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Lakhmí :
THE RÁJPÚT'S BRIDE

A Tale of Gujarát in Western India

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PREFACE.

THIS tale is meant to illustrate the state of society in Western India on the downfall of the Mussulman empire at Dehli.

In pronouncing the vowels in reading, the following rules should be observed :

a as *a* in *above*.

á as *a* in *cart*.

i as *i* in *image*.

í as *ee* in *seen*.

u as *u* in *put*.

ú as *oo* in *fool*.

CANTO I.

CANTO I.

THE sun had set, and dewy night
Drove fast away day's waning light.
The West was tinged with gorgeous dyes,
Seen nowhere but in tropic skies.
Scarce hidden 'neath day's lingering beam,
The evening star began to gleam,
And, harbinger of rest and peace,
Proclaimed from labour's toil release ;
Whilst with faint breath the Western breeze
Played gently with the waving trees.
The dove, to roost returning late,
Whispered soft cooings to his mate ;
Who, at his greeting well pleased, too,
Rustling her feathers answered "Coo."
Such is the hour when maidens coy, •
Hear vows of love with secret joy ;
And, though love's fullest power they feel,

Half of their passion will conceal ;
And hide, half-owning love's bright spark,
Their tell-tale blushes in the dark.
As the sun set and dipped below,
A lofty tower caught its glow.
Beneath that tower on the hill
There lay a garden dark and still ;
And in the garden's fairest grove,
A bower such as fays might love.
The garden on a mountain ledge,
The tower on its very edge,
A stone thence dropped by childhood's hand
Would reach sheer down the level land.
Rising abruptly from the plain,
The hill commenced a mountain chain ;
Where rocks on rocks in order wild,
As if by giant's hands, were piled.
A belt of jungle fringed its base,
Whilst all around fair Nature's face
Was decked with tree and bush and field,
Where canes their sweetest produce yield,
And cotton blooms, with wheat and rice—

A landscape sketched from Paradise.
Above the garden rose a wall,
With bastions round and turrets tall.
Deep, narrow loopholes, whence to throw
Destruction on approaching foe,
Lined every front—a pathway steep
Led upwards to the centre keep,
Which, high above the neighb'ring ground,
Was built upon a rocky mound.
Its outline in the twilight clear,
Stood forth the fort of Chámpáner.
And in the bower sat a maid,
In Eastern robe of rich brocade.
Her jewelled feet and hands and arms
Were decked with amulets and charms,
Such as a simple people say
Will keep the evil eye away.
The brilliant olive of her skin
Scarce showed her Eastern origin.
Her hair, the hue of raven's wing,
Was tightly bound with silken string.
Her eyelids, fringed with dark'ning dye,

Increased the sparkle of her eye ;
With henna tinged, by custom meet,
Her finger nails and tiny feet,
And she could with earth's fairest vie
In peerless grace and symmetry.
Scion of Vikram's¹ ancient race,
Nobility was on her face.
For she could trace through ages dim
Her royal lineage from him.
Although, by Rájput customs bound,
She could not quit the fortress round.
(For Rájputs, taught in Moslem school,
Their women, too, as slaves will rule,
And teach them that to show their face
Where men are present is disgrace.)
Within, she roved as fancy wild ;
Her sire had given her from a child
Full liberty at will to roam
Throughout her ancient mountain home.
Her beauty's meed and virtue's praise

1. An ancient king in Western India, from whom the Vikramájít era takes its name.

Were fitting themes for poet's lays.
E'er pure of heart and free of hand,
Her fame spread wide throughout the land.
The poor and fatherless in need
Had all in her a friend indeed.
From scenes of war and strife apart,
She reigned supreme in every heart.
Each to the death for her had fought,
And with his life her safety bought.
She had incurred her father's hate ;
His home with her was desolate.
He had no son to soothe his pride :
When she was born her mother died.
She had, by instant death appalled,
Her husband to her bedside called,
Conjured him, as he hoped for life,
To grant the last wish of his wife ;
And died as he his promise gave
For her dear sake her child to save.¹

1. Female infanticide was largely practised until lately among Rájputs and members of other castes unable to provide suitable dowries for their daughters.

His ancestors were lords of all,
From Reva's¹ stream to fair Chuvál.²
Once cities had their laws obeyed ;
A thousand villages they swayed.
Wars, largesses to Bháts, their bards,
Of fulsome praise the sure rewards,
The maintenance of idle bands,
Had so reduced their ancient lands,
That there remained of every sort
But ten poor hamlets round the fort.
The rapid ebb of fortune's tide
Could not abate the Chieftain's pride.
For still he never went abroad
Without a bard his name to laud,
Sounding the titles near and far
Of this once mighty Zamíndár,³
And make with praise the welkin ring
Of Mahárána⁴ Daolatsing ;

1. Another name for the river Narbadá.

2. A district in Gujarát, so called from its originally consisting of 44 villages.

3. Literally, a landholder.

4. A Rájput Chief's title in Rájputáne.

Though chieftains neither far nor near
Paid tribute now to Chámpáner.¹
Her mother's ancient nurse Lárú
Tended the infant as she grew :
In childhood's sport, in sickness' moan,
Waited upon her as her own.
Her pretty talk and childish wile
Soon forced her haughty sire to smile,
And in the struggle thus begun
His pride was vanquished—nature won !
The time had come when they must part,
And now her leaving wrung his heart.
The maiden's eye looked far and near—
That bright eye glistened with a tear.
She gazed at battlement and tower,
And then around her at her bower.
She looked on rock and tree and grot,
Gazed fondly on each well-loved spot,
Then stooping, gently she caressed
A fawn that nestled in her breast,
A bright-eyed, fairy-like gazelle,

1. The name of a real fort in Gujarát, as also is Pávágarh.

And then the tear, o'erflowing, fell.
By ruthless Eastern custom tied,
The infant child was made a bride.
She just remembered, long ago
Her father's halls were decked for show :
That she herself was richly dressed,
Admired and petted and caressed,—
Assembled men and women round,
Sat in a circle on the ground,
While she with shouts of childish joy
Ate sweetmeats with a little boy.¹
But little thought the infant wife
That boy her partner, aye for life !
Her nurse had said a day would come
When she must leave her father's home,
And when the child's eyes filled with tears,
Strove to allay her childish fears,
And said that if it must be so
With her her faithful nurse would go ;—
If fortune frowned or fortune smiled,
She never would forsake her child.

1. One of the numerous marriage rites common in India.

Her father, talking oft of Bhím,¹
Was ever loud in praise of him,
And sportively would speak of her
As his small Queen of Pávágarh.
It often struck the child as strange
That there should be a need of change ;—
That at a perfect stranger's call
She must leave home and friends and all,
And leave her aged sire to die,
Perhaps when not a friend was nigh.
Years rolled away, and she at last
Looked on her danger as if passed,
Or if the thought was e'er renewed
To suffer summoned fortitude.
Her form from first of perfect mould,
Time but fresh beauties could unfold.
Such loveliness on earth is rare,
And she was good as she was fair.

The years rolled on, those happy few, •

1. Bhím, Bhíma, and Bhímásingh, are all forms of the same name. Singh, signifying "lion," is a common termination to Rájput and Sikh names.

Until the child to woman grew.
The time had come. A Brahmin sage
Had studied heaven's mystic page,
Scanned the moon's mansions side by side,
To see what evils might betide ;—
Noted each mark and every sign,
Shown by the planet's rays benign,
By every comet, far or near,
Revolving in appointed sphere,
Neglected not the smallest star,
Scarce seen by mortals from afar.
He fixed upon the afternoon,
The day before the next new moon,
By heavenly influences blessed
As that on which it would be best,
The most auspicious hour of all
For her to leave her father's hall.
Respective Bháts their visits paid,—
To gods due sacrifice was made,
And Bhíma came to carry her,
His lovely bride, to Pávágarh.

Each beast of prey had sought its den,

Hid deep in woods from mortals' ken,
And, freed from care, the timid fawn
Rejoiced to see the morning dawn.
Soared high the eagle, as he flew
In heav'ns expanse of clearest blue,
And soaring higher still flew on
To be the first to greet the sun ;
Whilst vultures, sailing round and round,
Looked down for offal on the ground.
Its merry course the streamlet sped,
And rippled o'er its pebbly bed.
Where shapeless masses first were seen,
Stood forth the woods, distinct and green,
And, deep ensconced their leaves among,
The birds with one accord made song,
And sang their great Creator's praise
In unpremeditated lays.
All Nature's face was bright and gay
As she, too, hailed approaching day.
Just at that hour no little stir
Was visible in Pávágarh.
The trumpets' summons loud and deep

Resounded through the lofty keep.
And whilst the spear-points brightly glanced,
The fretful war-steeds neighed and pranced.
Soon on the rocks their footsteps rang,
Whilst bards young Bhíma's praises sang,
And heavy guns a salvo made
To speed the parting cavalcade.

Now pause a while, whilst I relate
How Rájput chieftains move in state.
One beats, the foremost as he rides,
The drums the Chieftain's rank provides.
These, sounding, give the bards relief,
And pay due honour to the Chief.
The standard-bearers ride behind
With pennons fluttering in the wind.
Next move the bards on ambling steeds,
Singing their master's warlike deeds.
Next comes the Chief, with chosen band
Of near relations on each hand :
Then household servants, mounted all,
To hand the pipe or come at call,

And following these a motley crew,
With swords and shields, with guns a few—
These often, as they walk along,
Join in the chorus of a song,
Or in their master's glory share
By firing matchlocks in the air.
Bhíma bestrode an Arab steed,
One of the desert's purest breed ;
As gentle as a lamb was he,
Yet full of life and energy,
Which like a beast of noble blood
Silent 'midst snorting screamers stood.
Of noble dam and noble sire,
A word sufficed his blood to fire,
But yet his full career to check
Bhíma had but to pat his neck.
Not such the creature that should feel
The stimulus of whip or steel.
In sandy desert Bedouin wild
Will treat his horse just as his child. •
It shares his tent, it shares his food,
And sleeps among his naked brood.

Horse, man and wife their hunger sate
On equal food, the desert date.
His horse, the Arab's firmest friend,
Is faithful to his journey's end.
No longer must unnoticed be
Bhíma's old bard, staunch Rúpájí.
He had the favourite poet been
Of Bhíma's father Jasvatsingh.
By caste a Bhát, of ancient race,
He could his lineage clearly trace
In legendary lore and lays
To famous bards of former days.
His turban towering in its height,
He was arrayed in robes of white.
With sparkling eye and bearing proud,
And form by age but slightly bowed,—
With wrinkled cheek and furrowed brow,
And flowing beard of grey, e'en now
It needed but a spark of light
His poet's genius and excite
In flowing metre, perfect rhyme,
Recitals of the olden time

When Bhíma's ancestors afar
Held lordly rule o'er Káthiávár.¹
The cavalcade held on its way
And reached the plain ere rose the day,
And long ere closed the second night
Old Dáolat's towers were full in sight.
They halted at a village near,
And sent on word to Chámpáner,
That Bhíma with a chosen few
Sought with its lord an interview,—
But that his train would there abide
Until he came back with his bride.
The messenger his message sped,
And it was this that filled with dread
The secret heart of that fair girl
And set her senses in a whirl.
She would not vex her father dear,
And struggled to repress the tear
That to her eye unbidden rose

1. The peninsula commonly called Kattywar, forming the West coast of the Gulf of Cambay and the East of the Gulf of Kutch.

