiefs led their troops bravely, but the chariot of Ravana slowly drove forward and around it the monkeys fell in hundreds. Steadily the rakshasa army pressed on till Ravana was close to Rama, who stood bow in hand. Looking down from heaven, Indra saw that the fight was unequal, for Rama had no chariot. So he sent him his own car of gold drawn by tawny horses swift as the wind with Matali as charioteer. Mounting this Rama faced Ravana, and the two fought for hours. They shot clouds of arrows at each other, but neither got the advantage. Sometimes the fight favoured Rama; sometimes Ravana seemed to be winning. At last the demon raja was fatigued and could no longer draw his bow and he sank fainting in his car. Seeing his master in this condition, his charioteer hastily drove him back towards the city. But before they entered the gates, Ravana recovered his senses and he ordered the man to drive him back into the thick of the fight. Then he closed with Rama and the struggle became more desperate than ever.

For some hours the awful fight raged. Ravana's arrows, on striking, turned some of them into red hungry flames, some into serpents which clung around Rama's limbs hissing, their fiery jaws agape. But the reptiles loosened their hold and fled when Rama took from his quiver the arrows sacred to Garuda. Then Ravana struck down the banner on Rama's car and killed the sacred horses. A minute later Rama had killed Ravana's horses and wounded the demon king severely in the breast. Over his armour the crimson blood was now streaming. Rama rained arrows on him and one of them cut off one of Ravana's heads. But no sooner did the head fall on the ground than another grew in its place. After the fight had lasted for hours, Matali advised Rama to shoot the Brahma arrow at Ravana, for only with that weapon would he be able to kill him. Rama took the magic arrow given to him by Agastya, endowed with the power of all the gods and, having pronounced mantras over it, he fired it at Ravana. The appointed hour of Ravana had come. The arrow struck him in the breast and split his breast open, passing right through his heart and coming out of his back. Ravana gave a roar like thunder and pitched forward out of the car, vomiting blood.

When the monkeys and bears saw that Ravana was dead, a great shout of joy was raised. With cries of "Rama, Rama, Long Life to Rama", the monkeys rushed about with their tails up, shouting and laughing and screaming with triumph. From the skies the gods showered flowers on Rama and the divine kettle-drums and trumpets sounded. The music of the Gandharvas filled the air and bands of lovely Apsaras danced before the chariot of Rama. Having slain the tyrant of gods and men, Rama stood in the midst of his triumphant cheering troops an heroic form of beauty and glory. In his left hand he held the bow and in his right a shining golden arrow. By his side were Lakshmana, Sugriva, Angada, Hanuman, Jambavat and all the chiefs,

Triumph in the
monkey army.
Lamentations
of the widows.

while around him the monkeys and bears danced and sang in their joy.

When they saw their chief fall, the rakshasas fled in terror to the city. The monkeys chased them and killed many; but Rama ordered the battle to cease and the car of Ravana was driven back towards the northern gate. When the news reached Lanka, the wives of Ravana, headed by Mandodari, tore their garments and dishevelled their hair. Weeping and beating their breasts, they came out of the gate to meet the corpse. When they saw it, they fell on the ground and wept. They placed the heads of Ravana in their laps and caressed him and cried out "What miserable wretches are we to have lost such a husband!" Above them all rose the cries of Mandodari, the chief Rani. When Rama saw their grief, he said to Vibhishana: "Ravana's sons are dead. Go into the city and perform the funeral rites for your brother." Vibhishana did not wish to do this, saying: "Ravana abused me before the council and drove me from the city. I do not wish to show him any affection now." But Rama reproved him, saying: "Your brother is dead. Therefore he is no longer your enemy but only your elder brother, and it is your duty to perform the funeral rites." So Vibhishana went into the city in obedience to Rama's order, and there he performed the funeral rites and the body was burned with all the splendid ceremonies befitting so great and powerful a king.

