



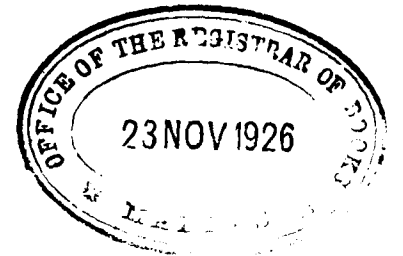
THE  
VISHNU PURĀNA

# THE VISHNU PURĀNA

A SUMMARY  
*With Introduction and Notes*

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Highest in the hierarchy of gods there stands the Hindu triad, Brahmā the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer. The *Vishnu Purāna*, as we have seen, identifies its own favourite deity with Brahma, the Supreme Spirit.<sup>1</sup> But there are other Purānas which make the same claim for Shiva. Religious life in India has been divided between these two great sects, the followers of Vishnu and the followers of Shiva, and what this book claims for Vishnu, other books claim for Shiva. No amount of theorizing will ever save the Hindu from this *impasse*. The impartial pages of the *Mahābhārata* calmly place the conflicting assertions of the rival sectaries side by side. In one chapter it makes Vishnu worship Shiva, in another it makes Shiva subordinate to Vishnu. But this Purāna has only one object, to extol the glory of its favourite god. And that is why in two of its legends it takes pains to show how all the hosts of the rival deity were crushed and slain by the unaided effort of Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu.

Were there no such rival claims it might be argued that Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva were merely modes of the Supreme Spirit. Unfortunately for that possibility we have to remember that Vishnu is separated from his partners and reckoned both as a mode, and as the Eternal Spirit. And more than that, so genuine is their separation from one another that they are spoken of as having wives and being frequently at strife among themselves. We shall see for instance how Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu, provoked Indra, the god of heaven, to anger, by persuading the cowherds of Gobardhana to abandon his worship; and carried off a tree which belonged to Indra's queen—an act which involved him in war with the celestials. In such incidents, however, we are able to realize what a mass of heterogeneous teaching the religious books of India contain. That the sectarian

<sup>1</sup> The reader must distinguish between 'Brahma' (final a short) and 'Brahmā' (final a long). 'Brahma' is the Supreme Spirit and 'Brahmā' is the member of the Hindu Triad.

worship of Vishnu was an effort in the direction of monotheism, no one will deny. But Vishnu, as presented at his highest, comes to us grievously burdened with his own previous history, and none of his followers have had the courage to ease him of his burden. There was a time in India, when Brahmā, the creator, was thought of as the highest god in subordination to a vaguely conceived Supreme Spirit. Round about Brahmā's throne stood a motley throng of lesser deities, his own children, or rather the children of his mind-born sons, the Prajāpatīs. Among these grandsons were the twelve Adityas. And of these twelve Adityas, Vishnu was one. In those early days Vishnu held a minor place to his brother Indra, who for long possessed the rank of king of heaven.<sup>1</sup> But by the time of the Epics Vishnu had stepped to the front, contending with Shiva, who had an equally obscure origin, for the worship and devotion of India. No one who reads the Epics can fail to see that Brahmā the creator has been pushed aside. He is still spoken of with respect and addressed as the grandfather. But his day is over and his task is done. The two younger gods have usurped his place and power. It was then that the Hindu Triad began to be spoken of. Brahmā had created the world, and needed to do no more. Vishnu preserved it, and when the dissolution came, Shiva, whose nature was conceived of under many terrific forms, would destroy it. It was this scheme of the universe that the authors of the Purānas inherited, and

<sup>1</sup> The reader will find the story of Vishnu's development set forth in Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. iv. Here it is sufficient to note that in the *Rig-Veda* his position is distinctly inferior to that of other gods. In the *Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, xiv. 1. 1, however, there is a passage which tells how the gods decided to hold a sacrifice which should test their relative greatness. As a result Vishnu was declared to be the most eminent. The story of the Dwarf, related in the same Brāhmaṇa, and how he recovered the earth from the demons, would show that Vishnu was already trying to act as a leader and defender against the powers of evil. Bhandarkar also calls attention to two passages in the Upanishads, where (1) food is called the form of the blessed Vishnu who sustains the universe (*Maitri Upanishad*, vi. 13); and (2) the end of the journey is termed the highest place of Vishnu (*Katha Upanishad*). But by the time the *Maitri Upanishad* was written men had begun to link Brahmā, Rudra and Vishnu together (iv. 5); and the other passage merely refers to the three steps of Vishnu (*Rig-Veda* i. 16) which were the origin of the Dwarf incarnation.

had they been content to conceive of Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva as three manifestations of the Supreme Spirit, creating, preserving and destroying the world, it might have laid claim to some reasonable coherence. But this claim is difficult to substantiate when first one sect and then another asserts that its own favourite deity is the Supreme Spirit, and the source not only of his colleagues, but also of all the other gods, in addition to demons, beasts and men.

From the historical point of view, then, Vishnu is no greater than a hundred other gods. His mother is Aditi, one of Daksha's many daughters, and his father is Kashyapa, Brahmā's mind-born son. It is true that the Purāna does not obtrude this fact, though it is not able to conceal it altogether; while it does not fail to let us know of Shiva's even more humble birth. One can only speculate on how these great changes took effect. It is a far cry from the picture which we find in the earlier portions of the Epics, of Brahmā presiding in the courts of heaven, surrounded by a multitude of subordinate deities<sup>1</sup> many of whom are his own grand-children, to the elaborate scheme, which has not only achieved the conception of a trinity, but declares that one or other of these, in accordance with the fancy of the writer, is the Supreme Spirit. There are, however, certain stages in that process which can be more or less clearly discerned. Of the ten incarnations or avatāras, descents which the later literature attributes to Vishnu, the first three, namely, the Fish, the Tortoise and the Boar, were originally ascribed to Brahmā. It is the same with the story of creation. The name Nārāyaṇa was once an epithet of Brahmā, because it was he who arose from the waters on which he rested, to recreate the worlds. But here again the followers of Vishnu appropriated both the work and the epithet of the creator, and we have many references to Vishnu, reclining on the ocean which has submerged a previous

**Vishnu's  
appropriations**

<sup>1</sup> Very similar to the mythology of ancient Greece and Rome.

universe, and, when the time for a new creation arrives, Brahmā emerging from a lotus which springs from the navel of Vishnu.

It is generally recognized that the worship of Vishnu contains the best elements of Hindu thought and teaching, and one would venture to suggest that it is his association with the idea of helping his brother deities, and incidentally the human race, that has led to his pre-eminence. In the story of his appearance as a Dwarf, which is told in the *Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, to recover the earth from the control of the demons, we have the first avatāra which is native to Vishnu. And once the belief in his manifestations began to grow, it was increasingly natural that his worshippers should seek his assistance and sing his praise. It is around Vishnu also, that the doctrine of Bhakti, or devotion to a particular god, has gathered, in literature so ancient as the *Bhagavadgītā*, as was to be expected once men had learned to look on him as a preserver god. There is a passage also in the *Maitri Upanishad* (v. 2) which would appeal to nobler natures, where we find Brahmā, Rudra and Vishnu identified respectively with the three qualities. Of the pantheistic soul it is said that the part of him which is characterized by *darkness* (tamas) is this Rudra, the part of him which is characterized by passion (rajas) is this Brahmā, and the part of him which is characterized by purity (sattva) is this Vishnu. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose that, just as Vishnu's saving powers attracted a certain type of worshippers, so would the destructive character of Shiva draw forth the efforts of another class to appease him and gain his favours.

When we consider the details of Vishnu's intervention in his various incarnations, it is true that the picture presented to us is not particularly alluring. The Fish, the Tortoise and the Boar avatāras, which, as we have seen, were eventually appropriated by Vishnu, are of the most primitive mythological

**Vishnu's  
first four  
incarnations**

order.<sup>1</sup> The Dwarf manifestation is little better, and is an introduction to those others which, in common with it, are directed to the deception and overthrowing of the demon race. The demons, as we learn, were the half-brothers of the gods (their elder brothers indeed according to one legend) and they appear to have been as well acquainted with the Vedas, and as devoted to the practice of asceticism, as the celestials themselves. But they were constantly at war with one another, and the gods, when worsted in the fight, had to devise some means by which their enemies could be overthrown.

This was what happened in the case of Rāvana, the ten-headed demon of Ceylon. His long years of asceticism had secured for him such power and dignity that the gods were filled with fear. Nature was so alarmed that the wind ceased to blow, and the sun to shine. In their distress the celestials appealed to Vishnu, and he agreed to be born as Rāma and his three brothers, the sons of Dasharatha, king of Ayodhyā. *The Vishnu Purāna* says very little about Rāma, but apart from the motive which brought Vishnu to earth in his person, his character is in many respects the purest and highest which Sanskrit literature has portrayed. And the devotion and love which later poets, like Tulsidās, have manifested towards him are the noblest expression of religious feeling which Indian vernacular literature contains. Despite that fact, however, we never can get away even in Tulsidās from the absurd and puerile motive which is repeatedly set forth as the reason for his birth and incarnation.

**Vishnu's  
incarnation  
as Rāma**

<sup>1</sup> For the Fish avatāra, see *Mahābhārata*, iii. 187, where Brahmā is the fish. *The Shatapatha Brāhmana* (i. 8. 1.) merely speaks of the Fish and does not say who the Fish is. In *Shatapatha Brāhmana* Prajāpati (Brahmā) is spoken of as having assumed the form of a tortoise. In *Mahābhārata* i. 18 it is the tortoise king who held up the mountain. Book xii. 340 of that work, however, says Vishnu was the tortoise, and so does the *Rāmāyana* (i. 45). With regard to the boar incarnation, *Rāmāyana* iii. 110, says that Brahmā was the boar. Muir's *Original Sanskrit Text*, vol. iv. p. 34, calls attention to the fact that another and as he believes a later copy has added after the words *Brahmā, the self-existent*, these others *the imperishable Vishnu*.

The story of Vishnu's incarnation as the man-lion has certain elements of greatness in its motive which none of the others can offer (i. 16). **Vishnu as the Man-lion** Because there we have a boy, Prahlāda, persecuted by his demon father, because he will not cease to worship Vishnu. Every contrivance is employed to shake his resolution, but nothing can move him. Eventually Vishnu comes to his relief. In doing so certain difficulties had to be met. In the case of Rāvana, Brahmā had promised that neither god nor demon would ever be able to destroy him, and Vishnu was compelled to come in human form. In the case of Prahlāda's father, Brahmā, with his usual facility in granting unconsidered boons, had promised that neither god nor demon, neither beast nor man, would be able to do him harm. And so Vishnu appeared in a shape that was none of these, but in a new and composite form, namely one that was partly man and partly animal, and slew the father. In telling this part of the story the *Vishnu Purāna* exercises wonderful restraint. It contents itself with stating the fact and nothing more. Indeed, the preceding sentence tells us that father and son were reconciled, a strange preface to be followed by the statement about the father's death at the hands of Vishnu. But what our Purāna lacks is more than compensated for by the ghastly narrative of the *Bhāgavata Purāna*. According to that work, Prahlāda had told his father that Vishnu was everywhere, a statement which caused the demon to strike a pillar and say, If he is everywhere, why is he not in this column? He received an immediate response. Vishnu himself appeared from the midst of the pillar, and in the form of a man-lion. In one part of his body he was a man, in another he had the shape of a lion. He had a thick and shaggy mane. His eyes were red as fire. His mouth was huge, and as deep as a cavern. His tongue was as sharp as a two edged sword, and his nostrils rose and fell with every breath. His head touched the sky. His body was covered with yellow hair. He had a hundred arms. The demon host took refuge in flight, but their master, though he knew

that he was face to face with Vishnu, showed no signs of fear. A long battle ensued. The gods, who had crept out of their hiding places to witness the combat, became anxious as to the result. But there was no cause for alarm. Because Vishnu seized his opponent as a reptile seizes a rat, carried him to the gate of the palace, and there when he had played with him for a little, tore him to pieces with his claws. As he did so, the mighty god rolled his eyes in fury, and licked his lips with his tongue. His body was covered with the demon's blood. When he had finally disembowelled him, he made a garland of his entrails and hung it round his neck.<sup>1</sup>

It is with wonder, too, that we read the explanation which this Purāna gives us of the career of Buddha (iii. 18). Modern writers dwell on the beauty of Buddha's character, and the pity which he showed towards his fellow-men. But the compilers of the Purānas looked upon the teaching of both the Buddhists and the Jains with peculiar loathing, and found in it a manifestation of evil and not of good. These heretics, they said, spoke disrespectfully of the Vedas, and the rites which they enjoined. They had no respect for Brāhmins and ignored the laws of caste. But in particular their teaching was atheistic, and they held that this world was without support. And so, to put the mark of shame upon them, they invented a story, which is to be found in this and other Purānas. It was placed in the usual setting. The gods and demons once more were at war. And as on former occasions, the devotion of the demons to works of piety, had made them so strong that the gods were driven from heaven, and compelled to go into hiding. Once again they appealed to Vishnu, and once again Vishnu came to their relief. It was a very novel method of attack which the god adopted. Dressed as an ascetic, he appeared among the demons as they were practising their religious ceremonies, and studying the sacred books. And then by his cunning arguments he persuaded them that the Vedas were of no value, and the rites of religion

**Vishnu's  
incarnation  
as Buddha**

<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavata Purana*, vii. 8. Burnouf's French Translation.

utterly vain. He was so successful in his efforts, that not a single demon adhered to his old beliefs, with the inevitable result that they lost all the merit they had acquired, and the strength and vigour that went with it. As soon as they learned of the success of Vishnu's stratagem, the celestials renewed the combat and were able to drive the demons down to hell. The incarnation of Vishnu as Buddha always stands in the list of the ten avatāras, and as a Hindu villager repeats for your information the list of Vishnu's descents, he includes that of Buddha among the ten. Probably he knows nothing of the details of the story as it is told in the Purānas. On the other hand, the educated Indian who has studied the history of India in school or college has little idea that the Buddha he is taught to admire was an illusion of Vishnu who came to deceive and destroy the demons by the inculcation of heresy and falsehood.

The culminating theme of this Purāna, however, is the exaltation of one particular incarnation of Vishnu, in Krishna and his brother Balarāma. And once again it is the evil conduct of demons, one demon in particular who was reigning at Muttra in the north of India, which calls for Vishnu's intervention. The complainant was the Earth who appeared at an assembly of the gods on the summit of Mount Meru. Strange to say she gave no information as to the injuries from which she suffered. She contented herself with saying that if the gods did not devise some plans for her relief, she would be compelled to sink down to the lower regions. Such an appeal roused the sympathy of the celestials, and Brahmā was their spokesman. Reminding his brother deities that Shiva and he and all of them were portions of Vishnu, he proposed that they should make a pilgrimage to the Sea of Milk, which was Vishnu's favourite haunt, and secure his assistance. This was done, and Vishnu gave an immediate and gracious response. When he had revealed his eternal form, a manifestation which brought the celestials to their knees in adoring worship, he plucked from his body two hairs,

**Vishnu's  
incarnation  
as Krishna**

one white and another black, and said that these two hairs would be born as Balarāma and Krishna, the seventh and eighth sons of Devaki, the cousin of Kansa, the demon of whom the Earth had made complaint. He called for the co-operation of the other deities however, saying that while he himself would deal with Kansa, they must make it their object to root out the whole of the demon race. In the introduction to this legend, which is told in the fifth book, Krishna alone is spoken of, and it is said that he will be *a part of a part* of Vishnu. Later on, as we have shown, the two brothers are made to represent nothing more than two hairs taken from Vishnu's body. But as the legend proceeds, Krishna is thought of as Vishnu himself, and time after time he reveals himself to his worshippers as such. Even Shiva and Indra, with both of whom he fights, address him, when the battle goes against them, not as a part, but as the embodied manifestation, not merely of Vishnu, but of the Supreme Eternal Spirit, Brahma. As for Krishna's brother, Balarāma, he occupies a distinctly inferior place in the story, and we read of practically no worship being addressed to him. But the account of his birth from the white hair of Vishnu is forgotten, and he is thought of as the great serpent, Shesha, which upholds the worlds and on which Vishnu rests in the intervals that elapse between the separate creations.

When such a conception is presented to us, of the Eternal Spirit manifest in the flesh, the nauseating account of Krishna's life presents a painful contrast. Whether as boy or man, Krishna makes no appeal to our better nature. It is true that his amours are spoken of in a comparatively clean fashion in this particular Purāna. But unfortunately the *Bhāgavata Purāna* throws aside all restraint, and in its description of his adventures with the wives and daughters of the cowherds, and with the hunchback, shows that he was guilty of immoralities for which the authors of the book feel they must produce some sort of excuse. 'This is indeed the act of a libertine who enjoys the wife of another,' they tell us, but they add that

#### The Story of Krishna's life

Krishna is a god and that no one can know or understand the action of the celestials. But lest anyone should think of following his example, the injunction is added, 'Revere the actions of Hari, but do not give your mind to the doing of them.' The tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāna* has been translated into Hindi, and as the Prem-Sāgar it challenges in popularity the great work of Tulsidās.<sup>1</sup> What a contrast there is between Rāma and Krishna! Of Rāma it is said that when Sitā his only wife died, he never married again. As for Krishna he is reported to have married more than sixteen thousand wives, and to have been the father of 180,000 sons. Rāma's brother, Lakshmana, had never raised his eyes higher than the feet of his sister-in-law. When Krishna saw a number of women bathing in a river, he stole their garments and compelled them to come out of the water with their hands upraised. It is in such contradictions that we find one of the most lamentable facts in the history of Indian religions. Its lofty conceptions of morality, often very beautifully set forth in the Epics and in portions of the Purānas, are darkened and degraded by conceptions of God which are unholy and unclean. And to crown the disaster, when the human heart cries out in protest, it is told that because the gods are all powerful they can do what they like. How the evil tendencies so early associated with the worship of Krishna developed is known to the student of Hinduism. Rādhā, Krishna's special favourite among the Gopis, is declared to be the eternal wife of Vishnu. It is even said that she was formed by the god dividing himself into two. While the modern worshippers of the god, forgetful of the warning not to imitate his actions, consider it incumbent upon them to re-enact the deeds of Krishna and his mistress.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Prem-Sāgar*, chapter xxxv; the Hindi Version of the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, book x.

<sup>2</sup> The comments of Sir R. G. Bhandarkar are much too cautious. 'The dalliance of Krishna with cowherdesses . . . introduced an element inconsistent with the advance of morality into the Vāsudeva religion: Moral rigidity, culminating in indifference to worldly enjoyments and self-abnegation, does not appear to be a characteristic of this school.' *Vaishnavism, Shaivism, etc.*, pp. 38, 82. Confronted with a similar problem, ancient Greek writers faced

Krishna's indifferent morality is seen in other ways also, and his easy-going character and the low standards which he set appealed with fatal results to the baser minds among the followers of Vishnu. Certainly the Purānic picture of Krishna is not inconsistent with what we read of him in the *Mahābhārata*. There he is content to represent himself as an unfair fighter. He does not think that victory can be gained without deceit. He persuades his friends to tell lies, and it is only after the greatest reluctance that they consent to do so. He advises his cousin, Arjuna, to carry off by force a maiden he is in love with, and he defends his conduct by saying that lying is permissible in dealing with women, in arranging marriages, and to save the lives of cows and Brahmins.<sup>1</sup>

Alongside these very sensuous and unattractive conceptions of Krishna there stands what we may call the spiritual. At the very hour of birth the divine infant reveals his divine form to his father and mother, and tells them that he has come in answer to their prayers. And on a later occasion, when his parents refused to let him kneel before them, they said to him: 'The whole universe, from Brahmā to a tree, is contained in thee.' In the same way when Krishna was about to kill a great water-snake, the reptile's wives cried aloud for mercy, and declared that Krishna was the god of gods, the eternal lord, the self-existent. But his greatest manifestation was to a nobleman in the service of the demon Kansa. This person had been sent to summon the two brothers to Muttra, and as he journeyed to the forest, he told himself that he would soon be privileged to see him by whom the world is sustained, who is the beginning and the end

it differently. Professor Gilbert Murray remarks, in his notes to the *Trojan Women* of Euripides (415 B.C.): 'Such gods were as a matter of fact the moral inferiors of good men, and Euripides will never blind his eyes to their inferiority. And as soon as people see that their god is bad, they tend to cease believing in his existence at all.'

<sup>1</sup> See Manmanātha Dutt's translation *Mahābhārata*, vii. c. 191, 197, 199; ix. 62. Also my *Summary of Mahābhārata*, pp. 7, 51, 114, 116, 121, 130, 133.

of all things, Hari,<sup>1</sup> whose nature is unknown even to the celestials, the soul of all, and the knower of all, the touch of whose finger alone is sufficient to dispel sin. It was apparently in response to this mental devotion that as the three were returning to Muttra, both Krishna and Balarāma revealed their divine forms, and in a specially remarkable fashion. At one moment Balarāma was seen seated in the chariot, wearing the guise of humanity; at another he showed himself as he really was, the mighty serpent Shesha, with a thousand heads and great red eyes, surrounded by the monarchs of the snake race. On every side stood the minstrels of heaven, singing his praise, with garlands on their heads and in a state of intoxication. Krishna was not nearly so wonderful as his brother, but he showed himself dressed in the unmistakable garments of Vishnu, and bearing in his four hands the peculiar weapons of that god (v. 17).

When such opinions were entertained with regard to Krishna, it was very natural that belief in him should be thought to secure the emancipation for which the soul of India has always longed. And thus we find in the last book of our Purāna, that to repeat the name of Krishna will obtain for his worshippers liberation from rebirth. Indeed it is said that those who live in the present evil age are more fortunate than those who lived in what were reckoned happier ages. And the reason given is that meditation, sacrifice, elaborate ritual, weary days and years of asceticism and prayer were required in previous ages. But now all that is necessary, since Krishna's advent inaugurated a new era, is to repeat his name. It is true we are sometimes told that his name must be uttered in a spirit of devotion and that the practice of Yoga which is set forth (vi. 7) enjoins the performance of religious rites as a part of the process which calls for attention and care. But the emphasis on the name and the value that is involved in its mere repetition reminds us of Manu's dictum, that the repetition of certain words, without any apparent reference

<sup>1</sup> Hari is one of Vishnu's many names.

to repentance or regret, can wipe away the most heinous sins.<sup>1</sup> Happily there is another type of teaching which is not absent from the Purāna, and it is beautifully set forth in the injunctions which the lord of death gave to his messengers. 'He who lives pure in thought, free from malice, contented, leading a holy life, feeling tenderness for all creatures, speaking wisely and kindly, humble and sincere, has Vāsudeva ever present in his heart' (iii. 7).<sup>2</sup>

As we have said, the supreme achievement is to secure liberation, and this aspiration prevails from beginning to end of the Purāna. And of person after person it is recorded that they gained their object and were born no more. There was a time in Indian thought when heaven itself, with its pleasures or its peace, was reckoned as a sufficient goal, and doubtless there was always a class, who were satisfied with that and never thought of what lay beyond. To spend several millions of years in heaven was better than to spend the same period in hell, even though one had to return to earth at the end of it. But as the belief in transmigration deepened and secured a growing hold, both men and gods realized that even in heaven joy must cease sometimes and they told themselves that heaven was just a sort of hell. There is no better illustration of that idea than the passage in the *Mahābhārata* which pictures the gods looking at their garlands and realizing that they have begun to fade: a sure token that their days in heaven are drawing to a close and that they must soon return to earth.<sup>3</sup> And we have the same thought expressed in this Purāna. No felicity is perfect unless it is without end. Belief in transmigration could have only

<sup>1</sup> It was usual to address Vishnu in what was called the twelve syllable mantra, viz. OM! Salutation to Bhagavat Vāsudeva (i. 6). 'Sixteen suppressions of the breath (prāṇāyama) accompanied by the repetition of the three words, bhur, bhuvah, svar, and the syllable OM, purify, if they are repeated daily, after a month, even the murderer of a learned Brāhmin.' *Laws of Manu*, xi. 249.

<sup>2</sup> See Note 10 for the whole passage. Vāsudeva is one of the many names for Vishnu or Krishna.

<sup>3</sup> See *Mahābhārata*, iii. 259. It was not possible to acquire fresh merit in heaven.

one result, and so they said: Tell us of the secret that will save us from this weary round of birth and death. And the writers of this book say that they have found it. Rites and sacrifices serve at best a temporary purpose. They are indeed parts of a necessary process. But the only certain method is to see all things in Vishnu, and to be able to say: 'Glory to Vāsudeva, who I also am. I am all things; all things are in me. Brahma is my name' (i. 19). When men are able to say that, emancipation from re-birth, final liberation, nirvāna, absorption in the Supreme Spirit, will have been realized.

But apart from the enthusiastic declarations made in the last book, it is generally recognized that except in the case of a few select spirits, it takes the soul a long time and entails many re-births before it can achieve this final goal.

**The world's  
sins and  
sorrows**

The rishi Vyāsa may declare (vi. 2) that those who live in the present age are particularly fortunate, because it is possible to acquire a very great deal of merit at very little cost and in a very short time. But the picture of the present age which is drawn for us presents a very different state of matters. It is one of unrelieved gloom, impiety, immorality, famine, pestilence, oppression and cruelty, pride and greed. And as the years pass, the horror grows, until the time is ripe for Vishnu's tenth and last descent,<sup>1</sup> when in the Kalki avatāra, he will destroy the wicked and re-establish righteousness (iv. 24). In very pathetic language, the writer, as his book approaches a close, enlarges upon the sufferings to which the human race is subject. Man is the victim of ignorance and of desire, and does not know whence he came or whither he goes. But if this life is terrible, the woes that await him are still more terrible. And surely nothing is lacking in making realistic the agonies in hell, which the sinner must endure. No wonder the sufferer, broken by his present sorrows and terrified by the thought of what is in store for him, was bidden flee to the tree of emancipation and find shelter there.

<sup>1</sup> For the incarnation of Vishnu as Parashu-Rāma, or Rāma of the axe, see note 14.

The belief in transmigration has been largely responsible for the hold which the caste system has on the Indian people. A man is what he is; his lot in life is what it is, because he comes burdened with the deeds of his former life. This is the doctrine of *Karma*. And it is brought before us in a remarkably vivid way by several legends. There is, for instance, the story of Bharata, who when in the forest saved the life of a fawn and grew so fond of it, thinking of it even in his dying moments to the exclusion of Vishnu, that in his next life he was born as a deer (ii. 13). And there is the story of the king who, because he ventured to speak to a heretic, was born as an animal on six successive occasions. And he did not escape from the fruit of his sin till he had been bathed in the water used at a horse sacrifice (iii. 17). Of these characters and of others it is said that they could remember what they had done in their former lives. They were thus able to understand the enormities of which they had been guilty, compare their present with their past lives, and repent accordingly. Unfortunately this cannot be said of most of us. If we are miserable, diseased, exposed to hardship and what seems injustice, born as out-castes or as low-castes, and told by our social superiors that we are what we are because of what we did in a previous existence, we cannot easily blame ourselves for what we are unconscious of. On the face of it the theory of transmigration appears to offer an explanation for what seems to be undeserved suffering or equally undeserved happiness. But, in practice, it has more often been used not as an incitement to do better because of what exertion will achieve for the future, but as an excuse for sloth and failure, on the ground that past blunders have sent us crippled and broken into the present and made effort and achievement impossible.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The *Mahābhārata* frequently contrasts destiny and human effort in a very frank and healthy manner, for example 'destiny and human effort depend upon each other. The high minded perform good and great deeds. It is only eunuchs who worship fate' (xii. 132, 81). 'Destiny thwarts not the man who has acquired virtue and righteousness. The man who does not exert himself is never contented, nor can destiny change the course of a man who has gone wrong. There is no power inherent in destiny' (xiii. 6, 29).

It is in the Purānas also that Hindu chronology has travelled far from its earlier and humbler flights. The doctrine of transmigration demanded long periods of time before it could possibly operate. There are many passages in the Epics which would indicate that their authors were content to think of four ages whose total length amounted to more than four million of years. But in the *Mahābhārata* at least, and in the more recent portions of the *Rāmāyana*, the changes had been already accomplished and it was left to the Purānas to bring the various schemes into one system. For now we have not merely four ages but a thousand cycles of four ages, and the thousand cycles constitute *a day of Brahmā*. And Brahmā lives for a hundred years, and each year is composed of such long drawn out days. It is said that half of Brahmā's life is spent and our author is able to tell us the very name of the Brahmā's day in which we happen to live. On one point silence is preserved. No information is given as to what will happen when Brahmā dies, except that his life is not more than a moment in the life of Vishnu. The period of time known as a day of Brahmā is also called a *Kalpa*, and during each Kalpa, which lasts, let us remember, 4,320 million years, there reign fourteen mysterious persons described as Manus. The Manu who reigns at present is the seventh, which means that there are still seven more Manus to reign over the now prevailing day of Brahmā.

It is in connexion with these various Manus that many very palpable inconsistencies arise. Because we find that there are for each Manu period (Manwantara) different gods for whose origin no clear explanation can be found.

It is generally assumed that there is a dissolution of the universe at the close of each of Brahmā's days, and each of Brahmā's days is followed by a night of equal length. When the night has expired, Brahmā awakes, and a fresh creation takes place. Gods and demons, beasts and men, every thing indeed, movable and immovable, come forth to life. But according to

another group of legends, it would appear that the advent of a new Manu involved a new creation for all living things, though unattended by any destruction of the universe.<sup>1</sup> In illustration of that, consider the story told in Book I chapter xv, of the gods, belonging to a previous Manu period, taking steps to be reborn in the next period, and thus continuing to retain their former glory.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, some of the great sages, who lived during the reign of the first Manu, are found still existing in the time of the seventh Manu. Two of them in particular, Atri and Vasishtha, are characters in the *Rāmāyana*, which, if the chronology is to be trusted, means that they continued to live for at least 2,000 million years.<sup>3</sup> Nor must we suppose that in dealing with such ancient history the authors of the Purānas are content to give names and nothing more. We read, for example, of the child Dhruva, a grandson of the first Manu (i. c. ii) and get such intimate details as that his step-mother would not allow him to sit on his father's knee, followed by a long account of his interview with the seven rishis, and the steps he took to secure the favour of Vishnu.

As for the teaching of this Purāna, as a whole, it follows the usual lines. It tells many legends of kings and sages, which had already appeared in the Epics or in the older Purānas; to some it refers more briefly, others it elaborates at greater length. It deals

**The general teaching of this Purana**

<sup>1</sup> A similar inconsistency is apparent in the *Laws of Manu*, which attributes to the first Manu its own authorship and the creation of the universe, and then proceeds to say that there are seven Manus, each of whom is responsible for a new creation in its own period. This does not prevent the later statement that a creation lasts for a day of Brahmā. See *Summary of Laws of Manu*.

<sup>2</sup> They were born in the reign of the seventh, or present, Manu, as the twelve Adityas. Their father was Kashyapa, and their mother Aditi. Vishnu was one of them! In Book III chapter i, it is said that Vishnu was born to Kashyapa and Aditi as a dwarf, that he might deceive the demon Bali. We have thus two separate ideas, that gods are created or born, and live for a day of Brahmā, and again that they only live for one-fourteenth of that time, namely, for the period of a Manu. There is a passage in the *Mahābhārata* speaks of their continuing for the space of four ages only, and in this Purāna also (i. 12).

<sup>3</sup> Compare the story of Mārkaṇḍeya (*Mahābhārata* iii. 183). He had witnessed many dissolutions of the universe, and yet looked like a young man of twenty-five. He lived in the days of Krishna, at the beginning of the present age. There is a second birth attributed to Vasishtha, of which the less said the better.

with the four castes in the customary fashion, glorifying the Brāhmin and depressing the Shūdra, declares that no Brāhmin must ever give instruction to a low-caste, or conduct religious services on his behalf (iv. 15). The name given to a Brāhmin must be indicative of honour; the name given to a Shūdra must express contempt. The duties prescribed for the four stages, student, householder, forest dweller and ascetic, through which a Brāhmin at least must pass, are set forth in practically the same terms as are to be found in the *Laws of Manu*. It is from the same law book that the description of the eight forms of marriage are obtained with an interesting preliminary on the kind of wife a man ought to marry. It does not venture to sanction marriage between members of different castes, as both the *Epics* and the *Laws of Manu* do. But legends of what must be an earlier time, incorporated without alteration, tell us of a Brāhmin who married the daughter of a king, and consequently a member of the warrior caste, and also of how members of that caste became Brāhmins (iv. 19). The ceremonies in connexion with the birth of a son and with marriage and death are also expounded. But it is the funeral rites which receive most attention (iii. 13) and for the very good reason that while a son is all important for the due performance of these rites, the future welfare, not only of the person who has just died, but of his ancestors also, depends on the correctness and thoroughness with which these ceremonies are performed. There are special times and places also, which are peculiarly auspicious, securing gratification to the dead, it may be for 10,000 years, or even for a whole age (iv. 14). And by way of encouragement, their descendants are informed that they will share in the benefits, indeed may even acquire the larger share. If they bathe in certain rivers, the Ganges for instance, after the rite is over, they will expiate all their sins, and for the rest of their lives they will be happy and rich, and when they die, they will be born as members of some noble house.

The word *Purāna* means old, belonging to ancient times, and among the earliest of India's religious books

it is already employed in reference to stories of former days. It occurs for example, in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, associated with the word *Itihāsa*, where we read, after a reference to the four Vedas, that the speaker knows *Itihāsa-purāna*, as the fifth.<sup>1</sup> It is in the *Mahābhārata*, however, that the word most frequently occurs in reference to the many stories which the characters in that voluminous work are so fond of telling one another. But the time came when these old stories were put together, and were gathered up in more than one collection. Thus a listener is informed that his father had read the whole of the Purānas (i. 5); a narrator of some story says he had heard it in the Purāna (xiii. 84. 59); while a third professes to have studied the Purānas with Romaharshan (xii. 319. 21). But there are passages more explicit still where the account of a story, said to have been taken from Vāyu's own Purāna (iii. 191. 16), and a reference to the merit of listening to the eighteen Purānas (xviii. 6. 97) show that the work of compilation had become complete. Now it so happens that the *Vishnu Purāna* gives a list of eighteen Purānas, and though the *Vayu Purāna* is not one of the number it appears in other lists. But it would be impossible to argue that the Purānas which exist to-day are the same Purānas as those to which the *Mahābhārata* so explicitly refers, while Mr. Hopkins declares that the narrative, professing to be taken from the *Vayu Purāna*, bears no real relation to the Purāna which is at present called by that name. The more reasonable explanation therefore is, either that the number *eighteen* may have been popular in the days of the Epic as in later days, or emendators

<sup>1</sup> *Chandogya Upanishad*, vii. 1, 2, 4. *Itihāsa* = so indeed it was. Hume translates the two words as 'legend and ancient lore.' In the *Shatapatha Brāhmana*, v. 11, 5, 6, where the two words also appear together, they are translated by Eggeking as 'traditional myths and legends.' See also the *Laws of Manu*, iii. 232, where the host at a sacrifice is bidden to recite to his guests, the Vedas. . . . legends, tales, Purānas.

have inserted that figure in recensions of the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>1</sup>

That many portions of the existing Purānas are very old, no one would deny. They contain many of the myths and legends that had already appeared in the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*. But they also contain a great deal that is much more modern. The *Vishnu Purāna*, for example, shows by internal evidence that it was not compiled earlier than the fifth century A.D., and it is the fifth century A.D., which is the earliest date for the final redaction of the *Mahābhārata*. Wilson, the translator of our present subject of study, was of the opinion that none of the Purānas assumed their present actual state earlier than the time of Shankara Achārya, who taught in the earlier part of the ninth century. He even holds that the Purānas accompanied or followed the innovations of later teachers, Rāmānuja, Mādhavāchārya, and Vallabha, a view which would relegate some of them to the sixteenth century. That is an opinion which would not be accepted by the present generation of students. Additions must, however, have been made from time to time, some of which are comparatively recent. Mr. Pargiter tells us, for instance, that emendation has been going on since they were first put together, especially in the case of the *Bhavishya Purāna*, where prophecies have been made which deal with the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

In common with other works of the same kind, the *Vishnu Purāna* consists of a series of questions and answers. These questions are addressed by a disciple called Maitreya to his teacher Parāshara. This individual appears in

<sup>2</sup> Other references are 'There are in the Purānas, interesting stories, and the history of the first generations of wise men' (*Mahābhārata* i. 5. 2). This Epic contains a compilation of the Purānas (*Mahābhārata* i. 1, 63). It also contains the essence of all the Purānas. (*Mahābhārata* i. 1, 65). See also *Mahābhārata* iii. 79; xii. 201, 6, and xii. 343, 2. In the *Rāmāyana* vii. 72 Rāma asks his ministers to listen to what is mentioned in the Purānas and proceeds to tell a story about creation. *Mahābhārata* xii. 201 also speaks of this old story about the origin of the earth, etc.

<sup>3</sup> See Note 15.

the *Mahābhārata* as having taken advantage of a maiden called Satyawati, when she ferried him across the river Jumna. Their offspring was Vyāsa, who, because he was born on an island in the river, was also named Dwaipayana or Island-born. Parāshara frequently refers to *my son Vyāsa*. He is credited with dividing the Vedas into four.<sup>1</sup> Parāshara himself is spoken of as the grandson of the famous rishi, Vasishtha, and Vasishtha again appears in the list of Prajāpatis or secondary creators of the universe. As readers of the *Rāmāyana* are aware, Vasishtha acted as prime minister at the court of Ayodhyā for many generations, and must have lived for millions of years. It is in such an atmosphere of exaggeration that the whole of this Purāna moves, a criticism which is met by the statement of Parāshara himself that such eminent persons as his grandfather lived on from age to age. In conclusion, attention must be called to the benefits which accrue from reading or hearing this book read in whole or in part. Those who listen to the history of Prahlāda, for example, are immediately cleansed of all their sins. Whatever the wickedness they may have committed, by night or by day, it is all wiped away as a result of either hearing or reading it once. Should it be read or heard on the day of full moon or new moon or on the eighth or twelfth day of the lunar month, the merit acquired will be equal to what one gets by making the gift of a cow (i. 20.) In bringing his work to a close, however, Parāshara declares that it is equal in sanctity to the Vedas, alleviates the sufferings of men and removes all their defects. Its perusal is as beneficial as the celebration of a horse sacrifice, or bathing at Prayāga and Pushkara. Parāshara does not claim to be its author. He only communicates what he has received from others. Its author was Brahmā, the creator. He taught it to the sage Nārāyana, and from Nārāyana it had been handed down by secondary creators, goddesses, serpent kings, and sages, till it came to Parāshara. And he instructs his disciple to tell it to someone else, so that the link may remain unbroken, to the end of this age.

<sup>1</sup> The word Vyāsa means *arranger*.

## CHAPTER II

### THE STORY OF CREATION—BOOK I

This Purāna begins with an invocation addressed to the god Vishnu,<sup>1</sup> and immediately thereafter Maitreya, the disciple of Parāshara declares that he will narrate a Purāna equal in sanctity to the Vedas. But it would appear that he has first to question his teacher, in whose presence he stands, before he can narrate anything at all, and the rest of the book is really the narrative of Parāshara, prompted from time to time by the fresh enquiries of his disciple. Maitreya sums up his questions somewhat as follows. He wishes to know, he says, about the origin and end of the world, about the nature and history of the gods, about the divisions of time, about sages, Manus and kings, about the duties of Brāhmins and other castes, and in conclusion how the Vedas came to be divided into their different branches at the hands of Vyāsa.

Parāshara congratulated his disciple on the way he had put his questions, and said they reminded him of something that had happened long before, and the advice he had received from his grandfather, Vasishtha. It so happened that Parāshara's father had been devoured by a Rākshasa.<sup>2</sup> When Parāshara heard of how his father

<sup>1</sup> See Note 1, for this invocation addressed to Vishnu.  
<sup>2</sup> The text says that the Rākshasa was sent by the sage Vishvamitra. The reader of the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* will remember the quarrel which arose between Vasishtha and Vishvamitra. The first book of the latter epic says that Shakti, father of Parāshara refused to stand aside to let a king go past. The king struck the sage who retaliated by changing the king into a Rākshasa. The first thing the transformed Rākshasa did was to eat up the sage. Parāshara was a posthumous child. When he grew up and heard of how his father died, he began the sacrifice referred to here.

had met his death, he began to perform a sacrifice, which would bring about the destruction of the whole Rākshasa race. By the time this powerful rite had caused the deaths of several hundreds of these wicked creatures, his grandfather intervened. He pointed out that the Rākshasas were in no way to blame. His father's death was due to fate, and indeed one might well ask, 'By whom is any one killed.' 'Every man reaps the consequence of his own acts.' In any case, anger was a very bad thing. It was the weapon of fools. It destroyed all that one had laboriously gathered by austerities and toils. It prevented the attainment of heaven or of emancipation. Vasishtha therefore urged his grandson to kill no more of those unoffending demons. In obedience to this urgent appeal, Parāshara at once brought his sacrifice to a close, a merciful act, for which he there and then reaped a high reward. Because Pulastya,<sup>1</sup> one of the mind-born sons of Brahmā, and the father of the demon race, appeared on the scene. When he had been presented with the usual offerings of hospitality (arghya), he said he had come to say how grateful he was that the sacrifice had been stopped, and his progeny saved from destruction.<sup>2</sup> And in recognition of this clemency he proposed to bestow a mighty boon on Parāshara. The boon was to the effect that he would be miraculously endowed with knowledge of every kind, including 'the true nature of the deities as it really is,' in consequence of which he would be able to compose a summary of the Purānas.<sup>3</sup> With such qualifications Parāshara was well fitted to answer the questions of his disciple. And yet everything he wanted to know could be expounded in a single sentence. 'The world was produced by Vishnu; it exists in him: he is the cause of its continuance and

<sup>1</sup> We shall learn in later sections of this book of Pulastya and the other mind-born sons of Brahmā. They are sometimes credited with being the progenitors of gods, demons, animals and men.

<sup>2</sup> This is one of the many illustrations of the idea that a sacrifice had power over gods and men, quite irrespective of the purpose, good or bad, for which it was performed.

<sup>3</sup> We know, from the Epics and Manu, that there were Purānas existing long before those that are now recognized. Here is a proof in this reference to older purānic works. *Purāna* means *old*.

cessation; he is the world.' At this stage, the sage begins to sing a hymn in praise of this eternal, supreme god, and declares that he is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world; Hiranyagarbha (Brahmā), Hari (Vishnu) and Shankara (Shiva).<sup>1</sup> But as he proceeds to answer his disciple's first question and tell how this world came to be, he finds it difficult to describe what is beyond man's powers; for how can one describe what cannot be apprehended, the Supreme Soul, the imperishable One, who is smaller than the smallest atom, and yet is everywhere and dwells in all things. For he is Brahmā, and Brahmā is all that is.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of his hesitations, however, the sage proceeds, and tells us that Vishnu is both the cause of this universe, and the universe itself, which has been produced. He is *Avyakta*, the unevolved evolver; he is *Vyakta*, that which has been evolved. But he goes on to say that we must think of Vishnu, as existing under four forms, the two just mentioned ranking as second and third, while the others are *Purusha* or spirit, and *Kāla* or time. And these four forms, in their due proportions, are the causes of creation, in whose fashioning Vishnu 'sports like a playful boy.'

Two new names are now employed for the word *Avyakta*, namely, *Pradhāna* and *Prakṛiti*<sup>3</sup> and we are told

<sup>1</sup> Those not already acquainted with Hinduism, will do well to remember that this Purāna claims that Vishnu includes within himself all the attributes of the Hindu triad, namely, Brahmā, the creator-god, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer.

<sup>2</sup> The author has advanced a stage. He not only identifies Vishnu with the Hindu triad, but declares that he is the supreme all pervading Spirit and Soul of the universe. The reader must carefully distinguish between Brahmā the creator-god, and Brahmā 'the divine essence and source of all being, from which all created things emanate and to which they return.' 'Brahmā,' says Monier Williams, 'is the Supreme Being regarded as impersonal or in the abstract, and divested of all quality and action.' *Sanskrit Dictionary*, p. 689. Vishnu is here spoken of as Achyuta, *that which does not perish*, and Purushottama, best male or Supreme Spirit.

<sup>3</sup> *Pradhāna* means the chief one, so called because it is the first source of all, at least in the Sāṅkhya philosophy which has no place for a God. It is another name for *Prakṛiti* and *Prakṛiti* means 'that which evolves or produces everything else.' It is the term most used in the Sāṅkhya for *matter in its primal form*; matter being 'eternal and self-existing,' and

in detail that this first source of all, *this matter in its primal form*, is without beginning, self-sustained, undecaying, devoid of sound or touch, possessed of neither colour nor form, is endowed with the three qualities and is the material cause of the world.<sup>1</sup>

During the period that elapses between two creations, the three qualities with which Prakriti is endowed are in a state of equilibrium and no creation is possible. Creation however, begins, when the supreme Brahma, the universal soul, Hari enters into *matter* and *spirit* (Pradhāna and Purusha), an influence that is compared to that of an odour. It is proximity only, and not an immediate operation on the mind itself, that makes it aware of the fragrance. Because the supreme spirit is 'both the agitator and the thing agitated.' The result of this proximity is embodied spirit, and *Mahat* or intellect is produced. *Mahat*<sup>2</sup> becomes three-fold, being affected by the three qualities of goodness, passion and darkness, and from *Mahat* there springs, *Ahankāra* or Egoism,<sup>3</sup> similarly affected by the three qualities. From *Ahankāra*, there next originates, the one being produced from the other, the five grosser elements *ether, wind, light, water, earth*, with their respective rudiments, *sound, taste, colour, and smell*.<sup>4</sup> This is the 'elemental creation, proceeding from *Ahankāra* when affected by the third

'from it all things emanate, except soul, which has an independent existence, and is eternal, both a *parte ante* and a *parte post*.' Davies, p. 17. In identifying Vishnu with the first sources of the Sāṅkhya philosophy, the Purāna has thus made its own scheme theistic. The word *Nature* is sometimes used as an equivalent for *Prakriti* and *Pradhāna*.

<sup>1</sup> The three qualities or *gunas*, are Sattva, goodness or purity, Rajas, passion or activity, and Tamas, darkness or ignorance. According to an aphorism of Kapila, Prakriti is the state of equipoise of goodness, passion and darkness.

<sup>2</sup> *Mahat* means the great one, and is so called because it is the great source of the other two internal faculties, *Ahankāra* and *Manas*. In his exposition of the Sāṅkhya system Davies remarks that *Mahat* is the substance or essence by which the soul obtains a knowledge of external things. It is also called *Buddhi* (intellect).

<sup>3</sup> *Ahankāra* is 'the I making faculty; that is, self-consciousness, or the sense of individuality, sometimes conveniently termed Egoism.' See Monier Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> It is best to quote here from Wilson's translation, p. 34. 'Elementary Egotism, then becoming productive, as the rudiment of sound, produced from it *ether*, of which *sound* is the characteristic, investing it with its rudi-

quality of ignorance or darkness. But the Purāna tells us that *Ahankāra* when affected by passion or activity is responsible for the ten organs of sense, and when affected by goodness or purity is responsible for the ten divinities.<sup>1</sup> The text adds that *Manas* (mind) is the eleventh organ.

These various elementary particles, grosser elements and organs of sense, possessing various energies, could not, without combination, create living beings. But when they combined, they assumed 'the character of one mass of entire unity,' and under the direction of *Purusha* (spirit) and with the acquiescence of *Avyakta*—i.e., Pradhāna or Prakriti—they i.e. from Mahat down to the grosser elements—formed or brought forth an egg. This egg, composed of all these elements or categories, rested on the waters, and was the 'abode of Vishnu, in the form of Brahmā.'<sup>2</sup> It contained within its gigantic womb, the continents and oceans, the planets and divisions of the universe, gods, demons and men.

When Vishnu engages in the creation of the universe, he assumes the quality of passion or activity, and the form of Brahmā. And it is he, who under the quality of goodness that is as himself, continues to preserve what he has created. But when the period of a Kalpa<sup>3</sup> expires,

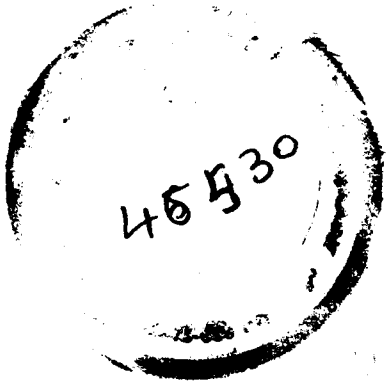
ment of *sound*. *Ether*, becoming productive, engendered the rudiment of *touch*; whence originated strong wind, the property of which is *touch* and *ether* with the rudiment of *sound*, enveloped the rudiment of *touch*. Then *wind*, becoming productive, etc.' These five rudiments are called *tan-mātras* ('subtle elementary particles').

<sup>1</sup> The ten organs of sense are skin, eye, nose, tongue, and ear; hands, feet, larynx and the excretory and generative organs. The ten divinities are not named, but the *Bhāgavata Purāna* says they are, Dish (space) air, the sun, Prachetas, the Ashvins, fire, Indra, Upendra, Mitra, and Ka or Prajapati, and speaks of them as presiding over the ten organs of sense. See Wilson's translation, p. 28.

The Sāṅkhya list of categories does not include the *ten divinities*. See Note 2.

<sup>2</sup> Dutt's translation reads 'that egg, formed by Prakriti (Pradhāna) becomes the body of Vishnu, wearing the form of Brahmā.'

<sup>3</sup> A Kalpa is supposed to last for 4,320 million years. The period of time, during which Vishnu reposes on the serpent, before resuming his work of creation, is equally long. These two periods are respectively called a Day and a Night of Brahmā. In this passage, Vishnu is called Janārdana. The serpent is the 1,000 headed *Shesha*, also called *Ananta*, the infinite.



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Vishnu assumes the quality of darkness and under the awful form of Rudra (Shiva) swallows up the universe. The world has now been converted into one vast ocean, upon whose waters the Supreme Being reposes resting on his serpent-couch. Thus passes another period of time equal to the former, and at its close the god once more awakes and the work of creation is renewed. Vishnu then is the cause of creation, preservation and destruction; as Brahmā he creates, as Vishnu he preserves; as Shiva he destroys; and when he creates, he creates himself; when he preserves, he preserves himself; when he destroys, he destroys himself.

When he had heard this wonderful account of creation, Maitreya asked his teacher; 'How can creative agency be attributed to that Brahma who is without qualities, illimitable, pure and free from imperfection?' To this Parāshara merely replied; 'Creation and hundreds of properties belong to Brahmā, as inseparable parts of his essence, as heat is inherent in fire.'<sup>1</sup> But he advised his disciple to listen while he describes how Vishnu proceeded with the work of creation. And he would speak, first of all, of Vishnu, when he assumed the form of Brahmā the creator god, the grandfather of the world. Brahmā was spoken of as being born; such was the term used to indicate his manifestation, being, as it were, produced, and the term of an hundred years was said to constitute his life. But one must first understand what one year—rather what one day in Brahmā's life is equal to, when compared to the days and years of mortals. Hear, then, what is the length of one of Brahmā's days? 12,000 divine years comprise the period known as the four ages, these ages are as follows: (1) the Krita-age, consisting of 4,000 divine years, with two twilights, each one-tenth of the age; (2) the Tretā, consisting of 3,000 divine years, with two twilights, each one-tenth of the age; (3) the Dwāpara age, 2,000 years in length, with its corresponding twilights;

<sup>1</sup> Wilson's translation; See also the note attached, which suggests that the objection raised by Maitreya is rather evaded than answered.

and (4) the Kali age 1,000 years in length, with its corresponding twilights.

These four ages taken together are called a Mahā-yuga, or *great age*, and it requires 1,000 great ages to form one day of Brahmā.<sup>1</sup> At the end of a day of Brahmā, there occurs a dissolution of a universe when the three worlds are consumed with fire. The heat is so great that the saints dwelling in Maharloka, have to take refuge in Janaloka.<sup>2</sup> Eventually the three worlds are submerged beneath the ocean, and Brahmā goes to sleep upon the waters for a period known as a night of Brahmā and equal in length to his day. When the night has expired, a new day begins with a new creation. 'Of such days and nights is a year of Brahmā composed and a hundred such years constitute his whole life.' Parāshara added that at the time he spoke one half of Brahmā's life was already spent.

Maitreya next asked his master to describe the creation of the present Kalpa. Parāshara's reply was prefaced by an explanation of the name Nārāyana which is here applied to the god. The waters on which Brahmā reposed during his night of sleep, are called Nāra, because they are the offspring of Nara, (the supreme soul) and since these waters were his ayana (dwelling place), he is called Nārāyana. When Nārāyana then, wished to raise the earth out of the waters,<sup>3</sup> he assumed the form of a boar,

<sup>1</sup> The Purāna also says, at this point, that the seven rishis, the gods Indra, Manu and his sons are created and 'as formerly perish in each creation.' It also enlarges on the fact that there are fourteen periods of a Manu in each creation and that each of these periods (Manwantara) is equal to the four ages (x. 71.) 'With some additional years.' These periods are discussed in detail in Book III. For the Four Ages, etc., see Note 4.

<sup>2</sup> The three worlds here referred to are: (1) Bhur-loka, the earth, (2) Bhuvar-loka, the space between earth and sun. (3) Svar-loka the heaven of Indra. Mahar-loka is the region above that and apparently much affected by the heat, rendered uninhabitable, but not destroyed; while Jana-loka, as we shall see later on, is the special dwelling place of certain sinless mind-born sons of Brahmā which is not destroyed at the end of a Kalpa. See Note 4, on 'The Three Worlds.'

<sup>3</sup> We should have supposed that, after a dissolution, there was no earth to raise out of the waters, that there was naught but the god resting on his serpent couch upon the waters. One even wonders why there could be either waters or serpent. Wilson suggests, that the creation here described is a secondary creation; 'water and even the earth being in existence and

even as in previous Kalpas he had worn the guise of a fish and of a tortoise. Plunging into the depths of the ocean, and reaching down to the regions that lie beneath the earth, his great hoofs made holes in the lower worlds and they were deluged with water. Seeing him approach, the earth, in gratitude, began a hymn in praise of her deliverer. She called herself his bride. She flew to him, she said, for refuge. He was her creator and upholder, he had raised her up before and he was going to do it again. But all things depended on him, not she alone. He was Pradhāna, he was the visible world, he was Purusha, he was Time.<sup>1</sup> He was Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva, creator, sustainer and destroyer. None could comprehend the mystery of his being. In whatever form he chose to manifest himself, that did the gods worship. It was to him as the supreme Brahma that men looked for emancipation. How else could they hope for liberation, if they did not adore Vāsudeva.<sup>2</sup> Earth then went on to declare that her deliverer was sacrifice and the lord of sacrifice, the sacrificial fires and the formula (vashat) used at the sacrifice, that he was the Vedas and its branches; the Sun, planets and stars, indeed the whole universe, everything visible and everything invisible, and if there was anything else she had not mentioned, he was that also.

The boar was evidently gratified with these words of praise, for he began to chant from the *Sāmā Veda*. As he did so, he raised the earth out of the waters, and placed her on the surface of the ocean, where she floats like a mighty ship, unable to sink because of her great size. As the boar raised his head high in the air, streams

**The boar  
raises the  
earth**

consequently having been preceded by the creation of Mahat and the elements'. Vol. i. p. 55. The Purāna in reference to Nārāyana quotes *Lavus of Manu*, i. 10. It says this verse is repeated, 'The waters are called Nārā, etc.'

<sup>1</sup> These are the four forms of Vishnu spoken of in an earlier paragraph.

<sup>2</sup> In this paragraph, the god is called Hari and Govinda, which along with Vāsudeva and Mādhava are all peculiar epithets of Krishna. Keshava, another name for that god, appears a few pages further on.

Vishnu's incarnation as Krishna is the theme of the fifth book of this Purāna.

of water poured from his brow, and wet the sinless ascetics, Sananda and others who dwell in Janaloka;<sup>1</sup> while he breathed so hard that these holy beings were driven as it were before the wind, to take refuge in the bristles of his body. Nevertheless they were greatly delighted to see the god and they bowed before him with words of praise and prayer. They said that he was the supreme lord of lords, Keshava (of the lovely hair). His feet were the Vedas, his tusks, the sacrificial stake 'to which the victim is bound': his teeth the sacrifice itself; his mouth was the altar, his tongue the fire, and the hairs of his body the sacrificial grass. His head, too, was the dwelling place of Brahma, his eyes were day and night, while his snout was the sacrificial ladle. They employed other metaphors more or less to the same effect, and ended by declaring that the god thus manifest in the form of a boar was the only reality.

Parāshara says that the god next proceeded to level the earth and created afresh those mountains which had been consumed at the destruction of the former universe. He divided the earth too, into seven continents or islands, and created the three worlds, earth, sky, heaven, with the fourth, Maharloka, or abode of the sages.<sup>2</sup> It was after this manner then that Hari, under the form of Brahmā, achieved the work of creation. But it must not be forgotten that 'Brahmā is only the instrumental cause of things to be created; the things that are capable of being created arise from *nature* as a common material cause. With the exception of one instrumental cause alone, there is no need of any other cause; for (imperceptible) substance becomes perceptible substance

<sup>1</sup> Dutt's translation reads that the water, surging up splashed the highly resplendent and sinless ascetics, Sananda and others, dwellers of the regions of Jana. The object of mentioning this is probably to let us realize the immensity of the boar. Because Janaloka is higher than Maharloka, and Maharloka is seventy million miles beyond the pole star!

<sup>2</sup> See Note 4 on 'The Three Worlds'; Maharloka is supposed to be only damaged, not destroyed by the conflagration.

according to the powers with which it is originally imbued.<sup>1</sup>

In the next chapter Parāshara proceeds to discourse on the work of creation in detail. To begin with he says, that immoveable things were created, and this he calls the first creation; animals, characterized by the quality of darkness were the second; gods in whom the quality of goodness predominated were the third; and man, largely influenced by the two qualities of passion and darkness, was the fourth. But he suddenly changes his mode of statement and tells us that these four with one other,<sup>2</sup> which he now mentions, are to be reckoned as 'secondary' creations, and that the first, second, and third creations are *Mahat*, the *Tan-mātras*, and *Aindriyaka*, or creation of the organs of sense, which should be termed 'primary.' The number of these creations, first given as four, and then as six, is finally said to be nine. In response to a further question, Parāshara undertakes to expound the origin of the fourfold condition of gods, men, animals and inanimate things. But in the very next sentence he proceeds to describe the four orders of beings, gods, demons, pitris or progenitors of

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Wilson's translation (p. 65) who gives in a note the illustration of a commentator that the cause of the budding of rice is in its own seed; and its development is from itself, though its growth takes place only at a determinate season, in consequence of the instrumental agency of the rain. Dutt's translation of this passage, seems to minimize the position of Brahmā. It is as follows: 'But in the matter of creation, he (Brahmā) was an instrument merely; as the force resident in the things created was the principal Cause.'

On the other hand, FitzEdward Hall expresses it thus: 'He (Brahmā) is only the ideal cause of the *potencies* to be created in the work of creation; and from him proceed the potencies to be created, after they have become the real cause. Save that one ideal cause, there is no other to which the world can be referred.' The comment is added that the author indicates that Brahma is a cause superior to *Pradhāna*.

<sup>2</sup> The one other, which he afterwards calls the eighth creation is Anugraha. Wilson says, it appears to have been borrowed from the Sāṅkhya. But the name is given and nothing more, save the statement that it is possessed by both goodness and ignorance. There is also a ninth creation, both primary and secondary, the Kaumāra. This refers to the creation of the four mind-born sons of Brahmā, already referred to; viz. Sananda, Sanat Kumāra, etc. who refused to beget offspring, and in consequence always remained boys (Kumāra). The confusion in some of these passages would indicate that the authors compiled their work from different sources, and did not seek to reconcile them.

the race, and men. First of all, demons arose. Brahmā, we are told, 'collected his mind into itself.' The quality of darkness prevailed, and the demons (Asuras) sprang from his thigh. The god cast off the form of darkness which he had assumed, and it became *Night*. The work of creation was then resumed, and Brahmā being well pleased, there issued from his mouth the gods in whom the quality of goodness prevailed. When the form of goodness had been cast off, even as darkness had been, it became day. And that is the reason why the demons are powerful by night and the gods more powerful by day. In the same way the pitris or progenitors were born from the side of Brahmā. On the occasion of their birth goodness also prevailed, and when the god cast aside the form he had assumed, it became the evening twilight. Finally man was born, from what part of the god's body it is not said,<sup>1</sup> but at man's birth the quality of activity or passion prevailed, and the form which was cast off became the morning twilight. And that is why men feel most energetic at the hour of dawn, even as the pitris feel the same at the other twilight.

Brahmā thereafter produced Hunger, and from Hunger Wrath was born. He produced, too, horrid creatures, wearing long beards, and emaciated from want of food. Whenever they saw the god, they rushed at him.

#### The origin of Rakshasas

Some called out, 'We shall eat him up,' and as a result they have since been called Yakshas, while the others said, 'Preserve him,' and for that reason they bear the name of *Rākshasas*.<sup>2</sup> The creatures looked so disgusting that Brahmā's hair shrivelled up and fell off his head. It grew on again, it is said. But in any case we are told that the hairs which fell off became serpents, and were called Sarpa and Ahi, because of what they had done.

<sup>1</sup> But see ch. vi.

<sup>2</sup> Dutt's translation is here followed. Wilson's translation is to the effect that the Yakshas said to Brahmā 'Let us eat' and the Rakshasas, 'Preserve us.' The Sanskrit words are *Yaksh*, to eat, and *Raksh*, to preserve. This story is told differently in the *Rāmāyana*.

