

# **Markandeya Purana, Books VII, VIII**

Rev. B. Hale Wortham

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ART. XIII. *Translation of the Marka.n.deya Pura.na.*  
Books VII. VIII. By the Rev. B. HALE WORTHAM.

## BOOK VII.

ONCE upon earth there lived a saintly king  
Named Harischandra; pure in heart and mind,  
In virtue eminent, he ruled the world,  
Guarding mankind from evil. While he reigned  
No famine raged, nor pain; untimely death  
Ne'er cut men off; nor were the citizens  
Of his fair city lawless. All their wealth,  
And power, and works of righteousness, ne'er filled  
Their hearts with pride; in everlasting youth  
And loveliness the women passed their days.

It so fell out, that while this mighty king  
Was hunting in the forest, that he heard  
The sound of female voices raised in cry  
Of supplication. Then he turned and said,  
Leaving the deer to fly unheeded: Stop!  
Who art thou, full of tyranny and hate,  
That darest thus oppress the earth; while I,  
The tamer of all evil, live and rule?  
Then, too, the fierce Ganesa, he who blinds  
The eyes, and foils the wills of men, he heard  
The cry, and thus within himself he thought:  
This surely is the great ascetic's work,  
The mighty Visvamitra; he whose acts  
Display the fruits of penance hard and sore.

Upon the sciences he shows his power,  
While they, in patience, discipline of mind,  
And silence perfected, cry out with fear,  
'What shall we do? The illustrious Kausika  
Is powerful; and we, compared with him,  
Are feeble.' Thus they cry. What shall I do?  
My mind is filled with doubt. Yet stay; a thought  
Has come across me: Lo! this king who cries  
Unceasingly, 'Fear not!' meeting with him,  
And entering his heart, I will fulfil  
All my desire. Then filled with Rudra's son  
Inspired with rage by Vigna Raj the king  
Spake up and said: What evil doer is here,  
Binding the fire on his garment's hem,  
While I, his king, in power and arms renowned,  
Resplendent in my glory, pass for nought?  
Surely the never-ending sleep of death  
Shall overtake him, and his limbs shall fail,  
Smitten with darts from my far-reaching bow,  
Whose fame this lower world may scarce contain.  
Hearing the prince's words, the saint was filled  
With wrath o'erpow'ring, and the sciences  
Fell blasted in a moment at his glance.

But when the king beheld the pious sage  
All-powerful, he quaked exceedingly,  
And trembled like the sacred fig-tree's leaves.  
Then Visvamitra cried: Stop, miscreant!  
And Harischandra, humbly falling down  
Before the saint, in accents low and meek:  
O Lord! most holy! most adorable!  
Oh, blame me not! This is no fault of mine!  
My duty calls, he said, I must obey.  
Is it not written in the Holy Law,  
'Alms must be given by a virtuous king;  
His people must be fought for, and be kept  
From every ill'? Then Visvamitra spoke  
And said: To whom, O king, should'st thou give alms?  
For whom in battle should'st thou fight? and whom  
Should'st thou protect? Oh, tell me, nor delay,  
But quickly answer, if thou fearest sin.  
Alms should be given to Brahmans, said the king:  
Those who are weak should be protected: foes  
In battle should be met and overcome.

Then Visvamitra spoke and said: O king!  
If thus indeed thou rightly dost perceive

Thy royal duty, give thine alms to me;  
I am a holy Brahman, and I seek  
A dwelling-place; moreover I would gain  
A wife: therefore bestow on me thine alms.  
The king, his heart filled with exceeding joy,  
Felt, as it were, his youth return, and said:  
Fear not! but tell me, son of Kausika,  
Thy heart's desire; and be it hard to gain,  
Or be it easy, it shall still be thine.  
Say, shall I give thee gold, or wealth, or life?  
Or shall I give thee wife, or child, or land?  
Or my prosperity itself? O king!  
The sage replied, thy present I accept;  
But let thine alms, I pray, be granted first,  
The offering for the kingly sacrifice.  
O Brahman! said the king, the alms are thine;  
Further than this, whatever be the gift  
Thou mayest desire, freely I give it thee.  
Ask what thou wilt. Then Visvamitra spake:  
Give me the earth, its mountains, seas, and towns,  
With all its kingdoms, chariots, horses, men;  
Its elephants, its treasure-houses too;  
Its treasures vast, and all whate'er beside  
Is recognized as thine: oh! give me all,  
I pray, except thyself, thy wife, thy son,  
And this thy righteousness, that follows close  
Beside thee. Sinless one! oh thou who art  
Perfect in righteousness! oh give me all  
All beside these. What need of further words.