At thought of leaving home and those
Whom from her youth she'd loved so well,
Thenceforth in strangers' homes to dwell.
The garden bower was her own,
And when she wished to be alone
Far from the castle's busy hum,
This was the place where she would come.
And thus it was that it befell
She sought the bower with her gazelle.
She wished to think alone and try
To face the stern reality,
And patiently her heart to drill
To learn to do another's will.
With mournful gaze o'er hill and land
She gazed. Her father touched her hand.
She, sad at heart, with harmless guile
O'er tearful features forced a smile.
There was no place for chilly pride :
Father and child sat side by side,
And there where she so oft had rest
She leant upon her father's breast.
His father-heart was not deceived :

He gently asked her why she grieved.
Then bending low, in accents mild
He kissed her cheek and said : “ My child !
Thou best belovèd of my heart,
Thou grieveest sore that we must part.
That heart had mouldered long in dust,
Had it not thee on whom to trust—
But when I die, which must, alas !
By nature's laws soon come to pass,
What being then on earth would be
Who would protect and shelter thee ?
This ancient fort, my father's lands,
Would be despoiled by hostile bands,
And thou wouldst soon be captive led,
By force some low-born churl to wed.
Our house is of an ancient name,
Writ in the chronicles of fame,
And when I pass to sure decay,
That very name must pass away.
What care was, then, there left for me
But to betroth thee happily ?
No easy task was this for me

To choose a worthy spouse for thee,
For though to ancient custom tied
I was not lightly satisfied.
There sought thee Dungar of Pannár
And many chiefs from Káthiávár,
Whilst suppliant at my threshold sat
The noblest lords of Gujarát,
And Rájput̐s with each other vied
To win in thee a peerless bride.
I cared not for their princely halls
Nor asked for forts nor castled walls.
Poets their praises might rehearse,
And tell their deeds in flowing verse.
I needed not their flattering strains,
Nor sought for wealth and wide domains.
I sought but one of equal birth,
Who would appreciate thy worth,
And who, despising sordid pelf,
Would make thee happy in himself.
Long time I looked through all the land
For one thus worthy of thy hand.
Though many offered, near and far,

Some little fault was sure to mar.
As I refused each haughty lord,
His deadly hatred I incurred,
Until at last I chose this one,
My neighbour Jasvat's elder son,
Whose prowess in the deeds of war
Has spread his fame through Káthiávár.
His father, slain in fray by chance,
Left him a fair inheritance.
He is in prime of health and youth,
Model of virtue and of truth.
In manly beauty, presence fair,
Few with young Bhíma may compare.
Possessed of wealth and ample land,
He's kind in heart, as free in hand.
A Rájput's virtues all combine,
My Lakhmi, in this land of thine."
Pleased, Lakhmi heard her father speak,
And rich blood mantled in her cheek,
To hear expressed in kindly phrase
Her lord and husband Bhíma's praise.
Such worth her feeling heart could move—

She thought he must be made to love.
She said : “ One little point’s forgot,
My father, that he knows me not,
And though his virtue’s great and rare,
Who knows if I his love may share ? ”
The father looked upon his child
With gaze of love, and gently smiled
That she should be so passing fair,
Yet of her beauty unaware.
She said : “ My father, years have sped,
And age is creeping o’er thy head—
I care not for myself, but do
Thy bidding when thou bid’st me go—
A Rájput maiden has no voice,—
Silent obedience is her choice.
How will my father live alone ?
Who’ll care for thee when I am gone ?
Why should I leave this home so dear,
Henceforth a stranger’s will to bear ?
Father ! My earnest prayer forgive :
Let me be with thee whilst I live.
And if thou art the first to die,

'Tis all I ask, for then would I
Light with firm hand thy funeral pyre,
And in the flames myself expire ! ”
“ And must the mighty Vikram's race,
Then, pass away without a trace ?
And must thy father's sacred word,
To Bhíma pledged, thy wedded lord,
Fall, as a straw would, to the ground ?
No, child ! I am in honour bound
To make my sacred promise good
When thou attainest womanhood.
Though thou to me art dear as life,
Thou art no less his wedded wife.”
She knew the last word had been said,
And, weeping, meekly bowed her head.
One little boon would he bestow,
That should life's tide be ebbing low,
Though skilled physicians might attend,
He yet would for his daughter send ?
That she might seat her by his bed,
To smooth the pillow for his head,—
With her own hand his food prepare,

And nurse him with a daughter's care.
Her sire's forgiveness she besought
For her first foolish, heedless thought,
And any words that might give pain
He should not hear from her again.
The father rose and kissed his child
In token they were reconciled.

Night on the scene was closing fast
As sire and child the postern passed,
And while they sought their beds and rest,
The hall was garnished for a guest.
The hall was low ; broad half its length,
Built not for elegance but strength :
Its windows narrow slits and deep,
Embrasures in the centre keep.
Its scanty furniture a cloth,
Spread on the ground, wherein the moth
Lived undisturbed, whilst, hung in rows,
The walls bore armour, swords and bows,
Matchlocks, spears, arrows, such as are
In common use in Eastern war.

Each had its story : here a bow
That laid a monstrous tiger low.
Here was a sword and there a knife
That saved Ajítsingh's precious life.
Some armour there, prized more than all,
Hung in the centre of the wall,
In which an ancestor had fought
When Ghazni's Mahmúd took Somnáth.¹
His, body found amongst the slain,
Was given to his friends again.
Such was the hall, in which was spread
A cotton drugget, dyed in red.
Just at the end, the arms below,
Soft pillows were arranged in row.
To each of these were cushions, fit
For people to recline or sit ;
Side cushions, too, in threes and twos,
For guests of lower rank to use,
And where the rows together met,
The Chief's own cushioned seat was set. •

1. The celebrated temple on the West coast of Káthiávár,
taken and destroyed by Mahmúd of Ghazni.

Night had advanced, and all was still
On garden, tower, plain and hill,
And naught was heard save foxes' bark,
Prowling for victims in the dark,
Or bats that chirped, in devious flight,
The moth pursuing through the night.
All was prepared ere Eastern grey
Had heralded approaching day,
When Dáolat would in fitting state
Meet Bhímásingh beyond the gate.¹

1. It is customary in the East to meet guests of rank at some distance, and escort them in. This ceremony is called the *Istikbál* in Persian and Arabic.

CANTO II.

CANTO II.

THE castle cocks gave early crow,
Answered by jungle fowl below ;—
The wakened *mina's* chattering song
Echoed the rocks and woods among ;
The porter, waking in surprise,
Looked round about and rubbed his eyes,
Convinced that he alone had kept
The castle safe, while others slept ;
Then, as directed by his lord,
To saddle horses gave the word.
These soon were ready, clad in mail,
With painted mane and flowing tail,
Cross-barred their legs the hock below,
Their zebra origin to show,
The Chieftain's own, a handsome mare,
The only gentle creature there.
She ever came at Lakhmi's beck,

And rubbed her nose 'gainst Lakhmi's neck,
And begging sugar-cane would stand
Till she was fed from Lakhmi's hand.
The Chief appeared, armed cap-à-pie,
In Rájput warrior's panoply—
His head-piece all of burnished steel,
Armour of chain and spur on heel,
Such as in pictures old you see
Was worn by knights of Normandy,
When Harold fell on Hastings' field
And Briton did to Norman yield.
The servants, armed with spear and sword,
Followed behind their mail-clad lord.
His bard, old Rámá, close at hand,
Dáolat headed the little band.
Arrayed in all befitting state,
They left behind the castle gate,
And passing on in single file,
Wound down the mountain's steep defile.
Passing beyond, the warlike train
Proceeded o'er the wooded plain.
The Chief, amused by Rámás song,

Smoking rode leisurely along.
On ev'ry side the beaten track
Was closed by jungle, thick and black,
With rocks and nullahs here and there,
Fit places for the lion's lair.
Sometimes there opened out a glade,
Where Chítal and the mouse-deer played,
And many a tale would peasants tell
Of accidents that there befell,
And cattle carried whole away,
The ruthless lion's mangled prey.
At one lone spot a jutting rock
All further progress seemed to block—
Approaching to its very face,
The road passed winding round the base.
A chosen band here, side by side,
Had once an army's might defied—
By arrows from its rocky crown
The foremost ranks were stricken down :
A panic seized the rest, and then
Ten thousand fled a hundred men.

Riding along the level land,

A single horseman met the band—
With flowing robes and turban high,
And trusty sword girt on his thigh,
He rode upon an ambling steed,
And smoked tobacco's fragrant weed.
He looked but on his horse's mane
And rode along with loosened rein,
And as he neared them they could see
'Twas Bhíma's poet, Rúpájí.
The bard, alighting, in salute
Touched with his forehead Dáolat's foot.
Then said he : " I a message bring
To thee, O Chief, from Bhímásingh,
And I have come at his desire
Your place of meeting to enquire."
The Chief replied : " Go, tell thy lord,
I wait his coming at the ford."
Dáolat, on courteous deeds intent,
Bard Rámá, too, with Rúpá sent.

•

The garrulous old men of song
Talked gaily as they rode along,

And thinking not of friend or foe,
Their tones were anything but low.
They did not see the prying face,
That kept up with them pace for pace.
In little more than nature's dress
A Koli of the wilderness
Close to them through the jungle strode
And eyed them closely as they rode.
He listened to the old men's talk,
And seemed to glide in place of walk ;
Like slimy serpents in the grass.
So lightly did the savage pass,
The horses with their ears erect
His cat-like tread could scarce detect.
He learnt the hour the bridal train
Would pass along that road again :
He learnt the strength of escort, too,
And undetected slid from view.
The bards rode on in friendly chat,
Talking of this thing and of that.
They crossed the river to the plain
Where Bhíma waited with his train.

Bhíma, who waited but to hear,
Started at once towards Chámpáner.
As they approached the river's bank,
Took Rúpájí the foremost rank,
And as they went across the ford
Thus sang the praises of his lord.

“ Who doth approach, as if armed for the fight ?
His armour casts back, as if scorning, the light.
Who is it comes with his pennons all streaming,
With sharp-pointed lance in the bright sunshine
gleaming ?

Bhímásingh, lord of the valley and plain !
He's known to the East o'er the cloud-cappèd
hills,
And thence to the West as the mountain stream
trills—

His forefathers all have been famous in story,
And he has inherited double their glory—
‘ Who'll sing his praise in appropriate strain ? ’
And as they gained the other side,
His brother poet thus replied :

“Dáolatsingh, scion of Vikrama's line,
Lord of the forest and mountain and mine,—
(Where is the hall whose arched roof never rung
With shouts of applause as his praises were sung?
Who can exceed, or e'en equal his fame?
Who bears more ancient or time-honoured name?)
Now approaches to meet his son-in-law dear,
And bid him right welcome to fair Chámpáner.”

•
These speeches made in rhyme uncouth,
Sprang to the ground the nimble youth,
And with due courtesy began
To help alight the aged man.
No single word did either speak,
But each embraced the other's cheek.
Each chieftain then his horse bestrode,
And ambled quickly o'er the road,
And chatted gaily, nor refrained
Until the castle gate was gained.

•
Historians of yore have told
Of the great Field of Cloth of Gold.

What lightest reader does not know
Ashby's fair field in Ivanhoe ?
With the old knights could Rájputs vie,
The very pink of chivalry.
Those days were passed—Mahratta hordes
Usurped the place of Rájput lords.
Of lands and power all bereft,
Few of the Rájput Chiefs were left.
Upheld alone by former fame,
Was Delhi's sceptre but a name.
Through Delhi's gates Mahratta horse
Had swept in devastating course,
And fast approached the fated hour,
When she must own a mightier power.
The fair-haired strangers of the West
Already half the land possessed.
The Rájput States were rent in war
With Peshvá,¹ or with Gaikavár.²
We sing not now their vain parade,

1.^o The head of the Mahratta power, finally subdued by the British in 1817.

2. A ruling Mahratta Prince in Gujarát.

Nor all the Chieftains did and said,
Nor how the bards all tuned their lays
And staunch retainers shouted praise.
With Lakhmi on the appointed day
Would Bhíma wend his homeward way.
By rules of Rájput etiquette
He could not see his bride as yet,
Nor till he reached his native place
Could he address her face to face.

The time approached. 'Twas on the eve
Of that dread day when she must leave.
That Lakhmi with a tearful eye
Bade each loved spot a fond goodbye,
And throwing thoughts of self aside,
In aid of duty summoned pride.
That self-same hour, with saddened heart,
Her father called her lord apart,
And when naught else the silence broke
Grave words of counsel, warning, spoke.
“My son, I speak not of the past,
Nor blame the customs of the caste.

I used to think that womankind
Had only life, but little mind.
I only late in life began
To know the selfishness of man.
Who would degrade his wife in dust
As made to satisfy his lust,
And whom the gods in bounty gave,
A fitting partner, make his slave.
I looked abroad. 'Twas not the case,
As here, in any foreign race.
The strangers settled in our lands
Of nations great are little bands.
Their wives abroad may go and come ;
Happier than ours their wedded home.
Of many monarchs she has seen,
England reveres her virgin Queen.
Then why should India's women be
Deprived of all their liberty ?
Wife, bound to man by dearest tie,
Should be the apple of his eye ;—
A comforter in moments sad,
In her lord's gladness should be glad.

In sickness who doth not rejoice
At sound of woman's gentle voice ?
Woman, I doubt it not, was made
To be to man a kindly aid :
Why should she then be made a slave,
And sink unhonoured to the grave ?
Though such my thoughts, by custom tied,
I could not shake off Rájput pride.
The last male of an ancient race,
I may not die without a trace,
And to provide lest this should be
I married her in youth to thee.
But I, who know her from her birth,
Can e'er appreciate her worth—
Deprived of her by cruel fate,
Home will indeed be desolate.
I still have pride enough of race
To fear a Rájput girl's disgrace.
She better far had lose her life
When she is born, than be the wife
Of low-born husband, who could say
The day of pride had passed away.

