

TALE XI.

THE sprite said, "Your majesty! there is a city named Punyapur, the king of which was named Bal-labh, and his minister's name was Satyaprakāsh, (and) the name of the minister's wife was Lakshmī. One day the king said to his minister, 'If one who is a king does not enjoy himself with beautiful women, his holding sovereignty is in vain.' Having said this, and made over the burthen of government to the minister, he himself gladly entered upon a course of amorous pleasures. He abandoned all cares of the state, and commenced spending his days and nights in enjoyment."

"It so happened that, one day, the minister was sitting dejected at home, when his wife asked him, 'Husband! you seem to me to be very weak?' He replied, saying, 'Night and day the cares of government weigh heavily on me, and hence my body has become feeble; while the king is the whole day long occupied with his own pleasures and enjoyment.' The minister's wife said, 'O husband! you have

carried on the government for a long time, now take leave of the king, and undertake a pilgrimage for a few days.'"

"He remained silent on hearing this speech of hers. Afterwards, when he stirred out (lit. when he rose thence), he went to the king at the time of his holding a court, and, obtaining his permission to go, set out on a pilgrimage. Journeying on, he reached Setband Rāmeshwar,¹ on the sea-coast. As soon as he arrived there, he visited the shrine of Mahādeva, and came out (of the temple), when, his gaze happening to stray towards the sea, what does he behold, but a (marvellous) tree of gold come up out of it, the leaves of which were emeralds, the blossoms topazes, the fruits corals,—it presented a most beautiful sight! And seated on the tree was a very beautiful woman, holding a lute in her hands, and singing in most soft and sweet strains. After a few minutes the tree disappeared in the ocean."

"After beholding this spectacle there, the minister turned back and came to his own city, and, proceeding to the king, made obeisance, and joining his hands,

¹ *Setband* (from the Sanskrit *setu-bandha*) signifies a dike or bridge, and is applied to the ridge of rocks between the Coromandel coast and Ceylon. This dike or bridge is said to have been built by the allies of Rāma (*i.e.*, the monkey army under the leadership of Hanumān), when he invaded Ceylon to recover his wife Sītā, who had been carried off thither by Rāvan. It is said that, as fast as the monkeys built up the dike, Rāvan destroyed it; so, to prevent his doing this, Rāma erected a temple to Shiva (the god adored by Rāvan) at the extremity of the dike. Thenceforth Setband Rāmeshwar became a place of pilgrimage.

said, 'Your Majesty! I have witnessed a marvellous sight!' The monarch said, 'Describe it.' The minister said, 'Your majesty! men of olden time have said that one should not speak of such things as are beyond the comprehension of any one, and which no one would credit. But this thing I saw plainly with my eyes, and hence I speak of it. Your majesty! at the place where the Lord Raghunāth¹ has bridged the ocean, lo! a golden tree came up out of the sea, which was so splendidly loaded with emerald leaves, topaz flowers, and coral fruit, that a description of it is impossible! And upon it was a very beautiful woman, with a lute in her hands, singing the sweetest of strains. But after a few minutes that tree was lost to sight in the ocean.' "

"On hearing these words, the king entrusted the government to the minister, and set out alone for the sea-shore. After several days he arrived there, and entered the temple to pay adoration to Mahādeva; and having bowed down and worshipped, he came out, when lo! the same tree, woman, and all, rose up (out of the sea). As soon as the king saw her, he leaped into the sea, and went and sat on the same tree. She, together with the king, descended to the nether regions.² She looked at him (the king) and said,

¹ Raghunāth (*i.e.*, the lord of the family of Raghu,) is a title of Rāma, who, as an incarnation of Vishnū, was born in the family of Raghu.

² *Pātāla* is one of the seven Hindu hells, and the region under the earth which is the abode of the Nāgas, or serpents with human faces.

'Valiant man! Why hast thou come hither?' The king replied, 'I have come, attracted by thy beauty.' She rejoined, 'If thou wilt not have intercourse with me during the dark fortnight of the lunar month, I will marry thee.' The king consented to this arrangement. Notwithstanding this, however, she took the king's solemn promise, and then married him."

"To be brief, when the dark nights set in, she said, 'Your majesty is not to remain near me to-day.' On hearing this, the king left her, taking his sword with him; and going apart, kept secret watch. When it was midnight, a demon came, and, on the instant of arriving, folded her in his arms. No sooner did the king witness this, than he rushed forward with his sword, and said, 'Foul fiend! lay not thy hand on my wife before my eyes! First fight with me. It was only ere I had set my eyes on you that fear possessed me; now I have no fear.' "

"This said, he drew his sword, and struck such a blow, that the head (of the demon) was severed from the body, and lay quivering on the ground. On beholding this, she said, 'O gallant man! thou hast done me a great kindness!' After saying this, she spoke again, saying, 'It is not every mountain that contains rubies, nor every city that holds true men, nor does the sandal-tree grow in every forest, nor do pearls exist in the head of every elephant.' Thereupon the king enquired, 'Why did this demon come to thee on the fourteenth night of the waning moon?' "

“She said, ‘My father’s name is Vidyādhara. I am said Vidyādhara’s daughter. Sundarī is my name. Now it was an established custom for my father not to partake of food without me. One day I was not at home at meal-time; thereupon father became angry and pronounced a curse on me, saying, ‘A demon will come and embrace thee every fourteenth night of the waning moon.’ On hearing this, I said, ‘Father! you have indeed given me your curse; but now have mercy on me!’ He replied, ‘When an intrepid man shall come and slay that demon, thou wilt escape from this curse.’ Now, therefore, I have escaped from that curse; and I will now go and pay my respects to my father.’”

“The king said, ‘If thou appreciatest the kindness I have done thee, come at once and visit my dominions; after that, go and visit thy father.’ She said, ‘Very well; I consent to what you say.’ Thereupon the king brought her with him to his capital. Festive music and rejoicing began to take place. The news spread throughout the city that the king had arrived. Then songs of congratulation and merry-making commenced in every house; and after that, all the musicians and singers of the city came and offered their congratulations at the court. The king gave away many presents, and performed many pious acts.”

“Again, after some days that fair one said, ‘Now, your majesty! I will go to my father’s.’ The king said in sadness, ‘Very well: go.’ When she perceived

the king to be sad, she said, ‘Your majesty! I will not go.’ The king said, ‘Why hast thou given up the idea of going to thy father?’ She replied, ‘I have now become one of the human race, and my father is a demi-god;¹ were I to go now, he would show me no respect: this is my reason for not going.’ On hearing this the king was highly delighted, and gave away lacs of rupees in presents and religious offerings. Hearing of these matters touching the king, the minister died broken-hearted.”

Having told so much of the tale, the sprite said, “O king! why did the minister die?” Then king Bīr Vikramājī said, “The minister perceived that the king had taken to sensual enjoyments, and banished all the cares of government from his mind; that the subjects had lost their master (or protector); and so, no one would heed what he (the minister) said. This is the anxiety of which he died.” Having heard this, the sprite went again and hung himself on that tree. The king went again, as on previous occasions, and placed him on his shoulder, and carried him away.

¹ The *Gandharvas* are demi-gods inhabiting Indra’s heaven, and serving as celestial musicians.