The work of creation now proceeded apace. In his anger, consequent on what has just been recorded, the creator produced more evil spirits, but they were followed by Ghandarvas, imbibers of music, with every kind of beast and bird. Sheep sprang from his breast, goats from his mouth, cows from his thighs and abdomen; elephants, horses, deer, camels, a creature called Sharabha with eight legs, and other animals from his feet, while roots, herbs and fruit came from the hairs of his body. Having created animals and plants Brahmā employed them in sacrifices in the beginning of the Tretā age.<sup>1</sup> In conclusion, there issued from one or other of his four mouths, the Gāyātri verse, the *Rig Veda* and other Vedas, in whole or part, the Agnishtoma and other sacrifices with a variety of metres and hymns. It was after this manner then, that all living things, great and small, sprang from the limbs of the creator. And these living things, or creatures, 'discharged the same functions as they had fulfilled in a previous creation; good or bad, false or true, kind or cruel, they are what they are, because of what they have brought with them from a former existence.

The sage next described the origin of the four castes, with the duties incumbent upon each. The Brāhmins, in whom the quality of goodness prevailed, sprang from the mouth of the creator; the Kshatriyas, dominated by the quality of passion, came from his breast; the Vaishyas, under the joint influence of the second and third qualities, issued from his thighs; while the Shūdras, possessed by ignorance or darkness, originated from his feet. Brahmā created the four castes in order that they might perform sacrifices. When the gods are duly nourished by sacrificial offerings, they in their turn nourish mankind

<sup>1</sup> The Tretā age is the second of the four ages. Does this statement have relation to what one reads elsewhere that there were no sacrifices in the first or golden age? The text gives a list of animals, domestic and wild. In the manuscripts consulted by FitzEdward Hall *man* appears as one of them, and he says that the commentator observes that in the naramedha, or human sacrifice, man is accounted a sacrificial animal.

by sending rain. In this way, the performance of sacrifices is the source of human happiness and those, who walk in the path of duty and adhere to the rules laid down for them, will obtain what they desire, a place in heaven and final emancipation. When men were first created, they were happy and sinless. But Vishnu in that form of his which is called *Time*, 'infused into those beings direful sin' which grew in strength, until their natures were darkened by passion and desire. Afflicted by suffering, exposed to heat and cold, they began to build for themselves houses and forts, to dwell in villages and towns, to cultivate the fields and to labour with their hands. Of the seventeen different kinds of grain which they reaped, fourteen were suitable for sacrifice. As long as they continued to offer sacrifice, the race was sure of offspring, and men were delivered from the sins of which they had been guilty. But alas, the poison of sin grew in their hearts. The sacrifices were neglected; the Vedas were reviled; and not only the Vedas but the gods and those who respected the Vedas as well. This particular discourse ends with the statement that Brahmā allotted to each caste the means of subsistence suited to each, as well as the duties which they ought to perform.<sup>1</sup> He also assigned different regions in the upper world for those members of different castes and orders, who had duly observed the rules prescribed for them. The heavens of the Pitris or manes, of Indra, of the Maruts, and of the Gandharvas, respectively, will be the reward of devout Brāhmins, brave Kshatriyas, industrious Vaishyas and submissive Shūdras. As to the four stages of a Brāhmin's life,

<sup>1</sup> The Vāyu Purāna informs us that in the Krita age when men were first created, there was no distinction of caste or orders, and no mixture of castes; that in the Tretā age, Svayambhu established divisions among them according to their tendencies. Those who were rapacious and destructive, he ordained to be Kshatriyas, protectors of others. Those who spoke the truth and probed sacred knowledge were made Brāhmins. Those engaged in the work of slaughter, and who were active in connexion with the ground, were called Vaishyas, while those addicted to mental tasks were designated Shūdras. See Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. i. pp. 91 and 97, where a long extract is given from the Vāyu Purāna and which is deserving of study, because it shows where the two works both agree and differ, in their description of the work of creation and the origin of the four castes.

the Brahmachārī or student will go to the region inhabited by the 88,000 saints; the forest dweller or Vānaprastha will find a seat beside the seven rishis; the householder (Grihastha) will gain an entrance to the heaven of the Pitris and the religious mendicant (Sannyāsī) will secure a home in the world of Brahmā.<sup>1</sup> But the highest region of all is the 'supreme state of Vishnu,' whose inhabitants 'perpetually meditate' upon Brahma. That blessed sphere even the gods are not able to behold. Sun, moon and stars will be created and perish over and over again, but there is no return for those who mentally repeat the sacred name.<sup>2</sup>

Reference has already been made to certain mind-born sons of Brahmā, Sanandana and others, devoid of all desire to beget progeny. This refusal on their part compelled Brahmā to create more mind-born sons, nine in number, whose names are as follows: Bhṛigu, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Angiras, Atri, Marichi, Daksha and Vasishtha.<sup>3</sup> Brahmā was so angry with his first set of offspring for declining to have offspring that the fire of his wrath enveloped the three worlds, 'like a garland.' And his anger was embodied in a fierce and awful form called Rudra, which was half

**The origin of  
Rudra and  
Brahma's mind-  
born sons**

<sup>1</sup> The reader will notice that the heaven of the Pitris is twice mentioned for devout Brāhmins and pious householders. These householders would also be of the Brāhmin caste, because both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Laws of Manu* restrict the four modes or stages to the Brāhminical caste, though it is said that the life of the mendicant was permitted to the three inferior castes.

<sup>2</sup> Or the spell of the twelve syllables. It is OM Bhagavata Vāsudevāya Namah: OM! Salutation to Bhagavat Vāsudeva. Seven hells are named as the alternative for those who neglect their religious duties.

<sup>3</sup> These Brahmarshis or Prajāpatis (lords of creatures) seem to have been originally seven in number, the seven great Rishis or sages. Manu says there were ten; one narrative in the *Rāmāyana* says there were seventeen. The *Mahābhārata* (book I chapter lxxv) speaks of Brahmā's six mind-born sons, omitting the first and the two last of the Purāna's list. But it adds Bhṛigu and Daksha, as born from his breast and toe. Elsewhere it speaks of no less than twenty-one Prajāpatis. In these works, they are recognized as the progenitors of all living creatures; gods, demons, men and animals, either as secondary creators or by procreation. In the Vishnu Purāna both schemes seem to be involved. The next paragraph gives another list of the nine Prajāpatis, with *Bhava* instead of Daksha. But this difference was necessary in the second list, because we are there told that the second list of nine Prajāpatis married Daksha's daughters!

male, half female. In obedience to the command of the god, Rudra first of all separated these two portions of himself from one another, and then divided the male part into eleven persons, some of which were mild while others were fierce. As to the female portion it was multiplied into many forms of black and white complexions.

When this had taken place, Brahmā 'created the Manu Svāyambhuva' born of and identical with his original self, and the female portion of himself he constituted Shatarūpā.<sup>1</sup> These two portions of the god became husband and wife, and had two sons and two daughters.<sup>1</sup> One of these daughters was married to Daksha, one of the nine Prajāpatis, whose names have just been recorded, and the result of their union was twenty-five daughters. Thirteen of these girls were married to Dharma (righteousness).<sup>2</sup> The remainder found husbands among the Pitris and the Prajāpatis.<sup>3</sup> The names of all these ladies are entirely symbolical: e.g., Faith, Prosperity, Modesty, Fame, Truth, Memory, Oblation and Expiation. The children born to Dharma were also, as far as the lists show, of the feminine gender. But the names these children bear are of a less lofty order. Prosperity gave birth to a daughter called Pride; Faith was the mother

<sup>1</sup> For a somewhat different reading of this passage which I have quoted from Wilson (see Muir's *Original Sanskrit Text*, vol. i. p. 65) and the comments of both, on the confused and inconsistent accounts of creation, which this and other Purānas contain. The reader should compare with these narratives, the three accounts of creation in my *Summary of the Laws of Manu*, pp. 17 and 23.

<sup>2</sup> Dharma is here mentioned without any reference to his birth. He is sometimes included in lists of the Prajāpatis. His opposite, Adharma (vice) is still more abruptly set before us. Wilson says that the *Linga Purāna* includes both Dharma and Adharma in its list of Prajāpatis. It is more usual to speak of Daksha's sixty daughters.

<sup>3</sup> Manu's other daughter married a Prajāpati called Ruchi. They had a son and daughter, who married, and had as issue, twelve sons, who held rank as gods and were called Yāmas, in the *Manwantara* of their great grand-father.

The Pitris, manes or spirits of the dead, are not merely any one individual's particular ancestors, to whom worship is paid, but primeval deities, as Manu expresses it, the progenitors of gods, demons and other beings. See *Summary of the Laws of Manu*, p. 41 for the *Worship of the Manes*.

of Desire. Thriving had Cupidity; Resignation, Content; Modesty, Good Behaviour; and Expiation, Prosperity.

Another being called Adharma or vice, of whose origin nothing is said, married Violence, and they had a son and daughter, Falsehood and Immorality, who, marrying in turn, had two sons and two daughters, named Fear, Hell, Deceit, and Torture. The same system of inter-marriage continuing between brothers and sisters, resulted in more offspring, Pain and Death, Diseases Decay, Sorrow, Greed and Wrath. Happily at this stage, these vicious creatures ceased to multiply. They had no more children. But as the 'terrific forms of Vishnu' they continue to act perpetually in the destruction of this world.<sup>1</sup> But there is another influence at work also, the influence of Daksha, Marichi, Atri and Bhrigu, as well as that of the Manus and their sons, and these all assist in securing the world's preservation.

The previous section has told us of how Rudra was born from the anger of Brahmā, and divided the masculine portion of himself into eleven parts. We are now presented with another account of that god's origin. In the beginning of the Kalpa, when Brahmā had resolved to create a son, who should resemble himself, there appears before him a youth of purple hue, weeping and running here and there. When the god asked why he was weeping, the youth said that he wanted a name, to which Brahmā replied, 'Your name is Rudra, have patience and do not cry any more.'<sup>2</sup> But the youth went on weeping, no less than seven times, and for each time he got another name, and another person. As a result the one Rudra became eight Rudras, each with a sphere of his own, and a wife of his own, and progeny as well. The eight names or rather the eight manifesta-

<sup>1</sup> The terrific forms of Vishnu are, of course, those of Rudra or Shiva.  
<sup>2</sup> Rud, to weep, and Dru, to run. It was thus he got his name, because he wept and ran.

tions, are: Rudra, Bhava, Sharva, Ishāna, Pashupati, Bhīma, Ugra, and Mahādeva. The eight spheres allotted to him are: the sun, water, earth, air, fire, ether, the moon, and 'the ministrant Brāhmin.' Of the eight wives, three of the best known names are Umā, Rohini and Sati.<sup>1</sup>

As the result of a question addressed to him by his disciple, Parāshara now begins a hymn in praise of Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu. She was 'the mother of the world, eternal and imperishable.' Vishnu was the creator, she was creation; he was desire, she was wish; he was sacrifice, she was the sacrificial gift; he was the altar, she was the stake to which the victim was bound; he was righteousness, she was devotion; he was the ocean, she was the shore; he was Indra, Shiva and other gods, while she was their wives; she was the creeper, he was the tree to which it clings; she was night and he was day. But, as the Purāna itself says, why dwell on this subject any more? Vishnu is everything that is called male, while Lakshmi is everything that is female. 'There is nothing else than they.'

The circumstances under which Lakshmi was born from the sea of milk took their origin in a curse which was uttered by the sage Durvāsa against Indra, the king of heaven.<sup>2</sup> Parāshara had stated that she was the daughter of Bhrigu the mind-born son of Brahmā, and so she was, but that was in a former birth. Her second origin was from the sea of milk, when gods and demons churned that ocean to obtain amrita, the liquor that confers immortality. To return to Durvāsa, that bad tempered

<sup>1</sup> Sati was a daughter of Daksha, and the text says she abandoned her corporal existence in consequence of her father's displeasure. Here is a reference to the famous sacrifice of Daksha. The text adds that in her next birth, she married the god under the name of Umā.

<sup>2</sup> Parāshara remarked that Shri (Lakshmi) the wife of Nārāyana, the god of gods, was a daughter of Bhrigu the Prajāpati. Maitreya expressed his surprise at such a statement, as he had always understood that she was born at the churning of the ocean. Shri had two brothers Dhātri and Vidhātri. Their mother was a daughter of Daksha. It is more usual to identify these two brothers with the creator.

saint one day compelled a spirit of the air (Vidyādhari) to give him a garland she was wearing. This garland had a wonderful fragrance and was made of flowers, gathered from the trees of heaven. As he journeyed through the earth bearing the garland on his brow, Durvāsa met the god Indra riding on his elephant Airāvata, and attended by the other deities. Taking the garland from his brow, Durvāsa threw it to Indra, who caught it and placed it on the elephant's head. But the foolish beast seized the garland and cast it on the ground. The saint was very angry at this double insult to the gift he had conferred upon the god, and after using the most abusive language, calling the deity both an idiot and a fool, swore that he would be deprived of his sovereignty over the three worlds. He added that he must not think that he, Durvāsa, was like other Brāhmins who increased the pride of the gods by their hymns of praise. Other saints and ascetics might relent, but he never would. Forgiveness was foreign to his nature,<sup>1</sup> and he never felt pity or remorse. By this time, Indra had got off his elephant and was kneeling at the sage's feet. But Durvāsa told him he need not waste words, nor assume the attitude of humility. Even as he had cast the garland to the ground, so would his dominion over the three worlds be cast down and overwhelmed.

As he uttered these awful words, Durvāsa went his way. And sure enough, the effect of the curse was soon apparent. Prosperity ceased from the universe. Indra lost his strength; trees, plants and herbs withered. Men ceased to render sacrifice, to practice asceticism, to offer gifts; they lost control over themselves also, and yielded to desire and greed. This gave an oppor-

**The awful effects of his curse**

<sup>1</sup> Dutt's translation reads, 'But me thou must know as Durvāsa, who is nothing if not unforgiving.' This is the Durvāsa, whose cruel and unforgiving nature leads to the death of both Krishna and Rama, incarnations of Vishnu. See the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*. The Purāna says Durvāsa was a portion of Shiva; but Durvāsa is also spoken of as a son of Atri the Prajāpati. His mother was Anasūyā. He is probably the most repulsive saint in all Sanskrit literature. He says to Indra, 'Who is there in the universe, that can behold my countenance dark with frowns and surrounded by my blazing hair, and not tremble?' Wilson, vol. i. p. 137.

tunity to the Dānavas and Daityas<sup>1</sup> which these demons at once seized, and they began to wage war against the gods. The result was that the gods were put to flight. They fled to Brahmā and reported all that had taken place. The creator, here spoken of as the Grandfather, said they must go to Vishnu. He would most certainly help them. He always took pity on the humble. He was the supreme god, the causeless cause of all things.

Thus encouraged, and with Brahmā at their head, the deities made their way to the northern shore of the milky

**The gods appeal to Vishnu**

ocean. Brahmā was their spokesman, and he addressed a long hymn of praise, to the supreme Hari. Among other things, Brahmā said that the power to create the universe resided in 'but a part of but the ten-millionth part of Vishnu,' and that neither himself nor Shiva had ever been able to apprehend him. He was Prakriti, Mahat and the rest of the categories. He was cause and effect. He was the one lord of all, whose triple energy is revealed in Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva, and whom the Yogis contemplate, as revealed through the sacred letters OM. They came to him, therefore, as the great soul of all, the asylum of all, begging him to have pity on his servants and to reveal himself to them. When Brahmā had finished his address, the other gods joined in the entreaty with bowed heads, asking that Vishnu might be so gracious as to manifest himself to them and to hear their cry. They were succeeded by Brihaspati, the priest of the celestials, and the great Rishis, who recited the names of the deities who were present. In addition to Brahmā, there were Shiva of the three eyes, the Rudras, Pūshan and the Adityas, Agni the god of fire, the Ashwins, the Vasus, the Sādhyas, the Viswadevas, the Maruts and Indra the king of the gods, all of whom had gathered as the rishis said to obtain Vishnu's help

<sup>1</sup> The Dānavas and Daityas were according to the *Rāmāyana*, the sons of Danu and Diti, wives of the rishi Kashyapa, who was a son of Marichi, one of the mind-born sons of Brahmā. These demons are here spoken of generally as Asuras, who, as the Purāna indicates, were the older brothers of the gods.

against the demons. The supreme deity no longer concealed himself, and to the immense joy of the celestials, he stood forth, bearing a shell, a discus and a mace. This gracious manifestation evoked another hymn of praise, in which Vishnu was told that he was all the deities already mentioned, with others in addition such as Varuna, Savitri and Yama. 'O universal soul, the whole world consists of thee.' Their last words were, 'in union with the goddess who is thy strength, protect us by thy great power.'

Vishnu at once promised to endow the gods with such vigour that they would be able to overthrow their enemies. His plan was that they should churn the sea of milk and invite the Asuras to assist them in the operation.

**The churning  
of the ocean**

They were to use Mount Mandara as their churning stick, and the serpent Vāsuki as their rope. The god himself, in the form of a tortoise, was to serve as the pivot, on which the mountain would revolve. The product of their toil would be Amrita, the liquor that confers immortality. To obtain the assistance of the Asuras, it would be necessary to conclude a peace with them and promise that they would share equally in the Amrita and thereby secure strength and immortality. Vishnu added, however, that he would take good care that the demons would never taste the amrita. The only share they would get, would be the hard work involved. In obedience to Vishnu's instructions, the gods approached the demons, made peace with them on the terms indicated, and when certain medicinal herbs had been cast into the waters, applied themselves to the work. The gods took up their station near the serpent's tail, the demons beside the head and neck. The result was that the

**The tortoise  
Incarnation**

latter were scorched by the flames that poured forth from Vāsuki's hood, while the clouds, driven towards his tail by the breath of his mouth, refreshed the gods with revivifying showers. In addition to acting as a pivot for the mountain, Vishnu assumed other forms as well. He took his place among the gods and demons, giving assistance in the dragging of

the serpent rope, while with other portions of his energy he imparted strength to both Vāsuki and the gods. And all the while he sat invisible on a lofty mountain.

The first product of the Sea of Milk, was not the Amrita, which the toilers sought. It was the cow *Surabhi*, a sight which filled all beholders with mingled amazement and delight. She was followed by *Vārūṇī* the goddess of wine, her eyes rolling in a

**The demons  
cheated and  
overthrown**

drunken frenzy. Next came the celestial tree, *Pārijāta*, followed by great numbers of *Apsarasas*, the nymphs of heaven, the *Moon* who was seized by Mahādeva, and *Poison* of which the Nāgas took charge. After these *Dhanwantari*, the physician of the gods, emerged. In his hands he bore a cup filled with amrita. But the joy, which both gods and demons experienced at the sight of it, was soon surpassed by the last product of the Ocean, 'Seated on a full blown lotus, and holding a water lily in her hand, the goddess *Shri*, radiant with beauty, rose from the waves.' The great rishis and the choirs of heaven at once began to sing her praise. The Ganges and other sacred streams appeared on the scene, that she might bathe in their waters. The task of bathing the goddess was assumed by the guardian elephants of the skies, who used golden vessels for the purpose. The sea of milk presented her with a garland of undying flowers, and Vishvakarmā, the divine architect, adorned her person with beautiful ornaments. When the goddess had been thus prepared she cast herself upon the bosom of Hari and, there reclining, turned her eyes upon the deities who were filled with rapture by her gaze. The demons however were in other case. The goddess of prosperity had not looked at them, and they felt themselves forsaken. They were determined to make a fight however for what they had laboured to obtain. They took possession of the cup. But Vishnu, assuming a female form, so fascinated and deluded them that they forgot to drink it. The gods thereupon seized it and divided it among themselves. A great fight ensued. The celestials, however, had obtained new strength, and easily put the

demons to flight. Nor did the demons pause till they had found refuge in the lowest depths of hell. The happiness of the world was restored. The sun shone brightly in the sky. Indra once more reigned in heaven. That deity in token of his gratitude uttered a lengthy hymn in praise of Lakshmi. It was rather a prayer that she would not forsake the world again, but always bless mankind with wives, children, dwellings, friends, harvests and wealth. All these things, he said, were easily obtained if she would only smile upon them. Lakshmi gave a gracious answer and promised that she would never forsake any mortal who, morning and evening, repeated the hymn which Indra had just uttered.<sup>1 2</sup>

The reader will remember the description of Manu Svāyambhuva, the Son of Brahmā. This Manu, the first of the fourteen Manus, had a son, named Uttānapāda, who was the father of two children by different wives. One day, when Uttānapāda was seated on his throne, fondling the son of his favourite wife, his other child, called Dhruva, approached and asked his father to take him upon his knee, beside his brother. But Dhruva's stepmother, who was standing near, intervened and rudely asked what right he had to ask for such a favour. He was only the son of an inferior wife and must not dream of ever enjoying the privilege of sitting on a throne. Dhruva was

<sup>1</sup> Neither the *Rāmāyana* nor the *Mahābhārata*, make mention of Durvasa as the indirect cause of Vishnu's appearance as the tortoise incarnation. They say that the churning of the ocean was agreed on by gods and demons with a view to the securing of the Amrita. Presumably up to that neither gods nor demons were immortal. Both refer to Vishnu's trick and his preventing the demons from getting their just share. Though both of them speak of which was produced from the Sea of Milk, they merely refer to it. The poison The *Rāmāyana* makes it plain that this was an act of the highest importance. The gods appealed to Shiva to save them. But in a Purāna devoted to Vishnu, one does not expect to see such credit paid to another god. See my *Summaries of the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata* for their version of the story.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter x. gives an account of the descendants of the daughters of Daksha, married to Marichi, Angiras and the other mind-born sons of Brahmā; e.g. Kratu's wife gave birth to 60,000 Valikhilyas, no bigger than a joint of the thumb; Pulastya is said to be the father of Agastya, whose origin is explained otherwise in the Epics; and Bhṛigu as we saw was the father of Lakshmi.

only five years old; nevertheless he was very angry at these observations, and went off in a passion to his mother's room. When he had told his story, she urged him not to grieve. He must be reconciled to his fate. A kingly throne and royal umbrella would never be his portion. He was not the son of the favourite wife. And she humbly acknowledged that both she and Dhruva must be suffering for sins they had committed in a former life, even as their successful rivals were being rewarded for the merit they had accumulated. At the same time, while she imparted these words of consolation, she pointed out that if he was still unable to be resigned, it was always possible to acquire merit and make his future better than his past. She brought her observations to an end by remarking that prosperity was always the portion of a meek and humble heart. To this wise counsel, however, Dhruva replied by saying that he would so exert himself, as to make his name renowned throughout the world. He would achieve and by his own unaided efforts a position such as his father had never enjoyed.

And without further delay, the child set out upon his task. Leaving his father's capital, he had not gone far when he came to a forest, where he saw seven ascetics who proved to be the seven rishis.<sup>1</sup> Dhruva approached them with the greatest reverence, and bowing humbly at their feet, said that he was tired of life and had come to seek their help. The rishis were greatly surprised, and asked how a child not more than four or five years old, the son of a king too, free from disease and sorrow, whose every want was satisfied, could be so discontented. When Dhruva had told the story of his wrongs, the ascetics could only marvel at a child so young cherishing such resentful feelings, but they ascribed it to

<sup>1</sup> Their names are given a little later; Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu and Vasishtha. The seven rishis or sages (saptarshis) are frequently spoken of in this and other ancient books. They are identified with the mind-born sons of Brahmā, or the Prajāpatis (lords of creatures) as is proved by the reference in an earlier chapter of the Purāna. That passage however speaks of nine, adding the names of Bhṛigu and Daksha, to the seven mentioned here (ch. vii).

the fact that he belonged to the passionate warrior caste. Nevertheless they asked him what he proposed doing, and to say plainly how he thought they could help him. The child replied that he wished neither wealth nor royal dignity. But he was resolved to reach such a station as no one before him had ever acquired. The seven rishis whose names are now recorded, each severally replied to this appeal. And their answers were all to the same effect. The person who propitiated Vishnu could get anything he desired.<sup>1</sup> 'You have told me,' said Dhruva, 'the god I ought to worship, recite to me the prayer that will please him best.' When they had first of all explained to the child that he must concentrate his mind steadily and keep it under control, emptying it of all 'external impressions,' they repeated these words. 'OM, glory to Vāsudeva, whose essence is divine wisdom, whose form is unscrutable, who is manifest as Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva.' He must recite it constantly, in a voice which would be inaudible to others.<sup>2</sup>

When he had received these instructions, Dhruva took a respectful farewell of the rishis, and went off to a place called the grove of Madhu,<sup>3</sup> situated on the banks of the Jumna. At this sacred spot, where Vishnu himself dwells, and which cleanses the worshipper of all sins, the child began the practice of penance and engaged in the contemplation of the deity in accordance with the forms, prescribed by the sages. And as a result, Vishnu so filled his heart, that the earth

**Dhruva's  
penance  
alarms the  
gods**

<sup>1</sup> Vishnu is here variously spoken of as Govinda, Vāsudeva, Achyuta (the undecaying), Janārdana, Hari and the supreme Brahmā.

<sup>2</sup> The reader will remember the dictum of Manu. 'A muttered prayer is ten times more efficacious than a sacrifice; a prayer inaudible to others, surpasses it a 100 times; and a mental recitation of sacred texts a 1000 times' (ii. 85). See *Summary of Manu*, p. 12. Wilson remarks that, 'the instructions of the rishis amount to the performance of the Yoga.' This prayer is translated by FitzEdward Hall as follows: 'OM, Glory to Vāsudeva, who has the form of Hiraṇyagarbha, and of soul, and of Pradhāna when not yet evolved, and who possesses the nature of pure intelligence.'

<sup>3</sup> The text tells us that this grove of Madhu, got its name from Madhu, father of Lavana, who was slain by Rāma's brother Shatrughna, and that after slaying the demon, Shatrughna built a city there and called it Mathurā. A very full account of the achievements of Shatrughna is to be found in the last book of the *Rāmāyana*.

could not bear the weight of the god-possessed devotee. When he stood on his right foot, one half of the world sank down; when he stood on his left foot, the other hemisphere bent beneath the burden. Again, when he stood on his toes, the whole world, with its mountains, rivers and seas, shook and was troubled. The celestials were equally distressed, and in consultation with Indra, took steps to interfere with and destroy the powerful penances of Dhruva.<sup>1</sup> One of them assumed the guise of his mother, and begged him to desist, as he was injuring his health. Childhood was intended to be spent in play. When he grew old, he could pray as much as he liked. Besides, he was leaving her all alone, unprotected and helpless. But Dhruva was so engrossed in his meditations, that he never even saw the false disguise which would have lured him from his prayers. Nor did he see, or if he saw, he did not heed, the horrid evil spirits, the goblins, and jackals, calling out to one another, 'kill him, tear him in pieces, eat him up.' All these illusions, vomiting fire, brandishing swords, and uttering awe-inspiring cries, made no impression whatever on his mind, and the gods had to confess themselves entirely baffled. They accordingly resolved to go and see Vishnu, in the hope that he would help them. When they had praised that deity in the usual manner, they explained how much they were 'distressed by the austerities of Dhruva.' They could not tell what he was aspiring to. It might be that he sought to overthrow Indra or the Sun. Perhaps he would be satisfied with the lordship of the ocean, or the wealth of the god Kuvera. Vishnu however soon set the minds of the celestials at rest. He said they need not be afraid. Dhruva was plotting against none of the deities they had mentioned. Neither Indra, nor Varuna, neither the Sun, nor the god of riches, had any cause for anxiety. The child had other ambitions, which he proposed to satisfy,

<sup>1</sup> The celestials are here called Yamas and Kūshmandas. The Yamas were the great-grand children of Suāyam Bhuva, the first Manu and held the rank of deities during his period. They were twelve in number. (See ch. vii.) The Kūshmandas are said to be 'a class of demi-gods or demons in the service of Shiva' (Dowson).

and their gratification would bring his penances to a close. The deities were greatly delighted to receive this information, and after making appropriate farewell salutations, went off, headed by Indra, to their respective abodes.

When the gods had departed, Vishnu addressed his worshipper, and bade him ask a boon. When he heard the voice, Dhruva opened his eyes and was filled with awe and rapture on realizing that he was privileged to see the four-armed god. His one thought was, how can I praise him as I ought, and he answered, 'Give me power to do this and I am content, because my heart is overflowing with devotion to thee.' In reply, Vishnu touched Dhruva with the 'tip of the conch shell' he was carrying, and the child at once began to sing a hymn of praise.<sup>1</sup> In this hymn, Vishnu's forms were said to be like the five grosser elements, (earth, air, fire, water and ether), mind, intellect, consciousness, Nature and Spirit.<sup>2</sup> He was also said to be Brahma, devoid of qualities, and the primeval male with a thousand feet, a thousand eyes and heads. The three Vedas, sacrifice, oblations, curds, clarified butter, horses, cows, sheep, goats and deer were all born from him, while the four castes sprang from his head, arms, thighs and feet. The sun came from his eyes, the wind from his ears, fire from his mouth, heaven from his head, the sky from his navel and the earth from his feet. In fact, the whole world had its origin in him, even as the seed of the fig tree contained the fig tree itself in germ. When he had brought his hymn to a close, Dhruva protested that in obtaining a vision of the god he had obtained all he wanted. But Vishnu graciously observed that while that no doubt was true, he wished him to say what boon he yet desired. Thus encouraged, Dhruva told the story of his wrongs, at the hands of his step-mother, and said he was resolved to achieve a position higher than that

**Dhruva is  
raised to the  
skies**

<sup>1</sup> Vishnu carried a discus, shell, mace, bow and scimitar.

<sup>2</sup> These are categories of the Sāṅkhya; mind, intellect, consciousness nature and spirit are manas, buddhi, ahankāra, prakṛiti and puruṣa.

held by all others, and one, too, that would last for ever. The god replied that his prayer was granted. Some of the celestials only lived through the four ages, some for the age of a manu. But Dhruva's life would continue for the whole period of a Kalpa. Those who worshipped Vishnu obtained emancipation, and one so devout, so absorbed in devotion as Dhruva was, did not look on heaven as a reward of any real value. He therefore proposed to raise him to a *station*<sup>1</sup> which was higher than heaven, higher than the three worlds, higher than the Sun, Moon and Stars, higher even than the dwelling place of the seven rishis. His mother, too, would be changed into a star, and for a period of time equal to his own, would dwell beside him in the skies, while those who sang his praise, both morning and evening, would acquire great religious merit. The Purāna tells us nothing more about Dhruva's encounter with the god. It says however, that, in virtue of this boon, Dhruva occupies his lofty position in the skies, and that those who repeat the story of his translation to these upper worlds, will, in this life, be blessed with every kind of happiness, and after death, purged of all their sins, obtain a place in Indra's heaven.

Apparently Dhruva was not translated right away. For the next chapter tells us of his marriage, and of his sons and grandsons. It is however a mere list of names for eight generations, until we come to a very wicked king of the name of Vena. As soon as this person had been placed on the throne of his father by the rishis, he issued a proclamation commanding his subjects to cease worshipping the gods. They were to offer no sacrifices or oblations, and to give no gifts to Brāhmins, because he, as their king, was the lord of sacrifice, and no one was entitled to receive gifts except himself. The rishis, over and over again, tried to prevent Vena from acting so foolishly. They pointed out that the prosperity of the world and

<sup>1</sup> This *station* so mysteriously referred to in the text is the *pole star*, still spoken of in India, as *Dhruva-tāra*. The seven rishis are said to inhabit the seven stars of the *Great Bear* or plough.

of its inhabitants depended on the regularity with which worship and sacrifice were performed, and that no one could hope for happiness who neglected to worship Hari. But Vena scornfully asked who Hari was. In fact he recited the names of quite a number of gods, and said that if there were any others, in addition to these, who hurled curses and conferred boons, they were all parts of himself, for a king was 'made up of all that was divine.' He therefore advised these holy men to go and do what they were told. It was as necessary for them to obey him as for a wife to obey her husband. When the rishis saw that their patient pleading was of no avail, they lost control of themselves and rushed on the king with one accord. In their hands were blades of sacrificial grass, and with these blades they smote him so severely that he died. But before they smote him, he was really dead already, smitten by his own impiety, when he reviled the lord of sacrifice, the god immortal. By his own words and deeds he had shown that he was not fit to rule the earth.

Vena's death was, however, immediately followed by consequences of a disastrous nature. A great dust was seen, rising all around, and when the rishis asked the cause, the people told them that, as the earth was now without a king, wicked men had begun to rob their neighbours. The rishis realized that they must take action without delay and find a successor to Vena, who had left no son to succeed him on the throne. They accordingly began to rub the dead king's thigh, with the object of creating progeny. But the rubbing produced an ugly dwarf, black as charcoal, with broad flat features. As soon as he was born, this creature said to the rishis, 'What am I to do?' They told him to sit down (*nishāda*), for which reason he got the name of *Nishāda*. His descendants, said *Parāshara*, continue to bear his name. They live among the *Vindhya* hills and inherit the depraved appearance and condition of their ancestor.<sup>1</sup> Their birth, however,

<sup>1</sup> The reader will compare with this contemptuous reference of the Purāna, the affectionate treatment which Guha, king of the *Nishādas*, obtained at the hands of Rāma, as recorded in the *Rāmāyana*.

had served a useful purpose. The wickedness of king Vena passed into their bodies, and he was thus purged of his sins. Having thus disposed of the dead king's iniquities, the rishis began to rub his right arm. As a result of this massage, a son named Prithu was born, so glorious in his appearance that it seemed as if the god of fire himself was revealed. This birth was a source of great joy to the world. *Brahmā* and the other gods took part in his coronation, a work in which the whole creation, animate and inanimate, was associated. The seas and rivers, in particular, brought water and pearls, for the bathing and adornment of the new ruler. *Brahmā* examined the right hand of Prithu, and was pleased to observe that it was impressed with the discus of Vishnu, because every king who is destined to be a universal monarch has the discus visible on his hand.<sup>1</sup> Another consequence of Prithu's birth was that his father obtained deliverance from the hell called *Put*, and ascended to the upper world.<sup>2</sup>

Prithu soon righted the wrongs from which the people had suffered at the hands of his father. The waters became solid when he sought to walk upon them. The mountains yielded a path to his feet. There was no need to plough the fields. Food could be got without the

<sup>1</sup> The title of *Chakravartin*, which came to be equivalent to universal monarch, is often claimed for ancient kings. The *Ashvamedha* or horse sacrifice, was performed by those monarchs who laid claim to universal dominion. For illustration of this consult both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*. During the Gupta empire, several of the kings belonging to that dynasty celebrated this sacrifice as an assertion of their paramount sovereignty. The last was *Adityasena*, in A.D. 647. According to the text, says Wilson, a *Chakravartin* is one in whom the *chakra* (discus of Vishnu) abides (*varṭate*) but he adds that the grammatical etymology is: 'He who abides in, or rules over, an extensive territory called a *chakra*.'

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the belief that a son delivers (*trayate*) his father from the hell called *put*, for which reason the son is called *putra* (*put-tra*). *Laws of Manu*. ix. 138. See *Summary*, pp. 6, 60, 83, 87, and *Summary of Mahābhārata*, pp. 29 and 86, for stories of *Jaratkāru* and *Agastya*. The reader has noted the derivation of the name *Nishāda*; a later paragraph tells us that Prithu got the title of *Rājah* or king, because the people were pleased with him; from *rāg*, passion or affection. Wilson observes that the more obvious etymology is *rāj*, to shine, or be splendid.

least trouble. All cows were like the cow of plenty.<sup>1</sup> There was honey 'stored in every flower.' At a sacrifice performed by Brahmā, two bards, Sūta and Māgadha were born.<sup>2</sup> When told to sing the praises of the king, they said it was a task beyond their powers. But when they had been assisted by the rishis, they sang to the effect that a king is truthful, generous and faithful to his word; wise, patient, brave and kind; a terror to his foes, but respectful to the aged, a performer of sacrifices, and a friend to Brāhmins; impartial in the administration of justice, and the encourager of those who do well. As he listened to these words, the king stored them up in his mind, and resolved that he would strive to merit such words of praise; resolved also that he would avoid the evil practices which they said he should shun.

Despite what we have just read of the wonderful prosperity men enjoyed under the rule of Prithu, the Purāna now says that as a result of the anarchy, consequent on his father's death, the world was so afflicted by famine that his subjects told him that if he did not take immediate action, they would all perish of hunger. When he heard this urgent appeal, Prithu at once seized his bow, and went forth to punish the earth for refusing to yield her harvests. The earth, realizing that the king had come to punish her, assumed the form of a cow, and took refuge in flight. The pursuit was long and arduous. Nor did the cow come to a halt till she had traversed the region of Brahmā and the heavenly spheres. By that time, seeing that Prithu was still following hard after her, she stopped and cried aloud for mercy, emphasizing the fact that it was reckoned a great crime to kill a female. But Prithu replied that when the happiness of multitudes

<sup>1</sup> For the cow of plenty, Kāmdhenu, identified with Surabhi, the cow produced at the churning of the Ocean, see the various references in the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*. She was able to satisfy every desire of her owner, Vasishtha.

<sup>2</sup> The names of Sūta and Māgadha appear in Manu's list of degraded castes or out-castes. See *Summary of Laws of Manu*, pp. 96, 97, 103. The Sūtas became the charioteer caste, says Manu; being the offspring of a Kshatriya and a Brahmin woman. The Māgadhas born from a Vaisya father and a Kshatriya mother were minstrels who sang before a king.

depended on the death of one so wicked as she was, her execution would be an act of virtue. After some further parley, during which the earth asked how vegetables could grow if she were killed, it was finally agreed that if the king would provide a calf, she would be able to yield milk. The calf, when provided, proved to be no less a being than Manu Svāyambhuva. How this great person was changed into a calf is not explained. But the object in view was somehow secured. Milk began to flow and vegetables were obtained in sufficient quantities to maintain mankind. The earth made another condition. She said that it would be necessary to level her, so that the milk would be able to flow along the ground. This Prithu did, although it involved uprooting mountains, covering many thousands of miles of the earth's surface. To this statement Parāshara adds another to the effect that before the time of Prithu 'there were no defined boundaries of villages and towns, there was no cultivation, no pasture, no agriculture, no highways for merchants.' On the ground thus levelled the king erected houses for the people, who before he came to their assistance, had experienced great difficulty in procuring food. Prithu's example was followed by the gods, demons, spirits of the dead, Gandharvas, mountains and trees. They too milked the earth and obtained from it what they happened to desire. They had their own particular milkers, calves and vessels.<sup>1</sup> It must not be forgotten that the Earth is the mother and nourisher of all created things. She herself sprang from the sole of Vishnu's foot. But because Prithu forgave her, and did not take her life, she became as it were his daughter,

<sup>1</sup> The *Vishnu Purāna* does not give any details about these particular milkers, calves and vessels. But the other Purānas do. Wilson, quoting from the *Matsya Purāna*, says that Brihaspati acted as the milker for the rishis, while Soma was their calf, the Vedas their vessel, and devotion the milk. Again, the milker of the gods was Mitra, Indra the calf, and superhuman power the produce. For the mountains, Meru was the milker, Himavat the calf, while the milk was herbs and gems. Wilson observes that 'these mystifications are all probably subsequent modifications of the original simple allegory which typified the earth as a cow, who yielded to every class of beings the milk they desired, or the objects of their wishes.' It will be remembered that Prithu was a descendant of Manu Svāyambhuva who, with his wife Shatrupa, sprang from the god Brahmā.

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<sup>1</sup> For the cow of plenty, Kāmdhenu, identified with Surabhi, the cow produced at the churning of the Ocean, see the various references in the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*. She was able to satisfy every desire of her owner, Vasishtha.

<sup>2</sup> The names of Sūta and Māgadha appear in Manu's list of degraded castes or out-castes. See *Summary of Laws of Manu*, pp. 96, 97, 103. The Sūtas became the charioteer caste, says Manu; being the offspring of a Kshatriya and a Brahmin woman. The Māgadhas born from a Vaiśya father and a Kshatriya mother were minstrels who sang before a king.

depended on the death of one so wicked as she was, her execution would be an act of virtue. After some further parley, during which the earth asked how vegetables could grow if she were killed, it was finally agreed that if the king would provide a calf, she would be able to yield milk. The calf, when provided, proved to be no less a being than Manu Svāyambhuva. How this great person was changed into a calf is not explained. But the object in view was somehow secured. Milk began to flow and vegetables were obtained in sufficient quantities to maintain mankind. The earth made another condition. She said that it would be necessary to level her, so that the milk would be able to flow along the ground. This Prithu did, although it involved uprooting mountains, covering many thousands of miles of the earth's surface. To this statement Parāshara adds another to the effect that before the time of Prithu 'there were no defined boundaries of villages and towns, there was no cultivation, no pasture, no agriculture, no highways for merchants.' On the ground thus levelled the king erected houses for the people, who before he came to their assistance, had experienced great difficulty in procuring food. Prithu's example was followed by the gods, demons, spirits of the dead, Gandharvas, mountains and trees. They too milked the earth and obtained from it what they happened to desire. They had their own particular milkers, calves and vessels.<sup>1</sup> It must not be forgotten that the Earth is the mother and nourisher of all created things. She herself sprang from the sole of Vishnu's foot. But because Prithu forgave her, and did not take her life, she became as it were his daughter,

<sup>1</sup> The *Vishnu Purāna* does not give any details about these particular milkers, calves and vessels. But the other Purānas do. Wilson, quoting from the *Matsya Purāna*, says that Brihaspati acted as the milker for the rishis, while Soma was their calf, the Vedas their vessel, and devotion the milk. Again, the milker of the gods was Mitra, Indra the calf, and superhuman power the produce. For the mountains, Meru was the milker, Himavat the calf, while the milk was herbs and gems. Wilson observes that 'these mystifications are all probably subsequent modifications of the original simple allegory which typified the earth as a cow, who yielded to every class of beings the milk they desired, or the objects of their wishes.' It will be remembered that Prithu was a descendant of Manu Svāyambhuva who, with his wife Shatrupa, sprang from the god Brahmā.

for which reason she received the name of Prithivi. Those who repeat the story of the birth of Prithu will not be punished for any sin they may have committed, while even those who listen to its recital, will be delivered from their distresses.

The names of Prithu's descendants to the third and fourth generations are recorded in the Purāna, but none of them are of any note, until we reach his great grandson, of whom it is recorded that he was the first to place the sacrificial grass on the earth, with its tips pointing to the east. He, in turn, had ten sons, each bearing the name Prachetas. The god Brahmā, we are told, was greatly exercised as to the need of multiplying mankind, and he approached these young men, through their father, to take the necessary steps to gratify him. As the propitiation of Vishnu was recognized as the only way to get one's wishes realized, the ten brothers gave themselves up to the work of praising Vishnu for a period of 10,000 years. This long period of asceticism was spent in the depths of the ocean. At the end of that time, Vishnu appeared to his worshippers, and told them that their prayer was granted, and they would be able to achieve the propagation of mankind. When the Prachetasas came up out of the ocean, they were greatly distressed to find that during their long absence, the wind had ceased to blow, owing to the earth being over-run with great trees. In consequence of this, the human race, unable to work and unable to breathe, had perished.<sup>1</sup> The ascetics were very angry when they saw what had happened. Indeed, fire and wind came out of their mouths at such a rate that the huge forests were consumed entirely off the face of the earth. At this point the Moon appeared on the scene, and asked them to restrain their wrath. In the first place he proposed that the brothers should come to terms of friendship with the few trees that were left, and secondly, to ratify this friendship, he offered them in marriage, a damsel called

**The ten  
Prachetasas,  
the fathers of  
Daksha**

<sup>1</sup> This destruction of the race, as we shall find, involved a new creation of men by the agency of Daksha.

Mārishā, who was the offspring of the trees and whom he had nourished by his rays. If they agreed to his suggestion and married the girl, she would give birth to Daksha, the lord of creatures. And this Daksha he promised would 'multiply the human race.' The Prachetasas according to this proposal, then, married Mārishā, and she gave birth to Daksha, who had previously been born as the son of Brahmā. Maitreya expressed surprise at hearing of this *second birth* of Daksha. He had always understood that Daksha was born from the right thumb of Brahmā, and that he was the father-in-law of the Moon. How was it possible to say that he was the son of Mārishā and the 'grandson of the Moon'? Parāshara however told his disciple not to worry. Wise men did not allow themselves to be perplexed by such questions. Daksha and other eminent persons were present in every age. Birth and death were constant events.<sup>1</sup>

It was only natural that the Moon should tell the brothers something about the origin of their prospective bride. Her father was a very eminent ascetic, of the name of Kandū, who lived on the banks of the river Gomati. He was so fervid an ascetic, that Indra the god of heaven, became alarmed, and sent Pramlochā, a heavenly nymph, to interrupt his penance. The maiden was entirely successful and Kandū fell a victim to her charms. When the saint had spent 150 years in the gratification of his passions, the nymph asked permission to depart. But Kandū persuaded her to wait a little longer. At the expiry of another hundred years, Pramlochā said she wished to go away, but partly out of love, and partly out of fear lest the saint's curses should destroy her, she continued to enjoy his company. This happened more than once. But one evening the sage got up and left his cottage in great haste. When

<sup>1</sup> This is not an answer. The Purāna is supposed to be describing what takes place in one age, not in different ages. The reader will remember that the first chapter speaks of Daksha as being a mind-born son of Brahmā. The *Mahābhārata* says it was from Brahmā's right toe that Daksha was born.

Pramlochā asked him what had happened, he said the sun was about to set, and he must not forget to perform the twilight act of worship. The girl smiled and said that he was talking very strangely of a day drawing near its close. His day must be a very long and wonderful day. Kandu asked her to explain what she meant. That very morning she had come to him at dawn, and entered his hermitage. He could not understand why she laughed. When Pramlochā explained that 907 years six months and three days had passed since she first arrived at the hermitage, the sage was overwhelmed with anger and self-reproach. His prayers and toil had been of no avail. He had hoped to acquire the wisdom of the Vedas and the knowledge of Brahma. They had all been stolen from him by the seductions of a woman, 'a vile bundle of delusion.' As he said this, he turned upon her with anger and ordered her to depart. She was the emissary of Indra, that he knew. And yet why should he reduce her to ashes? The sin was his own. He had yielded to a passion, it was his business to control. But she too was guilty. She had broken in upon his devotions, to curry favour with a god.

Pramlochā was greatly afraid that her lover would blast her with his curses, and her body was covered with big drops of perspiration that fear had gathered. As she fled through the forest, the leaves of the trees wiped the perspiration from her body, and the winds collected them into one mass. This mass the Moon nourished with his rays—so he said himself, for he is the narrator of the story—and it grew up into a lovely woman, Mārishā, the bride of the Prachetasas, and the mother of Daksha. 'She is the progeny of Kandu, the child of Pramlochā, the nursling of the trees, the daughter of the wind and the moon.' As for Kandu, the moon god went on to explain, he took refuge in the region of Vishnu, where he stood with uplifted arms, and repeated certain prayers addressed to that god, with so much effect that he 'obtained final emancipation.' His offspring Mārishā, in a former birth was married to a

**The strange birth of Mārishā, the mother of Daksha**

king who died and left no children. The childless widow worshipped Vishnu so fervently that the god appeared before her and told her to ask a boon. And this was her request: 'In every successive birth grant me honourable husbands, a son equal to a Prajāpati, wealth, beauty, and charm, and may I not be born in the ordinary way?' Vishnu promised that her prayer would be granted, even adding to his gift, by saying that she would have ten husbands in her next birth. All which came to pass, for her birth was extraordinary, she was married to the ten brothers, and Daksha, the Prajāpati was her son.

It will be remembered that the object of this wonderful marriage was to further the work of creation and 'increase mankind.' We accordingly learn that when Daksha was born, he proceeded to make 'bipeds and quadrupeds' and thereafter gave birth, by an exercise of will, to fifty daughters. Ten of these daughters were married to Dharma, thirteen to Kashyapa and twenty-seven to the Moon.<sup>1</sup> From these unions there sprang gods, Daityas, Dānavas, snake deities, Gandharvas, cattle, birds and other beings.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the time of Daksha, propagation of the different species had been secured by the exercise of will power, by sight and touch, or by the practice of asceticism. But when Daksha discovered that his mind-born progeny made no effort to add to their numbers, he decided to make use of sexual intercourse. He himself married Asiknī, a very devout lady, and by her he became the father of 5,000 sons.<sup>3</sup> Daksha naturally expected that

<sup>1</sup> In ch. vii. of this book we have already heard of Daksha being the father, by his wife Prasuti, of twenty-four daughters and of Dharma (righteousness) marrying thirteen of them. Kashyapa, not previously mentioned, is said in the *Mahābhārata* to be the son of Marichi, one of Brahmā's mind-born sons.

<sup>2</sup> The Daityas and Dānavas are demons. The Gandharvas are the minstrels of heaven. The reader will note that no mention is made of *men* though it was *men* that Brahmā was anxious about.

<sup>3</sup> The Purāna says she was the daughter of the patriarch Virāna. The *Mahābhārata* (Book I. ch. 66, ver. 14) says that Daksha's wife was born from the left toe of Brahmā. The reader should consult the epic for its much more straight-forward, if equally amazing, account of the propagation of

so many sons would be able to assist him in his task, and they were about to do so, when the divine rishi Nārada appeared on the scene. Having remarked in a friendly way, that it was evidently their intention to propagate their species, he asked how it came about that they were venturing to multiply their kind, when they were ignorant of the 'middle, height and depth of the world.' The 5,000 sons of Daksha were so impressed by this question that they went off, no one knows whither, and they have not yet returned. When Daksha saw his sons disappear, he begat 1,000 more sons. But when these sons were about to engender offspring, they too were assailed by Nārada, and his question had the same effect. They followed the path on which their brothers had travelled and said they would not multiply the race, till they had 'ascertained the extent of the universe.'<sup>1</sup> So they too went off, and like rivers that lose themselves in the ocean, returned no more. Daksha was very angry with Nārada for interfering so seriously with his plans, and he uttered a curse against his brother rishi, the nature of which is not recorded.

Forgetful of the fact that it has already spoken of Daksha giving birth to fifty daughters by an exercise of will, the text tells us that his wife, the daughter of Virana, gave birth to sixty daughters, ten more than before. The marriages already specified still hold good, while the extra ten were given to husbands whose names need not concern us here.<sup>2</sup> The ten daughters married to Dharma, became the mothers of a variety of deities, viz.,

**Daksha's sixty daughters**

living things. Being a later production, the *Vishnu Purāna* has introduced a great variety of very contradictory legends. The compilers were apparently unwilling to refuse house room to any of them.

<sup>1</sup> The *Mahābhārata* says that Nārada taught them the Sāṅkhya philosophy, whereby they obtained liberation. Nārada plays a great part in the *Mahābhārata* and the last book of the *Rāmāyana*. He appears in Manu's list of ten Prajāpatis. The Purāna elsewhere says he was a son of Kashyapa, the son-in-law of Daksha. The epics speak of him as a fomentor of strife. The *Bhāgavata Purāna* says Daksha's curse was to the effect that there would be no resting place for him in any region, and he certainly appears as being constantly on the move between earth and heaven. Another passage in the *Mahābhārata* (I. 66, 12) says that Daksha had no sons.

<sup>2</sup> This inconsistency is probably due to the compilers using two sources.

the Vasus, the Maruts, the Sādhyas, the Vishvadevas, the Bhānus, and Nāgavithī, the milky way, as well as those celestials who preside over the divisions of the earth and the moments of time;<sup>1</sup> while the twenty-seven who married the Moon were themselves 'nymphs of the lunar constellations' and had children as brilliant as themselves. All these more or less divine beings, here spoken of as *thirty-three* in number,<sup>2</sup> continue to live for a thousand ages, but though they are said to be born and die, they really go on living 'age after age' in the same manner as the sun sets and rises again. With reference to the thirteen daughters of Daksha, who married Kashyapa, Parāshara at this point merely gives their names, and promises to tell about them later.<sup>3</sup> His reason for doing so, is that he has much to tell of the offspring of one of Kashyapa's wives. Her name was Diti, and she was the mother of Hiranyakashipu, whose persistent efforts to persuade his son Prahlāda to abandon the worship of Vishnu brought that god to earth in his incarnation of the Man-lion.

Hiranyakashipu was king of the Daityas or demons, and had waged war so successfully against the gods, that he was now the lord of heaven, earth and hell.<sup>4</sup> He had dispossessed Indra, the king of the celestials, and assumed to himself the functions of the sun, the air and the moon. He was acting too, as the god of riches and ruler of the lower world. The deities were so hard

**Prahlada's devotion to Vishnu**

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that these allegorical offspring frequently bear their mothers' names, thus, the Vishvadevas were the sons of Vishva, and the Vasus of Vasu.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to find these very numerous personages referred to as the *thirty-three* divinities. The Vedas were first responsible for this number; see *Rig-Veda*, 8. 28. 1, but an earlier conception was of eleven gods. See I. 139. 11. and there is also frequent reference to the *thrice-eleven*. They are supposed to be eight Vasus, eleven Rudras, twelve Adityas and, says Wilson, Prajāpati (Brahmā or Daksha) and Vashatkāra. The two Ashvins are also spoken of as making up the 33.

<sup>3</sup> He does tell however of how one of them called Aditi, becomes the mother of the twelve Ādityas, Vishnu, Savitri, Mitra and others.

<sup>4</sup> The text says that he was trusting to a boon, which he had obtained from Brahmā, but it does not say what the boon was; both the *Vayu* and *Bhāgavata Purānas* say that the boon was that no created being would be able to destroy him; the latter adds that to circumvent this boon, Vishnu assumed the form of the *Man-lion*, and tore the king to pieces.

pressed that they were compelled to take refuge on the earth, where they wandered in fear of their lives, and in mortal guise. In his pride of heart, the demon king made proclamation that no one was to worship any god or being except himself, and that all offerings and sacrifices were to be made to him. Siddhas, Gandharvas and snake deities acted as his attendants, while the nymphs of heaven danced before him as he sat eating and drinking in his crystal palace. But there was one person in his realm who failed to give the demon king the honour and dignity he claimed, and that was his own son Prahlāda. This boy had been committed to the care of a Brāhmin teacher and dwelt in his house. But one day Prahlāda came to visit his father and was told to give a brief account of all that he had learned. Prahlāda at once replied that the substance of all he had learned was to adore Vishnu 'who is without beginning, middle or end, increase or diminution, the imperishable lord of the world, the universal cause of causes.' The demon's eyes flashed with anger as he listened to these words, and he charged the Brāhmin with the guilt of teaching his son to praise his father's greatest foe. But the man assured the king that he was in no way responsible, and Prahlāda boldly claimed that his teacher was no other than Vishnu himself, 'the instructor of the whole world,' the supreme spirit, 'the creator and protector not of me alone, but of all human beings and even father of you.' When the demon asked his son what evil spirit had taken possession of him and caused him to blaspheme, the boy replied that it was Vishnu who had entered his heart, and who 'pervades all the regions of the universe, and by his omnipresence, influences the conduct of all beings.'<sup>1</sup>

One might have expected, that the demon would have issued orders for his son's punishment. But he merely

told his servants to take him away to the house of his preceptor. But after some time had passed, Prahlāda

#### **The persecution of Prahlāda**

was sent for again and bidden to recite some poetry. The boy responded by reciting a hymn in praise of Vishnu. When he had finished, his father ordered his attendants to seize him and put him to death. It is said that thousands of demons, brandishing huge swords, rushed at the apparently helpless boy. But though they struck him again and again, they caused him not the slightest injury or pain. And he addressed them very calmly, saying that Vishnu was in their weapons and in his body, and that the one could not do the other any harm. When he saw what had happened, Hiranyakashipu tried to persuade Prahlāda to abandon the worship of Vishnu, and said if he gave him a promise to that effect, he would do him no further harm. But the boy asked what harm could happen to him, when he had a friend and helper, who was able to save him in every circumstance. The result was that the king called in other methods of punishment. Great snakes<sup>1</sup> were told to bite him, and they bit him accordingly in every part of his body. But again he felt no pain. Indeed as the snakes themselves confessed, his skin was not even scratched while their fangs and jewelled crests were either broken or destroyed. The demon next summoned to his aid the elephants of the skies, each of them as big as a mountain, and ordered them to attack his son with their united tusks. But though these mighty creatures bore him down to the earth, and trod him underfoot, they too failed to injure him in the slightest degree. Indeed Prahlāda called his father's attention to the fact that the tusks had been blunted in the attempt to pierce his flesh, a wonderful fact due to no strength of his, but because he had called upon Vishnu in the hour of his affliction. The king, though foiled once more, was

<sup>1</sup> On this passage Wilson remarks, 'The Purānas teach constantly incompatible doctrines. . . . According to this passage the supreme being is not the inert cause of creation only, but exercises the functions of an active providence. . . . Apparently the most ancient parts of the Hindu ritual recognized an active ruler in the creator of the universe; the notion of deity originating with the schools of philosophy.' Vol. ii. p. 36.

<sup>1</sup> Takshaka, a son of Kashyapa, was one of these great snakes. Kadru, his mother gave birth to 1,000 of them. His brothers were Shesha, Vāsuki and others. See ch. xxi. of this book. Takshaka was thus a brother of Hiranyakashipu, and an uncle of Prahlāda.

convinced that his son would be unable to resist the burning fire, and he caused great piles of brushwood to be built round the prince, and ignited. But here also, though the wind god blew his hardest at the request of the demon, Prahlāda once more declared that he felt no pain and that the air was as cool and fragrant as if it had been blowing over lotus fields.

At this stage, the Brāhmins, intervened and asked the king to restrain his wrath, pointing out that those who came under its influence, could not obtain a place in heaven. At the same time, they undertook,<sup>1</sup> if the king would set his offspring free, to devote themselves to his instruction, and make him realise the impropriety of worshipping his father's greatest foe. He should remember that, after all, Prahlāda was only a child. Youth was prone to many errors and people of experience should be tolerant towards its faults. They added, however, that if he refused to abandon the worship of Vishnu, they would take the necessary steps to bring about his death. In response to this appeal, the demon king gave orders for his son being sent free, and conducted to the house of his preceptor. When he reached his teacher's dwelling, however, Prahlāda at once began a series of discourses, on what he called the supreme truth,<sup>2</sup> which were addressed to an audience of young persons, who like himself, were members of the demon race. In these addresses, he dwelt on the fact that birth and death were the portion of all living things, passing as they did from infancy and youth to gradual but inevitable decay. But while that was manifest to all, there was something equally clear to every student of scripture, and that was that the dead were born again. And this brought him to the truth that 'pain was inseparable from every period of existence.' Men in their foolishness spoke of the pleasure they obtained in quenching their hunger and thirst. But they did not understand. Fire

<sup>1</sup> These Brahmins were descendants of Bhrigu who was one of the nine mind-born sons of Brahmā, mentioned in ch. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Paramārtha is the Sanskrit word.

was agreeable when we were cold, no doubt, and water was pleasant when we were thirsty, and food was grateful when we were hungry. But we would like the opposite equally well if our circumstances were changed.<sup>1</sup> And we can see that those, 'whose vision is darkened by delusion,' find delight in suffering, while the man who is paralyzed and cannot walk would be only too glad to experience fatigue. In the same way he who cherished affection for any one was opening the door of his heart to many miseries; planting a thorn that would expose him to many pricks. It was the same with the man who possessed wealth. He was harassed by the constant thought that it might be lost or stolen or destroyed. As he had said already, birth itself was a great misfortune, while the dying man had to look forward not only to the judgement seat of Yama, but to the pains of another birth. Indeed this world was a very sea of sorrow, in which Vishnu was our 'only hope.' Perhaps his hearers might reply that they were too young to understand such high matters. It was true that their bodies were young, but their spirits were eternal. And in any case he who addressed them was also a child, and he had resolved that he would not put off to old age the discussion and understanding of what was so important. When old age came, he would not have strength of body or mind, sufficient to deal with them. But that was always the way with men. They put off from day to day. They were always finding some excuse. Childhood and youth were absorbed in play and pleasure. And they arrived at old age, to find themselves ignorant and powerless. In the end they would die, with their thirst unquenched. Why then should his young friends not follow his example, and begin to meditate upon Vishnu right away? He was proposing nothing distasteful; Vishnu was the giver of happiness and of prosperity. He removed the sins of those who thought upon him night and day. If they fixed their hearts on him, they would be able to 'laugh

<sup>1</sup> See Wilson's interesting note on this page. 'Heat is agreeable in cold weather; cold is agreeable in hot weather. Drink is pleasant to a thirsty man; thirst is agreeable to one who has drunk too much; and more drink would be painful.'

at every care.' Prahlāda also dwelt upon the duty of hating nobody. All living things were 'objects of compassion.' If any one happened to be more fortunate than ourselves, we ought not to envy him his happiness, rather we should be pleased to see him so well off, and soon we should discover that the 'suppression of malignant feelings is itself a reward.' Even if we believed that the deity is distinct from his creatures as some do, our enemy was an object of pity and not of hate. But the conclusion of the whole matter was that Vishnu did not differ from us, but was the same as ourselves. 'He is identical with all things' and the whole world is his manifestation. This was Prahlāda's concluding appeal. He begged his hearers to lay aside the angry passions of their race, and try hard to obtain the perfect, pure, and eternal happiness 'which neither god nor devil, neither man nor beast, neither fever nor ophthalmia, neither dysentery nor spleen, neither hatred nor malice nor desire, would be able to destroy.' If they fixed their hearts on Vishnu, they would achieve a 'perfect calm.' Wealth, pleasure, virtue, were things of little moment. But the fruit they would gather from the tree of wisdom was beyond price.<sup>1</sup>

When the demon king heard of these efforts on the part of his son to corrupt the minds of the rising generation, he ordered his cooks to mix deadly poison in Prahlāda's food. But the poison did not cause him the slightest inconvenience. Hiranyakashipu, therefore, called upon the Brāhmins to implement their promise, and destroy his recalcitrant offspring, by the employment of those incantations, which, they said, could not possibly fail. But though they approached him, chanting verses from the *Sāma-veda*, and called into existence a terrifying female form who smote him on the breast with a fiery trident they were as unsuccessful as the cooks had been. Indeed even more so, for the tridents broke into an hundred pieces,

**Fresh efforts  
to coerce  
Prahlāda**

<sup>1</sup> In this very full summary many passages have been quoted from Wilson's translation.

and the magic, that the priests had employed, turned against themselves and consumed them. Prahlāda was greatly distressed at seeing the destruction of the priests. As he said himself, he cherished enmity against no one and he had nothing but the kindest feelings for the fire that had sought to burn, the elephants that had tried to crush, and the cooks who had failed to poison him. He therefore addressed a prayer to Vishnu, asking him to restore his persecutors to life. Vishnu heard his prayer, and the Brāhmins at once rose to their feet, very grateful to Prahlāda, for his generous treatment. When they had bowed before him and called down all sorts of blessings, they hastened to the king and told him what had happened. Hiranyakashipu now sent for his son once more, and told him to explain how he had become possessed of such wonderful power. Was it the result of magic, or had he been endowed with it from birth? This naturally led to a fresh discourse from Prahlāda on the greatness of Vishnu, who had taken possession of his heart. But he emphasized more than he had done on previous occasions, the fact that he cherished no feelings of hatred towards any one of those who had sought to injure him. Indeed he wished harm to no one, knowing as he did, that those who caused harm to others, in thought, word or deed, were sowing the seeds of a future birth, whose harvest would be reaped in pain. No suffering that any one might inflict would be able to disturb him. The priests had told him that he did not need to worship the gods, or to depend on the Eternal, when his father was lord of the three worlds. But it was only by glorifying Vishnu that one could obtain anything, be it wealth or offspring, virtue or emancipation.<sup>1</sup> Whenever Prahlāda had finished this further discourse, his father caused him to be thrown from the battlements of the palace. Now the walls of the palace were many miles in height, and one would have thought that his body would

<sup>1</sup> We also find Prahlāda asking the priests when they threatened to kill him, 'What living creature slays or is slain? What living creature preserves or is preserved? Each is his own destroyer, or preserver, as he follows evil or good.' Wilson naturally calls attention to similar passages in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

have been dashed to pieces when it fell on the rocks below. But the earth, the nurse of all creatures, received him gently on her lap, and he rose up quite unharmed. A great enchanter was next invited to try what he could do. This person tried his best. He employed an infinite variety of enchantments, some of which must have been very powerful, as Vishnu found it necessary to send his famous discus, to protect the boy, but every one of them, including a terrible cold wind, failed of its purpose, and the magician had to own defeat.