Lakhmi herself has pride of race,
But mercy it can ne'er displace
In her own heart of gentlest kind :
A cruel thought ne'er crossed her mind.
She aye affirms that girl and boy
Are equally a mother's joy,
And be the motive good or ill,
Murder is ever murder still.
So that her well-loved child might live,
Her own life she would freely give.
Though, then, her reasoning may not move,
Respect the feelings of her love,—
And should a female infant die,
Let her not know the reason why.
Forgive me, Bhíma, that I warn,
But yet treat not my words with scorn.
But why say this ? Thy castle stands
'Midst wide domains and ample lands.
No child of thine need dower want,
For thou hast wealth and will to grant—
Children of such a noble sire
May to the noblest lords aspire,

And highest Chieftains in the land
Would gladly seek thy daughter's hand."
Bhíma his head with bearing proud
In silent acquiescence bowed—
The Chieftain then retired to rest,
And was soon followed by his guest.
The dawn arose and put to flight
The shadows of departing night ;
The tropic morning bright and clear
Broke on the hill of Chámpáner—
The woods around were bright and green,
But there were aching hearts within.

Each bard had sung his meed of song,
Echoed the hall's old roof along.
The Chieftains seated on the ground,
Kasúmba¹ cup had gone its round :
Each seated in a cloud of smoke
Took pipe of silence : no one spoke.
Her sire pressed Lakhmi to his heart,

1. Made of opium juice. Equivalent to handing round wine and refreshments with us.

And all was ready for the start,
But ere they fairly took the road
The shadows East were dark and broad.
Her form from vulgar gaze to screen,
Sat Lakhmi in a palankeen :
In litter of an open kind
Lárú was carried close behind.
Bhíma, as always was his wont,
Rode on his Arab steed in front,
With chosen band of horsemen near :
Mounted retainers closed the rear.
Bushes where wild beasts well might hide
Hemmed in the road on every side.

Just as they reached the level ground,
The shades of evening closed around,
And straggling on in loose array
The cavalcade held on its way.
The skulking jackal's dismal howl
Was answered by the hooting owl.
Hyenas laughed their laugh of ill,
And birds of night screamed loud and shrill.

A tawny lion fiercely strode
Across his path as Bhíma rode.

Sudden and loud, a piercing cry,
Caught up by echo, rent the sky.
It was the cry of one in pain,
The guide of Bhíma's struggling train,
Who as he neared the jutting rock
Down by an arrow had been struck.
Bhíma pushed forward, spear in hand,
Surrounded by his chosen band,
Muttering curses not few nor low
Against the dastard, hidden foe.
They looked to left, they looked to right,
They strained their eyeballs through the night,
And in a moment, with a yell,
A swarm of Kólis¹ on them fell.
Seized Bhímásingh his trusty spear,
And straight transfix'd the first man near.
But as the *mélée* closer grew,

1. A well-known, and probably aboriginal tribe, much given to freebooting in former days.

This thrown aside, his sword he drew,
And passing on, struck right and left,
Till through the foe a path was cleft.
The torchmen, who the way had led,
Had thrown their torches down and fled,
And by the torches glimmering light
The servants mingled in the fight.
In dire confusion none could know
Who was a friend and who a foe.
The naked Kolis in the dark
Gave for a blow no certain mark,
And kneeling down or crouching low
They stabbed the horses from below.
Each fought around him as he stood,
The ground was slippery with their blood.
Each cut and slashed he knew not where ;
Oaths and loud curses rent the air.
Bhíma through foes had cut his way,
And turned him back again to slay.
But soon in silence sank the fight :
The foe had vanished in the night.
The dead and dying strewed the ground :
The jungle slept without a sound.

Thus, when a thunder-cloud at hand
Spreads darkness thick o'er all the land,
Deep silence reigns o'er plain and hill,
As if heav'n's very breath were still.
Suddenly the lightning's flash,
Followed by the thunder's crash,
Stunning, pealing long and loud,
Breaks from out the louring cloud.
Then, as the echoes die, again
Silence resumes its wonted reign.

His senses dazed, absorbed in thought,
The Chieftain Lakhmi's litter sought.
The litter lay upon the ground,
Whilst not a bearer near was found.
Its sides were closed. He cried in fear :
"Lakhmi, my bride, art thou not here ?"
He pushed in haste the doors aside :
The seat was empty, gone his bride.
Crying aloud, he sought Lárú,
But found her litter empty, too.
The servants flocking to his side,

He bade some through the jungle ride,—
Others on foot in haste pursue
In search of Lakhmi and Lárú.
Vain was their search : the pathless brake
Gave them no clue which way to take.
They shouted singly and at once,—
The jackals howled them wild response.
Tired out, at last each weary man
Came where the struggle first began.

Thus when a bird has left the strand,
And flown o'er ocean, far from land,—
At first without a thought or care
It cleaves the clear expanse of air,
Or darting down in wayward flight
Skims o'er the waves with pinions light ;
When, turning to return at last,
It finds the light of day has passed,
And, doubting which the way to go,
Perceives a vessel down below.
Night comes apace. With rapture hails
The bird the vessel's welcome sails.

These gained, it sleeps, and ere the morn
O'er ocean far away is borne.
Day breaks, and joyfully it flies,
Seeking for land with eager eyes.
'Tis far from sight—The bird at last
Dejected seeks the sheltering mast ;—
Still coming from its flight, will sit
On the same place where first it lit.¹

All were assembled. Bhíma then
Looked down among the wounded men,
And found a Koli safe and sound,
Beneath a horse, without a wound.
When threatened loud with instant death,
He bit his lip and held his breath,
And, pushed about by menials rough,
Seemed not to care for kick or cuff.
When pricked by Bhíma's threatening sword,
He flinched but spoke no single word.
At Bhíma's word a heap of wood,
Collected where the party stood,

1. This has been witnessed by the writer.

Was placed before him on the ground
The man still uttered not a sound,
Until at last a fire was lit,
On which held firm he had to sit,
To the great joy of Bhíma's men,
Till roaring lustily with pain
He looked to Bhíma in distress,
And said he would the whole confess.
The robber band had come, he said,
From the Chuvál, by Kánji led.
Two trusty men, by Bhíma sent,
In hot pursuit then quickly went,
To find out where the savage crew
Had carried Lakhmi and Lárú.
The Koli instantly should die,
If they suspected treachery,
But if their hiding place he'd show,
He'd spare his life and let him go.

The bearers saw the danger past,
And, trembling still, returned at last,
For they had hid, with abject fear

Half dead, in various thickets near.
The frightened torchmen, too, were found
Crouched in the thickest jungle round.
The litter and the palankeen
Bore off the wounded from the scene.
Men scoured the country far and near,
Whilst Bhíma's band sought C'hámpáner.

Our tale returns to where the cry,
Caught up by echo pierced the sky.
The god that watches over sleep
Had Lárú wrapped in slumber deep.
Lakhmi had murmured silent prayer
To the great Krishna for his care.
Her tearful eyes, with weeping red,
Had scarce relieved her aching head,
And she would soon have been in quest
In land of dreams of broken rest.
Themselves from enemies to screen,
The bearers dropped her palankeen,
And when the din of clashing swords,
Of curses loud and angry words,

Had forced themselves upon her ear,
She laid aside a woman's fear,
And stood enshrouded by the night,
A witness of that bloody fight.
Then saw she that her husband's fame
Was well deserved, and not a name.
Her spirit stirred as she began
For once to wish herself a man.
She had but time to see the fray
When she was seized and borne away.
A Koli took her in his arms
And tried to soothe her vain alarms,
Whilst, scream and struggle as she would,
He bore her through the tangled wood,
As deaf to her entreating prayer
As to her vain shrieks of despair.
Through the deep darkness of the night
They bore her in their rapid flight,
Without a check, without a stay,
Far, far, o'er hill and dale away.
One after other Kolis eight
Lifted her unresisting weight.

They checked their speed as morning's glow
Awoke the cocks and bade them crow.
Worn out with sheer fatigue and fear,
She learned at last their camp was near.
Just then they reached a mountain pass ;
Huge rocks o'erhung it, mass on mass.
One rock above, detached with force,
Would stay an army's farther course,
And shutting out the noontide heat,
Rocks from each side appeared to meet.
A streamlet down the centre sped :
The path passed winding up its bed,
And led to some more open ground,
Walled by impending rocks around.
It was a narrow gorge and long,
Nature itself had made it strong ;
For on the summit smooth and steep,
A goat might scarce its footing keep.
The winding footpath at the end
A little band might well defend.
A fragile hut of grass and wood
Was raised amidst the solitude.

This seemed to be the chief's abode,
For there a single watchman strode.
Cattle were picketed in rows,
Sleek buffaloes and leaner cows.
Large blazing fires were lit around,
And near them, lying on the ground
Groups of rude Fólis, old and young,
Scattered their ruger tents among ;
Whilst here and there a screaming child
Added to all the noises wild
That buzzed within the valley's round,
Unequalled e'en by Babel's sound.
Her journey ended, Lakhmi knew
That Lárú had been brought there, too.
As she regained her stiffening feet,
Oh ! joy, her faithful nurse to meet !
A message to the Chief was sent,
Which gave them shelter in a tent.
Nought but a coarse cloth o'er their head,
Naught but the rocky ground their bed,
Yet soon the two, afraid to weep,
Fell in each other's arms asleep.

CANTO III.

CANTO III.

THE dawn had broken bright and fair ;—
Calm as an infant's sleep the air :
By guardian spirits safely kept,
Lakhmi and Lárú soundly slept.
The camp put on a look of life
As, rising hastily, each wife,
Blithe singing as she ground the corn
Forestalled with toil approaching morn,
And, as a careful housewife should,
Prepared betimes her household's food.
The watchman on the day's advance
Had left his watch and ward to chance,
And quitting soon his weary round
Now snoozed at length upon the ground,
His body all, from head to feet,
Enveloped in a cotton sheet.
The tired cocks soon ceased to crow ;

The sun shed wide his genial glow,
And panting cattle of the shade
Of beetling rocks a shelter made.
The Chief refreshed, at length awake—
His only toilet was a shake—
Squatted at ease before the door,
His scant ablutions soon were o'er.
He looked benignly on the crowd,
Slow puffed tobacco's fragrant cloud,
And as its essence gently stole,
Pervading subtly heart and soul,
He saw no more the prospect near,
But built him castles in the air.
He knew, to speak in plundering wise,
That he had gained a splendid prize.
Well laid, as carried out, the plan,
The deed well suited such a man.
Few robbers could with him compare
In daring spirit, cunning rare—
Able coadjutor, his hand
Ne'er failed in what his head had planned—
A trusty band obeyed the call

Of Kánji, Chieftain of Chuvál.

Betrothed to one in early youth,
Whose parents broke their plighted troth,
His spirit all unused to cringe
Was bent intently on revenge,
And with a free-born Koli's pride
Weak rulers and their laws defied.
One day, incensed at slighting word,
He slew her father with his sword.
The outraged family avowed
Their hopes of vengeance for his blood.
That this on him alone should fall,
Kánji left home and friends and all,
And bidding law defiance high,
Outlawed himself in Báhvatai.¹
Trusting implicitly in fate,
He passed from trifling deeds to great.

1. Literally, "going out of the road," voluntary outlawry undertaken by a man who had a grievance. A Báhvatai's hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him till he was disposed of, or his demand met.

His fame had spread throughout the land,
And he collected soon a band
Of lawless spirits, paying still
Silent obedience to his will.
Obliged to act a sterner part,
Kánji in truth was kind of heart.
All useless bloodshed on a raid
The Chief himself had often stayed,
And in the midst of deadly strife
He risked his own to save a life.
In sharing plunder when 'twas gained
The strictest justice he maintained.
He knew his men full well, and they
Had but to hear him to obey.

The Moslem rule had had its day.
Broad were the symptoms of decay
That had appeared as one by one
Usurpers sat on Delhi's throne.
Forgotten Akbar's sterner school,
No longer feared his iron rule,
The sceptre held by feeble hand,

Mahratta horsemen ruled the land.
When unsupported by the sword,
Great Delhi's name was but a word.

As in the midst of youth and health
Old age comes on apace with stealth,
And every hour of beauty's bloom
Is one hour nearer to the tomb,
So slow advancing stage by stage
Great nations have their youth and age.
In Transatlantic woods are seen
Sites where large cities once have been—
Great nations built them : where are they ?
Their very names have passed away.
And as the human form each day
Progresses still towards decay,
Till that frail form, by years oppressed,
Tired nature's self desires a rest,—
As meteors flit across the sky
And soon are lost to human eye,—
So was the Moslem's brilliant reign
O'er India's hill and fertile plain,

**And modern Mussulmans scarce own
Their Delhi monarch's puppet throne.
As when the feline king's away
His subject mice at ease may play,
So when an army hovered near,
Quaked Delhi's vassals all with fear ;—
But once the force had marched away,
Nor tax nor tribute would they pay,
No longer threatened with the sword,
Each petty chieftain aped the lord.
Thus Kánji from an outlawed thief
Became an independent chief.**

**And in her slumber Lakhmi dreamed :
Vivid as life the vision seemed.
The journey's weary toil was o'er,
And she had come to Pávágarh.
Her husband's mother kindly smiled,
And welcomed home her new-found child.
Impatient then to see his bride,
Bhíma was quickly by her side,
And as she stood in matchless grace**

Gazed with fond rapture at her face.
With modesty to maidens meet,
She looked at first but on his feet,
And when she raised her glances high'r
Found that his eyes shot flames of fire,
Which blazing on without a rest
Burnt fiercely on her heaving breast.
With horror struck, she tried to scream,
And waking, found 'twas but a dream.
Her eyes beheld with opening light
An equally unwelcome sight.
High rocks in front her vision bound,
Whilst close about her on the ground
Cooked, chatted, laughed or joined in song
The Koli Chieftain's motley throng.
She smiled half sadly as she thought
Of what a change one night had wrought :
That she, a Rájput chieftain's child,
Should be the guest of Kolis wild,
And have above, her shelter sole,
A piece of coarse cloth on a pole.

