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because she had chosen him at her Swayamvara. But Mádrí was a lady of the Madra country, whom Bhíshma had bought with money and jewels from her brother Salya, who was the Raja of Madra.

Reign of Pándu.

This Raja Pándu was a mighty warrior, and he carried on many wars, and conquered many countries, so that in his time the Raj was as great and glorious as it was in the old time of Raja Bhárata.¹⁸ But Raja Pándu was much

Pándu devotes himself to hunting in the Himálayas.

given to hunting, and when some years had passed away, he went away with his two wives to the Himálaya mountains, and spent his time in hunting deer. And five sons were born to Pándu, namely, three sons by Kuntí, and two sons by Mádrí, and their names were Yudhishthira, Bhíma,

Five sons of Pándu, known as the Pándavas.

Pándu cursed by a sage.

Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva. And it so happened that one day Pándu shot his arrows at two deer; and the two deer were a Bráhmaṇ sage and his wife, who were accompanying together in that form; and the Bráhmaṇ assumed his proper shape and cursed Pándu that he should die in

Takes the vow of celibacy.

the embrace of one of his wives. Then Pándu took the vow of a Brahmachari, and gave all his wealth and goods to the Bráhmaṇs, and lived apart from his wives; but one day he sought the company of his wife Mádrí, and he perished in her arms according to the curse of the sage.

His death.

Mádrí, younger wife of Pándu, burns herself alive with her dead husband.

When Raja Pándu had thus died, his sons built up a funeral pile on which to burn his dead body, and his wives disputed together as to which of them should burn herself alive upon the pile with the dead body of the Raja. And Kuntí said:—"I must burn myself with the Raja, for I was his first wife and his chief Rání." But Mádrí said:—"Not so, for I was his favourite wife, and he died out of love for me." And the Bráhmaṇs who were there listened to all that the two women had to say, and they decided in

¹⁸ Raja Pándu is said to have undertaken a great campaign, which would have extended his empire over all Hindustan, from the Punjab to Bengal, and from the slopes of the Himálayas to the Vindhya mountains. The Dasarnas, or people of the Ten Forts, cannot be identified, though Professor H. H. Wilson thinks that they may be found in the neighbourhood of Chattisgarh in the Central Provinces (see Wilson's *note*, Vishnu Purána, p. 186). Magadhá corresponds to the modern Bahar. Mithila is the modern Tirhát, famous as the birth-place of Sitá, the wife of Rána.



favour of Mádri. So Mádri laid herself upon the pile by the side of her dead husband, and perished in the fire.

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Meantime the blind Dhritaráshtra had reigned over the Raj of Bhárata, and he sent messengers to the Raja of Gándhára, to ask for his daughter Gándhári in marriage. And the Raja of Gándhára betrothed his daughter to Dhritaráshtra; and when the damsel heard that she was betrothed to a blind husband, she tied a handkerchief round her eyes, so that she might be like unto her lord. And Gándhári was conducted to the city of Hastinápur by her brother Sakuni, and married to Raja Dhritaráshtra, according to the ordinance; and thenceforward she ever remained blindfold in the presence of her husband Dhritaráshtra. And Gándhári gave birth to a family of sons, who were named Kauravas after their ancestor Kuru, to distinguish them from the Pándavas or sons of Pándu. And the eldest of her sons was named Duryodhana, and the chief among his brethren was Duhsásana.

Reign of the
blind Dhritar-
áshtra.

Marries Gánd-
hári.

Story of Gánd-
hári blindfold-
ing herself.

Sons of Dhritar-
áshtra and
Gándhári,
known as the
Kauravas.

Now when Mádri had burnt herself with the dead body of Raja Pándu, Kuntí, the first wife, set out to return to the city of Hastinápur, accompanied by the five sons of the deceased Raja. And Kuntí and the five Pándavas arrived at the palace, and told the blind Raja Dhritaráshtra how his brother Pándu had perished in the jungle. And Raja Dhritaráshtra wept much at hearing of the death of his brother, and duly performed the funeral rites of bathing and offering oblations of water to the soul of the deceased Pándu. And he received his sister-in-law Kuntí and the five Pándavas with much affection, and they took up their abode in his palace along with Gándhári and the Kauravas.

Kuntí arrives at
Hastinápur with
the five sons of
Pándu.

The Pándavas
dwelt in the
palace with the
Kauravas.

The foregoing legend demands some consideration. Pándu is said to have obtained the Raj, because his elder brother was blind, and his younger brother was the son of a slave girl, a Súdra. But it seems difficult to understand why the younger brother should have been taken into consideration. The white complexion of Pándu was however re-

Review of the
foregoing legend
of Pándu and
Dhritaráshtra.

Pándu, probably
a leper.



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Suspicious details respecting Pándu's marriages. Kuntí, the daughter of the Raja of the Bhojas in the Dekhan.

Myth that Kuntí was the daughter of Sura, the grandfather of Krishna.

Origin of the myth.

garded as a blemish, and was probably indicative of leprosy. Accordingly it may be inferred that Pándu would have been excluded like Dhritaráshtira, had it not so happened that Vidura was begotten upon a slave.

The marriages of Pándu are also deserving of notice. Kuntí was his first and most celebrated wife, but her origin is involved in some obscurity. She is said to have been the daughter of Kuntí-bhoja, a Chieftain in the Vindhya mountains, and to have chosen Pándu for her husband at her Swayamvara. The statement as regards her birth seems not altogether improbable. The Bhojas, of whom her father was Chieftain, were a rude race who appear to have preceded the Rajputs and to have occupied the Vindhya mountains in the Malwa country,¹⁷ and it is just possible that Pándu obtained a wife from such a family. But the statement that Kuntí chose Pándu at her Swayamvara is open to suspicion, for it seems scarcely possible that she should of her own accord have chosen a man for her husband who was white complexioned, or who, in other words, presented the appearance of a leper. But another statement is added which is still more questionable. She is said to have been the daughter, not of Kuntí-bhoja, but of a Chieftain named Sura, who belonged to the Yádava tribe; and it is added that Sura and Kuntí-bhoja were friends, and that the latter was childless, and therefore Sura presented him with Kuntí, whilst still an infant, to bring up as his own daughter.

Now Sura was the grandfather of the celebrated

¹⁷ Comp. Wilson's *note* to Vishnu Purána, pp. 186, 418. The tribe of Bhojas are said to be still represented by the Dhar Rajas. Relics of the tribe may also be found in western Behar.



Krishna, and the improbable story of his giving his infant daughter to the Bhoja chieftain seems to be a myth, introduced for the purpose of connecting the family of Krishna with that of the heroes of the Mahá Bhárata. The extraordinary history of Krishna both as a warrior and a god will form the subject of consideration hereafter; but it may be generally stated that his worship was adopted by the Bráhmans, and that the Brahmanical compilers of the Mahá Bhárata especially inculcated the worship of Krishna as an incarnation of Vishnu. Accordingly throughout the Mahá Bhárata they have endeavoured to combine as far as possible the traditionary history of Krishna with that of the heroes who fought in the great war, much in the same manner as they have brought in the mythical history of Vyása. There is however a difference between the two attempts which is highly significant. The traditions of Krishna are to a great extent historical, and true to human nature, but those relating to Vyása are mythical inventions of a supernatural character. The result is that whilst it is easy to eliminate the myths referring to Vyása, it is difficult to separate the traditions of Krishna from those of Bhárata; and thus, whilst it is impossible to avoid the conviction that there is no real connection between the two series, it is better, where absolute proof is not forthcoming, to permit the connection to stand.

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Aim of the Brahmanical compilers of the Mahá Bhárata to promulgate the worship of Krishna, and to connect the traditions of Krishna with those of the Bhárata family.

Contrast between the historical traditions of Krishna and the mythical fables respecting Vyása.

The story of the marriage of Pándu to his second wife Mádrí is perhaps less open to suspicion. Madra is the ancient name for Bhootan, and there seems some reason for believing that Mádrí belonged to one of the mountain tribes occupying the southern slopes of the Himálayas, but probably much further

Mádrí, the sister of a Raja of Madra, on the southern slope of the Himálayas.

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toms of the peo-
ple of Madra.Difficulty as re-
gards the birth
both of Kuntí
and Madrí.

to the westward than the country of Bhootan. She was purchased with money and jewels from her brother Salya, who is described as the Raja of Madra; and the customs attributed to the people of his country are precisely of that depraved character which prevails to this day amongst the tribes of the Himálayas. They indulged in promiscuous intercourse without regard to relationship. They would eat flesh and drink wine until they were drunk, and then would dance together in a medley. If victorious in a battle they never gave quarter to the enemy; but if they were defeated they made over their wives and children to the conquerors without shame or concern.¹⁸

The inferences to be drawn from the marriages of Pándu are somewhat vague and unsatisfactory. The statement that he obtained one wife from the Vindhya mountains, and another from Bhootan, is open to suspicion; whilst the further statement that Kuntí was the real daughter of Sura, and only the adopted daughter of Kuntí-bhoja, is apparently mythical.¹⁹ The compilers of the Mahá Bhárata have so frequently tampered with the text for the purpose of associating Krishna or his family with that of the Pándavas, that it is difficult to accept statements which have that object in view. For the

¹⁸ See the charges brought by Karna against Salya on the seventeenth day of the great war.

¹⁹ The only circumstances under which female adoption is recognized by the Hindús is in the case of prostitutes and dancing girls, who are permitted to adopt daughters for the purpose of bringing them up to their own profession.

The traditions respecting Krishna and his family have been so extensively garbled that it is difficult to arrive at the facts. Krishna's real parents are said to have been Vasudeva, a chief of the Yádavas, and Devaki, a damsel of the royal family of the Bhojas, reigning at Mathurá; whilst his apparent parents were Nanda and Yasodá, a cowherd and cowherdess dwelling at Gokula. It will be seen hereafter that the reverse is probably the truth; that he was really the son of a cowherd, but that his biographers invented an absurd and impossible myth for the purpose of assigning to him a nobler parentage.



present, therefore, the parentage of Kuntī must be regarded as altogether doubtful.

