

TALE XIII.

THE sprite said, "O king! there is a city named Chandra-hriday, and a king named Randhir ruled there. There was in the city a merchant named Dharmdhvaj, whose daughter's name was Shobhani; and indeed she was very beautiful. Her youthful prime was daily developing itself, and her beauty was each moment increasing."

"It so happened that robberies became a nightly occurrence in that city. When the merchants experienced much vexation at the hands of the thieves, they all went to the king in a body and said, 'Your majesty! thieves have committed great outrage in the city; we can no longer dwell in the place.' The king replied, saying, 'Well; what has happened is beyond remedy (*lit.*, what has happened, has happened); but henceforth you shall suffer no annoyance; I will take vigorous measures against them.' After saying this, the king summoned a number of people and told them off to keep guard, and directed them how to keep watch, and commanded them to slay the thieves wherever they found them, without asking any questions."

"People began to keep watch over the city, by night, and yet robberies took place. All the merchants proceeded in a body to the king, and said, 'Your majesty has sent watchmen, and yet the thieves have not decreased in number, and thefts occur daily.' The king replied, 'Do you take your leave now; from to-night I will go forth to watch over the city.' On hearing this, they left the king, and went each to his own home. Now, when it was night, the king took his sword and shield, and, on foot and alone, began his watch over the city. Having advanced some distance in the course of his watch, and looked closely, he perceived a thief coming towards him. On seeing him, the king called out, 'Who art thou?' He replied, saying, 'I am a thief; who art thou?' The king said (in reply), 'I also am a thief.' He was pleased on hearing this, and said, 'Let us commit a robbery together.'"

"Settling this matter between them, the king and the thief, conversing with one another, entered one of the quarters of the city, and after committing thefts in several houses, carried off the articles, and came to a well without the city, and having gone down into it, ultimately reached the chief city of the nether regions. The thief stationed the king at the gate, and took the money and treasures to his own house. In the meantime a woman-servant came out of his house, and, seeing the king, began to say, 'Your majesty! what a

place you have come to with that miscreant! Well will it be if, ere he return, you fly hence as fast as you possibly can; otherwise he will kill you as soon as he arrives.' The king replied, 'But I do not know the road! In which direction should I go?' Then the servant showed him the road, and the king came to his palace."

"In fine, on the following day the king, with all his forces, went to the chief city of the nether regions by the road down the well, and surrounded the entire household of the thief; but the thief, escaping by some other road, went to the ruler of that city, who was a demon, and said, 'A king has led an attack against my house with the view to kill me; at this moment, either you must aid me, or I will give up dwelling in your city, and take my abode in some other place.' On hearing this, the demon said, graciously, 'You have supplied me with food; I am well pleased with you.' Having said this, the demon went where the king was with his army, surrounding the house, and began devouring the men and horses. And the king fled on beholding the form of the demon; and all such as were able to run away, escaped; and the rest the demon devoured."

"To be brief, the king was running off alone, when the thief came and cried out, 'Art thou, a Rajpūt, flying from the battle?' On the instant of hearing this, the king halted again, and the two confronted

one another, and began to fight. At length the king overcame him, and bound his hands behind his back, and brought him into the city. After that, having had him bathed and washed, and clothed in fine apparel, and mounted on a camel, he sent him all round the city, accompanied by a crier, and ordered the impaling stake to be erected for him. Whoever among the people of the city saw him said, 'This same thief has plundered the whole city, and the king will now impale him.' "

"When the thief arrived near the house of the merchant Dharmdhvaj, the merchant's daughter hearing the sound of the crier's drum, asked her handmaid, 'What is this proclamation about?' She replied, 'The king has brought captive the thief who used to commit robberies in the city. Now he will impale him.' On hearing this, she also came running (to the lattice) to see. No sooner did she behold the thief's comeliness and manly form than she became fascinated; and, coming to her father, said, 'Do you go to the king this moment, and return with that thief released.' The merchant said, 'How can it be expected that, at my request, the king will release the thief who has robbed his whole city, and on whose account his whole army has been destroyed?' She again urged, 'If you have to give up even all you possess for the king to release him, do you bring him away free; and should he not come, I too will sacrifice my life.' "

“On hearing this, the merchant went to the king, and said, ‘Your majesty! receive five lacs of rupees from me, and set the thief at liberty.’ The king said, ‘This thief robbed the whole city, and my whole army was swallowed up through him. I will not on any account let him go.’ When the king did not heed his request, he returned home in despair, and said to his daughter, ‘I said all that it was right to say, but the king did not consent.’”

“In the meantime, having had the thief taken round the city, they brought him to a stand-still near the impaling stake. Now, the thief having heard of the predicament of the merchant’s daughter, first laughed aloud, and then wept bitterly. The people the while pulled him down on the stake. And the merchant’s daughter, receiving intimation of his death, came to the same place to devote herself to death for his sake. She had a funeral pile constructed, and sitting thereon, had the thief taken off the stake, placed his head on her lap, and quietly seated herself to be burnt. She was on the point of having the torch put to it (the pile), when (a temple sacred to Devī happening to be on the spot) Devī instantly came out of her temple and said, ‘Daughter! I am pleased with thy courage; request a boon.’ She said, ‘Mother! if thou art pleased with me, restore this thief to life.’ Thereupon the goddess said, ‘Even so shall it be.’ Having said this, she brought nectar from the under-world, and restored the thief to life.”

Having told so much of the story, the sprite inquired, “Say, O king! why the thief first laughed, and why he afterwards wept?” The king said, “I know the reason why he laughed, and I know also why he wept. Attend, O sprite! The thief thought within himself,—‘Now that she is giving up all that she possesses to the king for my sake, what return can I make?’ He wept at the thought of this. Again, however, he reflected, ‘She loved me when I was about to die: the ways of God are altogether inscrutable; He bestows wealth on the unlucky, knowledge on one of low origin, a beautiful wife on a fool, and He causes rain to fall in showers on the mountains.’ Thinking of such things, he laughed.” On hearing this, the sprite went again and hung on to that tree. The king returned there, and unloosing him, made a bundle of him, placed him on his shoulder, and took him away.