Well pleased to see one well-known face,

She woke her nurse with short embrace,
And with her "sári" ¹ round her head
The way to Kánji's rude hut led.
Resolved at once to know her fate,
She firmly stilled her pulse's beat,
And as she stood the Chieftain nigh,
Bent on him full her lustrous eye.
At such unrivalled charms' disclose,
Kánji, half consciously, arose.
She said : "The Chieftain I would see."
"Lady," he answered, "I am he,
And humblest of thy servants all
Is Kánji, Chieftain of Chuvál."
At sound of that so dreaded name
A sudden tremor shook her frame.
He saw her shrink, and, drawing near,
Said gently : "Lady, calm thy fear,
For may my life the forfeit be
If slightest harm should come to thee."
Encouraged thus, she asked why they
Had thus been seized and borne away.

1. A woman's robe.

Did he not fear the vengeance dire
Of Rájput husband, Rájput sire ?
Kánji erect, with bearing high,
Replied, " Their armies I defy.
To equal force in open field
Kánji was never known to yield.
If from large armies ill betide
He still can in the jungle hide.
By grievous wrong forced from my home,
An outlawed wanderer I roam.
Lady, by robbery I live,
But as I take I freely give.
The houseless exile and the poor
Are oft relieved from Kánji's store,
And though for robbery you blame
I never caused a woman shame,
And no man dares where I command
Against a woman lift his hand.
Thy husband's lands are wide, and they
A heavy ransom well may pay.
All other motive I disown,
And guard thy honour as my own.

This hut is thine, forbid to all,
Sacred as is thy father's hall.
Cast off then, lady, all alarm :
No man of mine shall do thee harm.
I'll hang him on the nearest tree
Who shows thee e'en discourtesy.
In perfect safety here abide :
Thy faithful nurse is by thy side.
She will obey thy every mood,
Watch o'er thy sleep, prepare thy food.
And lest thy ransom cause delay
A messenger is on his way,
Who seeks this night thy lord and sire,
To name the sum that I require,
And though now captives you must be,
Ransomed, that moment you are free."

Lakhmi resolved, thus reassured,
To bear what needs must be endured :
She could not speak her thanks aloud,
But gratefully in silence bowed.
To prying eyes the door was shut,

As she retired within the hut.
When Kánji thus had said his say,
He took his pipe and went away.
He longed, through all his seeming pride,
For peaceful home with such a bride.



Ill had she fared had old Lárú
Not been by caste a Rájput, too ;
For food prepared by other castes
A Hindoo touches not, but fasts.
The crystal streamlet gurgling by
Gave water for their cookery.
With grain old Lárú, nothing loath,
Prepared a simple meal for both.
Lakhmi of this, by care oppressed,
Ate sparingly, her nurse the rest.

The men whom Bhímásingh had sent
Together with the Koli went.
Through tangled copse and brake and brae,
He slowly wound his doubtful way,
Determined in its mazes dim

They should not find the way through him.
Each moment threatened instant death,
The Koli held his quickened breath,
And though each instant death was nigh,
Denied all thought of treachery.
As morning dawned the Koli stood
And gazed intently through the wood,
For as his Chieftain's haunt drew near
A passing footstep caught his ear.
'Twas Kánji's messenger that day
Tow'rds Chámpáner who held his way.
They crouched them down amongst the grass,
And let the man in silence pass.
The Rájpúts, as the man passed on,
Perceived the danger when 'twas gone.
The Koli with pretended fear
Now told them that the camp was near,
And swore, about in any tree
A lurking Koli they might see.
They moved in silence o'er the ground ;—
Their cautious footsteps gave no sound.
Each, to a sense of danger nerved,

The strictest vigilance observed.
Each after other crept until
They reached the bottom of a hill.
They clambered up its slippery face,
Where scarce a goat a path could trace.
They saw when they had gained the top,
Inside a stone sheer down might drop—
Perceived from far the lion's lair,
They were content that he was there,
And seeing where the beast could hide,
Asked not how they could get inside,
But turning back in cautious fear
Arrived by night at Chámpáner.
The messenger by shorter way
Had there arrived ere close of day—
As day advanced, each faithful scout,
Searching the country side throughout,
Through every village far and near,
Came wearied in to Chámpáner.
Sad was the heart of Dáolatsingh
That none could cheering tidings bring,
And burned with fury Bhíma's pride

At this dread insult to his bride.
The Chiefs had long in conclave sat ;
Some counselled this plan, others that.
Some, foolish, headstrong in their ire,
Proposed to carry sword and fire,
And force the country far and wide
To aid the search for Bhíma's bride.
Tobacco's fumes had not availed,
And opium's inspiration failed.
Kasúmba cup passed frequent round,
But yet no remedy was found.
Old Rúpá, as he stroked his beard,
Absorbed in revery appeared.
One after other Chieftains spoke,
While he emitted clouds of smoke.
At last, when counsel seemed to lull,
He gave his pipe a longer pull ;—
Then puffed the smoke out through his nose,
Watching it curling as it rose,
And looking round, the aged man,
His cautious counsel thus began.
“ Bhíma, thou'st known me leal and true ;

So did thy sire and grandsire, too.
If fortune smiled or fortune frowned,
True to his lord was Rúpá found.
So when my counsel is that peace
Will soonest cause thy bride's release,
My witness be this honoured scar,
'Tis not from fear of strife or war."
The scar across his forehead high
Just grazed the corner of his eye.
Once Jasvatsingh with escort scant
Passed near a hostile robber's haunt,
And when the twilight just had failed
His band was suddenly assailed,
And struck with panic took to flight.
The Chief was wounded in the fight,
And had not Rúpá come to aid
Would soon a captive have been made.
The bard, though wounded by a sword,
Bore safely off his fainting lord.
Thence was the honoured scar : the plea
Bore witness to his bravery.
He raised his turban up to show

The mark remaining of the blow.
This re-arranged, without delay
He thus proceeded with his say.
“ My lord and master good, believe
That Rúpá in his heart would grieve,
Should e'en suspicion of disgrace
Attach to Bhíma's lordly race.
But ere we talk of waging war,
We must discover where they are.
What man amongst us, small or great,
Can Kánji's jungles penetrate ?
Or who amongst our bravest men
Would beard the lion in his den ?
Remember, he for years defied
All Delhi's armies in their pride.
What chance for forces would there be,
That we could bring, of victory ?
Searching the densest wilds among
To find subsistence for their young,
As beasts of prey the jungle roam,
The pathless wilderness their home,
And driv'n by famine only then

Will seek the busy haunts of men ;—
Such is the Kolis' life, for they
In others' riches know their prey—
'Tis for their daily bread they war :
Provided this, they seek no more.
Their Chief in early youth I knew.
He was of gentle heart and true,
And be the pledge thy honoured name
That ransom is his only aim.
He but attacks the rich man's store,
And never harasses the poor,
And many is the kindly deed
That he has done for those in need.
Thy fair bride's honour, never fear,
Is just as safe as were she here.
Suppose our forces found his lair,
There would not be one Koli there,
Whilst, forced with them in woods to hide,
The sufferer would be thy bride.
Of what avail are sturdy blows
At random dealt 'gainst hidden foes ?
And where one's foe one cannot trace,

There not to fight is no disgrace.
Then lay aside all thought of strife :
Pay ransom and regain thy wife.”
As thus the aged poet spoke,
No other sound the silence broke,
Solace sole of Rájput trouble,
Grateful hookah’s hubble-bubble.
Old Dáolatsingh, absorbed in grief,
In Rúpá’s words found no relief.
His agèd heart was wrung with shame
At this dishonour to his name,
That he, the noblest of the land,
Should lose his child by Koli’s hand.
With bursting heart he cried : “ My son,
There’s no undoing what is done,
And though my forced consent I rue,
I know that Rúpá’s words are true,
And, as he says, I feel that peace
Will soonest give my child release.”
As this was said, a servant ran,
And told his master that a man,
He seemed a Koli, had sent word

He wished an audience with his lord.
The admitted messenger appeared
With flowing hair and matted beard.
Loose drawers were all the dress he wore.
A bow unstrung his right hand bore.
The other hand his arrows pressed,
And folded closely round his waist
A cotton cloth, whose ample fold
Would save his body from the cold,
Or in the scorching tropic day
Keep off the bright sun's noontide ray.
He glanced around defiance high,
Until he caught the Chieftain's eye,
In Eastern salutation meet
Then bowed his head at Dáolat's feet.
With folded arms across his breast,
He then the Chieftain thus addressed.
"Thy daughter, heir of all thy lands,
Is in my master Káuji's hands
In health and safety. With her, too,
Her aged friend and nurse Lárú.
My master sends thee greeting warm.

They shall not come to any harm.
Rupees five thousand paid before,—
When she returns five thousand more ;
Such is the ransom he demands.
The money, lodged in banker's hands,
Shall be untouched till she, restored
And safe at home, shall give her word
That whilst in Kánji's hands retained
Her honour was and is unstained.”
Then to his feet young Bhíma sprang :
Through the wide hall his accents rang.
With scornful look of bitter hate
He cried : “ Shall Kolis thus dictate
Insulting terms to Rájput lords,
And they not answer with their swords ? ’
The father cried in accents mild :
“ Bhíma, she is my only child.
Let us at once the ransom pay,
And take revenge some future day.
An old man has not long to live,
And all I have I'd freely give
To save the last of Vikram's race

And see again my daughter's face.
Before to-morrow's noon is o'er
I'll lodge the sum in Vítlápúr,
In ancient Premchand's trusty hand,
The richest banker in the land,
And when my child is safe at home
He too shall pay the further sum.
To-morrow I, with chosen band,
To aid, if need be, close at hand,
Will wait her coming at the ford,
Not far from where the fray occurred.
Last night a prisoner was caught :
He, too, in chains shall there be brought.
Injure one hair of Lakhmi's head,
His wretched life is forfeited.
Uninjured bring her back in peace,
Your comrade, too, will I release.
This message to thy master speed,
So help then Vishnú¹ in thy need !”
An order then was sent below

1. One of the Hindoo Trinity, which consists of Brahmá, the Creator, Siva, the Destroyer, and Vishnú, the Preserver.

To give him food and let him go.
A letter horsemen quickly bore
To Premchand Shet of Vítlápúr.
The Chieftain offered hamlets three,
The borrowed sum's security—

All was arranged—approaching day
Saw Lakhmi on her homeward way.
Kánji as parting gift had brought
A cloth in red embroidery wrought.
The cloth he said that she must take
And keep it by her for his sake.
If e'er misfortune should oppress,
Or she should be in dire distress,
The cloth, placed on her garden wall,
Kánji to aid at once would call.
Lakhmi, scarce knowing what she did,
Took it and in her bosom hid.
The Kolis made two litters rude
Of fresh-cut branches from the wood.
The sides were filled with plaited grass,
Too thick for the sun's rays to pass ;

The top, with green leaves intertwined,
Gave shelter from the sun and wind.
The Kolis bore them all the day
By paths that none could trace but they,
Just as the sun was sinking West,
In safety to the place of tryst.

Whose is the heart too dead to know
For others warm affection's glow ?
Who, as a miser with his pelf,
Thinks only of his sordid self ?
On him may never children smile,
Nor please him with their infant wile !
If sickness lay him on his bed,
None smooth the pillow for his head !
Be no one there to soothe his end,
And may he die without a friend !
Emerged from dark clouds passing o'er,
The sun seems brighter than before.
Held in her father's fond embrace,
Was never brighter Lakhmi's face,
And as she kissed his aged brow,

She never loved, she thought, as now.
Of Kánji's courtesy assured,
Dáolat redeemed his plighted word,
And, casting off the Koli's chain,
Bade him be gone and free again.
The Koli bounded out of reach,
And shouted loud his taunting speech :
" Since you have found my master's den,
When will you visit him again ?
Now we have shown you where we hide,
When will you try to get inside ?
When next you come, you'll bring, I hope
A ladder with you or a rope ! "
This spoken, with a bounding leap
He hid himself in jungle deep.
'Twas just in time. A bullet sped,
And as he leaped it grazed his head.
The others knew their errand done,
And quickly vanishing were gone.
The day had closed, and evening's shades
Obscuring fast the forest glades,
The bats and creatures of the night

Aroused, prepared themselves for flight,
When Dáolat, freed from care and pain,
Brought Lakhmi to her home again.

CANTO IV.

CANTO IV.