The king, with heart rejoicing, and unchanged  
In countenance, hearing the sage's words,  
Said, humbly bowing down before the saint,  
So be thy wish fulfilled. O saintly king,  
Said Visvamitra, if the world is mine,  
And power, and wealth, I pray you who shall reign,  
Since in this kingdom as a devotee  
I dwell? Then Harischandra said: 'Ere this,  
Before the world was thine by my free gift,  
Thou wast the lord of all; how much more now?  
Thy right is doubly sure. Then said the sage:  
If this indeed be so, if the whole world  
Be truly mine, and all its sovereignty,  
Then should'st thou not remain, nor leave thyself  
Aught of that kingdom which thou hast renounced,  
But, casting off thy royal ornaments,  
Thou should'st depart, clothed in a dress of bark.  
The king, obedient to the sage's word,  
Stripped off his royal dress, and, with his wife

And son, made haste to go. Then said the saint:  
Stop, Harischandra! Hast thou then forgot  
The offering for the kingly sacrifice  
That thou hast promised us? Replied the king:  
O mighty saint! the kingdom now is *\_thine*;  
All have I given to *\_thee*: and as for me,  
What have I left? nought! save myself,  
My wife, my son! Thou sayest the truth, indeed,  
Answered the sage; but yet there still remains  
The offering for the kingly sacrifice.  
And this know well: A vow to Brahmans made,  
If unfulfilled, works special woe to him  
Who made the vow. For in this sacrifice  
Must offerings of worth be freely made  
To Brahmans; offerings until they cry  
Hold! that suffices for us! Therefore pay  
Thy promised vow, nor longer hesitate.  
'Alms are for Brahmans,' thou thyself hast said,  
'Those who are weak must be protected: foes  
In battle must be met and overcome.'  
O saintly priest! answered the king, my wealth  
Is all departed: nothing now remains  
For me to give: yet grant me time I pray,  
And I will pay the offering! Noble king,  
Said Visvamitra, speak I pray thee! Say  
What time dost thou appoint that I should wait?  
Speak! no delay! or else my curse of fire  
Shall burn thee up. Then Harischandra said:  
Most holy Brahman! when a month has past  
The money for the offering shall be thine.  
Now I have nothing. Oh! be pleased to grant  
Remission for the present. Said the sage,  
Go! go! most noble prince! maintain thy faith!  
And may'st thou prosper! may no enemies  
Harass thy road. Commanded thus, the king  
Departed as an outcast; he, the king  
Of all the earth, an exile with his wife  
Unused to go afoot, and with his son  
Went forth: while cries and lamentations rose  
On every side: Our hearts are filled with pain,  
Why dost thou leave us thus? O virtuous king!  
Show mercy to thy subjects. Righteousness  
Indeed shines forth in thee; if thou art full  
Of mercy, may it overflow on us.  
Stay! Mighty Prince! one moment, while we gaze  
With lover's eyes upon thy beauteous form.  
Alas! our Prince! Shall we ne'er see thee more?  
How changed thy princely state! Thou, who did'st once  
Go forth, surrounded by attendant kings,  
Who marched on foot; while stately elephants  
Bore e'en thy ministers. Now, Lord of Kings!

Thyself art driven forth on foot. Yet, stay!  
Think, Harischandra! how wilt thou endure  
The dust, the heat, the toil? Stay, mighty prince,  
Nor cast thy duty off. Oh, show to us  
Some mercy, for herein thy duty lies.  
Behold, we cast off all for thee! Our wives,  
Our wealth, our children, our possessions, all  
Have we relinquished; like thy shadow,  
We would follow thee. Oh leave us not!  
For wheresoe'er thou art is happiness,  
And heaven itself would be no heaven to us  
Without our prince. Then, overwhelmed with grief  
At these laments, the king stayed on his course,  
In pity for his loving citizens.  
Then Visvamitra, filled with rage, his eyes  
Rolling with wrath, exclaimed: Shame on thee! shame!  
O full of falsehood, and of wickedness.  
How! would'st thou, then, speaker of lies!  
Resume the gifts that thou hast freely made,  
And reinstate thee in thy kingdom? Sir!  
I go! replied the king to these rude words,  
And trembling crept away in haste, his wife  
Holding him by the hand. And, as she went,  
Her fragile form o'ercome with weariness,  
The Brahman smote her fiercely with his stick.  
Then Harischandra, pained with inmost grief,  
Seeing the stroke, said meekly, Sir! I go!  
Nor further spoke. Filled with compassion then,  
The Visvadevas said: What sin is this?  
What torments shall indeed suffice for him  
By whom this pious king the offerer  
Of prayer, and sacrifice, has been cast forth.  
Who now will sanctify the Soma-juice  
With prayers and hymns, at the great sacrifice,  
That we may drink it with rejoicing hearts?

Then, having heard these words, the Brahman turned  
Upon the Visvedevas; and, in wrath  
Exceeding hot, he spake a fearful curse:  
You shall be cast down from the height of heaven,  
And live as men. The curse had hardly passed  
His lips, when filled with pity for their fate,  
The sage yet further added: you shall live  
Indeed as men, but yet, there shall be born  
To you no son, nor shall you know the state  
Of marriage. Envy, love, and wrath shall ne'er  
Hold sway o'er you: and when the appointed time  
Has past, you shall re-enter once again  
The courts of heaven, and wear again the form

Which you had lost. The Visvedevas then  
Came down from heaven, and, clothed in human form,  
Were born as men, the sons of Pritha, wife  
Of Pa.n.du. Therefore those five Pa.n.davas  
Mighty in war by Visvamitra cursed,  
Knew not the state of marriage. Thou hast heard  
The tale of Pa.n.du's sons; thy question, too,  
Of fourfold import has been answered.  
I pray thee, say, what further would'st thou hear?