When the days of mourning were over, the city was surrendered to Rama who entered it in triumph. Seated in splendour in the council-hall of Ravana, surrounded by all the monkey chiefs, he declared Vibhishana Raja of Lanka in the place of Ravana, and there and then Vibhishana was installed and anointed as ruler of the land. Then Rama ordered Vibhishana to bring Sita to him, and Vibhishana sent his wife Sarana and many women to attend on Sita and to dress and adorn her. When all was ready, a litter of gold adorned with jewels was carried to the Asoka garden.

Sita received
by Rama with
harsh words.

Sarama had waited on Sita since the day when Ravana had banished his brother. Now Sita took an affectionate farewell of Sarama and of the women attendants who had comforted her in her imprisonment. Then she entered the litter and, escorted by thousands of monkeys, was carried out of the city to the plain where Rama awaited her. The whole army of the monkeys and bears had collected on the plain to see Sita. Rama sent orders that she was to get out of the litter and walk, so that the army might see her. Sita alighted and walked and the troops were amazed at her beauty, crying continuously, "Welcome to Sita! Long live the Rani Sita!" Thus through the rows of the soldiers she passed till she entered the presence of Rama. When she approached him, she stood with joined hands and bowed down at his feet. But Rama turned his face away, saying: "I have killed all my enemies and delivered you from captivity. Now that I have avenged my wrongs and cleared my honour of all stain, I do not wish to look on you. Never again can I receive you as my wife, for you have lived in the palace of Ravana."

When Sita heard these cruel words, her eyes filled with tears and in sad and indignant tones she said: "My Lord, how can you speak so cruelly to me? I did not deserve such unjust words. Never have I been unfaithful even in thought to you. Though Ravana threatened to kill me, though the rakshasa women who guarded me were ordered to tear me in pieces if I did not yield, never would I consent to be his wife. Is all my faithful love through joy and sorrow, wealth and poverty forgotten? If you intended to abandon me, why did you come to rescue me? If I had known this, I would have killed myself long ago. It was only the hope of seeing you again that helped me to bear my sufferings." Then, turning to Lakshmana, she said "Dear brother, prepare my funeral pile. I will enter the fire and thus end my sorrows. I cannot bear the injustice of my lord." Lakshmana looked at Rama and, as he said nothing,

Sita undergoes
the ordeal of fire.

Lakshmana with the help of the monkeys built a pile. When all was ready, Sita prayed to Agni: "Dear Lord of Flame, be witness that my heart has always been true to Rama. Protect my body on the pyre and prove his charge is false." Then, bowing before her husband and embracing his feet, she entered the fire fearlessly in the sight of all the inhabitants of Lanka and the army.

When the flames blazed up, there were cries of grief and murmurs of horror from all present; and, when he saw Sita ascend the pile, Rama was wild with grief and remorse. "What have I done in my jealous rage and maddened with suspicion?" he cried. "After great battles and much bloodshed I have rescued Sita only to be the cause of her untimely death. In her love for me she bore the persecution and torture of Ravana, and I have rewarded her faithful devotion by suspicion and injustice." But Agni had heard Sita's prayers and he came down into the midst of the flame and saved her from death. He came forth from the fire bearing Sita on his knee as his own daughter, and, as she came from the fire, she was more lovely than she had ever been. In the skies gathered the Gandharvas and the gods. Among them Rama saw his father Dasaratha, and he bowed his head humbly before them. "Rama", Agni said, "take back your faithful wife. The hearts of all are known to me, and if even in thought she had been untrue to you, she could not have escaped the flames." Then Rama took Sita's hand and said: "I take you as my wife before all. I was maddened with suspicion. I did not really doubt you. Now I thank the gods that your faithfulness has been proved before all men." Then the monkeys and bears raised a great shout of joy and leapt about crying, "Long life to Rama and Sita"; and thrones were brought and Sita sat beside Rama and the trumpets and drums sounded and flowers were showered on their heads by Hanuman and the monkey chiefs.