THRICE was the sun's bright course begun
And thrice his daily race was run :
Thrice had he vanished in the West,
And thrice had weary mortals rest.
Pleading fatigue to cause delay,
Lakhmi stayed on from day to day
And though the heavens' mystic page
Had quite deceived the Brahmin sage,
With woman's wile she would not go
Till he auspicious hour could show.
The Brahmin prophet came to try
To justify his prophecy.
He drew some puzzling diagrams
With squares and parallelograms,
Hieroglyphics, figures grand,
Which none but he could understand.
On this mysterious paper's face

He clearly saw a feeble trace,
That they, misled by adverse fate,
Had started off an hour too late.
The trace, forbid to common sight,
Sufficed to prove the prophet right :
Thenceforward peasant, merchant, lord,
Trusted implicitly his word.
He saw that Bhíma longed to go,
And thus arranged his planets so
That they predicted, with the moon
Combined auspiciously, that noon,
The morrow's noon, without a doubt
Should see the party marching out.
As men close stable-door with care
When the good steed's no longer there,
A chosen band of Rájput horse
Bhíma had added to his force.
Retainers armed, in war approved,
Close round the palankeen there moved.
They were to march in broad daylight,
And halt by stages for the night,
And till they cleared the jungle wide

Fair Lakhmi's sire rode at her side.
With heavy heart and falling tear
Dáolat returned to Chámpáner.

The second journey ended well ;
No further accident befell.
His vassals flocked from far and wide
To greet the Chieftain and his bride—
Fit welcome for the fair and brave
The castle guns a salvo gave,
And as they passed the courts along,
Old Rúpáji broke forth in song.

“ Let poet's tune their sweetest lays,
And vassals shout their Chieftain's praise.
Let *rayats*¹ all their tribute bring,
And each present his offering.
Let cannon fire the loud salute,
Nor let the trumpet's voice be mute.
Let banners on each turret high

1. Cultivators, or tenants of the State. The word in Arabic originally meant a subject. †

Flaunt proudly out toward the sky,
For drawn by ties of wedlock near
Are Pávágarh and Chámpáner.
Let all the stars their rays benign
To bless the union now combine—
The sun auspiciously full soon
Be in conjunction with the moon.
Planets good influences shed
Around our Chieftain's marriage bed.
Let fire and water, earth and air,
Unite to bless the happy pair,
And time produce a fitting heir
For Pávágarh and Chámpáner.
Our Chieftain's ancestors the lords,
Who won this fortress with their swords,
And what their valour thus obtained
Their princely wisdom has retained.
His bride of Vikram's royal race,
Whose rise dim ages scarce may trace.
Gentle and fair and good is she,
An honour to nobility.
The star of fortune rises clear

O'er Pávágarh and Chámpáner."

The train now passed within the fort
And gained the castle's inner court,
Bhíma's retainers with the bard
Remaining in the outer yard.
Lakhmi, by prying eyes unseen,
Left, closely veiled, her palankeen,
And Bhíma as she passed inside
Stood ready there to greet his bride.
With agèd form, yet brilliant eye,
Stood near his mother Motabai.
Then Lakhmi ran, in reverence meet
And knelt down at her husband's feet.
He took the lovely suppliant's hand,
And, raising gently, bid her stand,
And as she stood in matchless grace,
Gazed with fond rapture in her face.
Bhíma's old mother grimly smiled
And welcomed home her new-gained child—
Raised Lakhmi's glance, with pleased surprise
She saw no fire in Bhíma's eyes.

Her eye lit up with laughing beam
As she related them her dream, .
She laughed that she had looked to see
If 'twere indeed reality.
But though she spoke in jesting tone
There passed across his brow a frown,
And with the frown a look of ire,
That made his eyes seem lit with fire.
Unseen by her it passed away :—
She saw it on another day !
His mother saw the passing look,
And as she saw, a tremor shook
Her aged frame. That look of ill,
She knew its purport but too well.
They talked, but Rájput's words are few,
And in a little he withdrew,
Leaving his mother and his bride
With household matters occupied.

We follow Bhíma to the hall,
Where vassals gathered at his call.
There as he came his friends among,

Thus was the bards' rude chorus sung :
"As venturous merchants o'er trackless seas
Guide homeward their goods-laden argosies ;—
Joyfully gaining their dear native land,
Gladly are welcomed by friendship's right hand,—
Our Chieftain returns with a peerless prize,
More precious than rubies or merchandise—
Vassals, retainers and bards, side by side,
Shout their loud welcomes to him and his bride."

Then Bhímásingh, by custom bound,
Bestowed his largesses around,
And with due ceremony gave
To one a horse, to one a slave—
Rúpá received, with low salám,¹
A neighbouring village in Inám.²
Of all the vassals that were there
The bards received the largest share,
Yet, free of hand, he gave to all

1. The Eastern salutation, made by putting the right hand to the forehead.

2. In gift to enjoy its revenue.

At least a turban or a shawl.
Seated in order in the hall,
Each for his hookah¹ gave a call.
When these were brought, the Chieftain spoke,
And with grave words the silence broke.

“Vassals, it is with deepest shame
I own dishonour to my name,
To Jasvat’s line a foul disgrace ;—
Kolīs have blacked your Chieftain’s face !
Our ancient honour to retrieve,
My heart’s blood would I freely give.
Two of my household, trusty men,
Have visited the robber’s den.
Let these two men, then, be our guides,
And show us where this Kánji hides,
And let us go with chosen band,
And root the robber from the land ;—
As Rájput’s low abase his pride,
Who Dehli’s armies has defied.”

Thus spoke the Chief with flashing eye,

1. The Indian water-pipe.

And looked around him for reply.
His brother Jíva near him sat,
The fairest youth in Gujarát.
His upper lip thick fringed with down
Just showed the youth to manhood grown,
But though his cheek was smooth and round,
In danger he was foremost found.
Of ready wit and courage true,
He was renowned for learning, too.
Though Bhíma's only brother, he
Looked on him e'er with jealousy.
The youth with modesty replied :
" But can we trust these men to guide
Through pathless woods where there may be
Each step an ambushed enemy ?
First let us call the men, and know
If they are certain they could go."
Boiled Bhíma's rage as he began :
" Thou ever thwartest every plan.
If thy poor courage fails thee, then
Leave warlike deeds to braver men."
The noble youth at once suppressed

All angry feelings in his breast,
But firmly said : “ My brother, hear !
Our father’s children know not fear.
Thou know’st that once engaged in strife
I set no value on my life.
But should a man without a cause
Rush to a lion’s open jaws ?
As I love bravery, the less
Can I applaud foolhardiness.”
These words applauded by the rest,
The men were called, and then confessed,
For all that they the way could show,
’Twould be impossible to go.
And if they found the place at length,
It was impregnable in strength—
On hearing this the Chief began
Apparently to doubt the plan,
But in his heart resolved to try
What he could do by treachery.
The *darbár* rose, and with the day
Each vassal went his homeward way.
The chief sent for the men, and both

Bound to strict secrecy by oath.
They were to leave the fort by night,
Seek Kánji out as if in flight :—
Till they knew thoroughly the land
They should remain with Kánji's band.
Then with the surety of reward
Bring back the tidings to their lord.
The day had passed. That evening late
They left the castle's postern gate,
And till the cock's first morning crow
Remained in hiding down below.
Just as the dawn approached to light,
They hastened on their seeming flight.
They met with Kolis, to be brief,
Who took them to the forest chief.
Kánji, deceived, believed their tale,
And Bhíma's scheme now answered well.

•

Old Dáolatsingh, without his child,
But seldom spoke and never smiled.
He walked the garden's lonely round,
And viewed each spot as hallowed ground

In which his heart could ne'er rejoice
Till it was cheered by Lakhmi's voice.
In lonely misery his lot,
He felt it, though he spoke it not.
To others he was proud as e'er,
The stern old lord of Chámpáner.

The lofty Sáras¹ and his mate
Walk o'er the plains with graceful gait.
The ripening cornfields for their home,
The pair for food together roam.
But if death or some cruel fate
Should chance the two to separate,
The left one spends the lonely day
Still in the fields, but pines away,
And grieving to be left alone,
Few days it lives and then is gone.

Six months elapsed. With subtle art
Had Bhíma's spies well played their part.

1. An Indian crane, that generally feeds with its mate alone. Believed to be the Demoiselle crane.

For daring enterprise prepared,
Each with the Kolis danger shared,
And so won Kánji's heart that he
Trusted them now implicitly.
Acquainted with each jungle track,
They then resolved to get them back,
And from their watch at dead of night
Found safe occasion for their flight.
Their presence was no sooner missed
Than Kánji's wit the reason guessed.
Too old to be so lightly snared,
He for all consequence prepared.
His emissaries far and wide
Were scattered through the country side.
Nor lordly fort nor peasant's cot
By Kánji's spies was e'er forgot ;
He knew at once when any stir
Of arms was made at Pávágarh.
When Bhíma's men with news returned,
Their master with impatience burned
To wipe dishonour from his name
And thus retrieve his ancient fame.

His vassals all without delay
Were summoned for a certain day.
'Twas settled that two hundred horse,
Dismounted, should compose the force,
Which split in two, each separate band
One of the brothers should command.

The men, at thought of strife elate,
Had all been mustered at the gate,
And as the several bands defiled
Entered at once the jungle wild.
The space between was dense and wide,
And each band had its separate guide.
The Chiefs agreed each in his train
The strictest silence to maintain.
They hoped by halting once at night
To reach the spot by morning's light.

The sun had set and evening's shades
Had closed upon the forest glades.
His men all wearied with their tramp,
With caution Jíva chose his camp

In one clear spot a few yards wide,
Hemmed in by woods on every side.
Each as a resting place he found
Fell sound asleep upon the ground.
The Chief alone, whilst others slept,
A careful watch and anxious kept.
He watched each star as it arose
And passed along in mute repose.
He wondered what the mighty force
That could direct it in its course,
Each in its own appointed range
For ages never knowing change,
From West to East, from East to West,
Still on and on without a rest.
From Brahmins he had learnt the laws,
But groped in darkness for the Cause.

For long no other sound was heard
Save that of leaves that light winds stirred.
Ev'n hooted not the nightly owl,
And jackals had forgot to howl.
At last a seeming fox's bark

He heard close to him in the dark,
And others in the woods around
Replied in concert to the sound.
Rouse thee, fair youth, and for thy life
Prepare thee for the deadly strife !

Hast ever watched a kitten play,
Or tiger hunting nobler prey ?
The crouching gait, the stealthy tread,
The ears laid back upon the head ?
Foot soft as velvet poised in air,
As if no deadly claws were there ?
The brilliant eyeball full dilate,
Its helpless prey to fascinate ?
Its long tail lashing on the ground
Before it takes its fatal bound ?
So Kánji's band, in danger proved,
In silence through the jungle moved,
And as their wearied prey reposed
In narrowing circle round them closed.
As they crept on their stealthy track,
The smallest twig would hardly crack.

The fox's bark the signal giv'n,
A fearful howl was raised to heav'n,
And ere a man could raise his hand,
The Kolis were among the band.
These, as they left their leafy screen,
Poured in their arrows fast and keen.
Defenceless 'gainst the iron hail—
The Rájput soldiers wore no mail,
But not content with distant strife,
They closed upon them with the knife.
Each man, surprised as he arose,
Fought singly in the midst of foes—
Thrust followed thrust and blow on blow :
At every cut there fell a foe.
Their leader on the first alarm
Received an arrow in the arm,
But, though disabled for the fight,
Cheered on his men with courage bright.
Disputing every inch of ground,
They dealt their sturdy blows around,
Till from behind a treacherous foe
Struck their young Chief a coward blow,

And as he fell and lay as dead,
His men in consternation fled.
Kánji, content his foes to foil,
Now bade his men collect the spoil,
And at the time stern order gave
The wounded men alive to save.
Lighted by glimmering starlight, they
Rifled the bodies as they lay,
But where they saw a bleeding wound,
A cloth around it tightly bound.
Their own men wounded, half a score,
They from the field of battle bore.
The Rájput soldiers far and wide
Were scattered through the jungle side.
Their wounds untended as they lay,
Some fell and perished by the way,
Whilst sore of foot and weak of hand,
Some stragglers reached their master's band.
When Bhíma heard these tidings dire,
Flashed from his eyes that look of fire.
He cursed with curses loud and deep
Those who at such a time could sleep.