After these fruitless efforts, there was a lull in the persecution, and Prahlaḍa was once more permitted to return to his teacher's house, where he received daily instruction in the science of government. When Hiranyakashipu was informed that his son had acquired a thorough knowledge of the science, he sent for him and addressed to him a series of questions dealing with such matters as the treatment of friends and foes, the attitude a ruler should adopt towards his subjects, his councillors and the other officials and employees of the state, as well as the methods to be adopted in waging war, in the building of forts, and the reduction of aboriginal tribes. To these questions, which seem to have been addressed to him all at once, Prahlaḍa replied that though he had been fully instructed in these matters, he was unable to approve of the views which his teacher held concerning them. That honoured person, for instance, had said that conciliation, gifts, punishment and the sowing of dissension were the four contrivances by which a man achieves his purposes.<sup>1</sup> But he hoped his father would not be angry when he said that he knew 'neither friends nor foes.' Vishnu was everywhere, and in everyone, and it was therefore impossible to speak of any one as being distinct or separate from oneself.<sup>2</sup> And it was accordingly waste of time to study such unprofitable subjects as his teacher had prescribed. Such knowledge was

**Prahlaḍa is taught the science of government**

<sup>1</sup> The *Mahābhārata* refers to these four devices also.

<sup>2</sup> 'Gods, men, animals, birds, reptiles are all but forms of one eternal Vishnu.' Wilson's translation, vol. ii. pp. 55.

ignorance. The only knowledge worth acquiring was that which led to emancipation. He had no desire for either wealth or dominion, though he was convinced that those, who cared for neither of these things, would obtain both in a 'life to come.' All around him he could see men toiling to be great. But it was destiny, not human effort, that was the cause of greatness, and there were kings, both cowardly and ignorant, ruling over kingdoms to whom the science of government was unknown.

Hiranyakashipu, who had listened in silence to this long speech, could contain himself no longer. He rose from his throne and kicked his son upon the breast. Boiling with anger, he called for several of his most distinguished followers to bind his son and cast him into the sea.<sup>1</sup> This they did and in addition piled great rocks on the top of Prahlaḍa, as he lay chanting the praises to Vishnu, at the bottom of the ocean. If it is impossible to kill him, cried the angry father, we shall see to it that he shall lie there for thousands of years, imprisoned beneath a mass of mountains. For a time it seemed as if the earth would be submerged beneath the waves. The sea was so distressed that it rose to an alarming extent. But apparently that peril was obviated, and Prahlaḍa spent the days of his long imprisonment dwelling unceasingly on the greatness of the god he adored. In this fresh hymn he said in addition to much else, very similar to what has been recorded already, that Vishnu was both knowledge and ignorance, truth and falsehood, action and non-action, and he ended by declaring that he was so identified with Vishnu, that he was Vishnu himself. 'Glory to him,' he said, 'whom I, also, am!' '*I am all things; all things are in me.*' '*Brahma is my name.*'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Two of these demons were *Rāhu*, the demon who is responsible for the periodic eclipse of the sun and moon, and *Bali* whom Wilson identifies with the Bali to circumvent whom Vishnu appeared in the Dwarf incarnation. But it is Bali the grandson of Prahlaḍa who is usually identified with the Bali of the Dwarf avatāra.

<sup>2</sup> See Wilson's translation from which these words are quoted, vol. ii. p. 60.

The next chapter proceeds to tell us that as a result of recognizing Vishnu 'as identical with his own spirit,' Prahlāda 'forgot his own individuality.' The consequence was that the bonds with which he was bound could hold him no longer. They were snapped asunder, and despite the rocks and mountains which had been piled on top of him, Prahlāda rose to the surface of the sea. As he did so, the ocean was violently agitated, its inhabitants were filled with fear and the earth trembled. And finally, when the youth had uttered another hymn of praise, Vishnu appeared before him 'clad in yellow robes,' and told him to ask a boon. The only boon that Prahlāda thought worth asking, was that in a thousand births, his faith in the god might remain unshaken by any earthly passion or desire. When that prayer had been granted and he was told to ask a second boon, he begged that his father might be forgiven for the way in which he had tried to drive him from his devotion. Prahlāda enumerated the various persecutions to which he had been exposed, but thanks to the divine favour none of them had done him any harm. This boon Vishnu also granted, and told his worshipper that he would grant him yet another boon. But Prahlāda said he wanted nothing more, knowing, as he did that his faith in Vishnu had already secured for him the one thing he desired, and that was '*freedom from existence*.'<sup>1</sup> When Vishnu had said that this would undoubtedly be Prahlāda's reward, he disappeared from view.

When the god had departed, Prahlāda directed his steps to his father's presence and bowed reverently before him. Hiranyakashipu was delighted to see his son. He cast his arms about him and smelt his head, crying out with tears, 'Dost thou live, my child?' There was thus apparently a complete reconciliation achieved. Hiranyakashipu 'repented of

**Vishnu  
appears as  
the man-lion**

<sup>1</sup> The words in italics are quoted from Wilson's translation. In Mr. Dutt's translation we read that Vishnu said, 'Thou shalt, by my mercy, obtain final emancipation from existence.'

his former cruelty' and treated his son with kindness, while Prahlāda continued to live in subjection to his father and his teacher, fulfilling the duties incumbent on his station like any other youth. But in the very next sentence, the text becomes exceedingly abrupt, and we are told that after the demon king had been put to death by Vishnu 'in the form of the Man-lion,' Prahlāda reigned in his stead. In reward of his piety he was blessed with many children, great power and an extensive empire. And at last 'he was freed from the consequences of moral merit or demerit,' and obtained 'final emancipation from future births.'<sup>1</sup> If you listen once to this story about Prahlāda or hear it read once, you will be saved from the penalty of all the sins you ever committed. If you read it on the day of the new moon, or at full moon, you will secure as much benefit as if you had made the gift of a cow; while the man who listens constantly to its recital will be like Prahlāda. Vishnu will protect and help him in any calamity to which he may be exposed.

When Parāshara interrupted his narrative of the work of creation, to describe the wonderful story of Prahlāda, he had just observed that thirteen of Daksha's many daughters were married to the Rishi Kashyapa.<sup>2</sup> The result of these unions was that (1) *Diti* became the mother of the Daityas, the demon race to which Prahlāda

<sup>1</sup> Wilson on this passage, remarks, 'Here is another instance of that brief reference to popular and prior legends, which is frequent in this Purāna.' He says that the man-lion Avatāra is referred to in several of the Purānas, but that he has met with the story in detail only in the *Bhāgavata*. There it is said that the demon king asked his son, if Vishnu was everywhere, why he was not visible in a pillar of the building where they were at the time. When the demon rose and smote the pillar with his fist, Vishnu at once emerged. He had assumed a form, partly that of a man, and partly that of a lion. A fight followed, in which Hiranyakashipu was torn to pieces. The details are horrible.

<sup>2</sup> Both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* represent Kashyapa and his thirteen wives as the progenitors of gods, demons, men, beasts, birds, reptiles, grasses and trees. But it must not be forgotten that both the Epics also speak of the Prajāpatīs, or mind-born sons of Brahmā, as the progenitors of all living things, as does this Purāna also, at the close of this very paragraph. Kashyapa was a son of the Prajāpati, Mārīchi. See *Summaries of the Mahābhārata*, Note 3, of *Rāmāyana*, Note 4 and of the *Laws of Manu*, p. 19 where the second story of creation assigns to the ten Prajāpatīs of that work an important place.

belonged, and (2) *Danu* of the *Dānavas*, classed with the *Daityas* as evil spirits and hostile to the gods, while (3) *Tamra*, a third wife, was the mother of six daughters, five of whom gave birth to parrots, owls, hawks, vultures and other kinds of birds, the sixth being the parent of horses, camels and asses. Another wife, (4) *Vinatā*, gave birth to *Garuda*, the king of birds, who carried on a relentless war with his step brothers, born to (5) *Kadrū* the ancestress of the Serpent race.<sup>1</sup> The *Purāna* goes on to tell of other wives, each of whom in turn is claimed to be the mother of cows and buffaloes, of trees and plants, grasses and shrubs, of *Rākshasas* and *Yakshas*, of *Apsarasas* and *Gandharvas*. And of most of them we are told that they were the mothers of thousands, and that their descendants multiplied infinitely through successive generations. It is added that this creation which has just been described took place during the reign of *Swārochisha*, the second *Manu*,<sup>2</sup> but that in the present reign, that of *Manu Vaivaswata*, progeny was engendered after a different manner, by means of the seven *rishis*, *Brahma's* mind-born sons. The deity thus became the grandfather of *Gandharvas*, serpents, gods and *Dānavas*.<sup>3</sup>

*Parāshara*, at this point tells us that *Diti* having lost her children propitiated her husband *Kashyapa*.<sup>4</sup> In response to her entreaty, she was told that the boon she craved would be granted in due time. It was that she should give birth to a son, of such irresistible strength and valour that he would be able to slay *Indra*. There was a condition

#### The Birth of the Maruts

<sup>1</sup> See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 26 for the story of *Garuda's* enmity to the snake race. *Garuda* became famous as the vehicle of *Vishnu*.

<sup>2</sup> The reader will remember that there are fourteen *Manus*, each of whom is to reign for the period of a *Manu* (*Manvantara*). The first was *Svāyambhuva*; while we are living during the reign of the seventh. The *Purāna* here introduces the contradictory statement that is also to be found in the *Law of Manu*, viz., that the period of a *Manu* (the four ages X 71) marks the period of a creation, when we have been told in c. 3, that a period of creation is equal to a day of *Brahmā* (the four ages X 1,000).

<sup>3</sup> Here we have a recognition of the fact that the mind-born sons of *Brahmā* and not *Kashyapa* alone, were to be considered as the intermediate agents in creation. It should be noted that the creation of *men* is never mentioned in this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> We are not told how, and in a previous chapter we have just read of the famous grandson *Prahlaḍa* and of his numerous progeny! But the *Rāmāyaṇa*

attached to the boon, however, and *Kashyapa* spoke as follows: 'You shall bear a son who shall slay *Indra*, if with thoughts wholly pious and person entirely pure, you carefully carry the babe in your womb for a hundred years.' The god *Indra* soon learned of what was in store for him and resolved to prevent the birth of a child so full of danger to his own life. He, therefore, installed himself as an attendant upon the pregnant mother, meekly acting as her servant for no less than ninety-nine years. But during that long time *Diti* attended with such scrupulous care to her mental and bodily purity that *Indra* never got an opportunity to do her any harm. In the hundredth year, however, *Diti* made her first false step. One night she went to bed, and forgot to wash her feet. *Indra's* opportunity had come at last, and with his thunderbolt he divided the embryo in her womb into seven portions. The child thus cruelly treated, began to weep, and because it would not stop crying, *Indra* divided each of the seven pieces into seven,<sup>1</sup> making forty-nine pieces in all. It was thus that the *Maruts* or gods of the storm arose, and they got their name from the fact that *Indra* said, 'Weep not' (*Ma rodih*). They rank as subordinate deities, associates and helpers of the god who smote them in their mother's womb.

The narrator now goes back to *Prithu* and tells us that when he was appointed to rule the earth, other rulers were selected for other parts of creation. *Varuna* was made lord of the waters; *Soma* of the stars and planets, of *Brāhmins* and plants, of sacrifice and penance; *Vishnu* of the *Adityas*; *Pāvaka* of the *Vasus*; *Daksha* of the *Prajāpatis*; *Yama* of the *Pitris* or spirits of the dead;

*B. I. c. 46.* tells us that when *Diti* saw her offspring overcome and slain in the battle between the gods and the demons for the possession of the *amrita* secured at the churning of the ocean, she asked her husband to take pity on her childless state, and give her a son who would slay *Indra*. According to the epic, a 1000 years were to elapse before the birth would take place. (See *Summary of the Rāmāyaṇa*.)

<sup>1</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa* speaks of the embryo being divided into seven parts only, and says that *Diti's* impurity consisted of placing her head where her feet should have been. The lady admitted that the fault was hers and seemed to bear no grudge against the god; indeed it was at her request that *Indra* made her offspring into the seven *Maruts*.

Indra of the gods ; Garuda of birds ; Airāvata of elephants, and the lion of beasts. All these, with many others, continue to this day their work of protecting the earth. It was Vishnu who endowed them with this authority that they might be his 'instruments for the preservation of the world,' and all the kings 'who have been and who shall be, whether they rule over gods or demons, over beasts or men, over mountains or trees, or stars', are but portions of him in whom 'all that is and all that is not' are contained.

Parāshara concluded this particular discourse by saying that Vishnu, who in his threefold aspect was spoken of as creator, preserver and destroyer, revealed himself in a four-fold manifestation as well: (1) as Brahmā, when he assumes a visible form, (2) as Marichi and his fellow Prajāpatīs 'when he is the progenitor of all creatures' (3) as Time and (4) as '*all beings*.' This particular four-fold manifestation is shown when, endowed with the property of goodness, he preserves the world. But when he destroys the world, the first two manifestations are those of (1) Rudra and (2) 'the destroying fire;' the third and fourth being, *Time* and *all beings* as before. Maitreya evidently found it difficult to understand how the supreme being, though devoid of all qualities could be subject to such variety and he asked his instructor to explain. Parāshara, accordingly set himself to answer his disciple's doubts, but he did so by saying that there were two states in Brahma. After enlarging by way of example on the method adopted by the followers of Yoga, to attain liberation, he said with regard to these two states, that the first was the *imperishable being* himself and that the second was all this perishable world. The world was 'nothing more than the (manifested) energy of the supreme Brahma.' Maitreya must have observed that light and heat were strong or feeble, as we were near to, or far from fire. In the same way one might say that there was a gradation of created beings, some nearer, others further away from the central flame. The *most powerful energies*

of the Supreme were found in Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva; next to them came the secondary deities; then Daksha and the other Prajāpatīs, followed by many animals, wild beasts, birds, insects, trees, shrubs and the like, each becoming more and more feeble in proportion to their increasing distance 'from their primitive source.' It is thus, that 'this whole world although (in essence) imperishable and eternal, appears and disappears as if it were subject to birth and death.'

If you listen to the reading of this, the first portion of the Purāna, you will be freed from all your sins, and acquire as much merit, as if you had bathed in Pushkara lake for twelve years at full moon, in the month of Kartika.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Many thousands of pilgrims still visit Pushkar lake at full moon in the month of Kartik (October and November) in the belief that at that time, its waters have cleansing power. Pushkar is in Rājputānā; a few miles distant from the city of Ajmere.

### CHAPTER III

#### OUR OWN AND OTHER WORLDS—BOOK II

Maitreya, at this stage expressed his gratification at having received so complete an account of the creation of the world. But he added that there was one point on which he would like to receive a little more detail. Parāshara had said that the first Manu, Svāyambhuva, had two sons, one of them being Uttānapāda, the father of Dhruva, whose story he had been good enough to repeat. But he had said nothing, beyond mentioning his name, about the other son Priyavrata; could he tell him something about him? Parāshara at once acceded to this request on the part of his disciple. Priyavrata, then, according to the narrator, had ten sons, whose mother was the daughter of Kardama the Prajāpati.<sup>1</sup> Three of these youths devoted themselves to a religious life. 'Remembering the occurrences of a prior existence, they did not covet dominion, but diligently practiced the rites of devotion, wholly disinterested, and looking for no reward.'<sup>2</sup> For the benefit of his seven other sons, Priyavrata divided the earth into seven continents or islands. As we shall find later, each of these continents was surrounded by an ocean, one continent being in the centre surrounded by its own particular ocean, while the other continents and oceans formed ever widening circles round those that preceded them. The *Bhāgavata Purāna* says that to achieve his purpose Priyavrata 'drove his chariot seven times round the earth, and the ruts left by the wheels became the beds of the oceans separating it into seven

<sup>1</sup> Kardama's name does not appear in the Purāna's list of Prajāpatis, but it does in the lists given by the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Wilson's translation. This must have been during a previous *Day of Brahmā*, as these young men were born at the beginning of the present Kalpa, 2,000 million years ago.

islands.'<sup>1</sup> Of these seven islands or continents,<sup>2</sup> the one lying at the centre, called *Jambudvīpa*, is of the most importance, because it is the region in which we dwell. It was allotted to Agnīdhra, who was apparently the eldest of the family. He, in turn, divided *Jambudvīpa*, our world, into nine parts, and gave one part to each of his nine sons. These parts are called Varshas or countries. With regard to eight of them it is said that they are places of perfect enjoyment, whose inhabitants are unvexed by any thought of change, old age or death; perplexed by 'no distinction of virtue or vice; countries where there is no difference of degree as better or worse, nor any of the effects produced in this region (i.e., India) by the revolutions of ages.'<sup>3</sup>

And yet, despite this wonderful description of the happiness enjoyed by the inhabitants of those countries (Varshas), it is nothing compared with the blessed state of those who dwell in *Bhāratavarsha* (India). Because it is from *Bhāratavarsha* alone that one can hope to find a place in heaven or, better still, obtain emancipation from life itself. It is there that holy men practice the rites of asceticism; it is there that gifts and sacrifices are offered 'all for the sake of another world,' and it is this fact that makes the land of Bhārata the best of all the nine divisions of the earth. In the other eight, enjoyment is the one object of life. But it is only after

<sup>1</sup> See Wilson, vol. ii. p. 101. But the reader will remember that in Book I. c. 4. it is said that it was Vishnu, in the boar incarnation, who divided the earth into these seven continents or islands.

<sup>2</sup> Their names will be found in a later paragraph.

<sup>3</sup> See Wilson's translation, vol. ii. p. 103. In another passage (c. 2.) we have words to the same effect for it says that 'there is no sorrow, nor weariness, nor anxiety, nor hunger, nor apprehension; their inhabitants are exempt from all infirmity and pain, and live (in uninterrupted enjoyment) for ten or twelve thousand years. Indra never sends rain upon them, for the earth abounds with water. In those places there is no distinction of Kṛta, Tretā, or any succession of ages.' Wilson's translation, vol. ii. p. 125. In a corresponding passage, the *Bhāgavata Purāna* distinctly says of these eight countries, that there 'the celestials enjoy the remaining rewards of their works,' but it also speaks of the inhabitants as men, though their existence equals that of the Tretā age (1,296,000 years). It is very remarkable that such an idea should be recorded of those parts of the world beyond India which are usually spoken of as the dwelling place of barbarians and outcastes. See Muir's O. S. T. vol. i. p. 496.

they have been born a million times, that any one can hope to be born in India, in human form. Even the gods envy such a fate and say that that they shall reckon themselves fortunate if, after they have exhausted their stock of accumulated merit, they are privileged to be born as men in 'that land of works.' For then it will be possible by putting one's trust in Vishnu, to attain the joys of heaven, or, highest state of all, the boon of final liberation. Even the gods do not know when they will again assume a body, but this they do know, that those men are fortunate who are born with perfect faculties in Bhāratavarsha.<sup>1</sup> •

The Purāna gives us the names of the nine divisions into which Jambudvīpa (our world) was divided by Agnidhra, and the names also of his nine sons. But the text gives us these names and nothing more, as it wishes to tell, at least in brief, the story of those kings who ruled over India, during the period of the first Manu. The first king of Bhāratavarsha, or, as it was called at that time, the country of Hima, because it lay to the south of the Himālayas, was Nābhi, the great-grandson of Manu. He was succeeded by Rishabha, who followed the example of his grandfather, and devoted his declining years to the practice of asceticism. Retiring to the hermitage of Pulastya, one of Brahmā's mind-born sons, his austerities and penance were so severe that his body was reduced to skin and bones. He finally made the great journey, with 'a pebble in his mouth and naked.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Wilson's translation, vol. ii. p. 137, and also this quotation (p. 128). 'From this region heaven is obtained, or even in some cases, liberation from existence; or men pass from hence into the condition of brutes or fall into hell. Heaven, emancipation, a state in mid-air or in the subterraneous realms, succeed to existence here; and the world of acts is not the title of any other portion of the universe. The reference to perfect faculties indicates that a person crippled or defective in any way could not hope for liberation. 'his merits must first secure his being born again, perfect and entire.'

<sup>2</sup> This is the *mahāprasthāna* or *great setting out* on the journey that ends in death. The reader of the *Mahābhārata* will remember that Book XVII describes the great journey of Yudhishtira, his brothers and their wife Draupadi, one of the most moving narratives in all literature. See also the last book of the *Rāmāyana* for Rāma's *setting out*. Wilson has a note on this passage and its parallel in the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, which links Rishabha with Jainism and the west of India.

Rishabha was succeeded by Bharata, and it is from his time that India came to be called *Bhāratavarsha*. More than twenty names are now recorded of the kings who followed, son succeeding father without a break. Of several it is said that they resigned the sovereignty into the hands of their heirs-apparent, and retired to the woods, a place of pilgrimage called Sālagrāma, being twice mentioned. For the rest, it is merely added that their descendants held possession of the country for 'seventy-one periods of the aggregate of the four ages,' that is to say, throughout the reign of the first Manu, or for more than 306 million years.<sup>1</sup>

In the centre of our world, stands, the golden mountain, Meru. Its height is 84,000 yojanas, and its depth, beneath the level of the earth, 16,000 Yojanas.<sup>2</sup> At the summit the diameter is 32,000, and at its base it is 16,000 yojanas. In appearance it is like the seed cup of a lotus. Mount Meru is buttressed by four other mountains, each of them 10,000 yojanas high, the best known of them called Mandara. And on each of these mountains there stands a mighty tree, 1,100 yojanas high. One of them is a Jambu tree, and it is from this tree that the continent of Jambu acquired its name. The apples that grow on this tree are as large as elephants and, when they fall to the ground, the juice which exudes from them forms the river Jambu, whose waters quench the thirst of all who dwell in that region. These waters contain such remarkable properties, that no one who drinks thereof is subject to 'perspiration, foul odours, decrepitude or organic decay.'

<sup>1</sup> The reader will remember that in Book I. c. 13, we were told about the posterity of Dhruva, whose father Uttānapāda was Manu's second son. In that chapter we read of how Dhruva's descendants ruled the earth, and especially of Prithu the first king. On the face of it these two narratives cannot be reconciled. Wilson says that Uttānapāda and his descendants appear in one list as living during the reign of the second Manu. But that is a small inconsistency compared with what we find in Book I. c. 13, where it is said that Dhruva's great-grandson was the father of the sixth Manu.

<sup>2</sup> As a yojana is about seven miles, this makes Mount Meru 588,000 miles high, the same size as is recorded in the *Mahābhārata*, whose account of the earth (in Book VI) should be consulted.

The soil also on the river banks is changed into gold, and it is used by the Siddhas to make the ornaments with which they adorn their persons. On the four sides of this mountain also, there are four lakes,<sup>1</sup> from which the gods themselves are wont to drink.

But best of all, on the summit of Mount Meru there stands Brahmā's own city, fourteen thousand yojanas in length, and on every side of it other cities as well, the homes of Indra and those other gods who act as the regents of the spheres.<sup>2</sup> The river Ganges, which issues from the foot of Vishnu, flows round the capital of Brahmā and, when she has passed through the region of the moon, descends to the earth. It is not however as one river but as four that the Ganges enriches the world. One branch flows towards the north and falls into the northern ocean. Others travel east, south and west, until they reach the seas that lie in these different directions. In the valleys that cluster round Mount Meru, there are many pleasant spots, where Gandharvas, Yakshas, Rākshasas, Daityas and Dānavas spend their happy nights and days. While other gods, Vishnu and Lakshmi, Agni, Sūrya and many more have built cities and palaces among the woods and forests that clothe its mighty sides. To these blessed abodes, where the righteous dwell, no wicked men can hope to come, even at the end of a hundred births.<sup>3</sup>

Having completed his description of Jambudvīpa, and remarked once more that it is surrounded by an ocean of salt water, Parāshara now proceeds to describe the other six island-continent, with their corresponding oceans, which in ever widening concentric circles lie

**The seven continents and seven seas**

<sup>1</sup> One of these lakes is Mānasa. There is a Manasarovar lake to the north of the Himālayas.

<sup>2</sup> These are the Lokapālas, the guardian deities who preside over the eight points of the compass, i.e., the four cardinal and four intermediate points of the compass. Indra (east), Agni (south-east), Yama (south), Surya (south-west), Varuna (west), Vāyu (north-west), Kuvera (north) and Soma (north-east).

<sup>3</sup> One is surprised to find wicked creatures like Rākshasas dwelling there, but as we know from the *Rāmāyana*, Rāvana the greatest of all Rākshāsas, was an eminent ascetic and versed in the Vedas. Daityas and Dānavas, too, were enemies of the gods.

beyond our world. The first is called *Plaksha*, surrounded by an ocean of *sugar-cane juice*, and the others are *Sālmala*, *Kusha*, *Krauncha Shāka* and *Pushkara*. Their encircling oceans are composed of *wine*, *clarified butter*, *curds*, *milk* and *fresh water*. Each continent is twice the size of the one immediately nearer the centre. The statements about five of these continents, i.e., with the exception of Pushkara, vary very little the one from the other. They each contain seven separate divisions ruled over by seven kings; they have each seven mountain ranges and seven sacred rivers, the very mention of whose names is sufficient to remove all sin. The worship of Vishnu is practised in all, though in one it is under the form of the moon god; in another as Rudra; in others as Brahmā or Vāyu or the Sun. The inhabitants, who live for 5,000 years, spend their days in happiness, enjoying as they do the society of gods and Gandharvas. And yet, there also, the people are divided into four castes. In every continent the names of the castes are different, but the privileges and duties are the same.

As has been indicated, the condition of Pushkara, the continent furthest away from the centre, and situated on the other side of the sea of milk, differs from the others in many respects. **Pushkara-dvīpa** Pushkara has two divisions, not seven, and its kings are only two in number. It has only one range of mountains, and contains no rivers, while its inhabitants live for 10,000 years, double the age of those who dwell on the other islands. But most wonderful of all, in Pushkaradvīpa caste is unknown, nor is there any need of laws and regulations for the control and guidance of its inhabitants. As for the three Vedas, they do not exist there. Nor do men follow any occupation, because food of every sort and of the richest kinds is spontaneously produced. There they know nothing of virtue or vice, of truth or falsehood. They are haunted by neither jealousy nor fear, neither hatred nor covetousness. It is indeed an earthly paradise, where time brings no sorrow, and every one is free from sickness and

decay, unmoved by anger and love.<sup>1</sup> Like the other island continents, Pushkara is surrounded by an ocean, composed of fresh water. The contents of these seven oceans never vary in quantity, and yet they rise and fall to the extent of five hundred and ten finger breadths, in response to the waxing and waning of the moon. As an explanation of this phenomenon Parāshara called the attention of his disciple to the fact that water in a caldron expands when exposed to heat, and in the same way he thought that the waters of the ocean would swell with the increase of the moon.

Pushkaradvīpa and its surrounding ocean are, however, not the limit of the universe. Beyond the fresh water sea, there is yet another region, a **Thick darkness** land of gold and uninhabited. It is twice the size of Pushkara, and seems to have no name. But on its furthest verge, the very limit of the world, there stands a great range of mountains, many thousands of miles in breadth and height. They are called *the world not a world* mountains, and beyond them and on every side of them, there is thick darkness, a darkness which is encompassed by the shell of the mundane egg.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Muir (*Original Sanskrit Text*, vol. i. p. 502) reminds us that Homer placed the Elysian fields on the furthest verge of the earth.

'That realm which fair-haired Rhadamanthus sways,  
Where free from toil, men pass their tranquil days,  
No tempests vex that land, no rain nor snow,  
But ceaseless Zephyrs from the ocean blow,  
Which sweetly breathe and gently stir the air,  
And to the dwellers grateful coolness bear.'

See Note 8, on the countries that lie beyond our world.

<sup>2</sup> The mountains Lokāloka are so named, says the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, because the world (loka) is separated by them from that which is not a world (ālōka).

The egg is referred to in the first book, and in the *Laus of Manu* we read of the egg in which Brahmā was born and from the two halves of which he formed heaven and earth. See *Summary of Manu*, p. 17. This chapter closes with the statement that the earth, including continents and oceans, right up to the exterior shell, is 500 million yojanas in extent, which figure needs to be multiplied by 7 to give us the length in miles! Wilson suggests that this should include the planetary spheres as, according to the measurements given in the text, the total diameter of continent and oceans, including the Lokāloka land is only 51 million, 10 thousand yojanas. But it is better to fall back on the solution of an Indian commentator: 'Whenever any contradictions in different Purānas are observed, they are ascribed by the pious to differences of Kalpas and the like!'

Having explained what was on the surface of the earth, Parāshara proceeded to describe the lower regions.

#### The lower regions or Pātāla

To a depth of 490,000 miles the seven regions of Pātāla descend, one lying below the other and all of equal size. They are the habitations of Dānavas, Daityas, Yakshas and snake deities, whose comfort and happiness so surprised the rishi Nārada that he said there was no place in heaven to equal the lower regions. It was not to be compared to Pātāla, either in the goodness of the climate or the grandeur of the scenery. The sun was not hot, nor the moon cold; both confined themselves to imparting light. The air was full of the song of birds and the music of the inhabitants, as they wandered in beautiful gardens or by the shores of lovely lakes enriched with lotus flowers. The maidens of the demon race were so fascinating that they stole the hearts of the most austere, while time did not seem to exist for the men who did nothing but eat and drink.

Still lower down than the seven Pātālas there is the great serpent Shesha, on whom the whole world rests.

Another name for Shesha is *Ananta* or the infinite, and he is one of the forms of Vishnu. Shesha has a thousand heads, each of them bearing the mystic sign, *Swastika*, while the thousand jewels on his thousand hoods shed light on every side. It is Shesha that robs the demons (Asuras) of their strength. In one hand he holds a plough, in the other a pestle. His eyes are red with liquor, and as he rolls them about in his intoxication, and yawns, the earth trembles. No one can recount his many virtues; no one can sing his praises, as they deserve; not even the gods can comprehend his power and glory. Vārūṇī, the goddess of wine, is 'his own embodied radiance,' and at the end of a Kalpa he pours forth from his mouths poison and flame, which in the form of Rudra destroy the worlds.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is also said that by propitiating Shesha, the sage Garga obtained a knowledge of the stars, and of the omens which this knowledge reveals.

Altogether distinct from the lower regions there is a series of Hells, also spoken of as being situated beneath the earth. Where these are to be placed in relation to Pātāla is not clearly explained. But it is enough to know that it is to these hells (Naraka) and not Pātāla that sinners are consigned. There are said to be hundreds and thousands of them, indeed there is a hell for every sin that a man commits, but the Purāna gives a list of twenty-eight, specially named, whose sovereign is Yama. Other Purānas say that Yama is not only the sovereign of these regions, but that he acts as the judge of the dead who appear before his judgement seat. In the awarding of punishment Yama is assisted by Chitrakūṭa who keeps a register of men's deeds. Our Purāna is content with saying that these hells are fitted with instruments of torture and burning fires into which the wicked are cast. But there seem to be other forms of torture also. For instance, those who eat their food without making an offering to the gods and manes, or to guests will go to a hell where saliva will be their only nourishment, while those who take unlawful gifts will have to live in a hell where everyone hangs head downwards. There is another hell, too, the leaves of whose trees are swords, to which is condemned the man who, without good reason, cuts down a tree. And yet another hell, the hell of fiery flame, for the poor potter, because in the prosecution of his trade he has baked earthen vessels in the fire. Many of the sins specified in this chapter are the sins which every moral code condemns; the sins of theft, drunkenness, false witness, murder, adultery and incest. But we learn with some surprise that a gaoler and a horse-dealer go to the same place as the man who sells his wife, and that the man who lives by his wife's prostitution is no worse than the man who attends to his business affairs when the moon is new or full, because they will find themselves together in the hell whose wells are full of blood. Two more facts may be added. The man who eats sweetmeats by himself, that is, says the commentator, 'and thereby disappoints children,' the Brāhmin who sells liquor, flesh

**The twenty-eight hells**

or salt, and those who rear cats and dogs, goats, pigs and birds will all be swept in to the hell that flows with worms and pus. The religious student who sleeps in the day-time, and the father who allows himself to be taught the Scriptures by his own children, will have to eat dogs. In conclusion, any breach of the laws of caste, any failure to perform the duties which belong to our condition in life, 'whether in thought, word, or deed,' will most certainly be punished in one of these hells. The gods are able to look down and see how sinners suffer in torment, and these sufferers in turn can look up and see the gods in the enjoyment of their heavenly bliss. No wonder Parāshara once more reminded his disciple of the endless series of births, through which the soul must pass from body to body. Beginning with the lowest stage of life, that of inanimate things, and rising through worms, fish, birds, animals, men, saints and gods up to 'liberated spirits,' these are the stages through which the soul must pass. Yes, every being in heaven and hell is fated to pass through all these stages, each of which is a thousand degrees superior to the one that precedes it, until the final goal is reached and final emancipation is achieved.

Fortunately, for every sin there is an act of atonement, and the different modes of expiation have been duly set forth by Manu and others.<sup>1</sup> And the punishment fits the crime; grievous penances, hard to be borne, for grievous sins; trifling penances for trifling offences. But there is a much better way than the way of atonement. If we put our trust in Krishna,<sup>2</sup> and repent of our sins, that is the best penance of all. Turn your thoughts to him, repeat his name, think of him morning, noon and night, and you will be delivered from your sins and your sorrows. Nay! You will get final emancipation, if you come to look on heaven itself as a hindrance to your happiness. Who

<sup>1</sup> The text reads, Svāyambhuva, i.e. the first Manu. The *Laws of Manu* claims to have been composed by him, though it afterwards seems to forget this claim.

<sup>2</sup> Krishna is the incarnation of Vishnu described in the fifth book. Hari and Vāsudeva are other names employed in this passage.

wants to go to heaven, when he knows that he must return again to earth? Let us think on Vishnu then, and on Vishnu alone, for by meditating thereon, we are free for ever. Heaven is but another name for what gives happiness; hell is but another name for what gives pain. We call the one virtue, the other vice. That which at one moment affords us joy at another moment causes sorrow. Of nothing can it be truly said that it is either pleasant or painful, for pleasure and pain are merely states of mind. The Supreme Brahma is the only wisdom; from which you may 'conclude that both knowledge and ignorance are comprised in wisdom.'<sup>1</sup>

Just as there are seven lower regions, so also are there seven upper regions or worlds, the one rising high above the other. Parāshara had little to say about them beyond giving their names. They are as follows: (1) *Bhūr loka*, or the earth, including its oceans, mountains and rivers. (2) *Bhuvar loka*, or the space between the earth and the sun inhabited by *Munis* and *Siddhas*. (3) *Svar loka*, or the space between the sun and the pole star. (4) *Mahar loka*, or the sphere of saints who live there for the duration of a Kalpa or day of Brahmā. The first three worlds perish at the end of a Kalpa; Mahar loka is not destroyed, but has to be abandoned because of the heat, as we are told in the first book, which also says that its inhabitants take refuge in the higher worlds which only perish at the end of Brahmā's life, (5) *Jana loka*, the dwelling place of Brahmā's four pure minded sons, Sanandana and others who refused to marry and have offspring. (6) *Tapo loka*, the sphere of penance inhabited by deities called *Vairājas*, 'who are unconsumable by fire.' (7) *Satya loka*, the sphere of truth whose inhabitants will never again know death.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Commenting on this, Wilson remarks that both text and comment are somewhat obscure.

<sup>2</sup> In Book I. ch. vi. eight upper worlds are spoken of as places to which the pious are raised after death. The earth, is not included. But Maruṭ loka, or region of the Maruts, is inserted between (3) and (4) of the above list, while the highest is said to be the high world of Vishnu, where dwell those who permanently meditate upon Brahma. Book II. ch. viii. also refers to this excellent.

This summary of the seven worlds, includes a table of distances from the earth right up to Satya loka, showing a grand total of many millions of miles. Parāshara was able to give this, because he measured the distance from the earth to the sun, and then to the moon and other planets, finally showing that from the earth to the pole star was ten and a half million miles. As for the spaces beyond the pole star, he says that the pole star and Mahar loka were ten million yojanas apart, while the distance between the other worlds exceeded that of the two immediately below by multiples of two, four and six.<sup>1</sup>

These seven upper worlds, together with seven lower worlds, constitute the mundane egg, or egg of Brahmā, encompassed as we have heard already by its shell. Beyond the shell there is water for a space equal to ten times the diameter of Brahmā's egg. This water is encompassed by fire, the fire is encompassed by air, and the air by ether. But that is not all. The ether is enveloped by the origin of the elements (*Ahankāra*) and it again is enveloped by Intellect (*Mahat* or *Buddhi*).

place of Vishnu, to which those repair in whom all sources of pain are extinct. Dharma, the god of righteousness, and Dhruva are both there. The same chapter speaks of the 88,000 Siddhas, and says that by immortality is meant existence to the end of a Kalpa.

<sup>1</sup> Here are Parāshara's distances :

|                                       |                    |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| The Earth to the Sun                  | 100,000 yojanas.   |
| The Sun to the Moon                   | 100,000 "          |
| The Moon to the lunar constellations  | 100,000 "          |
| The constellations to Budha (Mercury) | 200,000 "          |
| Budha to Shukra (Venus)               | 200,000 "          |
| Shukra to Angāraka (Mars)             | 200,000 "          |
| Angāraka to Brihaspati (Jupiter)      | 200,000 "          |
| Brihaspati to Sani (Saturn)           | 200,000 "          |
| Sani to Seven Rishis (the plough)     | 100,000 "          |
| Seven Rishis to Dhruva (Pole star)    | 100,000 "          |
|                                       | <hr/>              |
|                                       | 1,500,000 yojanas. |

The text goes on to give other distances :

|                         |                     |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Pole Star to Mahar loka | 10,000,000 yojanas. |
| Mahar loka to Jana loka | 20,000,000 "        |
| Jana loka to Taparika   | 80,000,000 "        |
| Taparika to Satya loka  | 480,000,000 "       |

Each of these encompassing envelopes is ten times the breadth of that which it encloses. Here the author had paused to make this explanation, and he now goes on to say that *Intellect* is encompassed by Pradhāna (the chief one, Prakriti). No one can speak of its extent for it is infinite, 'the boundless and illimitable cause of all existing things, the cause of all mundane eggs, of which there are thousands and tens of thousands, and millions of thousands, such as has been described.'

But 'within Pradhāna resides Soul, diffusive, conscious and self irradiating; as fire (is inherent) in flint or sesamum oil in seed,' while both Pradhāna and spirit are encompassed by the energy of Vishnu. It is the energy of Vishnu, which causes Pradhāna and spirit to come together in creation, which maintains them in union, which separates them at the time of dissolution. It is Vishnu who causes all things to evolve. And Vishnu is Brahma, the supreme spirit, from whom the world proceeds, by whom it subsists, to whom it will return. 'He is the supreme abode of the existent and the non-existent. He it is by whose non-difference from Brahma, this entire universe, moveable and immoveable, has its being.'<sup>2</sup>

Sun, Moon and stars now claimed the attention of the sage, and he discoursed at length on the size of the sun's chariot, on its seven horses, and in particular, on its journey through the heavens. For every month in the year, the Sun had a different set of companions with him in his chariot. But they always included one of the twelve Adityas, a Rishi, a serpent, a Rākshasa, a Gandharva and a heavenly nymph. And it seems to have been the duty of the rishi to chant, and of the Gandharva to sing his praise, of the nymph to dance before him, of the serpent to yoke his horses, and of the Rākshasa to act as his general attendant. Crowds of Vālakhilyas, too, no bigger

**Sun, Moon,  
and Stars**

<sup>1</sup> See Wilson's translation, vol. ii. p. 233. The reader will remember that Pradhāna, Mahat and Ahankāra are the three primary categories of the Sāṅkhya philosophy. See Note 2.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from FitzEdward Hall's translation. p. 236.

than one's thumb surrounded the chariot on every side, and they, with the others, were responsible 'for the distribution of cold, heat and rain' at the different seasons. As he journeys through the sky the sun is daily exposed to a very great danger. This happens at the hour of dawn. It appears that there is a race of fiends called Mandehas, the victims of a curse uttered against them by Brahmā. The curse is to the effect that they shall die every day and presumably revive every night. In any case, what happens is that they attack the Sun each day at dawn.

In this daily combat with these demons, the Sun is always successful, but it is the imperative duty of all

**The Gayatri  
verse and OM**

Brāhmins to sprinkle water that has been purified by the recital of the sacred letters OM and the Gāyatrī verse. It is indeed this holy water which causes the downfall of the demons, and brings deliverance to the Sun. No one therefore should ever fail to perform this daily morning sacrifice. Neglect to do so is reckoned as equivalent to the murder of the Sun. And the Sun is really a part of Vishnu. Light is his essence, and the light is called forth by reciting the syllable OM, a syllable which itself is Vishnu the substance of the three Vedas.<sup>1</sup>

As has been already observed, the river Ganges finds her source in the foot of Vishnu. But Parāshara now enters into more exact detail. For to be quite accurate, it is the nail of the big toe of Vishnu's left foot, from which that river flows. From there it falls on the head of Dhruva, stationed in the pole star, and from him, thus highly favoured, it descends to the seven rishis<sup>2</sup> who not only use her waters in the practice of their devotions but cause it to pass through their hair. The Ganges next visits the moon, whose lustre is increased by her presence and from there she alights on the top of Mount Meru, the home of the gods. Having thus reached earth she

<sup>1</sup> Chapters 8-12 deal with sun, moon and stars. No further attempt is made to summarize these chapters. See Note 9.

<sup>2</sup> The seven rishis are Ursa Major or the plough constellation.

branches into four, and as she travels in these different directions purifies the world with her waters. One of the branches known as Alakanandā, on one occasion, continued to fall for more than an hundred years on the head of Shiva, a gracious act which enabled the Ganges to lave the ashes of the sons of Sagara,<sup>1</sup> and by her cleansing waters raise them up to heaven. And this is a privilege in which all men can share. Bathing in the Ganges affords the very greatest merit and is followed by the immediate removal of our sins. A man's ancestors acquire unusual satisfaction, if these sacred waters are reverently offered in oblation for a period of three years. The twice-born, who sacrifice on her banks, get whatever they desire either here or in heaven. While holy men who bathe in her with minds intent on Vishnu will obtain emancipation from the bonds of existence. To hear of her, to desire her, to see her, to touch her, to bathe in her, renders you holy. Yes! even hundreds of miles away, if you call out 'Ganges! Ganges!' you will remove the sins you have committed in three previous births.

In a previous chapter, when speaking about Bharata, a descendant of the first Manu, and who gave his name to Bhāratavarsha or India,<sup>2</sup> Parāshara promised to tell his disciple a story about that monarch. Bharata, the reader will remember, resigned his empire into the hands of his son and retired to the forest. And as Maitreya remarked, one would have thought that his devotion to Vishnu, as well as the sacredness of Sālagrāma, his place of retirement, would have secured for him final liberation. But he failed in his object and was subject to rebirth, first as a deer and next as a Brāhmin. How that came to pass the following narrative will explain. When he first retired to the hermitage of

<sup>1</sup> The story of Sagara is told in the fourth book of this Purāna, and in both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*.

<sup>2</sup> According to the *Mahābhārata* it was an entirely different Bharata who gave his name to India. The Bharata of the epic lived in the reign of the seventh Manu, not of the first, and was not descended from either of them, but from the Moon.

Sālagrāma, Bharata did nothing but repeat the names of Vishnu. Not even in his dreams did any other name present itself to his mind. And on these names he meditated night and day. In fact, apart from accepting fuel, flowers and sacred grass for the worship of that god, he performed no other religious rite of any kind, so absorbed was he in his devotion to the sacred name. But it so chanced that one day he went to bathe in a river. When he was in the water, a deer, that had come to drink, was so alarmed by the roar of a lion, that she gave sudden birth to her young. Unfortunately she died in the act of parturition, and her offspring fell into the stream. Had the king not gone to the rescue the poor creature would have been drowned. But Bharata plunged into the water, brought it safe to land and carried it to his hermitage. As the days passed, the king grew fonder and fonder of the creature he had saved. It played about his cell, or grazed quietly on the grass outside the hermitage. Gradually he became so devoted to it that he could think of nothing else, and if it chanced to wander into the forest or was longer away than usual, his anxiety became acute, and he wondered if some wild beast had destroyed it. And so it came to pass, that he, who had abandoned home and children, wealth and power, could think of nothing but his four-footed companion. And when, in course of time he died, Vishnu was absent from his thoughts, and in the moment of death both eyes and thoughts were turned to the creature that he loved.

Having died in this manner, with his last thoughts centred on a deer, it was as a deer that Bharata was born in his next birth. But he was endowed with the power to remember who he had been in his former life. In consequence of his knowledge Bharata was apparently ashamed of his folly. At least he left his mother and made once more for Sālagrāma, the scene of his past efforts and failures. By living on grass and leaves he was able to atone for what he had done, with the result that in his next life he was born as a Brāhmin,

**Bharata born  
as a deer and  
as a Brahmin**

in a family noted for its piety and asceticism. And once more, he was able to remember what had happened to him in former births. Without explaining how he acquired it the text says that Bharata in his new life was 'possessed of all true wisdom' and saw the soul as 'supreme over Prakriti' (matter). But he did not study the Vedas nor perform ceremonies. And when any one spoke to him, he replied in a rude and ungrammatical way. Every one concluded that he was ignorant and stupid and treated him with contempt. He added to the delusion by wearing dirty clothes, never washing his body and letting saliva dribble from his mouth. But if you are anxious to retain the respect of men, you will not make progress in piety. The more people despise you the more likely you are to attain your end. This is the advice of Hiranyagarbha, which the Brāhmin called to mind, and for that reason he assumed the appearance of a crazy idiot in the eyes of the world.<sup>1</sup>

But when his father died, Bharata's brothers and cousins took advantage of his simplicity. They sent him to work in the fields, and the only recompence he received was the coarsest and most unsavoury food. Others also shared in the exploitation of this poor simpleton as he appeared to them, and because he was strong and vigorous in body, he was at the disposal of every one who chose to bend him to their needs. At last he was commanded by a king's steward to assist in carrying the royal palanquin. One day this king set out to visit Kapila, the famous sage, who dwelt on the banks of the river Ikshumati, and the Brāhmin was one of those who were compelled to carry the palanquin.<sup>2</sup> None of the bearers were paid for their work, but while the others marched sturdily on, Bharata, plunged in thought, lagged behind his companions. Then remembering his

<sup>1</sup> See Wilson's translation of this interesting passage. He says that Hiranyagarbha or Brāhmā is named here, instead of the Yoga doctrine, which is sometimes ascribed to him as its author.

<sup>2</sup> Kapila is the reputed founder of the Sāṅkhya philosophy. If the Purāna's chronology be true, then Kapila lived during the period of the first Manu, or about 2000 millions of years ago.

former lives and the sins of which he had been guilty, he was glad to think that by bearing burdens he was able to do something by way of atonement. His slower movements, however, caused the palanquin to jolt badly, and the king several times ordered his bearers to keep step. When he had protested more than once without getting any satisfaction, one of the bearers at last replied that it was the Brāhmin's fault, not theirs. 'How is this?' said the king, 'you look strong and healthy are you so very tired that you cannot keep step with others, and bear you proper share?' To these remonstrances Bharata replied by a series of questions relating to the distinction between *I* and *Thou*. 'You say that I look strong and healthy. You say that you see I bear the palanquin. What do you mean by *I* and *Thou*. What part of me have you seen? The feet rest on the ground, the feet support the legs, the legs support the thighs, and so on, up to the shoulders, which support the palanquin. How then can it be said that the palanquin is my burden?' And then, pointing to the king's body, he said, 'This body which is seated in the palanquin is defined as *Thou*. Tell me what is *I* and what is *Thou*. *Thou* and *I* and *others* are all made up of elements, and "elements, following the stream of qualities, assume a bodily shape, but qualities, such as goodness and the rest, are dependent on acts, and acts, accumulated in ignorance, influence the condition of all beings." With much more of the same kind Bharata closed his observations by saying that the substance of the palanquin was the substance of the king, the substance of himself and of all others, 'an aggregate of elements, aggregated by individuality.' When he had said this, the king came tumbling out of his litter and fell at the Brāhmin's feet begging that he would have mercy on him and say who he was. He looked like a fool, but it was manifest that he was somebody else living in disguise. Was he the great sage, Kapila himself, to whose hermitage they were travelling? This led to further discourse when the Brāhmin, not unnaturally in view of what he had already said, replied that it was impossible.

to say who he was. Because when one had arrived at a knowledge of the truth, how could one recognize any distinction, or speak of his own individuality, and say, 'This is I'.<sup>1</sup>

The king was greatly impressed by these words of wisdom, and said he did not doubt their truth.

**Man's chief end**

Nevertheless, he continued to feel perplexed. What did the Brāhmin mean by saying that his body was something distinct from himself, or that he did not really carry the palanquin? All the same, he was sure that his questioner was the great sage, Kapila, whom he was going to see. Every one knew that Kapila was a portion of Vishnu himself, and he was confident that the venerable sage had taken compassion upon him and was now standing before him in the person of the Brāhmin. It was therefore quite unnecessary for him to go any further, and he begged that the Brāhmin would there and then explain to him what was *the best*. This fresh question produced a lengthy reply. As the Brāhmin pointed out the king was asking what was *the best*, when he ought to be asking what was the supreme and final truth. He was asking for *Shreyas*, instead of for *Paramārtha*.<sup>2</sup> No doubt when men worshipped the gods, hoping thereby to obtain offspring, power or wealth, or

<sup>1</sup> In this very full summary, much has been taken from Wilson's translation, vol. ii. p. 318-324. Here is another quotation, 'the pure imperishable soul, tranquil, void of all qualities, pre-eminent over nature (Prakriti), is one, without increase or diminution, in all bodies' (p. 320). And another, 'A man, a woman, a cow, a goat, a horse, an elephant, a bird, a tree are names assigned to various bodies, which are the consequences of acts. Puns (spirit) is neither a god nor a man, nor a brute nor a tree; these are mere varieties of shape, the effects of acts. The thing which in the world is called a king, or the servant of a king, or by any other appellation is not a reality; it is the creature of our imaginations.' 'Thou art called the monarch of the world, the son of thy father, the enemy of thy foes, the husband of thy wife, the father of thy children. What shall I denominate thee? How art thou situated? Art thou the head or the belly? Or are they thine? Art thou the feet? or do they belong to thee? Thou art, oh king, distinct in thy nature from all thy members.' p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> Monier-Williams gives as the meaning of *Shreyas*, 'better, more excellent; best, more excellent;' and of *Paramārtha*, 'the highest or most sublime truth, the best kind of wealth.' Using these interpretations, we might say that the Brāhmin told the king that he was seeking for *the better*, when he ought to choose *the best*.

happiness in heaven, they were seeking what they thought to be the best. Indeed, one might say that there were thousands of objects and conditions, to which the term *best* could be applied. But none of them was man's chief end. How could wealth be called man's chief end, when it was surrendered for the sake of virtue, or more commonly spent in the procuring of material satisfactions? Nor could offspring be considered 'final truth' for the son who was *the best* to his father had, in his turn, to hope for a son who would be *the best* to him. He had referred to the practice of religious rites. And now he asked the question: How could things like fuel, clarified butter and sacrificial grass, things that perished in the using, serve more than a temporary purpose? No form of worship could achieve for us that which was the best of all. Even meditation, in which one sought to achieve union with the supreme, was not efficacious. Because, when any one sought *union*, he was making a distinction, which did not exist. It was therefore wrong to say that the effort to secure union with the supreme was man's chief end.<sup>1</sup>

In further illustration of this argument, the Brāhmin told the king a story. The god Brahmā had a son called Ribhu, of deep piety and profoundly versed in the doctrine of unity. One of his disciples was Nidāgha, a son of Pulastya, the Prajāpati.<sup>2</sup> After his course of instruction was over, Nidāgha returned to his father's house in Vīranagara, a large and beautiful town on the banks of the river Devikā. At the close of a thousand divine years, (which means 360,000 human years) Ribhu thought he would like to know how his disciple was getting on, and

**The sage Ribhu on unity**

<sup>1</sup> On this passage, Wilson remarks, 'It is here argued that it is absurd to talk of effecting a union between the soul of man and supreme soul; for if they are distinct, essentially, they cannot combine; if they are already one and the same, it is nonsense to talk of their union. The great end of life or truth is not to effect the union of two things, or two parts of one thing, but to know that all is unity.' Vol. II. p. 328.

<sup>2</sup> Pulastya was one of the mind-born sons of Brahmā, referred to in the first book and father of the demons. Ribhu is sometimes spoken of as a fifth to the four Kumāras, or mind-born sons of Brahmā, and as having this Purāna communicated to him by Brahmā.

accordingly set out for the city of Pulastya. Nidāgha had just completed his worship of the Vishvadevas, and was standing at the door of his house when his spiritual teacher drew near. After the usual greetings were over and the hands and feet of the honoured guest had been duly washed, Ribhu, when asked to eat, said that he had no liking for ordinary and indifferent food. Indeed he declined to eat the rice, barley and pulse that were set before him, and demanded 'rice boiled with sugar, wheaten cakes and milk, curds and molasses.' After this sweet and savoury food had been consumed, the disciple asked his master if he had had enough, and was satisfied with its quality and taste. He also asked where Ribhu was staying, where he was going, and from where he had come. To this Ribhu replied that it was a stupid thing to ask where any one dwelt, where he came from and where he was going. The soul of man went everywhere. He was neither going nor coming, nor was his dwelling in any one place. He added, 'nor art thou thou, nor are others others, nor am I I.'<sup>1</sup> As for his hunger, of course a hungry man's hunger was satisfied when he had finished his meal, and one was pleased when hunger and thirst were removed. Probably his disciple wondered why he 'made any distinction between sweetened and unsweetened food.' He would explain. 'Is there anything really sweet or not sweet to him who takes meals? That which is considered sweet is no longer so when it causes the sense of repletion, and that which is not sweet, becomes so when a man considers it as such. What food is there, which is equally delightful from the first to the middle and last?' As a house built of clay is strengthened by fresh plaster, so is this earthly body maintained by earthly atoms. And barley, wheat, pulse, butter, oil, milk, curds, treacle, fruits and the like are made of earthly atoms. You have now understood what is sweet and what is not; do you so act that you may be impressed with the notion of

<sup>1</sup> For the worship of the Vishvadevas see *Summary of Laws of Manu*, pp. 11-38.

identity which leads to final liberation.<sup>1</sup> Nidāgha was overwhelmed by these words of wisdom and said that the infatuation of his mind had been removed. After a few more observations on the undivided nature of the supreme spirit (Vāsudeva) Ribhu went his way.

At the end of another thousand years Ribhu decided to pay another visit to the city of Pulastya, and impart still further wisdom to his former  
**I and Thou** disciple. As he drew near to the city gate he saw his pupil. He looked very starved and emaciated. On his head was a bundle of fuel and sacrificial grass which he had brought from the forest. And he was standing apart to avoid a great crowd of people watching their king as he entered the town riding on an elephant. Approaching Nidāgha, Ribhu asked him who among the crowd was the king and who were the others. Nidāgha replied that the person seated on the elephant was the king, and the others were his attendants. You have pointed out to me the king and the elephant, said Ribhu; but will you be good enough to explain, which is the elephant and which is the king? The elephant is beneath and the king is above; was Nidāgha's reply. Such an answer, said Ribhu, explains nothing. You must first tell me what you mean by *beneath* and *above*. This was too much for the victim of these many questions. And so, dropping his bundle of grass and fuel, he jumped on the top of his interrogator with the cry, 'I am above like the Rajah; you are beneath like the elephant. I hope you understand now.' But Ribhu was not to be so silenced, for as he panted beneath the weight of his assailant he was able to say, 'That is all very well; but please answer this question also. It seems that I am like the elephant and you are like the rajah; but which of us two, pray, is *you*, and which of us, is *I*?' At last Nidāgha's eyes were opened. He fell at

<sup>1</sup> This passage has been quoted from Dutt's translation, p. 167. Ribhu's explanation was a very poor one. If 'that which is not sweet becomes so when a man considers it as such,' why was not Ribhu content to eat what was set before him? To impress the *notion of identity* on his disciples' mind!

Ribhu's feet with the words, 'You must be my old teacher. There is no other person alive so deeply impressed with the doctrines and principles of unity.' It is not said what happened to Ribhu, but his disciple, we are told, was so impressed by this practical and final lesson of his master, that he eventually beheld all beings 'as the same with himself,' in consequence of which he obtained final liberation.

Having told this remarkable tale about Ribhu and his disciple the Brāhmin, who in a former existence had been Bharata, exhorted the king 'to consider himself as one, with all that exists in the world.' There is no other than Vishnu, who is present in all things. 'He is I; he is thou; he is all; this universe is his form.' 'Give up therefore the misconceived notion of distinction.' The king was able to act successfully on this advice, while Bharata himself, whose recollection of his former births had enabled him to acquire the true wisdom, was freed from the burden of future lives. Those who recite this story or listen to its recitation will have their minds enlightened on the deep question of *individuality* and, in the course of their migrations, become fitted for ultimate emancipation.

**Bharata  
obtains  
emancipation**

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MANUS, THE VEDAS AND RELIGIOUS RITES—BOOK III

Maitreya now expressed a desire to hear a description of the fourteen Manus who have ruled or will rule over the world. Parāshara graciously replied that he would give not only the names of the various Manus but of the gods and rishis who had lived or would live in their different periods.<sup>1</sup> Six of the Manus, we are told, have already passed away. Their names were Swāyambhuva, Swārochisha, Auttami, Tāmasa, Raivata and Chākshusha. Each of these periods, or Manwantaras, lasted for three hundred and six million years, and each period had gods of its own and rishis of its own. Parāshara reminded his disciple that he had already mentioned the names of the gods and rishis who lived during the first period. The gods, twelve in number, were called Yāmas and, according to Book I, chap. 7, they were the great grandchildren of the first Manu; while the rishis, nine in number, were Bhrigu, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Angiras, Marichī, Daksha, Atri and Vasishta, all of them the god Brahmā's mind-born sons. He now proceeds to give the names of the gods and rishis who flourished during the periods of the next five Manus, adding some information about the Manus themselves, as well as of their sons who shared with them the burden of sovereignty. Of the second Manu, for example, it is said that his father was the offspring of a Gandharva and a heavenly nymph, though a later paragraph says that not only he, but the third, fourth and fifth Manus were all descendents of Priyavrata the elder son of the first man. A similar inconsistency marks some of his statements about the gods. In this

**The first six  
Manus, with  
their rishis  
and gods**

<sup>1</sup> The period of each Manu is called a Manwantara (Manu and Antra).

chapter it is said that the gods of the second period were Pārāvatas and Tushitas, whereas Book I chap. 15, says that the Tushitas were the gods of the sixth Manwantara, and contrived to be born again in the womb of Aditi to reappear as the Ādityas, during the reign of the seventh and present Manu. It will be noted also that for the first period it is said that there were nine rishis, but when the text speaks of later periods, it consistently refers to seven. It does not, as a rule, say from whom they were descended, except when, in dealing with the third Manwantara, it records that the rishis of that period were the sons of Vasishtha.

When we reach the period of the seventh Manu, the names of gods, rishis and kings once more become familiar.<sup>1</sup> The present Manu is Vaivaswat, the offspring of the Sun. His nine sons, who presumably reigned over the nine regions of the world, include the name of Ikshwāku (the founder of the solar race and ancestor of Rāma) while the gods are the Ādityas, Vasus and Rudras; the king of the gods being Purandara, a name for India. The seven rishis for this period are Vasishtha, Kashyapa, Atri, Jamadagni, Gautama, Vishvāmitra and Bharadvāja.<sup>2</sup> In every one of these seven periods 'the unequalled energy of Vishnu' has played an all important part. By joining to himself the quality of goodness, he has secured

**The seventh Manu with his rishis and gods**

<sup>1</sup> The seventh Manu is supposed to be reigning at the present time.

