

became the wife of him who slew the demon and brought her back." The sprite said, "The good qualities of all were on a par,—how came she to become his wife?" The king replied, "The other two simply conferred favours, for which they were recompensed; but this one fought with and slew him (the demon) and brought her away, hence she became his wife." On hearing this the sprite went again to the same tree, and suspended himself on it, and the king, too, went immediately, bound the sprite, placed him on his shoulder, and carried him off as before.

TALE VI.

AGAIN the sprite said, "O king! there is a city named Dharmpur, of which Dharmshil was king; and his minister's name was Andhak. He said one day to the king, 'Your majesty! build a temple, and place an image of Devī therein, and pay constant adoration thereto, for this is said in the *Shāstra* to possess great merit.' Thereupon the king had a temple built and (the image of) Devī placed in it, and began offering adoration after the manner prescribed by the Vedas; and he would not drink water without having worshipped."

"When a considerable time had passed thus, the minister said one day, 'Great king! the saying is well known,—The house of a sonless man is empty, a fool's mind is empty, and everything pertaining to an indigent person is empty.' On hearing these words, the king went to the temple of Devī, and joining his hands in supplication, began to extol her, saying, 'O Devī! Brahmā, Vishnū, Rudra, Indra await thy bidding the livelong day; and thou it was

who didst seize the demons Mahish-āsura, Chand Mund, Raktbij, and slaying the evil spirits, relieved the earth of its burthen; and wheresoever trouble has befallen thy worshippers, there thou hast gone and aided them; and in this hope I have approached thy threshold; fulfil now the desire of my heart also.”

“When the king had celebrated the praises of the goddess to this extent, a voice issued from the temple of Devī, saying, ‘King! I am well pleased with thee; ask any boon that thou may’st desire.’ The king said, ‘Mother! if thou art pleased with me, grant me a son.’ Devī replied, ‘King! thou shalt have a son (who shall be) very powerful and very glorious.’ Then the king made offerings of sandal, unbroken rice, flowers, incense, lamps and consecrated food, and paid adoration. Moreover, he made it a practice of worshipping thus daily. To be brief, after some days a son was born to the king. The king, with his family and kindred, proceeded with music and song, and worshipped at the shrine of Devī.”

“In the meantime, it happened one day that a washerman, accompanied by a friend of his, was coming from a certain town towards this city, and the temple of Devī met his eye. He resolved on prostrating himself (before the shrine). At that moment he beheld a washerman’s daughter, who was very handsome, coming towards him. He was fascinated at the sight of her, and went to worship Devī. After

prostrating himself, he joined his hands in supplication, and said in his heart, ‘O Devī! if, through thy favour, my marriage to this beautiful being should take place, I will devote my head as an offering to thee.’ After making this vow, and prostrating himself, he took his friend with him, and went to his own city.”

“When he arrived there, the separation (from his love) so troubled him that sleep, hunger, thirst—all were forgotten. He spent the whole day in thoughts of her. On perceiving this woful state of his, his friend went and told his father all the circumstances. His father also became alarmed on hearing these things, and reflecting on the matter began to say, ‘From observing his state it seems (to me) that if his betrothal to that maiden does not take place, he will grieve to death; wherefore it is better to marry him to the girl, that thus he may be saved.’”

“Having thus considered, he took his son’s friend with him, and on reaching that town, went to the girl’s father and said, ‘I have come to solicit something of you; if you will grant my request, I will make it known.’ He replied, ‘If I possess the thing, I will give it; speak out.’ Having secured his promise thus, he said, ‘Give your daughter in marriage to my son.’ On hearing this, he too agreed to the proposal; and having had a priest called in, and the day, the auspicious conjunction, and the moment determined, said, ‘Bring your son; I, for my part, will stain my daugh-

ter's hands yellow.¹ On hearing this, he arose, returned to his own house, got ready all the requisites for the marriage, and set out for the ceremony; and on reaching the place, and having the marriage ceremony performed, he took his son and daughter-in-law with him and returned home; and the bride and bridegroom commenced a happy life together."

"Again, after some time, an occasion of rejoicing arose at the girl's father's, and so an invitation came to these (the bride and bridegroom) also. The wife and husband got ready, and taking their friend with them, set out for that city. When they arrived near the place, the temple of Devī came in sight, and then his vow came to his mind. Thereupon he reflected and said to himself, 'I am a great liar, and a very irreligious wretch, for I have lied to Devī herself!' Having said this to himself, he spoke to his friend, saying, 'Do you tarry here while I pay a visit to Devī.' And to his wife he said, 'Do thou also stay here.' Having said this and gone to the temple, he bathed in the pool, went before Devī, joined his hands in supplication, addressed her reverentially, and raised a sword and struck himself on the neck. His head was severed from his body, and fell upon the ground."

"To be brief, after some delay, his friend thought that as he had been gone a very long while and had

¹ See note at page 50.

not yet returned, he ought to go and see (what had happened); so he said to the wife, 'Stay here; I will soon hunt him up and bring him here.' Having said this, he went into the temple of Devī, and lo! his (friend's) head was lying apart from his body! On beholding this state of things there, he began to say to himself, 'The world is a hard place! No one will suppose that he, with his own hand, offered his head as a sacrifice to Devī; on the contrary, they will say, that, as his wife was very beautiful, he (the friend), in order to possess her, killed him, and is practising this artful trick. Therefore it is preferable to die here; whereas to obtain an evil reputation in the world is not desirable.'"

"Having said this, he bathed in the pool, came into the presence of Devī, joined his hands and made obeisance, and taking up the sword, struck himself on the neck, so that his head was severed from his body. And she, weary of standing there alone, and watching for their return till she quite despaired, went in quest of them into the temple of Devī. Arrived there, what does she behold but the two lying dead! Then, seeing them both dead, she thought to herself, 'People will not believe that these two have voluntarily offered themselves as sacrifices to Devī. Everybody will say that the widow was a wanton wretch, (and) that she killed them both and left them that she might indulge

in her depravity. It is better to die than to endure such infamy.'"

"After reflecting thus, she plunged into the pool (and bathed), and coming into the presence of Devī, bowed her head in obeisance; (then) taking up the sword, was about to strike herself on the neck, when Devī descended from the throne, and came and seized her hand, and said, 'Daughter! ask a boon; I am well-pleased with thee.' On this she said, 'Mother! if thou art pleased with me, restore these two to life.' Then Devī said, 'Unite their heads to their bodies.' In the tumult of her joy she changed the heads in putting them on. And Devī brought the water of life and sprinkled it upon them. The two rose up alive, and began disputing one with another; one saying, 'She is my wife;' the other, 'She is mine.'"

Having related so much of the story, the sprite said, "Now king Vikramājī! of which of these two is she the wife?" The king said, "Hearken! The guiding principle for this is laid down in the book of law, thus: 'The Ganges is the best of rivers, and Sumeru is the most excellent of mountains, and Kalpavriksh¹ is the most excellent of trees, (and) the head is supreme among all the members of the body. According to this judgment she becomes the wife of him

¹ *Kalpavriksh* is a fabulous tree, yielding all wishes, said to exist in the paradise of India.

who possesses the superior member.'"

On hearing these words the sprite went and again suspended himself on that tree; and the king having gone and bound him, placed him on his shoulder and carried him off.