When the rejoicings over the reunion of Rama and Sita were ended, Vibhishana begged Rama to stay for a time in Lanka. But Rama said :
 Rama and Sita start on the return journey to Ayodhya. "The fourteen years of exile have nearly passed and I must return to Ayodhya. My brother Bharata has vowed that he will enter the fire unless I return within four days of my period of exile ending." Then orders were given to the army to cross to the mainland and Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Hanuman and the monkey chiefs mounted the magic car Pushpaka. Amid the sound of drums and shells the army marched back across the bridge of rocks. When all had crossed, Rama ordered Lakshmana to destroy the bridge, for fear that there would be constant fighting between the people of the mainland and those of Lanka. So the monkeys and bears tore up the tree trunks and threw the rocks back on to the land. Then the whole army marched on towards Kishkindhya, and as they went Rama showed Sita where the battles had been fought and the different places which he had visited on his journey to the south to rescue her. In great happiness they all journeyed on till, having passed through the forest of Dandaka, they came at last to the hermitage of Bharadwaja at Prayaga near the Chitrakuta mountain. The sage welcomed Rama and told him how Bharata passed his days in a hut far from Ayodhya ruling the kingdom through Rama's shoes, living on fruits and roots, sleeping at night on the bare ground and clothed in the rough dress of a hermit. The fourteen years had now passed, and by Bharadwaja's advice Rama sent Hanuman to Bharata to tell him of his arrival, lest in despair Bharata, believing his brother to be dead, should take his own life.

Bharadwaja
entertains
Rama and the
monkeys.

When Rama had sent Hanuman to Ayodhya, Bharadwaja desired to entertain Rama and the monkeys and bears. So he invoked Visvakarma, the divine architect, and in a very short time Visvakarma had built palaces and dining halls and provided food and wines in great quantities and sweetmeats and robes of honour. The banquets were served by lovely Apsaras, but the monkeys and bears were frightened at the splendours of the banqueting chambers and of the maidens. They climbed up the trees and began to grin and chatter at them. Then the Apsaras called : " Come down and eat. At the command of the great sage we have come here to attend upon you. Why are you frightened ? Come down, bathe yourselves and put on the rich robes and ornaments we have brought for you." After a time the monkeys and bears climbed down and they permitted themselves to be bathed, dressed and perfumed. When they were robed, they looked very funny, but strangest of all sights was to see their efforts to put on the ornaments. None of them had seen such jewels before, and they handled them and turned them over and over ; but they did not know how to wear them. Some put the anklets on their heads ; others tried to fasten the necklaces round their waists ; while others tried to put the bracelets on their feet. Then when they found that the ornaments would not fit, they crushed them to pieces in their anger and threw them away. When the feast was ready, a silken mat richly embroidered with gold was given to each monkey and bear. But they thought that they were too beautiful to sit on and they put them on their heads and sat on the ground. Some of the curries were so hot that the monkeys thought that they must be poisonous and they would not eat them. All through the meal there was much merriment over the mistakes that they made, and, when the sweetmeats were brought, they threw some away because they were like coiled snakes and others they mistook for stones. When the Apsaras

told them how nice the sweets were and ate some themselves they tried them and, finding them delicious, ate them ravenously. Then betel was brought; and, when they chewed it and saw the red juice running out of their mouths, they thought it was blood, but the Apsaras told them to wipe their mouths and so ended their fears. When they entered the sleeping rooms and saw their reflections in the mirrors, they were very angry and broke all the mirrors in their efforts to fight the strange monkeys. So in great merriment the entertainment came to an end and all the monkeys and bears went to sleep.