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The history of Pándu's life in the jungle is filled with mythical details, which are introduced for the sole purpose of ascribing supernatural powers to a Bráhma's curse. He is said to have departed with his two wives to the southern slope of the Himálayas for the sake of indulging his passion for hunting; but in all probability he retired on account of his leprosy.²⁰ The remaining details of his life might well be passed over in silence. The wild idea of a sage taking the form of a deer, and the ostentatious statement that Pándu gave all his property to the Bráhmans, are equally unworthy of criticism. But the statement that Mádrī perished with Pándu upon the funeral pile demands some consideration. The original idea of Satī was simply that of sending a favourite wife to keep company with her husband after death. When the ancient Scythians buried a king, they strangled one of his concubines, and buried her with him, together with his cup-bearer, cook, groom, waiting-man, messenger, and favourite horses.²¹ Amongst the Thracians there existed a still more significant custom. Every Thracian had several wives, and whenever a man died, a sharp

Mythical account of the death of Raja Pándu in the jungle.

Absurd details beneath criticism.

Self-sacrifice of Mádrī on the funeral pile of her husband Pándu. Original idea of Satī amongst the Scythians.

Thracian custom of choosing the best-beloved wife.

²⁰ A curious Buddhist legend respecting the retirement of both a Princess and a Raja on account of leprosy is to be found in the Mahawansi. A Princess named Priya in the city of Kapila was seized with white leprosy, and was taken to a distant jungle, and placed in a large cave where she was supplied with fire, fuel, and all kinds of food. At the same time Rāma, Raja of Benares, was seized with the same disorder, and abandoned his Raj, and retired to the same jungle. Subsequently he found a remedy in the root, leaves, fruit, and bark of a certain tree, and his body became as pure as gold. Ultimately he fell in with Priya, cured her leprosy, and married her, and they resided in the city of Koli.

²¹ Herodotus, IV. 71. The same idea is brought forward in the story of the adventures of the Pándavas during the thirteenth year of their exile in the city of Virata, which will appear further on.

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Similarity between the Sati of Mádri and the Thracian custom.

Myth that the Pandavas were directly begotten by the gods.

contest ensued between his wives as to which of them he loved the best. On such an occasion a number of men and women assembled to hear the dispute, and finally settle the question; and when the best-beloved woman had been chosen, she received the praises of all present, and was then slain over the grave by her next of kin, and buried with her husband, whilst all the others are said to have been sorely grieved at not being thought worthy to follow their husbands.²² The legend of the Sati of Mádri is precisely of this character. Mádri disputes the honour with Kuntí, and urges the circumstances of her husband's death as a proof that she was the best-beloved, after which she sacrificed herself upon the funeral pile.²³ How this extraordinary rite became sublimed into a religious duty will be considered hereafter.

As regards the birth of the five sons of Pán du an extraordinary myth has been inserted in the Mahá Bhárata, which has not been incorporated in the foregoing text, but which may be briefly in-

²² Herodotus, V. 5.

²³ The extraordinary self-sacrifice of Mádri is not without its parallel in modern times. In 1862, a horrible case occurred in Rajputana. A wandering Bhat and beggar died in a village at Jodhpur. His wife, aged twenty-two, was not with him at the time, but arrived at the village one evening six days afterwards, accompanied by her husband's brother. She then learned for the first time that her husband was dead, and at once declared her intention of becoming Sati; but she is said to have been dissuaded by her husband's relations, and to have retired for the night, having apparently abandoned the idea. In the night her brother-in-law heard her moving, and saw that she was collecting wood for a funeral pile. Accordingly he assisted her, and when the pile was finished the poor woman seated herself upon it, whilst her brother-in-law set it on fire. At early dawn the people of the village saw the blaze, and came up to see what was the matter, when they found that the woman had burnt herself to death upon the pile.

The legend, however, respecting the Sati of Mádri is not altogether without suspicion, inasmuch as it is the only instance recorded in connection with the family of Bhárata. Neither the widow of Sántanu nor the widows of Vichitravírya perished upon the funeral pile.



dictated here. It is said that Pándu never had any children, and that when he took the vows of celibacy he permitted his two wives to invite the gods to their embraces. Accordingly Kuntí became the mother of Yudhishtira by Dharma, or personified virtue; of Bhíma, by Váyu, the god of wind; and of Arjuna, by Indra, the sovereign of the gods. In like manner, Mádrí became the mother of Nakula and Sahadeva by the two Aswins. This myth furnishes a valuable illustration of the interpolating process which has been carried on by the compilers of the Mahá Bhárata; a process which has hitherto been unimpeached by the Hindús, although replete with senseless contradictions. Thus in the more mythical portions of the Mahá Bhárata, the sage Vyása constantly appears as the grandfather and protector of the Pándavas, whilst the Pándavas occasionally assume to be the sons of the gods specified. At the same time, in the more authentic portions the Pándavas are invariably alluded to as the undoubted sons of Pándu.

Palpable contradictions in the mythical portions of the Mahá Bhárata.

The marriage of Dhritaráshtira and Gándhári is significant from a totally different point of view. Gándhári came from the Gándhára country, and the history of the Gandharians is somewhat remarkable. They were a cognate race with the Kshatriyas, and fought in the army of Xerxes (B.C. 480) armed with bows of cane and short spears, and were associated with the Indians.²⁴ Originally they appear to have occupied Cabul on the upper Indus, but about the fifth or sixth century of the Christian era they migrated to the westward, where their

Significance of the marriage of Dhritaráshtira and Gándhári.

The Gandharians a famous people, whose name is still preserved in Kandahar.

²⁴ Herodotus, VII. 64, 66.



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Monogamy of
Dhritarashtra
as opposed to the
polygamy of his
predecessors.

name is still preserved in the modern province of Kandahar.²⁵ Dhritarashtra, therefore, does not appear to have intermarried, like his successors, with the women of Hindustan; but he seems to have sent for a wife from the country of his ancestors, in the same way that Isaac and Jacob sought for wives in the family of Nahor. The result was that he did not indulge in polygamy; and it will be seen hereafter that Gándhári held a position of equality with her husband, which corresponded with the Aryan idea of marriage.²⁶ The sons of Dhritarashtra and Gándhári were called Kauravas after their ancestor Kuru, the son of Hastin; and it is by this term that they are generally distinguished from the Pándavas, or sons of Pándu.²⁷

²⁵ See Professor Rawlinson's learned and valuable Essay on the obscure tribes contained within the empire of Xerxes. Rawlinson's edition of Herodotus, Vol. IV. p. 175.

²⁶ Dhritarashtra is said to have had another son, named Yuyutsu, by a woman of the Vaisya caste; but there is every reason to believe that the existence of Yuyutsu is purely mythical. According to the tradition all the sons of Dhritarashtra were killed in the great war; and the repugnance felt at the idea that he should die without a son seems to have led to the introduction of Yuyutsu. The point will be further noticed hereafter.

²⁷ Another Brahmanical myth of the usual type has been inserted in this part of the Kshatriya tradition, for the sake of glorifying the miraculous powers of that imaginary and unreal personage, the sage Vyása. Gándhári is said to have owed the existence of her family to the interposition of this sage. Having on one occasion hospitably entertained Vyása, he offered her a boon, upon which she requested that she might become the mother of a hundred sons. Accordingly after two years' gestation, she produced a lump of flesh, which Vyása divided into a hundred and one pieces, and placed in as many jars, and the sons were ultimately born from the jars!



CHAPTER II.

EARLY FEUDS AT HASTINÁPUR.

HAVING thus disposed of the group of legends which refer to the ancestors of the Kauravas and Pándavas, it will be necessary to take into consideration those which are connected with the early rivalry which broke out between the sons of Dhritaráshtira and the sons of Pándu, and which led to the first exile of the Pándavas. This second series of legends, although somewhat interlarded with mythical matter, is of considerable historical value. It throws light upon the so-called education which prevailed in the Vedic age. It illustrates the relations which subsisted between the Aryan settlers and the original inhabitants. It also comprises a curious account of an exhibition of arms, which was evidently the origin of the later tournament. The main incidents of this portion of the narrative may be thus indicated.

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Historical value
of the legends
referring to the
early rivalry be-
tween the Kau-
ravas and Pán-
davas.

Main incidents.

1st, Jealousies between the Kauravas and Pándavas, and attempt of Duryodhana to take the life of Bhíma.

2nd, Education of the Kauravas and Pándavas by Drona.

3rd, Legend of the son of the Bhíl Raja, and his skill in archery.



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- 4th, Exhibition of arms at Hastinápur.
5th, Legend of the birth of Karna.
6th, War against Drupada, Raja of Panchála.
7th, Rivalry between Yudhishtira and Duryodhana for the post of Yuvaraja.

1st. Jealousies
between the
Kauravas and
Pándavas.

The narrative of the jealousies between the Kauravas and Pándavas, and the attempt of Duryodhana to take the life of Bhíma, may now be related as follows:—

Attempt of Duryodhana to take the life of Bhíma.

After this the Kauravas and the Pándavas were brought up together in the old palace at Hastinápur, and they sported together, and were taught together, without any favour being shown to any one more than to the others; but from the days of their early youth the sons of Dhritaráshtira were ever jealous of the sons of Pándu. Now about this time Duryodhana, who was the eldest of the Kauravas, became very jealous of the strength of Bhíma, and he resolved to work evil against Bhíma. And on a certain day Duryodhana put poison into Bhíma's food, and when Bhíma had eaten he was seized with a deep sleep, so that he seemed like one who is dead. Then Duryodhana lifted him up, and carried him to the river Ganges, and threw him into the stream; and Bhíma sank in the deep waters, but he was not drowned, for he descended into the great city of serpents which is underneath the earth. And the serpents recovered him from the poison, and gave him a drink which made him as strong as ten thousand serpents. And Bhíma took leave and returned to the city of Hastinápur, and he had henceforth great strength, and was the mightiest of the mighty.

Bhíma's escape
to the city of
Serpents.

Bhíma's great
strength.

Review of the
foregoing legend.

Mythical character of the story of Bhíma's escape from Duryodhana.

The foregoing legend presents a very mythical appearance. In the first place, it may be remarked that the bards of the Mahá Bhárata exhibit from the first a palpable leaning towards the Pándavas, and were quite capable of inventing a myth for the sake of blackening the character of the opposite party.



Secondly, the escape of Bhíma from the bottom of a river to the city of serpents is unquestionably mythical, and belongs to that group of legends which confounded real serpents with a tribe of Scythians named Nágas, and which will be more fully discussed hereafter.