## BOOK VIII.

Said Jaimini: An answer ye have found  
To all my questions; and indeed have filled  
Me full of deepest interest. Oh! I long  
To hear yet more! Alas! that saintly king!  
What grief he suffered! Did he e'er attain  
To any comfort answering to his woe?  
Noblest of Birds! Oh tell me this, I pray.

The Holy Birds continued: Then the king,  
O'ercome with grief and pain, hearing the words  
Of Visvamitra, with his wife and son  
Journeyed along, dragging his weary steps.  
At length the holy place appeared in view  
The shrine of Siva; thus within himself,  
He said: Benares, sacred to the god,  
Lies now before me; there shall I find rest,  
For there man has no power. The king approached  
The gates on foot: lo! at the entry stood  
The Brahman Visvamitra. Mighty Saint!  
The king, his hands in supplication joined,  
With humble reverence, said: Here is my life,  
My wife, my son, I offer all to thee;  
Accept, I pray, the offering! or choose  
Whatever else thou wouldest! But the sage  
Replied: The month is past! most saintly king!

Give me the present for the sacrifice  
The offering thou hast promised. One half-day  
As yet remains before the month be past,  
Oh Brahman of surpassing piety,  
And penances unfading. Wait, I pray,  
A few short hours. Then Visvamitra said:  
So be it, king! once more I will return,  
But if the offering be not duly paid,  
Before the sinking of this evening's sun,  
My curse shall smite thee. And the priest  
Departed, while the king, in anxious thought,  
Debated thus: How shall I make the gift?  
The promised gift? where are my friends? my wealth?  
I may not beg for alms; how can I then  
Fulfil my vow? Nor even in the world  
Beyond shall I find rest. Destruction waits,  
If with my promise unfulfilled, I pass  
From hence. A robber of the holy saints;  
I shall become the lowest of the low.  
Nay, I will sell myself! and, as a slave,  
Redeem my promise. Then the queen, in tears  
Bewildered, and afflicted, lost in thought,  
With face cast down, Maintain thy truth, she said,  
Most mighty prince! Oh! let not doubt prevail!  
The man devoid of truth is to be shunned  
Like contact with the dead. The highest law  
Declares, that inward truth and faithfulness  
Must be maintained. Burnt sacrifices, alms,  
The study of the scriptures, penances,  
Are counted not for righteousness to him  
Whose word is faithless. Listen! noble prince!  
Is it not written in the sacred law:  
'The wise attain Salvation through the truth,  
While lies and falsehood are destruction's way  
To men of low and evil minds.' There lived,  
'Tis said, a king upon the earth, by whom  
The kingly sacrifice burnt offerings too,  
Were offered in abundance. That same king  
Fell once from truthfulness, and by that fall,  
He lost his righteousness, and forfeited  
His place in heaven. Prince! I have borne a son  
Her utterance failed her, issuing forth in nought  
But sighs and lamentations. Then the king,  
With eyes o'erflowing, said, Behold thy son!  
He stands beside thee! cast away thy grief!  
Tell me what presses on thee. Said the queen,  
Prince, I have borne a son; and sons are born  
To none but worthy women. This my son  
Shall take me he shall offer me for sale  
Then with the money gained, pay thou the priest  
The promised offering. Hearing these words,

He fell down fainting. When his sense returned,  
Filled with exceeding pain, the king burst forth,  
Lamenting: This, alas! most loving one!  
Is hardly to be framed in words, much less  
Be carried out in deed. Alas! alas!  
His spirit fled again, and to the earth  
He fell unconscious. Overcome with grief,  
The queen exclaimed, filled with compassion: King!  
How art thou fallen from thy high estate!  
The ground is now thy resting-place, whom once  
A gorgeous couch received. Lo! this my lord,  
By whom wealth, honour, power, are freely given  
An offering to the Brahman see, he lies  
Insensate on the ground. Ye gods of heaven!  
Tell me, I pray you, has this noble king,  
Equal to gods in rank, committed sin  
Against you, that he lies thus overcome  
With woe? Then fell the queen, bereft of sense  
Upon the earth, o'erwhelmed with grief and pain,  
Seeing her husband's misery. When the boy  
Beheld his parents lying on the ground,  
He cried in terror: Father! give me food!  
Mother! my tongue is parched with thirst! Meanwhile  
Upon the scene the mighty Brahman came;  
And when he saw the king lie senseless, King!  
Sprinkling cold water on his face he said,  
Rise up! rise up! Pay me the promised vow;  
For this thy misery from day to day  
Increases, and will yet increase, until  
The debt be paid. The water's cooling touch  
Refreshed the king; his consciousness returned;  
But when he saw the Brahman, faintness seized  
His limbs again. Then overpowering rage  
Seized Visvamitra; but before he left,  
The best of Brahmans said: If what is just,  
Or right, or true, enters thy mind, O king!  
Give me the present. Lo! by truth divine  
The sun sends forth his vivifying rays  
Upon the earth. By truth this mighty world  
Stands firm and steadfast. Truth all law excels.  
By truth the very heaven itself exists.  
Wert thou to weigh the truth, and in the scale  
Opposing, wert to place burnt-offerings,  
And sacrifices countless, still the truth  
Would far outweigh them all. Why need I waste  
My words of loving-kindness upon thee  
An ill-intentioned, false, ignoble man.  
Thou art a king, so should the truth prevail  
With thee. Yet hear me; if the offering  
Be still unpaid when th' evening's sun has sunk  
Behind the western mountain to his rest,