His men aroused, the spot he sought
Where the defeated band had fought,
And quickly through the jungle path
Bade chase the Kolis in his wrath.
He gained the place. The stars' dim light
Made ghastlier still the ghastly sight.
Here was a limb and there a head :
Around his vassals staunch lay dead,
Whilst others wounded, lying nigh,
Shrieked in their mortal agony.
The jungle jackal, prowling beast,
Had smelt afar expected feast,
And in the thickets scouting round,
Sniffed at the corpses on the ground,
Whilst owlets their ill-omened tones
Joined with the dyings' feeble moans.
Young Jívá, falling where he stood,
Had fainted from the loss of blood,
But Kánji, seeing he had swooned,
Had tightly bound the flowing wound.
The bleeding staunched, the youth had soon
Recovered from his death-like swoon,

And leaning on his feeble hand
Had tried to raise himself and stand,
But helpless in his failing strength,
Despair had mastered him at length.
The groans of dying men around
Smote on his ear with mournful sound :
He wished with those dead by his side
He, too, had in the conflict died.
The Rájput's raised their youthful lord
In pity from the blood-stained sword,
For kind in heart and manner too,
He was beloved by all he knew.
But Bhíma, as they bore him past,
Smiled grimly with his teeth clenched fast.
With diligence the wounded men
Were gathered from amidst the slain.
The dead were left : their comrades bore
Their wounded friends to Pávágarh.
With all the skill that she possessed
Fair Lakhmi Jíva's wounds had dressed,
And gently as a sister may,
Attended him by night and day.

With quackish salves they healed the skin,
But inflammation lurked within.
Believing still the danger past,
She saw not he was dying fast,
Till hollow cheek and sunken eye
Showed her that Jíva's end was nigh.
Bhíma at last with scanty grace
Agreed to see his brother's face,
And with a heart of hardened pride
Stood darkly scowling by his side.
Well was it others were not by
To overhear their colloquy,
For, heedless of his feeble groan,
Bhíma in hatred's deepest tone,
Compassion stifled in his breast,
His dying brother thus addressed.
"Art thou, then, fallen here at last,
Thou foul disgrace to Rájput caste?
Unworthy of thy ancient name,
Thou hast defiled our father's fame,
And, low abasing, down to dust
Hast thou our house's honour thrust.

Where was of wisdom all thy store,
Thou coward slave of learned lore,
That thou neglected'st watch and ward,
To fall beneath a Koli's sword ? ”
The youth in feeble accents cried :
“ My brother, would that I had died
Rather than lived to see the day
My father's son such words could say.
I swear, though taken by surprise,
I had not closed my weary eyes.
The woods in silence slept around,
Yet unperceived their footsteps' sound.
My band were all asleep when they
Pounced like a tiger on his prey.
Much skill in war I can not vaunt,
Yet merit not thy sneering taunt,
And bitter is it to be borne
To hear in death a brother's scorn.
If I was vanquished in the strife,
I pay the forfeit with my life.
Then tell me, Bhíma, while I live,
That thou canst this one fault forgive.

So when thou breath'st thy latest sigh,
To speak thee peace may friends be nigh."

His dying brother's piteous tone
Seemed not to touch that heart of stone.
Enwrapped, as by a cloak, with pride,
He turned him quickly from his side,
And heedless of his sorrowing cry,
Between his teeth hissed : " Wretched, die !"
Exhausted all his little strength,
Jíva felt death approach at length,
But, glad his bitter woes to end,
Hailed the stern monarch as his friend.

Lakhmi returned. Confirmed her fears,
She did not check her flowing tears,
And by his pallet seated down,
Took his cold hand within her own.
The sun was low. Approaching eve
Scarce saw his sinking bosom heave :
As disappeared the orb of day
His gentle spirit passed away.

She knew but by his failing breath
The hand she held was clasped in death.

CANTO V.

CANTO V.

IN fitful gusts the wayward breeze
Piped shrill amidst the silent trees,
And ever with its mournful sound
Moaned through the castle's ancient round.
If ever demons move in air,
Well might one fancy they were there,
And answering to each other's call
Crept through each crevice in the wall,
With noisy roar or plaintive wail
Rode, seeking mischief, on the gale.

A little fort, with turrets tall,
With scant defence save loopholed wall,
Now wrapped in darkness deep and still,
Stood at the bottom of the hill.
A Rájput of an ancient race,

But little riches, owned the place.
Lord of the whole surrounding plain,
Longed Jasvatsingh this fort to gain,
But scorned to win except with right
What he could soon have seized by might.
With Rájput's care did he provide
His elder son a wealthy bride.
He then agreed in place of dower
To take the old man's lonely tower,
And with the castle thus had won
His daughter for his younger son.

Years rolled away until at last
Her term of girlhood's days was past,
And she full shortly would have come
To join her husband in his home.
Lakhmi with heavy heart and sore
In pity the sad tidings bore
To that poor widowed virgin bride,
The victim of a Rájput's pride.
She ere the message had been said
Saw Lakhmi's eyes with weeping red.

At once their tearful meaning guessed,
She threw herself on Lakhmi's breast,
And as they stood, the lovely pair
Looked the mute pictures of despair.
But soon of sympathy the balm
Worked on the widow to her calm.
Her tears subdued, a little while
Brought to her mouth a tranquil smile.
She gazed upon her sister's face,
Nor sought, but rather shunned, embrace.
Lakhmi beheld, with mute surprise,
Unwonted light flash from her eyes.
The hidden thought that moved her breast
Was soon in burning words expressed.

“'Tis writ by fate ! My Lakhmi, hear !
This life to me is no more dear.
Of earthly joys and hopes bereft,
'Twere better I this being left ;
For He who me that being gave
Has pre-ordained me for a slave,

Unless I choose, the only one,
The way this misery to shun—
My body shall with Jíva's burn :
My soul to Indra shall return !"¹
In tones inspired by pitying grief
Would Lakhmi shake her vain belief.
She strove in every way to move,
By angry words, in tones of love,
By every argument and word
That to her gentle mind occurred.
In spite of all that she could say,
If Brahmins heard, she knew that they
For worldly gain would all compete,
And make the sacrifice complete.
When all her reasoning was vain,
She warned her of the cruel pain,
Of anguish spoke, of torture dire

1. The practice of *Sati*, by wives burning themselves with the bodies of their husbands, was finally put a stop to by law in the time of Lord W. Bentinck. In many cases, especially among Rájputa, more than one wife was burnt, with a potter, a barber, &c., in order to do honour to a deceased Chief, that he might be properly attended in Paradise.

When flesh is scathed and scorched by fire.
The widow heard and quickly turned
Round to a lamp that near her burned,
And said : " My mind, as fickle breeze,
Think'st thou is moved by words like these ?
Or that a fear of mortal pain
Can me from my resolve restrain ?
Be this my witness ! Foul my shame
If I should shrink me from the flame."
She held a finger to the light,
Till Lakhmi sickened at the sight.
The outward flesh was burned and cracked,
The very bone itself was blacked ;
The oozing blood in heavy dots
Dropped on the floor in thickening clots.
She looked unmoved upon the stain,
And seemed insensible to pain.¹
Amazed at torture thus defied,
" Enough ! Refrain !" Her sister cried.

1. This incident actually took place in the presence of a connection of the writer, before the practice of *Sati* was forbidden by law.

Sad was her heart and pale her cheek,
As she arose her home to seek.
That night through all her troubled rest
The sight in dreams her heart oppressed.
She thought she saw her on the pyre,
Encircled by the flaming fire,
And clear above the burning brand
Was still stretched out that scorching hand.
By Hindoo Shastras'¹ rigid school
Woman herself can never rule.
In early youth to gain applause,
She must obey her parents' laws.
In their control her earthy life,
They make the speechless babe a wife,
And if the husband of their troth
Die, leaving her in tender youth,
The widowed maid, unhappy doom,
Goes down a maid into her tomb.
At home in riper age her lord
Exacts obedience to his word,
And, be his folly what it will,

1. Hindoo religious books.

The helpless wife obeys him still.
In mirthful hour or sullen mood—
The wife prepares her husband's food,
And standing near in reverence meet,
Sees her fond lord and master eat.
She lives for him, and wretched thrall,
Proclaims his deeds perfection all.
The widowed wife on whom no child,
Sole earthly hope, has ever smiled,
The husband dying, must become
A burden in his cheerless home.
Deprived of liberty, must she
Live but on others' charity,
Who e'er the slightest morsel grudge
To their dependant, household drudge,
Till she descends, a helpless slave,
Unloved, unhonoured, to the grave.

When Lakhmi left her, Jíva's bride
Summoned a council to her side
Of Brahmins who in any wise
Upon the matter could advise.

Many, intent upon the spoil,
Came in hot haste for many a mile,
Prepared, all sure of being feed,
To praise the meritorious deed.
Her body burned through their advice,
Her soul should rest in Paradise.
In future, as in earthly life,
With Rájput Chief must be his wife :
Thus only with her duty done
Could Indra's Paradise be won.
What worldly joys could there compare
With what in death would be her share,
When mounting on the funeral pyre,
Her spirit purified by fire,
Its essence thus from dross refined
Should be absorbed in Indra's mind ?

Beneath the fort, in space enclosed,
The ashes of its Chiefs reposed,
Where monuments of varied date
Told of each Chief's untimely fate,
For most of them were slain in war

With rival Chiefs of Káthiávar,
Whilst here and there a sculptured stone,
With female arm and moon and sun,
Showed where of old some Rájpút dame
Had died to share her husband's fame.
Here early artizans repaired
In time to have the pyre prepared.
And first a pile of sandalwood,
With perfumes and with spices strewed,
Was raised amidst : the upper row
Rested on pots of oil below.
Tall strong posts at the corners four
A heavy scaffolding upbore.
The rope that tied them all below,
Severed, would crush with sudden blow.

The news spread fast : the morning tide
Saw swarming in from every side
In crowds halt, lame, infirm, diseased,
All whom such exhibitions pleased,
Or who of blessings were in want
They thought the holy one might grant.

Some came because they wished an heir,
Whilst many an anxious mother there
Came hoping news to hear that day
Of well-loved children far away.
Poor Jíva's corpse, now he was dead,
In Bhíma's choicest robes arrayed,
Decked out with gems of value great,
Was laid upon a bed of state,
And smeared with frankincense and myrrh.
The choicest flowers in Pávágarh
Were culled, and fitting chaplets made
To wreath around the dead man's head.
And thus the lifeless clay was dressed
As had it been some favoured guest.
Nor would a little show suffice
To deck for death the sacrifice.
By early morn was she arrayed
In costly robes of gold brocade.
Her hair was loose : its flowing curls
Were wreathed with flowers and with pearls.
With golden amulets and charms
Were covered wrist and rounded arms ;—

One might have thought, so calm her breath,
She dressed for marriage, not for death.

A watch of day had hardly passed
When brazen trumpets' shrilly blast,
And squealing fife and sounding drum
Proclaimed her fated hour had come.
Though unconcerned she tried to look,
Her frame a passing tremor shook,
But learned Brahmins standing near
Poured consolations in her ear,
With holy verse and *Mantra's* charm
From evil eye to ward all harm.
The banners fluttered in the wind.
Musicians followed close behind
With drum and fife and sounding trump,
Insignia of Rájput pomp.
Then next bareheaded Rájputs bore
A bed with gold thick studded o'er.
On this was seated, ghastly sight,
As if in state, the corpse upright,
In gorgeous costly robes arrayed,
With those fresh flowers round its head.

Men with umbrellas running on
Shaded the cold corpse from the sun.
As if in mockery of pride,
The body swayed from side to side :
The head on each side to the crowd,
As if in recognition, bowed,
And as the lifeless body stooped,
Its chin upon its bosom drooped,
And the glazed eye in death laid bare,
Heeded no more the noonday's glare.
Around him arms were brightly flashing,
And noisy cymbals harshly clashing,
With fife and drum their discord sounding.
There Brahmins, in excitement bounding,
Wild, frantic leaping as they danced along,
Joined in the chorus of a sacred song.
Glanced in the sunshine each shaven crown,
As the funeral train wound gaily down.
No holy man breathed the holy prayer,
Nor sigh nor a sound of grief was there.

•

The widow ere the train had come

Had been be-drugged with opium,
And now bedecked in fitting state
Waited its coming at her gate,
Where from a costly palankeen
She gazed bewildered at the scene.
The potent drug her senses fired ;
The Brahmins said she was inspired,
And that the flashing of her eye
Showed all her words were prophecy.
The bride, as Jíva passed along,
Joined the dead bridegroom's bridal throng.
Brahmins, bareheaded, at her side,
In quoting Sanscrit *Mantras*¹ vied.
Whilst round her thronging, maidens fair,
And agèd dames with silver hair,
And smooth-faced youths and ancient men
Joined eagerly the motley train,
Struggling and pushing as they tried
To reach the holy *Sati's* side.
Many in reverence profound
Kissed, as she passed, the hallowed ground,

1. Sacred passages read as charms.

Whilst others, pressing through the crowd,
With folded palms as suppliant bowed.
The Brahmins watched with anxious care
Her gifts themselves alone should share.
These worldly priests and beggars bold
Seized as she stripped each piece of gold,
And blessings culled from Sanscrit lore
Gave as they stretched their hands for more.
In answer to each piteous cry
She gave propitious prophecy.
There all in fortune's favour basked ;—
She promised each what each one asked.
Her magic words had power to calm
Each aching heart as soothing balm.
The simplest and the wisest, too,
Were all convinced her words were true.
Infatuate, already she
Fancied herself half deity.