The next incident, namely, the education of the Kauravas and Pándavas, is more valuable, and may be related as follows :—

Some time after this a famous Bráhmaṇ preceptor, named Drona, who had cause of quarrel with the neighbouring Raja of Panchála, arrived at the city of Hastinápura. And Bhíshma rejoiced to see Drona, and made him very welcome, and requested him to instruct the Kauravas and Pándavas in arms and sciences. And Drona said :—“ This I will do, but when the young men are fully practised in the use of arms, they must fight for me against the Raja of Panchála.” So Bhíshma agreed, and Drona took up his abode in Hastinápura; and Bhíshma gave Drona his half-sister in marriage. And Drona took great pains in teaching all the young men, but he especially delighted in teaching the Pándavas. To Yudhishtira he imparted the use of the spear, but that young Prince became more renowned for wisdom and goodness than for deeds of arms. To Arjuna he taught the use of the bow, and Arjuna became the most famous archer of his time. To Bhíma he taught the use of the club, for Bhíma was a young man of great appetite and enormous strength, and could wield the club right lustily. To Nakula he taught the whole art of taming and managing horses, and to Sahadeva he taught the use of the sword and a perfect knowledge of astronomy. And Drona instructed the Kauravas in like manner, as well as his own son Aswattháma. But of all his pupils the most beloved was Arjuna, for he was the most perfect of all; and thus whilst Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, was jealous of all the Pándavas, he was the most jealous of Arjuna.

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2nd. Education
of the Kauravas
and Pándavas by
Drona.

Arrival of Drona
at Hastinápura.

Drona educates
the Princes, on
condition that
they afterwards
fight the Raja of
Panchála.

Marriage of
Drona.

Practice in the
use of the spear,
club, bow, and
sword.

Taming horses.

Astronomy.

Duryodhana's
jealousy of Ar-
juna.

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foregoing ac-
count of the edu-
cation of the
Kauravas and
Pándavas.Wrestling.
Fagilism.
Stone throwing.
Casting the
noose.
Marking cattle
every three
years.Practical astron-
omy.

The education of the Kauravas and Pándavas is very briefly indicated in the foregoing legend; but it will appear hereafter that they followed other pursuits of a primitive character, such as might have been expected amongst a fighting community in ancient times. Thus it will be seen that they practised wrestling, fighting with fists, throwing stones, and casting a noose. They also went out every three years into the pastures to mark all the calves which had been born during the interval, and to re-mark all the other cattle. The astronomy that was taught was no doubt of a practical character; and was either to enable the young men to find their way through a jungle in the night-time, or else to assist them in calculating nativities, or really to impart to them some primitive knowledge of the movements of the heavenly bodies, and the recurrence of months, seasons, and years.

Question of whe-
ther Drona was
a Bráhmaṇ or a
Kshatriya.

An interesting circumstance is connected with the education of the young men, namely, the selection of a tutor or preceptor, which opens up a curious question as to whether Drona was a Bráhmaṇ or a Kshatriya. In the previous generation the venerable Bhíshma had undertaken the education of the fathers, but from causes not stated he appears to have taken no part in the tuition of the sons. This duty is said to have been fulfilled by an able and veteran warrior named Drona, who was engaged for the purpose, and who was retained in the household by being married to a damsel of the family named Kripá, who was apparently the daughter of old Raja Sántanu by a slave girl. He appears to have been treated, both by his pupils and the Chieftains of the house, as an experienced and honoured veteran.

Marriage of
Drona to a lady
of the family of
Bhárata.



One slight difficulty occurs in the narrative, which is, however, capable of explanation. Drona had a son named Aswattháma, whom he educated together with the Kauravas and Pándavas. From this statement it must be inferred that Drona married Kripá some years before taking upon himself the office of instructor; for, otherwise, Aswattháma would have been an infant in arms when the Kauravas and Pándavas were almost men.

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Drona's son, Aswattháma, educated with the Kauravas and Pándavas.

It will subsequently be seen that Drona is occasionally represented as a family priest as well as an instructor in the use of arms; that he offered up prayers to the gods on public occasions; and that he was treated by his pupils with a reverence approaching the divine homage which is due to a religious Bráhmaṇ preceptor, rather than with the ordinary respect which would be paid by young men to an elder. This circumstance is deserving of some consideration. It seems certain that Drona was a warrior and a Kshatriya. He occupied the same position as regards the sons of Dhritaráshtra and Pándu which Bhíshma occupied as regards their fathers, and Bhíshma was unquestionably a Kshatriya. On the other hand, the Bráhmaṇs were essentially priests, and are never represented as warriors, excepting in some wildly supernatural legends, which are utterly unworthy of credence. The Brahmanical compilers of the Mahá Bháráta, however, appear to have resolved on representing Drona as a Brahmanical priest and preceptor, corresponding to the Purohita, or family priest, who occupies so important a position in the modern social system of the Hindús. Accordingly, they have introduced an absurd story respecting his birth, which consists

Efforts of the Brahmanical compilers to represent Drona as a Bráhmaṇ, who officiated as Purohita, or family priest.



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Distinction between the two classes of Brahmins: viz.
(1.) The Purohita, or family priest.
(2.) The Guru, or great ecclesiastical head.

wholly of supernatural details of the character already indicated, and which in itself is utterly devoid of interest, excepting on account of the object for which it has been inserted, namely, that of representing Drona as a Bráhmaṇa.¹

Here it may be convenient to point out the distinction between two classes of Brahmanical

¹ These Brahmanical myths, when closely intertwined with the Kshatriya traditions, and introduced for the sole purpose of concealing the real truth, are a decided difficulty to the historian. He may be able to untwine the one from the other, and even to explain the process by which he has separated the truth from the fable, but he is more or less restrained by the character of the supernatural details, which can rarely be introduced without a shock to modern delicacy. At the same time, the reader can be scarcely expected to accept the judgment of a historian without some proofs of its being based upon a sufficient data; and accordingly the task of separating truth from fable in the present instance must be attempted.

The myth is as follows:—Drona was the son of a famous Bráhmaṇa sage, named Bharadvāja; the germ from which he sprung having escaped from the sage whilst inflamed at the sight of a celestial nymph. Drupada, Raja of Panchála, was born under similar circumstances of a Raja named Prishata, and was educated together with Drona by the sage Bharadvāja. Subsequently, as mentioned in the text, Drona had a feud against Drupada, because when Drupada succeeded his father in the Raj, he did not treat his old fellow-pupil with kindness and respect; but rather taunted him with the inferiority of his position as a mendicant Bráhmaṇa when compared with that of a Kshatriya or Raja. Hence Drona entered the service of Mahárája Dhritarashtra for the very purpose of obtaining revenge against Drupada.

The truth may probably be as follows:—The association of Drona and Drupada, both as regards the similarity of their births and their being educated together by the same sage, very likely had a natural basis, and in all probability that basis was family relationship. Moreover, it is distinctly stated that in their youth they had agreed to divide the Raj between them; and Drona says plainly that had Drupada adhered to this agreement there would have been no war. This simple hypothesis at once clears away every difficulty. Drupada and Drona were probably brothers. The former succeeds to the Raj of Panchála, whilst Drona goes into exile; and Drona finally marries a lady of the house of Bhárata, and undertakes the education of the Kauravas and Pandavas, on condition that they ultimately undertake an expedition against Drupada. It will be seen, hereafter, that the result of the expedition was that the Raj of Panchála was divided, the half going to Drona whilst the remaining half was left with Drupada.

The Brahmanical compilers also insert another myth, to the effect that Kripá the wife of Drona, was born from a Bráhmaṇa named Gautama, the son of Gotama, in the same unnatural manner as her husband had been. The object of this myth is obvious. Having represented Drona to be a Bráhmaṇa, it was necessary that his wife should be born of a Bráhmaṇa also. It may be added that Kripá had a brother named Kripa.



dignitaries, which, according to Brahmanical ideas, have existed from time immemorial; inasmuch as a clear perception of these two priestly orders will enable the historian to explain with greater clearness the character and scope of some of the most important of the Brahmanical interpolations. The great mass of Bráhmans may be regarded as mendicant priests. They are feasted on occasions of births, marriages, deaths, and other periods of ceremony and festival; and large gifts are distributed amongst them in times of sorrow and trouble, as well as in times of joy. Again, every Bráhman who is acquainted with the different formulas of worship, may become an officiating priest, and receive pay accordingly. But there are two special Brahmanical orders, who form an essential part of the framework of Hindú society, and who for ages have effectually garrisoned and defended the social system against any hostile attack, whether of foreign religions from without or of heresies from within. These two orders are the Purohita, or family priest; and the Guru, or great ecclesiastical head. In relative position they correspond generally to that of Chaplains and Bishops in Christian communities; excepting that the offices, like those of all Hindú institutions, are hereditary; and that sons, real or adopted, have been known to succeed their fathers as Purohitas or Gurus for many generations. Occasionally a Hindú family becomes divided, and the new branch entertains a new Purohita. In like manner also a Bráhman of great wisdom, or austerities, or endowed with a powerful eloquence, or invested by the popular voice with supernatural powers, suddenly appears before the world as a new

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Generally correspond to the Chaplains and Bishops of Christian communities, excepting that the offices are hereditary.

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Duties of the
Purohita, as a
priest of the
family, an in-
structor in the
Śástras, a confi-
dential adviser,
and an envoy.

and famous Guru, surrounded by a band of disciples or followers, and ultimately succeeds in founding a new sect, of which he is the spiritual head.

The Purohita is essentially a family priest and a religious preceptor. Amongst the poorer classes he may officiate for very many families, in which case he employs assistants, and gives them a stipulated share of the gifts and other perquisites which he may receive. But amongst the richer classes, the duties of a Purohita are confined to a single family, and under such circumstances his influence becomes paramount in the household. He performs all the necessary religious rites and ceremonies for the members of the family, and imparts religious instruction from the sacred books. At the same time, he is the repository of all the family secrets, and the confidential and authoritative counsellor in all times of doubt and difficulty. He is also frequently engaged in more secular matters, such as the settlement of disputes; and in modern times a Hindú Zemindar or Raja has occasionally employed his Purohita as an ambassador or envoy.

The Guru, or
great head of the
sect.

His ecclesiastical
visitations.

His spiritual
powers.