<sup>2</sup> That means that Atri and Vasishtha were rishis during the first, as well as the present, Manwantara, an interval of at least 1,500 million years, elapsing between their two appearances. In the *Rāmāyana*, we find Rāma paying a visit to the hermitages of Gautama, Atri and Bharadvāja while the same poem makes both Vasishtha and Vishvāmitra act as ministers to the prince's father. Vasishtha acted as prime minister to the royal house for more than forty generations. As both the epics say that Vishvāmitra was originally a member of the warrior caste, and only obtained the rank of Brahmin after long austerities, it is strange to find him enrolled as one of the seven rishis. His quarrel with Vasishtha is referred to in the *Rig-Veda*, which knew nothing of these absurd periods of time. It should be added that Jamadagni was the father of Parashurāma. He as well as Gautama and Bharadvāja are all mentioned in the epics, but as sages merely, not as great rishis. It is the nine rishis of the first Manwantara for whom both the epics and the *Laws of Manu* always find a place, among the great rishis or Prajāpatis, the mind-born sons of Brahṁā. Manu speaks of ten, adding Nārada to the nine, and calling Daksha, Prachetas.

the preservation of all created things. For example, during the period of the first Manu a portion of his divinity was born as Yajna, the will-begotten progeny of Akuti. If we refer to Book I. ch. 7, we shall find it stated there that Akūti was the daughter of the first Manu, and that as a result of her marriage to the patriarch Ruchi, she gave birth to a son and daughter, Yajna (sacrifice) and Dakshina (gift) who afterwards became husband and wife, and were the parents of the twelve Yāmas, the deities of that period. This Yajna—the reader will realize the symbolical significance of his name as well as that of his sister-wife—was reborn during each of the seven Manwantaras. His name for our present age is Vāmana, born as the son of Kashyapa and Aditi, and it was he, who by taking three steps, subdued the worlds and handed them over to the charge of Purandara the king of the gods.<sup>1</sup> It is because 'this whole world has been pervaded by the energy of the deity' that Vishnu is called Vishnu, 'from the root *Vish* to enter or pervade; for all the gods, the Manus, the seven Rishis, the sons of the Manus, the Indras the sovereigns of the gods, are but the potencies of Vishnu.'<sup>2</sup>

No purpose would be served by giving the names of the seven Manus who, it is said, will live and reign when the present Manwantara has expired, nor of the gods and rishis who will appear in these successive periods. But it is worthy of remark that the Indra or king of the gods during the eighth Manwantara will be the demon Bali, the 'sinless son of Virochana,' who by the favour of Vishnu is at present ruling over a part of the lower

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the incarnation of Vishnu as a Dwarf, when he circumvented the pious Daitya Bali, whose austerities had robbed Indra of his control over the three worlds. The demon Bali was a descendant of Prahlāda and, as we shall find in a later paragraph, will appear as the Indra of the eighth Manwantara. Vishnu appeared as a Dwarf before Bali, and asked for as much ground as he could cover in three paces. When the boon was granted, he expanded to an enormous size and, in three steps traversed the three worlds. Vāmana means a Dwarf.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson's translation, vol. iii. p. 18.

world.<sup>1</sup> This chapter also links the present with the future by giving an account of the matrimonial experiences of the Sun. His wife Sanjnā, a daughter of Vishvakarman, the architect of the gods, bore him three children, two boys and a girl. The first was Vaivaswata the seventh Manu, the second was Yama the god of the dead, and the third was Yami (the river Jamna). Unfortunately their mother was 'unable to endure the fervours of her lord' and took refuge in the forest, leaving her handmaid Chhāyā (shadow) behind her. The Sun, imagining that the handmaid was his wife, became by her, the father of three children more, namely Sanaishchara (Saturn), Sāvarni, who eventually became the eighth Manu, and a daughter the river Tapati. In consequence of Chhāyā one day cursing her step-son Yama, the Sun-god discovered that his real wife had deserted him, and at once took steps to find her. By bringing his powers of meditation (samādhi) into play he discovered where she was engaged in austerities and in the guise of a mare. Having changed himself into a horse the Sun took possession of his wife and for the third time became the father of three children, Revanta, and the two Ashwins.<sup>2</sup> When the Sun brought his errant wife home, her father, who as we have seen was the architect of the gods, 'placed the luminary on his lathe', and by grinding him down was able to reduce his fervour and brilliance by an eighth of what it was, evidently with the intention of rendering his daughter's position more comfortable. He would have taken off more, it is said, but it could not be done. The portions that were pared off fell down still blazing to the earth, but the divine architect put them to a good use, making weapons out of them for his brother

<sup>1</sup> Readers of the *Mahābhārata* will be interested to learn that the rishis of the eighth Manwantara will include Parashurama, one of Vishnu's incarnations, Kripa, Ashwatthaman, 'my son Vyasa', and Rishyashringa. So says the *Vishnu Purāna*.

<sup>2</sup> Revanta was an attendant of the god Kuvera. The Ashwins are Vedic deities, 'the horse-men' twin sons of the sun or sky, 'harbingers of dawn.'

celestials. The discus of Vishnu and the trident of Shiva were both obtained and fashioned in this way.

Having dealt with such vast periods of time as Manwantaras Parāshara condescends for a moment to refer to what happens during the course of the *four ages*. As the reader will remember these *four ages* taken together amount to more than four millions of years. In the first or golden age, owing to the disappearance of the Vedas at the close of the previous cycle, the seven rishis come down from heaven and 'give them currency again,' while the Manu who flourishes at that time composes a system of law known as *Smṛiti* or tradition.<sup>1</sup> In addition to that, Vishnu assuming the form of Kapila and other eminent teachers gives a knowledge of divine wisdom to mankind.<sup>2</sup> During the Tretā or second age Vishnu apparently devotes his energies to keeping the wicked under control and protecting the three worlds. In the Dwāpara age, in the person of Vyāsa, he divides the one Veda into four,<sup>3</sup> while in the Kaliyuga or fourth age he appears as the Kalki-incarnation to bring the wicked back to the paths of righteousness. This process manifestly goes on through one cycle of *four ages*, one after another, until a thousand cycles of *four ages* have passed away. And this will complete a Kalpa or day of Brahmā, to be followed by a 'night of similar duration, when he who wears the form of Brahmā, Janārdana, the substance of all things, the lord of all and creator of all, involved in his own misfortune and having swallowed up the three spaces, sleeps upon the serpent Shesha amidst the ocean, to awake and once more,

<sup>1</sup> *Smṛiti* what is remembered or tradition. To contrast to *Śruti* what is heard or revelation—the Vedas. The *Laws of Manu* speak of both the first and seventh Manus as propounding the laws. But here we have to infer that they intervene at the first age of every cycle of four ages.

<sup>2</sup> *Kapila* was the founder of the Sāṅkhya philosophy. He destroyed the 60,000 sons of Sagara, with his own hand. The *Rāmāyana* also identifies him with Vishnu.

<sup>3</sup> *Vyāsa* was, according to the *Mahābhārata*, the son of that work also. The name means *arranger*. 'My son Vyāsa'—Parāshara; how that was so is very much to the discredit of the author of this Purāna. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 31, for the story of his birth. The text speaks of Veda-Vyāsa.

when his sleep is over, to create and to preserve the worlds he had destroyed.<sup>1</sup>

The mention of the Veda and of how it had been divided into four by the son of his instructor, naturally led Maitreya to ask how and why this was done. Parāshara replied that this division took place in every Dwāpara age; and that since the beginning of the present Manwantara, it had happened no less than twenty-eight times. There had thus been twenty-eight Vyāsas or dividers of the Veda. The first was the god Brahmā himself, while among the earlier stood the names of the gods Indra, Brihaspati, Savitri and Yama, while his father and himself had been the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth, to be followed as he had already observed by his own son Krishna Dwaipāyana.<sup>2</sup> While claiming that every one of these twenty-eight Vyāsas was an embodied Vishnu, Parāshara went the length of saying that his son was the lord Nārāyana,<sup>3</sup> for nobody else was capable of composing the *Mahābhārata*. At this point Parāshara begins to extol the greatness of the syllable OM, which he identifies with Brahmā, with the three worlds of earth, atmosphere and sky, and with the three Vedas, Rig, Sāma and Yajur.<sup>4</sup> He is the source and cause of all. He creates the Vedas, he divides them into branches, he is the author of the branches, yet he is

<sup>1</sup> The reader should refresh his memory by referring to Notes 3 and 5.

<sup>2</sup> His first name refers to the fact that he had a swarthy complexion; the second was because of his birth on an island; the third Vyāsa because he had arranged the Vedas.

<sup>3</sup> The lord Nārāyana is Vishnu; though it was originally applied to the god Brahmā. We are told in the first book of the *Mahābhārata* that, by the intervention of Brahmā, the god Ganesha acted as Vyāsa's scribe, but it is not suggested by the epic that Vyāsa was the deity himself. The reader will note that Parāshara claims to have been living in a previous cycle of four ages. The question arises, had he died in the interval, or had he gone on living these millions of years.

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to find this reference to *three* Vedas, when the chapter is elsewhere referring to four. As is well known, the fourth Veda, the Atharvan, was much later than the others; the Rig-Veda being the earliest, and to a greater and lesser extent the source of the Sāma and Yajur Vedas. The Atharva Veda, says Professor Macdonell, 'only attained its present position after a long struggle. In spirit it is not only entirely different from the Rig-Veda, but though a later compilation, it represents a much more primitive stage of thought.'

himself the Vedas and the branches, even as he is the soul of all embodied spirits.<sup>1</sup>

Two chapters are devoted to describing how the division of the Veda took place, with the various schools that were established, and the names of many teachers and their disciples. It is enough to record here that Krishna Dwaipāyana, when he had made the division, chose four disciples, and that the duty of each was to make himself thoroughly conversant with one of the four Vedas. He also selected a fifth disciple whose special task was to study the histories and Purānas. Strange to say Parāshara seems to indicate that the Yajur Veda was the original Veda, for he says that 'there was but one Yajur Veda' which was divided into four parts.<sup>2</sup> The individual by whose assistance the tree of the Yajur-Veda developed twenty-seven branches had a rather trying experience. He had been summoned to attend a conference on Mount Meru. The summons carried with it a threat that any one who failed to arrive in time would be guilty of the sin of killing a Brāhmin. Unhappily for some reason or other, Vaishampāyana,<sup>3</sup> as he was called, was late, with the result that very soon after he accidentally killed his sister's son. He at once called upon his disciples to assist him in performing the penance necessary to expiate so great a sin. But Yājñavalkya, one of his pupils, said he was willing to perform the penance, but he would rather do it alone, as he declined to associate with such 'miserable and inefficient Brāhmins' as his fellow disciples were. This scornful language made his teacher very angry, and he ordered him to relinquish all he had learned. Apparently there was only one way of doing so, and Yājñavalkya

<sup>1</sup> The chapter ends by saying that the form of Vāsudeva (Vishnu) is the same with Brahmā, the supreme spirit. The reader will note that this is Brahma, not Brahṁā, the creator.

<sup>2</sup> Four kinds of priests were appointed, the Adhwaryu to recite the prayers of the Yajur; the Hotri of the Rig; the Udgātri of the Sāma, and the Brāhmin of the Atharvan.

<sup>3</sup> Vaishampāyana, according to the *Mahābhārata*, recited that epic at the great snake sacrifice of King Janamejaya, after it had been repeated to him by Vyāsa.

proceeded to reject all that he had learned in the most literal fashion bringing it up from his stomach stained with blood. His fellow scholars were, however, not so contemptuous. They changed themselves into partridges (tittiri) and picked up the texts which their companion had disgorged. These texts were in consequence called the Taittiriya, a name which they bear to this day.<sup>1</sup>

Having so grossly insulted his teacher it was natural that Yājñavalkya should go away. But he resolved that

**Yājñavalkya  
glorifies the  
Sun**

he would secure for himself an eminence such as his old master had never achieved. This was not difficult for one who was not only 'distinguished for piety and obedience to his preceptor,' but an adept in the suppression of breath. He accordingly devoted himself to the worship of the Sun, whom he addressed as the gate of liberation, and the visible form of Vishnu, the three Vedas and the supreme syllable (OM) with many other terms, all calculated to magnify the greatness of the god. His prayer was heard. The god appeared in the form of a horse, and bade him say what he wanted. Yājñavalkya at once replied 'Give to me a knowledge of those texts of the Yajur Veda which even my teacher does not know.' The deity was graciously pleased to grant Yājñavalkya's request. A whole series of texts was revealed to him, and the Brāhmins who study this portion of the Vedas are called *horses* in consequence.

Having dealt with the Vedas Parāshara proceeded to deal with the eighteen Purānas. He did so very briefly, but he claimed for his son, Vyāsa, the credit of having prepared a Purānic collection (sanhitā) 'consisting of historical and legendary traditions, prayers and hymns, stories and minor tales,' which he communicated to the fifth

**The eighteen  
Puranas**

<sup>1</sup> This is the *Black Yajur Veda*. The more rational explanation is that there was a teacher of the name, and it is curiously confirmed by a grammatical rule of Pāṇini's. 'The Taittiriya is those who read what was said or repeated by Tittiri.' See Wilson, vol. iii. p. 54, who points out that the legend is most probably posterior to the time of Pāṇini. Yājñavalkya occupies a prominent place in the Upanishads, and a law book bears his name.

disciple referred to in a previous paragraph. This person, assisted in turn by three of *his* pupils, prepared four collections, the substance of which, says the text, is gathered in the *Vishnu Purāna*. Parāshara gives the names of the eighteen Purānas, but does not say what relation the other Purānas bear, either to the *Vishnu Purāna*, or to the collections of legends, prayers, hymns and stories for which Vyāsa and his disciples were responsible.<sup>1</sup>

At the close of the previous chapter Parāshara had asked his disciple if there was any other subject on which he would like information. Maitreya at once replied that there was one question he would like to ask. It referred to the fact that the world was full of living

**How to escape  
the grasp of  
Yama**

creatures, large and small, so full indeed that there was not 'an eighth part of an inch in which they did not abound.' And all these creatures were 'captives in the chain of acts' and at death descended to the dwelling place of Yama where they were subjected to the most cruel punishments. But that was not the end. According to the teaching of the sacred books (Shāstras) they were eventually 'released from these inflictions,' but only that they might be born again as gods, as men, or other living creatures. And this was a process that was

<sup>1</sup> The names of the eighteen Purānas are: Brahma, Brahmanda, Brahmavaiivarta, Mārkaṇḍeya, Bhaviṣya Vāmana; Vishnu, Nārāyaṇa, Bhāgavata, Garuda, Padma, Varāha; Matsya, Kūrma, Linga, Shiva, Skanda and Agni. This is not the order in which they appear in the text. This chapter closes with the statement, more suitable for insertion in the notes than in the summary that there are fourteen branches of knowledge, namely, the four Vedas, the six Angas (or subsidiary portions of the Veda), (11) Mīmāṃsā, theology; Nyāya, logic; (13) Dharma, the institutes of law, and (14) the Purānas. It then adds, 'or they are eighteen' and proceeds to add four more; Āyur-Veda, medical science; Dhanur-Veda, science of archery; Gāndharva-Veda, drama, dancing; and Artha-Shāstra, science of government. The six angas are: (a) Kalpa, a ceremonial directory; (b) Shikshā, science of pronunciation; (c) Chhandas, metre; (d) Nirukta, exposition of difficult words; (e) Vyākaraṇa, grammar; and (f) Jyotiṣha, astronomy. See the *Laws of Manu* for many references to the angas or limbs for supporting the Vedas. (*Vedāngas*).

N.B. The Vāyu Purana does not appear in the above lists. Other Puranas do include it however, omitting either the Shiva or the Agni. Though the total eighteen is always preserved the lists vary in other respects. Has the figure *eighteen* been looked on as something sacred?

continually going on.<sup>1</sup> He would therefore like to know, he was sure his instructor was able to tell him, if there was any method or course of action by which one could free oneself from the grasp of Yama.

Parāshara replied by saying that this very question had once been addressed to Bhīshma by his grandson Nakula, and Bhīshma had answered by telling a story about a friend of his own, a Brāhmin from Kalinga, who had met a Muni able to remember what had happened to him in former births. The Brāhmin naturally had asked the Muni many questions about the past and the future, and among other things he received a full account of a conversation that had taken place between Yama, the lord of death, and one of his servants. It was a great mystery, said Bhīshma, and 'what he related, I have never met with elsewhere,' but I shall tell it to you as it was told to me. The conversation then was somewhat as follows: One day, Yama said to this assistant, I am the lord of all creatures, except the worshippers of Vishnu. The god Brahmā appointed me to act as judge over the deeds of men, but he who seeks the shelter of Hari the slayer of Madhu, is absolutely free from my control. Just as gold is always gold whether it is made into bracelets or ear-rings or tiaras, so is Hari always Hari, whether he is in the form of gods or animals or men. Separated from him by the action of the three qualities they return to him again, even 'as drops of water raised by wind from the earth sink into the earth again when the wind subsides.' The man, who bows himself before Hari, whose lotus feet are revered by the gods, is freed from all the bonds of sin, and you must keep out of his way 'as you would avoid a fire fed with oil.'

<sup>1</sup> 'And thus living beings, as the Shāstras apprise us, perpetually revolve.' It will be noted that gods as well as lesser beings are all bound on the wheel of time. Brahma, the eternal spirit, is alone exempt, while we have learned from Book I that even Brahmā the creator god had a limit to his existence.

Yama's messenger not unnaturally asked how he was to recognize the devotees of Vishnu. To this question, the god replied: 'The worshipper of

**The marks of  
a devotee of  
Vishnu**

Hari never fails to perform the duties assigned to his caste. He looks on friend and foe with equal indifference.

He never injures any one. He takes nothing that is not his own. His soul is undefiled by the soil of the Kali age. His heart is as pure as crystal, for Vishnu cannot dwell with envy, malice and other evil passions. He lives a holy life. He is humble and sincere. Just as the Sāl tree by its beauty shows how excellent are the juices it has imbibed from the earth, so when the eternal has taken up his abode in the bosom of any one, that man is lovely amidst the beings of this world. He is not a worshipper of Vishnu who is guilty of pride and malice, who is covetous, untruthful and cruel, who is unkind to his wife and children, to his parents and friends. He, whose thoughts and deeds are evil, is a beast and not a man, and in his heart Vishnu cannot dwell.' Keep far away then with your noose, from all true worshippers of the Eternal; yes, keep out of their sight, for they are protected from my power by the discus of that god, and are destined to go to an upper and happier world.<sup>1</sup>

When Maitreya had heard this wonderful narrative of the power of Vishnu to protect his worshippers, he very naturally wanted to know by what method those who wished to overcome the world must propitiate the deity.

**The duties of  
the four castes**

The result was that Parāshara proceeded to tell another story. For it so happened that Sagara, a king belonging to the solar race, had propounded that very question to

<sup>1</sup> This fine passage is given in Note 10. Its high moral worth demands that it be given in full. Bhishma who repeated this dialogue was one of the heroes of the *Mahābhārata*. As he was under a vow not to marry he was not the grandfather, as the Purāna says, of Nakula, but a sort of step-grand-uncle. See Note 4, Lunar Race, and p. 36, of *The Summary of Mahābhārata*. Nakula was really the illegitimate grandson of Vyāsa, the compiler of the Vedas. Vyāsa in accordance with the practice of those days was called in to raise up children to the childless widows of a dead prince.

the eminent sage Aurva.<sup>1</sup> Much of the answer is marked by the same high moral teaching as has been described in the previous chapter, but it also warns us against 'beating or slaying any animate or inanimate thing;' while it insists on diligent service of the gods, the Brāhmins and one's religious teacher.

But when the sage went on to speak of the duties incumbent on each of the four castes, Sagara said he would be grateful if Aurva explained what these duties were. The account of what constitutes the *āchāra*, or established rule of conduct, the personal and social obligations resting on Brāhmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shūdra, was accordingly duly expounded to the king. As to the Brāhmin, Aurva said that he should worship the gods with sacrifices, make gifts, study the Vedas, preserve the sacred fire and perform the water oblation. To secure his own livelihood the Brāhmin is permitted to offer sacrifice for others, to 'accept liberal presents in a becoming manner,' and to teach the scriptures. He must always be on his guard against covetousness, remembering that a Brāhmin's true riches is the cherishing of a spirit of benevolence towards everybody. The duties of the warrior caste are to give presents to Brāhmins, to perform sacrifices and to receive religious instruction. His special task is to protect the earth, to punish the wicked, and to care for the righteous. If he does that, and sees to it that every caste attends to its own duties, a king will go to whatever heaven he prefers. The Vaishya's lot is to till the ground, to rear cattle and to engage in commerce. Brahmā, the great father of the world (*loka-pitāmaha*), appointed these as the duties of the Vaishya, but study of the sacred books, the offering of sacrifice and the making of gifts, as well as other 'occasional rites' are also appointed to him. These are the three twice-born castes, and the duty of the Shūdra or fourth caste is to serve them. But in addition to

<sup>1</sup> Aurva was a descendent of Bhrigu, one of Brahmā's mind-born sons. The story of his birth—he was born from his mother's thigh—is told in the first book of the *Mahābhārata*. He was Sagara's religious teacher. The fourth book of this Purāna deals with Sagara and his 60,000 sons.

that the Shūdra may engage in trade, or earn his bread by labour. He is also permitted to make gifts and to offer those sacrifices in which food is presented, and to perform rites in honour of the dead.<sup>1</sup> In times of calamity a Brāhmin may follow the occupation of a Kshatriya, and in the same way, a Kshatriya may engage in trade and agriculture, like a Vaishya; but a Kshatriya and a Vaishya must never dream of adopting a Shūdra's mode of life. And yet, if they are absolutely helpless and nothing else is possible, they may do a Shūdra's work, but on no occasion are they permitted to perform the functions of the mixed castes.<sup>2</sup> Happily the next paragraph, leaving aside these distinctions of class, tells us that there are 'duties equally incumbent upon all the four castes. And these are, apart from the procuring of offspring and support of one's family, the practice of kindness to man and beast, patience, humility, purity, truth, gentleness of speech, and contentment, with an absence of envy and avarice, grumbling and abuse.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wilson says that the sacrifices in which food is offered (*pākayajna*) implies either worship of the Vishwadevas, the rites of hospitality or occasional oblations on the birth of a child, the building of a house or any occasion of rejoicing. The ceremonies would require to be performed through a Brāhmin, as a Shūdra cannot repeat the prayers that accompany them perhaps not even be present, as he ought not to hear such prayers repeated. The performance of funeral rites involves some personal share, and a Shūdra must present the cakes, but it must be without Mantras (prayers). See vol. iii. p. 88. Wilson in this note, also suggests that the Purāna may have relaxed in some degree from the original rigour, and reminds us that the *Laws of Manu*, on which much of the next chapter is based, declares that none have any right or part in his code, except those who could perform rites with *mantras*, that is, the first three castes. To teach the Vedas to Shūdras, to perform sacrifices for them; to take gifts from them is spoken of as 'most reprehensible for a Brāhmin on account of its results in the next life.' *Manu*, x. 109.

<sup>2</sup> The mixed castes were the offspring of parents belonging to different castes. Manu was more generous to the Vaishya. He said (x. 98) that a Vaishya in times of difficulty, could adopt a Shūdra's mode of life, but he must give it up when able to do so. Of course permission to marry wives from the caste beneath them was granted to the men of the first three castes, by the *Laws of Manu*. That means that a Brāhmin could have four wives, one from each of the four castes. In chapter 10, however it is said that the offspring of such marriages are base-born, but the book as a whole does not support that opinion.

<sup>3</sup> This passage reminds us of the words of St. Paul: 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.' New Testament, Epistle to Galatians, v. 22. When the author of these two chapters could

The next eight chapters continue to give us an account of the instruction which king Sagara received from his religious teacher. Having

**The four orders** dealt with the four castes, and the duties incumbent upon each, Aurva proceeded to describe the duties of the four orders or stages (āshramas) through which a man must pass.<sup>1</sup> The first stage is that of the *student*. Whenever he has been invested with the sacred thread it will be the boy's duty to study the Vedas under the supervision of his religious teacher in whose

**The student** house he will live. Both morning and evening he must offer worship to the Sun, and to fire, and when he has done so, pay his respects to his preceptor. Thereafter he shall go out and collect food in alms. When the food has been brought home, he must eat none of it till his guru has eaten, and only after leave has been obtained. When he bathes, he must use the water in which his teacher has bathed. Other household duties are the gathering of fuel and the carrying of water. It should be added that when his teacher stands he must stand, when he walks he must walk, and when he sits, the disciple must always be seated on a less exalted place than his master.

When his years of study are over, the next duty of the twice-born youth is to marry, and in this way enter the second order, that of the *householder*.

**The householder** In that rank of life he will apparently have a house of his own, and it will be his task to satisfy (1) the spirits of the dead with food

write so beautifully about kindness to man and beast, one wonders why he countenanced such cruel restrictions imposed on the Shūdras and mixed castes.

<sup>1</sup> These are Brahmachāri, student : Grihastha, house-holder ; Vānaprastha dweller in the woods ; Sannyāsi, ascetic or mendicant. The Purāna shows that these are open to the *twice-born* only, that is, the first three castes, the wearers of the sacred thread ; while it was understood that the fourth order, that of mendicants, was open to the Brāhmins alone. The *Laws of Manu*, with whose legislation much of chapters ix-xvi agree, describes these *four orders* at great length, but that work was written primarily for Brāhmins. The reader will remember that the fourth caste was, as it were only born *once* and that a boy of the other castes was not considered *twice born* until he underwent the rite of initiation, when the sacred thread was placed over the one shoulder and under the other. Until that was done, he could not begin the study of the Vedas, or repeat its words in prayer.

(nivāpa) ; (2) the gods with sacrifices ; (3) guests with hospitality ; (4) the sages with the study of the sacred books ; (5) Prajāpati (or Brahmā) with offspring ; (6) spirits of all kinds with an offering of food (bali karman) ; and (7) all the world with truth. The faithful performance of these seven obligations will secure a place in heaven for the pious householder.<sup>1</sup> In this rank of life, a man has great opportunities of doing good. For example, there are those who give themselves up to a life of self-denial, who live on charity, and wander over the earth, visiting sacred shrines and bathing at holy places. These were once householders too, but now they have neither house nor home, and if they are received with cordiality and suitably entertained, the host is well repaid, for his act of hospitality will 'release him from every kind of bondage,' and after death, he will reach a very high position. On the other hand, the man who turns the holy beggar from his door will suffer grievously. His rejected guest will 'transfer to him all his own misdeeds, and bear away his religious merit.'<sup>2</sup>

When the householder himself gets old, the time has come for him to leave his wife in the care of his sons, and go to the forest to live the life of a hermit.<sup>3</sup> In the forest his food shall consist of leaves, roots, and fruit ; his bed the ground, his garments the skins of animals and sacred grass ; while, he must bathe three times a day and offer oblations to gods and to fire. In the practice of austerities, he must face with equal mind the extremities of heat and cold, and never fail to afford hospitality

**The forest dweller**

<sup>1</sup> According to Manu there are five, not seven obligation or sacrifices (5) and (7) of the Purāna do not occur. Manu's list is as follows : (1) Study and teaching of Vedas is the sacrifice to sages or to Brahmā. (2) offering of water and food is the sacrifice to the spirits of dead, (3) burnt oblation is the sacrifice to the gods, (4) the Bali offering is offered to Bhūtas (goblins) and (5) hospitality is the offering to men iii. 70 and iv. 21. When a man becomes a hermit, these duties are still in force. vi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Manu, iii. 100, says, 'A Brāhmin who stays unhonoured in the house takes away with him all the spiritual merit even of a man who subsists by gleanings ears of corn, or offers oblations in five fires.' (Buhler.)

<sup>3</sup> Manu, vi. 2. 'When a householder sees his skin wrinkled and his hair white, and the sons of his sons, then he may resort to the forest. . . . committing his wife to his sons, or accompanied by her.' It adds that he must abandon all his belongings and all food raised by cultivation.

to all who approach him. Whole-hearted obedience to these rules will ultimately cleanse the *forest dweller* of all his imperfection, and gain him an entrance into heaven.

The fourth and last stage of a man's life is that of the *ascetic*. The hermit who would follow on this final path, must surrender all affection for wife and child; he must cease to place his thoughts on 'the three objects of human existence' (pleasure, virtue, and wealth). Abstaining from injury in thought, word and deed to all creatures, and yet devoid of affection or partiality for any, he must exercise his mind with the practice of devotion. Wandering constantly from village to village he must never spend more than one night in any one place unless it be a town when he may lengthen his stay to not more than five days. He should wait till the evening meal is over and the domestic fires extinguished before he approach a house to beg for alms, and in the house that receives him—which must be one of the twice-born castes—his conduct should be such as to earn the owner's good will. Unmoved by passion or desire, causing alarm to no one, and fearing none, the ascetic has become, as it were, his own sacrificial fire and feeds its flame with the butter which he receives and consumes. Final emancipation will be his at last, but he must seek it with a mind 'perfected by self-investigation' when he will go to the tranquil yet radiant world of Brahma.<sup>1</sup>

After the manner of Maitreya, king Sagara questioned his teacher on a variety of subjects which he spoke of as the 'religious institutes which men should individually observe.' The first was about the ceremonies which should be performed at the birth of a child. To this Aurva

#### Birth ceremonies

<sup>1</sup> *Manu* vi. 33-97 dwells at length on the duties of the ascetic. It says that a twice born man who seeks liberation without having studied the Vedas, offered sacrifices, or begotten sons, that is, paid the three debts, sinks downwards (37). Let him not desire to die, let him not desire to live, let him wait for his appointed time, as a servant waits for his wages (45). When the embers have been extinguished, when the people have finished their meal . . . . . let the ascetic go to beg (56). Let him not be sorry

replied that as soon as the child was born, his father ought to feed a couple of Brāhmins, seated with their faces to the east, and make offerings to the gods and to the manes. The offering to the manes was to consist of 'balls of meat mixed with curds, barley and jujubes.'<sup>1</sup> When the child is ten days old, a name should be chosen for him; a double name, the first part of which should be the name of a god, while the second part should be connected with a man. A Brāhmin's second name should be Sharma, a Kshatriya's, Varma, a Vaishya's, Gupta, and a Shūdra's, Dāsa.<sup>2</sup> A name denoting something indecent or absurd, or one that is of bad omen, or meaning nothing at all, should never be given. Nor should the name be difficult to pronounce, with too many long vowels in it; but euphonious, being neither too long nor too short. When the boy has grown up, if he does not wish to marry, he may take a vow of celibacy, and continue his studies in the house of his religious teacher, pledged to his service and that of his descendants. Or he may at once proceed to the third and fourth stages of a Brāhmin's life, choosing<sup>3</sup> which he prefers, either the life of the hermit or of the ascetic.

As to the wife a man should marry, Aurva had a great number of conditions. She must not have either

when he obtains nothing, nor rejoice when he obtains something; let him accept so much only as will sustain life (57). By the restraint of his senses, by the destruction of love and hatred, and by abstention from injuring creatures, he becomes fit for immortality (60). *Buhler's translation.*

<sup>1</sup> The offering is to be made 'with the part of the hand sacred to the gods,' i.e., the tips of the fingers, or with that sacred to Prajāpati; i.e., the part of the hand at the root of the little finger. See *Manu* ii. 59. The text adds, 'Let a Brāhmin perform such a Shrāddha, with all its offerings and circumambulations, on every occasion of good fortune.' *Shrāddha* commonly means the funeral ceremony, but it is also applied to offerings made to the manes or pitris, and to the religious ceremony on an occasion of rejoicing. See Wilson's note, vol. iii, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> Sharma, Varma, Gupta, are to this day added to the names of the members of the first three castes; Dāsa means a servant or slave, and was a suitable name for a member of the servile caste. In the *Laws of Manu*, ii. 31, we read that the first part of a Shūdra's name should express something contemptible, and the second denote service.

<sup>3</sup> *Manu* vi. 35, did not allow this. No man could become an ascetic till he had begotten sons. His asceticism only did him harm.

too much or too little hair on her head and body. She must not be too black in complexion, or too yellow.

**The wife a man should marry**

A cripple or a hunchback is equally objectionable, as well as one who is too big or too little. If the girl has red eyes or fat hands and feet or thick ankles, or white nails, or has teeth like tusks, or eyebrows that meet, she must be rejected. A harsh voice or a shrill voice is not pleasant, while nobody wants a wife with a beard and a masculine manner, or one with bulging eyes or sleepy eyes. Nor does a wise man choose one who has some hereditary disease, or is of low birth. Her character and conduct also must be good; in fact she must have been well brought up, be devoid of vice, and possessed of pleasant manners and agreeable speech. In conclusion, a husband should be three times as old as his wife, and she must be 'five degrees distant in descent from his mother and seven degrees from his father.'<sup>1</sup>

This chapter closes with the statement that there are eight forms of marriage, some of which are peculiar to one caste and some to another. But it is desirable that each caste should adhere to the rites and forms, which have been appointed for it by holy men of old. It is a great comfort to a man when he gets a wife 'connected with him by similarity of religious and civil obligations,' and in co-operation with whom he can 'discharge the duties of his condition.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the *Laws of Manu*, ix. 94, it is said: 'A man aged thirty shall marry a maiden of twelve, who pleases him, or a man of twenty-four, a girl of eight years of age.'

<sup>2</sup> The text gives the names of these eight forms of marriage, but it says nothing about them, except that the last, *Paishacha*, is the worst. In *Manu* iii. 20-63, however, they are carefully described. The *Brāhma*, *Dāva*, *Arsha*, *Prājāpatya*, open only to Brāhmins are spoken of with commendation, as they liberate a man's ancestors and descendants for many generations, and sons are born acquainted with the Vedas. Wealth and fame, beauty, long life and happiness for a hundred years are also secured. The three other castes must be content with the four other forms of marriage, which, though in some verses described as lawful, are in others condemned with the assurance that cruel and wicked sons will be born from such unions (verse 41). They are as follows: (5) *Asura*: the giving by the bridegroom of as much wealth as he can afford to the bride's kinsmen; spoken of as lawful (23), said to be

Continuing his cross-examination, king Sagara next asked the sage to expound those established rules of conduct by which a *householder* would be able to gain approval in this world and the next. Aurva cordially agreed to do so and prefaced his description with the statement that the practices and ceremonies he was about to explain, had been both enjoined and practiced by the seven rishis, the Prajāpatis and the Manus. They were perpetual observances, handed down from time immemorial, and those who held fast to these observances would make both worlds their own.<sup>1</sup> They are as follows: A wise man awakens before sunrise and with a collected mind meditates on the three objects of life, virtue, wealth and pleasure, but in such a way that none of them will come into conflict with the others. By treating them alike, he will be able to counteract the 'unseen consequences of good or evil acts.' That is to say, he should not seek for wealth or pleasure in directions calculated to distress virtue, while he should not, on the other hand, be so devoted to virtue, as to expose himself to trouble and danger.<sup>2</sup> When he has completed his meditations, the pious householder should get up out of

unlawful (25) and equivalent to selling one's daughter (51). (6) *Gāndharva*: the coming together of a man and woman, as the result of mutual desire, apparently without any rite or ceremony. (7) *Rākshasa*: the forcible abduction of a female after the house has been broken into and her kinsmen slain. Manu (23) sanctions both (6) and (7), for Kshatriyas, and in the *Mahābhārata*, i. 221, Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu, commends to Arjuna the forcible seduction of his sister Subhadrā. (8) *Paishacha* is the 'base and sinful rite' in which a man by stealth seduces a girl who is sleeping, intoxicated or disordered in intellect; verse 25 says this rite and the *Asura* must never be used, but verse 23 allows it except for Brāhmins. 'The first six are lawful for a Brāhmin, the four last for a Kshatriya, and the same four, except the *Rākshasa* rite, for a Vaishya and a Shūdra. See also *Summary of Laws of Manu*, p. 27. It is humiliating to be told that the only forms of marriage open to the vast mass of the people should be of such a dishonourable nature, from which 'spring sons who are cruel and speakers of untruth, who hate the Veda and the sacred law.' *Buhler's translation*, p. 38.

<sup>1</sup> These practices and observances are called *Sadāchāra*, which means moral or virtuous conduct, approved usage, immemorial custom, especially as preserved in the land lying between the Sarasvati and Drishadvati rivers. (*Manu* ii. 18) See *Williams' Dictionary*, p. 1053.

<sup>2</sup> *Manu* iv. 176, says, 'Let a man avoid the acquisition of wealth and the gratification of his desires, if they are opposed to the sacred laws, and even lawful acts which may cause pain in the future, or are offensive to men.' A lawful act causing pain, says Kulluka the commentator, is giving away in

bed and proceed to a retired spot, in a south-westerly direction, at least a bow shot from his village, and attend to the calls of nature. When doing so, there is a large number of regulations to which he must give careful heed, such as avoiding a ploughed field, his own shadow or that of a cow, as well as the position he ought to assume, in relation to sun and wind. When he has completed his task, he must cleanse both feet and hands, first with earth and thereafter with water. This rite is to be followed by other ablutions, which include the rinsing of the mouth, sipping water three times, and a double washing of the face. The final procedure, is to touch with water the following parts of the person: the cavities of eyes, ears and nostrils, the arms, the head, the breast and the navel. When he has completed these details, he is at liberty to wash his mouth, to comb his hair, and to adorn his person with the assistance of a looking glass. When that is done, he should say his prayers, and devote himself to his daily tasks, the earning of a livelihood and the acquisition of wealth. If he has not wealth a man cannot afford to offer sacrifices, which consists of food, acid juice and clarified butter.

Without explaining its relation to the previous paragraph, the text goes on to say that before performing any religious rite, the householder must bathe and put on clean clothes.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter he may make his offerings

**The water oblation**

charity one's whole property, when a man has a family to support or immolating a cow at a sacrifice. Wilson says it means, foregoing ablutions if they disagree with one's health, omitting pilgrimages if the way to them is infested by robbers. 'Again in some ceremonies, it is enjoined to eat meat or drink liquor, but these practices are generally reprehended by pious persons and a man may therefore disregard the injunction.'

See *Summary of Mahābhārata* for frequent references to the three objects of life; Virtue or Religion, Profit or Wealth, Pleasure or Desire.

<sup>1</sup> But a commentator says, the rite about to be described takes place at noon. The *Laws of Manu* frequently insist that the householder, at least the Brāhmin householder, is his own family priest, and with the help of his own domestic fire should offer, every day of his life, the five great sacrifices. We have three of them mentioned in this paragraph, viz. (1) to the gods, (2) to the rishis or sages, (3) to the spirits of the dead. The fourth sacrifice, referred to by Manu, is the offering of food to appease all kinds of spirits, and a later paragraph speaks of that also, while Manu's fifth sacrifice, hospitality or homage to men is strongly emphasized before this chapter closes. See *Summary of Manu*, pp. 11, 38, 47, and 61. and foot note of ch. 9. in this book.

to the gods, to the rishis or sages, and to the spirits of the dead. The offering consists of water only, scattered thrice in honour of each (and once for Prajāpati, whose name is here inserted.) This is to be followed by similar libations, in honour of parents, grandparents and religious teacher, with other relatives and friends, and also of the king. Different parts of the hand have to be employed in connexion with each libation, for as we have already seen, the tips of the fingers are sacred to the gods, and the space between the thumb and finger to the manes. In conclusion, the worshipper is told to repeat a prayer in an inaudible voice. This prayer discloses the fact that sesamum, as well as water, was included in the offering, for he is bidden to say, 'May this water and sesamum, presented by me, relieve the hunger and thirst of all who are suffering from these inflictions, wheresoever they may be.' The prayer goes on to ask that the denizens of hell may have their pains alleviated by the water oblation, and that gods, demons, serpents, spirits good and bad, the inhabitants of earth, air and water, as well as trees, may be propitiated by his offering.<sup>1</sup> This water oblation is of great value. It affords satisfaction to everybody, and the man who performs it with an honest heart acquires as much merit as if he had given food and drink to 'all creatures.' This ritual being completed, the worshipper should rinse his mouth once more, and make another water oblation, this time in honour of the Sun. Thereafter he should offer to his favourite god water, flowers and incense;<sup>2</sup> with the fire rite to Brahmā. A long list of gods is now given, and to each of them the offering is either of water, fire or food.<sup>3</sup> This list includes Indra, Yama, Varunā, Indu, Vāyu, Brahmā, Dhatri, Vidhātri, the sun and moon, the

<sup>1</sup> The *spirits* include Yakshas, Gandharvas, Rākshasas, Pishāchas, Guhyakas (servants of Kuvera the god of wealth,) Siddhas (perfected saints) and Kushmāndas (divine beings belonging to period of first Manu.) See Book I ch. 12. Prajāpati in the singular usually refers to Brahmā.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson translates this as 'tutelary deity' but the Sanskrit word is, as Hall points out, *abhishhta-sura*, which means 'acceptable,' 'optional,' 'favourite deity.'

<sup>3</sup> The burnt offering (*Huta*) consisted of pouring butter on the fire, while the offering of food was called *Bali*.

Vishvadevas (all the gods), the Prajāpatis, the manes, as well as earth, water and rain. Sometimes the worshipper had to stand at the door of his house, sometimes at the different corners, sometimes at the middle, or he went outside of his house altogether and scattered the water in all directions, when he wished to make his offering to the sun and the spirits of the dead.

What appears to be an alternative ceremony is now described, in which the householder scatters some food on the ground, as an offering to *all beings*. This offering should be accompanied by a prayer, addressed to gods,

**Another ceremony**

men, beasts, birds, Siddhas (saints), Yakshas, serpents, demons, ghosts, goblins, trees and insects, in the hope that the food he offers may afford them satisfaction. The prayer refers to all those enumerated above as very hungry and bound in the bonds of acts. The worshipper is also to add the pious hope that those who have no parents or friends, no food or the 'means of preparing it may be satisfied and pleased with the food presented for their contentment.' The reason he gives for this hope is, that all beings, including himself and Vishnu, as well as the food he offers, are one and the same, and the author adds that by so doing, the householder becomes the supporter of all.<sup>1</sup>

The duty of hospitality receives still further emphasis in the next paragraph. There it is said that the house-

**The duty of hospitality**

holder should be on the lookout for guests, as the hour of sunset draws near. Indeed he ought to wait in the courtyard of his house for as long as it takes to milk a cow. If any stranger should appear, he should be received graciously and offered a seat. Water to bathe his tired feet, should also be brought, and a generous supply of food placed before him. It is not good manners to cross-examine a guest about his family or ways of life. Indeed there is special merit in entertaining a visitor about whom nothing is known. But the narrative seems

to assume that the visitor must be a Brāhmin, for it goes on to say that the householder should seek to 'entertain *another Brāhmin* whose family and observances are known, and who performs the five sacramental rites.' In addition to these, two more are spoken of, a learned Brāhmin and a religious student. When a householder has entertained four such persons, he has paid the debt he owes to his fellow men. To send any one empty away, is a great crime, and means that you transfer to him all the religious merit you have gathered, and acquire all his sins. The gods are present in the guest you entertain, and when you feed a stranger you feed them.<sup>1</sup>

In the matter of his own food, the householder receives many and varied instructions as to how and when he should eat. To begin with, he is warned that he must not eat till certain others in his house have been fed; the aged, the young and the sick, as well as a married daughter living with her father, and a pregnant woman, should all be fed first. Transgression of this rule condemns a man to hell, where saliva is the only food. There are equally repugnant hells for those who eat without first bathing, or uttering appropriate prayers.<sup>2</sup> With clean garments, his body perfumed and adorned with jewels and garlands, a man may then begin to eat, not failing to make the fire oblation. He must face, too, either the east or north, and of course, the food must be clean and well cooked, untouched, by the hand of any base-born person, and with texts repeated during the process. A man should begin with sweet dishes and end with what is pungent, taking salted or sour food in between, or begin and end with fluids, taking solids as his middle course. If a man adheres to that practice, he will always be strong and healthy. Once his food is set before him, a

<sup>1</sup> A later verse says that to turn away a stranger after sunset is a sin eight times greater than that of turning away one who comes by day. 'He, who feeds himself and neglects the poor and friendless stranger in want of hospitality, goes to hell.' *Wilson*, vol. iii. p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> The commentators say that the *gāyatrī* verse is the appropriate prayer

<sup>1</sup> Another sentence bids him 'scatter food upon the ground for dogs, Chandalas (out-castes), birds and all fallen and degraded persons.'

man should eat with a happy, contented mind, and not talk while he is eating. And when the meal is over, he should rinse his mouth, sip water, and wash his hands up to the wrist, fixing his gaze towards the east or north.<sup>1</sup> But this is not all. Calling to memory his favourite gods, the pious householder will pray that he may digest well what he has eaten, to the 'uninterrupted gratification' of the earth, water, fire, and air, which constitute his body. Vishnu, among other deities, is invoked with the observation that 'Vishnu is the eater and the food' and the power of digestion, and it is hoped that by entertaining this opinion, complete and thorough assimilation of the evening meal may be achieved. As a conclusion to the whole matter, the householder is advised to rub his stomach with his hand, and then devote himself to such amusements as are lawful, and calculated to encourage sleep. But sleep must not be sought before sunset, nor must the sun have set without the performance of evening worship; just as in the morning a man must have completed his morning prayers before the stars have disappeared.<sup>2</sup> The due performance of morning and evening prayer is of the first importance, and failure to observe them can only be excused by circumstances over which one has no control, such as sickness and sorrow.<sup>3</sup>

Aurva next enlightened the king with a very miscellaneous set of rules, dealing with matters of the

<sup>1</sup> Manu also insists on a man turning to the east and north in connexion with this ceremony, as also when he is giving evidence ii. 61, and viii 87. It is worth repeating that much of what appears in the *Laws of Manu* is also to be found in these and other regulations.

<sup>2</sup> *Manu* ii. 101, says, 'Let a man stand during the morning twilight muttering the *Sāvitrī* until the sun appears, but let him recite it seated in the evening until the constellations can be seen distinctly.' As the *Vishnu Purāna* does not tell us what the prayer is, the reader should note that it is the *Sāvitrī* or *Gāyatrī* verse: *Rig-Veda* iii 62. 10. It is as follows in English: Let us meditate on that excellent glory of the divine vivifying Sun (*Sāvitrī*): may he enlighten our understanding!

<sup>3</sup> The chapter closes with certain intimate details regarding a man's marital relations. Restraint is enjoined and the adulterer is strongly condemned, 'for his days in this world are short, and when dead, he falls into hell.' It may be added that a man should sleep with his head to the east or south; 'any other position is unhealthy.'

most diverse and varied nature.<sup>1</sup> In the forefront it is said that the householder should always hold in rever-

**Miscellaneous rules** ence gods, cows, Brāhmins, Siddhas, aged people and teachers of religion; nor should he ever fail to practice the rites

of morning and evening prayer, and offer oblations to fire.<sup>2</sup> But when these religious duties have been enforced once more, we find the householder told to wear elegant garments, garlands, emeralds and other precious stones; keep his hair smooth and neat, and scent his person with agreeable perfumes. As to his friendships, he ought not to associate with people of bad character, liars, drunkards, harlots and paupers; nor with any one who is covered with vermin. It is equally unwise to climb a tree, to sit on a broken down cart, to enter a house when it is on fire, or to expose oneself to frost, to sunshine or the east wind. It is also very bad manners to clean one's teeth, blow one's nose, or yawn without covering the mouth, or sigh or cough, or laugh loudly, or emit wind or bite one's nails, tear off grass, or put one's beard in one's mouth, or crumble a clod of clay.<sup>3</sup> It is also wrong to show disgust at the sight of a corpse, for the curious reason that 'the odour of a dead body is the produce of the moon.' No respectable man will ever spit, or void urine in front of a fire, the sun, the moon, or in the presence of a 'respectable person,' nor will he perform the latter act standing, or make it in water, or on a public road.<sup>4</sup> It is equally improper to expectorate

<sup>1</sup> FitzEdward Hall remarks on this chapter that these maxims are dictated by prudence, propriety and superstition.

<sup>2</sup> The fire oblation consisted of pouring butter in the flame. It must have been the practice in ancient family life, at least among the well-to-do, to have a special room in which 'a fire could always be maintained, or if extinguished, could be rekindled whenever religious rites were performed. As a general rule, the householder was content with kindling the sacred fire in a single hearth or circular clay receptacle.' Williams' *Brahminism and Hinduism*, p. 365.

<sup>3</sup> See Wilson's translation, vol. iii. p. 135, from which these words are quoted. *Manu*, iv. 72, says a man should not wear a garland and the previous verse asserts that those who crush clods, tear off grass, or bite their nails, will go to hell. Wilson inserts 'in company' before the injunction about cleaning one's teeth; this is manifestly necessary for such natural processes as blowing one's nose, but apparently it was always wrong to bite one's nails.

<sup>4</sup> Manu is equally strong on this point. For *respectable person* he reads a *Brāhmin*.

when eating, praying or offering sacrifice. After bathing, it is wrong to dry the body with a towel or with one's hands; it is equally improper to dry the hair by shaking it, or to rinse the mouth after standing up. Nor is it correct to sit with one's foot over the other, or spread out, at least in the presence of one's superiors. Sitting on one's knees is the correct and modest attitude to adopt. Other regulations are to the effect that no one should pray or sacrifice, or wash the mouth, dressed with one garment only, while it is most improper to bathe or to sleep naked.<sup>1</sup> It is wrong to step on the shadow of an aged person. It is wrong to step on the shadows cast by the sun and moon, or by the banner or the image of a god. In passing a temple, always have the sacred building on your right. Avoid beasts of prey and animals with tusks and horns. Don't lie in bed long after you awake. Don't sleep alone in an empty house, and see that you have companions when travelling through a forest. When night has fallen avoid a burning ghat, a bad woman, the village tree,<sup>2</sup> and the place where four roads meet. People who are wise and prudent will not argue with their superiors or their inferiors. 'Controversy and marriage are to be permitted only between equals.' The wealth that is acquired by means of strife is not worth having. Treat women with respect, but don't trust them with any serious matter. When you leave your house in the morning, 'salute the chaplets (mangalya), flowers, gems, clarified butter and venerable persons in it,' and pay respects to the place where four roads meet. Always carry an umbrella; it protects you against both sun and rain. Always carry a stick, at least at night, or when you are travelling in a forest. Always wear shoes, otherwise your body may be hurt. As you walk along, keep your eyes fixed on the ground. Don't read the Vedas when there is a thunderstorm, or an

<sup>1</sup> *Manu*, iv. 45, insists on these rules also. The Purāna also says that no one should wash his mouth or perform any sacred rite, with his waistband unfastened.

<sup>2</sup> FitzEdward Hall suggests for village tree, the variant 'the interior of a temple.'

eclipse, or at the changes of the moon.<sup>1</sup> Be kind to the poor, 'reverence the virtuous if they are very learned,' worship the gods and the sages, gratify the spirits of the dead with sacrificial cakes, and water; entertain strangers, and after death you will go to the highest heaven.<sup>2</sup> Because final emancipation will be the reward of those who free themselves from sin of every kind by the exercise of kindness and charity towards all. Always speak the truth, that is to say, when it is agreeable truth, but when you find that by speaking the truth you would cause pain, it is best to be silent. On the other hand, don't say what is false, because you find it would afford pleasure, for the expression of unpalatable truth often proves beneficial in the end. In short, a wise man tries in thought, word and deed, to do what is conducive to the well-being of all living creatures, both in this world, and in that which is to come.<sup>3</sup>

The funeral rites in honour of deceased relatives now claim the attention of the sage. These ceremonies are called Shrāddha, and though primarily connected with the dead, they are, as Aurva pointed out, celebrated 'upon joyous occasions as well' because on these occasions also, the worshipper is worshipping his ancestors, and presumably, though the Purāna does not say so, inviting them to be sharers in his joy.<sup>4</sup> The periods of rejoicing when a Shrāddha

<sup>1</sup> *Manu* (iv. 114) says: 'The new moon day destroys the teacher, the fourteenth day, the pupil, the eighth and the full moon days destroy all remembrance of the Veda; let him therefore avoid reading on those days.'

<sup>2</sup> Another verse indicates that the attainment of heaven (swarga) 'is a trifling thing to him' who is free from anger and malice, and is kind to all: see Dutt's translation, p. 211. This verse is wedged in between advice to carry an umbrella, and not to read the Vedas on certain unlucky days.

<sup>3</sup> *Manu*, iv. 138, expresses this somewhat utilitarian sentiment as follows: 'Let a man say what is true, let him say what is pleasing, let him utter no disagreeable truth, and let him utter no agreeable falsehood; that is the eternal law.' *Bühler's translation*.

<sup>4</sup> The Pitris, (manes or spirits of the dead,) are of two kinds: (a) the spirits of any individual's immediate ancestors, father, grandfather and great-grandfather, and (b) the progenitors of mankind generally. To both of these, it is proper to offer worship. Without the performance of the Shrāddha ceremonies, the spirit of a deceased relative cannot reach the upper air, but will flit about, an unhappy ghost. The proper observance of the ceremony will however make him a *Pitri* or beatified father. *The Laws of Manu*, iii. 203, says, that the rites in honour of the Pitris are of more importance than those

should be performed, include—the first time a father sees his son's face after birth, the giving of the child his name, the marriage of a son or daughter, and the entering of a new house. At such times the householder should feed Brāhmins and offer to the Pitris balls of rice, with curds, grain and some sort of sweetmeat.<sup>1</sup> But with this preliminary, Aurva now discourses on the ceremonies that follow on the death of a relative. When the body has been washed with holy water and adorned with flowers, it is carried to the burning ghat outside the village and cremated. The relatives thereafter bathe with their clothes on, and looking to the north, make a water oblation, repeating as they do so, the names of the dead and the family to which he belonged. The period of mourning is not always the same, but as long as it lasts a *pinda*, or ball of food is placed on the ground each day, while Brāhmins are fed by the relatives of the deceased. This is manifestly an essential part of the funeral rites, for it is declared that the soul of the departed derives satisfaction from the way in which the guests are fed. On the fourth day after the death, the ashes and bones are collected. When that has been done, it will be possible to come in contact with the nearer relatives 'without thereby incurring impurity' while the other relatives may resume their usual avocations.<sup>2</sup> The nearer relatives, who up to this have slept on the ground, may now use beds, but they must practice self-control, and use neither perfumes nor flowers until the period of mourning is over. For the same reason the rites of hospitality should be

in honour of the gods, and that the regular continuance of these rites is necessary to their comfort. Other passages speak of the manes as if they had some other origin. 'The manes are primeval deities'; 'from the sages sprang the manes, from the manes the gods and the Dānavas (demons)'. *Manu*, iii. 192 and 201.

<sup>1</sup> These are the Pitris called Nādimukhas says the text, and a note suggests that they refer to the ancestors prior to one's great-grandfather or a certain class of them.

<sup>2</sup> The two sets of relatives are (a) the *Sapindas* who offer the *pindas* or balls of food, their connexion with the dead person extending to four, or as some say, seven degrees, in an ascending or descending line; (b) the *Samānodakas*, those more remote, to the fourteenth degree, and whose action at the ceremony is confined to the offering of water.

suspended, as well as sacrifice and the study of the Vedas. The period of mourning for the more immediate relatives varies in extent; for a Brāhmin and a Kshatriya, ten days; for a Vaishya, fourteen days, and for a Shūdra, a month. Its close should be marked by the nearest relative giving a feast to Brahmins and placing a ball of food upon sacred grass (*darbha*) as another offering to the dead. When he has touched water, a weapon, a goad, or a staff, his purification is complete, and he, too, may resume the work of life.

But while the more immediate mourning for a dead relative is now over, he must be remembered once a month for a year. In this monthly ceremony it is not necessary to make offerings to the gods, or to repeat the prayers and rites employed when the death happened, but a *pinda* must be offered to the deceased, and Brāhmins must be fed. Not only so, but the Brāhmins must be asked if they are satisfied with their entertainment. When they say that they are, then the chief mourner says he hopes that the dead are equally pleased. At the close of the twelve months, another rite must be performed, which by its power will formally enrol the deceased among 'the ancestors of his race.' Four vessels of water are solemnly set forth; one of them in honour of the dead, the other three in honour of the ancestors of his race. When this has been done, the contents of the first vessel are poured into the other vessels, and the act of union is complete. This ceremony should be an annual celebration.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the fixed periods already described when a man should perform a Shrāddha in honour of his ancestors, there are other occasions on which the worship of the blessed dead is highly expedient, and sometimes of the very greatest advantage to the worshipper himself.<sup>2</sup>

#### Occasional shraddhas

<sup>1</sup> The monthly rite is called *Ekoddishtha*, the annual rite *Sapindikarana*.

<sup>2</sup> At this point Aurva, who is still the narrator, remarks that the maker of the offering to the manes, should, at the same time, seek to obtain the approval of the following gods; Brāhma, Indra, Rudra, the Ashvins, the

Opportunities for such a celebration appear to have been fairly frequent. The arrival of a distinguished guest; the eclipse of sun or moon; an unlucky dream, the arrival of the longest or the shortest day, as well as the seasons of equinox, and when one first eats the grain of a new harvest are, with many others, sufficient reasons for remembering the manes. Some days and seasons are much more beneficial than others. For instance, if you make an offering on the day of the new moon when certain stars are in conjunction, the Pitris secure a satisfaction that lasts for eight years; but when other stars are in conjunction they are gratified for four years more. But that is nothing compared with other times and seasons which are so sacred that an offering, presented then, makes our ancestors happy for a thousand years, or even for ten thousand years. Indeed there is *one* particular time so wonderfully sacred that the departed are gratified for a whole age.<sup>1</sup>

Nor does the worshipper fail to get a blessing. In addition to the gratification afforded to the manes, the maker of the offering is even more benefited. Because if he goes to bathe in the Ganges, or the Sutlej, the Beas, the Saraswati, or the Gomati in the Naimisha forest, when the rites are over, he will 'expiate all his sins.' Indeed there is a song which the Pitris sing about what a pious man secures who does not fail to observe these ceremonies. It says that he is wise if he does not refuse to share his wealth with his ancestors. Because he will always be happy, successful and rich, while in the next life he will be born 'in a distinguished family,' if he gives jewels, clothes, land, carriages and wealth to Brāhmins, and feeds them to the best of his power. On the other hand, the poor man will not go

**The song of  
the Pitris**

Vasus, the Maruts, the Vishvadevas, the sun and fire, as well as sages, birds and serpents, beasts and men. In fact 'all existing things' should be asked to countenance the offering.

<sup>1</sup> The Pitris repose for a whole age when satisfied by offerings made on the day of new moon, when Ardra is the lunar mansion. Sanatkumāra the mind-born son of Brahman referred to in Book I is, according to the text, the person who expounded this knowledge as to specially sacred times and seasons.

without a blessing if he gives what he can. Even when he is so poor that he can offer nothing more than a few grains of sesamum seeds to a single Brāhmin; if he does that and sprinkles a little water on the ground in honour of his ancestors, they will be grateful. If even that is impossible, then he should go to the forest and, lifting up his hands, address the gods who guard the worlds (lokapāla) and tell them that he has nothing at all to offer. If he does that, and says he hopes that his ancestors, before whom he bows, will accept his hands, held up before them 'in devotion,' his words will not be in vain. That is what the Pitris themselves say. It is our duty, therefore, to do what they want, and perform this solemn rite in their honour to the utmost of our power.

The Purāna is very particular as to the kind of Brāhmins to be employed and fed at these ceremonies in honour of the manes. It says that they must be able to recite certain verses in the Rig and Yajur Vedas; be acquainted with the six Vedāngas, as well as the Vedas themselves, and practice the rites which they have studied in these books.<sup>1</sup> Nor should any of the following be entertained at a Shrāddha; a Brāhmin who neglects the study of the sacred books, or fails to tend the sacrificial fire; a Brāhmin who acts as a priest in a temple; a Brāhmin who conducts religious ceremonies for the low castes, a thief, a slanderer, or one who is accused of any crime, a man married to a woman who was betrothed to some one else, or married to a Shūdra, a eunuch, persons with black teeth or ugly nails, sellers of Soma, those who give their protection to Shūdras, false friends, sons who have shown disrespect to their parents, and those who teach Shūdras or receive instruction from them.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These Brāhmins are further defined as 'one who exercises penance (yogin), a chanter of the principal *Sāma Veda*, an officiating priest, a sister's son, a daughter's son, a son-in-law, a father-in-law, a maternal uncle, an ascetic, a Brāhmin who maintains the five fires, a pupil, a relation by marriage, one who reverences his parents.' These look like rules for Brāhmin householders only. See Wilson's notes on the *five fires*, and also in regard to the verses of the *Rig* and *Yajur Vedas* that the Brāhmins should know. *Manu*, iii. 185, speaks of these also. The *penance* of the five fires is different.

<sup>2</sup> Manu has a very similar list (iii. 150, 168). See also *Summary of Laws of Manu*, p. 40.

When the Brāhmin guests arrive, they should be asked to decide what portion of the feast is to be given to the gods and what portion to the manes. When that question has been decided the Brāhmins should be entreated, most respectfully, to sit down, but not until water has been brought to bathe their feet and to rinse their mouths. Should other Brāhmins, holy men, put in an appearance, even though they have not been invited, they must not be turned away. The giver of an ancestral feast must never be overcome by anger and fatigue, or lose self-control. Lack of continence, at such a time, will occasion great suffering to his ancestors. 'An uneven number of Brāhmins' should be invited to a ceremony in honour of the manes. As to the worship of the gods, it does not matter whether the number is even or not. In both cases, one Brāhmin is enough.<sup>1</sup> Now that everything is ready, the householder begins the Shrāddha by offering oblations to both his father's and his mother's ancestors.