And thus 'midst crush and dust and shout
Passed slowly on the motley rout.
E'er making money where he can,

There sold his wares the Banian ;—
One heard his voice above the noise
Cry : “ Buy for little children toys,”
Whilst sweetmeat sellers eager sold
Their luscious sweets to young and old.
Amidst them all with steady pace
The train soon reached the burning-place.
Then, as by magic, ceased each sound
And deepest silence reigned around.
Raised by relations from its bed,
The corpse, still in its robes arrayed,
Was laid upon the lofty pyre,
Where Bhíma held the ready fire.
He was the nearest relative,
To whom the Hindoo *Shastras* give,
And dearly prized the fearful right,
Their kinsmen's funeral flames to light.
Stepped from her palankeen the bride,
Whilst Brahmins clustered at her side.
The drug's dread influence passed away,
Her mind resumed its wonted sway.
No more through those fierce fumes elate,

She shuddered at her awful fate.
As full that fate she understood,
She quaked with terror as she stood,
And found from all her misery soon
Welcome oblivion in a swoon.
A priest adorned with holy rice
The forehead of the sacrifice,
And tried to rouse her pride. In vain :
She thought not in this world again.
But that the sport might not be balked,
They bore her form as if she walked
Around her husband's body thrice,
The shortest road to Paradise,
And uttered words that should prepare
The gods for her reception there.
Without delay the Brahmin swarm
Then raised her unresisting form,
Almost as cold her mortal clay
As his by whose dead side she lay.
A *Sati* should with fond embrace
And kisses press her dead lord's face.
To such an instant path is giv'n

Through open gates to Indra's heav'n,
Their spirits purified by flame,
Absorbed in him from whom they came.
Such, freed from all misdeeds on earth,
Avoid the ills of future birth.
All else are doomed for certain years
To seek again this vale of tears,
And to be free from mortal stain
Must know both birth and death again,
As beast or bird or fish or worm
Must to all nature's laws conform.
Then only can the soul secure
Absorption when itself is pure.

Scarce was the widow on the pyre
When Bhíma lit the funeral fire.
Whilst Brahmins, standing round the pile,
Fed fast the flames with streaming oil.
And as they blazed up fierce and high,
As if exulting, to the sky,
The heavy dark smoke, wreathing fair,
Rose slowly curling in the air—

The rope was cut at Bhíma's call,
And let the ponderous scaffold fall.

As if till then their fury nursed,
And only then allowed to burst,
The pipes and *tomtoms* beating fast
Answered the trumpet's loudest blast.
The Brahmins and half-frenzied crowd
Shouted the names of gods aloud,
But noise nor shout nor falling beam
Could drown the agonising scream,
That single shriek so clear and shrill
The widow gave ere all was still.

Full fast, with oily nurture fed,
The work of incrimination sped.
Sounds as of many fiends in ire
Were heard amidst the roaring fire.
Perhaps they mourned with demon spite
So soon must end the fearful rite,
Or, now the bride was dead, in vain
Wished she had died with fiercer pain,

Whilst, hovering further, spirits kind
Wept at the follies of mankind.

Whilst still the death-fire brightly burned,
Each to his home the crowd returned,
But till its work complete was done
Rájputs and Brahmins still stayed on;—
The first as bound by rules of caste
To watch the bodies till the last;—
The rest, determined not to lose
One tittle of their lawful dues,
Watched for their perquisites of old,
The scattered bits of melted gold.
When sure no more gold could be found,
The holy Brahmins left the ground,
And as the shades of evening fell,
The Rájputs at a neighbouring well
Bathing with ceremony due
All clothed themselves in garments new.
The kinsmen of the youthful chief
Had their lips shaved in sign of grief,
And then with many a Brahmin priest
At Pávágarh sought dainty feast.

That night, the kinsmen of the dead,
Unshod their foot and bare their head,
Went by the pale moon's glimmering light
To end the whole with solemn rite.
With them an earthen jar they bore,
Fresh-made, unused by man before.
From earth's pollution to secure,
They made the ash with water pure,
And all the fire's heat could not burn
Was buried in a simple urn.
Soon o'er the youthful Chieftain's tomb
His brother built a lofty dome.
Upon a pedestal below
Was raised the sculptured "*paliyo*."
The Chief a prancing steed bestrode,
All armed for battle as he rode
With spear and shield, whilst brilliant shone
Above his head the moon and sun,
To typify his fame should last
Until their glories, too, were past.
There graced the pedestal beside
The simple tribute to his bride,

Where perfect finish to impart
Sculptors exhausted all their art,
But though they had the perfect will,
Their tools were rude and poor their skill.
An arm in bold relief was raised
Beneath a sun and moon that blazed,
But round the orbs the rays of light
Looked as if petrified with fright.

At evening in the inner court,
The women's portion of the fort,
Assembled many a Rájput dame,
Widows and wives of lords of fame.
There came, with sad looks and forlorn,
The hireling mourners, too, to mourn,
With practised art who never fail
To make the loud and bitter wail,
And as they raise the mournful cry,
Beat on their breast and cry : "*Hai, hai !* "
Soon one more practised than the rest,
In all the country side the best
To shed the tear or heave the sigh

Or raise to heav'n the piteous cry,
Stood up, from all her mates apart,
To make a trial of her art.
And as she sang her flowing rhyme
The beaten breasts kept perfect time,
Whilst Lakhmi sat in silent prayer,
The only real mourner there.

“ Weep all for the young and the brave,
So early summoned to his grave,
The warlike Chieftain, noble youth,
With heart of love and soul of truth.

Hai, hai ! Hai, hai !

But shout for his glorious bride
Who quitted not in death his side,
And gave her life a sacrifice,
To go with him to Paradise !

Hai, hai ! Hai, hai !

In grace like the palm that with head bending low
Looks down on the bushes that grovel below ;
Though lofty its stature and noble its crown,
On the grass at its feet looks benignly down.

Shall we e'er see his like on the morrow ?
Kámá's¹ alone, of the deities above,
Could equal his eyes in their bright glance of love.
His waist as the cypress stem slender and round—
Proud was his step as the "*kabbak's*"² on the
ground.

Bow we our heads, unfeigning in sorrow.
What need to sing of his ancestors of name,
When his wisdom and sword had given him fame?
What need to repeat his forefathers' story
When he had attained unperishing glory,
Ever to last while the sun and moon shine ?
In the darkness of night unshrinking he stood,
Whilst his strong manly arm was crimson with
blood,
And shouting his war-cry was felled by a blow,
Dealt foul from behind by a treacherous blow.

Stony the hard heart that cannot repine.
Well worthy was she of a place by his side,
His brave, noble, peerless and beautiful bride,

1. The Hindoo god of love.

2. "The rock grouse."

Who, led by the *Shastras* revealed in their truth,
All earthly hopes dead with the lord of her youth,
 Burning was pure through the sanctified flame.
Great though the blessings to man on earth given,
Greater the glories of Indra's bright heaven.
Who would willing not quit this vile earth to go
Where the blue lotus doth in Paradise blow ?

 Whate'er can equal the *Sati's* bright fame ? ”
Her song the dames with praises meet
Applauded as she took her seat,
And then again the well-paid crowd
Poured forth their lamentations loud.
Oft have I heard this mournful wail
Come sweeping down the midnight gale,
And as I listened to the sound
Knew that death did his work around,
And silent breathed the heart-felt prayer :
“Teach me, O God, mine end prepare.”
Bhîma each day with pious care
Bid them the Brahmins' feast prepare.
These holy mortals, feed and fed,

Were zealous for the noble dead.
Now reigned supreme without control
Pride's demon foul in Bhíma's soul.
His brother dead, no other heir
His father's property to share,
Thoughts of a son aye filled his mind,
To whom to leave this whole behind.

CANTO VI.

CANTO VI.

LAKHMI'S slight arm a token bore,
An heirloom from the days of yore ;
A twisted silken string around
Her graceful wrist was tightly bound,
A sign that she full soon would know
A mother's joy, a mother's woe.¹
Her shape assumed a rounder form,
That but enhanced each youthful charm,
And in the heaving of her breast
Its grateful burden stood confessed.
Changed for the better Bhíma's mood,
He pleased his wife in all he could :
No wish or word that she could say
But he would hasten to obey.
Lakhmi had sought with woman's art
To melt to love his icy heart :

1. A custom among the Rájputs.

But soon had known the bitter pain
To love and not be loved again.
All that he did was not for her,
But for the heir of Pávágarh.
Bhíma amidst his anxious care
Built endless castles in the air,
His every thought absorbed in one,—
When would appear his eldest son ?
In Lakhmi's lap the nuts were laid,
And kinsmen their due honour paid.¹
The Brahmins, sure in prophecy,
Told of the fortunes of the boy,
And Bhíma bade his Bháts prepare
Choice couplets for the coming heir.
Now Lakhmi's heart in its unrest
Longed ever for some faithful breast,
For some loved friend to whom to fly
And find a heart's true sympathy ;
For often crossed her mind the thought,
'Twould be a boy, but should it not !

1. Cooanuts are laid in the lap of a pregnant woman by her kinsmen at a certain period, by way of congratulation.

If 'twere a girl, then Bhíma's rage
No thought of pity would assuage.
She feared lest her unfriendly fate
Should turn his want of love to hate.
Had not her own good mother died,
She would have had, wherein to hide
Her cruel wrongs, one faithful breast,
On which her weary head might rest.
Her mother would with anxious care
Have brought her home to Chámpáner,
And there, with loving friends around,
Would she full sympathy have found :—
The child had seen, by custom right,
Where she, too, first had seen, the light.

Her child was born. A waiting maid
With trembling steps and downcast head,
Dreading her master's fiery mood,
With folded arms before him stood.
He started up in fierce alarm,
Seizing with iron grasp her arm,
And cried, his tone almost a shriek :

“’Tis not a girl? Vile widow, speak.”

The woman falling on her knees,
Burst into tears and said : “ It is.”

The thunder cloud high poised in air
Bids for the coming storm prepare.
The darkening wave and seabirds’ call
Show mariners approaching squall.
The crouching tiger ere he springs
His tail with agitation swings—
But Bhíma’s anger, all unnursed,
Unbid, with sudden fury burst.
One might have thought he acted well
The part of some fiend loosed from hell.
For thus he cried : “ Accursèd fate ;
That gave me such unworthy mate !
Accursed the tongue and curst the voice
That guided first my father’s choice !
Accursed each day in every year
He ever went to Chámpáner !
May all the gods their fury pour
On this accursèd, evil hour,

And cursed for ever be on earth
The hour that gave this brat its birth ! ”
Completed thus his demon say,
The wrathful Bhíma strode away,
Whilst sycophantic servants vied
In vain to sooth his wounded pride.
From Lakhmi's room the women heard
With curses mingled every word,
But by good chance those words of fear
Had not yet reached her gentle ear.
Had she but heard. the hopeless wife
Had quitted then her feeble life.

Some days elapsed. No loving voice
Bade Lakhmi's aching heart rejoice.
Hope thwarted, Bhíma in his pride
Cared little if she lived or died.
He only once had asked Lárú
From whence the child its nurture drew,
And smiled, well-pleased, when she replied
It never left its mother's side :
She little knew its dire intent

Nor half that simple question meant.

Calm was the air—On such an eve
Could evil man ill thoughts conceive ?
Though Bhíma's curse had been concealed,
And his fierce anger not revealed,
He came not Lakhmi's chamber near
Nor spoke to her kind words of cheer.
She guessed the cause, and trembling knew
She or her child his rage must rue.
Weeping in silent woe and deep,
She cried herself that eve asleep.
Bhíma discovered that she slept,
And light across her threshold stepped,
Then sent her women all away,
But bade his ancient mother stay,
And whispered as he called her near
Words of ill omen in her ear.
As she approached his sleeping bride,
He stood, dark scowling, at her side,
And from beneath his long robe drew
A cup till then concealed from view.

Still Lakhmi slept, nor dreamed of ill.
His mother, pliant to his will,
Beckoning her son the cup prepare,
Quick laid his wife's round bosom bare.
Nor whispered word nor breath was heard
As he the deadly mixture stirred,
And then, his purpose full confessed,
Rubbed gently on her swelling breast ;
Whilst as the deed went bravely on,
The mother smiled upon her son.
By accident the cold brass cup
Touched Lakhmi, and she started up.
Her bosom bare ! In mute surprise
She sought response from Bhíma's eyes,
Which sparkling in his purpose dire,
As in her dream, flashed out like fire.
At first confused, but not for long,
He blurted out his demon wrong,
And said, all grimly as he smiled :
“ 'Tis opium, to kill the child ! ”¹

1. The common method of female infanticide, called “*dúdh-pítí*” or “milk-drinking.”

The purport of that fearful speech
Could hardly Lakhmi's senses reach.
So fiendish did the foul deed seem,
She fancied still she could but dream,
Until she smelt the sickening smell
Of the foul drug she knew so well ;
But thus convinced, at length she knew
That Bhíma's words were but too true.
Long silent, at the truth aghast
She lay, but found her speech at last.
" Ye monsters vile in human form,
With hearts of stone and life's blood warm !
It can not be that mortal seed
Could ev'n imagine such a deed !
Who ever saw in visions wild
A father kill his only child
By wile no demon could have blessed,
With poison from its mother's breast ?
My brain ! My brain ! Oh hear my cry,
Great *Rám* ! In pity let me die ! "

In bitter grief she bowed her head,
And sank, half-fainting, on her bed.

