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[The Little Clay Cart, by Shudraka, tr. Arthur William Ryder, \[1905\], at sacred-texts.com](#)

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INTRODUCTION

I. THE AUTHOR AND THE PLAY

CONCERNING the life, the date, and the very identity 1 of King Shūdraka, the reputed author of The Little Clay Cart, we are curiously ignorant. No other work is ascribed to him, and we have no direct information about him, beyond the somewhat fanciful statements of the Prologue to this play. There are, to be sure, many tales which cluster about the name of King Shūdraka, but none of them represents him as an author. Yet our very lack of information may prove, to some extent at least, a disguised blessing. For our ignorance of external fact compels a closer study of the text, if we would find out what manner of man it was who wrote the play. And the case of King Shūdraka is by no means unique in India; in regard to every great Sanskrit writer,—so bare is Sanskrit literature of biography,—we are forced to concentrate attention on the man as he reveals himself in his works. First, however, it may be worth while to compare Shūdraka with two other great dramatists of India, and thus to discover, if we may, in what ways he excels them or is excelled by them.

Kālidāsa, Shūdraka, Bhavabhūti—assuredly, these are the greatest names in the history of the Indian drama. So different are these men, and so great, that it is not possible to assert for any one of them such supremacy as Shakspeare holds in the English drama. It is true that Kālidāsa's dramatic masterpiece, the Shakuntalā, is the most widely known of the Indian plays. It is true that the tender and elegant Kālidāsa has been called, with a not wholly fortunate

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enthusiasm, the "Shakspere of India." But this rather exclusive admiration of the Shakuntalā results from lack of information about the other great Indian dramas. Indeed, it is partly due to the accident that only the Shakuntalā became known in translation at a time when romantic Europe was in full sympathy with the literature of India.

Bhavabhūti, too, is far less widely known than Kālidāsa; and for this the reason is deeper-seated. The austerity of Bhavabhūti's style, his lack of humor, his insistent grandeur, are qualities which prevent his being a truly popular poet. With reference to Kālidāsa, he holds a position such as Aeschylus holds with reference to Euripides. He will always seem to minds that sympathize with his grandeur 1 the greatest of Indian poets; while by other equally discerning minds of another order he will be admired, but not passionately loved.

Yet however great the difference between Kālidāsa, "the grace of poetry," 2 and Bhavabhūti, "the master of eloquence," 3 these two authors are far more intimately allied in spirit than is either of them with the author of The Little Clay Cart. Kālidāsa and Bhavabhūti are Hindus of the Hindus; the Shakuntalā and the Latter Acts of Rāma could have been written nowhere save in India: but Shūdraka, alone in the long line of Indian dramatists, has a cosmopolitan character. Shakuntalā is a Hindu maid, Mādhava is a Hindu hero; but Sansthānaka and Maitreya and Madanikā are citizens of the world. In some of the more striking characteristics of Sanskrit literature—in its fondness for system, its elaboration of style, its love of epigram—Kālidāsa and Bhavabhūti are far truer

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to their native land than is Shūdraka. In Shūdraka we find few of those splendid phrases in which, as the Chinese 1 say, it is only the words which stop, the sense goes on,"—phrases like Kālidāsa's 2 "there are doors of the inevitable everywhere," or Bhavabhūti's 3 "for causeless love there is no remedy." As regards the predominance of swift-moving action over the poetical expression of great truths, The Little Clay Cart stands related to the Latter Acts of Rāma as Macbeth does to Hamlet. Again, Shūdraka's style is simple and direct, a rare quality in a Hindu; and although this style, in the passages of higher emotion, is of an exquisite simplicity, yet Shūdraka cannot infuse into mere language the charm which we find in Kālidāsa or the majesty which we find in Bhavabhūti.

Yet Shūdraka's limitations in regard to stylistic power are not without their compensation. For love of style slowly strangled originality and enterprise in Indian poets, and ultimately proved the death of Sanskrit literature. Now just at this point, where other Hindu writers are weak, Shūdraka stands forth preëminent. Nowhere else in the hundreds of Sanskrit dramas do we find such variety, and such drawing of character, as in The Little Clay Cart; and nowhere else, in the drama at least, is there such humor. Let us consider, a little more in detail, these three characteristics of our author; his variety, his skill in the drawing of character, his humor.