On the morrow, bidding Bharadwaja farewell, Rama and the army went on to the Bhil country. There they were received with great joy by Raja Guha who had heard from Hanuman that Rama was coming. The city of Sringavera was decorated with banners and flowers and Guha entertained Rama and the troops at a great banquet. Meanwhile Hanuman had gone on to Ayodhya and told Bharata that Rama was coming. Bharata was overjoyed. He summoned Vasishta and all his counsellors and told them the glad news. He ordered the following proclamation to be made throughout the city by beat of drum:—"Know all men that Maharaja Rama is returning from his exile. To-day he is the guest of Raja Guha and to-morrow he will enter Ayodhya. Let all put aside their grief and sorrow and prepare to welcome him. Let the whole city be decorated and let worship be offered to all the gods. Let every horse, elephant and car be got ready, and let every man go out to meet their Maharaja."

Great was the joy of the people of Ayodhya when they heard this news. The streets were cleaned and swept, watered with sandal-water and strewn with flowers. Flags and banners were set up on poles; the trees on each side of the road were festooned with garlands and all the houses were decorated with coloured cloths. On all sides sounded pipes, drums and shells, and the happy people gathered

Hanuman
reaches
Ayodhya. Pre-
parations for
Rama's recep-
tion in the city.

in crowds at the gates dressed in holiday attire. Then the gates were opened and the crowds swarmed out of the city. The army was made ready and marched out. First went the chariots newly painted, then the elephants whose gilded girths sparkled with jewels, then the cavalry on horses with embroidered saddles. Last of all came the foot soldiers. On the house tops and at the windows were the women in bright dresses, and at every door-way were placed lucky things, fruits and pots of water. Within the palace all was joy and thanksgiving. The good Kausalya cried with happiness and Kaikeyi also, who had long repented of her wickedness, rejoiced that her evil plans had failed and that Rama would sit at last on his father's throne.

At dawn the next day the Rani Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra and all the women of the palace started in chariots and carriages drawn by bullocks to welcome Rama. A great procession was formed. First went the musicians, then followed the dancing girls, then the singers, then the heralds, eulogists and bards. Next came hundreds of Brahmans chanting the Vedic hymns, with Vasishta at their head. After them followed the people of Ayodhya carrying auspicious things, curds, parched paddy, garlands, ghee, fruit, flowers and red powder. Then came Bharata carrying the shoes of Rama on his head with the royal umbrella held over the shoes and two men fanning the shoes with milk-white chamaras. Bharata was followed by all the counsellors and rajas of the kingdom. Thus in solemn procession they went out of the city. Before them had gone the army, and soldiers lined the roads. When the monkey army came in sight, loud cheers and cries of joy rent the air. "Long live Rama!" all cried, "Welcome to Rama!" "Rama returns from exile to bless his people!" The cheering and shouts were as loud as thunder. When Rama's chariot came in sight, Bharata hastened towards it. Rama descended and took his brother in his arms and kissed him. Rama asked: "Is all well with the kingdom? Are my

The return of
Rama to
Ayodhya.

mothers well?" and Bharata answered: "All is well." Then Bharata greeted Lakshmana and Rama embraced Satrugna and his father-in-law Raja Janaka. Then Vasishta and the Brahmans came forward with grass and grain in their hands and they called down heaven's blessing on Rama, saying: "Great Maharaja, you have served the gods by killing their great enemy. Welcome now to your home. It is the prayer of your people that you will seat yourself on the throne of your father." And all the people shouted "Long live Maharaja Rama!" Then Rama passed to the chariots of the Rasis and he bowed at the feet of his mother and Kaikeyi and Sumitra, and they all embraced him and wept with joy. When he had greeted them, he led Bharata to his mother and bade him forget the past and to be as devoted to Kaikeyi as in former days. Thereupon Bharata was reconciled with his mother.