When this has been accomplished the feast begins, and two parties of Brāhmins must be fed. Some with their faces looking north are fed in honour of the Vishvadevas (all the gods); others with their faces looking east, in honour of the manes. Some even say that the food set before the two parties should be of different kinds, and kept religiously apart. Others are of the opinion that it doesn't matter, and that there is no reason why they should not get the same food and at the same time. The householder, under the guidance and with the approval of the Brāhmins, should now call upon the gods. But the invocation is nothing more than the statement that he is there waiting, and wishes the gods to hear him.<sup>2</sup> To this appeal he adds the gift of water and barley, flowers, perfumes, incense

**Give them  
nice food**

<sup>1</sup> Manu says it is better to feed one learned Brāhmin than a million ignorant of the Veda.

<sup>2</sup> 'Vishvadevas, he is come! Vishvadevas, hear him!' 'These are the two Mantras,' says Wilson, vol. iii, p. 180. Of the invocation addressed to the manes unfortunately we are merely told that the householder invokes them with (the usual) prayers.

and lights. This is followed by the invocation of the manes, attended by the gift of water and sesamum;<sup>1</sup> and after a short interval, an appeal is made to fire, Soma and Vaivaswata, when food unsalted and unseasoned is presented no less than three times with the exclamation, Swāhā. Thereafter the real feast begins, and the Brāhmins have set before them dishes full of good food, well cooked, well seasoned and plenty of it. The guests should eat in silence and 'at their ease,' while the host should play his part with cordiality and entreat them to eat as much as they like; and as long as they like, because there is no need for haste.

When the meal is over, a prayer to keep evil spirits away recited, and sesamum seeds scattered on the ground, the householder solemnly addresses his ancestors, and expresses the hope that they have been pleased with his offering, whether in the oblations made to fire, or by the entertaining of Brāhmins. In this invocation the suppliant addresses his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather four times, and 'his maternal grandfather, his father and *his* father' once. It concludes with the prayer that the gods, including Hari, may be pleased, and the demons scattered and destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

The time has now arrived for offering *pindas* to the manes. These are balls of food, four in number, composed 'of all sorts of food and sesamum,' and are placed on kusha grass, whose points are turned towards the north. The first three balls, with flowers and incense are for the worshipper's father, grandfather and great-

<sup>1</sup> We have here the statement inserted to the effect that, if any one arrives at this time the householder 'should worship him with the permission of the Brāhmins, because the saints, for the behoof of mankind, travel over the earth, disguised in various shapes and forms.' See Dutt's translation, p. 220. The next sentence adds that a man is wise if he 'worship a guest who comes at such an hour' because neglect of a guest would make the ancestral offering of no effect.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson's translation is as follows: 'May the lord of the sacrifice, the imperishable deity Hari, be the acceptor of all oblations made to the manes or the gods.' Vol. iii, p. 183. One would be inclined to suggest that this is a sectarian addition made to an old ritual. Needless to say *Manu* has no mention of the imperishable Hari in his description of the ceremony.

grandfather, and the fourth for the manes of his maternal ancestors. Both before and after the placing of the *pindas*, the Brāhmins are given water to rinse their mouths. In addition these holy men receive generous gifts, and their blessing is entreated. When the presents have been handed over, the Vishvadevas are once more invoked, and the guests depart in the following order. The Brāhmins who represented the paternal ancestors go first, next those who represented the gods, and lastly those who 'personated' the maternal ancestors of the worshipper. The householder is now at liberty to sit down and take some food himself, along with his own friends and relatives. The man who adheres to these various rules and regulations will not fail to get his desires realized. If he employs a Yogi, that is one who practices austerities, he will get a greater blessing than if he employed a thousand Brāhmins.<sup>1</sup>

A chapter is now devoted to describing the different kinds of food which give most satisfaction to the manes.

**The kinds of food to give at a Shraddha**

Clarified butter comes first, followed by fish, and the flesh of birds, of the goat, the deer, the sheep, the hog and other animals, and the milk of the cow with its products.<sup>2</sup> Flesh meat affords a satisfaction that lasts for ever, but there is nothing they like better than a long-

<sup>1</sup> Wilson thinks this a Puranic innovation. The reason why it sets such value on a Yogi is, according to the text, because austerities nourish the moon, and the moon nourishes the manes. We are also told that there are 'three things pure at obsequies—a daughter's son, a Nepal blanket and sesamum seeds, and a gift or naming or sight of silver (is also propitious)'; quoted from Wilson's translation. See too, *Manu*, iii. 235, which says 'these three things are means of sanctification.' The Purāna tells us that when the guests depart, they give the benediction Svadhā, of which *Manu* (iii. 252) says: 'Of all rites in honour of the manes, the word Svadhā is the highest benison.' Some of these regulations seem to be taken over bodily from the *Code of Manu*, as where it is said that 'the manes are always pleased with offerings made in open naturally pure places, on the banks of rivers, and in secluded spots.' *Manu*, iii. 207.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson says 'the expression *Gavya* implies all that is derived from a cow; but in the text it is associated with *flesh*, and as the commentator observes some consider the flesh of the cow to be here intended. But this he adds relates to other ages. . . . The sacrifice of a cow or calf formed part of the ancient shrāddha. It then became typical; or a bull was turned loose instead of being slaughtered, and this is still practised on some occasions' vol. iii. p. 193. The term *gavya* is still employed for the five products of the cow; milk, curds, butter, urine and dung.

eared white goat. Honey, a vegetable called Kalashaka, and the flesh of the rhinoceros are peculiarly gratifying to the manes. Vegetables grown in the forest, certain grains that spring up spontaneously, barley, wheat, rice, both wild and cultivated, and sesamum are among the legitimate foods, but a householder should never offer grain that has not been consecrated, nor lentils, garlic, onions, salt, nor anything that looks like salt. As for the water offered in the ceremony it must be fresh, devoid of smell and froth, and enough in quantity to satisfy a cow. The milk of camels, sheep, goats and buffaloes is also barred. If the rite in honour of the manes is seen by an out-caste, a heretic, a eunuch, a naked ascetic,<sup>1</sup> a sick man, a drunk man, a monkey, a village pig, or a pregnant woman, or a woman ceremoniously unclean, or by a carrier of corpses, neither gods nor ancestors will accept the offering. In days gone by, Manu's son, the great Ikshwāku, when wandering on the lower slopes of the Himālayas, once happened to hear the Pitris sing, and this is what they sang: Our descendants will be happy indeed if they come to Gayā and offer us sacrificial cakes there. May we have born in our race those who will give to us milk and honey and clarified butter 'during the rainy season, under the asterism of Māgha,' on the occasion of their marriage, when they liberate a bull, or take part in the horse sacrifice.

The previous ten chapters as we have seen, contain the reproduction of the lengthy discourse uttered by the sage Aurva for the benefit of king Sagara. But at this point we resume the conversation between Parāshara and his disciple Maitreya. Parāshara had remarked that the presence of a heretic or *naked one*, rendered the celebration of the ancestral rites of no effect and Maitreya naturally asked who these heretics were, and what were the practices of which they were guilty. Parāshara replied that he called them the *naked ones*

<sup>1</sup> We shall find in the next chapter that the naked ascetic probably refers to the Jains. This list of prohibited persons corresponds with the list in *Manu* (iii. 239-242.) See *Summary of Laws of Manu*, p. 42.

because they had stripped from themselves the garment of the three Vedas. He was speaking the language of parable, but one might say that the three Vedas was the garment with which the various castes were clothed, and if they threw aside and abandoned the observances set forth in the Vedas, they were making themselves *naked*. In illustration of what he said, he would relate a wonderful incident. He had heard his own grandfather Vasishtha describe it to the hero Bhīshma. Long ago, the gods and demons waged with one another a relentless war, which lasted for no less a period than a year of the gods. Owing to the fact that the demons diligently practiced the rites set forth in the Vedas, they eventually gained the victory over the celestials and put them to flight.<sup>1</sup> The discomfited deities took refuge on the further shore of the sea of milk. In their distress they gave themselves up to the practice of austerities and called upon Vishnu to come to their aid. In the prayer which they addressed to that mighty god, they said that the whole creation, visible and invisible, was his body, that he was Brahmā, Indra, the Vasus and a great many more deities, including themselves; that he was at one with blessed saints, wicked demons, cruel serpents, brute beasts and men; at one with *piety* which gives rewards for virtuous deeds; at one with Rudra, who dances with delight after devouring all beings—gods and men.<sup>2</sup>

When their prayer had come to a conclusion, Vishnu appeared in person. He was riding on the great bird Garuda, and bore in his hands the shell, the discus and the mace. The advent of the god called forth fresh adoration, and a special appeal that he would save them from the power of the demons. The celestials did not indicate that they had been themselves remiss in the practice of devotion. But it was manifest that the demons had faithfully adhered to the teaching of the Vedas, and were so strengthened

**Vishnu's  
illusory form**

<sup>1</sup> And yet it is said that by attacking the gods, the demons were transgressing the commands of Brahmā, the creator-god. Evidently sacrifice and ritual were of more value than obedience.

<sup>2</sup> Pradhāna (matter) and Puns (spirit) as well as the other categories, mind, earth, air etc., discussed in Book I, are also identified with Vishnu.

by asceticism that the gods could not destroy them. Indeed the three worlds were now in their hands, and they were appropriating the offerings, which really belonged to the gods. They therefore begged Vishnu to tell them what they ought to do for the recovery of their lost inheritance. Manifestly the only thing to do was to persuade the demons to abandon the study of the Vedas, and the practice of the rites and ceremonies which the Vedas enjoin. And this was the plan which Vishnu in his wisdom decreed. He produced from himself an illusory form<sup>1</sup> and gave it to the gods. He added the explanation that this illusory form would deceive the demons and persuade them to forsake the Vedas, with the result that destruction would come upon them. Because as he said, no god, demon or man can hope to prosper who becomes hostile to or forsakes these holy books.

The scene now changes to the banks of the river Narmadā, where we find the demons assembled engaged in penance. The illusory form of Vishnu appears in their midst. He came as a naked mendicant (digambara) with shaven head and carrying a bunch of peacock feathers.<sup>2</sup> Addressing the demons, the beggar asked them what purpose they hoped to serve by indulging in asceticism. The demons replied that they were seeking a reward in the life to come. If that is so, said their interrogator, I shall explain to you the great secret. You look as if you were worthy to have it revealed to you. Thus persuaded and cajoled the demons turned an attentive ear to their new instructor, and before he was done with them they had abandoned the teaching and rites of the Vedas, believing 'that the same thing might be for the sake of virtue and of vice; might be and might not be, might or might not contribute to liberation, might be the supreme object, and not the supreme object (paramārtha) might be effect and not be effect, might be

<sup>1</sup> The Sanscrit word is Māyāmoha.

<sup>2</sup> Peacock feathers are still carried by sannyāsīs and others. The *Mahābhārata* Book xiv. 6, 18, 22, speaks of a priest who went about 'clothed in air (digvāsas) clothed like a mad-man.' He was 'desirous of seeing Maheswara' (Shiva) says the epic.

manifest or not be manifest.' Thus it came to pass that the demons put their trust in a series of contradictions and procured for themselves the name of *Arhata* because their deceiver said to them 'Ye are worthy (arhatha) of this great doctrine.'<sup>1</sup>

But the work of the illusory form of Vishnu was not yet complete. Putting on red garments and 'assuming a benevolent aspect,' he approached other members of the demon race and told them if they wished to secure either heaven or final liberation (nirvāna)<sup>2</sup> they must abandon the cruel practice of offering animal sacrifices. He added by way of doctrine that 'this world subsists without support and, engaged in the pursuit of error which it mistakes for knowledge, as well as vitiated by passion and the rest, revolves in the straits of existence. In this manner exclaiming to them, 'Know,' (Budhyadhwam), and they replying, 'It is known,' (Budhyate) these Daityas were induced to deviate from their religious duties.'<sup>3</sup> By these two deceptions and others as well, the illusory form of Vishnu eventually beguiled the whole of the demon race. They not only abandoned the Vedas, but they spoke against the gods, abused the Brāhmins and treated the sacrifices with contempt. Here are some of the things they said: It is wrong to take the life of animals. It is silly to imagine that casting butter into the fire can secure any sort of

<sup>1</sup> This is manifestly a reference to the Jain religion. One of its sects is known as digambaras (sky clad) because they go naked. They still employ the term Arhat. Wilson says the Jainas, because of their sceptical tenets, were called 'Syadvādins, assertors of probabilities or of what may be.'

<sup>2</sup> Here again the other great heresy is referred to, namely, Buddhism. The teaching of this Purāna still holds in India, and Buddha ranks as one of the ten incarnations of the god Vishnu. The *Bhāgavata Purāna* cleverly brings in a reference to both heresies by saying 'Vishnu will become incarnate, under the name of Buddha, the son of Jina, for the purpose of deluding the enemies of the gods.' The words, 'assuming a benevolent aspect and speaking in soft and agreeable tones,' used in the text, must be reckoned as a sneer at the gentle and gracious nature of Gautama Buddha. The *Skanda Purāna* has a similar reference to the delusive instructions of Buddha, who spoke 'with a low, sweet and affectionate voice.' See Wilkin's *Hindu Mythology*, p. 230. It was the atheistic implications of the Buddha's teaching that *this world exists without support* which offended India, as much as his criticism of the Vedas and his abuse of Brāhmins.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Wilson's translation, vol. iii. p. 210.

reward. If Indra, who was made a god for the many sacrifices he offered, can be nourished by the wood used as fuel in the holy fire, he is lower in the scale of creation than a brute beast which at least feeds on leaves. If it is true that the animal slaughtered in a sacrifice goes to heaven, why don't you kill your own father and thus secure him a place in that happy region? If the food eaten at a funeral feast really goes to nourish the spirits of the dead, why do people setting out on a journey take any food with them? You who remain behind can arrange to feed them in their absence by means of food oblations.<sup>1</sup> Think of what we say. Is it not worthy of acceptance? We don't believe that words of authority come down from heaven. The only sacred text that we acknowledge is reason and reason alone.' The upshot of all this teaching was that not a single demon acknowledged the authority of the Vedas.<sup>2</sup>

The opportunity of the gods had come at last, and they were not slow to seize it. Hostilities were renewed.

#### The gods defeat the demons

But the demons had weakened themselves hopelessly. They had forsaken the path of truth. They had spoken with scorn of the sacred books, and poured contempt on asceticism and the other rites of religion. And so because they cast aside the armour of righteousness which had given them strength, stripped off the garment of the Vedas that covered their nakedness, they were defeated and slain. And he who tells this tale, does not fail to point the moral for the benefit of ordinary men. Take good heed, he cries, that you also are not deceived. Don't look at those who teach such wicked doctrines. Even to look at one of them is a very great sin; a sin which can only be expiated by gazing at the sun. If you

<sup>1</sup> We have here a reference to another school of heretics, the Chārvakas. In the *Sarva Darshana Sangraha* of Mādhava Āchārya, the author quotes the words of Brihaspati as a summary of the teaching of this school. The Purāna has used them to some extent. See my *Summary of the Rāmāyana* Note 6 The materialists of ancient India.

<sup>2</sup> 'Words of the competent do not, great Asuras, fall from the sky. It is only words supported by reasons that should be admitted by me and other like yourselves.' Muir's Translation, *Original Sanscrit Texts*, vol. iii. p. 128.

happen to touch one of them, you must bathe with your clothes on. Think of it; these wicked creatures do not worship the gods, make no offerings to the spirits of the dead, pay no respect to rishis. Don't eat with them, don't sit in their houses. They are robbers of the dead, robbers of the gods, for both the gods and the spirits of the dead depend on you and me for their daily nourishment. and their curse falls on those who rob them of the food they need.

To show you the calamities in store for the man who speaks to a heretic, listen to what happened to king Shatadhanu, and his pious wife Shaibyā. **Don't speak to a heretic** By prayers and fasting, by gifts and oblations, this loving couple daily showed how great was their piety and devotion. And yet one day, when it was full moon in the month of Kārtika, as they came out of the river Ganges in which they had been bathing, they happened to meet one of these heretics, with the most disastrous results. The heretic happened to be a friend of the king's instructor in archery, and out of courtesy the monarch engaged shortly in conversation. But the queen was wiser. Remembering that she was fasting she turned her eyes away from the heretic and fixed them on the sun. As far as this life is concerned, nothing happened. Indeed it is said that in the lapse of time, the king died victorious over his foes, and the queen ascended the funeral pyre of her husband.

But because of the sin he had committed, that is, speaking to an unbeliever, the king was, in his next life, **The punishment that follows if you do** born as a dog, while his queen who very properly had turned away her eyes, was born as the daughter of the king of Kāshi. The princess was able not only to remember what had happened to her in her previous lives, but endowed with 'the eye of divine intelligence,' she knew that her husband had been born as a dog in the town of Vaidishā.<sup>1</sup> In her desire to see her former

<sup>1</sup> Kāshi is Benares. Vaidishā may be Vidisha (the modern Bhilsa, in Eastern Malwa) once a famous and populous city frequented by Buddhists. The country of Videha, which is referred to later, lay east of Kāshi.

husband, she made a visit to that city and immediately recognized him. For some time her father had tried to arrange her marriage, but she always resisted his efforts. And now that she had found her husband, although in the form of a dog, she solemnly placed upon his neck a bridal garland, accompanied by the appropriate rites and prayers. She also fed the dog with food and sweetmeats, much to his delight. But when she spoke to the dog and reminded him of the sinful act of which he had been guilty in a former life, the whole past was recalled to his mind, and he left the town in a mood of deep dejection. Retiring to the forest, the dog died not long after of a broken heart, to be born within a year as a jackal. Once more the princess in virtue of her divine intelligence was able to discover where her husband was. She found him this time on a mountain side, and spoke to him, as she had spoken to the dog. 'Do you remember how I told you when you were a dog, of the sin you committed when you were a king?' As on the former occasion, the question was enough. The jackal remembered his former lives and his former sin; gave up the use of food and died. The next birth he took was that of a wolf, and in that guise also the princess found him and reminded him of the past with a result similar to what had happened before. In short, the king was thereafter successively born as a vulture, as a crow, and as a peacock, and each time his wife was able to discover his whereabouts and reveal to him the secret of his birth. It is not explained how she got possession of the peacock, but the text tells us that she fed it and petted it continually. In course of time when her father was celebrating a horse sacrifice, the princess seized the opportunity and caused the peacock to be bathed. When the ceremony was over, she told the animal who he really was, and reminded him of the various births through which he had passed. As on former occasions, the peacock was grieved to the heart, and almost immediately thereafter died, but the sorrows of the princess had come to an end. In his next birth he who had been king, dog, jackal, wolf, vulture, crow and peacock, was born as the son of the great king

Janaka: The princess no longer resisted proposals for her marriage and when her father held a Swayamwara which was attended by many candidates for her hand, she chose from among the suitors her former husband. They lived happily together for many years. As king of Videha in succession to his father-in-law, the prince offered many sacrifices, gave many gifts, was the father of sons and overcame his enemies. On his death which took place on the field of battle, the queen once more ascended the funeral pyre and they passed to heaven where they enjoyed a conjugal bliss as unusual as it was complete.

From this story you will see how great a sin it is even to speak to a heretic. And you will also observe what benefits result from bathing at a horse sacrifice. See to it, then, that you never speak to, never come into contact with, never entertain one of these wicked men. They have abandoned the Vedas and deny their truth. They put their trust in reason and do forbidden things. They make no offerings of food to gods, rishis, spirits and men. For them there is no place at the sacrifice offered to the dead. You will go to hell if you have any truck with them, these hypocrites of the twisted hair and shaven crown.

<sup>1</sup> A Swayamwara, as the word implies, is the ceremony in which a woman chooses her own husband. The epics prove that this practice was common in ancient times. See *Summary of the Mahābhārata*, pp. 22, 38, 46, 51, 68, 72, 94. Damayanti and Sāvitrī, next to Sitā, India's two greatest types of womanhood, both chose their own husbands.

## CHAPTER V

### ROYAL DYNASTIES—BOOK IV

In response to the request of his disciple, Parāshara next recited the names of the kings who had ruled over the earth. Beginning at the very beginning of the present Manwantara with the origin of the solar race, he showed how that famous dynasty was descended not only from the Sun but from Brahmā, the creator god, himself. Because Daksha, who sprang from the right thumb of Brahmā, was the father of Aditi, and Aditi was the mother of the Sun.<sup>1</sup> From the sun was born Vaivaswata, the seventh or present Manu. This Manu had ten sons, the oldest being Ikshwāku, the ancestor of Rāma, prince of Ayodhyā, and an incarnation of Vishnu. Though the names of Manu's other sons and many of their descendants are given, the only list professing to be in any way complete is the direct line from Ikshwāku down to Rāma, and again from Rāma to a prince named Brihadbala who was killed in the 'Great War.' The great war of course refers to the long battle between the Kurus and the Pāndus of which Vyāsa the son of Parāshara was himself both witness and historian.<sup>2</sup>

From time to time, however, the monotonous roll of names is broken by some legend worthy of repetition. The first is about the birth of a daughter to Manu. She was his first-born, and before her birth Manu had begun a sacrifice in honour of the gods, Mitra and Varuna, with a view to securing offspring. But owing to some blunder on the part of the officiating

<sup>1</sup> The Sun is here called Vivaswat.

<sup>2</sup> The reader will remember that Vyāsa is said to be the author of the *Mahābhārata* which tells the story of that war.

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priest, a girl instead of a boy was born.<sup>1</sup> However, when Mitra and Varuna were appealed to, the sex of the child was changed and she who had been called Ilā, was now called Sudyumna. But unfortunately as a result of incurring the anger of Shiva, a curse changed Manu's offspring again into a female and in that sex she married Budha, the son of the moon god, and gave birth to a boy called Purūrasas. The transformations to which this person was subjected were not yet complete, because certain rishis prayed to Vishnu and the male sex once more became his (or her) portion, and under the old name of Sudyumna he was the father of three sons. Manu, however, felt that he could not give this changeling any share in his dominions and they were divided among his other sons. But not all of them apparently; for we are told that some of them became the heads of priestly households being Brahmins as well as Kshatriyas, while the son of another became a Vaishya, and of a third it is said that he killed a cow and in consequence was degraded to the Shudra caste.<sup>2</sup>

Revata, a great grandson of Manu, had a very wonderful experience. It is said that as he could not find on earth a suitable match for his daughter, he decided to go to heaven and ask the god Brahmā for advice. When Revata reached the upper world the minstrels of heaven were singing the praises of the god. Naturally the king waited till their hymns of praise were finished. It never occurred to him that in the interval ages and ages had passed away. The music was so enchanting that he

**The wonderful story of Revata**

<sup>1</sup> It was necessary to perform rites and sacrifices with meticulous care; any blunder might produce results, entirely different from what was desired as here, when 'a' girl instead of a boy was born.

<sup>2</sup> Of another of these descendents it is said: 'There never was beheld on earth a sacrifice equal to the sacrifice of Marutta. All the implements and utensils were made of gold. Indra was intoxicated with the libations of Soma juice; and the Brāhmins were enraptured with the magnificent donations they received. The winds of heaven encompassed the rite as guards; and the assembled gods attended to behold it.' This Marutta, according to the *Mahābhārata*, was able to produce whole armies and every kind of wealth by blowing on his hand. The Pāndus, on the information of Vyāsa, secured untold wealth which had been left in the Himālayas after the performance of a great sacrifice by this king. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 199.

seemed not to have listened for more than a moment. But when the king, in response to the god's enquiry, mentioned the names of certain persons who would not be unworthy of his daughter, he was told that they were dead, they and their children and their children's children, long years before, and that he and his daughter were the sole survivors of their age and generation. In fact there had been twenty-seven revolutions of the four ages since the birth of Manu, and the Kali age of the twenty-eighth cycle was close at hand.<sup>1</sup> When Revata in his amazement asked what he was to do, Brahmā told him to return to the earth with his daughter. Once arrived there he would find a husband worthy of her. He was to proceed to his old capital, Kushasthalī, though it now bore a different name and was called Dwāraka. There he would find reigning over that city no less a person than Balarāma who was himself a portion of the god Vishnu.<sup>2</sup> If he offered her in marriage to Balarāma he would receive her as his wife. When Revata reached the earth he found that the human race was very much smaller in size than it had formerly been, and not only smaller in size but much weaker in strength of body and power of understanding. However he approached Balarāma, and as the god had foretold, a marriage was soon arranged. Unfortunately the size of the damsel was a considerable problem but this difficulty was overcome by the prince 'shortening

<sup>1</sup> Twenty-seven cycles of four ages means more than 100 million years. No wonder Revata and his daughter were the sole survivors of their generation. Brahmā in this story is called sapta-loka-guru, the teacher of the seven worlds.

<sup>2</sup> Brahmā discoursed at length on the greatness of Vishnu, identifying him with the supreme God (parameshwara), the eternal without name or shape, the universal form of all things; with Time made up of moments, hours and years; by whose favour he, Brahmā, was the agent of his power in creation; himself, as Vishnu, was the cause of preservation; and as Rudra (Shiva) was the cause of destruction; impersonated as Indra and the other gods, as guardians of mankind; as Sun and Moon in dispersing darkness, as air, water, ether, fire, and earth, affording activity, satisfaction, space, warmth and nourishment respectively to all things. 'In him is the world, he is the world, and he, the primeval selfborn is again present in the world,' i.e. 'a portion of himself in the person of Balarāma' who, the god suggested, should marry Revata's daughter. Balarāma, of course is the brother of Krishna, and as we shall read later, the incarnation of a white hair of Vishnu. See Wilson, vol. iii. p. 252.

her with the end of his plough-share, and she became his wife.<sup>1</sup> When his daughter had thus been happily married Revata retired to the Himālayas, where he spent the rest of his days in the practice of asceticism.

Revata was the descendant of one of Manu's younger sons, but, as has been said, the Purāna dwells with

**Puranjaya a  
portion of  
Vishnu**

most detail on the family of Ikshvāku, the oldest son. Of Ikshvāku, himself, strange to say, nothing is recorded except that he was born from his father's sneeze and had a hundred sons. But his grandson, Puranjaya, rendered a great service to the gods. It was in the Tretā age, when the gods and demons were at war. The gods suffered so serious a defeat that they appealed for help to Vishnu. Nārāyana, as he is here called, kindly promised to infuse a portion of himself into the above-mentioned Puranjaya,<sup>2</sup> and instructed his brother celestials to go to Puranjaya and ask for his assistance. The king agreed to join his forces to theirs, but he made a strange request. It was that Indra, the king of the gods and the lord of a hundred sacrifices, should mount him on his shoulders. On these terms he was prepared to be their ally. Indra at once consented and, having transformed himself into a bull, seated the king on his hump. Thus mounted, and at the same time endued with the strength of Vishnu, Puranjaya advanced to the conflict. The demons were overthrown and slain. And in recognition of the fact that he had been seated on the hump (kakud) of the bull, the king was ever after called Kakutstha.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The *Mahābhārata* says that in the Krita or first of the four ages, men lived for 4,000 years, in the Tretā, for 3,000, in the Dwāpara for 2,000; but in the Kali age there is no fixed period, death in the womb even sometimes taking place. (Book VI) In another place it is said that in the Kali age they will be small and weak in body, girls of seven and eight giving birth to children, boys of ten or twelve begetting offspring; famine and disease covering the earth. (Book III.) See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, pp. 87, 112.

<sup>2</sup> A later chapter in this book (3) tells us Vishnu infused a portion of himself into another member of the solar race, viz., Purukutsa, and on behalf of the Nāgas destroyed the Gandharvas. That chapter also says that the sage, Kapila was a portion of Vishnu.

<sup>3</sup> In the *Rāmāyana*, Rāma is very frequently spoken of as Kakutstha's son.

For fifteen generations thereafter, we get the name of the kings of the solar race and nothing more, till we

**Mandhatri's  
wondrous  
birth**

come to Yuvanāshwa.<sup>1</sup> This prince was childless, and certain rishis resolved to celebrate a very powerful rite, calculated to procure offspring. The rite appears to have lasted for several days, for it is said that one night the sages placed a vessel full of holy water on the altar and retired to rest. In the middle of the night the king awoke and feeling very thirsty, went in search of water. Happening to see the vessel full of water, he picked it up and drank it off little realizing that he had taken water that had been 'endowed with prolific efficacy by sacred texts.' When the rishis awoke and found the vessel empty, they asked who had drunk the water, adding that the person who had done so, would give birth to a very brave and eminent son. The king replied, 'But it was I who drank the water; I didn't know that I was drinking consecrated water.' Nothing, however, could stay the power of holy texts. A child was conceived and when the time came for it to be born, it tore open the king's right side without causing its father any further harm. When the question was asked, 'Who will act as the child's nurse?' the god Indra put his forefinger into the infant's mouth, and said, 'I shall be his nurse.' The divine finger yielded amrita, the drink of the gods, and the child, who was named Māndhātri, grew up a very strong and powerful boy. When he reached manhood, he became a Chakravartin, or universal emperor, bringing the seven continents and seven seas under his control. This is the verse that men recite in his praise. 'From the rising to the going down of the sun,

<sup>1</sup> Except this, about a king called Kuvalayāshwa whose name was changed to Dhundhumāra, because he destroyed a demon called Dhundhus who had persecuted Uttanka, a holy man. 'In his conflict with the demon, the king was attended by his sons, to the number of 21,000; and all these, with the exception of three, perished in the engagement, consumed by the fiery breath of Dhundhu.' Wilson's translation, Vol. iii. p. 264.

all that is irradiated by his light is the land of Māndhātṛi.<sup>1</sup>

Māndhātṛi had fifty daughters whose matrimonial experiences were very remarkable, in that they were all married to one man. The circumstances which led to this strange event were as follows. There was a very eminent rishi of the name of Saubhari, who lived immersed in water. This he had done for a period of twelve years, during which time he formed a friendship with the king of the fishes who lived in the lake, where the rishi had made his home. This fish had a very large family of sons and daughters, who were happily married and had children of their own. The sage was often disturbed by these frolicsome creatures, and found it difficult in consequence to concentrate his thoughts on spiritual things. Finally envy arose in his breast as he watched his friend, born though he was in the low condition of a fish, with his children and grandchildren swimming on all sides of him. He watched with growing envy till he could watch no longer. For he got up out of the water, determined that he, too, would be a householder, taste the joys of family life and play among his children. It was to king Māndhātṛi's palace that the sage directed his steps. When the monarch heard of the great honour he was about to receive, he descended from his throne, hastened to meet the sage, and received him with the greatest reverence.<sup>2</sup> But when Saubhari, who by this time was old and frail, broken by years of asceticism, explained that he wanted to marry one of the king's daughters, Māndhātṛi did not know what to say. He was afraid that if he refused to grant the sage's request, the holy man would blast him with a curse.<sup>3</sup> And so he

<sup>1</sup> See Wilson, Vol. iii. p. 267. The *Mahābhārata* also tells this story about Māndhātṛi. It says that when Indra gave him his thumb to suck, milk and butter at once began to flow, and in twelve days the child was twelve cubits high. When he reached manhood, he conquered the whole earth in a single day and gave it all to Brāhmins. He had fishes of gold, seventy miles in length. He gave them all to the Brāhmins. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> He also made the usual offering (Arghya).

<sup>3</sup> The text refers three times to the king's fear of sage's curse. See the *Mahābhārata*, on the wonderful effects of a Brāhmin's curse.

held down his head and remained silent. After waiting some time, the sage asked why he was so reluctant to answer. Did he not know that by gratifying the desires of the eminent person who stood before him, he would be able to secure anything he wanted? Realizing that some sort of reply must be made, Māndhātṛi reminded his visitor that the ancient practice of their royal house was to allow princesses to choose their own husbands, and it was impossible therefore for him to make any promise. The girls must choose for themselves, and no action could be taken until they had been consulted.

The sage was too clever to be deceived by this excuse. He knew that the king was confident none of his daughters would consent to marry so old and unattractive a person as he appeared to be. But he concealed his knowledge

**A sage marries them all**

and merely suggested that in the circumstances the best plan would be for the young ladies to see him and he would marry the one who was willing to have him. If they all happened to refuse, then the blame must be attributed to the burden of his years. With evident reluctance, Māndhātṛi ordered a eunuch to escort the sage to the inner chambers of the palace. But as the sage advanced, a wonderful change took place in his appearance. His beauty became so wonderful that there was no one in earth or heaven to be compared to him.<sup>1</sup> And when the eunuch had explained the purpose of the sage's coming, the fifty sisters eagerly competed with each other in their desire to win him as their lord. Indeed they quarrelled violently with one another over the matter, each of them asserting that Brahmā had specially created her for no other purpose than to marry so extremely attractive and beautiful a bridegroom.<sup>2</sup> When the superintendent of the Zenana informed the king of what had happened, he came to the conclusion that the only way out of the difficulty was to marry the whole fifty to the holy man.

<sup>1</sup> Neither mortal, nor Siddha, nor Gandharva. See Wilson's Translation, vol. iii, p. 271.

<sup>2</sup> Here is another illustration of *Swayamwara*, or the maiden's choice of her husband.

When the marriages had been celebrated, the sage commanded Vishvakarma, the architect of the gods, to build for each of his wives a crystal palace. The beauty of these buildings seems to have passed belief, and it is said that wealth personified took up its abode in each of them. Their furniture was equally gorgeous, and they were surrounded by gardens and woods, and lakes where water birds played among the lotus beds. The ladies, too, exercised unbounded hospitality, in which both guests and attendants shared. After some time had passed, king Māndhātṛi, naturally anxious to see how his daughters were, paid them a visit to what he imagined would be the hermitage of their husband. What was his surprise, when he arrived at the place, to find a mighty row of gorgeous palaces, each standing in its own grounds, and surrounded, as has been said, by woods and gardens and lakes of water. Entering the first palace and greeting the daughter he found there, he learned that she was supremely happy. She could not say enough in praise of her husband, nor could she be tempted to express any feeling of home sickness. Indeed she asked how any one could yearn for home surrounded as she was by every luxury that wealth could give, and the wife of a husband so loving and attentive that day or night he never left her side. Indeed it was in that connexion that she betrayed the one feeling of anxiety that troubled her. She sometimes wondered if her sisters were not jealous. They must be bitter at the thought that their husband never went near them in his consuming love for her alone. But strange to say, when Māndhātṛi passed on to the next palace and interviewed his second daughter, he found after the usual enquiries that she was as happy as the sister whom their father had just left, and that the one cause of anxiety, in her case also, was the fear that her sisters would be jealous, as he never left her by night or day. And as the king went from palace to palace—for he did not fail to visit every one of his fifty daughters—he was told the same story. His daughters were all equally

**The sage  
builds a palace  
for each of  
them**

happy and all of them more or less afraid lest her sisters were broken hearted by their husband's neglect. Māndhātṛi was overwhelmed with wonder as he listened to the words of his daughters, and when his visits had been completed, sought the presence of the sage. Bowing low before him, he gave expression to his feelings, and said that he had never seen or heard of such miraculous power before. It was very manifest his son-in-law was reaping a rich reward for his long years of asceticism.

But doubt was beginning to perturb the mind of Saubhari. In course of time his wives made him the father of no less than one hundred and fifty sons.

**The sage  
retires to the  
forest**

And as the days passed, their father became more and more devoted to them. He pictured in his mind, how they would learn to speak, learn to walk, how they would reach manhood, get married and have children of their own, and how these grandchildren in turn would occupy his thoughts and his affection. And thinking of these things, the saint realized that one desire gives place to another, and that, in short, there is no end to the desires that spring up within the mind of man, even were he to live for an hundred thousand years. Then casting his mind back to the days when he lived immersed in water, he remembered how desire had first arisen in his heart as he watched his friend, the king of the fishes, sporting with his offspring. This first desire was the beginning of evil, and he realized at last that the only hope of liberation lay in separation from the world. But it was not yet too late. He would break the chain which bound him to material things. He would not allow wealth or luxury or offspring to rob him of salvation. He would renew his former devotions. He would regain the favour of Vishnu by the practice of asceticism, and thus be freed from sin. Having formed this pious resolve, Saubhari lost no time in acting upon it. Leaving his wealth and children behind him, the sage, accompanied by his wives, took refuge in the forest and devoted his nights and days to the practice of asceticism. In the end

he obtained his reward, and was born no more.<sup>1</sup> Those who read or hear this story of Saubhari and of his marrying the fifty daughters of Māndhātṛi will not be afflicted 'for eight successive births,' by sinful thoughts, selfish attachments or wicked deeds.

Passing over some ten or twelve generations<sup>2</sup> the Purāna goes on to tell the story of Sagara's birth. His father was defeated in battle by the **King Sagara's strange birth** Haihayas and other tribes. Accompanied by his wives the vanquished prince took refuge in the woods. One of his queens was pregnant at the time, but owing to the fact that she had been poisoned by a rival, the birth of her child did not take place till seven years elapsed. And indeed the child ran great risk of never being born at all. Because the king, worn out with his sufferings died in exile, and the pregnant queen was in the very act of ascending the funeral pyre when the rishi Aurva interposed.<sup>3</sup> Endowed with the knowledge of past and future events, he said the lady's immolation could not take place. She carried in her womb one who would yet be a mighty warrior and ruler of the world.<sup>4</sup> In obedience to the command of the saint the lady abandoned her resolve, and very soon after a boy was born. At his birth the poison which had

<sup>1</sup> The text says that he achieved the *condition of Achyuta*. This condition is referred to from time to time in the Purāna. *Achyuta* means 'what has not given way or fallen, firm, solid, imperishable, permanent.' It is also a name for Vishnu or Krishna. See Monier Williams' *Dictionary*, p. 9. Saubhari said that he would propitiate Vishnu by arduous penance and prayed that his mind might be so intent on his (i.e. Vishnu's) everlasting body 'so that I may be born no more.' He complained that his heart had become occupied with *mineness* (mamata).

<sup>2</sup> One of these was Satyavrata who obtained 'the appellation of Trishanku, and was degraded to the condition of a Chandāla or out-caste. During a twelve years famine, Trishanku provided the flesh of deer for the nourishment of the wife and children of Vishvāmītra, suspending it upon a fig-tree that he might not subject them to the indignity of receiving presents from an out-caste. On this account Vishvāmītra, being highly pleased with him, elevated him in his living body to heaven.' *Wilson*, vol. iii. p. 285. For a very different account of this legend see *Summary of Rāmāyana*, p. 47. Trishanku means three sins, and according to the *Vāyu Purāna* this king's sins were, displeasing his father, killing a cow, and eating flesh not previously consecrated; hence his name and the degradation which befel him.

<sup>3</sup> The reader will remember that this is the Aurva who in a previous book discoursed at such length on many subjects for the benefit of king Sagara.

<sup>4</sup> Once more the term Chakravartī is employed.

troubled his mother was expelled from her body, and at the naming of the child he was called Sagara, which means *with poison*. Aurva continued to take an interest in the boy, invested him with the sacred cord, taught him the use of arms, and instructed him in the Vedas. When he grew up and heard why he and his mother were living in the forest, Sagara resolved that he would regain the throne and kingdom of his fathers. Accordingly he devoted himself to the extermination of those at whose hands his father had sustained defeat. The Haihayas were almost entirely wiped out, but the tribes associated with them, namely, the Shakas, Yavanas, Kāmbojas, Pāradas and Pahlavas,<sup>1</sup> appealed for protection to Vasishtha,<sup>2</sup> Sagara's family priest. Vasishtha pointed out that the vow which Sagara had taken to destroy utterly his father's enemies would be fulfilled if they were deprived of their caste privileges. To this proposal Sagara agreed. The Shakas and the others were degraded from the Kshatriya caste. They were forbidden to read the Vedas, to share in the various religious rites, or to make use of the services of Brāhmins. In this way these various nations sank to the level of Mlechas or out-castes. As a further indignity Sagara ordered that the Shakas should shave the upper half of their heads, the Pāradas wear their hair long, and the Pahlavas grow their beards.

<sup>1</sup> The Shakas were the Scythians; the Yavanas, the Greeks; the Pahlavas, Persians; the Kāmbojas and Pāradas were probably also both settled on the north-west frontier of India. Other Purānas give much longer lists of nations when they tell this story, mentioning races that inhabited the south and east of India and also the Chinas or Chinese. The reader should consult Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts* vol. i. c. 5. for many passages in Sanskrit literature dealing with degraded Kshatriyas.

<sup>2</sup> Note that Vasishtha, a mind-born son of Brahmā born in the time of the first Manu, is here in the reign of the seventh Manu, more than three hundred million years after. He is spoken of as Sagara's family priest. We shall find that he agreed to act as priest to Nimi, Ikshvāku's son (c. 5.) Sagara was thirty-seven generations after Ikshvāku. The *Rāmāyana* says he was still acting as family priest to Dasharatha, the father of Rāma, and he was in the sixtieth generation. Even if we ignore the statement that he was one of Brahmā's mind born sons and suppose that he belongs to the present four ages of the world, he 'must have been possessed of a vitality altogether super-human.' See Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. i. p. 337. But c. 55. tells how he was reborn after being cursed by Nimi.

Sagara has two queens, one of them the daughter of Kashyapa.<sup>1</sup> But as he had no children by either of them, the king appealed to Aurva to come to his aid. That holy man heard his prayer and promised that one queen would be the mother of one son, and the other of no less than sixty thousand. It was left to the ladies to say which they preferred. Sumati, Kashyapa's daughter elected the easier task, and a boy called Asamanjas was born. From his boyhood Asamanjas was very wicked and as he grew to manhood, he got worse instead of better, with the result that his father turned him out of doors. But not until he had corrupted his sixty thousand brothers. Indeed under their corrupt influences the condition of the world became so bad that the gods went to the rishi Kapila who was a portion of Vishnu<sup>2</sup> and asked him to take action. They said they did not know what would happen if he did not interfere, and suggested that he should assume a body and protect the 'afflicted universe.' The sage told them not to worry as it would not be long before the sons of Sagara were destroyed. Not long after this promise was made, king Sagara made arrangements for a horse sacrifice. In accordance with custom Sagara's sixty thousand sons were appointed to guard the horse. But 'someone stole the horse and carried it off into a chasm in the earth.' In obedience to their father's command, the sons of Sagara went in search of it. When they reached the chasm and saw the animal's footprints, they not only descended into the chasm, but went on digging

<sup>1</sup> If this was Kashyapa, the son of Marichi, one of Brahmā's mind-born sons, we have here another remarkable case of longevity, for it means that after he had been living millions of years, Kashyapa was the father of a daughter young enough to marry Sagara.

<sup>2</sup> Kapila was the founder of the Sāṅkhya system. This book records another legend, not given in the summary, of the Nāgas or snake deities inviting Vishnu's assistance against the Gandharvas who had invaded the lower regions and put them to flight. Vishnu promised 'to enter into the person of Purukutsa' the son of Mādhātṛi, and destroy the Gandharvas. In gratitude the Nāgas said that the solar race would never lack a descendant and promised their sister the river Narmada, who had interceded for them with Vishnu and married Purukutsa, that anyone who should call upon her would never be bitten by a snake or suffer any harm from poison mixed in their food.

deeper and deeper till they found themselves in hell. Once they arrived there it was not long before they saw the animal they had lost. And close at hand they saw the rishi Kapila. They naturally concluded that they were in presence of the thief who had carried off their property, and they rushed at him with one accord, drawing their swords and resolved to kill him. But Kapila looked up, and with one glance reduced them all to ashes.<sup>1</sup>

When Sagara was informed of what had happened, he sent his grandson, the son of the disinherited Asamanjas, to try and recover the animal. This prince journeyed by the way his uncles had travelled, and like them eventually found himself in the presence of the sage. But he was wiser than they. Indeed, he so propitiated Kapila that he was not only allowed to take the horse away, but was bidden ask a boon. Kapila added the information that the youth's grandson would in other days bring down the Ganges from heaven. When the prince said the boon he craved was that his unworthy uncles might be raised to heaven, Kapila replied: When the Ganges as the result of your grandson's effort is brought down from the skies, and her waters touch your uncles' ashes, they will be raised to heaven. And more than that, so great is the power of the river which flows from Vishnu's toe, every one who will bathe in her water, yes, every one whose bones or ashes are left upon her shores, will attain to the abode of the blessed.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wilson here quotes the *Bhāgavata Purāna's* comment on the story: 'The report is not true that the sons of the king were scorched by the wrath of the sage. For how can the quality of darkness, made up of anger, exist in a world-purifying nature, consisting of the quality of goodness? How should mental perturbation distract that sage who was one with the Supreme and who has promulgated that Sāṅkhya philosophy which is a strong vessel by which he who is desirous of liberation passes over the dangerous ocean of the world, by the path of death.'

<sup>2</sup> They shall obtain Swarga, whose bones, skin, fibres, hair or any other part shall be left after death upon the earth which is contiguous to the Ganges.' Wilson, vol. iii, p. 302. The reader should compare the epics' description of the incident. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 78 and *Summary of Rāmāyana*, p. 32. The *Purāna* adds that Sagara gave his name

Twelve generations pass away and nothing is recorded save the names of princes in the solar race who lived and reigned and died. But in the thirteenth generation, king Mitrasaha has a long legend associated with his name. One day this king went in search of two tigers which had destroyed the deer in a neighbouring forest. He was so far successful in his object that he met both of these wild beasts and slew one of them with an arrow. But when at the very point of death the tiger changed into a Rākshasa, while its companion, pronouncing vengeance on the king, took refuge in flight. Not long after Mitrasaha celebrated a sacrifice in which the great rishi Vasishtha was the officiating priest. When the rite had been completed Vasishtha retired from the scene. But very soon after, the tiger Rākshasa who had vowed vengeance against the king, assuming the form of Vasishtha appeared in the royal presence. He came with the request that the king would cause some flesh to be prepared for his immediate use. Having made this request, the seeming priest once more withdrew. But it was to the kitchen of the palace this time that he went, where he assumed the form of a cook and prepared a dish composed of human flesh. This flesh he placed in a golden dish and carried to the king. Almost immediately after, Vasishtha himself appeared and the king set before him the dish of flesh. The holy man was very angry when such food was set before him, but his wrath knew no bounds when in virtue of his divine power<sup>1</sup> he discovered that the prince had set before him human flesh. Full of wrath he cursed the king, saying that he had insulted not only him but every holy man in offering food that should not be eaten and that in punishment the king would be condemned to live on human flesh. Naturally the monarch strove to defend himself by saying that the priest had himself asked for flesh food, with the result that Vasishtha once more

to the chasm which his sons had dug. Sāgār is the Hindi word for *ocean*. The youth who brought down the Ganges to earth is mentioned in the next paragraph, but the story of how he did so, is not recorded. His name was Bhagīratha.

<sup>1</sup> The Sanskrit word is *saṁdhi*.

made use of his divine power and discovered how the king had been deceived. He therefore graciously qualified the curse, limiting it to a period of twelve years, promising in addition that the king would have a desire for human flesh only on the evening of every third day.<sup>1</sup> It is to be added that the king had taken action to repay the holy man's curse and for that purpose had collected some water in the palms of his hands. But when Vasishtha reduced the measure of the curse as we have seen, the king's heart was softened and he decided to refrain. The problem, however, was, what to do with the water charged as it was with his maledictions. If he threw it on the ground it would destroy the crops. If he cast it into the air, the clouds would refuse their moisture. He therefore decided to throw it on his own feet. He did so with the result that the water, hot and burning with his curses, scalded his feet to such an extent that ever after they were covered with black and white spots.

For the next twelve years on every third night, the king went forth in search of human flesh, and during that time it is said, he 'devoured multitudes of men.' On one occasion, he came upon a Muni 'engaged in dalliance with his wife.' Disregarding the woman's passionate appeals, the royal cannibal slew and devoured the holy man 'as a tiger devours a deer.' As she saw her husband thus consumed before her eyes, the wife declared that because the king had intervened when she and her husband were indulging in the joys of married life, and shown no pity, so he too would die, should he ever seek to approach his queen. Terrified by this curse, Mitrasaha was compelled to remain childless and when the twelve years were over he invited the co-operation of Vasishtha with the result that

<sup>1</sup> The *Mahābhārata* has many illustrations of the idea that curses cannot fail. Once uttered they could not be annulled, however unjust they might have been. We have manifestly the same idea here. It is a pity the priest did not exercise his divine power a little sooner. Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, as we shall see, suffered grievously from a curse uttered against him by the sage, Durvāsa, and for a very trivial cause.

the queen became pregnant.<sup>1</sup> The child however, remained in the womb for seven years; his mother, unable to wait longer, secured delivery of her offspring by making an incision with a stone.

This lady had a grandson, of whom it is said that when the whole warrior race had been exterminated, he was concealed by a number of women, for which reason he was called Nārī-kavacha, which means having women for armour. His other name was Mūlaka, which signifies a root. Though the text does not say so, this is manifestly a reference to the destruction of the Kshatriya race by Parashurāma, one of the incarnations of the god Vishnu. Passing over six more generations, we read of a wonderful feat on the part of king Dilipa. He had gone to the assistance of the gods in one of their many battles with the demons. When the battle was over and he was conversing with the deities in heaven, he was told to ask a boon. Strange to say, the boon he craved was to know how many years he had to live, and stranger still the answer he received was that his life would not last more than an hour (muhūrta.) Fortunately, Dilipa was remarkable for his powers of rapid movement, and he returned to earth at once, where he devoted the time that remained to him in prayer addressed to Vishnu. In this prayer he said that he had always cared for Brāhmins more than for himself, that he had always done his duty, that he had always recognized the unity of all things, gods, men, animals, vegetables, indeed all created things, with the imperishable Achyuta, and in consequence of all that, and because of it, he asked that he might obtain union with the Supreme. His prayer was heard, he was united

<sup>1</sup> At this point we are told that when the twelve years were over and the curse had ceased, the king returned home. But the earlier narrative would indicate that it was on only every third night that the king took to the woods. One wonders at the king's complaisant treatment of Vasishtha whose curse had wrought him so much woe. Inviting the co-operation of a holy man to raise up offspring for childless husbands is unfortunately referred to in the *Mahābhārata* on several occasions. (See Book I. c. 178, 199, where this and another similar story of Vasishtha are told) *The Āitareya Brāhmaṇa* definitely claims that the household priest shall have liberty to satisfy his desires in the king's zenana. (Book VIII. c. 5, Haug's trans.)

'with that divine being on whom sages meditate,' with Vāsudeva, the teacher of the gods, who is abstract existence and whose form cannot be described. The seven rishis reckoned this an unparalleled event, and they made a verse about it, to the effect that there never will be anyone like Dilipa, because in the space of an hour he 'mastered the three worlds by his wisdom and self-surrender.'

Dilipa was the grandfather of Raghu, and Raghu was the grandfather of Dasharatha. And then we read: 'the god from whose navel the lotus springs became four-fold, as the four sons of Dasharatha—Rāma, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna for the stability of the world.' With remarkable brevity and restraint, the text mentions the more remarkable of Rāma's deeds, but never seeks to dwell on any of them. It gives the names of his sons and nephews, with the kingdoms over which they reigned. Then following the line of Kusha, the elder of Rāma's twins, it carries on for thirty generations more, bringing us finally to Brihadbala, who was killed in the *Great War*. At this point the story of the solar race comes to an end, because Parāshara, who is our informant, lived during the period of the 'great war.' But when we come to the twenty-third chapter of this book, we shall find the narrative resumed, with this difference, that the Purāna then assumes the role of prophecy, and professing to cast its gaze into the future, gives the names of dynasties and kings, who in the coming days will live and reign.<sup>1</sup>

The reader will remember that Ikshwāku, the offspring of Manu and founder of the solar race, had a hundred sons, and we have traced the line of his descendants for nearly a hundred generations. But before beginning the story of the lunar race, as it does in the sixth chapter, this chapter,

<sup>1</sup> See Note 13, for what the text tells us about Rāma. The chapter closes with the statement that those, who listen to the account of the princes in the family of Ikshwāku, will be purified of all their sins. And Note 15 for dynasties of the Kali age.

gives the descendants of Nimi, one of Ikshvāku's younger sons. Like his ninety-nine brothers this prince was endowed with a country of his own to govern. And it is said that he resolved to perform a sacrifice which would last for a thousand years. For this purpose he invited the great Vasishtha to officiate as priest. Vasishtha however explained that he had already arranged with the god Indra to act at a similar ceremony. As this ceremony would not last for more than five hundred years he proposed that the king should wait for that period of time, when he would be happy to meet his wishes. The king said nothing and Vasishtha set out for Indra's court. When the five hundred years were over, Vasishtha returned as quickly as he could to fulfil his bargain with Nimi. What was his indignation when he found that Nimi had engaged the rishi Gautama. The king was asleep when he arrived but regardless of that fact, the angry saint cursed his majesty and said that from that moment he would 'cease to exist in a corporeal form.' When Nimi, awaking from his slumber, discovered what had happened, he uttered exactly the same curse against the holy man. He was particularly angry at the fact that the rishi had been so unjust as to curse him without giving any notice of what he intended to do. Be that as it may, both king and rishi were separated from their bodies. The servants of the king embalmed his corpse with 'fragrant oils and resins and it remained as entire as if it were immortal.' In accordance with their custom the gods appeared at the close of the sacrifice to 'receive their portions' and in recognition of the king's piety and at the request of the officiating priests, said they would restore him to his old condition. But Nimi said he had no desire for such a boon, and would prefer to dwell in the eyes of all beings. His prayer was granted and from that time Nimi has dwelt 'in the eyes of all living creatures' in consequence of which their eyelids have never since ceased to wink.<sup>1</sup> As for Vasishtha, his 'vigour entered into the vigour of Mitra and Varuna,' and he was reborn

<sup>1</sup> The Sanskrit word for wink is *nimisha*; hence the legend.

as a result of the lustful gaze which these gods cast upon the nymph Urvasī.<sup>1</sup>

As Nimi had no offspring, the sages were distressed to think of what would happen to the world without a king. They therefore agitated Nimi's corpse which had been carefully embalmed, and as a result, a son was born to whom they gave the name of Janaka. Because his father had no body they also called him Videha, and because they shook the corpse, he was named Mithi, from the word *mathana*, or agitation.<sup>2</sup> After a lapse of twenty generations more, we come to the story of Sitā's wondrous birth. King Śiradhwaṇa was one day ploughing the ground in preparation for a sacrifice, with a view to obtaining offspring, 'when there sprang up in the furrow, a damsel who became his daughter Sitā.'<sup>3</sup>

In response to the request of his disciple, Parāshara went on to tell the story of the equally great and glorious kings who traced their descent from the Moon, and whose descendants, as he said, still add lustre to the world. Nor did the sage fail to begin at the very beginning with no less a being than Vishnu Nārāyaṇa. From his navel it is said there grew a lotus, and from the lotus there sprang Brahmā the creator god. Brahmā had a son called Atri, and Atri was the father of Soma the moon

<sup>1</sup> This obscene legend is recorded with repulsive detail in both the Epics, while its earlier source is *Rig Veda*, vii. 33-11. *The Laws of Manu*, vii. 41, speaks of Nimi as one of those kings who perished for want of submission to Brahmins.

<sup>2</sup> Here we have far-fetched explanations of Videha and Mithilā, the country and capital over which Sitā's father ruled.

<sup>3</sup> This is undoubtedly Sitā, the wife of Rāma, and daughter of Janaka, king of Videha. It is strange that the Purāna should here call the prince Śiradhwaṇa. Both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* call him Janaka. In a note Mr. Wilson is content to say, 'This identifies Śiradhwaṇa with the second Janaka, the father-in-law of Rāma; c. 4 calls Sitā the daughter of Janaka, self-born from the earth.' See Note 13. And no doubt this chapter on Nimi and his descendants is here inserted that we may trace the history of Janaka's race. The reader will note with wonder that Janaka, Rāma's father-in-law is only twenty-two generations from Ikshvāku, while Rāma himself is sixty-one generations. (See Muir's *Old Sanskrit Texts*, vol. i, p. 337.) This is a grave discrepancy.

god.<sup>1</sup> Soma's grandfather, Brahmā, made him king over Brāhmins, plants and stars. In course of time Soma celebrated the Rājasūya sacrifice,<sup>2</sup> and he became so arrogant in consequence, that he made an attack on Brihaspati, the priest of the gods, and carried off his wife. Not only Brahmā but both gods and sages protested in vain. Soma refused to give up the lady, and unfortunately Ushanas, the religious teacher of the demons,<sup>3</sup> took the culprit's part. The result of this was that the demons sided with their priest and from words they passed to blows. Another war had arisen between the gods and the demons and because Tārā was the cause of the dispute, it was called the Tārakāmaya war. On this occasion, another person intervened and this time with success. It was the Earth, who protested that she was being shaken to her very centre by the vigour of the combatants and that the fighting must come to an end. Thus appealed to, Brahmā took action once more, ordered both gods and demons to lay aside their arms and compelled the moon god to restore Tārā to her injured spouse. When Brihaspati, however, saw that his wife was pregnant, he insisted that she must come to him unburdened. In accordance with the will of her lord, Tārā at once gave birth to a boy, of such surpassing beauty and splendour, that both husband and ravisher declared that the boy was his. Appeal was made to Tārā, but she held down her head and refused to answer. Her newly born offspring, however, became very angry at his mother's silence and said that he would curse her if she did not solve the mystery of his birth. He did not say what his curse would be, though he added that it was of such a nature as to prevent women ever after from telling the truth. But Brahmā very properly told the infant to be silent, and persuaded the mother to confess that Soma was the father of her offspring. The moon god was so

<sup>1</sup> The *Vāyu and Bhāgavata Purānas* say that Soma issued from the eyes of Atri. Wilson says that other Purānas give a grosser name to this effusion.

<sup>2</sup> This sacrifice signified that the celebrant claimed universal dominion.

<sup>3</sup> Another name for Shukra.

delighted that he took the child in his arms and called him Budha, which means *he who knows*.<sup>1</sup>

We have already read of how Budha became the father of Purūravas. Of this prince it is said that he was

**Pururavas  
and Urvasi**

renowned for liberality, devotion, magnificence, love of truth and personal beauty. His beauty led him to form a connexion

with Urvasī, one of the nymphs of heaven. The gods Mitra and Varuna had cursed Urvasī, and in consequence she resolved to go and live in the world of mortals. When she reached the earth and saw Purūravas, she was so smitten by his beauty that she lost all desire to return to heaven. Purūravas was equally charmed with Urvasī,<sup>2</sup> and when he proposed that they should live together, the nymph at once consented, but with certain reservations. They were three in number. She had two rams to which she was greatly attached. These must always be kept beside her bed, and on no consideration taken away. She must be supplied with clarified butter as her only food. And thirdly she must never see him naked. Purūravas accepted the three conditions, and the happy pair lived together for sixty-one thousand years. If that were possible their love for one another increased day by day. But though Urvasī had forgotten her friends in heaven, they had not forgotten her. Gandharvas, Siddhas and Apsarases<sup>3</sup> felt lonely without her and they resolved to get her back. As they knew the terms of the contract which Urvasī had made with the king, they decided that the best plan would be to secure a violation of it, and to begin with to carry off the rams. One of the Gandharvas therefore went down to the earth, and under cover of darkness, approached the bed where the nymph and the king were sleeping. Seizing one of the rams, the Gandharva carried it off. But the animal made such a

<sup>1</sup> Budha is the regent of the planet Mercury, and has no connexion with Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. Budha called his mother 'Vile woman.'

<sup>2</sup> The reader will remember how Urvasī was the indirect cause of Varishtha's birth.

<sup>3</sup> The Gandharvas are the minstrels of heaven: the Siddhas are glorified saints; the Apsarases are heavenly nymphs; like Urvasī, females of easy virtue.

noise, that Urvasī awoke, and discovered that she had been robbed, to use her own phrase, of one of her children. The king of course heard the cries of the lady, but he remembered also that he was naked, and dare not get out of bed. But when the Gandharva came and stole the second ram, Urvasī's anger knew no bounds. She said she was manifestly living with one who was both a coward and a knave. If she had had a real husband, it would have been otherwise. He would surely have protected her and her children. These taunts overcame the caution of Purūravas, and hoping that in the darkness Urvasī would not be able to see him, he got up out of bed, resolved to pursue the thief and recover the animals. But the prince had not reckoned on the cunning of the denizens of heaven. At the critical moment they filled the room with a great flash of lighting. Urvasī saw the prince naked; the conditions of their contract were cancelled, and the nymph disappeared. When they saw that their object had been achieved, the Gandharvas released the rams in which they had no further interest and went off to heaven. Purūravas at once secured the animals, and returned to the house, greatly pleased at achieving his purpose, as he thought, with so much success. But to his horror, he found that the nymph had disappeared and no trace of her was to be found. Crazed with sorrow, and naked as he was, he searched for her everywhere, in every corner of the world. At long last, he found her at Kurukshetra. She was in the company of several other nymphs to whom she remarked, as her late paramour drew near, that she had spent many happy years in his society. The nymphs said they were not at all surprised, as he was a very handsome man indeed, and they would be very glad to have the opportunity of following her example. When Purūravas however appealed to Urvasī to come back and live with him, she said it could not be. As it happened she was already pregnant at the time. But if he came back at the end of a year she would present him with a son, and consent to spend a night with him. Purūravas was compelled to accept this very

limited offer. And as time passed he was allowed to spend one night every year for six years with Urvasī. In this way he became the father of six sons. When the sixth son was born, Urvasī told the king to ask a boon. To this the lover replied that there was one thing only lacking in his life. He had overcome his foes. He was possessed of wealth and power. He was strong in mind and body. He had troops of friends and a great army. But he would never be happy unless she consented to live with him for ever more. It was the Gandharvas who had authorized Urvasī to offer the king a boon. They now came forward and presented him with a vessel full of fire. As they did so, they told him to divide it into three, to fix his mind on the idea of living with Urvasī, and to offer oblations, adding that if he did so, he would get what he desired. At first Purūravas was quite satisfied with this assurance and set off for home. But as he journeyed through a forest, he began to think that he had been a fool. It was Urvasī he had asked for, and in place of her he had got nothing but a vessel full of fire. So he placed the vessel on the ground, and went off empty handed to his dwelling. At mid-night when he awoke, he began to think that he had made a blunder and getting up out of bed, set out then and there for the forest. But he found that the vessel had disappeared. In its place, however, two young trees had sprung up, the one growing out of the other. These he took to his palace resolved that by rubbing them together he would produce fire and worship it. As he rubbed the pieces together, he recited the Gāyatri verse. His efforts were entirely successful. He elicited fire, divided it into three, offered oblations with it, and secured a place among the Gandharvas, never to be separated any more from his love.