To gain a rough idea of Shūdraka's variety, we have only to recall the names of the acts of the play. Here The Shampooer who Gambled and The Hole in the Wall are shortly followed by The Storm; and The Swapping of the Bullock-carts is closely succeeded by The Strangling of Vasantasenā. From farce to tragedy, from

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satire to pathos, runs the story, with a breadth truly Shaksperian. Here we have philosophy:

The lack of money is the root of all evil. (i. 14)

And pathos:

*My body wet by tear-drops falling, falling;
My limbs polluted by the clinging mud;
Flowers from the graveyard torn, my wreath appalling;
For ghastly sacrifice hoarse ravens calling,
And for the fragrant incense of my blood. (x. 3)*

And nature description:

But mistress, do not scold the lightning. She is your friend,

*This golden cord that trembles on the breast
Of great Airāvata; upon the crest
Of rocky hills this banner all ablaze;
This lamp in Indra's palace; but most blest
As telling where your most beloved stays. (v. 33)*

And genuine bitterness:

*Pride and tricks and lies and fraud
Are in your face;
False playground of the lustful god,
Such is your face;
The wench's stock in trade, in fine,
Epitome of joys divine,
I mean your face
For sale! the price is courtesy.
I trust you'll find a man to buy
Your face. (v. 36)*

It is natural that Shūdraka should choose for the expression of matters so diverse that type of drama which gives the greatest scope to the author's creative power. This type is the so-called

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"drama of invention," ¹ a category curiously subordinated in India to the heroic drama, the plot of which is drawn from history or mythology. Indeed, The Little Clay Cart is the only extant drama which fulfils the spirit of the drama of invention, as defined by the Sanskrit canons of dramaturgy. The plot of the "Mālatī and Mādhava," or of the "Mallikā and Māruta," is in no true sense the invention of the author; and The Little Clay Cart is the only drama of invention which is "full of rascals." ²

But a spirit so powerful as that of King Shūdraka could not be confined within the strait jacket of the minute, and sometimes puerile, rules of the technical works. In the very title of the drama, he has disregarded the rule 3 that the name of a drama of invention should be formed by compounding the names of heroine and hero. 4 Again, the books prescribe 5 that the hero shall appear in every act; yet Chārudatta does not appear in acts ii., iv., vi., and viii. And further, various characters, Vasantasenā, Maitreya, the courtier, and others, have vastly gained because they do not conform too closely to the technical definitions.

The characters of The Little Clay Cart are living men and women. Even when the type makes no strong appeal to Western minds, as in the case of Chārudatta, the character lives, in a sense in which Dushyanta 6 or even Rāma 7 can hardly be said to live. Shūdraka's men are better individualized than his women; this fact alone differentiates him sharply from other Indian dramatists. He draws on every class of society, from the high-souled Brahman to the executioner and the housemaid.

His greatest character is unquestionably Sansthānaka, this combination

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of ignorant conceit, brutal lust, and cunning, this greater than Cloten, who, after strangling an innocent woman, can say: 1 "Oh, come! Let's go and play in the pond." Most attractive characters are the five 2 conspirators, men whose home is "east of Suez and the ten commandments." They live from hand to mouth, ready at any moment to steal a gem-casket or to take part in a revolution, and preserving through it all their character as gentlemen and their irresistible conceit. And side by side with them moves the hero Chārudatta, the Buddhist beau-ideal of manhood,

*A tree of life to them whose sorrows grow,
Beneath its fruit of virtue bending low. (i. 48)*

To him, life itself is not dear, but only honor. 3 He values wealth only as it supplies him with the means of serving others. We may, with some justice, compare him with Antonio in The Merchant of Venice. There is some inconsistency, from our point of view, in making such a character the hero of a love-drama; and indeed, it is Vasantasenā who does most of the love-making. 4