When the greetings were over, the procession halted at Nandigram outside the city. Rama and his brothers were anointed by the Brahmans with scented oils and bathed in perfumed water. They took off their dresses of bark and put on splendid robes of yellow silk and adorned themselves with jewels and golden ornaments. Sita also was dressed by the ladies of the palace in royal garments. Then amid the glad sounds of trumpets and drums the procession reformed and started for the city. In the first chariot were seated Rama and Sita. Over their heads Satrugna held the white umbrella. At their side stood Lakshmana and Hanuman fanning them with fans of richly embroidered silk. On each side stood Sugriva and Vibhishana waving the chamaras, while behind stood Jambavat and Angada waving peacock's tails. Bharata took the reins and whip and acted as charioteer. Then the music burst out and singers and dancers surrounded the car. Thus in great joy they went forward towards Ayodhya. Continually the people cried, "Long live Rama", and the monkeys were so happy that they scampered about, leaping some of

Rama and Sita
enter Ayodhya
in royal state.

them on to the cars, some on to the backs of the elephants, on the tusks of which they hung by their tails ; and some leapt on the horses of the cavalry and hung on by their manes. Amid this cheering laughing merry crowd Rama entered the city. There immense crowds had collected in the streets and they cheered and cheered, and the women and girls threw flowers from the houses on Rama and Sita as they passed. When they reached the palace gates, Bharata ordered jewels and gold without stint to be thrown among the people.

Rama had not entered the palace since the death of his father, and at first he was overwhelmed with sorrow. But Bharata comforted him and begged him to forget the past and prepare to rule the land. Then they summoned Vasishta and asked him to fix an auspicious day for the installation. "To morrow", replied Vasishta, "is auspicious and all the chiefs and rajas are in Ayodhya." Then he summoned the priests and ordered them to make all ready. "Bring the five purifying things of the cow. Bring the white garlands, honey, parched paddy, the chamaras, the white flags, the golden mace, the sacred grass, the ornaments of gold and silver, the royal jewels, the golden pots of holy water and all else that is needed for the ceremony." The priests hastened out to obey his orders, and in all the temples the gods and goddesses were adored. That night Rama and Sita fasted and passed the night without sleep. Sita spent it in the women's apartments telling the ladies of the palace her adventures, and Rama stayed with Vasishta and the priests.

At dawn the music began in the palace courtyard, and when the sun rose the citizens flocked to the palace in bright dresses to witness the ceremony. Then within the palace, after their morning prayers, Rama and Sita were splendidly robed and adorned with jewels and they walked in state, surrounded by all the ministers and court officials, to the durbar hall, while the ladies of the palace viewed the cere-

mony from latticed galleries. Holding Sita's hand, Rama enquired of the Brahmans, rajas, counsellors and people if it were their will that he should be their king, and with one voice they all shouted "Long live our beloved Maharaja Rama!" Rama then seated himself on the throne with his face to the east and placed Sita on his left hand. The heralds blew a flourish of trumpets and all cried "Long live Rama and Sita! May our Maharaja's reign be long and prosperous!" Then Vasishta and the rishis came forward with the pots of holy water. Vasishta poured the water on Rama's head and the rishis poured water over Sita. Next, the Brahmans came forward and poured water over both. They were followed by representatives of all the castes and, last of all, the people came forward. Each class poured water over their heads. Then Rama and Sita rose and withdrew to the palace and changed their wet robes. When they returned, once more they took their seats on the thrones, and Lahshmana held the umbrella over their heads, while Sugriva and Vibhishna fanned them with the chamaras. Then all the people within and without the durbar hall acclaimed Rama as the Maharaja, and the Brahmans came forward with paddy and kusa grass to bless Rama. They poured the rice and grass over his head, and a great blast of trumpets and beating of drums announced that the installation was complete. Then by Rama's order presents of gold, cows, lands and jewels were given to the Brahmans. To the dancers, musicians and minstrels also were distributed costly gifts. To Sugriva Rama gave a set of rich gold ornaments and to Angada he gave the bracelets off his wrists; while by his permission Sita gave to Hanuman the pearl necklace off her neck. Then Rama and Sita walked in procession back to the palace and the people gave themselves up to feasting, song and dance for many days. When all the ceremonies were completed and the days of public rejoicing were at an end, Rama gave presents to all the monkeys and bears who had helped him against Ravana and they marched away to their own kingdom.