<sup>1</sup> This legend is also told in the *Rig Veda*, x. 95. the *Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, xi. 5. 1. 1.

The *Mahābhārata* also reports that Purūravas divided fire into three. The *Bhāgavata Purāna* says that before his time there was but one Veda, one caste and one god, Nārāyaṇa, and that in the beginning of the Tretā age, Purūravas made them all three. See Wilson, vol. iv. p. 11. The *Mahābhārata* however declares that, though a mortal, he was always surrounded by superhuman companions, and that, intoxicated with power, he quarrelled with the

Some ten or twelve generations after Purūravas, came Kushāmba, whose austerities, indulged in to procure a son who should equal Indra, so alarmed that god that he resolved to take birth as the ascetic's son. In accordance with this resolve, Indra was born in due course and received the name of Gādhi. When Gādhi, or Indra incarnate, grew up and married, he became the father of a daughter named Satyawati, whose hand was asked in marriage by Richika, an old decrepit Brāhmin of the house of Bhrigu. Afraid to refuse, yet unwilling to consent, the king demanded as a marriage gift one thousand white horses, each with one black ear. Gādhi never dreamed that it would be possible to procure so many animals of this description. But by propitiating Varuna, the holy man secured the animals, and the king was compelled to surrender his daughter.<sup>1</sup> When the marriage ceremony was over, Richika prepared for his royal bride a dish composed of rice, barley, pulse, milk and butter, and another of the same kind for his mother-in-law. The intention in both cases was the same, to procure offspring. But while the Brāhmin intended for himself a son, who would be endowed with 'gentleness, knowledge and resignation,' he had planned for his mother-in-law a son who would be a true Kshatriya, one who would fight and kill his fellow men. Unfortunately the mother proposed and carried out a change of dishes, and when the Brāhmin returned from the forest to which he had for a season retired, he was able to tell by his wife's appearance that the exchange had been accomplished. She had, he said, a most repulsive appearance and the result of her tampering with the consecrated food would be, that while her mother would give birth to a son endowed with all the good qualities

Brāhmins, caring little for their anger and robbing them of their wealth. He rejected the advice of Sanatkumār, and was eventually destroyed by the curses of the rishis. It also says he brought three kinds of fire from the region of the Gandharvas for sacrificial purposes with the nymph Urvāsi. Book I c. 75, Dutt's translation. The same work says that Ilā was both his father and mother.

<sup>1</sup> Richika propitiated Varuna at the Ashwatīrtha, the place of the horse pilgrimage. This legend is referred to in both the epics.

of a Brāhmin, a lover of peace and quietness, she, a Brāhmin's wife, would be the mother of one who would find pleasure in strife and slaughter. Satyawati was greatly distressed as she listened to these words, and falling at her husband's feet, begged him to mitigate the blow, which she had unwittingly brought upon herself. This he graciously consented to do, and promised that the fierce propensities of which he had spoken, would be manifest not in her son but in her grandson. And so it came to pass. Satyawati gave birth to Jamadagni, and Jamadagni was the father of Parashurāma and Parashurāma, who was an incarnation of Vishnu, eventually destroyed the whole warrior caste. On the other hand, the mother-in-law gave birth to Vishvāmitra, whose great austerities eventually raised him to the Brāhminical caste.<sup>1</sup>

During the reign of Raji, a grandson of Purūravas, there was war between the gods and the demons. When interrogated by the combatants as to the issue of the contest, Brahmā declared that victory would lie with those who secured the help of Raji. But when the demons were told by that monarch, that he would only help them on condition that he was made their king in place of Prahlada the ruler of their hosts, they refused saying that 'they could not profess one thing and mean another,' because Prahlada was their Indra, and it was for him that they were waging war.<sup>2</sup> The gods were more accommodating. They promised to make him their king, should he secure them the victory. And when victory was obtained, Indra himself in fulfilment of the

The Purāna does not tell the story of Parashurāma, but the reader should consult both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* for the story of his exploits. He is one of the ten avatāras or incarnations of the god Vishnu. (See Note 14.) This chapter also says that Vishvāmitra was the father of Shunahshepha. But the *Rāmāyana* says that this youth was the son of the above mentioned Richika, who sold him to be offered as a sacrifice and that Vishvāmitra, who was his mother's brother, taught him how to escape. See *Summary of Rāmāyana*, p. 49. See also *Aitareya Brāhmana* VII. 3, and *Summary of Laws of Manu*, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> See *Wilson's translation*, vol. iv. p. 41. Prahlada was the pious demon on whose behalf Vishnu appeared as the man-lion. See Book I. c. 16, of this Purāna. It is strange to find Prahlada fighting against the gods.

promise, placed the feet of Rāji on his head and said: 'Thou hast preserved me from a great danger, and I acknowledge thee as my father. Thou art the chief over all this region and I, Indra of the three spheres, am thy son.' Rāji, however, though thus installed as lord of heaven and monarch of the gods, was content to make Indra his deputy and returned to earth, ruling over his own country. But when Rāji died, or, as the text expresses, when he 'ascended to the skies,' his five hundred sons, at the suggestion of Nārada,<sup>1</sup> claimed their father's rights and privileges. This claim Indra refused to recognize, and a battle ensued, in which the god was put to flight, and deprived of all share in the sacrifices that were offered to the gods. As the celestials depended on these sacrifices for nourishment and vigour, Indra grew very weak indeed. In his despair he asked Brihaspati, the priest of the gods, if he could not give him just a little of the sacrificial butter 'were it no larger than a jujube.' Brihaspati asked his afflicted friend why he had not appealed for his assistance earlier, and promised that, in a very short time, he would put everything right. And sure enough, everything happened as Brihaspati foretold. He instituted a sacrifice, which renewed the strength of Indra, and so weakened the power of Rāji's sons, that they were soon destroyed. We are not told what the sacrifice was, but it is said that these princes began to hold the Vedas in contempt, neglected their religious duties and opposed the Brahmins. There could only be one result. It was an easy task for Indra, the god of an hundred sacrifices,<sup>2</sup> to overcome and slay such irreligious persons, and regain his place in heaven.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nārada, the rishi, got the name of the mischief maker or the spy. He was constantly causing trouble in his many peregrinations between earth and heaven.

<sup>2</sup> The *Mahābhārata* says that Indra secured his rank in heaven because of his many sacrifices; hence his title. The text adds 'Whoever hears this story shall retain for ever his proper place and shall never be guilty of wicked acts.'

<sup>3</sup> Chapter viii. contains a long list of names and little more. But it should be noted that it is said of one prince that he first established the distinctions of the four castes; of another that he promulgated the rules

Five generations after Purūravas, who was the grandson of the Moon, the founder of the Lunar race, we come to Yadu. The name and race of Yadu became famous in after days, from the fact that Krishna, the incarnation of Vishnu, was born a member of this Royal house. 'In the family of Yadu, the eternal immutable Vishnu descended upon earth, in a portion of his essence, of which the glory cannot be described though for ever hymned' in order that he might confer the fruit of all their wishes—whether they desired virtue, wealth, pleasure or liberation—upon all created beings, upon men, saints, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Rākshasas, Guhyakas, heavenly nymphs, Kimpurushas, serpents, birds, Daityas, Dānavas, gods, sages, Devarshis and ascetics.'<sup>1</sup> The text goes on to say that whoever reads the account of the race of Yadu will be released from his sins, and yet, despite this promise, in the long list of names of kings and princes who ruled from the time of Yadu to that of Krishna, we get only two legends, and such statements as that one of them had a hundred thousand wives and a million sons; that another was equal to the gods, while more than once it is recorded that from such and such a prince particular families of Brāhmins were descended. This is the less remarkable when we remember that kings were married to wives who were either Brāhmins or of mixed Kshatriya and Brāhmin descent.<sup>2</sup>

The former of these two legends demands some reference because it tells of Arjuna Kārtavīrya, and his encounter with Parashurāma. Arjuna Kārtavīrya was

for the four castes; of a third that he lived for 60,000 years; of a fourth that in a previous life, he was Dhanwantari, the physician of the gods, (produced at the churning of the ocean.) Chapter 10 is also passed over. It contains the unsavoury story of Yayāti exchanging his old age and infirmity for the youthful vigour of his son Pūru. Because they refused to exchange their youth for their father's old age, Yayāti cursed his other sons, and they became the princes of the lawless Mlechchhas or suffered in other ways. Yadu, the ancestor of Krishna, was told that his posterity would not possess dominion. For the story of Yayāti, see *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 32.

<sup>1</sup> Wilson's translation, Vol. iv. p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> For example Book 4. c. 19. says that their descendants although Kshatriyas by birth became Brāhmins, and we saw how Richika a Brāhmin married a daughter of Gādhī, a monarch of the lunar race.

ten generations distant from Yadu, and was of so great power that he not only ruled over the whole earth, but was lord of the seven continents or islands that lie beyond the ocean. This power he had acquired by gaining the favour of the sage Dattātreyā.<sup>1</sup> When told to ask a boon, he demanded and received the promise that he would never do an unjust deed, that he would obtain victory over his enemies, that when he conquered the world he would govern it with equity, and that in the end he would be slain by a 'person renowned in the three regions of the universe.' And so it came to pass. There never was any one, his equal in self-control, in courtesy or in piety. He offered ten thousand sacrifices. Nothing was ever lost or destroyed in his time.<sup>2</sup> And he continued to rule the earth for eighty-five thousand years. So great was his power, that he was able to take Rāvana prisoner and to confine him like a tame beast in a corner of his capital.<sup>3</sup> But though he was able to subdue this potent conqueror of the gods, he was himself killed by Parashurāma the incarnation of Vishnu.<sup>4</sup>

The other legend is about a king called Jyāmagha, who was so afraid of his queen that, despite the fact of her sterility, he did not dare to take a second wife. On one occasion he was about to do so, but the queen's force of character prevailed. He had put his enemies to flight, and among the spoil a maiden of surpassing loveliness fell into his hands. He was so smitten with her beauty that he resolved to marry her and obtain an heir to his throne. But as he journeyed towards his capital, with

**An obedient husband**

<sup>1</sup> Dattātreyā, says the text, was 'the descendant of Atri who was a portion of Vishnu.' In addition to more valuable boons, the sage gave the king a 1,000 arms.

<sup>2</sup> The *Brahmānda Purāna* says that by simply calling the king to mind a thing lost or ruined was restored. See Wilson, Vol. iv. p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Rāvana was the ten headed Rākshasa of Ceylon to whom, in reward for his asceticism, Brahmā had promised that he should never be overcome by gods or demons. His subsequent attack on the gods rendered necessary Vishnu's incarnation as Rāma.

<sup>4</sup> Here is another reference to Vishnu's incarnation as Parashurāma, but there is no attempt to tell the story. See Note 14.

the maiden in his chariot beside him, he began to realize that he must not venture on a second marriage without the consent of his queen. And so when he descended at last at his palace gate and was welcomed by his courtiers, citizens and queen, that lady did not fail to notice the maiden standing at her husband's side. She at once demanded in an angry voice: 'Who is this female that you have brought in your chariot?' The victorious monarch unprepared with an answer, and trembling with fear, replied 'She is my daughter-in-law.' 'Your daughter-in-law!' said the queen, 'How is that possible, you and I have never had a son.' 'Ah, but we are going to have one,' answered the king, 'and when the son, whom you will bear, reaches manhood, this damsel will be his bride.' Such a reply was made merely to turn away the queen's wrath, but it was eventually fulfilled. Because, as it happened, their conversation took place at an auspicious moment, and though the queen was long past the age for bearing children, she in due season gave birth to a son, who, when he grew up, married the damsel his father had brought home. And that is why the following verse is repeated to this day: 'Of all the husbands submissive to their wives, who have been or who will be, the most eminent is the king Jyāmagha.'<sup>1</sup>

We are now approaching the story of Krishna's birth, but for reasons that are not explained, the narrative pauses to tell of certain incidents that happened in the midst of that mighty being's career. The first is about a gem which one of the princes of the Yadu race, whose name was Sattrājita, received as a gift from the sun-god. The scene of the story is Dwāraka, the later home of Krishna.<sup>2</sup> One day

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Wilson's translation. The queen's name, Shaibya, deserves to be recorded.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to find the race of Yadu thus transferred to Dwāraka in Western India, without any warning. Krishna fled to this town from Mathurā, after waging eighteen battles with Jarāsandha. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 54. As far as one can judge from the lists of names, Sattrājita was many generations before Krishna, but that is a small matter, as we find Balarāma, Krishna's brother, visiting king Janaka at Videha, and Janaka is supposed to have lived at the close of the second age, (Tretā) while

as this prince was walking by the shore, singing the praises of the Sun, that god appeared in person and presented him with a wonderful gem in recognition of his piety and devotion. The gem filled the whole world with its glory and yielded to its fortunate owner eight loads of gold every day. In addition, it had this marvellous property, that it delivered the whole kingdom of Dwāraka and its inhabitants from famine, drought, disease, fire and wild beasts. Krishna was of the opinion that such a gem should be in the possession of the king, but as he did not wish to cause dissension among his relatives, he held his peace. Sattrājita, however seemed to be afraid that Krishna wished to deprive him of the gem, and he therefore committed it to the care of his brother Prasena. But Prasena was a man of evil life, and as it proved, the gem while it yielded every sort of good when it was in the possession of a good man, was so endowed that it caused the death of the wearer who happened to be lacking in virtue. In consequence of this, Prasena, who had gone out hunting one day with the gem hanging round his neck, was killed by a lion. As the lion went off carrying the jewel in his mouth, he was seen by Jāmbavat, the king of the bears, who slew the lion, took the gem and retreating to his cave, gave it to his little son to play with. When the murdered prince failed to appear, suspicion at once centred on Krishna, and his relatives began to say among themselves that Krishna must have killed him.

It was not long before these false accusations reached the ears of Krishna<sup>1</sup> and he at once resolved to silence them. Accompanied by a number of his friends, he followed the course of Prasena, and when the dead body was found, from the condition of the ground it was seen that he had been killed by a lion. Further enquiries revealed

**Recovered  
by Krishna**

Krishna lived at the close of the *third age*, (Dwāpara) 864,000 years after! The lists of the lunar race are much more confusing and imperfect than those of the solar race, which is remarkable in view of the fact that Krishna, the hero of this Purāna, belongs to the former.

<sup>1</sup> Krishna is in this story called either *Rhāganat* 'the blessed one' or *Achyuta* 'he who does not perish with created things.'

that the lion had been subsequently killed by a bear. To make a long story short, Krishna followed the footmarks of the bear right up to the cave where the bear lived. Entering the cave, Krishna overheard the nurse of the little bear comfort her charge by saying, 'Don't cry little one, the gem is yours. The lion killed Prasena, and your father killed the lion; the gem is yours, and no one can take it from you.' Ordering his followers to remain without Krishna penetrated to the depths of the cavern, where he saw the nurse and infant bear playing with the gem. Afraid that it was about to be taken from them the nurse raised a loud cry for help, which brought Jāmbavat on the scene. A battle followed, which lasted for twenty-one days. For the first seven days the attendants waited without. On the eighth day they concluded that their master must have been killed, and returned to Dwāraka with the sad intelligence. The funeral ceremonies for the prince were at once performed with the happy result that the food and water, offered in celebration of his *Shrāddha* so renewed the strength of Krishna<sup>1</sup> in his battle with the bear, that he finally emerged victorious. Jāmbavat, however was not slain. Opposed by the growing strength of Krishna, the bear realized that he was fighting not with a man, but with a god, or as he said, 'fighting with a portion of his sovereign lord, Nārāyana, the defender of the universe.' So great a being was not to be conquered by either gods or demons. How then could beasts and men stand before him?<sup>2</sup> Krishna acknowledged that he was indeed the great god Vishnu, who had come to earth to ease its burdens. The gem was accordingly handed over, the bear was miraculously healed of his wounds, and before he left

<sup>1</sup> This of course refers to the belief that the food offered in the funeral obsequies nourishes the soul of the departed. See the scornful reference to this belief in the doctrine of the Chārvākas, that a traveller on a journey does not need to take food with him. His friends sitting quietly at home can feed him!

<sup>2</sup> See *Wilson's translation*, vol. iv. p. 78. 'Thou art not to be vanquished by . . . creatures in human shape, and still less by such as we are, who are born of brute origin.'

Krishna was presented with the daughter of his opponent<sup>1</sup>. When Krishna, bringing his bride with him, arrived in Dwāraka, his coming was hailed with the greatest delight, so much so that those who were bowed down with years recovered their youthful vigour.

When the owner of the gem, Sattrājita, had recovered his property in this marvellous manner, he felt that he must make some atonement for the unjust aspersions which had been cast on the character of Krishna. He accordingly gave him his daughter in marriage. Unhappily, this act roused the anger and jealousy of certain other princes who killed Sattrājita and made themselves the owners of the gem. At the time of the murder, Krishna was visiting his cousins the Pāndu princes<sup>2</sup> in the north of India. As soon as he returned, accompanied by his brother Balarāma, he set off in pursuit of a prince who had fled from Dwāraka on Krishna's arrival. This prince had been the real murderer of Sattrājita, and it was natural to suppose that he had the gem in his possession. After a long pursuit, the brothers caught up with the fugitive. But it so happened that, just then, the ground over which they travelled became so bad, that Balarāma had to stay with the chariot and horses, while Krishna went on alone. When at a distance of four miles, Krishna threw his discus and cut off the head of the fugitive. But though he carefully searched the garments of the dead prince, Krishna could not find any trace of the gem, and returned to his brother with the news. Balarāma however got very angry and said it was manifest that greed had made Krishna tell a lie. He therefore renounced all relationship with him and told him to go where he pleased. Nor would he listen to Krishna's appeals but went off to Videha, where he was graciously received by king Janaka.

<sup>1</sup> This daughter of the bear was presented as an offering suitable to a guest. What can we make of such a story? The daughter of one who, as he confessed, was of *brute origin* married to one of human or divine origin.

<sup>2</sup> Krishna had heard that they had been burned to death in a house of lac, by the cunning of their cousins the Kurus. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 43. Krishna helps the Pāndus against the Kurus in the *great war*.

It may be added that three years passed before the brothers were reconciled. The reconciliation was achieved by certain princes of the house of Yadu going to Videha, and giving the most satisfactory proofs that Krishna had not the gem.

The story now returns to the individual in whose possession the gem was all the time. His name was

**Akrura its  
resetter**

Akrūra, and for the space of fifty-two years he continued to retain it, carefully concealed in a gold box, without any suspicion being aroused. All that time however Akrūra was unremitting in the performance of sacrifices and kept himself pure by the constant repetition of prayers.<sup>1</sup> In addition we have to remember that famine, disease and other evils never afflicted the kingdom of the Yadus, while, as before, the gem continued to confer upon its possessor daily gifts of gold. But when fifty-two years had passed, owing to certain feuds in which Akrūra was involved, he was compelled to flee the country, and from the very hour of his flight one calamity after another descended upon Dwāraka. This coincidence afforded much cause for thought to Krishna, and summoning a meeting of the princes of the Yadu race he asked them if they had any opinions to suggest. One of these princes, an aged man, said he thought Akrūra had something to do with it. At any rate the presence of that person's father had preserved Dwāraka from famine and plague also, and it was known how, when he visited the kingdoms of Kāshi on one occasion, his arrival was heralded by rain. This aged councillor told a still more remarkable story about Akrūra's mother. She was the daughter of the king of Kāshi. Her mother was pregnant with her for twelve years, and even at the end of that time the child refused to be born. When solemnly adjured to come out, and not occasion her mother further suffering, the unborn child spoke from within the womb, and said that if her father would give a cow every day to the

<sup>1</sup> Confiding in the fact that to kill a Kshatriya engaged in sacrifice is as great a sin as the killing of a Brāhmin. See Fitz Edward Hall's translation in Wilson. Vol. iv. p. 85.

Brāhmins, she would be able to secure release at the end of three years more. This was done and when the wonderful child grew up, she was married to Akrūra's father.

In view of these marvellous statements the gathering of princes resolved that Akrūra's absence from the state was sufficient explanation for the calamities that had befallen them, and they sent a deputation, headed by Krishna and his brother, inviting him to return, and with

**The gem  
finally  
recovered**

the assurance that nothing would be said or done about the feuds which had occasioned his departure. And they had every cause to congratulate themselves on their decision. Because with Akrūra's return plague, famine and portent immediately ceased. Nevertheless, Krishna was not satisfied. All he had heard about Akrūra's parentage did not explain the marvellous changes that had taken place. He remembered too, the continuous and expensive sacrifices which Akrūra had celebrated. Where had he got the money to enable him to do so? After long thought<sup>1</sup> he came to the conclusion that Akrūra must have the long-lost jewel concealed about his person. He therefore invited the princes of the house of Yadu to a feast at his house. In the course of the entertainment, Krishna began to joke with Akrūra on the great expenditure he had incurred, adding that it was easy for him to be so generous, when he had the gem which had once belonged to Sattrājita in his possession. When Akrūra, very much alarmed, was wondering what reply he should make, Krishna remarked that nobody had any wish to take it from him. It could not be in better hands. They had all shared in the blessings it had conferred on their country. But as Balarāma continued to think that he had it, he would be much obliged if Akrūra would show it to the gathering. Thus appealed to, and knowing that they would probably search his garments if he refused, Akrūra confessed that he had had it all the time, and had never been happy in its possession. Every day for fifty-two

<sup>1</sup> The Indian commentator says there was no need for Krishna to reason or reflect, because he was omniscient, and the account given of him here is as if he were a mere man. See *Wilson's translation*, vol. iv. p. 88.

years, he had expected to be called upon to produce it. Now he would be glad to hand it over to anybody that Krishna cared to appoint. As he said this, he produced from a secret place in his garments the box of gold, and took out the jewel. Its beauty and radiance created the greatest wonder and delight. But two claimants to its possession presented themselves at once. Balarāma said it belonged to him and Krishna in virtue of their efforts to secure it fifty-two years before. While the daughter of its original owner, now married to Krishna, said it was hers by right of inheritance. However Krishna interposed and said that the jewel must be in the charge of a person who lived a life of perpetual continence. If worn by an impure individual, it would be the cause of his death. Krishna proceeded to say: 'As I have sixteen thousand wives, I am not qualified to have the care of it. It is not likely that my wife will agree to the conditions that would entitle her to its possession, and as regards Balarāma, he is too much addicted to wine and the pleasures of sense to lead a life of self-denial. We are therefore out of the question.'<sup>1</sup> In consequence of this declaration, it was resolved that Akrūra should take charge of the jewel. But he did not keep it any longer hidden in the golden box. He wore it wherever he went, shining like the sun, a very garland of light. If you meditate on this story of the *Blessed One* and of how his character was cleared, you will never be falsely accused, and will be cleansed from every sin.

In connexion with the lists of names, appearing in this chapter, there occurs a very interesting story about

**Shishupala  
slain by  
Krishna**

Shishupāla, king of Chedi, who, as we shall learn later, was killed by Krishna. The reader has already heard of how the demon Hiranyakashipu was killed by Vishnu in his incarnation as the man-lion. This demon was, some time after, born again as Rāvana, the ten-headed Rākshasa of Ceylon, and for the second time

<sup>1</sup> This is a very humiliating confession for the god of gods to make about himself and his brother, both incarnations of the eternal Supreme Spirit. See *Wilson*, vol. iv. p. 91 for passage quoted.

met his death at the hands of Vishnu, in his incarnation as Rāma, son of Dasharatha. And now we find him, after a long interval of blessed freedom from an embodied state, once more on earth, and this time as Shishupāla, king of Chedi. As in his former lives, this monarch was full of undying hatred towards the god Vishnu, but because his thoughts were always centred on 'the supreme being,' Shishupāla, when he died, was united to him for ever more.<sup>1</sup> Maitreya was very much surprised to hear that such an inveterate enemy of Vishnu should have obtained, after his first and second deaths, such great rewards as the gods themselves seldom achieved, while after his third death he was absorbed for ever into the eternal. The sage however pointed out that there were two excellent reasons. The first was that one acquired very great merit from being slain by Vishnu, and had Shishupāla in his previous lives known at the hour of death who his destroyer was he would undoubtedly have obtained absorption on one or other of these occasions. As it was, his mind on both occasions was so darkened by passion, that he obtained nothing more than a certain limited happiness, first as Rāvana, and now as Shishupāla. As Shishupāla, however, the second reason began to operate. His hatred for Vishnu had gone on growing in his various births to such an extent, that the name of Vishnu was never absent from his lips, not however out of love, but out of hate. And you know what blessed results flow from repeating the name of Vishnu. It was in this way that Shishupāla was united with the supreme. 'Uttering his names, even though in malediction, and dwelling upon his image, though in enmity, he beheld Krishna, when inflicting his death... as the supreme being, and all his passion and hatred ceased.' 'If even an enemy,' concludes the sage, 'can acquire such benefits from repeating the sacred name, what great

<sup>1</sup> Parāshara adds somewhat inconsequentially 'For the lord gives to those to whom he is favourable whatever they desire and he bestows a heavenly and exalted station even upon those whom he slays in his displeasure.'

things must be in store for those who repeat it with faith and devotion.'<sup>2</sup>

When Vasudeva, Krishna's father, was born, the gods caused the drums of heaven to beat, but when Krishna himself took birth sun, moon and stars shone with unclouded splendour. Every one was happy, and none strayed from the paths of righteousness. All fears and portents were dispelled. When Krishna lived in this world, he had 16,100 wives and 180,000 sons, while the race of Yadu grew so rapidly that the teachers employed to instruct their youth in the use of arms, numbered 38 millions.<sup>2</sup> But Vishnu was their supreme teacher and ruler as well. And none of the many branches of the house of Yadu ever ventured to disobey his commands. If you listen frequently to the account that we have given you of this royal race, you will be cleansed of your sins and obtain a place in the sphere of Vishnu.

As we have seen, the race of Yadu was descended from the oldest son of king Yayāti. But Pūru, the youngest son of that monarch and who gained his father's high approval, was the ancestor of the Pāndu princes. These princes were assisted by Krishna in the great war against their cousins, the hundred sons of Dhritarāshtra, and when they went to heaven were succeeded in the government of the whole world by Parishit who, says Parāshara, reigns at present. Having thus brought his record of past dynasties, from the days of the first man right up to his own time, one might have thought that the sage would have been content. But he now assumes the role of prophecy, and proceeds to tell the names of future kings. In these lists there are names well known to history, for example, the nine Nandas and the Mauryas. The

<sup>1</sup> See *Summary of Mahābhārata* for a very different and fuller account of Shishupāla's death, p. 55. The reader is advised to consult *Wilson's translation*, vol. iv. pp. 104-108 for a complete account of this very remarkable passage.

<sup>2</sup> The story of Krishna's birth is told in Book V. with greater clearness and detail. It is therefore omitted here.

Brāhmin Kautilya, too, is spoken of, and how he helped to place Chandragupta on the throne. Bindusāra and Asoka, the son and grandson of that monarch are also referred to, with many more of their descendants. But the Purāna is silent with regard to their lapse into Buddhism. We go on to read of Sungas, Andras, Shakas (Scythians), Yavanas (Greeks) and others, but apart from mentioning the number of the kings in each dynasty, and the years they ruled, we hear no more. Finally we come to the 'Guptas of Magadha' who ruled 'along the Ganges to Prayāga' and we know that the kingdom of these later Guptas belongs to the fourth century A.D.<sup>1</sup>

The Purāna informs us that the death of Krishna marked the close of the third age of the world, and the beginning of the fourth or Kali age. **The evils of the present age** It is the characteristic of this present evil age, that it grows more and more evil as the years proceed, while at its close, the human race will be swept out of existence. Fortunately two persons will survive; they are alive just now, says the narrator. Their names are Devāpi and Maru, and they live in the village of Kalāpa. When at the close of 360,000 years, the Kali age ceases to be, and the first or golden age is restored, these two persons will repeople the world. This always happens. There are always a few persons eminent for their piety, who are preserved to secure the continuity of the race.

But before the end takes place, the world will have become very depraved. Might will prevail over right. **Vishnu's future incarnation as Kalki** Dynasty will succeed dynasty in quick succession. Life will be short; passion will be supreme; the rites of religion will be ignored; falsehood and perjury will prevail in courts of law; marriage will be held in scorn; the thread will constitute a Brāhmin. In the end to escape oppression, the common people will hide themselves in the dens and caves of the

earth; their only food, roots and leaves and flowers; their only garments, the barks of trees. So great will be the sufferings of that time, that no man's life will exceed twenty-three years. But when things are at the darkest, there will be born in the village of Sambhala, under the name of *Kalki*, a portion of Vishnu. He will destroy all those who love iniquity, all thieves and outcastes. He will re-establish righteousness upon the earth with the result that those who live to the end of the Kali age will have their minds purified and awakened. It is these virtuous persons who will pass over to the new age and re-people the earth.<sup>1</sup>

As he closes his narrative of the kings who have lived and passed away, Parāshara is deeply impressed with the vanity of life. How kings boast, he cries, **The vanity of life** 'This earth is mine, it is my son's, it belongs to my dynasty.' They boast and die. And the earth laughs at monarchs who have conquered everything but themselves. Kings of great power and unbounded wealth—some of them performed the most arduous penances for countless years—what are they all now? The subject of a tale, whose very truth is questioned by those who listen to it. Men repeat the names of Bhagīratha, Sagara, Rāma and Lakshmana, and ask who were they? Did they ever really exist? Where are they now? We do not know! When we think of all that, we shall never centre our hearts on land and wealth, on wife and children and grandchildren, knowing that there is nothing which we can call our own.

<sup>1</sup> This is hardly consistent with what we have read in a previous paragraph of the two persons who are to do this.

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of these dynasties, the reader should consult Pargiter's *Dynasties of the Kali Age*. See also Note 15.

## CHAPTER VI

## VISHNU'S INCARNATION AS

## KRISHNA—BOOK V

In response to further interrogation on the part of his disciple, Parāshara gave a long account of Vishnu's descent to earth in the form of Krishna. I shall describe to you, he said, what actions were performed by him who was a *part of a part* of Vishnu.<sup>1</sup>

At an assembly of the gods held on the top of Mount Meru, the Earth appeared as a suppliant. She was grievously burdened, she said, by great numbers of demons. These demons had left their proper haunts, and dwelling among mortals, begun to plague mankind. Some of them wore the guise of celestials, but others had taken birth as human beings, and been born as sons of kings. She gave the names of quite a number of them, all more or less famous during their previous births, but she spoke with special emphasis of a particularly powerful individual called Kansa. In his former existence he had been slain by Vishnu and now he was king of Muttra, having dispossessed his father and assumed control of the kingdom.<sup>2</sup> The earth goddess did not say in what way she was made to suffer. She contented herself with declaring that if her brother celestials did not come to her help, she would sink down to the lower regions.

In making this appeal, the earth did not fail to remind her hearers that they were all parts of Vishnu, and not they only, but the inhabitants of hell also; both heaven and earth, with all that they contained, fire, water, earth and air, nay, the whole universe were only the many

<sup>1</sup> Anshānshāvatāra. In saying this of the divine *Purushottama*, an Indian commentator points out that it refers only to his condition as a man, and not to his power which suffered no diminution. See *Wilson*, iv. p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> Kansa in his demon birth was called Kālanemi, and was the great grandson of Hiranyakashipu. (See Book I. 17.)

forms of that manifold being, which encounter and succeed one another, night and day, like the waves of the sea. When the earth had finished her statement, Brahmā homologated all that she had said. There is no doubt whatever, said the grandfather, that what the earth says is true. Shiva and I and all of you are portions of Vishnu. Let us go to him without delay, and tell him what we have heard. He has already on numerous occasions descended to the earth in a small portion of his essence, when some evil had to be set right. In accordance with this proposal, the gods went off to the sea of milk, and at once began to sing Vishnu's praise. In their hymn of adoration, they said that he was Brahma, the Eternal Spirit, that he was the four Vedas, that he was the largest of the large and the smallest of the small; that he could not be seen, could not be described, could not be conceived; that he was all that had been, and all that would be; the protector and saviour of the world. When the hymn had come to an end, Vishnu, addressing the creator, told him to say what they wanted. He was not to be afraid to speak. His prayer would undoubtedly be heard. As he said this, Vishnu revealed his eternal form, a sight which brought Brahmā to his knees, and evoked another outburst of devotion. When he was at last able to speak, Brahmā explained the purpose of their visit, and ended with the cry: 'Shew thy favour to us; deliver the earth from her oppressors. Tell us what we are to do, and we shall humbly obey.'

Vishnu made an immediate response. He plucked out two hairs from his body, and said: These two hairs, one white and the other black, will descend to the earth, and free her of her burdens. The black hair will be born as the eighth child of Devaki, the wife of Vasudeva. It is he who will slay Kansa. But you gods also must play your part. You too must go down to the earth, and fight with the demons, until they have all been destroyed. When he had made this announcement, Vishnu disappeared from view, and the gods,

**Vishnu  
promises to  
become  
incarnate**

after bowing before his invisible presence, returned to Mount Meru.

The scene now changes to the town of Muttra, where Kansa soon receives information of his impending doom.

**The demon  
Kansa is  
warned**

There are two narratives difficult to reconcile. In one it is said that the rishi Nārada went and told the demon king that Vishnu had announced his intention of being born as the eighth son of his cousin Devaki. But the other account says that Kansa one evening took his cousin and her husband Vasudeva for a drive, when a voice from heaven cried aloud and said: 'What a fool you are, Kansa. Do you not know that the eighth child to whom this woman will give birth will cause your death?' The king at once drew his sword and was about to kill his cousin right away. But her husband intervened and said, 'Do not kill her. I promise to hand over every one of her children immediately after birth to be dealt with as you please.' Confident that Vasudeva would keep his promise, the king had mercy on his cousin and spared her life. But according to the former of the two narratives he placed both husband and wife under close supervision.<sup>1</sup>

As far as the first six children were concerned Vasudeva faithfully adhered to the agreement. He

**Plans for  
saving the  
children**

delivered them to Kansa, who caused them to be put to death. But in doing so Kansa was really destroying members of his own race. Because these six infants were the children of the demon Hiranyakashipu, whom Vishnu caused to be brought up from the lower regions and placed in Devaki's womb. This transaction was carried through by the goddess of sleep, who is herself the great illusion of Vishnu, even as Vishnu in that form of his which is known as ignorance, beguiles

<sup>1</sup> The text does not give any details of the wicked deeds of which Kansa had been guilty. According to the *Bhagavata Purana*, Kansa had deposed his father Ugrasena, because he refused to worship Siva, and adhered to the worship of Rāma, an incarnation of Vishnu. Kansa issued a proclamation that no one should ever mention Rāma's name or pay him any kind of worship.

the world. In issuing his command to the goddess, Vishnu explained that Devaki's seventh child would be a portion of himself. At this point he does not say, as he had said to the celestials, that it would be an incarnation of one of his white hairs, but that it would be himself in the form of Shesha, the great serpent on which he rests. It would, of course, be necessary to save this seventh and divine child, and the goddess of sleep was told to transfer it some time before birth to the womb of Rohini, another of Vasudeva's queens. When this had been achieved the king would be told that Devaki had a miscarriage. But the contrivances of the god were not yet complete. For, as he went on to explain, he himself was to be born as the eighth child; and special precautions had to be taken, as it was against the eighth child that Kansa had been warned. The plan which the god had devised was as follows: There was a cowherd encamped outside the city walls, on the further bank of the river Jumna, whose wife was to give birth to a child on the same night as Devaki. And just as Vishnu would enter the womb of Devaki, so was the goddess of sleep to enter the womb of the cowherd's wife. Under Vishnu's guidance, Vasudeva would take his new born son to the cowherds' encampment, make an exchange of the children, and when he had got back to the house, Kansa would arrive, take possession of the changeling, who, as we have seen was to be really the goddess of sleep, and dash her head against a stone. But the goddess would come to no harm. She would rise uninjured to the skies and, because she had rendered so great a service, she was told that men would bring to her offerings of flesh and liquor; while in return those, who worshipped her twice a day, would always receive an answer to their prayers and secure their heart's desire.

The goddess of sleep duly carried out the command of Vishnu. With regard to the first six children, the text is content with saying that when Kansa heard of their birth, he caused them to be destroyed. As to the seventh, the incarnation of Vishnu's white hair,

**The double  
birth of  
Vishnu**

all that is said is that the child when born was transferred to the womb of Rohini, Vasudeva's other queen. But full details are given of the approaching birth of Krishna, Devaki's eighth child. As her time drew near, the stars shone with special radiance, and the mother was surrounded by a light so dazzling that those who looked at her had to turn away their eyes. The gods, too, came and sang her praise. They compared her to Prakriti, from which all things draw their birth. They said she was identical with creation, that she was Aditi, the mother of the gods; that she was Diti, the mother of the demons. For was she not carrying in her womb Him who is all things, the eternal Vishnu, who is beyond the understanding and comprehension of men? It was the hour of midnight that the birth took place. The child was the colour of the lotus. He had four arms and bore Shrivatsa, the sacred mark, upon his breast. His parents at once cried aloud and begged him not only to withhold his divine shape, but to see to it that Kansa did not know of his descent. In reply Vishnu merely said that he had come in answer to their prayers, and then was silent. But Vasudeva, taking him in his arms, passed out into the darkness, and crossing the Jumna, hurried to the encampment of Nanda, the cowherd. Though there were guards at every gate and in every street, they passed unnoticed and unknown, and though the Jumna was in flood, the water did not reach to Vasudeva's knees. For the goddess of sleep was with them and stupified the soldiers, while Shesha, the great serpent, bore them company and holding his mighty hoods above them protected both father and child from the torrential rain which was falling at the time. Now it so happened that Yasodā, the cowherd's wife, had just given birth to a daughter when Vasudeva arrived. By the power of the goddess, he was able to exchange the infants without anyone noticing what had been done, and returned to his house with the female child. Very soon after his return, the infant cried aloud, the watchers were aroused by the cry, and hastening to the palace of Kansa, told him that his cousin had been delivered of a child. The king came

hurrying to the house. The child he had been told to fear had been born, and despite the appeals of Devaki, he laid hands upon it and dashed it to the ground. But it rose unharmed in the air, a mighty form with eight arms and in every arm a mighty weapon. The mighty form was the goddess of sleep and no other. As she rose higher and higher in the air, she laughed and said: 'You have not hurt me, Kansa, your efforts have been all in vain. He who is appointed to slay you has been born. Seize him if you can. He was the cause of your destruction in a former birth, and he will be so again.'

Kansa was very much perturbed by these threatenings. He sent for his principal followers and told them what had happened. It was manifest, he said, that the gods were trying to bring about his downfall. But he was not afraid. He had fought with every one of them and put them to flight. Indra had done his best. He had forbidden the clouds to send down rain. But he had made war on the clouds, and compelled them to give him all the rain that was required. What could Shiva do? What could Vishnu do, except destroy his enemies by treachery? But he would punish them more grievously than he had ever done. As they all knew, the celestials depended for their very life on the gifts and sacrifices of the pious, and he would strike at their power by putting their worshippers to death. With regard to the child who had been born to Devaki, he commanded his followers to make a thorough search in every corner of the world, and to slay every boy who showed himself to be of more than ordinary vigour. When these commands had been given and presumably obeyed, Kansa released his cousin and her husband from confinement. It was needless to watch them further, he said, and they were welcome to have as many more children as they chose. But though he spoke to them so calmly he was nevertheless burdened and perplexed.

Vasudeva was now free to go where he would. Naturally he made his way to the encampment of the

cowherd. There he found him rejoicing in the fact that his wife had given birth to a son. But Vasudeva's object was to get the cowherd away from Muttra and its neighbourhood as quickly as he could. He therefore urged him now that his business at court was settled and his taxes paid to return home. The other cowherds, who had apparently come to town on the same errand, received similar advice, and Vasudeva had the satisfaction of seeing them pack their goods into their waggons and depart from the encampment. Before they went, Vasudeva entrusted his seventh son to Nanda and his wife. 'This son of mine, whom Rohini has borne to me, was the way he expressed himself, and he, of course, was the incarnation of the white hair of Vishnu, whom the goddess of sleep had transferred from the womb of Devaki to that of Rohini. It was by this artifice that the two brothers, both descents of the Supreme Being, were taken out of harm's way and brought up together as if they were the cowherd's own children.

Many were the pranks which Krishna played in his childhood and youth. For instance, while he was still an infant, and before he could walk, a female demon came in the middle of the night, picked him up from the place where he lay asleep and gave him breast to suck. She had caused the deaths of other infants in the same way, for she was known as the child-killer, but she met her match in Krishna. The infant seized her breast with both hands and went on sucking till he had sucked her life away. Her shrieks of pain and terror roused the whole encampment, but Krishna would not let go, till he saw her dead at his feet. His parents were in a great state of alarm, and they did not put him back in his bed beneath the waggon till they had sprinkled cow-dung on his head and fastened an amulet round his wrist,<sup>1</sup> with appropriate prayers to Vishnu in his various forms. On another occasion, his foster-mother happened to offend

<sup>1</sup> Dwellers in India know that this is still the practice. The female fiend was called Pūtānā.

him. Awaking out of sleep and feeling hungry, he called aloud for nourishment. But his impatience was so great that he kicked his feet about in all directions, with the result that the waggon itself was overturned and all the waterpots were broken. Such a fresh exhibition of strength filled the encampment with amazement. But it was not long before another adventure of the divine infant eclipsed all that had gone before. By this time he had begun to crawl, and his mother was never able to keep him out of mischief. If he was not covering himself with ashes and dung, he was in among the feet of the cattle and pulling their tails. At last when neither he nor his brother<sup>1</sup> paid any attention to their mother's injunctions and threats of punishment, she tied a rope round Krishna's middle, fastening the other end to a large wooden mortar. Thinking that such a contrivance would hold him fast, she went off to attend to her household affairs. But Krishna was not to be so detained. Left to himself he went on crawling and dragging the heavy mortar after him. At last he passed between two trees which grew close together. The mortar stuck between them. Krishna went on pulling and the mortar kept its place. The result was that the two great trees were uprooted and came crashing to the ground. When the cowherds rushed to the spot, they found the child unharmed, and laughing aloud as he thought of what he had done.<sup>2</sup> But the headmen of the tribe were very much disturbed. They said it was an exceedingly bad omen, and it was not the first. There was the death of the female fiend, the overturning of the waggon, and now two trees had fallen, when there was no wind to blow them down. They therefore resolved to break up their encampment, and go to some other part of the forest, where no such portents would disturb them.

The district which they chose for their new settlement was Brindābana. It was Krishna himself, we are

<sup>1</sup> By this time the boys had been named Krishna and Rāma or Balarāma. A priest, sent by Vasudeva, performed the rite in secret.

<sup>2</sup> As he laughed, he showed his little white teeth just budded. Krishna is called *Dāmodara*: *dāma*, rope and *udara*, belly.

told, who made the selection, because even in the hottest part of the year there is plenty of green grass there.<sup>1</sup> At

**Krishna fights  
with a water-  
serpent**

Brindābana they had adventures even more wonderful than those already recorded. One of them was an encounter which Krishna had with a great water snake, whose home was in a deep pool of the river Jumna. Owing to the presence of this fearful creature, neither beasts nor men dared to approach the river, and Krishna, true to the purpose which had brought him down to earth, resolved to bring them relief. And so he jumped into the pool, smiting his arms and calling upon the serpent to come forth. The monarch of the serpent race quickly responded to the challenge. He was attended by hundreds of other snakes, both male and female, the latter adorned with costly gems, and with lovely rings in their ears. They were all poisonous too, and coiling themselves round the youthful hero, plunged their fangs deeply into his flesh. When word of this encounter reached the encampment, the cowherds accompanied by Balarāma and his foster-parents, hurried to the scene. None of them seemed to have entertained any hope that he would escape alive, and out of love for the darling boy, they said that they would plunge into the waters and perish with him. But Balarāma knew better, though he thought that his brother was assuming the role of mortal quite long enough. He therefore called upon him to put forth his divine strength and remember who he was, the eternal God, the very centre of creation.<sup>2</sup> In obedience to this appeal, Krishna easily released himself from the serpents' coils and seizing their king with both hands, trod him underfoot. When the wives of the vanquished serpent saw their husband thus overthrown, they cried aloud for mercy. 'We know who thou art,' they said.

<sup>1</sup> The Harivansa says that it was Krishna who wished a change of settlement, and that to compel a removal he changed the hairs of his body to wolves, who preyed on the herdsmen and their cattle, and made them anxious to leave their old home in Vraja.

<sup>2</sup> He also spoke of the cowherds and their wives as divinities, and of himself as 'a portion of thee, and born as thy senior.'

'Thou art the god of gods, the eternal lord, the self-existent one. And yet we do not know thee. For how can we, women as we are, tell what thou art, when pious rishis have sought in vain to proclaim thy greatness, for thou art without beginning and without end. But hear us, we entreat thee. The virtuous should have pity upon women; even fools are kind to animals. Thou art a serpent in one of thy many forms, and as such dost uphold the worlds. Why then shouldst thou crush to death this fragile and feeble creature that lies helpless before thee? Give us back our husband, that is our cry.' The snake himself seconded these appeals for mercy. He also declared that Krishna was the god of gods, the Supreme Spirit, in whom all the celestials dwelt,<sup>1</sup> and whom they ever worshipped with offerings of incense and flowers. By way of excuse for his evil ways, the snake said that when he showed himself cruel and remorseless, he was merely fulfilling the law of his being, and no sin attached to those who conformed to the nature with which they had been endowed. Indeed he said to Krishna: 'I am what I am because you created me so, and I do the things which you appointed me to do. Were I to act differently I should be deserving of punishment.'<sup>2</sup> In response to such mighty appeals, Krishna spared the creature's life, but he made a condition that the serpent should leave the river Jumna at once, and make his home in the ocean. He also promised that Garuda, his own vehicle, and the great enemy of the serpent race, would not attack him when he saw his footprint on the serpent's head. On another occasion when Balarāma fell into the hands of a powerful demon, and was seized with a momentary fear that the fiend was going to carry him away, Krishna had to remind his brother that he too was the cause of all that existed, and that in their dual forms they were the soul of the universe, continuing to exist when that universe

<sup>1</sup> He gave the usual list: Brahmā, Rudra, Chandra, Indra, the Maruts, the Ashwins, the Vasus and the Adityas. The serpent's name was Kaliya.

<sup>2</sup> This is a very prevalent teaching. See *Bhagavadgītā*, xviii, where we read: One's duty though defective, is better than another's duty well-performed. Performing the duty prescribed by nature, one does not commit sin; one should not abandon a natural duty, though tainted with evil.

would be destroyed. 'Thou hast a thousand heads, a thousand hands and feet, and bodies. A thousand Brahmās spring from thee.' When he had received this exhortation to lay aside thought of his mortality and remember who he was, Balarāma put forth his strength and crushed his adversary to death.<sup>1</sup>

Krishna's most remarkable feat, however, was a trick which he played on the god Indra. It was in the days that followed the rainy season when the cowherds had gathered in large numbers to offer a sacrifice to that deity. Krishna, wishing to make the king of heaven

**Krishna plays  
a trick on  
Indra**

angry, asked the cowherds what was the object of such a sacrifice. They replied that Indra was the god of the clouds, and of the waters, and in common with others it was their practice at the close of rainy season to show their gratitude for what they had received, for were it not for his kindness in sending rain, there would be neither grass nor grain, and without such nourishment their cows would neither bear calves nor yield milk. To these explanations, Krishna replied that such arguments were all very well for farmers and traders, whose livelihood depended on the soil. But our source of livelihood is in our cattle and we wander freely among the forests and hills. It is the spirits of the woods and mountains whom we should worship. If we do not propitiate them, they will become angry with us, and assuming the forms of tigers and other wild beasts, destroy both us and our cattle. What have we to do with Indra? Leave him to the farmers and others of that kind. But let us worship our cattle and the hills on which they roam.<sup>2</sup> And so, pointing to a mountain called Gobardhana, which raised its great height in front of them, he said, Let that mountain be the object of our devotion. Let us offer to

<sup>1</sup> C. 8 contains another legend about a demon in the form of an ass whom Balarāma killed. Its name was Dhenuka.

<sup>2</sup> Krishna also said that the object that is cultivated by anyone should be venerated and worshipped as his benefactor. He who worships the deity of another and diverts from him the reward that is his due, obtains not a prosperous station either in this world or in the next. See *Wilson*, vol. iv. p. 311. Where the land ceased to be cultivated, was the beginning of the territory over which the spirits of the woods and mountain reigned.

it an animal sacrifice, and feed it with flesh and milk. The cowherds were delighted with the proposal. They abandoned their worship of Indra. They made a great feast to which they summoned many thousands of Brāhmīns, and when they had worshipped the mountain, they, on the advice of these holy men, adorned their cows with garlands, and solemnly walked round them. In the performance of these religious rites, Krishna played a double part. Because he not only went to the top of Gobardhana, saying, 'I am the mountain,' and there received the worship and consumed the offerings of his fellow cowherds, but while doing so, he also climbed the mountain with his companions and worshipped his other self.<sup>1</sup>

As Krishna had expected, the god Indra was very angry when he saw himself flouted and deprived of his rightful dues. He knew that it was Krishna who was responsible for the insult he had received, and he was determined to be revenged. He therefore summoned the clouds to his presence, and though the rainy season was over, commanded them to pour forth their waters on the impious and ungrateful cowherds. In obedience to their lord's behest, the clouds discharged great volumes of rain, which fell without ceasing for seven days and seven nights. The deluge was so great that the whole earth was under water. But whatever may have happened to others, Krishna and his friends experienced no trouble of any kind. For here is what he did. He lifted up the mountain which his friends had so recently worshipped, and holding it aloft with one hand, told the cowherds to drive their cattle and waggons under it and take refuge from the storm. This was a command which they were not slow to obey, and as long as the storm lasted, they with their wives and children and cattle dwelt secure. His friends and companions had witnessed many of Krishna's remarkable deeds. But this was the most wonderful of them all, and they could not sufficiently

<sup>1</sup> See *Wilson*, vol. iv. p. 313, who quotes the Hari Vansa. An illusory Krishna, having become the mountain, ate the flesh that was offered.

express their wonder and praise. They told him that he really could not be of mortal birth. He must be either a god or a demon or one of the heavenly minstrels at least. To these observations Krishna at first made no answer. But after a little, he said, 'I am sorry you should be ashamed of your relationship to me. I am not a god, nor am I a demon, or a heavenly minstrel. I was born one of yourselves, and you must be content to know that I am your kinsman.'<sup>1</sup>

When Indra saw how he had been outwitted, he thought that it would be advisable to go down to the earth and come to terms with his supplanter. He made the journey on Airāvata, the mighty elephant on which he always rode. By the time he reached

**Krishna and  
Indra recon-  
ciled**

the earth, the rain had ceased, the sun was shining and Krishna had put the mountain back in its place. Indeed when Indra arrived at Brindābana, he found Krishna herding cattle in the jungle, surrounded by his rustic companions. But though the supporter of the worlds appeared in the guise of a cowherd, Indra's more spiritual eyes were able to distinguish Garuda, the vehicle of Vishnu, spreading out his wings above the head of the incarnate. Whatever his feelings may have originally been, the king of heaven had no intention of prolonging the quarrel. Indeed the first thing he did was to confess that he had acted wrongly when he deluged the earth with rain. And he was very glad that Krishna had intervened and saved the lives of so many cows. The uprooting and elevating of the mountain was a most remarkable achievement, and it had afforded great gratification to the celestials. The object of his coming so far, however, was in obedience to the request of the cattle, whose lives had been saved, to confer two new titles upon Krishna. For he would hereafter be

<sup>1</sup> See *Wilson*, vol. iv. p. 323. and *Dutt*, p. 352. This is a passage which requires some explaining.

known as Upendra,<sup>1</sup> and as Indra of the cows bear the name of Govinda. In confirmation of this statement, the god took a pitcher and sprinkled Krishna with holy water, while the cows, which had by this time gathered round in large numbers, poured forth such quantities of milk that it seemed to submerge the world. When these ceremonies were over Indra took occasion to commend to Krishna's care a portion of himself which had recently taken birth in Arjuna, a prince of the house of Bharata. Krishna promised that Arjuna would never sustain defeat so long as he was present, and added that in the great war which was about to take place, he would give the victory to Arjuna and his brothers.<sup>2</sup> Having thus successfully accomplished the object of his journey, Indra, after a parting embrace, mounted his elephant and returned to heaven.

Krishna and his brother, like the other boys in the encampment, followed the cattle to their pastures, and there they spent many happy days, making garlands of forest flowers, and binding peacock feathers in their hair; playing at games, roaming through the forest, swinging on the branches of the trees, boxing and wrestling and throwing stones. But as he grew older, new desires began to surge in Krishna's breast and he found it was the society of the other sex which appealed to him most. Nor were the wives and daughters of the cowherds slow to respond. Whenever they heard the music of his lute, they hurried after him. One would sing in company with him, another would listen, others would come pressing forward, and again smitten with bashfulness, shrink suddenly back. But whether they

<sup>1</sup> Upendra = Upa Indra, a lesser Indra. Commentators have tried to get over this disparaging name by saying that *Upa* here stands for *Upari*, above, superior to. See *Hari Vansa*, which reads: As thou, Krishna, art appointed by the cows, Indra superior to me, therefore the deities in heaven shall call thee Upendra. *Wilson*, iv. p. 319.

*Govinda* means *tender of cattle*. Both names are epithets of Krishna.

<sup>2</sup> The great war is the central theme of the *Mahābhārata*. Krishna acted as Arjuna's charioteer during the eighteen days' battle and the *Bhagavadgītā*, which has been inserted in the sixth book of the poem, records the conversation that took place between them. See my *Summary of the Mahābhārata*.

cast their arms about him, or were content to meditate upon his person, their sins were wiped away, and final emancipation was their reward. On other occasions, when the women went forth to look for Krishna, they could not find him. But though they found him not, they would comfort their hearts by pretending that they themselves were Krishna. 'Look,' one would cry, 'how gracefully I walk.' Another would slap her arms in defiance and present herself as Krishna in one of his mighty deeds, overcoming the water snake, or holding up Gobardhana. And while they were thus trying to pass the time till their loved one would appear, one of the women would declare that she could trace Krishna's foot-prints and the foot-prints of some happy female, who had been privileged to enjoy his solitary company. And so they followed after on the way the two had gone. They were sure that Krishna's favoured companion must have been drunk with love. She had walked so unevenly along the path. So they would speculate, wondering if Krishna was still with her or not, when all at once the object of their search appeared in their midst and asked them to come and dance. Every one of them was anxious to have Krishna all to herself; each of them pressed close to his side. And in virtue of his power, he was able to please them all. For he took the hand of every one of them; and each of them was confident that she had Krishna to herself. How happy they were. To be absent from him a moment seemed like ten million years. To embrace him and to kiss him was the height of joy.<sup>1</sup> Their husbands, fathers and brothers did their best to stop these expeditions and amusements. But their efforts were of no avail. With the coming of darkness, the wives and daughters of the cowherds could not be absent from their love. He who is the eternal being, the gracious deliverer of mankind, sported with the Gopis, pervading their natures, and that of their lords, by his own essence, all diffusive like the wind.

<sup>1</sup> 'The drops of perspiration from the arm of Krishna, falling on the cheeks of the women produced a crop of down.' See *Wilson*, vol. iv. p. 331. The *Bhāgavatapurāna* enters into more sensuous detail.

About this time, the rishi Nārada went to Kansa once more and told him what had happened to the seventh and eighth sons of his cousin Devaki, and how they were living as cowherds in Brindābana. Kansa was very angry and bitterly reproached Devaki's husband, Vasudeva, for the deceit of which he had been guilty. But he did not give up hope, for, as he said, the boys were not yet full grown, and perhaps some of his famous boxers would be able to slay them. And that no time might be lost, he sent one of his nobles to the cowherds' encampment with a challenge to take part in the approaching athletic games. But while he did so, Kansa instructed a demon called Keshin, to attack Krishna in the form of a horse and trample him to death. When the demon came rushing through the woods of Brindābana, the cowherds and their cattle fled before him in terror. Naturally they took refuge with Krishna. They had already witnessed his prowess, and they were destined to see it again. For we are told that the youth was not in the least afraid. He cried and said, 'Come to me you wretched demon, and I will do to you what Shiva did to Pushan—knock everyone of your teeth down your throat.'<sup>1</sup> And Krishna did more than he promised. Because he thrust his arm into the beast's mouth, and caused his arm to swell to such an extent that its body was torn in two. The two portions were so exactly equal that as they lay on the ground, the spectators could count on each two legs, one ear, one eye, one nostril, and half a tail. The cowherds were overwhelmed with wonder, but their wonder was shared by a much greater person than they. The rishi Nārada, anxious to see what would happen, had followed the demon horse from Muttra, and from his station on a cloud he called out in a loud voice, 'You have done well, oh, lord of the world (jagannāth). Such an amazing contest never happened before. The gods are grateful to you. Every time they heard this

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the famous incident at the sacrifice of Daksha, when Shiva maltreated quite a number of his brother deities of whom Pushan was one. It is referred to in both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*.

creature's neigh, yes, every time he tossed his mane, the celestials were filled with fear, and because you have killed Keshin you will be known hereafter by the name of Keshava.<sup>1</sup>

Soon after this great achievement the nobleman who was sent to summon the brothers to Muttra arrived at Brindābana. But he was very unlike his master. And he congratulated himself on the fact that he would soon be standing in the presence of a portion of the deity and would be permitted to touch him who is the soul of all.<sup>2</sup> In any case, when he arrived and told his message, Krishna and Balarāma at once accepted the challenge and set out next morning for the capital. Before they went, they requested the cowherds to follow them. Their wives and daughters, however, were left behind, and great was the lamentation of these love-intoxicated females as they bewailed the departure of Govinda. He will forget all about us, they cried. We are unlettered and rude. How can we hope to hold our position in his affection once he is exposed to the charms of educated and polished ladies with their fine words, their polished manners, and their artful wiles? Alas! Alas! What can we do? The creator is indeed devoid of compassion to take away so soon this wondrous gift. But their tears and lamentations were of no avail, and the swift car in which the brothers made the journey soon brought them to the shores of the Jumna.

<sup>1</sup> Another legend is told in c. 14 of a demon in the form of a bull, Arishta, whom Krishna slew.

<sup>2</sup> 'I shall behold,' he said, 'the lotus eye of Vishnu which when seen only in imagination, takes away the sins of men . . . I shall see the sovereign of the world by whom the world is sustained, who is worshipped as the best of males (Purushottama), as the male of sacrifice (Yajnapurusha) in sacrificial rites. I shall see Keshava who is without beginning or end, by worshipping whom with a hundred sacrifices, Indra obtained the sovereignty over the gods. That Hari whose nature is unknown to Brahmā, Indra, Rudra, the Ashwins, the Vasus, Adityas and Maruts, will this day touch my body. The soul of all, the knower of all, he is who is all and is present in all, he who is permanent, undecaying, all pervading, will converse with me. He, the unborn, who has preserved the world in the various forms of a fish, a tortoise, a boar, a horse, a lion, will this day speak to me . . . That Ananta, (a name for Shesha, the great serpent incarnate in Balarāma, Krishna's brother) who holds the earth upon his crest and who has descended upon earth for its protection, will this day call me by my name.' Wilson, vol. v, p. 2.

There the nobleman asked permission to alight that he might bathe in her waters. Apparently the brothers did not join him. But as he stood in the stream, meditating upon Brahma, he was privileged to see his two companions in their divine forms. Balarāma was specially wonderful, for he appeared in his real and original character as the chief of serpents with a thousand heads and attended by others of his race. His mighty form with its multitudinous coils, acted as a couch, on which his brother Krishna reclined. Krishna himself was not so wonderful as his brother, but the nobleman observed that he had four arms, wore yellow garments, and that his breast and arms were adorned with the proper crests and ornaments of Vishnu, while in his hands he bore the discus and the mace. On every side of him stood some of the most eminent sages, in an attitude of profound meditation, each of them with his eyes fixed on the tip of his nose. The nobleman was very much amazed and he got out of the water and approached the car. But he was still more dumbfounded when he saw the brothers sitting in the chariot, and in their human forms. And so he ran back to the river, plunged once more into its waters, and looking up, saw what he had seen already; Balarāma and Krishna in their divine forms, surrounded by saints and sages, heavenly minstrels and snakes, singing their praise. Not unnaturally the nobleman joined his voice to theirs and worshipped Krishna with imaginary incense and flowers.<sup>1</sup> When the nobleman once more got out of the water and entered the chariot, the look of rapture on his face called forth a strange question from Krishna: 'Surely my friend, you have seen some strange portent when you were bathing in the river. What was it that you saw? Your eyes are staring wide with wonder and

<sup>1</sup> It is unnecessary to summarize the second hymn. But it is worth adding. 'Thou art termed by us, Krishna. Achyuta or Vishnu. Thou art the whole world, thou art all; thou art the gods and all other beings; there is nothing except thee in all this existence. Thou art Brahmā, Pashupati, Aryaman, Dhātri and Vidhātri, etc. Thy supreme form is denoted by the imperishable term *sat* (existence) 'Thou art *sat* and *asat* (real and unreal)' Wilson, vol. v. p. 15.

amazement.' To which the nobleman made answer: 'That mighty marvel which I saw, when standing in the Jumna, I now see seated by my side, clothed in mortal form. He whom I saw in the water, oh, Krishna, was none other than your own self, from whom the whole universe is derived.' And then he added somewhat strangely, 'But let us say no more about it. It is time to hasten on to Muttra. Kansa will be angry if we are late. The man who serves a master must do what he is told.'