Vasantasenā is a character with neither the girlish charm of Shakuntalā 5 nor the mature womanly dignity of Sītā. 6 She is more admirable than lovable. Witty and wise she is, and in her love as true as steel; this too, in a social position which makes such constancy difficult. Yet she cannot be called a great character; she does not seem so true to life as her clever maid, Madanikā. In making the heroine of his play a courtesan, Shūdraka follows a suggestion of the technical works on the drama; he does not thereby cast any imputation of ill on Vasantasenā's character. The courtesan class in India corresponded roughly to the hetæræ of

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ancient Greece or the geishas of Japan; it was possible to be a courtesan and retain one's self-respect. Yet the inherited ¹ way of life proves distasteful to Vasantasenā; her one desire is to escape its limitations and its dangers by becoming a legal wife. ²

In Maitreya, the Vidūshaka, we find an instance of our author's masterly skill in giving life to the dry bones of a rhetorical definition. The Vidūshaka is a stock character who has something in common with a jester; and in Maitreya the essential traits of the character—eagerness for good food and other creature comforts, and blundering devotion to his friend—are retained, to be sure, but clarified and elevated by his quaint humor and his readiness to follow Chārudatta even in death. The grosser traits of the typical Vidūshaka are lacking. Maitreya is neither a glutton nor a fool, but a simple-minded, whole-hearted friend.

The courtier is another character suggested by the technical works, and transformed by the genius of Shūdraka. He is a man not only of education and social refinement, but also of real nobility of nature. But he is in a false position from the first, this true gentleman at the wretched court of King Pālaka; at last he finds the courage to break away, and risks life, and all that makes life attractive, by backing Aryaka. Of all the conspirators, it is he who runs the greatest risk. To his protection of Vasantasenā is added a touch of infinite pathos when we remember that he was himself in love with her. ³ Only when Vasantasenā leaves him ⁴ without a thought, to enter Chārudatta's house, does he realize how much he loves her; then, indeed, he breaks forth in words of the most passionate jealousy. We need not linger over the other characters, except to observe that each has his marked individuality,

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and that each helps to make vivid this picture of a society that seems at first so remote.

Shūdraka's humor is the third of his vitally distinguishing qualities. This humor has an American flavor, both in its puns and in its situations. The plays on words can seldom be adequately reproduced in translation, but the situations are independent of language. And Shūdraka's humor runs the whole gamut, from grim to farcical, from satirical to quaint. Its variety and keenness are such that King Shūdraka need not fear a comparison with the greatest of Occidental writers of comedies.

It remains to say a word about the construction of the play. Obviously, it is too long. More than this, the main action halts through acts ii. to v., and during these episodic acts we almost forget that the main plot concerns the love of Vasantasenā and Chārudatta. Indeed, we have in The Little Clay Cart the material for two plays. The larger part of act i. forms with acts vi. to x. a consistent and ingenious plot; while the remainder of act i. might be combined with acts iii. to v. to make a pleasing comedy of lighter tone. The second act, clever as it is, has little real connection either with the main plot or with the story of the gems. The breadth of treatment which is observable in this play is found in many other specimens of the Sanskrit drama, which has set itself an ideal different from that of our own drama. The lack of dramatic unity and consistency is often compensated, indeed, by

lyrical beauty and charms of style; but it suggests the question whether we might not more justly speak of the Sanskrit plays as dramatic poems than as dramas. In *The Little Clay Cart*, at any rate, we could ill afford to spare a single scene, even though the very richness and variety of the play remove it from the class of the world's greatest dramas.