When the coronation festivities were at an end, Rama installed Bharata as Yuvaraja and began to reign in great happiness. Every morning he was waked by the court minstrels singing his praises in the palace courtyard. Then after his prayers he took his seat in the council hall and administered the affairs of the kingdom, assisted by his brothers and the counsellors of his father. At noon he went to his mother's apartments where he ate his meal. In the evening, seated in his garden-house with Sita, he delighted in music and dancing. So the happy days passed in contentment. But after some months there was poverty among some of his subjects, and one of the ministers, a man of harsh speech, ventured to address him as follows: "Maharaja, the poverty among your subjects is a punishment upon you and the kingdom because of your sin in taking back Sita after she had lived for ten months in the palace of Ravana. It is right that you should put her away for the sake of your people." At these words Rama was amazed, but he made no answer. When the council rose, Rama retired to his rooms and thought long on what the counsellor had said.

Now it happened that Rama went that very afternoon to bathe in a tank in the palace gardens. On the farther bank lived one of the royal dhobis whose daughter had recently been married. On the day before she had returned to her father's house and slept the night there. Just when Rama came to bathe, the husband was having a quarrel with his father-in-law, and the latter said: "I beg you to take her back." But the husband said: "Not so. Your daughter left my house and I only have your word for it that she spent the night under your roof. I cannot therefore take her back. If I were a great Maharaja like Rama, then I might take her back, even if she had spent ten months in another man's house. But I am a poor man, and I cannot do this for fear my kinsmen will expel me from my caste."

When he heard these words, Rama was very much troubled and his former suspicions of Sita were aroused. It so happened that, when he returned to the palace, he went to Sita's apartments. She was telling her maids the tale of her adventures in Lanka and she had just drawn a picture of Ravana on the floor when Rama came in. When he saw the figure of Ravana, Rama was angry and his heart hardened against Sita. He went out at once and, summoning his brothers, told them that he had resolved to exile Sita. They were all grieved and begged him not to do so, reminding him how she had passed through the ordeal of fire. But Rama would not listen to reason. He declared that he knew that Sita was innocent, but that he could not bear the taunts of the people. Then he ordered Lakshmana to take her the next morning at dawn out of the city and drive her to the bank of the Ganges and there abandon her, or he threatened to kill himself. Some time before this Sita had expressed the wish to visit the rishis and Rama hid from her his decision and told her to prepare to go next day at dawn with Lakshmana. So Sita gladly prepared for the journey and took leave of her mothers-in-law. Then at dawn she mounted into the car with Lakshmana and drove out of the city. On their road they met many evil omens. Jackals howled in front of the car; deer fled from them on the left side; and many snakes appeared on the road. Seeing these omens, Sita feared that they foretold evil for Rama, and she prayed earnestly for his safety. At last they reached the Ganges, and Lakshmana got a boat and they crossed the river. Then they went on towards Chitrakuta, where they had once lived. But now the hill was deserted, the fruit trees were old and dying and in the hollowed trunks snakes made their homes. When they were four miles from the hermitage of Valmiki, Lakshmana knew that he must tell her. He wept bitterly and begged her to forgive him. Then he told her of the cruel orders that Rama had given him, and advised her to take refuge in the house of

Valmiki. Then he left her and made his way back to Ayodhya where he bowed before Rama silently weeping.

When Sita heard Lakshmana's words, she was overwhelmed with surprise and terror. She sank to the ground sobbing bitterly. When Lakshmana had gone, she struggled to her feet and tried to walk on towards Valmiki's hut. But she was already weak and ill and the pains of childbirth were attacking her. In an agony of grief she stumbled on over the sandy plain, the scorching mid-day sun blazing down on her. After a short time her tender feet were blistered and swollen. Her mouth and throat were burning with thirst. There was no tree near to shelter her. Sometimes she staggered on a little, then she fell and lay moaning in the sand. At last she fell down and was too weak to rise again and struggle on. She lay there for a long while and the wild beasts sat solemnly round her as if to guard her, while the great birds fanned her with their wings or hovered over her to protect her from the sun's rays. In this swoon-like death she was found by Valmiki. He restored her to consciousness and took her to his hut where his wife and her maid-servants looked after her and fed her.