The Guru holds a still higher position in the Brahmanical hierarchy. He is the head of the religious sect to which the family may belong; and he is generally engaged in extensive ecclesiastical visitations or tours, accompanied by a band of disciples who occasionally act as assistant Gurus. During his progress he levies such contributions as he may be able to impose upon the families belonging to his sect; he likewise confirms the younger Hindús, who have attained a suitable age, by a number of ceremonies which need not be repeated here. According to the popular belief he is entitled to divine



worship, for he can work miracles and forgive sins. His benedictions can bring down health, wealth, and long life; whilst his curses can burn up armies, remove mountains, change the courses of rivers, or hurl Mahárajás from their thrones. By virtue of these supposed spiritual powers he exercises very large temporal powers. He can excommunicate an offender from his family, as well as from his sect or caste; and he alone can restore the degraded wretch, who otherwise is doomed to a life of utter solitude and despair.

Amongst the ancient Kshatriyas to whom the Mahá Bhárata refers, there may possibly have been Purohitas, but there certainly were no Gurus. It is not wholly impossible that Drona, whilst instructing the Kauravas and Pándavas in the use of arms, may have acted as a family priest.² But the ancient representatives of the modern Gurus were mythical; Rishis, or sages, of whom Vyása is pre-eminently the type; and their presence is not only never necessary to the story, but is invariably foisted on to the Kshatriya tradition by some supernatural details which sufficiently betray the nature and object of

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His temporal
powers.

Question of whether the family priest, or Purohita, existed amongst the ancient Kshatriyas.

Question of Gurus amongst the ancient Kshatriyas, disproved by the mythic character of the traditions respecting them.

² The following texts in the Aitareya Bráhmaṇam indicate not only that it was the duty of a Raja to engage a Purohita, but that the ancient Rajas were sometimes disinclined to engage a Purohita.

"Now about the office of a Purohita. The gods do not eat the food offered by a Raja who has no Purohita. Thence the Raja, even when not intending to bring a sacrifice, should appoint a Bráhmaṇ to the office of Purohita.

"This Agni Vaisvanara, who is the Purohita, is possessed of five destructive powers. With them he surrounds the Raja for his defence, just as the sea surrounds the earth. The empire of such a ruler (Arya) will be safe. Neither will he die before the expiration of the full life term (100 years); but live up to his old age, and enjoy the full term apportioned for his life."—Haug's translation, Vol. II. pp. 528, 530.

Dr Haug is of opinion that the institution of a Purohita, as a political functionary as well as a house-priest, may be traced back to the remotest times. See introduction to the Aitareya Bráhmaṇam, p. 67. His opinion is valuable, but his proofs are inconclusive.

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Garbling of the
Mahá Bhárata
by the Puránitas
and Gurus.

3rd. Legend of
the son of the
Bhil Raja.
Illustrative of
the supremacy
exercised by the
Aryan tribes
over their abo-
riginal neigh-
bours.

Ancient and mo-
dern condition
of the Bhils.

the interpolation. Moreover it must always be borne in mind that the later Brahmanical compilers of the Mahá Bhárata were undoubtedly Gurus, and that the reciters or readers of the Mahá Bhárata are to this day either family priests, or Bráhmans engaged for the purpose. Consequently every opportunity has been afforded to the Bráhmans for carrying out their interested purpose of exalting their own caste in the eyes of the community at large.

But to proceed with the traditionary history of the great war of Bhárata. During the period that Drona was instructing the Kauravas and Pándavas in the use of arms, an incident occurred which throws an unexpected light upon the supremacy exercised by the Kshatriya settlers in the Raj of Bhárata over the aboriginal populations in their neighbourhood.

Amongst all the Hill tribes which appear to represent the more ancient inhabitants of India, and which have preserved their rude habits and manners to the present day, there are none more remarkable than the Bheels or Bhils. These people still occupy the hill tracts of Rajputana and central India, and in ancient times seem to have dwelt in much the same localities; having Rajas or Chieftains of their own, but acknowledging or dreading the supremacy of the Kshatriyas. In the Mahá Bhárata they appear to the south of the Jumná, and in the immediate neighbourhood of the Raj of Bhárata; whilst in the Rámáyana they make their appearance further to the east, near the junction of the Jumná and Ganges. To this day the Bhils are cattle-lifters, highway robbers, hunters like Nimrod and Esau, capable of almost any outrage, yet imbued with a sense of truth and honour strangely at contrast with



their external character. At the same time, they are yielding so perceptibly to the personal influence of British administrators, and the advancing tide of British civilization, that within a few generations they will be probably converted into peaceful and industrious men.

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The legend of the son of the Raja of the Bhîls may now be related as follows:—

The legend.

When the Kauravas and Pândavas were well practised in the use of arms, so that men could see their strength and skill, the fame of Drona became noised abroad, and many sons of Rajas flocked to the city of Hastinâpur to take lessons from so great a preceptor. And it came to pass that the son of the Raja of the Bhîls came to Hastinâpur, and prostrated himself at the feet of Drona, and prayed that he might be taught to shoot with the bow. But Drona refused to teach the Bhîl, saying:—"The Bhîls are a race of highwaymen and cattle-lifters, and it would be a sin to teach them the use of weapons." At these words, the son of the Bhîl Raja returned to his own country, but he was very sorrowful, for he had greatly desired that Drona should teach him the use of the bow.

Flocking of sons of Rajas to Hastinâpur to learn archery from Drona.

Arrival of the son of the Bhîl Raja.

Drona refuses to teach the Bhîl.

Sorrow of the Bhîl.

After this, the son of the Bhîl Raja made a clay image of Drona, and he set it up, and performed worship before it; and he practised the use of the bow in the presence of the clay image. And after many days the young man acquired great skill in archery by virtue of the clay image, and the fame of his shooting was spread abroad on all sides, and great complaint was made to Drona, that by his means the Bhîl had become a mighty archer. So Drona went to the Bhîl country, accompanied by all the young men of the royal house of Hastinâpur; and they beheld the shooting of the Bhîl, and saw that it was very good. And Drona determined to spoil the archery of the Bhîl, and he called to him and commanded him to cut off the forefinger of his right hand. And the Bhîl fell down and worshipped Drona,

The Bhîl sets up a clay image of Drona, and learns archery by practising before the image.

Drona contemplates spoiling the Bhîl's archery, but is restrained by his submission.



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and prepared to do as he had been commanded; but the heart of Drona was touched by the obedience of the Bhíl, and he ordered him to stay his hand and leave his forefinger whole. But Drona still feared lest the Bhíl should become too powerful an archer; and he bound him over by a solemn oath never more to shoot with his forefinger, but to draw his arrow through his middle fingers only; and this became the custom amongst the Bhíls, and they shoot the bow with their middle finger until this day.

Review of the foregoing tradition. Religious worship paid in modern times to favourite heroes.

Cause of the alarm of the Kshatriyas.

Barbarous character of the age.

Refutation of the alleged custom that the Bhíls shoot the bow with the middle fingers only.

The foregoing significant tradition bears generally the stamp of truth. The devotion which is implanted in the breasts of Indian soldiery at the deeds of some daring hero, will frequently lead them to pay divine honours to his image; and it is notorious that the gallant John Nicholson was worshipped by his men as a demi-god, although with a soldier's simplicity he punished all who engaged in such unhallowed rites. The display of feeling on the part of the Kshatriyas at finding that the Bhíl was as good an archer as themselves, would be shared by any band of foreign settlers who were called upon to maintain an ascendancy over a native population by their superior skill in warfare. The cruel intention of Drona to cut off the forefinger of the Bhíl may be accepted as an illustration of the barbarous character of the age. The final statement, however, that the Bhíl obeyed the command of Drona, and that the whole tribe adopted the custom of shooting with their middle fingers only, may be fairly questioned. It is scarcely in accordance with human nature that a tribe so numerous as the Bhíls should have obeyed a law so detrimental to their efficiency in war, and one which no enemy could have enforced. Moreover, in the present day



the Bhils have lost all memory of the tradition, and shoot their arrows in the usual way.³

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The legend of the public exhibition of arms at Hastinapur, at which the Kuravas and Pándavas displayed their skill before all the Chieftains and ladies of the royal house, is exceedingly curious and interesting; inasmuch as it was evidently an institution of the Kshatriyas, resembling in a remarkable degree the tournaments of the age of chivalry. Sometimes these public exercises took place, as on the present occasion, to enable the younger Chieftains to display their prowess before all the people of the Raj. At others however it was undertaken at a Swayamvara, for in certain cases the daughter of a Raja was not called upon to indicate the husband of her choice, but became the passive prize of that Kshatriya who distanced all his compeers in the performance of some difficult exploit. Under these latter circumstances the Swayamvara seems to have borne so strong a resemblance to the tournament, that it might almost be regarded as the origin of the institution. Subsequently, at a later period in the history of Hindú civilization, the feats of arms were no longer performed by Chieftains of high rank, in the hope of winning a Princess as a bride; but the exhibition degenerated into a mere prize ring, where professional boxers and wrestlers fought each other, or fought with bears and tigers, for the pleasure of the

4th, Public exhibition of arms at Hastinapur.

Resemblance to a tournament.

Three varieties of public exhibition of arms, viz.

(1.) The exhibition proper.

(2.) The Swayamvara.

(3.) Professional pugilism and wrestling.

³ For this information I am indebted to Colonel R. J. Meade, the agent to the Governor-General in Central India, and to Lieutenant T. Cadell, the Bhil agent. Lieutenant Cadell kindly attempted to verify the tradition by directing a number of Bhils, who were in his camp, to practise at a batt; but they all drew the bow with the fore and middle fingers, the arrow being held between the two, and declared that they did so after the manner of their ancestors. They knew no tradition of the custom mentioned, but the Karkoons, or writers, who were present, had heard or read of it.



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Raja and his ladies. Instances of all these different forms of exhibitions of arms are to be found in the Mahá Bhárata, and will in due course be brought under consideration.

The narrative.

The narrative of the exhibition of arms at Hastinápura may now be related as follows:—

Mahárája Dhritaráshtra directs Drona to make preparations for a public exhibition of arms.

After a while the Kauravas and Pándavas became fully practised in the use of arms; and Drona told the Mahárája,⁴ saying:—"Your own sons, and the sons of your brother Pándu, are well skilled in the use of weapons, and able to fight against other men on the field of battle." Then the Mahárája replied:—"Let a place be prepared in the great plain without the city, that the young men may engage in mock-fighting, and display their skill before all the Chiefs and people of the Raj." So Drona ordered every preparation, and a large space was set apart in the great plain, and fenced round about with barriers. And on one side of the ground galleries were built for the Mahárája and his Chieftains; and on the other side galleries were set up in like manner for the ladies of the royal house of Hastinápura.