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II. THE TRANSLATION

THE following translation is sufficiently different from previous translations of Indian plays to require a word of explanation. The difference consists chiefly in the manner in which I have endeavored to preserve the form of the original. The Indian plays are written in mingled prose and verse; and the verse portion forms so large a part of the whole that the manner in which it is rendered is of much importance. Now this verse is not analogous to the iambic trimeter of Sophocles or the blank verse of Shakspeare, but roughly corresponds to the Greek choruses or the occasional rhymed songs of the Elizabethan stage. In other words, the verse portion of a Sanskrit drama is not narrative; it is sometimes descriptive, but more commonly lyrical: each stanza sums up the emotional impression which the preceding action or dialogue has made upon one of the actors. Such matter is in English cast into the form of the rhymed stanza; and so, although rhymed verse is very rarely employed in classical Sanskrit, it seems the most appropriate vehicle for the translation of the stanzas of a Sanskrit drama. It is true that we occasionally find stanzas which might fitly be rendered in English blank verse, and, more frequently, stanzas which are so prosaic as not to deserve a rendering in English verse at all. ¹ But, as the present translation may be regarded as in some sort an experiment, I have preferred to hold rigidly to the distinction found in the original between simple prose and types of stanza which seem to me to correspond to English rhymed verse.

It is obvious that a translation into verse, and especially into rhymed verse, cannot be as literal as a translation into prose; this

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disadvantage I have used my best pains to minimize. I hope it may be said that nothing of real moment has been omitted from the verses; and where lack of metrical skill has compelled expansion, I have striven to make the additions as insignificant as possible.

There is another point, however, in which it is hardly feasible to imitate the original; this is the difference in the dialects used by the various characters. In *The Little Clay Cart*, as in other Indian dramas, some of the characters speak Sanskrit, others Prākṛit. Now Prākṛit is the generic name for a number of dialects derived from the Sanskrit and closely akin to it. The inferior personages of an Indian play, and, with rare exceptions, all the women, speak one or another of these Prākṛits. Of the thirty characters of this play, for example, only five (Chārudatta, the courtier, Aryaka, Sharvilaka, and the judge) speak Sanskrit; ¹ the others speak various Prākṛit dialects. Only in the case of Sansthānaka have I made a rude attempt to suggest the dialect by substituting *sh* for *s* as he does.

And the grandiloquence of Sharvilaka's Sanskrit in the satirical portion of the third act I have endeavored to imitate.

Whenever the language of the original is at all technical, the translator labors under peculiar difficulty. Thus the legal terms found in the ninth act are inadequately rendered, and, to some extent at least, inevitably so; for the legal forms, or lack of forms, pictured there were never contemplated by the makers of the English legal vocabulary. It may be added here that in rendering from a literature so artificial as the Sanskrit, one must lose not only the sensuous beauty of the verse, but also many plays on words.

In regard to the not infrequent repetitions found in the text, I

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have used my best judgment. Such repetitions have been given in full where it seemed to me that the force or unity of the passage gained by such treatment, or where the original repeats in full, as in the case of v. 7, which is identical with iii. 29. Elsewhere, I have merely indicated the repetition after the manner of the original.

The reader will notice that there was little effort to attain realism in the presentation of an Indian play. He need not be surprised therefore to find (page [145](#)) that Vīraka leaves the courtroom, mounts a horse, rides to the suburbs, makes an investigation and returns—all within the limits of a stage-direction. The simplicity of presentation also makes possible sudden shifts of scene. In the first act, for example, there are six scenes, which take place alternately in Chārudatta's house and in the street outside. In those cases where a character enters "seated" or "asleep," I have substituted the verb "appear" for the verb "enter"; yet I am not sure that this concession to realism is wise.

The system of transliteration which I have adopted is intended to render the pronunciation of proper names as simple as may be to the English reader. The consonants are to be pronounced as in English, 1 the vowels as in Italian. Diacritical marks have been avoided, with the exception of the macron. This sign has been used consistently 2 to mark long vowels except e and o, which are always long. Three rules suffice for the placing of the accent. A long penult is accented: Maitréya, Chārudátta. If the penult is short, the antepenult is accented provided it be long: Sansthānaka. If both penult and antepenult of a four-syllabled word are short, the pre-antepenultimate receives the accent: Mādanikā, Sthāvaraka.