My curse shall smite thee. Speaking words like these  
 The Brahman left him; and the king, o'ercome  
 With fear a fugitive robbed of his wealth  
 Degraded to unfathomable depths  
 The victim of his evil creditor  
 Heard once again the counsel of his wife:  
 O king! sell *me*! nor let the fiery curse  
 Dissolve thy being! Urged repeatedly,  
 The king at length replied: Most loving one!  
 What the most wicked man could hardly do,  
 That same will I: and I will sell my wife.  
 Alas! that I should utter such a word!  
 And going with his wife into the town  
 Eyes dimmed with tears, voice choked with grief he cried:  
 Come hither, townsmen! hearken unto me!  
 A wretch! inhuman! savage as a fiend!  
 I offer here my wife for sale, and yet  
 I live! Here is a female slave! Who buys?  
 Make haste and speak. The female slave is mine!  
 (So spake an ancient Brahman to the king.)  
 Money I have in heaps, and I will pay  
 You well for her. My wife is delicate;  
 Her household duties are beyond her strength;  
 I want a slave, and therefore I will give  
 A price proportioned to the woman's skill  
 And temper; nor will I o'erlook her youth  
 And beauty. What you think is fair and right,  
 That will I pay. Struck dumb with grief, the king  
 Stood mute, nor answered aught. And then the priest,  
 Tying the price in the king's garment—hem  
 His bark—cloth garment roughly grasped the queen,  
 And dragged her off. But when the loving child  
 Beheld his mother led away, he seized  
 Her by her garment. And the queen exclaimed:  
 If only for a moment, noble sir!  
 Oh! let me go! that I may gaze once more  
 Upon my child, whom I shall never see,  
 And never touch again! My child, behold  
 Thy mother, now a slave! And thou a prince!  
 Oh, touch me not! My lot of servitude  
 Forbids that thou should'st touch me. But the child,  
 His eyes bedewed with tears, ran after her,  
 Calling her Mother! As the boy came near,  
 The Brahman spurned him with his foot; but he  
 Still following close would not be torn from her,  
 Calling her Mother! Oh, my lord! I pray,  
 Be gracious to me! said the queen. Oh, buy  
 My son with me; divide us not! For I  
 Without him shall be nought of use to you.  
 Be gracious, O my lord! Then said the priest:  
 Here! take the money! give the boy to me!

The saints, who know the scriptures, have ordained  
 The right and lawful sum. Take it! He tied  
 The money in the king's bark dress, and led  
 Them both away the mother and the child  
 Together bound. But when the king beheld  
 Himself bereft of both his wife and son,  
 He burst forth: Ah! my wife! whom neither sun,  
 Nor moon, nor air have ever seen I who hast  
 Been kept from vulgar gaze! Alas I a slave  
 Hast thou become! Alas! thou, too, my son!  
 A scion of the noble dynasty,  
 Sprung from the sun! disgrace has seized on thee,  
 And shame upon me! thou too art a slave!  
 Ye have become a sacrifice; ye, through my fault,  
 Have fallen. Would that I were dead! Thus spoke  
 The king. Meanwhile the Brahman hastily  
 Entered the grove wherein his dwelling stood,  
 And vanished with his slaves. Then met the king  
 The Brahman Visvamitra. Prince! he said,  
 Pay me the offering! Harischandra gave  
 The money gained by the shameful sale  
 Of wife and child. And when the priest beheld  
 The money, overcome with wrath, he said:  
 How canst thou mock me with this paltry sum!  
 Base Kshatriya! And thinkest thou that this  
 Suffices for a sacrificial gift  
 Such as I would accept? But if thy mind  
 Thus far misleads thee, thou shalt feel my power  
 Power transcendant, gained by penances,  
 And scripture meditation. Yes! the power  
 Of my pure Brahmanhood shall show itself  
 On thee. More will I give thee, said the king,  
 But wait, most noble saint! Nought have I left!  
 Even my wife and child are sold. Replied  
 The Brahman: Hold! be silent! Further time  
 Than the remaining fourth part of to-day  
 I grant thee not. Enraged, he turned away,  
 Departing with the money. And the king,  
 Immersed in grief and fear, with face cast down,  
 Cried out: If there be any one of you  
 Who wants a slave, let him make haste and speak  
 While day remains. Then Dharma, putting on  
 The form of a Chanda, hastily  
 Came forward, taking pity on the king.  
 His countenance was fearful, black, with tusks  
 Projecting; savage in his words; his smell  
 Was foul and horrible; a crowd of dogs  
 Came after him. Tell me thy price, he said;  
 Be quick; and whether it be large or small  
 I care not, so I have thee as my slave."  
 The king, beholding such a loathsome form,