Space set apart in the great plain.

The galleries.

Morning of the exhibition.

Galleries adorned with flags and garlands.

The multitude.

The blind Mahárája.

The Chieftains and ladies.

Now when every preparation had been made, the Mahárája appointed a day for the exhibition of arms. And when the morning of the day had begun to dawn, the galleries on either side, and the trees that were round about, were adorned with flags of various colours, and long garlands of sweetly-smelling flowers. After a while all the people of Hastinápura, and great multitudes from all parts of the Raj, gathered together round the barriers and between the galleries, to behold the exercises of the sons of Dhritaráshtra and the sons of Pándu. Presently the blind Mahárája was led in and took his seat upon his throne; and Bhíshma, who managed the affairs of the Raj, sat upon his right hand; and on his left sat Vidura, who was appointed to describe to the blind Mahárája all that took place in the plain below. And all the Chieftains of the royal house, and all the ladies of

⁴ Dhritaráshtra is always alluded to throughout the Mahá Bhárata as the Mahárája, or "Great Raja," or Raja of Rajas.



Hastinápur, were arrayed in many-coloured cloths, and garlands of flowers, and bright jewels, and took their seats in like manner upon the galleries; and chief amongst the ladies were Gándhári, the mother of the Kauravas, and Kuntí, the mother of the Pándavas.

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When all was ready Drona, the preceptor, and his son Aswattháma, entered the area in pure white garments, and offered up prayers to the praise and glory of the gods.

Drona and his son Aswattháma invoke the gods.

Then the young Princes in like manner entered the area arrayed in garments of different colours, and lightly girded for exertion. Each young man carried his bow and arrows in his hand, and respectfully saluted the feet of his preceptor, and awaited his commands. Each one then in

The Kauravas and Pándavas enter the area.

Salute Drona.

turn exhibited his skill by shooting arrows at a butt, first on foot, and then mounted in succession upon a horse, an

Feats of arms. Archery on foot, horseback, elephants, and chariots.

elephant, and a chariot. Next followed mock fights with the sword and buckler. Then the whole body of pupils, first on foot, and afterwards mounted as before on horses, elephants, and chariots, exhibited their skill in archery, whilst running, galloping, or driving round the area at full speed. After this the young men fought with clubs, and

Sword-fighting.

Club-fighting.

the fighting was terrible to behold; and then it was manifest to all men that there was ill blood between the Kauravas and Pándavas. At one end of the area Duryodhana engaged with Bhíma, and after exchanging some heavy blows, the mock combat became a downright battle.

Combat between Duryodhana and Bhíma.

The young men rushed upon each other like wild elephants, and laid about them right manfully; whilst the multitude without caught the spirit of the fray, and ran to and fro, shouting some for Duryodhana and others for Bhíma, until the air was filled with noise and dust, and the whole plain was in great commotion. Drona sent his son Aswattháma to put an end to the combat, but no one heeded him; and Drona at last went himself with all haste, and parted the combatants by main force, and thus put a stop to the turmoil.

Interference of Drona.

When the uproar was somewhat over, Drona called upon his favourite pupil Arjuna to exhibit his accomplishments

Handsome appearance of Arjuna.

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Marvellous feats
of Arjuna in
archery, sword-
playing, whirl-
ing the chakra,
and throwing
the noose.

before the assembly. The young Chieftain was as handsome as one of the bright gods; and when he entered the area, clad in golden mail, and carrying in his hand a bow inlaid with various colours, the multitude hailed him as another Indra, and the heart of his mother Kuntí was filled with pride and exultation. Arjuna then performed very many excellent feats of arms, which surpassed any which had ever before been seen. He set up an iron figure of a bear upon a pillar of wood, and shot five arrows into its mouth at one bending of the bow. Next he tied a cow's horn on a pole, and in one discharge shot twenty-one arrows into the hollow of the horn. Then he mounted his chariot and was driven swiftly along, whilst he shot his arrows right and left with such rapidity and dexterity as bewildered all the beholders. His sword-playing was equally excellent, and he flourished the blade so fiercely that men thought they saw the lightning on the earth and heard the thunder in the sky. Then he took his quoit-shaped chakra, and whirled it at different objects without missing one. Lastly, he armed himself with the noose, and threw it about with such skill, that horse or deer, or any other animal at which he cast it, was invariably brought down. At length he finished his exercises, and respectfully saluted the feet of his preceptor, upon which Drona affectionately embraced him amidst the applause of the whole assembly.⁵

Sudden appearance of Karna, the son of a charioteer.

At this time, whilst the Pándavas were exulting in the triumph of Arjuna, and Duryodhana was bursting with jealous rage, another young warrior suddenly entered the

⁵ The description of this exhibition of arms, as it appears in the Mahá Bhá-rata, is filled with Brahmanical exaggerations, which are pleasing to the present taste of the Hindús, but which are excluded from the above text, as they would be tedious to the last degree to European readers. They include the use of weapons which combine contradictory powers, such as arrows having a broad blade at the point which will cut a man's head off; or weapons of a supernatural character, such as arrows producing fire, water, venom, diseases, tempests, and other extraordinary phenomena. It will, however, be seen hereafter that the weapons described by the Brahmanical compilers of the Rámáyana are, if possible, still more extravagant. The Bráhmans in the present day point to the fire-producing arrows as proofs that the ancient Hindús were possessed of fire-arms.



area, striking his arms together with a great noise, after the manner of the ancient wrestlers. This was Karna, the son of a charioteer from the country of Anga, who was very skilful in the use of arms. Karna then said :—"O Arjuna, you have exhibited all your feats of arms; come and look on whilst I perform each one better than you." At these words Duryodhana was in an ecstasy of joy, whilst Arjuna was much displeased, and held his peace. Karna then, to the delight of the Kauravas, and the disquietude of the Pándavas, executed every feat which had been performed by Arjuna; and Duryodhana came forward and embraced Karna, and praised his prowess, and called him "brother." At this honour, Karna was greatly pleased, and said before them all that it was his desire to fight Arjuna. Then Arjuna was in a great rage, and cried out :—"You desire to place yourself on an equality with me, but I will so handle you, that you shall learn what it is for men like you to come here without being invited, and to speak before they are spoken to." Karna replied :—"O Arjuna, waste not your words, for when it comes to open fight between you and me, you shall see who will be roughly handled: and as you taunt me with having come without invitation, let me tell you that this plain is none of your property that I may not enter it without your invitation: All other questions between us must be settled by the sword and bow, and I will so handle you in the presence of your tutor here, that all present shall be astonished." These words filled Drona with wrath, and he cried out :—"Why do you listen to Karna with patience? You have my leave: Go, and fight him at once!" So Arjuna and his brothers stepped into the field to face Karna, and Duryodhana and his brothers came forward to back Karna; when a kinsman of the royal house, named Kripa, who was the brother of the wife of Drona, interposed to prevent a battle between the son of a Raja and the son of a charioteer. Kripa said to Karna :—"O young man, are you come hither to measure weapons with Arjuna? Know you that he is the son of Raja Pándu and the Rání Kuntí, and you must now declare the names

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Exultation of
Duryodhana
and mortifica-
tion of Arjuna.

Karna chal-
lenges Arjuna to
single combat.

Mutual abuse.

Drona calls upon
Arjuna to fight
Karna.

Kripa interposes
to prevent the
battle.



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Karna created a
Raja by Duryo-
dhana.

Appearance of
Karna's aged
father.

Karna's filial
reverence.

Bhima's con-
temptuous lan-
guage towards
Karna.

Combat pre-
vented by the
approach of
night.

Review of the
foregoing tradi-
tion of the exhi-
bition of arms.

Question re-
specting the
birth of Karna.

of your father and mother, that we may know whether you are worthy of being matched with Arjuna." At these words Karna was abashed, and hung down his head like a drooping lily; for he knew that his father was only a charioteer. But Duryodhana, who desired to set up Karna against Arjuna, replied thus to Kripa:—"Greatness depends not upon birth but upon strength, and I hereby appoint Karna to be Raja of the country of Anga." So saying Duryodhana took Karna by the hand, and led him to a golden seat, and ordered the umbrella of royalty to be held over his head. At this moment the father of Karna appeared, trembling with age, but rejoicing in the honours bestowed upon his son; and when Karna saw him he threw down his bow and arrow and advanced to meet the old man, and kissed his feet. Then the Pándavas looked upon the two with smiles of contempt, and Bhíma said to Karna:—"Is it with such a father as this that you presume to match yourself with Arjuna: You, the son of a charioteer, what have you to do with a bow and arrows? You had better far take a whip and drive a bullock-cart after your father." Karna was enraged at their taunts, but made no reply; and the darkness came on very rapidly. And Duryodhana led Karna away to his own palace, and the multitude dispersed to their several homes.

The picture presented in the foregoing tradition calls for little or no remark. The description of the mock combats, and the ill feeling displayed by Duryodhana and Bhíma, are perfectly true to human nature, and there is no doubt that the story is so far authentic. But the abrupt appearance of Karna on this occasion, and his sudden elevation to the dignity of Raja, are points of considerable interest, and seem to invite a close investigation. That Karna was of low birth may be accepted as a fact; but the implication that he was of low birth by reason of his being the son of a charioteer seems



open to question. The driving of chariots was a favourite and royal amusement with the ancient Kshatriyas, as it was with the ancient Greeks. It will be seen hereafter in the authentic tradition of Nala and Damayantí that the deserted Rání recognized her husband by his furious driving; whilst amongst the virtues of Mahárajá Dasaratha, as described in the Rámáyana, he is said to have been a perfect charioteer. Again, the charioteer of the sovereign is frequently represented as his confidential friend and chief adviser. Thus it will be seen that Sanjaya was the friend and charioteer of Mahárajá Dhritaráshtira, and that Sumantra was chief counsellor and charioteer of Mahárajá Dasaratha. But the “arrangers” of the Mahá Bhárata were evidently anxious to throw contempt upon charioteers; and in addition to the reflection upon Karna’s birth, there is a curious story in the narrative of the great war, of the rage of Raja Salya on being asked to drive Karna’s chariot. The reason for this antagonism appears to be as follows:—The charioteer anciently occupied the same confidential position in relation towards a Raja as was subsequently filled by the Purohita, or family priest. Thus, just before the breaking out of the great war, Raja Drupada sent his Purohita as envoy to Hastinápura; whilst Dhritaráshtira sent his charioteer as envoy to the Pándavas. The inference, therefore, follows that the Bráhmans were jealous of the influence exercised by the charioteers; and the substitution of a Purohita for a charioteer probably marks the period in Hindú history when the military domination of the Kshatriyas was brought under the ecclesiastical and caste supremacy of the Bráhmans.