When they approached the walls of Muttra, Krishna and Balarāma, at the request of their companion, got out of the chariot and entered the town on foot. They had not gone far when they met Kansa's washerman, engaged in cleaning his master's clothes. The two young men went forward and threw some of the garments on the ground. This action irritated the washerman and he began to abuse them in a most insulting fashion. But Krishna smote him to the ground and killed him. With the dead man's washing on their shoulders they continued to go along the public street until they came to the shop of a flower seller. From this individual, they received a very different reception, because when they asked him for some flowers, he bowed himself before them and thanked them for honouring his shop by their presence. And it was a wonderful recompense he received for his courtesy, for we read that Krishna not only promised health and happiness and wealth for himself and his descendants, till the end of time, but said that when he died, he would secure a blessed dwelling-place in heaven.

Very soon after, they met a young woman, a hunchback, carrying a vessel full of perfume. 'Who are you, my pretty maid,' said Krishna, 'and whither are you going?' 'I am the servant of Kansa,' answered the hunchback. 'I am his maker of perfumes, and he says that nobody can make them so well as I.' 'Will you give me some,' said Krishna. 'We wish to rub it on our bodies.' 'Certainly,'

**Krishna kills  
Kansa's  
washerman**

**Krishna cures  
a hunchback**

said the young woman, and she gave them all that they required. And then a wonderful thing happened. Placing his feet on the young woman's feet, and raising her chin with two fingers and thumb, he lifted up her head and went on pressing, till she stood, erect and beautiful. The brothers had now possessed themselves of suitable garments, blue and yellow. They had anointed their bodies with sweet smelling perfumes, and they felt that they might now proceed to the arena, to meet the challenge which Kansa had sent.<sup>1</sup> Great preparations had been made for witnessing the contest.

It seemed as if the whole population of the city had assembled. Kansa himself sat on a splendid throne, while platforms had been erected for the ladies of the zenana, for the courtesans and the wives of the citizens. Some of the populace when they saw the lads, spoke with anxiety as to the result, and said it was cruel to expect that two young striplings should contend successfully against two such experienced opponents. But in contradiction to this we are told that they knew who the young men were. They had heard of their wonderful achievements. It was Krishna in particular of whom they spoke, saying to one another, This is a portion of Vishnu who has come down to earth and will deliver the earth from her oppressors. The same conflicting sentiments are attributed to their mother Devaki and their father Vasudeva. It is said that Devaki looked longingly and anxiously in their direction, feeling that their last hour had come, and again we find them both confident of the issue, knowing, even as the others did, that they were portions of Vishnu. The same conflicting ideas are present in the description given of the wrestling match. It is spoken of as a desperate struggle, of which the issue was life and death, and we are told that it was only after a long effort that Kansa's boxers began to lose ground, while Krishna

<sup>1</sup> The text also says that Kansa sent against them a wild elephant and that the brothers killed it but no details are given. The *Bhāgavata Purāna* however says that one brother caught it by the trunk and the other by the tail, and when they had played with it, Krishna whirled it round his head a hundred times and dashed it to the ground.

**The wrestling  
match**

and his brother are described as engaging in the combat as if it were all mere child's play. The rules of the game permitted pushing, pulling and grappling, and the employment of both hands and feet. When Kansa saw that his candidates were getting the worst of it, he ordered his musicians to cease their play. But the gods, who were watching from the sky, ordered the minstrels of heaven to strike up, and themselves called out words of encouragement to the brothers. Nor had the spectators long to wait. As they had treated the elephant so did the youthful cowherds treat their opponents. They seized them by their waists, swung them round their heads a hundred times, and dashed them to the ground. When he saw that his first two champions were dead, Kansa ordered others forward, but after one of their number also had been killed, they took refuge in flight. Kansa was beside himself with anger and, calling to his guards, bade them not only to drive the two boys out of the arena, but to put their father Vasudeva to death.

He had scarcely uttered these words, when Krishna rushing forward, seized him by the hair of his head, knocked off his tiara, threw him to the ground and got on top of him. The weight of him, who is the upholder of the universe, was too much for Kansa, and he was dead in a moment. Krishna, still holding him by the hair of the head, dragged the dead body into the middle of the arena. The spectators were greatly shocked to see their king treated in such an ignominious fashion, but the few who ventured to interfere soon shared their master's fate, and no further attempt was made to resist the conquerors. One of Krishna's first acts was to open the prison doors and restore to his throne and kingdom, Ugrasena, whom the unfilial Kansa had so unjustly deposed. But even before doing that he and his brother were embracing the feet of Vasudeva and Devaki, their father and mother. Such an act of worship, however, both parents declined to receive. And it was to Krishna that they addressed their protests. 'Thou art no son of ours. The whole universe from Brahmā to

a tree, is contained in thee.'<sup>1</sup> It was only for a little while however that Krishna permitted his parents to remain conscious of his true nature. And he proceeded to offer his apologies for not coming to their relief earlier. He then approached the elders and leading citizens of the Yadu race and offered his respectful greetings. When the widows of the dead usurper came to mourn his fate, Krishna sympathized with them in their grief, expressed his regret at what happened and mingled his tears with theirs.<sup>2</sup>

Though none of the people had attempted to oppose Krishna further, the dead king had friends in other parts of the country. Of these the greatest was his father-in-law, Jarāsandha, king of Magadha. And on no less than eighteen different occasions he brought great armies and endeavoured to take the city. But his efforts were of no avail. The two young men alone were more than a match for all the armies of the king of Magadha, strengthened as they were by the weapons which they called down from heaven. Krishna sent for his bow and two quivers stocked with an inexhaustible supply of arrows, while Balarāma procured his famous ploughshare and a mace. But though they did so, they fought as men among men, and even when they thought it expedient, took refuge in flight. For how could it be other than a pastime, when he who is the lord of the universe condescends to dwell among mortals?

**Kansa's  
friends attack  
Muttra**

<sup>1</sup> Vasudeva said, 'The affection that inspires my heart and the heart of Devaki towards thee, as if thou wert our child, is indeed but error and a great delusion. . . . How should he, in whom all fixed and moveable things are contained, be conceived in the womb and be born of a mortal being?' *Wilson*, vol. v. p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 21 tells of Krishna sending the wind-god to Indra and ordering him to send his royal hall to Muttra for Ugrasena's use. It was emblazoned with jewels. The two youths studied for sixty-five days all the books dealing with military science, and the incantations required for procuring the use of supernatural weapons. Their Brāhmin instructor was rewarded by having his son restored to life. The boy had been carried off beneath the ocean by a demon. Krishna marched against the ocean, thinking that he was to blame. But when the ocean explained who the real culprit was, Krishna plunged into the sea, slew the demon, and appropriated his conch shell. This is the shell he still uses.

Very soon after the successive defeats of Jarāsandha Krishna received the information that he was about to be attacked from an entirely different quarter. Away to the west there was a king of the Yavanas (Bactrian Greeks) who, as a result of being told by the rishi Nārada that the Yadus were the most powerful race on earth, resolved to fight with them. And so he advanced against Muttra with an army of many million men. Realizing that the people of Muttra were very much exhausted with their long-drawn battles against the king of Magadha, and that they were scarcely able to fight successfully against this new foe, Krishna resolved to convey the whole population of Muttra, indeed the whole Yadu race, to some fresh settlement where they could dwell in peace and safety. The place he chose was Dwāraka, on the western seaboard of India. And having requested and secured from the ocean a stretch of territory about forty miles square, he built a great city, surrounded by high walls, and containing beautiful gardens and tanks full of water.<sup>1</sup> Indeed it was so grand and spacious and beautiful that one could only compare it to Amaravati, the capital of Indra. When their new dwelling place was ready, Krishna conveyed the people to Dwāraka, and himself waited behind to meet the attacking hosts. Nor had he long to wait. When they arrived Krishna stepped forth unarmed and alone. The barbarians at once recognized him and came forward. But Krishna, who had all his plans ready, turned and fled. Naturally the barbarian

<sup>1</sup> The *Mahabharata* says he merely enlarged an already existing city. The Prem Sāgar says that he caused the architect of the gods to erect this city in a single night. When the city was ready, Krishna conveyed the whole population of Muttra to Dwāraka, without their knowledge. When the people woke up next morning they were very much surprised to see the ocean, and in amazement cried out, 'The ocean has come to Muttra.' When Krishna could do so wonderful deeds, why did he fear lest the Yadus would be defeated? In any case, we find him causing the death of the Greek leader and taking his whole army captive. But the father of the Greek king, a Brahmin who cohabited with this monarch's mother, had obtained a boon from Shiva that he would have a son who would be a terror to the race of Yadu. The Yadus had laughed at the Brahmin and he was determined to have revenge! That explains everything.

ran after him, and Krishna took refuge in a cave. Now a person called Muchukunda was lying asleep within the cavern. He had been lying there for a very long time. When the barbarian saw him, he concluded that he was Krishna, and giving him a kick, told him to get up. The sleeping man awoke and looked at the Greek with the result that he was at once reduced to ashes. The reason of this was as follows. Once upon a time when the gods and demons were at war, Muchukunda had come to the help of the gods and put the demons to flight. His labours had greatly exhausted him, and he asked the gods to give him a long and sound sleep. This boon the gods graciously gave, and added that the person who dared to waken him would be reduced to ashes. Being aware of this promise, Krishna had decoyed the Grecian monarch into the cave, and thus procured his destruction.<sup>1</sup> With their leader thus destroyed, Krishna was able to take the whole army captive, with all their camp equipments as well as elephants, horses and chariots. We are not told how he achieved this great feat. But it is added that he conveyed them to Dwāraka and handed them over to Ugrasena.

Not long after these events, Balarāma decided to pay a visit to Brindābana, and see his foster parents and the cowherds. He was cordially received and spent some happy days in their society. But the Gopis (cowherdresses) were very disappointed that Krishna had not come with his brother. What has happened to him? they asked. Has he forgotten all about us? Is he as fickle as ever? Does he tell the ladies of Muttra of how he amused himself with us? And does he tell them what simple rustics we are? Why does he not come to see his mother? We abandoned everything and everybody, our

<sup>1</sup> In a conversation that ensued, Krishna told Muchukunda, who is spoken of as 'the king of men,' who he was. A hymn in praise of Vishnu at once followed, and when Muchukunda asked that he might obtain emancipation, Krishna told him to go to whatever celestial region he wished, promising that after he had enjoyed all heavenly pleasures, he would be born again in a distinguished family, retaining the recollection of his former births, and finally obtain emancipation.

**The Gopis  
lovesick  
for Krishna**

fathers, our husbands and kindred out of love to him, and he does not care. Surely he is a very 'monument of ingratitude.' Alas! he loves us no longer, and in the society of other women, looks back on his old associates with disdain. Balarāma did his best to comfort them, and said that Krishna had sent them many loving messages, and hoped that they were well.

But most of his time was spent wandering in the woods. And one day as he passed a particular tree, he felt the strong and pleasant odour of an intoxicating liquor called Madirā.<sup>1</sup> Now

**Balarāma  
intoxicated**

Balarāma had from of old, a great love of intoxicants and the craving seized him once more with irresistible force. Examination showed that in the hollow of this tree, there was a quantity of liquor concealed, and he and his companions quickly drank it up. Intoxication was very soon the result, and before long, Balarāma was dripping with perspiration and he shouted out that he wanted to bathe. Remembering that the river Jumna was flowing near, he called to the river to leave her usual banks, and come to him. But the river, not at all disposed to obey the commands of a drunken man, paid no attention to him and pursued her usual course. This refusal made Balarāma very angry. Seizing his ploughshare he drove it deep into her banks, and calling out, 'What do you mean, you sinner. I will teach you to do what you are told. And sure enough, he did. Because he dragged the Jumna back and forward up and down, all over the country. Nor did he release her until she had assumed a mortal form and begged him humbly for his forgiveness. He seems also to have bathed in her waters before he let her go, because we read that after his bath, Lakshmi came and presented him with a lotus and an ear-ring, which he placed in his ears, a necklace of lotus flowers, and some beautiful garments of a dark

<sup>1</sup> The text explains this by saying that Varuna said to his wife Vārūni, the goddess of wine, 'Thou, Madirā, art ever acceptable to the powerful Ananta (i.e. Shesha, of whom Balarāma was an incarnation.) Go and promote his enjoyment' Wilson, vol. v. p. 65. Dutt, p. 396. She accordingly went and hid herself in a Kadamba tree. It is said that the flowers of this tree yield an intoxicating liquor.

blue colour. Baiarāma spent two months with his friends the cowherds, after which he returned to Dwāraka. It was after this visit that he married the daughter of Raivata, whose capital had, in former ages, occupied the site of Krishna's new city.

The king of Vidarbha had a beautiful daughter whose name was Rukmini. Krishna was very anxious

**Krishna  
carries off a  
princess**

to marry her. But her brother, who had conceived a great dislike to Krishna, refused to listen to his proposals, and persuaded her father to have her betrothed to Shishupāla, king of Chedi.<sup>1</sup> But Krishna resolved that he would carry off Rukmini by force, and came to the capital of Vidarbha accompanied by his brother and a large number of Yadus. There were other kings and princes present and naturally when Krishna, on the day of the marriage ceremonies, carried off the bride, a great battle took place in which large numbers were slain. Krishna is said to have himself destroyed the whole army belonging to the father of the ravished bride, and would have killed her brother, had Rukmini not earnestly pleaded for his life.<sup>2</sup>

Rukmini in due course gave birth to a son, but when he was six days old, a terrible demon crept into his mother's room and cast him into the sea. He was swallowed by a fish, and not long after the fish was caught by a fisherman. The fisherman in turn sold the fish to Māyādevi, the demon's wife. When Māyādevi and her cook cut the fish open, they were greatly

<sup>1</sup> Vidarbha is identified with the later Berar. We have already heard of Shishupāla and his hatred for Krishna. Chapter 15. Chedi also was in Central India.

<sup>2</sup> The text adds that Krishna married Rukmini in due form, having first made her his own by the Rakshasa ritual. The *Laws of Manu*, III. 33 says, 'The forcible abduction of a maiden from her home, while she cries out and weeps, after her kinsmen have been slain or wounded and their house broken open, is called the Rakshasa rite. Verse 26 says that this form of marriage is permitted by the sacred tradition, but verse 41 says that it and three other forms of marriage are blameable, and that they produce sons who are cruel and speakers of untruth, who hate the Vedas and the sacred Law. In the *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna acting on Krishna's advice, carried off a lady. He intended to be a candidate at her Svayamvara, but Krishna said she might choose somebody else and it would be better to make use of force.'

surprised to find within a beautiful and healthy boy. In her wonder as to how the child could have got there, the lady was visited by the rishi Nārada, who explained all that happened, and strongly urged her to take great care of the infant, who had so miraculously come into her hands. Māyādevi consented very willingly, and as the years passed, loved him more and more dearly. Indeed when he reached years of adolescence she began to look at him with other eyes than those of a mother. The youth, whose name was Pradyumna, was very much distressed at the conduct of one whom he had always regarded as his mother, and told her so. But she answered, 'You are not my son. You are Vishnu's son, and my husband took you when you were a mere infant and cast you into the sea. I rescued you from death, and your mother is somewhere lamenting her loss.' When the young man heard the story, his heart was filled with anger, and he went out and slew the wicked demon, and all his followers. The demon before he was destroyed, had made use of many enchantments, one of which Pradyumna was able to appropriate and use for his own advantage. It was the power of rising up and flying in the air. And before long, accompanied by Māyādevi, he was standing in the zenana of his father's palace. He was so like his father that when the women saw him approach they thought it was Krishna himself. Rukmini also was greatly attracted by his appearance and said, 'If my boy had lived, he would have been just like you. Surely you also are one of Krishna's children. But Nārada who very opportunely appeared on the scene, just at that moment, intervened and said, 'Yes, truly this is a son of Krishna, and he is yours also. He was carried off by a wicked demon, and here is the demon's wife, and your son is already married to her, for they were husband and wife in a former birth. He thereupon proceeded to explain that Pradyumna, in his previous existence was Kāma, the god of love, and when he perished<sup>1</sup> his wife

<sup>1</sup> The text merely says that the god of love perished. The usual explanation is that Shiva was angry with the god of love and reduced him to ashes with his frown. In chapter 26, it is said of Pradyumna that he was a portion of the deity of love.

Rati, eager to be reunited to him, had also come to earth, and brought the demon under her control. In view of these facts, Nārada advised Rukmini to put aside all hesitation and graciously accept the lady as her daughter-in-law.<sup>1</sup>

Evidently Rati or Māyādevi, was not to be Pradyumna's only wife, for we find that his cousin, the daughter of Rukmin his mother's brother, chose him as her husband at her Svayamvara. Pradyumna's son<sup>2</sup> again was, at a later date, married to a grandson of Rukmin. At the marriage festivities a most unfortunate quarrel took place. Balarāma and Rukmin were playing at dice. The game itself was provoked by some of the princes present jeeringly protesting that the wielder of the ploughshare, as they called Balarāma, could not play. Such a taunt Balarāma was compelled to challenge, and he lost one stake after another. As the stakes were constantly being increased until they amounted to as much as ten million gold pieces, both players and spectators grew very excited. The king of Kalinga, in particular, could not conceal his joy and laughed aloud, showing his teeth very fully as he did so. Eventually the players began to quarrel, and accused one another of falsehood and deceit. Balarāma's anger at being called a cheat was increased, when a voice from heaven was heard declaring that Rukmin was a liar, and throwing restraint to the winds, Balarāma rushed at his opponent and killed him. He next turned upon the king of Kalinga, and drove his teeth down his throat—those teeth which he had exposed so plainly when he jeered at Balarāma. This measure of revenge did not appease the passion of the hero. Because he wrenched a golden pillar out of its place, and rushed upon the other princes, intending to kill them all. But they fled before him, panic-stricken and afraid. Krishna

<sup>1</sup> At this point the text tells us that Krishna had seven other beautiful wives, and adds that he had 16,000 other wives. See also Book 4, chapter 15, where it says they numbered 16,100, and that they had among them 180,000 sons.

<sup>2</sup> This son was Aniruddha.

was very much perplexed at this distressing incident. He was afraid to say anything to his brother, and he was equally afraid to say anything to his wife Rukmini, the sister of the murdered man.

Very soon after his return to Dwāraka, with his grandson and his bride, Krishna received a visit from the god Indra. The celestial came as he had come on a previous occasion, riding on his elephant, Airāvata. The object of his visit was to invite Krishna to go forth and slay a wicked demon. The demon ruled over a city on the borders of Assam.<sup>1</sup> He had been guilty of many cruel deeds. Among other crimes he had carried into captivity the daughters of gods and demons, saints and kings; the umbrella of Varuna, the ear-rings of Aditi, and last of all, said Indra, he is insisting that I should hand over to him my elephant. Krishna never said a word in reply. He merely smiled, got up from his throne, and took Indra by the hand. Remaining entirely silent, he expressed a mental wish that Garuda should present himself. The great bird at once appeared. Krishna, accompanied by one of his wives, got on to its back, and set off in the direction of Prāgjyotisha, the demon capital. No purpose would be served by describing the battle. The demon and many thousands of his followers were slain. The point of interest is in what follows. Because we read that the Earth came and handed to Krishna the ear-rings of Aditi, which the demon had stolen. She then went on to say that the demon who had just been slain was her son, and that Krishna was his father, born to them both when Vishnu, in the boar incarnation, had come into contact with the earth. She added, He whom thou gavest me has now been killed by thee.<sup>2</sup> Krishna made no reply to this address, beyond saying, 'That is so,' and turned to his more immediate task, the recovery of the property of the celestials and

**Krishna slays  
thousands of  
demons**

the delivery of the women whom the demon had taken captive. Of the latter, he found that there were no less than sixteen thousand and one hundred. He also recovered 6,000 elephants, each with four tusks, and more than 2,000,000 horses. The women, the elephants and horses, he sent on to Dwāraka, under the care of the servants of the dead demon. As for the property of the gods, he decided to deliver it in person, and placing his wife in front of him on the back of Garuda, he flew to heaven.

When he arrived at heaven's gate, Krishna blew a loud blast upon his conch, and he was immediately welcomed by a great concourse of deities, who came hurrying with the usual hospitable offerings. His first duty, however, was to visit Aditi the mother of the gods.<sup>1</sup> Aditi, was very pleased to see him and to get her ear-rings back. And she expressed her feelings in a long hymn of praise in which she said that Krishna was the eternal, universal soul; the origin of all beings, one with the three qualities, beyond the qualities, the agent of creation, duration and dissolution; the master over the agent, 'in thy three forms which are called Brahmā, Vishnu and Shiva.' She then proceeded to deplore the fact that men should ever be so foolish as to say, 'Anything is mine,' or to say even that they existed, but that she knew was because they were all the victims of illusion, deluded by her who is called *Māyā*, the mother of the world. But there was hope for all. If men would only attend to their duties and worship Krishna, they would secure emancipation in the long run. Unfortunately even Brahmā and the gods suffered from this illusion, as well as men and beasts. And that was why they were content to ask for lesser things, such as the gratification of desire, or the destruction of their enemies, or the birth of a son, and passed by, as of little value, emancipation, which knows no end. They were

**Krishna  
visits heaven**

<sup>1</sup> The city of Prāgjyotisha, in the country of Kāmarūpa. The text of course does not mention Assam.

<sup>2</sup> This was followed by the usual description of praise to the effect that Krishna was the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe, etc.

<sup>1</sup> The reader will remember that Aditi, wife of Kashyapa was the mother of the gods, even as Diti, another wife of Kashyapa was the mother of the demons. Of course, Vishnu, as one of the twelve Adityas was Aditi's son.

like a man who stood beside the wishing tree, and asked for nothing more than a rag to cover his nakedness, when he might obtain anything he chose to ask.<sup>1</sup>

When further compliments had been interchanged, and Krishna's companion had received the benedictions

**Krishna quarrels and fights with the gods** of Aditi, Indra, who acted as their escort, took the two visitors to see and admire the various gardens of the gods.

In the course of their tour, they naturally visited Nandana, Indra's own particular garden, where they saw the Pārijāta tree, for which Indra's queen had a very special liking. This famous tree was one of the many products secured at the churning of the ocean, and was said to have been produced that Sachi, as Indra's queen was called, might be supplied with flowers for her personal adornment. Be that as it may, Krishna's queen, whose name was Satyabhāmā, conceived a very violent liking for the tree and demanded that her husband should uproot it and take it back with him to Dwāraka. She gave strength to her appeal by saying that he had always professed to like her better than any of his other queens. If he had really been speaking the truth, he had now the opportunity of doing what she asked. She was simply dying to wear the blossoms in her hair, and show herself off before her rivals. In response to these entreaties, Krishna did as he was told. He uprooted the tree, and despite the earnest protests of the gardeners, placed it on Garuda's back. But he was not allowed to depart without a struggle. Because the gardeners hurried to Sachi's presence and told her what Krishna had done. Sachi at once appealed to her husband who hurried to the gardens, accompanied by a crowd of brother deities, and made a violent attack on Krishna. It was a very wonderful battle that ensued. Krishna met the attack of the celestials single handed. He was however more than equal to them all. For instance, he broke in pieces the

<sup>1</sup> There was a tree in Indra's heaven, which granted all desires, Kalpataru. She said that both gods and men were 'invested by the thick darkness of fascination, in the gulf of the illusions of Vishnu.' 'The delusions of the mother of the world originate in thy active agency.' Wilson, vol. v, p. 95.

club of Yama, the god of death, he divided Agni, the god of fire, into no less than one hundred parts, he destroyed the tridents of the Rudras, he put the Maruts, the Vasus, the Gandharvas, the Vishvadevas and the Sādhyas to flight. His only helper was Garuda, who, in addition to putting the elephant of Indra out of action, attacked the celestials with beak and claw. In the end, Krishna stood face to face with Indra, and in his case Krishna was determined to show mercy, because he contented himself with disarming his opponent. This was, however, sufficient disgrace, which the king of heaven was disposed to enhance by running away. But Satyabhāmā suddenly interfered by telling him to stay where he was. She really did not wish to keep the tree. But Sachi had not received her as graciously as she ought to have done, and she had therefore resolved to punish her, by provoking a combat. She added, Your wife is proud of you, but I am proud of Krishna, and I have shown you what he can do, and you need not be ashamed to own defeat. Why should I be ashamed? said Indra. There is no disgrace in being conquered by him who is the creator, the preserver and the destroyer of the world. In him the whole universe is comprised, though it is his pleasure to become a mortal for the time being and to dwell among men.

When Indra had finished his glowing assertion that Krishna was the 'unborn eternal lord,' the latter smiled and said 'Why do you speak of me in such terms? I am a mortal and nothing more. Forgive my foolishness and permit me to replace this tree which I have uprooted from your garden.' But

**Krishna marries sixteen thousand wives**

Indra would not allow him to do so. Indeed, he insisted that Krishna should take the tree to Dwāraka as his wife had proposed, and that it should remain there till Krishna's term of life on earth was over. And so it was decided, while Krishna and his wife departed for the lower world, the hymns and adoration of the heavenly choirs ringing in their ears. Krishna's first task on his return to Dwāraka was to plant the tree in his wife's

garden. So powerful was the odour it gave forth that it could be smelt twenty miles away, and those who approached it were able to remember what had happened to them in a former birth. When that duty was accomplished, Krishna turned to the disposal of the women and animals whom he had caused to be sent to Dwāraka from Assam. The horses and elephants went to enrich the property of the state. As for the 16,100 women whom he had rescued, he decided to marry them all himself. Each of them obtained a separate dwelling and such was Krishna's superhuman power that he divided himself into as many forms as there were women, and visited each of them at one and the same time. The wives he married previously had made him the father of numerous sons, but this large addition to his zenana resulted in a huge accession to his household, and in course of time his various wives presented him with not less than 180,000 sons.

The cares of so large a family were the source of considerable trouble on more than one occasion. And it was in connexion with one of his grandsons that Krishna was involved in a very deadly battle with the great god Shiva. There was a powerful king called Bāna, the grandson of the demon Bali.<sup>1</sup> This monarch had a thousand arms, and was a devoted worshipper of Shiva. He also had a daughter named Ushā, who was very anxious for a husband and prayed to Pārvati,<sup>2</sup> Shiva's wife, to give her a husband. Pārvati heard her prayer, and when the maiden asked who he was, and when she would secure him, the goddess promised that she would see his face and form in a dream on a particular night which she specified. When the night came the promise was fulfilled, and Ushā saw the face and form of her future lord. But the problem still remained, Who is he, and how shall I secure him? Now it so happened that

<sup>1</sup> Bali was the demon who was circumvented by Vishnu in the Dwarf incarnation. Bali, in turn, was the grandson of the pious Prahlāda, and the great grandson of Hiranyakashipu, whom Vishnu, in his Man-lion incarnation, slew.

<sup>2</sup> Pārvati is also called Gauri and Ūmā in the text.

the maiden had a female attendant, who was deeply versed in all kinds of magic art. And when she heard of the perplexity in which her mistress was involved, she undertook to call up before her, visions or portraits of the more eminent gods, demons, heavenly minstrels and men. After a long series of these prominent personages had been caused to appear, the face and form of Aniruddha, one of Krishna's grandsons, stood before her, and the maiden cried out, This is he! When her mistress made this observation, the attendant flew up into the air, proceeded to Dwārakā, and in a very short space of time, was back again. She brought Aniruddha with her, and took him to the apartments of the princess right away. Her father's guards, however, saw what was happening, and hurrying to the king, told him that a strange young man had entered the palace and was at that moment with the princess. Bāna at once took steps to have him arrested, and it was only after a long fight and eventually by the use of magic powers that the youth was seized and placed in bonds.

In the meantime there was great commotion in Dwārakā. Aniruddha had disappeared and no one could tell whither he had gone. Finally the rishi Nārada appeared on the scene, and told the anxious relatives that the youth had been carried off by a woman to Sonitapura, the capital of Bāna.<sup>1</sup> This information set Krishna's mind at rest, as he was afraid that the gods had carried him off in retaliation for the appropriation of Indra's tree. Without delay, he summoned to his side the great bird Garuda, and taking with him his brother and son, the latter the father of the captured youth, flew off to Bāna's capital. It will be remembered that the demon king had gained the favour of Shiva, and as they approached the city, the three heroes were met by the emissaries of that god. They were however, quickly

<sup>1</sup> Wilson says that Sonitapura is Devikola in the Carnatic. The reader will have noted how often Nārada appears on the scene. He was constantly travelling between earth and heaven. He had a bad reputation as a fomenter of quarrels. Hence his names: 'the strife maker,' 'the spy,' 'monkeyfaced.'

overcome and slain. But Krishna found another foe waiting for him and his companions, more difficult to deal with. This foe is spoken of as Fever, an emanation from Shiva, with three feet and three heads.<sup>1</sup> It attacked Balarāma with special virulence, filled his body with a burning heat and so weakened his power that he had to cling to his brother for support. But Krishna called forth from himself a rival Fever which neutralized the fever of Shiva, and compelled it to retreat. Brahmā, the creator god, happened to be present, and as he had no pleasure in seeing either of the Fevers, he asked Krishna to recall the Fever he had engendered. This Krishna graciously did. As the Fever disappeared, it promised that those who remembered this wonderful combat, would never suffer from the disease. When this difficulty had been overcome, Krishna found himself face to face with not only the whole demon host but with Shiva, the god of destruction, and his son Kārttikeya, the god of war, as well. When Shiva and Krishna engaged in single combat, the whole universe began to tremble, and the gods told one another that the end of the world had come. It was a long and terrible fight. But Krishna brought it to a close by a very strange device. He had a weapon called the weapon of yawning, and this he discharged at his opponents. It had a most immediate and startling effect. The mighty god began to yawn, and could not stop yawning. Indeed he was so overcome by this most inconvenient affliction, that he had to sit down in his chariot, unable to do anything but yawn. With Shiva thus *hors de combat*, Krishna's task was comparatively easy. The demon host was either slain or put to flight, while Shiva's son, the god of war, who had been wounded both by Garuda and Krishna's son, ran away. But the demon king had yet to be dealt with. He was, as the reader will remember, a very powerful person indeed and possessed of a thousand arms. He even succeeded in wounding Krishna, and the hero resolved to close the combat by slaying his opponent. This he proceeded to do by cutting off his

<sup>1</sup> Wilson observes that here we have a reference to tertian ague.

arms, one by one, with his discus. When all the arms had been severed and the demon stood before Krishna a bleeding and mutilated trunk, Shiva interposed and asked him to have mercy. He had two reasons for his request. The first was that he had promised Bāna that he would not perish and he did not wish to see his word falsified. But his second reason was that the supreme lord of the universe had higher tasks to which he might devote his energies! In response to this appeal, Krishna at once lowered his discus. He would never dream of doing anything that would cancel any promise which Shiva had made. For he added, 'You know that there is no distinction between you and me. It is only those whose minds are darkened by ignorance, who speak of such a thing. What I am, thou art, and all the world, with gods and demons and men, are parts of me.' When matters had thus been amicably settled, Krishna, having secured the release of his grandson, returned to Dwārakā.<sup>1</sup>

Parāshara had yet another exploit to record in which Krishna secured a great victory over the followers of Shiva. It arose in connexion with an individual named Paundraka, who held the title of Vāsudeva. How that came about we are not told, but he was not our Vāsudeva.<sup>2</sup> He was so puffed up however, by the flattery of his followers, that he sent Krishna a challenge, calling upon him to surrender his discus and other emblems of divinity, as well as the name, which he had so falsely assumed. He followed up his challenge by advancing

<sup>1</sup> For Krishna's son Pradyumna, and his grandson, Aniruddha. See *Mahābhārata*, xii. 340, where it is said that Vāsudeva is the supreme creator, that Sankarshana (Balarāma) represents all living beings, and is a form of Vāsudeva that from Sankarshana sprang Pradyumna the mind, and from Pradyumna, Aniruddha, self-consciousness. Cf. Bhandarkar's *Vaishnavism, Saivism, etc.*

<sup>2</sup> That Krishna as the son of Vāsudeva, was known as Vāsudeva, is a later explanation. There was probably a deified Vāsudeva, before Krishna the cowherd was thought of. What this statement means that Paundraka held the title of Vāsudeva is not explained, but Wilson sees in it the indication of a Vishnuite schism between two claimants for the insignia of divinity. Vol. v. p. 129. When Krishna came to be identified with Vāsudeva, his followers gave to Krishna's father the name of Vāsudeva, Bhandarkar, op. cit. p. 11.

against Dwārakā, an enterprise in which he was aided by the king of Benares. Not only so, but the false Vāsudeva came to the field wearing on his breast, Krishna's own peculiar mark, Srīvatsa, clothed in yellow garments, and holding in his hands, a discus, a club, a sword and a lotus. When the messenger arrived at Dwārakā with Paundraka's insulting message, Krishna laughed and said, 'Yes, surely I shall send to him my discus. Nay, I shall come and give it to him with my own hands. I shall come as quickly as I can, and take shelter with him.' And this Krishna did, with the result that, very soon the two rivals were face to face. But not for long, because Krishna poured such a mass of weapons of all kinds on the army of his opponents, that they were soon destroyed, and Paundraka among them. Before slaying his rival however, Krishna mockingly cried out, See Paundraka, I have come as you bade me do, and here is my discus. I give it to you, as I promised. And as he spoke, he hurled the discus at his foe, and cut him to pieces. The king of Benares was by this time apparently the sole survivor, and he put up a brave fight, but him also Krishna put to death, and cutting off his head, sent it flying within the walls of Benares, much to the amazement and horror of the inhabitants.

When the dead king's son and heir saw that his father had been slain, he hastened to propitiate the great god Shiva. Indeed, he made a very definite request that Shiva would assist him to destroy Krishna, his father's murderer, by producing what he called *Kṛitā*, a magical creation.<sup>1</sup> To this prayer Shiva gave a gracious assent, and from the sacrificial fire there arose a great and awe-inspiring female form, which sprang into the air and directed her flight to Dwārakā. When the inhabitants saw her approach, they fled in terror to the palace of Krishna, to tell him what had happened and beg for protection. Krishna, however, who knew all that happen-

**Another fight with Shiva**

<sup>1</sup> Wilson translates it, 'Let thy mystic spirit arise to destroy Krishna,' but *Kṛitā*, says Monier Williams, means 'a female deity to whom sacrifices are offered for destructive and magical purposes.'

ed, and that the portent had been produced by the agency of Shiva was not disposed to disturb himself unnecessarily. Indeed he was playing at dice when the citizens broke in upon him. He therefore told his discus to go and slay the female fiend. In response to this command, that wonderful weapon, Sudarshana, the discus of Vishnu went forth to punish and to destroy. But the magical creation refused to wait for him. She turned and fled. Naturally she fled to Benares, where she sought to hide herself as well as she could. But by fleeing to Benares, she involved that city in overwhelming destruction. It is true that a great army sought to arrest the progress of the discus. And in their efforts they were assisted by those devouring fiends who always wait on Shiva. But their efforts were of no avail. The whole city was burned to the ground. Nothing could withstand the consuming power of Krishna's weapon. And with the destruction of Benares itself, there was involved every one of the inhabitants, and all the animals which it contained.<sup>1</sup>

Having told so many stories in illustration of Krishna's greatness, Maitreya said he would now like to hear a little more about his brother, Balarāma. Parāshara at once responded by telling of how he came to the rescue of his nephew, Shāmva, who had been taken prisoner by the king of Hastinapura. It so happened that this youth, one of Krishna's many sons, had gone to attend the Svayamwara of that monarch's daughter. The youth, however, was not content to take his chance with the other candidates, and carried off the lady. But his ruse was not successful, because he was followed by the highly incensed princes of Hastinapura, and taken prisoner. When the people of Dwārakā heard of what had happened, they began to prepare for immediate war. But Balarāma, who was drunk at the time, said that he

<sup>1</sup> As Wilson remarks, these two legends describe a serious struggle between the two sects, the followers of Vishnu and Shiva. He adds, 'Benares had been from all time, as it is at present, the high place of Shaiva worship' Vol. v. p. 129.

would go alone. He was sure that he would be able to secure the release of his nephew. When he reached the city, he took up his position in a grove outside the walls. His cousins,<sup>1</sup> on hearing of his arrival, sent him the usual hospitable offerings. They included water, fruit, flowers and a cow. In reply Balarāma sent back a message on behalf of Ugrasena, demanding the immediate release of his nephew. This urgent demand led to a very acrimonious, wordy warfare. Great warriors like Bhishma and Drona were not in the habit of receiving commands, and they refused absolutely to release the young man. He had been guilty of a very heinous offence, and must be punished. At this stage, also, Balarāma appears to have been still under the influence of liquor, and he struck the ground so fiercely with his foot that the whole earth trembled. But what was much more serious, he drove his ploughshare deep beneath the walls of the city and began to draw it towards him. Great was the astonishment and the alarm of the inhabitants when they felt their city being slowly drawn in Balarāma's direction. There was no further talk of defiance, no more threatening to come to Dwārakā and take from Ugrasena his emblem of sovereignty, the white umbrella. No longer did they declare that the rulers of Dwārakā were their inferiors and not entitled to the name of kings. Instead they came hurrying to Balarāma, begging him to forgive them for their arrogance. And in proof of their repentance, they brought forth the nephew and his ravished bride. When he had received this ample proof of their change of heart, Balarāma removed his ploughshare and returned to Dwārakā, accompanied by Shāmva and his wife. But the city of Hastinapura still bears the marks of the rough handling it received at the hands of the hero. So great was the power and valour of Balarāma.

<sup>1</sup> The king of Hastinapura was Duryodhana. He was one of the hundred brothers (Kurus) who fought against their five cousins (Pāndus) in the great war, which is the theme of the *Mahābhārata*. In this war Krishna helped the Pāndus, his cousins, by acting as charioteer to Arjuna, one of the five. See *Summary of Mahābhārata*. According to the epic, Balarāma was more sympathetic to the Kurus, with whom he is at enmity in this narrative. The site of Hastinapura is supposed to be near Delhi.

Another of Balarāma's exploits was the destruction of a demon who had assumed the form of an ape. It is said that this ape had resolved to bring about the overthrow of all religious rites and observances and thus occasion the downfall of both gods and men. He also set fire to villages, towns and forests. He uprooted mountains and, casting them into the ocean, caused the tide to rise so high that the towns and villages, on the sea board were swept out of existence. Indeed the whole world was filled with fear and sorrow by the evil deeds of this wicked creature. One day, however, he came to a forest where Balarāma and a number of women were having a picnic. Bursting in upon them, the monkey carried off the club and ploughshare of Balarāma, mocked and jeered at both him and his companions, upset their liquor and broke their wine cups. These insults Balarāma was not prepared to endure, and with a blow of his fist, he killed the monkey. Some idea of the monkey's size is learned from the fact that the mountain on which he fell was broken into a hundred pieces, as if it had been shattered by the thunderbolt of Indra. The gods were so pleased that they came down from heaven and thanked the hero for saving them from one of their greatest foes.

The story of the mighty deeds which these two brothers accomplished now draws quickly to a close. Their task was well nigh accomplished. They had eased the earth of her burden by slaying countless millions of demons and men. But there was one duty that yet required to be performed, and that was the destruction of their own race, the family of Yadu. When that was finished, Krishna would be able to abandon his human form, and to re-enter Vishnu. These thoughts were already revolving in Krishna's mind, when he received a visit from a messenger of the gods. This messenger came to remind him, on behalf of Indra, the Maruts, Ādityas, Rudras, and others, that as a hundred years had passed since he came down to earth and his work appeared to be over, they were expectantly awaiting his return to

**Balarama kills  
a demon**

**Krishna summoned back  
to heaven**

heaven. To this affectionate message Krishna replied that he would be with them within the space of seven days, as he had only one thing left to do, the destruction of the Yadu race, considering that it would be a misfortune for even one of them to survive.<sup>1</sup>

How that destruction was achieved we are now to hear. Three eminent sages, Vishvāmitra, Kanwa, and Nārada, had come to pay a visit to a neighbouring shrine.<sup>2</sup> Soon after their arrival, some of the younger members of the royal house dressed up Krishna's son Shāmva, as a woman, and took their disguised companion to the holy men. This female, they said, is very anxious to have a son. We should like you to tell us what kind of child he will be. Now these sages were far too holy to be deceived by such a foolish contrivance, and they were very angry as well. They therefore sternly answered, Yes, this young man will be seized with the pangs of labour as you desire, but it will not be a child to which he will give birth. Within twenty-four hours he will be delivered of an iron bolt, and it will destroy you and every one belonging to your race.

The young men at once went to Ugrasena, the king of Dwārakā, confessed what they had done, and told him of the prophecy of the holy men. Ugrasena was greatly distressed, and when Shāmva gave birth to an iron bolt on the following day, he ground it to powder and threw the ashes into the sea.<sup>3</sup> He vainly hoped that by so doing, he would be able to annul the Brāhmins' curse. But the powdered iron whenever it fell into the water, was changed into rushes, while one small portion of the bolt which they had been unable to reduce to powder, was swallowed by a fish.

<sup>1</sup> No explanation is given why Krishna wished to destroy his own race. The text says, 'he exterminated, by the pretext of an imprecation denounced by Brāhmins, his own Yadu race.' Later passages are not consistent with this statement, and as we shall find, the children were not destroyed and his great grandson became king of Muttra.

<sup>2</sup> Pindāraka in Gujerat is still a place of pilgrimage.

<sup>3</sup> The *Mahābhārata* says the young men were drunk at the time and that Ugrasena issued a proclamation forbidding the manufacture of strong drink. His proclamation was not obeyed.

This fish was caught by a fisherman who gave the iron to a hunter and the hunter, whose name was Jaras, fitted the iron to the point of an arrow, and as we shall see, it was this arrow which smote Krishna on the foot and caused his death. But Krishna, though he knew all that would happen, did not choose to interfere with the workings of Fate.

And now many terrible omens began to show that Dwārakā must soon be destroyed. Anxious to hasten the inevitable end Krishna advised his fellow citizens to quit the town of Dwārakā and go to the sea shore, to a place called Prabhāsa, and in the hope that by doing so they would be able to avert their doom.<sup>1</sup> When they got to the sea, the Yadus bathed in its waters, and thereafter began to indulge in liquor. Before long, scenes of wild intoxication ensued. From drunkenness they passed to quarrelling and blows. Some of them laid hold of the rushes which were growing at the water's edge, and no sooner were they in their hands than they changed to iron bolts. With these amazing weapons, whose origin was the iron bolt to which Shāmva had given birth, a terrible battle began. In the battle Krishna also shared and he caused the death of many of his race.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, Krishna's chariot disappeared across the ocean, while his discus, his club, his sword and shell, with the bow and quiverful of arrows, mounted up into the sky and were seen no more. When the carnage was over, Krishna found that he and his charioteer alone survived. Balarāma was not with them, but as the two survivors were leaving the fatal spot, they saw Balarāma sitting at the foot of a tree. A great snake was issuing from his mouth. This vast creature glided swiftly away in the direction of the ocean where it was received with every

<sup>1</sup> A commentator says that if they had died in Dwārakā, the Yadus would have secured final liberation. To prevent this, Krishna persuaded them to go to Prabhāsa, as dying there would only procure them a place in Indra's heaven. Wilson. vol. v. p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> The *Mahābhārata* says that 500,000 were slain at Prabhāsa.

mark of reverence by the ocean god himself, amid the singing of the celestial choirs.<sup>1</sup>

Krishna at once turned to his companion and bade him go to Dwārakā and tell his father Vasudeva, and Ugrasena, the king, all that had taken place. But an even more important commission entrusted to the charioteer was that he should go to Krishna's

**Krishna  
returns to  
heaven**

cousin, Arjuna, who lived in Indraprastha, and ask him to come to Dwārakā without delay. This was in order that Arjuna might take the survivors, the aged, the women and children, under his protection, and convey them to his own capital. For himself, Krishna was resolved to follow his brother's example and return to heaven. And so he seated himself upon the ground in the attitude of Yoga, with his foot resting upon his knee.<sup>2</sup> He had not long to wait. A hunter approached. It was Jaras, who had fitted to his arrow the piece of iron which Ugrasena had been unable to grind to dust. And so, mistaking Krishna for a deer, the hunter shot his arrow and it struck Krishna on the foot. The hunter was deeply distressed when he realized his blunder. But Krishna told him not to grieve, or to be afraid. Indeed he even promised that the hunter, by his favour, would soon find himself in heaven.<sup>3</sup> These were Krishna's last words on earth, and he who is the unborn, the undecaying, the imperishable, the boundless, the universal spirit, abandoned his mortal body and became Nirguna.<sup>4</sup>

When Arjuna in obedience to the message of Krishna, arrived in Dwārakā, his first task was to arrange for the funeral ceremonies of his cousins and those who had

<sup>1</sup> The reader will not forget that in addition to being the incarnation of a white hair of Vishnu, Balarāma was also Shesha, the great serpent on which Vishnu rests, and which is also another form of Vishnu.

<sup>2</sup> This was one of the prescribed attitudes of Yoga. The text adds that he did so out of respect to the imprecation of the sage Durvāsa. It does not explain what this imprecation was. But elsewhere we read that he had once offended this had tempered saint. When entertaining the holy man he allowed some food to fall upon his foot and the sage cursed Krishna to die of a wound on his foot!

<sup>3</sup> When Krishna spoke these words, a celestial car appeared and carried the hunter up to heaven.

<sup>4</sup> See Wilson, vol. v. p. 153. Nirguna—devoid of the three qualities.

been slain in the awful carnage at Prabhāsa. Krishna's eight primary queens mounted the funeral pyre, and

**The miserable  
end of  
Krishna's  
wives**

Vasudeva, with both his queens, as well as Ugrasena, also cast themselves into the flames.<sup>1</sup> When this task had been accomplished, Arjuna gathered the survivors together,<sup>2</sup> and they began their long journey to the north of India. Krishna's sixteen thousand other wives were among them. No sooner did they begin their journey than the ocean rushed in and submerged the city of Dwārakā. The only building that survived was the temple sacred to the guardian deity of the Yadu race.<sup>3</sup> Before this calamity had taken place, the heavenly palace of Indra, which Krishna had caused that deity to send down for the benefit of Ugrasena, and the celestial tree, which Krishna had uprooted from the same god's garden, returned to heaven. The fugitives travelled with great comfort till they reached the borders of the Punjab. There however, they were attacked by robbers. When these wicked men saw such a great multitude of defenceless females under the solitary escort of Arjuna,<sup>4</sup> they thought that they had before them an easy prey. And so indeed it proved. In former days Arjuna could easily have put all the robbers to flight. But on that dreadful day, it proved otherwise. His opponents had nothing better than sticks and stones in their hands. But the hero discovered that the mighty bow which had once dealt death and destruction among his foes, had lost its strength. His arrows hardly scratched the robbers' skins, while he tried in vain to call to his aid those celestial weapons which in the past had always answered

<sup>1</sup> Vasudeva's two queens were Devaki, the mother of Krishna and Balarāma, and Rohini. The *Mahābhārata* says that Vasudeva died soon after Arjuna's arrival, and that four of his queens performed Sati. For Krishna's eight queens, see c. 27. The 16,100 wives would probably occupy a secondary rank.

<sup>2</sup> To the number of many millions, says the *Mahābhārata*.

<sup>3</sup> The text says that this temple is still standing, and that Krishna always dwells there. Those who visit it are freed from all their sins.

<sup>4</sup> The *Mahābhārata* speaks as if there were a large number of men among the fugitives, though it says also that Arjuna alone offered the only real opposition. Wilson suggests that the survivors consisted of old men, women and children.

to his call. Stricken with shame, Arjuna saw the robbers carry into captivity the widows of the house of Yadu, and with them went Krishna's sixteen thousand queens. But the children appear to have escaped, for we are told that Arjuna passed on to Muttra, where he placed Krishna's great grandson upon the throne.

When Arjuna arrived in Muttra, he met the rishi Vyāsa, who asked him why he looked so sad.<sup>1</sup> When

**Curses cannot fail**

Arjuna told his friend what had happened, how Krishna had left them and how with his departure, all his strength and courage had also disappeared, and in particular, how he had been unable to protect so many defenceless women from the attack of border ruffians, Vyāsa told him not to grieve. What had happened had been decreed by Time, and Time was lord of all. Everything that had been created was doomed to perish at the hands of Time. Krishna had accomplished his work, and there was nothing more for him or for anyone else to do. As for the defeat which Arjuna had sustained, he had an explanation for that also, which he would now set forth. In former days, there was a Brāhmin, very ugly and deformed, who stood in water for many years, plunged in pious meditation. One day as he stood thus, many thousands of Apsarasas or heavenly nymphs, on their way to a festival on the top of Mount Meru, which the gods were celebrating in honour of a victory they had over the demons, happened to see the holy man. They at once began to sing his praises and they did it so successfully that the Brāhmin told them to ask a boon. We do not seek a boon, replied the ladies. It is reward enough to have been able to please you. But there were some among them who suggested that what they would like best of all would be to obtain Vishnu as their husband.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> What sins have you been guilty of, said Vyāsa. Have you failed to secure a son? Have you committed adultery? Have you eaten the food that was destined for a Brahmin? Have you defrauded the poor? Has the evil eye been cast upon you? Have you been touched by the water of a finger nail? Has the water of a water jar been sprinkled on you? Or what is more likely, have your inferiors defeated you in battle?

<sup>2</sup> The word used is Purushottama, referring to Vishnu or Krishna.

The Brāhmin at once replied that their desire would be granted. But just as he said that, he stepped out of the water. The women, seeing his ugly deformed figure, burst out into loud shouts of laughter. This insult made the holy man very angry, and he said, The promise I have made you will be indeed fulfilled. You will be married to Vishnu, but afterwards, here is my curse. You will fall into the hands of thieves.<sup>1</sup> And thus you will understand, added Vyāsa, that you were in no way to blame. It was necessary that the curse of the holy man should be fulfilled. They became the wives of Krishna, as he said, but they also fell into the hands of thieves, as he foretold. In any case, death is the lot of everyone who is born; separation follows union; decay succeeds to growth; and those who rise are destined to fall. The wise man is never joyful; nor is he ever sad.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The *Mahābhārata* would indicate that these ladies did not fall into the hands of the thieves, for it speaks of them retiring into the forest eventually.

<sup>2</sup> Vyāsa in conclusion advised that Arjuna and his four brothers should give up the world and retire to the forest. The five brothers were the Pāndu princes whom Krishna assisted in the great war against their cousins, the Kurus. The *Mahābhārata* says that the five brothers were so distressed at the death of Krishna that they not only went to the forest, but that they walked up to heaven on the summit of Mount Meru.

## CHAPTER VII

THE END OF THE WORLD AND FINAL  
EMANCIPATION—BOOK VI

Parāshara once more enlarges on those lengthy periods of time with which he had dealt in an earlier book.

**The evils of the present age**

A day of Brahmā consists of 1,000 cycles of four ages. The four ages, composing a total of 4,320,000 years, are the Krita, Tretā, Dwāpara and Kali. When the Kali age comes to an end, it is succeeded once more by the Krita. And Virtue (Dharma), which is compared to a four-footed animal, is said to lose a foot at the close of each age; which means that at the beginning of the fourth age she has only one.<sup>1</sup> During the Kali age, there is a great decline in both religion and morals. Men cease to observe the rules of caste and the institutes of the sacred law. The marriage bond is broken, and wealth alone is held in honour. If a man has money, he can get a wife from any caste. Penance yields no fruit, and individual conduct is supported by texts got from every quarter. Gods of no reputation are worshipped, and every one makes a god for himself. The lower castes think themselves the equal of Brāhmins, and cows are only held in estimation for the fact that they supply their owners with milk. There are frequent famines and great distress for want of food. What food does happen to be secured is eaten without thankfulness, while gods and guests and the spirits of the dead obtain no share. Women are lazy and dirty and immoral. They pay no honour to their husbands. Kings oppress their subjects,

<sup>1</sup> See *Laws of Manu*, I. 81. 'In the Krita age, Dharma is four-footed and entire, and so is truth . . . . In the other ages, Dharma is deprived successively of one foot, and through the prevalence of theft, falsehood and fraud, the merit gained by men is diminished by one-fourth in each.'

and every man, who owns a horse or an elephant, is called a rajah. Members of the Vaishya caste perform menial tasks. Shūdras, whose duty it is to serve others, take to begging and the religious life. Householders cease to offer sacrifice, abandon hospitality and make no gifts. Young men, if they study the Vedas at all, ignore the regulations set down. People of low birth adopt heretical opinions. Children die in infancy. Girls become mothers at the age of five or seven. Boys are fathers, when not more than eight or ten years old. They are grey by the time they are twelve. Before they are twenty they are dead. As the Kali age advances, all these horrors increase, and men speak with increasing contempt of the Vedas, of the gods and Brāhmins; they even cease to worship Vishnu.

• But in the midst of all these calamities, there is one great advantage. It is possible to acquire in the Kali

**The merits of the present age**

age, without effort and without difficulty, what men only obtained as a result of great penance and toil during the first or golden age. In proof of that, listen to what happened to certain sages. One day these pious men were discussing among themselves, how and when a person could acquire the greatest amount of merit by the least possible effort. As they could not come to a decision, they resolved to go and ask the rishi Vyāsa.<sup>1</sup> They found the holy man standing in the river Ganges. As they approached, he plunged his head beneath the waters three times, and each time that he raised his head, he cried out: 'Excellent, excellent is the Kali age. Well done, Shūdra, you are happy; Well done! women, who is more fortunate than you?' He then came out of the river and asked the sages what they wanted. They said that they had come to ask him certain questions. But they were so surprised at his ejaculations that they would for the moment put their questions aside, and beg to be informed what he meant by such wonderful expressions

<sup>1</sup> 'My son Vyāsa,' says Parāshara. The reader will remember that the death of Krishna was supposed to mark the arrival of a Kali age. Vyāsa was a contemporary of Krishna.

as he had just used. How could he say that the Kali age was excellent, that Shūdras were happy, or that women were fortunate. Vyāsa smiled and said: 'It was because I knew what your questions were to be, that I made these ejaculations. You want to know how to acquire great merit at the expenditure of little trouble. Well, here is my answer. A man can obtain great merit and very easily in the Kali age. What would have cost him ten years toil in the first age, one year in the second and one month in the third, can be secured in one day in the fourth age. That is why I said that the Kali age is excellent. In the Krita age, meditation is required; in the Tretā age, sacrifice; in the Dwāpara age, worship; but in the Kali age all that he needs to do, is to repeat the name of Krishna. By repeating Krishna's name, he acquires the very greatest merit. In former days all sorts of asceticism were necessary, and elaborate sacrifices were often rendered of no value, owing to some slip in the ritual. There were many regulations as to what a man should eat and drink. In these and other ways, the pious were greatly burdened and often very much perplexed. But none of these difficulties arise in the Kali age.' As to Shūdras, he had said that they were fortunate, because the duties they had to perform were very simple. All they were required to was to serve their superiors faithfully. With regard to women, they were in a similar case. If they honoured their husbands in thought, word, and deed, they would reach the same position in heaven as their lords had laboriously acquired; and to obey their husbands should be for women an easy task.

As we have seen, 1,000 cycles of the four ages constitutes a *day of Brahmā*. That means that a day of Brahmā, otherwise called a Kalpa, is equal to 4,320 million years, and it is followed by a *night of Brahmā*, also called a Kalpa, and of equal length.

The close of each of Brahmā's days is followed by a dissolution of the universe, and it is defined as *occasional*, because it occurs over and over again; and it is set in contrast to the greater dissolution which will take place

**The lesser  
and greater  
dissolutions**

at the close of Brahmā's life, and which receives the name of *elemental*.<sup>1</sup>

The dissolution which takes place at the close of one of Brahmā's days, is, to begin with, preceded by a famine, which afflicts the world for a hundred years. As a result, all living creatures gradually perish. Vishnu then assumes the form of Shiva (Rudra) the destroyer,

**The dissolution  
of the  
universe**

absorbing into himself all the moisture of the universe, until there is not a drop of liquid in heaven, earth, and hell. Deprived of moisture and greatly afflicted by the fervent heat, first hell and then earth are consumed in fire. The fire spreads higher and higher, until the denizens of the upper worlds are also put to great inconvenience and are driven first to Maharloka, being eventually compelled to take refuge in Janaloka. When this condition has been achieved, Vishnu evolves great masses of clouds, and these clouds pour forth vast volumes of water for another period of one hundred years. By the end of that time, the three worlds have been submerged. Indeed the waters only cease to rise when they reach the region of the *Seven rishis*. It is then that Vishnu goes to sleep, resting on the coils of the great serpent Shesha, which in turn reclines on the surface of the mighty deep. It is as Brahmā, the creator, that he sleeps, and his sleep lasts for a *night of Brahmā*. All that time, the great saints and sages who dwell in Brahmā Loka, and those who took refuge in Janaloka, continually sing his praise. When the *night of Brahmā* is over Vishnu awakes to recreate the worlds, and a new day of Brahmā dawns.<sup>2</sup>

This then is what happens in each of the lesser dissolutions which close one of Brahmā's days. But

<sup>1</sup> The dissolution at the end of one of Brahmā's days is termed *Upasamhriti*. The great dissolution at the close of Brahmā's life consisting of 100 years, is called *Mahāpralaya*, or Prakrita pralaya. As we have been told elsewhere, half of Brahmā's life is already spent.

<sup>2</sup> The reader will note that Brahmāloka is higher than Janaloka, even as Janaloka is higher than Maharloka. These three lokas (worlds) are higher than the three worlds of heaven (atmosphere) earth and hell. What happens to the spirits which inhabit the lesser, men, gods, demons and beasts, is not explained. And yet they can't have perished in soul as well as in body.

Brahmā will live for a hundred years, years whose days each number 4,320 million years and when his life will end, there will occur the much greater dissolution known as elemental.<sup>1</sup> Here also many of the phenomena, already described, repeat themselves. But the narrator's chief purpose is to show how the categories of the Sāṅkhya philosophy swallow up one another until Nature and Spirit, i.e. Prakṛiti and Puruṣa alone remain, when these two resolve themselves into the Supreme Spirit. It is added that Vishnu is the Supreme Spirit who is the upholder of all things, and whose glories are declared in the Veda and in the Vedānta. What happens after that we are not told, but this vast period of time, which is brought to an end by the elemental dissolution, is called a day of Vishnu, and Vishnu's day is followed by a night of equal length; if we can speak of day and night in relation to him, with whom there is neither night nor day.

There is yet another dissolution however, the third and greatest, which is known as the absolute and final dissolution,<sup>2</sup> when the soul obtains salvation and is freed for ever from the burden of re-birth. And who that knows the pains and burdens which men bear, would not seek for such deliverance? Think of the suffering and sorrow in body and mind, to which we are exposed; fever and dysentery, leprosy and ophthalmia, with many other and varied aches and pains which weaken and destroy the human frame; while mind and soul are torn by love and hate, greed and envy, fear and despair. From the very hour of birth, nay, even while it is in the womb, the soul, because of its entanglement in the flesh, is surrounded by hardship. The victim of ignorance and of desire, man struggles through life, not knowing whence he came

<sup>1</sup> The text says that Brahmā's life is equal to the figure *one* followed by 17 cyphers, i.e. 100,000 millions of millions of years. But if we multiply 4,320 million years by 360 × 100 it will yield a much lesser amount. It also says that Brahmā's life is equal to two Parārdhas, or a day of Vishnu. We are left to imagine what will happen when Brahmā dies.

<sup>2</sup> Called *Atyantika*, that which is without end.

or whither he is going. He does not know that piety alone can save him, and yet hell with all its tortures is the ultimate issue for those who neglect religious rites. And what lot is more sorrowful than that of old age? Weak in body, scarcely able to walk, with wrinkled skin, blind and deaf, every movement a source of pain; racked by violent coughing, unable to breathe, unable to dress himself, unable to raise himself, he depends on the reluctant service of others, of wife, or child, or servant, who laugh at his sufferings, and are impatient to see him gone.

But if this life is terrible, the woes which await him in hell are still more terrible. In the land of death, the servants of Yama bind him with cords and beat him with sticks. There are many and varied hells, but in each of them the soul must suffer tortures of every kind. Some are sawn asunder, some are forced to walk on burning sand, some are chopped in pieces, some are impaled on stakes, others are buried alive or boiled in oil, some are gnawed by wild beasts, or they are torn by vultures, and others are cast down from great heights. Were we to try to describe the sufferings which the soul endures in hell, our narrative would never come to an end.

And even when the soul goes to heaven, though his lot is much happier there, he is never able to be really at rest. Because he knows that his felicity must come to an end. Some day or other, he must return to earth and resume the weary round of birth and death. So long as the soul continues to revolve, it is never free from sorrow. A man may have houses and lands, wives and children and servants, but they afford him in the long run more pain than happiness. Where can he find rest and shade, exposed, as he always is, to the scorching sun of transmigration? It is under the tree of emancipation alone that he can secure felicity. And if he wishes to achieve that, then the way is open. He must be absorbed in the Blessed Lord. And the Blessed Lord is Vishnu, and Vishnu is Brahma, the Supreme

**The pains of hell**

**Heaven's happiness imperfect**

Spirit.<sup>1</sup> The two ways of attaining this end are knowledge and works, and knowledge again is of two kinds; the knowledge which one acquires through the Vedas, and the knowledge which is the result of contemplation.<sup>2</sup> It would appear however that the second kind of knowledge is superior to the first, for we are told that those who meditate upon the name of the Blessed Lord, and fully understand its meaning are possessed of holy wisdom—the sum and substance of the three Vedas.<sup>3</sup>

That a knowledge of the Vedas, however, is highly necessary is shown by the next statement made by Parāshara. The muttering of sacred texts and contemplation must both be practiced by the devotee of Brahma. He should pass from the one to the other, and from the other back to the first.<sup>4</sup> They are each of them an eye by which true vision is secured. When Maitreya asked his teacher to explain what was meant by meditation or Yoga,<sup>5</sup> he got a long account of a conversation which took place between two kings. Neither of them seem to have set much store by the power and dignity which they possessed; and they were of the belief that it was folly for any one to say, *This is I*, or, *That is mine*. Indeed they realized that it was ignorance which compelled human beings to travel along the dusty road of countless births. But one of them had discovered how to wash away

<sup>1</sup> The blessed Lord—Bhagavat, a frequent epithet of Krishna.  
<sup>2</sup> The text also says that Brahma is of two kinds: *Shabda-Brahma*, i. e. God to be attained through the word (the Vedas) and the duties they prescribe, and *Para Brahma*, i. e. God to be attained by meditation or reflection (*videka*.) In c. 7, we read that Brahma is twofold, as being with or without form. The first is spirit embodied or with form in its highest state; Vishnu and his manifestations. The second is formless spirit, without attributes of any kind. Wilson, vol. v. p. 210-232.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson quotes a commentator thus: The decoction (preparatory process) being digested by rites, thereafter knowledge is the supreme resource. Having crossed the gulf of Death by ignorance (ceremonial acts) man obtains immortality by knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson quotes the Yoga Shāstra: 'Wearied of meditation, let him pray inaudibly; weary of prayer, let him repeat meditation.' The muttering of sacred texts is *Swādhyāya*.