Of mien revolting What art thou? he said.  
 Men call me a Cha.n.dala, he replied.  
 I dwell in this same city in a part  
 Of evil fame. As of a murderer  
 Condemned to death, such is my infamy.  
 My calling is a robber of the dead.  
 I will not be a slave, exclaimed the king,  
 To thee, a base Cha.n.dala. Better far  
 That I should perish by the fiery curse.  
 The words were scarcely uttered, when the saint  
 Returned, his countenance with rage  
 Distorted; and he thus addressed the king:  
 The sum is fair; why dost thou not accept  
 The offer? Then indeed thou mightest pay  
 The gift thou owest for the sacrifice.  
 O son of Kusika! replied the king,  
 Consider this, I pray! my noble race!  
 Truly am I descended from the sun!  
 How can I then become, though sore in want,  
 Lowest of creatures a Cha.n.dala's slave?  
 Delay no more, the Brahman said, but pay  
 The gift at once, and sell thyself a slave  
 To the Cha.n.dala or assuredly  
 I curse thee. Sainly priest, be merciful!  
 The king entreated; and, immersed in care,  
 He seized the Brahman's feet, exclaiming thus:  
 What am I but a slave, o'erwhelmed with grief!  
 Fear holds me! Sainly priest, be merciful!  
 Protect me, mighty saint! Save me, I pray,  
 From this most horrible Cha.n.dala. Sir!  
 Most noble saint! hereafter shall thy will  
 Be all the object of my life! To serve  
 Thy lightest wish shall be my highest joy!  
 Thus will I make the offering I will be  
 Thy *slave*! Replied the Brahman: If thou art  
 My slave, then will I sell thee as a slave  
 To the Cha.n.dala. Then, filled with delight,  
 Paying the money, the Svapaka bound  
 His lately-purchased slave, and striking him,  
 Led him away. Parted from all his friends;  
 In utmost grief; in the Cha.n.dala's house  
 Abiding morning, noon, and eventide,  
 And night, the king thus made lament:  
 Alas! my tender wife, overwhelmed with pain,  
 Looking upon her son in misery,  
 Bewails her lot. But yet she says: 'The king  
 Will surely ransom us, for he has gained  
 By now more money than the Brahman paid  
 For us;' and all the time she little knows  
 My fate worse than her own. For I have passed  
 From woe to woe kingdom and friends my wife,

My son, have passed from me, and now the state  
 Of a Cha.n.dala holds me. While he dwelt  
 A slave in the Cha.n.dala's house, the forms  
 Of those he loved were still before his eyes  
 Were ever in his mind. Meanwhile the king,  
 Obedient to his master's will, became  
 A robber of the dead; and night and day  
 He watched for plunder. One part of the spoil  
 Is for the king, three for thy master, two  
 For thee. Go to the city's southern part,  
 Where is the dwelling of the dead, there wait.  
 Obeying the Cha.n.dala, to the place  
 Of burial he went; an awful place,  
 Filled full of fearful sounds and loathsome sights  
 Of evil smells, and smoke, and locks of hair  
 Fallen from the dead; while troops of fiends and ghouls,  
 Vampires and demons, wandered to and fro.  
 Vultures and jackals prowled, and spirit forms'  
 Of evil hovered o'er. The ground was strewn  
 With heaps of bones; and wailing, sharp and shrill,  
 Re-echoed from the mourners of the dead.  
 The bodies on the funeral piles, half burnt,  
 Crackled and hissed; showing their shining teeth,  
 They grinned, as if in sport; while all the time  
 The howl of demons and the wail of fiends  
 Were mingled with the roar of flames a sound  
 Of fearful import, such as ushers in  
 The day of doom. The sights, and sounds, and smells  
 The heaps of ashes, and the piles of bones,  
 Blackened with filth the smoke, the shouts,  
 The yells struck fear on fear into the heart.  
 The burial-place resembled nought but hell.  
 Such was the place appointed for the king.  
 Priests! Brahmans! Counsellors! how have I fallen  
 From all my royal state! Alas! my queen!  
 Alas! my son! Oh! miserable fate!  
 We have been torn asunder by the power  
 Of Visvamitra. Thoughts like these possessed  
 His inmost mind; while foul, unshorn, unwashed,  
 He served his master. Running here and there,  
 Armed with a jagged club, he sought the dead,  
 From whom he gained his wages. So he lived,  
 Degraded from his caste. Old knotted rags  
 Served as his dress; his face and arms and feet  
 With dust and ashes from the funeral piles  
 Begrimed; his hands defiled with putrid flesh  
 From contact with the bodies of the dead.  
 So neither day nor night he ceased from toil.  
 And twelve months passed twelve weary months, which seemed  
 To his grief-stricken mind a hundred years;  
 And then at last, worn out, the best of kings