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Driving chariots a royal amusement.

High rank of charioteers in ancient times.

Reasons why the Brahmenical compilers threw contempt upon the charioteers.

Confidential position of the charioteer, subsequently held by the Purohita, or family priest.

Historical significance of the change.

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Karna's father
not a charioteer
but a carter.

Question of Kar-
na being created
a Raja; mythi-
cal character of
the legend.

5th. Legend of
the birth of
Karna.

Early life of
Kunti in the
house of the
Raja of the
Bhojas.

As regards Karna, it seems not unlikely that his father was not a charioteer in the higher sense of the word, but a mere carter or waggoner. The language of Bhíma in taunting Karna seems to bear out this view. "You had better," he said, "take a whip and drive a bullock-cart after your father."

The sudden elevation of Karna to the dignity of Raja appears to be open to question. The golden seat to which he is said to have been conducted is evidently mythical. The name of the territory over which he is appointed to be Raja is equally doubtful. Anga is a country which lies far away to the eastward, in the neighbourhood of the modern town of Bhagalpur; and consequently would be separated by an interval of many hundreds of miles from the Raj of Bhárata. But still the dignity may have been conferred, like that of a modern knight-hood, without reference to territory. The right of Duryodhana to create a Raja seems, however, very dubious; and the subsequent language of Bhíma to Karna appears to imply that there was no real recognition of the new rank which had been thus bestowed upon him.

The legend of the birth of Karna is nothing more than a wild myth which has been concocted for the obvious purpose of ennobling Karna by connecting him with the royal house at Hastinápura. The myth is as extravagant and improbable as that of the birth of Vyása, and bears the same marks of a Brahmanical origin; but it may be related here, as reference is frequently made to it in the more modern portions of the Mahá Bhárata. The story is as follows:—

Now Kuntí, the wife of Raja Pándu, was brought up in



the house of Kunti-bhoja, the Raja of the Bhojas, and she ever thought him to be her father; but her real father was Sura, the grandfather of Krishna.

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And it happened on a certain day that a sage named Durvāsas came to the house of Kunti-bhoja; and he was tall in stature, and his hair was matted after the manner of a devotee, and his limbs were of the colour of honey. And Durvāsas said to Kunti-bhoja:—"O Raja, I am desirous of dwelling with you, but if I do so your people must conform to all my wishes; and they must let me eat when I please, and sleep when I please, and no one must contradict me." And the Raja replied:—"My daughter Kuntí shall wait upon you always, and I am sure that she will serve you to your heart's content." Then the Raja called to his daughter and said:—"O Kuntí, this Bráhmaṇ is about to dwell in my house, and you must serve him night and day; for he is a man of great mortification, and has subdued all his senses by the strictness of his austerities." And Kuntí had great reverence for Bráhmans, and she gladly promised to serve Durvāsas, the sage, according to the will of her father.

Visit of Dur-
vāsas, the sage.

Kuntí appoint-
ed to wait day
and night upon
Durvāsas.

Then the Raja lodged the Bráhmaṇ in the sacrificial chamber, where he had been used to kindle the sacred fire; and Kuntí served the Bráhmaṇ day and night with all diligence and purity. And Durvāsas was greatly pleased with the service of the damsel; for sometimes he would go out in the morning, and not return till evening or midnight; but Kuntí was always ready with various sorts of victuals to set before him; and if he lost his temper or used harsh words, she took no notice, but continued to serve him as diligently as before.

Kuntí's dutiful
service to the
Bráhmaṇ.

When a year had passed away, Durvāsas said to Kuntí:—"O well-accomplished damsel, I am entirely satisfied with your service; so now ask a boon of me, and let it be such as will render you blessed beyond all other women." But Kuntí replied:—"O greatest of Bráhmans, if you and my father are contented with me, it is as if you had bestowed all blessings upon me." So the Bráhmaṇ taught her a mantra, and said:—"Whenever you repeat this mantra, any

Durvāsas offers
a boon to Kuntí.

Teaches a man-
tra to Kuntí.

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PART II.

god you desire will descend from heaven, and you will bear to him a son, who shall be like unto his father." So Kuntí made no answer, and learned the mantra; for she feared lest she should offend the Bráhmaṇ, and he should pronounce a curse against herself and her father. And Durvāsas praised her greatly to the Raja, and then left the house and went his way.

Kuntí repeats the mantra, and is visited by the Sun god.

One day after this Kuntí beheld the bright Sun in the sky, and her soul was enlightened, and she saw the Sun in the likeness of a warrior arrayed in golden mail with earrings in his ears. And she repeated the words of the mantra that Durvāsas had taught her; and the god left himself in the form of a Sun to illuminate the world, and descended to the earth in the form of a Raja, with a crown upon his head and bracelets upon his arms. But when Kuntí saw him she implored his forgiveness and besought him to return; but he said:—"I cannot do this, for all the gods are laughing at my discomfiture." And the eyes of Kuntí were opened, and she saw that Indra and the gods were laughing, and she was much ashamed. So the Sun stayed with her some time, and then went his way.

Birth of Karna.

The babe floated in a chest upon the river to the country of Anga.

After this Kuntí gave birth to a son with golden earrings in his ears, and a golden cuirass upon his body; and no one knew it, and she became a virgin as before. And she took the infant and placed it in a chest, and with many tears and prayers she floated it upon the river; and the river carried the chest into the waters of the Jumná, and the Jumná carried it to the Ganges, and the Ganges to the country of Anga. And the wife of a charioteer saw the chest and carried it to her home; and her husband opened it and found the babe therein, and he and his wife brought it up as their own child; and this boy was Karna.

Review of the foregoing myth. Its incredibility.

The foregoing myth is perhaps beneath criticism, but still the pretensions of Durvāsas are very significant, and the reference to the country of Anga is worthy of consideration. The enormous distance which the chest would have had to travel down the



Jumná and Ganges to the country of Anga is alone sufficient to render the myth of the birth of Karna altogether incredible, even if his divine paternity could be explained away; but the object of the myth is not devoid of interest, and can easily be explained. Local tradition in the country which formerly went by the name of Anga, has preserved the name of Karna. A dynasty of Buddhist Rajas appear to have reigned at Anga about the second century of the Christian era under the name of Karnas;⁶ and it is by no means unlikely that the Brahmanical compilers sought to gratify the tastes of the people of the country by establishing a mythical connection between the Karna who fought in the great war, with the Karna Rajas of Anga, who flourished at a much later period. But the vast geographical interval between Hastinápur and Anga has already excited a suspicion that the connection is a fabrication; and this suspicion is confirmed by the supernatural details which the compilers have introduced to carry out their design.

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Object of the
myth.

Association of
Karna with the
later Rajas of
Anga.

The next legend, namely, that of the war against Drupada, Raja of Panchála, may now be related as follows:—

Now when the Kauravas and Pándavas had proved before the Maháraja and all his Chieftains, that they were capable of bearing arms, they were called upon by Drona to fulfil the terms upon which he had educated them, namely, to chastise Drupada, Raja of Panchála. Accordingly, Duryodhana and all his brethren marched out by themselves against Raja Drupada, but were defeated by the enemy, and compelled to return to Hastinápur. Then Yudhishtíra and his brethren marched out against Drupada, and they van-

6th, War against
Drupada, Raja
of Panchála.

Defeat of the
Kauravas, and
victory of the
Pándavas.

⁶ This tradition will be found in Dr Buchanan's account of the Bahar district, preserved in Martin's Eastern India, Vol. I.

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INDIA.
PART II.Division of the
Raj of Panchála.Significance of
the legend of the
division of the
Raj of Panchála.Geographical
position of the
Raj of Panchála.

quished him and all his forces, and brought him away prisoner. So Drona took the half of Drupada's Raj, but left the remainder in the possession of Drupada. Then Raja Drupada returned to his own country; but he swore that the day should come when he would be revenged upon Drona.

The story of this expedition against Drupada is somewhat isolated in the Mahá Bhárata, but still appears to have an important bearing upon the main incident in the Epic. The defeat of the Kauravas and victory of the Pándavas may be somewhat mythical; and, indeed, chiefly serve to illustrate the tendency of the original bards to celebrate the praises of the Pándavas at the expense of the Kauravas. But the division of the Raj of Drupada seems to imply that Drona had some claim to the half share, and confirms the suspicion already expressed that Drona was a brother or near kinsman of Drupada, and that the Brahmanical compilers have suppressed the relationship in order to represent Drona as a Bráhmaṇ.

The geographical position of the Raj of Panchála opens up a curious question of inquiry. The name has been sometimes applied to the Punjab, and the Raj certainly appears to have been situated in close contiguity with that of Hastinápura. But Manu identifies Panchála with Kanouj, which is at least two hundred miles from Hastinápura; whilst the compilers of the Mahá Bhárata indulge in far grander ideas, and seem to indicate that the Raj of Bhárata extended over the northern Doab, whilst the Raj of Panchála occupied the more southerly portion as far as the junction of the Ganges and Jumná. It will be seen hereafter that the Raj of



Panchála was probably a little territory in the more immediate neighbourhood of Hastinápur.

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The story of the rivalry between Yudhishtira and Duryodhana for the post of Yuvaraja, or heir-apparent, may now be related as follows :—

When the war against Drupada was fully over, there was more ill blood between the Kauravas and the Pándavas than had ever been before, because the Kauravas had been defeated by Drupada, and the Pándavas had gained the victory. Meantime the Mahárajá decided that Yudhishtira, the eldest son of Pándu, had the best right to succeed him in the Raj ; and as the custom was, Yudhishtira was installed as Yuvaraja, or “ Little Raja.” Then Yudhishtira began to rule the Raj for his uncle the Mahárajá, and the glory of his reign became greater than the glory of his father Pándu ; for though he was not skilful in the use of arms like Bhíma or Arjuna, his wisdom and virtue were famous throughout the land, and his truthfulness, and justice, and patience on all occasions rendered him beloved by all people.