<sup>5</sup> Yoga (which means *union or joining*) is the name of the Yoga system, one of the six systems of Indian Philosophy. Here it is used specifically and properly for those exercises by which the worshipper is able to obtain abstraction of mind and spirit. This is indeed the philosophy of Yoga

the dust of ignorance with the cleansing waters of real knowledge, and acquire for himself eternal peace. After a long introduction, which it would be superfluous to repeat, beyond saying that the two kings had been engaged in frequent wars with one another, the monarch, who was yet in comparative ignorance, was content to be a learner at his royal brother's feet. And this, in brief, is what he was told. If a man wishes to obtain emancipation he must practise the prescribed exercises of Yoga. By so doing, he may confidently expect to secure his object in the course of several lives.

These exercises are eight in number, or rather, eight stages through which a man must pass before he can reach the goal, and they are duly explained. The first step is (i) *Yama*, or practising the five arts of restraint; the learner must be truthful, he must not kill, he must not steal, he must not covet, and he must be continent, and along with Yama he must practise the five acts of religious observance; meditation on Brahma, the muttering of sacred texts, purification, contentment and penance, all which is known as (ii) *Niyama*. Having attained this stage or acquired these virtues, the practiser of Yoga should sit in a certain posture known as (iii) *Bhadrāsana*,<sup>1</sup> and engage in contemplation. Thus seated, he should practise (iv) *Prāṇāyāma*, or the regulation of breath; in which he breathes out and then breathes in, and finally holds his breath.<sup>2</sup> The next step in the process is (v) *Pratyāhāra* by which the senses are withdrawn from the influences of outward things and directed to the contemplation of mental objects. If this process is not successfully

<sup>1</sup> *Bhadrāsana* says Wilson, is the posture in which the devotee sits with his legs crossed underneath him, and lays hold of his feet on each side with his hands. There are 84 different postures or āsana.

<sup>2</sup> The first act is *expiration*, performed through the right nostril, the left being closed with the fingers of the right hand, called *Rechaka*. The thumb is then placed upon the right nostril and the fingers raised from the left nostril, through which breath is inhaled, this is called *Puraka*. In the third act, both nostrils are closed and breathing is suspended; this is *Kumbhaka*. A succession of this exercise is called *Prāṇāyāma*. Wilson, vol. v. p. 231. For the great benefits flowing from this practice see *Laus of Manu*, ii. 75. vi. 69. 71. xi. 200, 202, 249.

accomplished, the devotee cannot hope to make progress. Because just as the regulation of breath restrains the vital airs, so does Pratyāhāra subdue the senses until the final goal is reached.

In the earlier stages of his worship, the devotee must be content with directing his mind to Vishnu in one of his many forms, as Brahmā, as Prajāpati, as the Maruts, as the Vasus, as the

**Final  
Emancipation**

Rudras, as the demons, as all the gods, as sun and moon and stars, as beasts, as rivers, mountains, trees, and so on. These are all the sensible, perceptible forms of Vishnu, by whom all things and all beings are permeated in varying degrees; beasts having more of his divine energy than things without motion, men more than beasts, and gods more than men. But higher even than the sensible, perceptible forms of Vishnu, of which all created things are the manifestation, there stands the imperceptible shapeless form of Vishnu of which we can only say that it is.<sup>1</sup> To reach this highest of all conceptions must now be the task of the devotee and the process, which is called (vi) *Dhāraṇā*,<sup>2</sup> consists of retaining and fixing the image of Vishnu in mind. At first he is to suppose that he sees Vishnu before him, clad in yellow robes, with the Sriyatsa on his breast, and wearing his diadem, bracelets and earrings, and with eight hands, in which he holds his discus, mace, sword and shell, his bow and arrow, his rosary and lotus. When the worshipper is sure that he has achieved perfect retention, he should then meditate on Vishnu without anything in his hands, except the rosary, and when that effort is successful, meditate on Vishnu, not only with his hands entirely empty, but also without his diadem and other ornaments. This is to be followed by thinking of Vishnu, with only one limb, and then by meditation upon the trunk, apart from the limbs. This course, the

<sup>1</sup> See note on previous page, regarding *Shabda Brahma* and *Para Brahma*. Here Wilson remarks, we have (1) the universal visible form of Vishnu and (2) his formless imperceptible condition. That which is Sat-Existence.

<sup>2</sup> *Dhāraṇā* retention or holding of idea or image formed in mind by contemplation.

gathering up and making perfect of the six previous stages of the process is called (vii) *Dhyāna* or meditation, and leads to the final goal, when the individual has become one with the object of his worship. This last is called (viii) *Samādhi*, and it means that the practiser of Yoga has achieved liberation, for he knows that there is no difference or distinction between the individual and the Supreme Spirit.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this discourse, the two kings decided to abandon their thrones; they gave up all confidence in works, and practised religious rites, without any thought of reward. They concentrated their minds on Krishna; they freed themselves from ignorance and in the end secured absorption in Brahma.<sup>2</sup>

The closing chapter briefly summarizes what has been set forth. It declares that this Purāna is equal to the Vedas. It says that one invocation of

**This Purana  
equal to the  
Vedas**

Vishnu is enough to save a man from hell, and that the repetition of his name when uttered with devotion (*bhakti*) cleanses the soul as fire purifies iron. By listening to this Purāna, as much benefit is acquired as can be got by bathing at Pushkara or Prayāga, or by the offering of a horse sacrifice. Those, who read it and remember it, will secure emancipation. And nothing less than emancipation is of any real use, because heaven itself is merely a stage on the journey to the highest goal. Even Brahmā's heaven is lightly valued by the man whose mind is fixed on that which abides for ever. Does any one ask why the repetition of Vishnu's name should be able to take away men's sins? It is Vishnu who is worshipped by those who offer sacrifices. It is Vishnu who is worshipped when men bring offerings to their different gods. It is Vishnu who is worshipped when men make oblations to

<sup>1</sup> The text of *Patanjali* says: 'The idea of identification with the object of such meditation, so as if devoid of individual nature,' is *Samādhi*, see Wilson v. p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> There are thus eight stages in Yoga: (1) Yama, (2) Niyama, (3) *Bhadrāsana*, (4) *Prāṇāyāma*, (5) *Pratyāhāra*, (6) *Dhāraṇā*, (7) *Dhyāna*, (8) *Samādhi*.

accomplished, the devotee cannot hope to make progress. Because just as the regulation of breath restrains the vital airs, so does Pratyāhāra subdue the senses until the final goal is reached.

In the earlier stages of his worship, the devotee must be content with directing his mind to Vishnu in one of his many forms, as Brahmā, as Prajāpati, as the Maruts, as the Vasus, as the Rudras, as the demons, as all the gods,

**Final  
Emancipation**

as sun and moon and stars, as beasts, as rivers, mountains, trees, and so on. These are all the sensible, perceptible forms of Vishnu, by whom all things and all beings are permeated in varying degrees; beasts having more of his divine energy than things without motion, men more than beasts, and gods more than men. But higher even than the sensible, perceptible forms of Vishnu, of which all created things are the manifestation, there stands the imperceptible shapeless form of Vishnu of which we can only say that it is.<sup>1</sup> To reach this highest of all conceptions must now be the task of the devotee and the process, which is called (vi) *Dhāraṇā*,<sup>2</sup> consists of retaining and fixing the image of Vishnu in mind. At first he is to suppose that he sees Vishnu before him, clad in yellow robes, with the Sriyatsa on his breast, and wearing his diadem, bracelets and earrings, and with eight hands, in which he holds his discus, mace, sword and shell, his bow and arrow, his rosary and lotus. When the worshipper is sure that he has achieved perfect retention, he should then meditate on Vishnu without anything in his hands, except the rosary, and when that effort is successful, meditate on Vishnu, not only with his hands entirely empty, but also without his diadem and other ornaments. This is to be followed by thinking of Vishnu, with only one limb, and then by meditation upon the trunk, apart from the limbs. This course, the

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the spirits of the dead; Vishnu, the eternal, omnipresent spirit, the substance who knows no change; the one who became the many, who blesses and helps men. 'May he who is both nature and spirit, bestow upon all mankind that blessed state which knows neither birth nor decay.'

## NOTE 1

## invocation to Vishnu

'Om! Glory to Vāsudeva,' these are the words with which the Purāna begins. It then goes on to say, 'May that Vishnu who is the existent, imperishable Brahma, who is Ishwara (God); who is spirit (puns or purusha); who, with the three qualities, is the cause of creation, preservation and destruction; who is the parent of nature, intellect and the other ingredients of the universe (i.e. the parent of Pradhāna, buddhi, etc., pradhānabuddhyādijagat-prapanchasūh), be to us the bestower of understanding, wealth and final emancipation.' On this passage Mr. H. H. Wilson remarks that the commentator understands the text to signify that Vishnu is any form of spiritual being that is acknowledged by different philosophical systems; and that he is the Brahma of the Vedānta, the Ishwara of the Pātanjala (Yoga) and the Purusha of the Sāṅkhya school.

(a) *Brahma*, who must be carefully distinguished from Brahmā the creator, is 'the Supreme Being regarded as impersonal or in the abstract and divested of all quality and action.'<sup>1</sup> The *Vedānta* system teaches that 'all this universe is Brahma; from him it proceeds, into him it dissolves, in him it breathes; Brahma is both creator and created, actor and act.'

(b) *Purusha*, in the teaching of the *Sāṅkhya* is *Soul*, which is neither producer nor produced, but eternal like Nature, (Prakriti or Pradhāna 'There are,' says Monier Williams, 'innumerable individual souls, separate, eternal existences, eternally separate from each other and from the world evolver, Prakriti.' In such a system there is no place for God, and it is difficult to understand how the commentator can assert that when the text says Vishnu is Purusha, it means that he is the Purusha of the Sāṅkhya. But as the chapter on creation shows, the compilers of the Purāna, while pantheistic from one point of view and followers of the Vedānta doctrine that the universe is Brahma, make full use of the Sāṅkhya system in describing the evolution of the worlds.

(c) As regards the third statement that Vishnu is the *Ishwara* of the Pātanjala, we know that the founder of the Yoga system, modified the atheism of the Sāṅkhya by asserting that there was a Supreme Spirit who directed and presided over the workings of Nature.<sup>2</sup>

(d) *Vishnu*, with the three qualities, is the cause of creation, preservation and destruction. In this statement Vishnu is identified

<sup>1</sup> For this and other quotations in this note see Monier Williams' *Indian Wisdom*.

<sup>2</sup> See Davies' *Hindu Philosophy* (The Sāṅkhya Kārikā of Ishwara Krishna.)

with the work of Brahmā the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer.

(e) *The three qualities* are *Sattva*, goodness or purity; *Rajas*, passion or activity; and *Tamas*, darkness or ignorance. According to an aphorism of Kapila, Nature (Prakriti) is the state of equipoise of goodness, passion and darkness, and we are told that so long as these three are in equilibrium, creation is not possible. The three qualities are thus imagined to be the actual substances of which Prakriti is constituted; just as trees are the constituents of a forest.

(g) In the second chapter it is said that Time (Kāla) is another form of Vishnu, and that by it, Nature (Pradhāna) and spirit (Purusha) are connected or separated. 'From this we are to infer that Time is when everything else is not, and at the end of a certain interval it unites Nature and Spirit and produces creation.' *Wilson*, vol. i. p. 26.

(h) On the origin of the name Vāsudeva, and its identification with Nārāyaṇa and Vishnu, and afterwards with Krishna and Gopāla the cowherd, the reader should consult Sir R. G. Bhandarkar's *Vaishnavism, Shaivism and minor religious systems*.

## NOTE 2

### The Sāṅkhya philosophy

In the third aphorism of the Sāṅkhya Kārikā by Ishwara Krishna, we have various principles or entities of that system thus set forth.

'The root and substance of all things (except soul) is Prakriti. It is no production. Seven things produced by it are also producers. Thence come sixteen productions. Soul, the 'twenty-fifth' essence, is neither a production, nor producer.' (Monier Williams' translation. *Indian Wisdom*, p. 82.)

They may be expressed for greater clearness in the following table:

1. *Prakriti*: the eternally existing essence; also called *Pradhāna*, the chief one, and *Ayākta*, the unevolved evolver.
2. *Mahat*: the great one, also called Buddhi intellect.
3. *Ahaṅkāra*: the I-making faculty; Egoism.
- 4-8. *Tanmātras*: or five subtle elementary particles, the 'primary forms or essences of gross material things, viz., sound, touch, odour, form or visibility and taste.'

A man's character or conduct depends on which of the three qualities predominates. See *Laws of Manu*, xii, 25. Where it is said that all existences are pervaded by the three qualities in varying degrees.

### 8-24. The sixteen productions:

- (a) the five grosser elements; ether, air, earth, light or fire and water.
- (b) the five organs of sense; ear, skin, eye, nose and tongue.
- (c) the five organs of action; larynx, hand, foot, and the excretory and generative organs.
- (d) Manas, mind, an internal organ of perception, volition and action, often called *the eleventh* from its association with the ten organs of sense and action.

### 25. Purusha, or soul:

These are the twenty-five tattvas or categories of the Sāṅkhya system, and 'he who understands them thoroughly has attained to the highest state of man in the present life and, in laying aside the body in death, shall know death no more; he is freed for ever from any matter, and therefore from pain.'

Purusha or soul, the twenty-fifth category of the Sāṅkhya is not the Parusha set forth in the text of the Purāna, and identified with Vishnu. There is no place for God in the Sāṅkhya system. It asserts the eternity of Prakriti, but, alongside of that, it believes in the existence of an infinite number of individual souls, which are also eternal. 'This *separate* eternal existence of innumerable individual souls is the great feature distinguishing the Sāṅkhya from the Vedānta, which holds the oneness of all soul.' 'But although Prakriti is the sole originator of creation, yet according to the pure Sāṅkhya, it does not create for itself, but rather for each individual soul, which comes into connexion or juxtaposition with it, like a crystal vase with a flower. Souls indeed, exist eternally separate from each other, and from the world-evolver Prakriti, and with whatever form of body they may be joined, they are held to be all intrinsically equal, and each retains its individuality, remaining one and unchanged, through all transmigrations. But each separate soul is a witness of the act of creation, participating in the act.' 'As the original World Evolver only evolves the world for the sake of the spectator soul, this is practically an admission that there can be no realization of creation without the union of Prakriti with Purusha, the personal soul. In all probability, Kapila's own idea was that every Purusha, though he did not himself create, had his own creation and his own created universe, comprehended in his own person.' (*Indian Wisdom*, pp. 86, 89.) Patanjali, the founder of the Yoga system, modified the Sāṅkhya system by adding to it 'the doctrine of a Supreme Spirit' (Ishwara) 'who directed and presided over the workings of Nature (Prakriti).'

In the *Mahābhārata*, when asked to explain the difference between the Sāṅkhya and Yoga systems, Bhīṣma tells Yudhisthira that the follower of each praised his own system, though the Yogins put forward very good reasons for showing that one who did not believe in the existence of God could not achieve liberation. For himself Bhīṣma approved of both. We also find Vyāsa, after giving a description of the Sāṅkhya and the Yoga systems, declare that they are only dissimilar if the speaker be disposed to treat them as such. (Book XII, chapter 352.) The explanation of these two observations, as well as many others, is to be found in the fact that the adherents of the Yoga sought to amalgamate the philosophy of the Sāṅkhya with their own system. In chapter 308 of Book XII for instance we are told that in the Sāṅkhya system, no topic above the twenty-five is admitted. Nevertheless, the very next chapter proceeds to declare that there is a twenty-sixth principle and this twenty-sixth principle is Ishwara, a personal God, whom the Sāṅkhya system had just denied or at least ignored. Quoted from *Summary of Mahābhārata*, p. 196.

In addition to *Indian Wisdom* and Davies' *Hindu Philosophy*, see Hopkins' *The Great Epic of India*, pp. 85-190.

## NOTE 3

## The Four ages, etc.

The four ages are as follows :

|                    | divine years |        |
|--------------------|--------------|--------|
| Krita              | 4,000        |        |
| two twilights      | 800          |        |
|                    | <hr/>        | 4,800  |
| Tretā              | 3,000        |        |
| two twilights      | 600          |        |
|                    | <hr/>        | 3,600  |
| Dwāpara            | 2,000        |        |
| two twilights      | 400          |        |
|                    | <hr/>        | 2,400  |
| Kali               | 1,000        |        |
| two twilights      | 200          |        |
|                    | <hr/>        | 1,200  |
| Total divine years | <hr/>        | 12,000 |

But as one day of the gods=one year of men, we must multiply the 12,000 divine years by 360, to get mortal years: The four ages, therefore, when expressed in years of mortals, are as follows :

|             | mortal years                   |
|-------------|--------------------------------|
| Krita ...   | $4,800 \times 360 = 1,728,000$ |
| Tretā ...   | $3,600 \times 360 = 1,296,000$ |
| Dwāpara ... | $2,400 \times 360 = 864,000$   |
| Kali ...    | $1,200 \times 360 = 432,000$   |

a Mahāyuga (the four ages). = 4,320,000

and 1,000 Mahāyugas = one day of Brahmā.

∴ one day of Brahmā = 4,320,000,000 years.

and one night of Brahmā = 4,320,000,000 years.

each period of creation = one day of Brahmā (a Kalpa).

each period of dissolution = one night of Brahmā (a Kalpa).

As the text goes on to explain that Brahmā's life consists of hundred years, and each of these hundred years consists of days and nights of Brahmā each representing an alternating creation and destruction of a universe, it is easy to calculate that there must be 36,000 ( $360 \times 100$ ) such creations and destructions during the life of Brahmā. What will happen after that we are not told. But the *Brahmā Vaivarta*, according to Wilson, says Brahmā's life is but a Nimesha of Krishna, and a Nimesha is but a twinkle of the eye. The *Shiva Purāna* puts in a similar claim for Shiva.

One half of Brahmā's life has expired, 'terminating with the Mahā Kalpa, called Pādma. The Kalpa (or day of Brahmā) termed Vārāha is the first of the second period of Brahmā's existence.' Book I. c.3. We are suppose to be living in this Vārāha Kalpa.

## NOTE 4

## The three worlds

There are many references in Sanskrit literature to the three worlds, as for example when it is said of gods, demons or men, that they obtained the lordship of the three worlds. That phrase is understood to mean, heaven, earth and the lower regions. On the other hand, Book I. Chapter 3, says that at a dissolution of an universe, the three worlds are destroyed, and we learn from Book I. Chapter 4, and Book II. Chapter 7, that this refers to the first three of the seven upper worlds. These three upper worlds are *Bhūr*, *Bhuvah* and *Svar* or the earth, the atmosphere and heaven.

N. B. The words, Bhūr, Bhuvaḥ and Svar, known as the three vyāhritis (utterance) are repeatedly referred to in the *Laws of Manu*. Their employment by Brāhmins in their daily worship and at other times is emphasized. It is said that if a Brāhmin repeat the *Gāyatrī verse*, the sacred syllable OM, and the three words, Bhūr, Bhuvaḥ and Svar, morning and evening, he need do no more. He has acquired all the merit that a recitation of the three Vedas would confer, and by repeating them outside his village 3,000 times, he will be freed from the guilt of any crime, however heinous. See *Summary of Manu*, pp. 12, 16, 29, 35, ff. It will be observed that while the *Vishnu Purāna* exalts the value of the *Gāyatrī verse* and the syllable OM, it has nothing to say about the three Vyāhritis, at least in that connexion.

## NOTE 5

## Creation

The Purāna has so many and inconsistent statements about creation, that it may be an advantage to put them in more or less tabular form:

- (a) Book I. Chapter 5, says: (1) *Immoveable things* first created, followed by (2) *beasts*, (3) *gods*, and (4) *lastly men*. The next paragraph, however, falls back on the Sāṅkhya system and says that (1) Mahat (2) the Tanmātras and (3) Aindriyaka, or the organs of sense come first as the *primary creation*, and that the four mentioned above must rank as *secondary*, as well as an eighth creation, *Anugraha*; with a ninth, *Kaumāra*, which is both primary and secondary.
- (b) A later paragraph in the same chapter, discussing created beings, says there is a fourfold condition of *gods, men, animals and inanimate things*, and in the following sentence, that there are four orders of beings, gods, demons, pitris (progenitors) and men. The demons were born first and sprang from the thigh of Brahmā, the gods from his mouth, and the pitris from his side. It is not said from what part of the god, *men* originated. These were followed by (5) Hunger the parent of wrath, (6) Rakshasas and Yakshas, all produced from the god, (7) Serpents from his hair, which fell off at seeing the Rakshasas, (8) other evil spirits, products of his anger, (9) Gandharvas, (10) sheep from his breast, goats from his mouth, roots and herbs from the hairs of his body, cows from his thighs, elephants from his feet, etc.

- (11) the *Gāyatrī verse*, the Vedas and various sacrifices from his four mouths. The text adds that it was thus all things sprang from the limbs of the creator.
- (c) Chapter 6 says, that the four castes sprang from the mouth, breast, thighs and feet of Brahmā, and that all were originally sinless. This last statement is manifestly a reference to the other legend, that at first all were of one caste, and that sin led to the origin of caste divisions, as described in the *Vāyu Purāna*.
- (d) Chapter 7 records the birth of (1) four mind-born sons of Brahmā, who refused to propagate their species, (2) of nine others, the Prajāpatis, Daksha, etc. (3) of Rudra, from Brahmā's wrath; this Rudra was half male and half female, while the male part sub-divided into eleven portions.
- (e) Creation of the first Manu with his female portion, Shatarūpā. They had two sons and two daughters; one daughter married Daksha, and had twenty-four daughters, thirteen of whom married *Dharma*, and eleven married the nine mind-born sons of Brahmā (Bhava is substituted for Daksha),<sup>1</sup> Fire and the Pitris (manes).
- (f) Chapter 8 gives another origin for Rudra, who became eight Rudras with a wife for each. This is the later Shiva.
- (g) Chapter 15 says, that people perished during the 10,000 years' meditation of the Prachetasas; the situation was saved by the birth of Daksha, born a second time as son of the Prachetasas. Daksha had fifty daughters and 7,000 sons. The daughters alone carried on the race of Daksha and from their marriages sprang gods, demons, snake deities, cattle, birds and other beings, but no mention is made of *men*, although it is indicated that Brahmā was specially anxious about multiplying the human race!
- (h) Chapter 15 gives the offspring of Daksha's various daughters, (see the summary of this chapter); married to Dharma (10), to the Moon (27) and to four others, viz., Arishtanemi (4), Angiras (2), Krishāshwa (2), and Bahuputra (2). Dharma's children were deities, Vishvadevas, Sādhyas, Marutwats (Indras), Vasus, etc. The moon's offspring were the nymphs of the lunar constellations.
- (i) Chapter 15 records the names of Daksha's other daughters, thirteen in number, married to Kashyapa,

<sup>1</sup> It is strange to find the same chapter giving two lists of the *nine*, that do not agree, but it would have been still stranger if Daksha had married his own daughter.

but only gives an account of the children of one wife, viz. *Aditi*. There were in the reign of Chākshusha, the last Manu, twelve celebrated deities called Tushitas, who when they saw that the period of that Manu was approaching its close, determined to be reborn in the period of the present Manu, Vaivaswata. So they said to one another, 'Come! let us quickly enter into the womb of Aditi that we may be born in the next Manwantara, for thereby we shall again enjoy the rank of gods.' The result was that they were born as 'sons of Kashyapa, the son of Marichi, by Aditi, the daughter of Daksha,' and obtained the names of the twelve Ādityas. Their names are as follows; Vishnu, Shakra, Aryaman, Dhātri, Twashtri, Pūshan, Vivaswat, Savitri, Mitra, Varuna, Amsa, and Bhaga. See *Wilson*, vol. ii. p. 27, for this important passage.

- (i) Chapter 21 gives details about the offspring of Kashyapa's twelve other wives. (2) *Diti*, mother of Daityas or demons, (3) *Danu*, mother of Dānavas, also demons, (4) *Tāmra*, mother of six daughters, who gave birth to parrots, owls and crows; hawks; kites; vultures; waterfowl; horses, camels and asses. (5) *Vinātā*, mother of Garuda, the king of birds, and Aruna (Atrū?); (6) *Surasā*, mother of 1,000 many-headed snakes, traversing the skies. (7) *Kadrā*, mother of 1,000 great serpents, e.g., Takshaka, Vāsuki, Shesha, Nāga, etc. (8) *Krodhavasha*, mother of sharp-toothed monsters. (9) *Surabhi*, mother of cows and buffaloes; (10) *Irā*, mother of trees, plants, shrubs and every kind of grass, (11) *Khasā*, mother of Yakshas and Rākshasas; (12) *Muni*, mother of Apsarasas, and (13) *Arishta*, mother of Gandharvas.

The paragraph is added; 'These were the children of Kashyapa, whether moveable or immovable, whose descendants multiplied infinitely through successive generations. This creation took place in the (second or) Swarochisha Manwantara. In the (present or) Vaivaswata Manwantara . . . the creation of progeny, as it is called, occurred. For he (i.e. Brahmā), begat, as his sons, the seven rishis, who were formerly mind-engendered, and was himself the grandsire of the Ghandarvas, serpents, gods, and Dānavas. *Wilson's translation*, vol. ii. p. 76.

Several passages make it quite plain that each period of a Manu marks something very like a new creation, and that we are supposed to be living in the reign of the seventh Manu. This would not involve the destruction of the universe, but it indicates a disappearance of animal and vegetable life, as well as of gods

and demons. See, for example, what happened during the long asceticism practiced by the ten Prachetasas, the fathers of Daksha in chapter 14, though that was not at the beginning of a Manu period. The reader will note that c. 15 clearly says that Kashyapa's wife, Aditi gave birth to the twelve Ādityas in the period of the present Manu, and yet we find c. 21 seeking to refer its summary of Kashyapa and his other wives with their offspring to the period of the second Manu, and attributing the parentage of gods, etc. to the seven Rishis, during the period of the present Manu. The explanation of course is to be found in the fact that there were two traditions, the one emphasizing the part played by the seven Rishis or Prajāpatis in the work of creation, and the other emphasizing the part played by Kashyapa. In this long list of Kashyapa's progeny, there is *no mention of mankind*. For Kashyapa's and the Rishis' part in the work of creation as told in the Epics, see *Summaries of Mahābhārata*; Note 3, and of *Rāmāyana*, Note 4. Also *Laws of Manu*, p. 19.<sup>1</sup>

## NOTE 6

### The Period of a Manu

The Purāna says that there have been seven Manus reigning over the earth, that we live during the period of the seventh, and that there will be seven more in the future. (Bk. 1. c. 3, Bk. 3. cc. 1 and 2.) The combined reigns of these fourteen Manus constitute a day of Brahmā, that is a total of 4,320 million years. The period of each Manu is called a *Manwantara* and, to quote the text, 'is equal to seventy-one times the number of years contained in the four ages with some additional years.' Those interested in such calculations should consult *Wilson's* note on the subject. But it is sufficient to remark here that each Manu reigned 306,720,000 years as the Purāna itself asserts. Though the dissolution of the universe takes place at the end of Brahmā's day, viz., at the end of 4,320 million years, it is to be inferred from cc. 3, 15 and 21 of the first book, that the seven rishis, the

<sup>1</sup> The Rīg Veda (II. 27. 1) says that Daksha was one of the twelve Ādityas or sons of Aditi while in x. 72, 5, it says that Daksha was both the son and the father of Aditi.

The nine mind-born sons of Brahmā, according to the first paragraph of Book. I. c. 7. were Bhrigu, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Angiras, Marichi, Daksha, Atri and Vasishtha. As has been noted in the summary, the next paragraph gives another list. Eight of the names are the same, but Bhava is substituted for Daksha. Such a change was necessary, as the passage says that the nine Munis, (naming them) married Daksha's daughters.

The names of the seven rishis are not given in c. 21, but they appear in the story of Dhruva. (c. 11.) The names of Bhrigu and Daksha are not included. The others correspond; Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Angiras, Marichi, Atri and Vasishtha, with the mind-born sons of Brahmā.

Manus, and a number of deities, of whom Indra and the twelve Adityas (a list which includes Vishnu) do not last longer than the period of a Manu. See the story told in c. 15, of the twelve deities called *Tushitas*, who lived during the reign of one Manu, arranging to retain their rank in the period of the succeeding Manu, by being born as the twelve Adityas. Note also what Vishnu said to Dhruva, that some of the gods only lived through the four ages, and others for the age of a Manu, but that Dhruva would live for the whole period of a Kalpa. Dhruva himself was the grandson of the first Manu and must have lived about 2,000 millions of years ago.

The various accounts of the creation of living things, gods, demons, beasts, birds, etc., summarized in Note 5, *Creation*, shew that these took place during the periods of different Manus, but no ingenuity will ever be able to reconcile them. See for example the statement in Bk. I. c. 15 that Aditi, one of Kashyapa's wives, gave birth to the Adityas during the period of the seventh or present Manu, and compare it with what is said in c. 21, that the offspring of Kashyapa's other wives were born in the reign of the second Manu. But the confusion is somewhat reduced if the reader will bear in mind that in addition to the creation of the universe, at the beginning of a Kalpa, the Purāna also asserts that there were creations of life, in the form of gods, demons, animals and plants, at the beginning, one would presume, of each Manwantara, and that the mode of these creations varied in the different periods.

It is from the *Mahābhārata* or similar sources, that the Purāna has drawn most of its creation stories, but the epic never ventures on such details as the Purāna does. When it speaks of Kashyapa and the other progenitors of the race, it does not seek to carry us beyond the four ages. It no doubt refers to Kalpas and Manus, but one might infer that the four ages, and not the four ages multiplied by seventy-one, constitute a period of Manu. See for instance the passage in Bk. I. c. 16, of the epic which speaks of Kashyapa marrying the daughters of Daksha. There is no mention there of either the second or the seventh Manu. It merely says that he married them in the first of the four ages. In the interval that elapsed between the two works, the authors of the Purāna had ample opportunity to draw upon their imagination.

#### NOTE 7

##### Jambudvīpa our world

The island continent of Jambu is surrounded by the salt sea, and is the world imagined by the compilers of the Purāna. It contains nine separate countries or kingdoms, divided among the nine sons of Agnidhra. Bharatavarsha or India, the most southerly

of them all, lies to the south of the Himalaya mountains. Of the others, six are to the north of Bharatavarsha, divided from each other by ranges of mountains, whose names are given. In the very centre of the fourth country, stands Mount Meru, the home of the gods, and it is flanked to the east and west by the eighth and ninth. The total diameter of Jambudvīpa is calculated to be 100,000 yojanas, and a yojana is seven miles.

#### NOTE 8

##### The Seven Island Continents and their encircling seas

It has been shewn in the Summary, book II. c. 4, that beyond our world and its surrounding ocean of salt water, there are six other encircling worlds, with their corresponding oceans. We shall here quote from Wilson and Muir, descriptions of *Kusha*, *Shāka* and *Pushkara* dvīpas, the fourth, sixth and seventh of these entirely imaginary worlds.

(a) 'The sea of wine is entirely encircled by Kusha dvīpa, which is every way twice the size of the preceding continent. The king had seven sons. . . . There reside mankind along with Daitas and Dānavas as well as with Gandharvas, Yakshas. . . . and gods. The four castes, assiduously devoted to their respective duties, are termed Damins, Sushmins, Snehas and Mandehas, who, in order to be relieved of the obligations imposed upon them in the discharge of their several functions, worship Janārdana (Vishnu) in the form of Brahmā, and thus get rid of the unpleasant duties which lead to temporal rewards. Kusha dvīpa is so named from a clump of Kusha grass growing there.' It is surrounded by a sea of butter of the same size as itself.

(b) Of Shāka dvīpa it is said that it was divided unto seven divisions under seven kings, that it has seven mountain ranges which separate these divisions one from the other, and that the island got its name from a great Shāka or teak tree, which grew there, frequented by Siddhas and Gandharvas, the wind from which, as produced by its fluttering leaves, diffuses delight. The sacred lands of this continent are peopled by the four castes. Its seven holy rivers wash away all sin (their names are given). There are also hundreds and thousands of minor streams and mountains in this dvīpa, and the inhabitants drink of these waters with pleasure, after they have returned to earth from Indra's heaven. In these seven divisions, there is no deviation from rectitude.' Of the four castes whose names are given, it is said that Vishnu is devoutly worshipped by them as the Sun, with appropriate ceremonies. Shāka dvīpa is surrounded by the Sea of Milk.

(c) Of Pushkara dvīpa which lies beyond the Sea of Milk, apart from what has been mentioned in the summary as to its size and divisions, the statement in the Purāna is of great importance. 'In this dvīpa men live 10,000 years, free from sickness and sorrow, from affection and hatred. There is no distinction among them of highest and lowest, of killer and slain; there is no envy, nor ill-will, nor fear, nor anger, nor defect, nor covetousness, nor other fault; there is neither truth nor falsehood; men there are all of the same appearance, of one form with the gods. The two divisions of this dvīpa have no rules of caste or orders, nor any observances of duty; the three Vedas, the Purānas (or trade), the rules of criminal law and service do not exist. This dvīpa is a most excellent terrestrial heaven; where time brings happiness to all, and is exempt from decay, sickness and all other evils.' (Muir, *Old Sanskrit Texts*, vol. i. p. 502.) A sacred fig tree grows on this dvīpa which is the especial abode of Brahmā and he resides in it, adored by the gods and demons (asuras). Nothing is said as to whom the inhabitants of the island worship, but both divisions of the island are frequented by 'Daityas and the like' and gods.

As the summary records, the picture of the seven oceans and seven seas is completed by the addition of still another region, twice as broad as Pushkara dvīpa. This nameless region has on its furthest border, the Lokāloka mountains, invested with darkness, a darkness which is encompassed by the shell of the mundane egg. Though chapter 4, tells us that this never-never land is uninhabited; chapter 8, says that four holy men, whose names are given, dwell in the mountain. They include two sons of Kardama, the Prajāpati, spoken of in Book II. Chapter 1, as the father-in-law of Priyavratha.

#### NOTE 9

##### The Chariot of the Sun

It is impossible to summarize the astronomical discourses which appear in chapters 8-12, of Book II. It is no reflection on the authors, that their calculations, mixed up as they are with many fanciful ideas and myths, should not be in accordance with modern scientific truth. A few of their statements and figures are set forth in this note. The chariot of the sun is 9,000 yojanas in length; its pole is twice that size; its axle is 15,700,000 yojanas; on this axle is fixed a triple nave, five spokes and six peripheries—'consisting of the ever during year; the whole constituting the circle or wheel of time.' Wilson says that the triple nave is morning noon and night; the spokes, five cyclic years, and the peripheries the six seasons. Another and

shorter axle, 45,500 yojanas long, is supported by the Pole star, while the end of the longer axle, to which the wheel of the car is attached, moves on Mānasa, the mountain range, which runs through the middle of Pushkara, the furthest away of the seven island continents. The car is drawn by seven horses, who continue on their career without stopping for the period of a Kalpa. (4,320 millions of years.) On his course, the sun is attended by the constellations of the Zodiac. He causes the distribution of day and night, and is the divine vehicle and path of the sages, who have overcome the inflictions of the world. 'The radiance of the solar orb, when the sun has set, is accumulated in fire, and hence fire is visible at a greater distance by night.' Those who wish to be happy should make offerings to the gods and pitris, and give gifts to Brāhmins at the equinoxes and other times, such as the day of full moon, when it is first seen, when it first disappears, and when it is quite round. Vishnu, as consisting of the constellations, assumes the form of a porpoise, and Dhruva, the pole star, appears in his tail. Vishnu upholds the pole star and the pole star upholds the sun, and on the sun depends the world, with its gods, demons, and men. It is the sun that, by its heat, absorbs the moisture of the earth, and with it nourishes the moon. It is the moon that through tubes of air passes on this moisture to the clouds; the clouds give rain, the rain causes fertility, vegetables are produced, and by vegetables life is maintained, and by using these vegetables in their daily sacrifice, men nourish the gods. So that rain, by which food is produced supports sacrifices, the Vedas, the four castes, the dwelling places of the gods, animals and the whole world. And it is the sun that evolves the rain, and the sun is sustained by Dhruva, who is 'supported by the celestial porpoise-shaped sphere, which is upheld by Nārāyana,' and he is the supporter of all things.

It may be added that the moon and planets also move through the sky in chariots. The moon has ten horses yoked to his; Mercury eight. It is said of them that they are fastened to the pole star by cords, which keep them in their proper orbits.

#### NOTE 10

##### How to please God

As has been remarked in the summary of Book III. c. 7. this fine passage, describing the dialogue between Yama the god of the lower world, and one of his ministers, deserves to be given in full. It has to be remembered that Yama was the judge of the dead. 'Yama, beholding one of his servants with his noose in his hand, whispered to him and said: "Keep clear of the worshippers

of Madhusūdana. I am the lord of all men, the Vaishnavas excepted. I was appointed by Brahmā, who is revered by all the immortals, to restrain mankind, and regulate the consequences of good and evil in the universe. But he who obeys Hari as his spiritual guide is here independent of me; for Vishnu is of power to govern and control me. As gold is one substance still, however diversified as bracelets, tiaras or ear-rings, so Hari is one and the same, although modified in the forms of gods, animals and men. As the drops of water, raised by wind from the earth, sink into the earth again when the wind subsides, so the varieties of gods, men and animals, which have been detached by the agitation of the qualities, are reunited, when that disturbance ceases, with the eternal. He who through holy knowledge diligently adores the lotus-foot of that Hari who is revered by the gods is released from all the bonds of sin; and you must avoid him as you would avoid fire fed with oil."

'Having heard these injunctions of Yama, the messenger addressed the lord of righteousness and said: "Tell me, master, how am I to distinguish the worshipper of Hari, who is the protector of all beings?" Yama replied "You are to consider as the worshipper of Vishnu him who never deviates from the duties prescribed to his caste; who looks with equal indifference upon friend or enemy; who takes nothing (that is not his own), nor injures any being. Know that person of unblemished mind to be a worshipper of Vishnu: Know him to be a devout worshipper of Hari, who has placed Janārdana in his pure mind, which has been freed from fascination, and whose soul is undefiled by the soil of the Kali age. Know that excellent man to be a worshipper of Vishnu, who, looking upon gold in secret, holds that which is another's wealth but as grass, and devotes all his thoughts to the lord. Pure is he as a mountain of clear crystal: for how can Vishnu abide in the hearts of men with malice, and envy, and other evil passions? The glowing heat of fire abides not in a cluster of the cooling rays of the moon. He who lives pure in thought, free from malice, contented, leading a holy life, feeling tenderness for all creatures, speaking wisely and kindly, humble and sincere, has Vāsudeva ever present in his heart. As the young Sāla-tree, by its beauty, declares the excellence of the juices which it has imbibed from the earth, so when the eternal has taken up his abode in the bosom of any one, that man is lovely amidst the beings of this world. Depart, my servant, quickly from those men whose sins have been dispersed by moral and religious merit, whose minds are daily dedicated to the imperceptible deity, and who are exempt from pride, uncharitableness, and malice. In the heart in which the divine Hari, who is without beginning or end, abides, armed with a sword, a shell, and a mace, sin cannot remain; for it cannot co-exist with that which destroys it: as darkness cannot continue in the world, when the sun is shining. The eternal makes

not his abode in the heart of that man who covets another's wealth, who injures living creatures, who speaks harshness and untruth, who is proud of his iniquity, and whose mind is evil. Janārdana occupies not his thoughts who envies another's prosperity, who calumniates the virtuous, who never sacrifices, nor bestows gifts upon the pious, who is blinded by the property of darkness. That vile wretch is no worshipper of Vishnu, who, through avarice, is unkind to his nearest friends and relations, to his wife, children, parents, and dependants. The brute-like man whose thoughts are evil, who is addicted to unrighteous acts, who ever seeks the society of the wicked, and suffers no day to pass without the perpetration of crime, is no worshipper of Vāsudeva. Do you proceed afar off from those in whose hearts Ananta is enshrined; from him whose sanctified understanding conceives the supreme male and ruler, Vāsudeva, as one with his votary and with all this world. Avoid those holy persons who are constantly invoking the lotus-eyed Vāsudeva, Vishnu, the supporter of the earth, the immortal wielder of the discus and the shell, the asylum of the world. Come not into the sight of him in whose heart the imperishable soul resides; for he is defended from my power by the discus of his deity; he is designed for another world (for the heaven of Vishnu)." *Wilson*, Vol. iii. pp. 75-79.

One is reminded of the somewhat similar passage in the *Laws of Manu*. After dwelling on many rules and regulations, to be practised by the Brāhmin in each of the four orders or stages, through which he must pass, student, householder, forest-dweller, and ascetic, the law book goes on to declare that there is a ten-fold law which every one must obey, in whatever stage of life he may be. 'Contentment, forgiveness, self-control, abstention from unrighteously appropriating anything, obedience to the rules of purification, coercion of the organs, wisdom, (probably of the sacred books), knowledge (of the supreme Soul), truthfulness, and abstention from anger, form the ten-fold law.' *Manu*, vi. 92. Bühler's translation, S.B.E. It is added that study of, and obedience to this, will carry a Brāhmin to the highest state.

Unfortunately the *Garuda Purāna* (chapter 236) which also represents Yama as telling his emissaries to leave alone the worshippers of Vishnu, asserts that even if the worst of miscreants worship Vishnu alone in exclusion to all other deities, he should be regarded as a holy person. (*Dutt's translation*, p. 753.)

## NOTE 11

**Funeral Ceremonies**

The *Garuda Purāna*, chapter 84, 85, lays great emphasis on the benefits that accrue to the manes from the celebration of ancestral rites and the offering of the *pinda*. It tells us of a ghost who appeared to a merchant and asked him to make an offering on his behalf at Gaya, adding as an inducement, that the giver of the funeral cake also was liberated from hell and went to heaven. It tells also of a youth, who was met by three shadowy figures, white, red and black respectively. The white figure when questioned, said he was the youth's father, living in the region of *Idra*, as a result of the merit he had acquired from his good deeds. But the red figure, he went on to say, is my father and your grandfather, who killed a Brāhmin, and the black figure is my grandfather, and your great grandfather who killed a great number of holy men. They are now suffering the pains of hell, condemned to a life of unending misery, unless you come to their assistance. The way to release them from such torment and send them to heaven, was, of course, by making the proper offering to his ancestors.

In another passage the *Garuda Purāna* shews how very comprehensive this offering could be. The pilgrim to Gaya was told to name those whom he wished to include; all those born in his family who died without the performance of the proper rites; those who died in the womb, or before they cut a tooth; those who were burned to death or devoured by wild beasts, or committed suicide, or were killed by thieves; all indeed who had no proper sort of funeral ceremony, and whose bodies were not consumed in a consecrated fire. He was next to pray in detail for those now suffering in the various hells several of which are named; for those who had been re-born as serpents, birds and lower animals; for those 'consigned to the voiceless agonies of vegetable life'; for those who were constantly falling in the scale of being, and for whom all hope of rising seemed impossible. Indeed he was to make the offering not only for every one connected with the families of both his father and mother, especially those who had died childless, but for his friends, including those whose names he had forgotten, and indeed, for every poor and helpless person, who stood in need of help on such a momentous question. In conclusion, Brahmā and other gods were called on to note that he had come to Gaya, and duly performed all the rites prescribed. *Dutt's translation*, pp. 230-232.

## NOTE 12

**Hell and its punishments**

Whenever death occurs the spirit of the dead man emerges from his body. It is no bigger than a thumb. If his life has been good, it comes out at a suture in the top of the skull. If his life has been evil, it comes out at the anus. The two messengers of Yama, the god of death, appear and escort the soul to the lower regions, where it is confronted with Chitragupta, Yama's recorder. In his books are written down all that the dead man has done, and a balance is kept to the day of his death. His future depends on whether his credit or debit side is the greater. The soul, however can enter neither heaven nor hell, till it has received a suitable body, and this frame is acquired by eating the offerings of food and water presented by the relatives of the dead. Until that takes place, the soul remains a restless disembodied ghost. Each of the twelve days for which the funeral ceremonies last, a limb is furnished, first a head, then a neck and shoulders and so on, until it is able to eat and to enjoy all that is set before it. On the thirteenth day it goes to either heaven or hell. Monier Williams, in his *Brāhmanism and Hinduism*, has given a very vivid account of the soul's experience in hell, should that be its portion.

It is as follows:

'The road by which Yama's two officers force a wicked man to descend to one or other of the twenty-one hells is described in the first two chapters of the *Garuda-Purāna*. The length of the way is said to be 86,000 leagues (yojanas). The condemned soul, invested with its sensitive body and made to travel at the rate of 200 leagues a day, finds no shady trees, no resting-place, no food, no water. At one time it is scorched by a burning heat, equal to that of twelve meridian suns; at another it is pierced by icy cold winds; now its tender frame is rent by thorns; now it is attacked by lions, tigers, savage dogs, venomous serpents and scorpions. In one place it has to traverse a dense forest whose leaves are swords; in another it falls into deep pits; in another it is precipitated from precipices; in another it has to walk on the edge of razors; in another on iron spikes; here it stumbles about helplessly in profound darkness; there it struggles through loathsome mud swarming with leeches; here it toils through burning sand; there its progress is arrested by heaps of red-hot charcoal and stifling smoke. Compelled to pass through every obstacle, however formidable, it next encounters a succession of terrific showers not of rain, but of live coals, stones, blood, boiling water and filth. Then it has to descend into appalling

fissures, or ascend to sickening heights, or lose itself in vast caves, or wade through lakes seething with fetid ordure. Then midway it has to pass the awful river Vaitarani, one hundred leagues in breadth, of unfathomable depth; flowing with irresistible impetuosity, filled with blood, matter, hair and bones; infested with huge sharks, crocodiles, and sea-monsters; darkened by clouds of hideous vultures and obscene birds of prey. Thousands of condemned spirits stand trembling on the banks, horrified by the prospect before them. Consumed by a raging thirst, they drink the blood which flows at their feet, then tumbling headlong into the torrent they are overwhelmed by the rushing waves. Finally, they are hurried down to the lowest depths of hell, and yet not destroyed. Pursued by Yama's officers they are dragged away and made to undergo inconceivable tortures, the detail of which is given with the utmost minuteness in the succeeding chapters of the *Garuda-Purāna*.

A description so monstrous would be scarcely worth reproducing in any form, did it not profess to represent an important article of the creed of a vast majority of our fellow-subjects in regard to a future state. It might indeed be thought that a belief in such horrors and in the possibility of undergoing a fate so awful would be calculated to produce a salutary deterrent effect on wicked persons, did we not find that, however intense is a Hindu's belief in the reality of hell's most excruciating torments, as described in the *Garuda* and other *Purānas*, he is equally ready to accept the doctrine laid down in the same works, that by performing certain religious rites and giving gifts to the Brāhmins, all the terrific penalties of sin may be avoided and the god of hell disappointed of his victims.' Pp. 291-295.

The *Vishnu Purāna*, Book II. Chapter 6, after giving the names of twenty-eight hells, proceeds as follows: 'These and many other fearful hells are the awful provinces of the kingdom of Yama, terrible with instruments of torture and with fire; into which are hurled all those who are addicted, when alive, to sinful practices. The man who bears false witness, through partiality, or who utters any falsehood, is condemned to the Raurava (dreadful) hell. He who causes abortion, plunders a town, kills a cow, or strangles a man, goes to the Rodha hell (or that of obstruction). The murderer of a Brāhmin, stealer of gold, or drinker of wine, goes to the Śūkara (swine) hell; as does any one who associates with them. The murderer of a man of the second or third castes, and one who is guilty of adultery with the wife of his spiritual teacher, is sentenced to the Tāla (padlock) hell; and one who holds incestuous intercourse with a sister, or murders an ambassador, to Taptakumbha (or the hell of heated caldrons). The seller of his wife, a gaoler, a horse-dealer, and one who deserts his adherents, falls into the Taptaloha (red-hot iron) hell.

He who commits incest with a daughter-in-law, or a daughter, is cast into the Mahājwāla hell (or that of great flame); and he who is disrespectful to his spiritual guide, who is abusive (to his betters), who reviles the Vedas, or who sells them, who associates with women in a prohibited degree, into the Lavana (salt) hell. A thief, and a contemner of prescribed observances, falls into Vimoha (the place of bewildering). He who hates his father, the Brāhmins, and the gods, or who spoils precious gems, is punished in the Krimibhaksha hell (where worms are his food); and he who practises magic rites for the harm of others, in the hell called Krimiśa (that of insects). The vile wretch who eats his meal before offering food to the gods, to the manes, or to guests, falls into the hell called Lālabhaksha (where saliva is given for food). The maker of arrows is sentenced to the Vedhaka (piercing) hell; and the maker of lances, swords and other weapons, to the dreadful hell called Viśasana (murderous). He who takes unlawful gifts goes to the Adhomukha (or head-inverted) hell; as does one who offers sacrifices to improper objects, and an observer of the stars (for the prediction of events). He who eats by himself sweetmeats mixed with his rice, and a Brahmin who vends lac, flesh, liquors, sesamum, or salt, or one who commits violence, fall into the hell (where matter flows, or) Puyāvaha; as do they who rear cats, cocks, goats, dogs, hogs, or birds. Public performers, fishermen, the follower of one born in adultery, a poisoner, an informer, one who lives by his wife's prostitution, one who attends to secular affairs on the days of the Parvans (or full and new moon, etc.), an incendiary, a treacherous friend, a soothsayer, one who performs religious ceremonies for rustics, and those who sell the acid Asclepias (used in sacrifices,) go to the Rudhirāndha hell (whose wells are of blood). He who destroys a bee-hive, or pillages a hamlet, is condemned to the Vaitarani hell. He who causes impotence, trespasses on others' lands, is impure, or who lives by fraud, is punished in the hell called (black, or) Krishna. He who wantonly cuts down trees goes to the Asipatravana hell (the leaves of whose trees are swords); and a tender of sheep, and hunter of deer, to the hell termed Vahnijwāla (or fiery flame); as do those who apply fire to unbaked vessels (potters). The violator of a vow, and one who breaks the rules of his order, falls into the Sandamśa (or hell of pincers); and the religious student who sleeps in the day, and is (though unconsciously) defiled; and they who (though mature) are instructed in sacred literature by their children, receive punishment in the hell called Śwabhojana (where they feed upon dogs). These hells, and hundreds and thousands of others, are the places in which sinners pay the penalty of their crimes. As numerous as are the offences that men commit, so many are the hells in which they are punished; and all who deviate from the duties imposed upon them by their

caste and condition, whether in thought, word, or deed, are sentenced to punishment in the regions of the damned.' *Wilson's translation.*

## NOTE 13

**The deeds of Rama**

The reader acquainted with Vālmiki's *Rāmāyana* will be interested to read what the Purāna has to say of Rāma and his brothers, sons and nephews:

'The god from whose navel the lotus springs became fourfold, as the four sons of Dasaratha: Rāma, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna, for the protection of the world. Rāma, whilst yet a boy, accompanied Visvāmitra, to protect his sacrifice, and slew Tādakā. He afterwards killed Mārīcha with his resistless shafts; and Subāhu and others fell by his arms. He removed the guilt of Ahalyā, by merely looking upon her. In the palace of Janaka, he broke, with ease, the mighty bow of Maheshwara, and received the hand of Sītā, the daughter of the king, self-born from the earth, as the prize of his prowess. He humbled the pride of Parashurāma, who vaunted his triumphs over the race of Haihaya, and his repeated slaughters of the Kshatriya tribe. Obedient to the commands of his father, and cherishing no regret for the loss of sovereignty, he entered the forest, accompanied by his brother (Lakshmana) and by his wife, where he killed, in conflict, Virādha, Khara, Dūshana, and other Rākshasas, (the headless giant) Kabandha, and Bālin (the monkey monarch). Having built a bridge across the ocean, and destroyed the whole Rākshasa nation, he recovered (his bride,) Sītā, whom their ten-headed (king, Rāvana,) had carried off, and returned to Ayodhyā, with her, after she had been purified, by the fiery ordeal, from the soil contracted (by her captivity), and had been honoured by the assembled gods, (who bore witness to her virtue).'

'Bharata made himself master of the country of the Gandharvas, after destroying vast numbers of them; and Shatrughna, having killed the Rākshasa chief, Lavana, the son of Madhu, took possession of his capital, Mathurā.'

'Having, thus, by their unequalled valour and might, rescued the whole world from the dominion of malignant fiends, Rāma, Lakshmana, Bharata, and Shatrughna reascended to heaven, and were followed by those of the people of Koshala who were fervently devoted to these incarnate portions of the Supreme (Vishnu).'

Rāma (and his brothers) had (each) two sons. Kusha and Lava were the sons of Rāma; those of Lakshmana were Angada

and Chandraketu; the sons of Bharata were Taksha and Pushkara; and Subāhu and Surasena, were the sons of Shatrughna. (Book IV. chapter 4. *Wilson's translation.*)

## NOTE 14

**Vishnu's Incarnation as Parashurama**

In the third book of the *Mahābhārata*, the story of this incarnation is given in detail. As it is only referred to in the Purāna, the following summary may be of value. There was a king of the Haihayas, called Arjuna Kārta-Vīrya, who had a 1,000 arms. He was possessed of a golden car, and he was lord of all the earth, and of all creatures. Able to go everywhere in his car, he persecuted gods and demons and Rishis. He even insulted Indra, the lord of the celestials. As the result of a conference, it was resolved that Vishnu should take birth among men, and he was eventually born as Parashurāma, a son of the ascetic Jamadagni, of the family of the demi-god Bhrigu. Both his grandmother and mother were the daughters of kings. Rāma of the axe was thus of mixed Brāhmin and Kshatriya descent. One day when Jamadagni was alone in his hermitage the wicked king, Arjuna-Kārta-Vīrya carried off the cow whose milk supplied the ghee that the ascetic used for worship. When Rāma heard of it, he followed the king and slew him. The king's sons and followers came soon after, and killed the old ascetic. Rāma had again been absent, collecting fuel for their religious ceremonies. When he saw his father lying dead, he took an oath that he would kill every member of the Kshatriya race. Not less than twenty-one times did he kill all the Kshatriyas to be found on the earth, while he filled five lakes with their blood. In this way did Vishnu fulfil his promise to kill the oppressor, the king of the Haihayas, and destroyed in addition the whole of the warrior caste.

In the first book of the epic, Bhīshma says that when Parashurāma, the incarnation of Vishnu, exterminated the Kshatriya race, twenty-one times, the Brāhmins went to the childless widows, and not lustfully, but from pure motives, raised up offspring to the warriors who had been slain, but elsewhere we are told that the earth concealed some of them, and that others were saved and nourished by cows, bears and sages, thus ensuring the continuity of the race. The Purāna, as the reader will observe, dwells on the virtues of Arjuna-Kārta-Vīrya, and indicates that he was promised as a favour, that he would die by the hands of a person renowned in the three regions of the universe. (IV. c. 11.) It says nothing of his evil ways.

The epic also tells how Jamadagni, Parashurāma's father, ordered his sons one after the other to slay their mother for a certain offence. They all refused except Parashurāma, and were cursed by their angry father to become idiots and live like beasts. Parashurāma however obeyed the unnatural command, and in reward was told to ask a boon. In reply he asked that his mother should be restored to life, his brothers to their understanding, and for himself, forgetfulness of the murder, as well as invincibility in battle and length of days.

In the *Rāmāyana* Rama quotes Parashurāma as a supreme instance of filial obedience. It does not say that he is an incarnation of Vishnu, and in his encounter with Rāma the son of Dasharatha, he had to own defeat. The *Rāmāyana* manifestly finds Parashurāma a difficulty and the *Vishnu Purāna* tells us frankly that Rāma tamed his pride. (Note 13.) As both Rāma and Krishna belonged to the warrior caste, it was not easy for either them or their worshippers to tolerate an incarnation of Vishnu, whose one object was to exterminate the warrior caste. It was only the impartial *Mahābhārata* which could record a legend that branded the whole warrior caste with impure descent. Nevertheless the name of Parashurāma still stands in the list of Vishnu's ten avatāras.

### NOTE 15

#### The Dynasties of the Kali Age

As has been stated in the summary, the present age (Kali-yuga) is said to have begun with the death of Krishna. 'As long as he touched the earth with his lotus feet, so long the Kali age could not encompass the earth.' Parāshara, the narrator of this Purāna professes to be a contemporary of Krishna, but this fact does not prevent him from giving an account of what will happen throughout the Kali age, a period of 360,000 years. It is chiefly a list of dynasties and kings with the years that each reigned.

In his *Dynasties of the Kali age*, Mr. Pargiter shows that the *Bhavishya Purāna*, was the original authority for these dynasties, the *Matsya* and *Vāyu Purānas* expressly stating that their accounts are based on it. In several of the Purānas, including the *Vishnu*, these lists extend to the rise of the Guptas who are spoken of as ruling over the country comprised within Prayāga, Sāketa, (Ayodhyā) and Magadha, that is exactly the territory which was possessed at his death by Chandra Gupta I who founded the Gupta dynasty in A. D. 319-320, and reigned till 326 or 330 (or even till 335 perhaps) before it was extended by the conquest of his son and successor, Samudra-gupta. With the Guptas are mentioned Nāgas, Manihānyas and others as reigning

contemporaneously over the countries which surrounded the Gupta territory, and which were afterwards subjugated by Samudra-gupta. The account takes no notice of his conquests nor of the Gupta empire. For these reasons which are quoted from Mr. Pargiter's book p. xii, he concludes that the dynastic accounts were closed at least by 335 A. D. as it is hardly credible that it would have omitted to notice Samudra-gupta's conquests. As it is the kings of Magadha who are referred to with most detail, the same writer is of the opinion that these accounts must have been composed in or near Magadha, more particularly as it was one of the chief centres of political life and thought during these times. He adds that a quiet process of emendations in detail has been at work since they were first put together. This has been specially so, in the case of the *Bhavishya Purāna*, the source of them all. It has been unscrupulously tampered with in order to bring its prophecies up-to-date, and the text now presented in the Venkateshwara edition shows all the ancient matter utterly corrupted, but the prophecies brought boldly down to the nineteenth century. Some of the 'ancient matter' contains 'a summary of the Biblical account from Adam to Abraham in the early chapters of Genesis. There can hardly be any doubt that this interpolation has been made very recently in view of Christianity.'

The following quotations from the *Vishnu Purāna* may suffice to show how these future dynasties are described.

'After these, various races will reign; as, seven Abhīras, ten Gardabhillas, sixteen Shakas, eight Yavanas, fourteen Tushāras, thirteen Mundas, eleven Maunas, (altogether seventy-nine princes), who will be sovereigns of the earth for one thousand three hundred and ninety-nine years; and, then, eleven Pauras will be kings for three hundred years. When they are destroyed, the Kaila-kila Yavanas (Greeks) will be kings.'

'In Magadha, a sovereign named Vishwasphatika will establish other tribes; he will extirpate the Kshatriya (or martial) race, and elevate fishermen, barbarians, and Brahmins, (and other castes) to power.'

And as the darkness closes before the coming of the Kalki to destroy the age, we read:

'Men of the three tribes, but degraded, and Abhīras and Shūdras, will occupy Saurāshtra, Avanti, Sūra, Arbuda, and Marubhūmi; and Shūdras, out-castes, and barbarians will be masters of the banks of the Indus, Darvika, the Chandrabhāgā, and Kashmira.'

'These will all be contemporary monarchs, reigning over the earth; kings of churlish spirit, violent temper, and ever addicted to falsehood and wickedness. They will inflict death on women, children, and cows; they will seize upon the property of their subjects; they will be of limited power, and will, for the most

part, rapidly rise and fall: their lives will be short, their desires insatiable; and they will display but little piety. The people of the various countries intermingling with them will follow their example; and the barbarians being powerful in the patronage of the princes, whilst purer tribes are neglected, the people will perish. Wealth and piety will decrease day by day, until the world will be wholly depraved. Then property alone will confer rank; wealth will be the only source of devotion; passion will be the sole bond of union between the sexes; falsehood will be the only means of success in litigation; and women will be objects merely of sensual gratification. Earth will be venerated but for its mineral treasures; the Brahminical thread will constitute a Brahmin; external types (as the staff and red garb) will be the only distinctions of the several orders of life; dishonesty will be the universal means of subsistence; weakness will be the cause of dependence; menace and presumption will be substituted for learning; liberality will be devotion; simple ablution will be purification; mutual assent will be marriage; fine clothes will be dignity; and water afar off will be esteemed a holy spring. Amidst all castes, he who is the strongest will reign over a principality thus vitiated by many faults. The people, unable to bear the heavy burthens imposed upon them by their avaricious sovereigns, will take refuge among the valleys of the mountains, and will be glad to feed upon (wild) honey, herbs, roots, fruits, leaves, and flowers; their only covering will be the bark of trees; and they will be exposed to the cold, and wet, sun and rain. No man's life will exceed three and twenty years. Thus, in the Kali age, shall decay constantly proceed, until the human race approaches its annihilation. Book IV. Chapter 21, quoted from *Wilson's translation*.

The reader is referred for further information on these questions to Wilson's Voluminous notes to his translation of these passages, and to Mr. Pargiter's *Dynasties of the Kali Age*. (Oxford University Press, 1907) and to Mr. Smith's *Early History of India* should also be consulted.

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