Lay down to rest; and as upon his couch  
All motionless in sleep he lay, he saw  
A wondrous vision. By the power divine  
He seemed to wear another form, a form  
Both new and strange, and in that form to pay  
The vow. Twelve years of expiation passed  
With difficulty. Then within himself  
King Harischandra thought: So too will I,  
When I am freed from hence, perform my vows  
With generous freedom. Forthwith he was born  
As a Pukkasa; while a place was found  
For him among the dead, and funeral rites  
Were ordered as his task. Thus seven years  
Were passed; then to the burying-place was brought  
A Brahman seeking sepulture: in life  
He had been poor, but honest; and the king,  
Though he knew this the dead man's poverty  
And his uprightness pressed his friends to pay  
The funeral dues. Enforce thy right, they said,  
And do this evil deed; yet know thou this:  
Once upon earth there was a mighty king  
Named Harischandra; though he but disturbed  
A Brahman's sleep, through that offence he lost  
His merit, and by Visvamitra's curse  
Became a base Pukkasa. Yet the king  
Spared not the dead man's friends, but still required  
His fee. Therefore they cursed him in their rage  
Go! go! thou most degraded of mankind  
Go to the lowest hell! Then in his dream  
The king beheld the messengers of death.  
Fearful to look at, armed with heavy chains,  
They seized him, and they bound him hand and foot,  
And bore him off. And then, in fear and pain,  
Headlong he fell into the bath of oil  
In Naraka. There, torn with instruments  
Sharp-edged as razors, fed on putrid blood,  
He saw himself. For seven years in hell  
Now burnt from day to day, now tossed and torn,  
Now cut by knives, and now by icy winds  
Frozen and numbed a dead Pukkasa's fate  
He underwent. Each day in Naraka,  
A hundred years of mortal reckoning  
So count the demons who inhabit hell.  
Then he beheld himself cast up to earth,  
His spirit entering a filthy dog;  
Feeding on things all foul and horrible  
Consumed by cold. A month thus passed away.  
His spirit changed its dwelling, and he saw  
Himself an ass; and after that an ox,  
A cow, a goat, a sheep, a bird, a worm.  
So day by day he saw his spirit change

Its outward shape. A multitude of forms  
Some moving, others rooted to the ground  
Received his soul. And when the hundred years  
Were passed and gone, he saw himself again  
Re-occupy his pristine human form  
Once more a king. And then he seemed to lose  
His kingdom, casting it away in games  
Of chance. Turned from his home a wanderer  
Into the forest with his wife and child:  
Devoured by a ravening beast, but raised  
To life again on earth, he sore bewailed  
His wife: Alas! why hast thou left me thus?  
Alas! O Saivya! where hast thou gone?  
Then in his dream he seemed to see his wife  
And son lamenting: What hast thou to do  
With gambling? Oh protect us, mighty king!  
The vision faded, and he saw no more  
The cherished forms. And then the dream returned  
By power divine. And Harischandra stood  
In heaven, and he beheld his wife on earth,  
With flowing hair, dragged forcibly along  
Stripped of her clothes: the cry came to his ear,  
Protect us, king of men! Then, snatched away,  
The demons hurried him before the judge;  
And Harischandra seemed to hear the words:  
Go forth! return once more to earth! Thy grief  
Is well nigh past and ended; joy ere long  
Shall come to thee. The sorrows that remain  
Endure. The king, then driven from the sky  
By Yama's messengers, falling through space  
Senseless in fear and terror, filled with pain  
Yet more exceeding thought within himself,  
How shall I suffer all these torments sore!  
The changes manifold of form the pain  
In Naraka. Then Harischandra sought  
Aid from the gods: O mighty lords, he said,  
Protect me! O protect my wife and child!  
O mighty Dharma, thee I worship! Thee,  
O Krish.na, the Creator! Faultless ones,  
Both far and near, before you now I come,  
A suppliant. On thee, O lord of prayer,  
I call! on thee, O Indra too! to thee  
O ancient one! I pray immutable!  
The vision fled, the king arose from sleep.  
His tangled hair, his body black and grimed,  
Recalled to him his state the plunderer  
Of dead men's clothes. His recollection gone,  
He thought not of his sorrowing wife and child,  
For reason failed. The loss of kingdom, wealth,  
And friends, his dwelling—place among the tombs,  
Had overthrown his senses, and destroyed