7th. Rivalry between Yudhishtira and Duryodhana, for the post of Yuvaraja.

Yudhishtira appointed Yuvaraja, or heir-apparent.

Now when Yudhishtira was appointed Yuvaraja, his cousin Duryodhana was in great affliction, and Duryodhana plotted day and night with his brother Duhsásana, and his uncle Sakuni, and his friend Karna, how to bring about the destruction of the Pándavas. One day when the Mahárajá was quite alone, Duryodhana went into his presence, and spoke to him as follows :—“ O my father, why have you shown such small regard for your own sons, and treated them so unworthily ? You were the elder brother of Raja Pándu, and ought to have succeeded to the Raj, but you gave up the whole to your younger brother ; and now you have passed by your own sons, and have intrusted the management of all affairs to the sons of Pándu : The Raj is yours by right, and the inheritance should descend to us who are your sons ; why, then, do you give the preference to others, and make us small and contemptible in the eyes of all people ?” Dhritaráshtira replied :—“ O my son, my

Jealousy of Duryodhana.

Conversation between Duryodhana and the Mahárajá.

Remonstrates at the Kauravas being passed over in favour of the Pándavas.



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PART II.

brother Pándu was without an equal in all the world; and how with my blindness could I pretend to govern the Raj? His sons after him are endued with every qualification for the management of affairs, and give every satisfaction to all the people; how then can I banish them from my councils? Moreover, Yudhishtira possesses the most praiseworthy qualities, such as you do not yourself possess; how then can I be at enmity with him, and exclude him from the government?" Duryodhana said:—"I know of no such qualifications as render Yudhishtira superior to me, but I do know that in the field I am more than a match for half a score of Yudhishtiras: So if you are resolved to exclude me from all share in the management of the Raj, I will certainly kill myself, and thus get rid of all my vexations." Dhritarashtra replied:—"O my son, why do you give way to such violent impatience? If you are bent upon exercising power I will divide the management, and give the half to you and other half to Yudhishtira; so that henceforth there shall be no strife betwixt him and you."

The Mahárajá offers to divide the administration between Duryodhana and Yudhishtira.

Duryodhana stipulates for a division of the land, but is refused by the Mahárajá.

When the Mahárajá had thus spoken, Duryodhana said:—"I accept your proposition, O my father; but let the country be divided, so that the Pándavas can take their own land and rule there, whilst I and my brethren stay here at Hastinápura, and govern under you; for if both we and they dwell in the same place there may be feud between us, and many of our friends may be slain." The Mahárajá replied:—"The great head of our family is Bhíshma, and he will never be satisfied if the Pándavas are sent away to a distance from this city; neither will Drona or Vidura rest content; how then can I tell them to go?" Duryodhana said:—"O Mahárajá, it is beneath your dignity to consult others: Do you summon the Pándavas, and command them to go to the city of Váranávata, and dwell there for some time; and they will obey your commands without delay, and after they are gone, nobody will trouble about the matter." Accordingly the Mahárajá did as Duryodhana counselled. He sent for Yudhishtira and said to

The Mahárajá sends the Pándavas to dwell for a while in the city of Váranávata.



him:—"O my son, there is a renowned city, rich in gold and jewels, named Vāranāvata : Go thither, you and your brethren, and dwell there for some time ; and after that I will recall you." So Yudhishtira and his brethren took leave of the Mahārāja, and of all their kinsmen, and departed with their mother Kuntí to the city of Vāranāvata.

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CHAPTER III.

FIRST EXILE OF THE PÁNDAVAS.

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PART II.

Authentic tradi-
tion of the first
exile of the Pan-
davas lost in a
later fiction.

Mythical cha-
racter of all le-
gends referring
to localities at a
distance from
Hastinápúr.

Váranávata, the
modern Alláhábád, 500 miles to
the south-east of
Hastinápúr.

Legend of the
first exile of the
Pándavas, some
thousand years
later than the
original tradi-
tion.

WITH the journey of the Pándavas to the city of Váranávata the narrative undergoes an entire change, and for a brief period the authentic tradition is utterly lost in a later fiction. Here it may be remarked that so long as the scene is laid in the city of Hastinápúr, or its immediate neighbourhood, so long the story seems to approximate to historic truth; but when the locality is removed to a distance of hundreds of miles from Hastinápúr, the narrative is immediately reduced to the condition of either a religious myth or a palpable fiction. Such is the case as regards the alleged journey of the Pándavas to the city of Váranávata, the modern Alláhábád, the sacred city at the junction of the Ganges and Jumná, and one of the most famous places of pilgrimage in Hindústán. A geographical interval of five hundred miles separates the city of Hastinápúr from the city of Alláhábád; and, in all probability, a chronological interval of some thousand years separates the old tradition of the sons of Pándu from the modern fiction of their visit to the city of Váranávata. A better judgment, however, will be formed after a brief narrative of the events which are said to have transpired, and which may now be related as follows:—



Before the Pándavas departed out of the city of Hastinápúr, their uncle Vidura took them aside, and told them that when they arrived at the city of Váranávata they should beware of fire; and he repeated a verse to the brethren, and said:—"Should a man come to you, and repeat this verse, put your trust in him, and receive him as a man sent by me for your deliverance." After many days the five Pándavas, and their mother Kuntí, reached the city of Váranávata; and very speedily their eyes were opened to a wicked plot which had been devised by Duryodhana and his friends. That jealous Chieftain, ever bent upon the destruction of his kinsmen, had sent on a trusty retainer, named Purochana, to prepare a handsome house in the city of Váranávata for the reception of the sons of Pándu; and Purochana had been secretly commanded to fill the house with hemp and resin, and to plaster the walls with a mortar of grease and pitch; so that some night, when the Pándavas and their mother were fast asleep, the doors might be closely fastened on the outside, and the house set on fire, and all within it be consumed in the flames. Accordingly Purochana welcomed the Pándavas with every sign of rejoicing; and he conducted them first to the College of holy men, where they paid every respect and reverence to the devotees, and received their blessings and good wishes in return; and next he led them to the house prepared for their reception, and presented each of them with a collation and fruit, together with gold and jewels, silks and cloths, as is customary among the Rajas. Yudhishtira was amazed at the splendour of the habitation, but he began to smell the mortar, and told his suspicions to his brother Bhíma. After this a man came from Vidura, and repeated the verse which had been agreed upon, and said:—"Vidura has sent me to dig an under-ground passage from your house, to deliver you from it should it be set on fire." So after much discourse together, they secretly employed the man to dig a passage under-ground, by which they could escape out of the house, should the dwelling be set on fire and the doors be locked on the outside. When the under-ground passage

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Extraordinary plot of the Pándavas to burn the Pándavas in their house at Váranávata.

Details of the magnificent reception of the Pándavas at Váranávata.

Suspicious of Yudhishtira.

Digging of a subterranean passage.



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Bhíma anticipates the plot by burning the house of Purochana. Kunti gives a feast to the poor.

House of the Pandavas catches fire!

Escape of the Pandavas and Kunti into the jungle.

Joy of the Kauravas, and sorrow of the elders at the supposed death of the Pandavas.

Story of the visit of the Pandavas to Váranávata, to be referred to the later age of Brahmanism.

Burning a sleeping enemy totally opposed to Kshatriya ideas.

was all complete, Bhíma resolved that he would work upon Purochana, who was living in a house close by, all the mischief that Purochana was meditating against himself and brethren. Now it so happened that one day Kuntí invited all the poor people of the city, and gave them a feast; and amongst her guests was a Bhíl woman and her five sons, who, according to the practice of their tribe, drank a large quantity of strong liquor, and then lay down and slept heavily. That same night a violent wind arose, and Bhíma stole out through the passage, and strongly barricaded the house of Purochana, and set it on fire; and the flames speedily destroyed the building and reached the house of the Pándavas; and Bhíma then conducted his mother and brethren through the passage under-ground, and hurried them away into the jungle. Next morning the people of the city saw that both houses were destroyed by fire, and believed that all the inmates had perished; for they discovered the blackened remains of Purochana and his servants, and also those of the Bhíl woman and her five sons, whom they took to be those of Kuntí and the Pándavas. The tidings soon reached the city of Hastinápur, and the Kauravas rejoiced greatly at the supposed death of their enemies the Pándavas; but Bhíshma, Drona, and Dhritaráshtra were affected even unto tears.

It would be presumptuous perhaps to state positively that there is no foundation whatever for this story in the original and authentic legend; yet it bears such evident traces of being entirely composed in the later age of Brahmanical revival, that it is impossible to escape the inference. The whole story turns upon burning the house of kinsmen, whilst those kinsmen are asleep inside; and this idea would be altogether repugnant to the sentiment of honour which undoubtedly prevailed amongst the ancient Kshatriyas, who regarded an



attack upon a sleeping enemy as a heinous crime.¹ But at the same time, this idea would be perfectly familiar to the Brahmanical compilers of the Mahá Bhárata, who had only recently engaged in burning down the monasteries and temples of the Buddhists with all the deadly hate of religious persecutors. Again, the subordinate details of the fiction refer, in every way, to a later and more luxurious age. The city of Váranávata is said to have been famous for gold and jewels. The College of holy men to which the Pándavas were introduced on their arrival, is either Buddhist or Brahmanical; and so, too, is the feast given by Kuntí to all the poor of the city; whilst the alleged magnificence of the house in which the Pándavas were lodged, and the presents of gold and jewels, silks and cloths, belong altogether to a late period of Hindú civilization. The story of the Bhíl woman and her five sons who were burnt alive in the house, and originated the rumour that the Pándavas and their mother had perished in the flames, is also precisely one of those artificial turns in a narrative which betray the hand of the romancer or novelist. Altogether, it seems most probable that the whole story is a later fiction, introduced for the sole purpose of associating the Pándavas with the famous city of Váranávata.²

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Familiar to the age when the Brahmins persecuted the Buddhists.

Subordinate details to be also ascribed to a later age.

The fiction inserted to associate the Pándavas with the city of Váranávata.

Having made their escape from the city of Váranávata, the Pándavas are said to have disguised

Alleged escape of the Pándavas from the city of Váranávata into the great jungle.