In the course of time Sita gave birth to two sons and the beauty of the boys was as dazzling as the sun's splendour. Valmiki gave them the names of Lava and Kusa and brought them up and educated them with the greatest care. When they reached the age of boyhood, he invested them with the sacred thread, and he taught them the Vedas and Vedangas, and he taught them also to recite his own poem the Ramayana relating the history of their father up to the defeat of Ravana and his triumphant return to Ayodhya. He instructed them also in the arts of war, so that they became in time most skilful archers, and the lads grew in strength and beauty till they were great warriors.

Sita's sufferings
in the forest.
The birth of her
sons.

When he had exiled Sita, Rama was not happy; and, though the kingdom prospered, he withdrew more and more from public life and lived within the palace grounds. As the years passed, he became sadder and sadder and took no pleasure in life. At last he convinced himself that all his unhappiness was due to his having killed a Brahman, for Ravana was grandson of Pulastya and therefore a Brahman. He summoned Vasishta and the sages of Ayodhya and told them his fears. They advised him to perform the great sacrifice of an *Aswamedha* and so win the forgiveness of the gods. Preparations for the ceremony were made, and a white horse without spot or blemish on it was let loose to wander over the earth escorted by Satrughna and an army. The horse wandered through the jungle till it came to the place where Sita was dwelling with her two sons. When they were out hunting one day, Lava and Kusa saw the horse and captured it, and took it to their home. Then Satrughna and his army marched against them, but the two young princes defeated their uncle and his troops, and Satrughna was left wounded on the battle-field.

When Rama heard that two young warriors had defeated his army and seized the horse, he was very angry, and he sent Lakshmana with a larger army to recover the horse. But Lava and Kusa and their followers defeated Lakshmana and drove his soldiers away, Lakshmana being wounded and left for dead on the ground. Then Rama sent Bharata to rescue his brothers, even if he could not recover the horse. Hanuman went with him and they had many soldiers. But they were defeated also and only had time to recover the bodies of Satrughna and Lakshmana, whom they carried off in their chariot. But, when Hanuman saw Lava and Kusa, he was certain who they were and he told Bharata that they were the living image of Rama at the same age. But when they returned and told Rama of their defeat, Hanuman said nothing about his suspicions.

When Bharata and Hanuman told Rama what had happened, he was greatly distressed and ashamed. He marched out with a large army to recover the horse. When he came to the jungle where Lava and Kusa lived, he halted his troops and went forward, alone to meet the two lads and persuade them to surrender the horse. When he saw them, he felt towards them a sudden tenderness, and when they saw him, they came forward and bowed at his feet. When Rama asked whose sons they were, they replied : " Our mother's name is Sita, but we do not know the name of our father. We have been brought up by Valmiki the sage who has been a father to us." Then Rama knew that they were his sons, and he begged them to take him to Valmiki. When he had greeted the sage respectfully, Valmiki told him the story of Sita and how she had been found unconscious and how the boys had been born in his house. Rama was greatly ashamed and asked Valmiki to beg Sita to come to him. At first Sita would not listen to the sage, for, she said, Rama had treated her so unjustly. But Valmiki said : " All that is past. Your sons have avenged your wrongs. Your husband has been humiliated and now comes to ask you to forgive. You will sin if you refuse to forgive." So Sita allowed herself to be led into the presence of Rama and they were reconciled and Sita forgave him. Then Lava and Kusa kissed the feet of their father and he took them into his arms and blessed them. They all returned to Ayodhya with the white horse and the *Aswamedha* was performed with great splendour. For many years Rama and Sita lived in Ayodhya in great happiness with their children.

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