His mind. Then to the burying-place the queen  
Came, bearing the dead body of her son  
Pale and distracted. My beloved son!  
My child! she kept exclaiming, while she threw  
Dust on her head. Alas! alas! O king!  
O that thou could'st behold thy child, she said  
Thy child now lying dead upon the earth,  
Killed by a serpent's bite. Alas! my son!  
So lovely! so delightful! Then the king,  
Rearing the sounds of mourning, went in haste  
To rob the dead: nor did he recognize  
His wife, in that sad mourner, changed by grief  
As if into another. And the queen  
Knew not the form that stood before her, clothed  
In rags, with matted hair, withered and foul.  
Then recollection dawned upon the king,  
Seeing the dead child's princely form, the thought  
Of his own son came o'er him. Ah! my child!  
What evil chance, he said, has brought thee here!  
A child of princely race thou seemest. He, my son,  
Long lost to me through my accursed fate,  
Would have been even such as thou in age.  
Then raised the queen her voice, and thus she spoke:  
Alas! has some unexpiated crime  
Brought upon us, my child! this endless woe.  
My absent lord! since thou did'st not console  
My grief in times gone by, how can the pain  
I suffer now assuage? Did'st thou not lose  
Thy kingdom? did'st thou not desert thy friends?  
Did'st thou not sell thy wife and child? The king  
Heard her lament, and as he heard, the wail  
Fell from his eyes, he recognized again  
His wife and son and saying but the words,  
Ah! Saivya! Ah! my beloved child!  
He fainting fell to earth. Then, too, the queen,  
Hearing her husband's voice, o'ercome with grief,  
Insensate fell. Returning consciousness  
Brought to them both affliction's heaviest weight  
And mutual lamentations. Ah! my son!  
Thus mourned the king, my inmost heart is torn,  
When I behold thy form so delicate:  
My child! embracing thee in tend'rest love,  
Words of affection I will speak, that rise  
Unbidden to my lips. Alas! thy limbs  
Will be defiled by my embrace; the dust  
That clings about my garments will pollute  
Thy lovely form! Alas! my child, thou had'st  
An evil father! He who should have kept  
All dangers from thee, he it was who sold  
Thee as a slave! and yet in heart and mind  
First of all things I love thee. Ah! my child!

Thy father's realm my heaped-up wealth all this  
 By lawful right was thine inheritance,  
 And now thou liest slain! Ah me! the tears  
 Rise to my eyes in blinding force: thy form,  
 In grace and beauty like the lotus flower,  
 Fades from my sight. He spoke, and faltering  
 With grief embraced his son. The queen exclaimed:  
 This is indeed my lord I know his voice!  
 I know his form! this is the mighty king.  
 The wisest of all beings. But how changed!  
 What fate is this? Ah what a dreadful place  
 For him, the lord of men. This grief yet more  
 Is added to the mourning for my son  
 My husband's fate for as a slave he serves  
 A base Cha.n.dala. Cursed be that god,  
 Or demon foul, through whom a godlike king  
 Has fallen to this degraded state; the lot  
 Of a Svapaka. Ah! most noble prince,  
 My mind is filled with grief, when I recall  
 Thy regal state, thy past magnificence.  
 No kingly ensigns go before thee now,  
 No captive kings, brought down to slavery,  
 Humbly precede thee, casting in the way  
 Their garments, lest the dust should soil thy feet.  
 But now! O king! alas, thyself a slave,  
 Thou livest in this fearful place, begrimed  
 With filth; thy sacred cord concealed, thy hair  
 Tangled and long, plunder of dead men's clothes  
 Thy livelihood. Ah! king! and is thy life  
 Spent in this awful wise? So spake the queen,  
 And falling on his neck, embraced her lord:  
 While she, sprung from a king herself, bewailed  
 Her sorrows endless. King! I pray thee speak!  
 Is this a dream? If it be real and true,  
 Then justice, truth, and righteousness have fled  
 And gone from earth: nor aught avails mankind,  
 Of sacrifice, or reverence, to gods  
 Or priests! 'Tis vain to follow innocence  
 If thou, most perfect, purest of mankind,  
 Art brought to such a depth of infamy.  
 Then spoke the king, and told his sorrowing wife  
 How he had fallen to this wretched state,  
 The state of a Cha.n.dala. She, in turn,  
 Weeping, with many sighs, poured out her tale,  
 Telling him how the serpent's bite had killed  
 Their child. Beloved one! I suffer not  
 These evils, said the king, by mine own will  
 Thou seest what I endure; my evil fate  
 Depends not on myself. I am a slave,  
 And if I fly from the Cha.n.dala's bonds,  
 The fiery torment in the depths of hell

Will overtake me, and I shall become  
A slave again. My doom is fixed! lo! hell  
Is my abode hereafter; and in forms,  
Creeping and loathsome, shall my soul abide.  
Yet from this miserable life on earth  
There is one only refuge. He! my son!  
My hope! my stay! is dead; drowned by the sea  
Of my misfortunes. But I am a slave!  
I am dependent on another's will!  
Can I give up my wife? Yes! even so!  
For know thou this: one who is steeped in woe  
Cares not for evil chances; not the state  
Of the most loathsome beast, nor yet the wood  
Of sword-leaved plants, nor even hell's dread stream,  
Could add the smallest fraction to the pain  
I have already borne. My son is dead!  
Who then will make atonement for my sins?  
Yet listen to my words, beloved one,  
If I have offered sacrifice, and paid  
Due reverence to the saints; if I have given  
Alms to the needy may we meet again  
Hereafter, in the world to come, and find  
The refuge for our woes denied us here.  
Let us together follow in the path  
By which our son has gone. Our hopeless fate  
Can never alter here. Whatever words  
I may have uttered, thoughtlessly, in jest,  
These, when I pray for pardon, shall receive  
Fullest forgiveness. Thou must not despise  
Thy lord: nor pride thee on thy queenly state  
Now passed and gone. The prince's wife replied:  
I am prepared to tread that path with thee,  
O king, most saintly! and with thee that world  
To enter. While she spoke these words, the king  
Made up the funeral pile, and placed thereon  
His son, himself ascending with his wife.  
And then, in meditation wrapt, he thought  
Upon Narayana, the lord supreme,  
And Vasudeva, lord of deities,  
Siva, and Brahma the eternal god,  
And Krish.na clothed in glory. As the king  
Was meditating, all the gods from heaven  
Came down headed by Dharma. And they said:  
Hear us, O king! hear us, O lord! The gods  
Even the mighty gods have come to earth,  
And at their head is Dharma. Gods, and saints,  
And heroes yea, and Visvamisra too,  
The sage implacable, all summon thee  
Ascend! to heaven: receive the due reward,  
That thou hast gained. O king! slay not thyself!  
I, perfect Righteousness, I summon thee