¹ Compare the story of the terrible revenge of Aswattháma, in the night of the last day of the great war; where it will be seen that Aswattháma, even whilst bent upon being revenged on the murderer of his father, awoke his sleeping enemy before slaying him.

² An extraordinary well, or under-ground passage, still exists in the Fort at Alláhábád, and is pointed out as the veritable passage through which the Pándavas made their way out of the burning house between thirty and forty centuries ago.

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Pándavas to be
regarded as the
representatives
of the Aryan
race.

Progress of the
Aryan invasion
from the Punjab
to Alláhábád.

Later legends of
the wars of the
Aryans against
the aborigines,
tacked on to the
story of the great
war.

Ancient wars to
be found
amongst the ear-
liest traditions
of every people.

themselves as Bráhmans, and to have proceeded with all haste into the great jungle. Now if the Pándavas may be accepted as the representatives of the Aryan race, it would appear from the story that they had advanced far away to the eastward of the Aryan outpost at Hastinápúr, and had almost reached the centre of the land of aborigines. This direction was undoubtedly the very one which was eventually taken by the Aryan invaders; that is, they pushed their way from the Punjab towards the south-east, along the fertile valleys of the Ganges and Jumná, until they arrived at the junction of the two rivers at Alláhábád. Probably, as already indicated, this migration occupied a vast period of unrecorded time, and the Aryans may not have reached Alláhábád until ages after the Kauravas and Pándavas had fought their famous battle for the little Raj at Hastinápúr. But when the story of the war of the Mahá Bhárata had been converted into a national tradition, it seems not unlikely that the legends of the later wars waged by the Aryans against the aborigines during their progress towards the south-east, would be tacked on to the original narrative. This process appears to have been carried out by the compilers of the Mahá Bhárata; and although, as will be seen hereafter, the adventures of the Pándavas in the jungle, and their encounters with Asuras and Rákshasas, are all palpable fictions, still they are valuable as traces which have been left in the minds of the people of the primitive wars of the Aryans against the aborigines.

The adventures of a band of warlike emigrants whilst seeking for new homes amongst an aboriginal population have been generally found amongst the



earliest events in the history of a people. These wars, however, have rarely been recorded with truthful simplicity by a prose annalist, but have generally fallen into the hands of bards, whose object was rather to gratify their audience than to instruct them in authentic history. Sometimes when the national legends have corresponded to the national religion, the narrative has assumed a historic form, as in the conquests of Joshua, and to some extent in the lives of Samson, of Gideon, and of Jephthah. But when the national religion has undergone modifications, as in the case of Greece and Rome, the legends have been remodelled by poets and dramatists, and converted into religious myths. Still further, when the old religion has been driven out altogether, and a new and radically foreign religion like Christianity has taken its place, the traditions of forgotten wars have been left in the hands of ballad singers and beldames, and consequently have been converted into barbarous nursery stories of giants and ogres. This latter fate has certainly befallen the traditions of forgotten wars in Europe; and a similar fate has befallen the Hindú traditions of the wars between the Aryans and aborigines.

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National traditions preserved when corresponding to the national religion.

Remodelled by changes in the religion.

Converted into nursery stories when the old religion has been driven out by a new one.

It is somewhat remarkable that the general similarity of circumstances under which Hindú and European traditions of primitive wars have been exaggerated and modified, has resulted in a striking similarity in the fictions themselves. They are characterized by the same rude vigour of imagination; and consequently present the same extravagant pictures of the horrible combined with a broad sense of humour, which are precisely fitted to the tastes of an uncultivated people. In the Hindú fictions the

Striking similarity between Hindú and European traditions of forgotten wars.

Characteristics of Hindú fiction.

Wars of Bhîma as the representative of the Aryan settlers against the aborigines.



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Popularity of
the fictions.

Historic value of
the fictions, as
illustrations of
the period in
which they were
composed,
rather than as
facts belonging
to the period to
which they refer.

Interest to be
divided between
the fictions and
the audiences to
whom they are
related.

aborigines are described under the names of Asuras and Rákshasas, as being giants and cannibals, and of course hideously repulsive; whilst the Aryan settlers, of whom Bhíma as the strongest man of the Pándavas is pre-eminently the type, are represented as overcoming their enemy by strength of arm, and under circumstances of rough comicality not unlike those which sometimes appear in a Christmas pantomime. It need scarcely be added that such stories are exceedingly popular with the Hindús; and indeed the degree to which the alternations of mirth and wonder are excited, is scarcely conceivable excepting by those who can sympathize in the undoubting and childish credulity of the masses.

To reject such stories as unfitted to the dignity of history would be to lose some valuable glimpses into the inner life of ancient nations. The narratives may be palpable fictions, but they are true to an element of human nature; that element which leads the imagination to depict circumstances, not as they are, but as they would be best received in the times in which they are related. Histories of every description must be especially regarded from this point of view. The question of how far they represent the real facts of the period to which they refer is doubtless of primary importance, but it is nearly as important to consider how far they illustrate the ideas, the feelings, and the judgments of the age in which they were produced; for histories in general represent far more truthfully the spirit of the period in which they are written than the facts of the period to which they refer. Accordingly in relating the stories of Bhíma's adventures with the Asuras, the attention should be divided between the mirthful and



marvellous incidents on the one hand, and the open-mouthed audiences on the other; between the grotesque and horrible scenes, and the alternate laughter and terror of the men, women, and children who are looking on. Nor must the narrator of the story be entirely forgotten; for the sympathies which exist between the Hindú story-teller, and the events he is describing, and the people to whom he is telling his tale of wonder, would be almost inconceivable to the European who may read a history aloud without action and without vivacity. Thus in the opening scene of the first fiction, where the giant Bhíma is carrying his mother and three brothers through a dreadful forest haunted with wild beasts and Asuras, an enthusiastic narrator will represent Bhíma by carrying two children on his back and one under each arm; and will moreover imitate the roaring of lions and tigers, and indulge in hideous grimaces to indicate the cannibal propensities of the Asuras. With these preliminary observations, the attention may now be directed to the stories themselves. The first fiction is as follows:—

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Action of the
narrator in
heightening the
interest of the
actions.

Now when the Pándavas escaped from the burning house in the city of Váranávata, they proceeded in all haste towards the southern jungle, which was inhabited by wild beasts, and also by Rákshasas and Asuras, who were eaters of men. And Kuntí and all her sons, excepting Bhíma, were very weary; but Bhíma was tall and strong, and he carried his mother and elder brother on his back, and one of his younger brethren under each of his arms, whilst Arjuna followed close behind. Next morning they passed along the western bank of the river Ganges, and proceeded more and more towards the south, until they reached a very dark and dreadful forest; and all, excepting Bhíma, were so overpowered with sleep that they threw themselves beneath

1st Fiction.
Bhima's encounter with
Hidimba, the
Asura.

Bhima carries
his mother and
three brethren
through the
great forest.

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INDIA.
PART II.Description of
the hideous Asu-
ra Hidimba, and
his beautiful sis-
ter Hidimbi.Hidimbi's pro-
posals to Bhíma.Battle between
Bhíma and Hi-
dimba.Horrible death
of the Asura.Hidimbi en-
treats Bhíma to
take her as his
wife.

a tree, and were soon in a profound slumber, whilst Bhíma stood by to guard them. It so happened that hard by was the abode of a terrible Asura and man-eater, named Hidimba, who had yellow eyes and a horrible aspect, but who possessed great strength; and he had a sister, named Hidimbi, who was very tall and handsome. Now the cannibal Hidimba smelt human beings in the neighbourhood of his den, and he sent out his sister to bring them in; but when she saw the long arms and mighty form of Bhíma, resplendent with royal vestments and rich jewels, she fell in love with him, and straightway proposed to carry him away into the jungle upon her back, and to leave the others for her brother to devour. But Bhíma refused to desert his mother and brethren in such extremity, and declared himself willing to fight the Asura. Whilst he was thus speaking, the monster came up furious with wrath at the delay of his sister, and engaged in battle with Bhíma. First the Asura and Bhíma fought with fists; then they tore up trees and cudgelled each other; and then, when all the trees had been torn up and broken to pieces, they attacked each other with vast stones. The Pándavas were awakened by the noise of the combat, and Arjuna came up to help his brother; but at that moment Bhíma seized the Asura by the waist, and whirled him round several times, and dashed out his brains against the ground; and then holding his head under one arm he so belaboured him with his fist that he broke every bone in his body.

Then the sister of the Asura set up a cry so terrible that the wild beasts of the jungle fled away from fear; but after a while, when she saw that Bhíma was leaving the place together with his mother and brethren, she ceased her cries and began to follow them. And Bhíma desired her to return to the abiding-place of her brother; but she replied that as she had chosen him for her husband, she would never leave him, but henceforth be his faithful slave. She then threw herself at the feet of Kuntí, and wept bitterly, and said:—"O lady, command your son to take me as his wife, for I have known no man; and if he refuse to take me



I will kill myself, and my blood will be upon your head." So Kuntí, believing that the strong Asura woman, experienced in the jungle, would greatly help them in their sojournings, desired Bhíma to marry her; and Bhíma took Hidimbi as his wife, and the marriage rites were duly performed by his elder brother Yudhishtira. And Bhíma took his newly married wife, and went away to a beautiful spot on a mountain, where the flowers were blooming and a crystal stream was flowing, and the trees were laden with fruits of the choicest description; and there Hidimbi brought him every day such prodigious quantities of excellent food that he rejoiced exceedingly. And in due course a son was born to them as robust as his parents; and Bhíma then returned with his wife to his mother and brethren, and presented his sturdy infant to the delighted Kuntí.

The foregoing fiction is chiefly remarkable for the downright plainness of the points of interest. The gloomy forest, the wild beasts, the cannibals, the strong man carrying his mother and brethren, the terrible Asura and his handsome sister, the triumph of Bhíma, the outspoken desire of the handsome Asura to become the wife of the strong man, the marriage, the honeymoon, and the birth of a boy, all follow one another with a simplicity which is as charming as a story invented by a child. The death to which the Asura is subjected is especially worthy of notice, for it is not only mythical in itself, but is sufficient to indicate a myth. In the authentic tradition of the great war it will be seen that Bhíma beheaded his enemy and drank his blood; but in the myths he either whirls his enemy round and dashes out his brains, or rends him asunder, or kneads up his flesh, blood, and bones into an extraordinary ball. A modern critic might also object to the improbability of Bhíma leaving his mother and brothers

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