Her words of scorn and haughty look
The fiery Bhíma could not brook.
Sneering he spoke. " My gentle bride,
I soon will tame that lofty pride.
I care not for this wedded strife,
And love not censure from my wife.
Know, minion, and look up with awe ;—
Thy husband's will must be thy law !
Thus far my promise now I give,
To let the wretched infant live.
There but one month shall it abide.
And draw its nurture from thy side.
The wretched cause of my disgrace
Shall see no more its father's face,
But where its race may be forgot
Shall live obscure in peasant's cot,
And soon another wife shall share
The honour thou canst hardly bear."

This spoken, Bhíma strode away ;
In silent horror Lakhmi lay.
The words sank deep into her soul,—

Her tears flowed fast without control.
The tiny babe, by grief oppressed
She held yet closer to her breast,
And as she gazed upon her child
E'en through her tears the mother smiled.
"No mortal arm, whose'er it be,
Shall tear my child away from me!"
Schemes upon schemes of every kind
Now occupied her troubled mind,
At any time, on any day,
How she could safely flee away,—
A thousand things, yet knew that none
By her unaided could be done.
She called her nurse Lárú at last,
And whispering told her what had passed.
Lárú replied that, faithful still,
Her only law was Lakhmi's will.
From Lakhmi's breast with anxious care
She drew the drug that rankled there,
And promised now should Lakhmi sleep,
She by her bedside watch would keep,
And guard with her protecting arm

The innocent from every harm.
Lakhmi, worn out, soon soundly slept
Whilst faithful watch old Lárú kept,
And as her body rocked in time
Sang in soft tones her simple rhyme.

“ Sleep soundly, my loved one,—
Sleep on without fear—
No harm shall come nigh thee
While Lárú is near.
Here she will caress thee
In fondness and love,
And pray the gods bless thee
With gifts from above.
Then sleep on, my Lakhmi,
In quiet and rest—
Press fondly thy infant
Still close to thy breast.

'Twas I nursed thy mother
On that fearful night,
When thou on her deathbed

First sawest the light
I mourned her in sorrow,
And nursed thee with care,
And hoped for the morrow
Thy woes to repair.
Then hope in the future,
Forgetting the past :
Thy father's deep hatred
Became love at last."

Lakhmi at first so gently breathed,
As gentle zephyrs play.
One might have thought that pleasure wreathed
Her lip with smile so gay,
And naught but joy was there.
Soon passed the smile. With bitter tears
Her lowly couch was wet,
And ev'n in sleep a mother's fears
She could no more forget :
So great was her despair.
She dreamt the dreaded hour had come :
Her child must leave its mother's home.

She tried by words, by tears, by smiles,
A doting mother's thousand wiles,
With all a woman's matchless art,
To touch the stubborn Bhíma's heart.
Vain were her pains : with angry brow
He said : " The child must go, and now ! "
Then turned and to a household slave
To take the child his mandate gave.
The man approached at his command,
And snatched the infant from her hand,
Whilst closing round, the menial swarm
Unloosed the mother's clinging arm.
Just then appeared, with frowning mien,
Another actor on the scene.
The Koli Kánji, sword in hand,
Bade the too zealous menials stand,
And o'er the helpless infant threw
A broidered scarf of blood-red hue.
She started up—The cue was giv'n ;
Devout she thanked the gods of heav'n.
A moment's thought her doubts dissolved,
And found her purpose firm resolved.

The blood-red scarf was Kánji's gift
When, ransomed, she his camp had left.
His parting promise to her ear
Came welcome back, distinct and clear.
The cloth, hung on her garden wall,
To aid at once would Kánji call.
Not e'en to Lárú's faithful ear
She told the hope that fluttered near,
Determined, when her flight was known,
She should be blamed, and she alone.
In her tamed spirit, now she feigned,
That deepest resignation reigned,
And flattered Bhíma further still
By full submission to his will.
He little thought her inmost soul
Revolted at his vile control.

The twilight faint had passed away
And night usurped the place of day.
Dark-hued her robe, unshod her feet,
And flowing loose her locks of jet,
In hope to summon Kánji there

She gave her child to Lárú's care ;
And silent sought a turret tall
That overlooked the outer wall ;—
There placed the scarf with stealthy tread
And gained unseen her sleepless bed.

In the pale East the dawning light
Was lifting up the veil of night,
When she again the turret sought.
Perhaps the scarf its charm had wrought.
It was not long ere from the wood
That clothed the hill forth Kánji stood.
As he approached, he bared his feet,
Saluting as by custom meet.
“I see my summons on the wall,
And come, fair lady, at thy call.”
“Chieftain,” she said, “I know thou art
Of noble mind and true of heart,
And as thou promisedst the maid,
I now as mother claim thy aid.
His helpless child a female born
Has brought on me my husband's scorn.

For such a cause his hardened heart
Has vowed my child and I must part.
This shall not be, for rather I
Would with my well-loved infant die.
This hated place I fain would flee,
And in full trust have summoned thee,
That thou mayest succour me in need,
And aid me in my daring deed.
Bhíma's full rage I greatly fear
And long for home and Chámpáner,
But spies the castle's walls throughout
Shut every hope of succour out.
Then, Chieftain, aid me hence to flee;—
My honour, life, I trust to thee.”
“Lady, 'tis well,” he said. “This night
Have all things ready for thy flight.
With chosen band will I await
Thy coming at the postern gate.
My men a litter shall prepare,
And bear thee hence with every care.
I will provide, to save delay,
Relays of bearers on the way

Fear not. To-morrow's noon, I swear,
Shall see thee safe at Chámpáner."

With quick assent she sought the fort,
And gained unseen the inner court.
She told now all her hopes and fears
To honest Lárú's faithful ears.
It was arranged between the two
That Lakhmi there should leave Lárú,
Who to give time for Lakhmi's flight
Should sleep upon her bed that night,
And feign to prying eyes around
Her mistress' sleep was calm and sound.

Dark was the night and dark the skies,
As if to aid her enterprise.
The stormy wind that whistled round
Concealed the Kolis' footsteps' sound,
Who as the shades of evening fell
Approached the dozing sentinel.
He started up a moment late : •
The Kolis held the postern gate,

And he was seized and gagged and bound,
And thrown down helpless on the ground.
The Kolis' ready hands had made
A litter in a neighbouring glade.
Lakhmi, veiled closely, with her child,
Was carried by those woodsmen wild—
Though rough and stony was the way,
No need of torch or lamp had they,
But guided by the fireflies' light,
They hastened on their stealthy flight,
Whilst at the head the outlaw bold
Rode like some paladin of old.
Her earnest wish accomplished soon,
Lakhmi reach Chámpáner at noon.
Embraced her sire, she joyed in truth
To see those loved scenes of her youth.
Though yet a year had hardly passed,
Since she had parted from them last,
And by her father's anxious care
Nothing was changed since she was there,—
So chequered since her being's page,
To her that short time^d seemed an age.

In words supplied by passion's glow
She told her sire her tale of woe.
Then only was the truth revealed—
Her infant's birth had been concealed.
To find his solemn warning scorned,
The old man's indignation burned.
He knew at last, when 'twas too late,
His well-loved child's unhappy fate,
And promised for the time to come
That she should live with him at home.

It was not till the day was old
The tale in Pávágarh was told.
Hast ever watched a tiny spark
Catching on cotton in the dark !
Hast ever seen its stealthy spread,
First slow, then fast, from thread to thread,
Till, all absorbing in its heat,
Its deadly fiery circles meet ?
Such the faint image of the ire
That glowed in Bhíma's heart of fire.
Boiling and seething, now his rage

Nothing but vengeance could assuage.
He shouted loud, with passion's force,
"Bring here my arms ! To horse ! To horse !
Thrice is the lord of Pávágarh
Bearded by Kolis, and for her !
Now shall her dotard father know
My patience can no farther go,
And as he made his child my wife,
The tie must end with either's life !"

Now steeds were accoutred,
And banners upreared,
As if for the battle
The Chieftain prepared.
North and South, East and West,
His messengers hied,
And their steeds were the best
That horsemen could ride.
And they rode and they scampered in evident
glee :
They were all glád at heart that the lady was
free.

A gallant band was soon arrayed,
With spear and shield and trusty blade,
Nor was departure long delayed

For absence of their Chief.

With angry brow and heated face,
He took at once the foremost place,
And starting off at goodly pace

In action found relief,

Then, pushing on with might and main,
Pulled but at Chámpáner the rein.

But as the band approached the fort,
They found it manned in hostile sort.

Cannons were placed the road to sweep,
And watch did trusty sentries keep,

Pacing at intervals the wall,

And answering to each other's call.

Dáolat's broad banner floated high,

Caught by the breeze that whistled by.

The gate was closed with lock and bar,

And everything prepared for war.

Accosting Bhímasing by name,

The warder challenged as he came.

Foiled in his plan, the crafty Bhím
Instant revolved another scheme.
He spoke aloud with angry word :
“Is this the way your foolish lord
Must close his castle gate to me
As if I were his enemy ?
Tell Dáolatsingh my band is weak,
I come not here to fight, but speak.”
Dáolat believed his words were true
And granted him an interview.
With wily skill Bhím played his part
And won the old man's simple heart.
He feigned his stony heart had bled
For words to Lakhmi he had said :—
That only urged by passion wild
He once had thought to kill the child,
But now would bind himself by oath
To love and fondly cherish both.
Dáolat, deceived, without demur,
Let in the men from Pávágarh.
His fault Bhím would to Lakhmi own,
And plead his cause with her alone,

And Dáolat set himself the task
This meeting from his child to ask.
But in her heart the crime was traced
In lines too deep to be effaced,
And she refused to hear his prayer
Unless her sire were present there.
The treacherous Bhíma in the while
Had laid his plot with deeper guile.
Out of the men who with him came
He called a chosen few by name,
Men deep in villainy, whom he
Knew he could trust for treachery.
These, when their master went inside
In feigned contrition to his bride,
Should be prepared without the hall
Instant to enter at his call.
Down to the court as Dáolat went,
And gave the message Lakhmi sent,
In doubt how he might purchase peace
And for his suffering child release,
Bhíma repressed his rising ire
At his proud wife before her sire.

Concentred all his hopes in guile,
He clothed his passion in a smile,
And said : " Lest thou shouldst think me weak,
Ev'n in thy presence will I speak."
Dáolat, deceived by crafty say,
To Lakhmi's chamber led the way.
In posture meek, but unsubdued,
Within the room fair Lakhmi stood.
For she had marked with terror new
The ill flash from his eyes that flew.
Prepared a treacherous tale to hear,
She listened with attentive ear,
And knew the grief he feigned so well
Hid of his heart some purpose fell.
Her firmness stood in need her friend :
She heard his speeches to their end,
And thus addressed her husband : " Chief !
I hear thy words with double grief,
For in thy words thou hast, forsooth,
Not spoken yet one word of truth.
Hear once for all, and know that I
Than live with thee would rather die.

Another wife thy lot may cheer :
I live henceforth at Chámpáner."
Bhíma replied : "I need no more,
But knew not all thy pride before.
By force thou shalt be carried hence ;
I scorn henceforward vain pretence.
Preventing egress from the fort,
I hold each wicket, gate and port."
His voice, as death-knell sharp and clear,
Rang as he cried : " My men, appear !"
They came, and at his Chief's command
One villain seized the lady's hand.
One moment then she held her breath,
And drew a dagger from its sheath,
And ere her purpose could be guessed .
It flashed and sank into her breast.
Her father caught her, as a stream
Flowed crimson to the feet of Bhím.
Lakhmi, each instant growing weak,
With one last effort tried to speak.
She said : " My father ! Oh forgive !"
And as she spoke she ceased to live.

Dáolat in silent horror gazed,
And Bhíma stood as one amazed.
Her dying words as Lakhmi spoke,
A deafening shout the silence broke.
Amidst the cry, "To arms ! to arms !"
The trumpets sounded vain alarms.
Before a man could raise his brand,
Fast filled the room a Koli band,
And, bent in pity o'er the dead,
Their Chieftain Kánji at their head.
But for a moment Bhíma gazed.
The next his heavy hand was raised,
And with a sweeping, mighty blow
He laid the nearest Koli low.
Short-lived his triumph. Kánji's blade
At once avenged the parting shade.
"Is still, then, unsubdued thy pride ?
Then lie thee by thy victim's side."
As thus he spoke, his trusty sword
Pierced to the heart the Rájput lord.