To enter now the heaven that thou hast gained  
By thy transcendant virtues, self-control,  
Patience, and truth. Then Indra spoke, and said:  
O Harischandra! King, most eminent!  
In virtue! lo! before you Indra stands  
For I am he. The everlasting world  
Thou hast attained: together with thy wife,  
And son, ascend to heaven; to that third heav'n  
So difficult to be attained by men  
The heav'n that thou hast won. Then Indra rained  
Life-giving am.rit from the sky, and flowers  
That blossomed in the heavenly courts: while sounds  
Of music filled the air, and round him stood  
The gods, a vast assembly. Then the son  
Of Harischandra rose, restored to life,  
And health, his mind and senses whole, his form  
More beautiful than ever: and the king  
Embraced his wife and son, with perfect joy  
Filled to o'erflowing, crowned with heavenly wreaths.  
Then Indra said: Thou, with thy wife, and son,  
Shalt dwell in bliss supreme: bliss that thyself  
Hast purchased, by thy virtues and thy toils.  
Then spoke the king: Hear me! most holy gods!  
Unbidden by my master, will I not  
To heaven itself ascend. Then Dharma spoke:  
I am thy master. I assumed the form  
Of a Cha.n.dala. All thy pain and woe  
Was brought upon thee by my magic power,  
And thou wast made a slave! I have beheld  
Thy truth, and thy uprightness. Sainly king!  
The highest place that heaven accords to men,  
Whose virtue has been tried and proved: to that  
Ascend! But Harischandra answering, said:  
Receive, most mighty lord! my words of praise  
And thanksgiving. I offer them to thee  
Full of affection. Lo! my people stand  
With grieving hearts, longing for my return.  
Can I ascend to heav'n while they on earth  
Lament for me? If they have ever slain,  
Brahmans, or teachers of the holy law,  
If lust or avarice have ruled their hearts,  
Then may my labours and my toils atone,  
For these their sins. I may not leave my friends.  
For neither here, nor in the world to come,  
Can there be peace to one who casts aside  
The friend whose love is pure and true the friend  
Who serves him from the heart. Return!  
Return! to heaven! O Indra! If thou grant  
My friends to rise with me, to heav'n will I  
Ascend; if not, with them will I descend  
To Naraka. O king! thy prayer is heard!

Thy people's sins are pardoned: even for them,  
Hard though it be, thy toils and pains have gained  
A place in heaven. Thus mighty Indra spoke.  
Replied the king: Indra! I will not leave  
My kinsmen. By his kinsmen's help a king  
His kingdom rules; by them he offers up  
The kingly sacrifice, and for himself  
Lays up a store of meritorious deeds.  
So have my kinsmen too enabled me  
To work whate'er I may of righteousness.  
My actions virtuous, my granted prayers,  
Truly I owe to them, for by their aid  
Have these been possible. May the reward  
Thou grantest me, I pray, be shared with them.  
My kinsmen, though I should ascend to heaven,  
I will not leave. So be it! Indra said;  
So be it! said the Brahman; Dharma, too,  
Gave his assent; and then, in countless hosts,  
Appeared the heavenly chariots. Indra said:  
Men of Ayodhya, ascend to heaven.  
The saintly Brahman, having heard with joy  
The words of Indra, poured the sacred oil  
Upon the prince, and with the perfect ones,  
The sages, and the gods, anointed him  
Son of the mighty king. Then all the throng  
The king, his wife, his son, his followers  
Filled with rejoicing and delight, ascend  
To heaven, surrounding, as they go, the king  
Borne in his chariot. He, too, filled with joy  
The mighty father, who eternal bliss  
Both for his people and himself had gained,  
Once more in form and mien a king reposed,  
Resting from all his toils, his faithful friends  
Surrounding him with a protecting wall.  
And Indra spoke and said: Upon this earth  
Great Harischandra's equal has not been  
Nor shall be. Whosoe'er may hear his life,  
His toils, his sorrows, and in sympathy  
For him lament, transcendant happiness  
Shall he attain, and all his heart's desire  
Shall be accomplished. Is his prayer a wife,  
Or son, or kingdom, he shall gain them all,  
E'en heaven itself. And he who imitates  
The truth, and steadfastness, of that great king,  
Like him shall enter everlasting rest.