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III. AN OUTLINE OF THE PLOT

ACT I., entitled *The Gems are left Behind*. Evening of the first day. —After the prologue, Chārudatta, who is within his house, converses with his friend Maitreya, and deploras his poverty. While they are speaking, Vasantasenā appears in the street outside. She is pursued by the courtier and Sansthānaka; the latter makes her degrading offers of his love, which she indignantly rejects. Chārudatta sends Maitreya from the house to offer sacrifice, and

through the open door Vasantasenā slips unobserved into the house. Maitreya returns after an altercation with Sansthānaka, and recognizes Vasantasenā. Vasantasenā leaves a casket of gems in the house for safe keeping and returns to her home.

ACT II., entitled *The Shampooer who Gambled*. Second day.—The act opens in Vasantasenā's house. Vasantasenā confesses to her maid Madanikā her love for Chārudatta. Then a shampooer appears in the street, pursued by the gambling-master and a gambler, who demand of him ten gold-pieces which he has lost in the gambling-house. At this point Darduraka enters, and engages the gambling-master and the gambler in an angry discussion, during which the shampooer escapes into Vasantasenā's house. When Vasantasenā learns that the shampooer had once served Chārudatta, she pays his debt; the grateful shampooer resolves to turn monk. As he leaves the house he is attacked by a runaway elephant, and saved by Karnapūraka, a servant of Vasantasenā.

ACT III., entitled *The Hole in the Wall*. The night following the second day.—Chārudatta and Maitreya return home after midnight from a concert, and go to sleep. Maitreya has in his hand the gem-casket which Vasantasenā has left behind. Sharvilaka enters. He is in love with Madanikā, a maid of Vasantasenā's, and is resolved

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to acquire by theft the means of buying her freedom. He makes a hole in the wall of the house, enters, and steals the casket of gems which Vasantasenā had left. Chārudatta wakes to find casket and thief gone. His wife gives him her pearl necklace with which to make restitution.

ACT IV., entitled *Madanikā and Sharvilaka*. Third day.—Sharvilaka comes to Vasantasenā's house to buy Madanikā's freedom. Vasantasenā overhears the facts concerning the theft of her gem-casket from Chārudatta's house, but accepts the casket, and gives Madanikā her freedom. As Sharvilaka leaves the house, he hears that his friend Aryaka, who had been imprisoned by the king, has escaped and is being pursued. Sharvilaka departs to help him. Maitreya comes from Chārudatta with the pearl necklace, to repay Vasantasenā for the gem-casket. She accepts the necklace also, as giving her an excuse for a visit to Chārudatta.

ACT V., entitled *The Storm*. Evening of the third day.—Chārudatta appears in the garden of his house. Here he receives a servant of Vasantasenā, who announces that Vasantasenā is on her way to visit him. Vasantasenā then appears in the street with the courtier; the two describe alternately the violence and beauty of the storm which has suddenly arisen. Vasantasenā dismisses the courtier, enters the garden, and explains to Chārudatta how she has again come into possession of the gem-casket. Meanwhile, the storm has so increased in violence that she is compelled to spend the night at Chārudatta's house.

ACT VI., entitled *The Swapping of the Bullock-carts*. Morning of the fourth day.—Here she meets Chārudatta's little son, Rohasena. The boy is peevish because he can now have only a little clay cart to play with, instead of finer toys. Vasantasenā gives him her gems to buy a toy cart of gold. Chārudatta's servant drives up to

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take Vasantasenā in Chārudatta's bullock-cart to the park, where she is to meet Chārudatta; but while Vasantasenā is making ready, he drives away to get a cushion. Then Sansthānaka's servant drives up with his master's cart, which Vasantasenā enters by mistake. Soon after, Chārudatta's servant returns with his cart. Then the escaped prisoner Aryaka appears and enters Chārudatta's cart. Two policemen come on the scene; they are searching for Aryaka. One of them looks into the cart and discovers Aryaka, but agrees to protect him. This he does by deceiving and finally maltreating his companion.

ACT VII., entitled *Aryaka's Escape*. Fourth day.—Chārudatta is awaiting Vasantasenā in the park. His cart, in which Aryaka lies hidden, appears. Chārudatta discovers the fugitive, removes his fetters, lends him the cart, and leaves the park.

ACT VIII., entitled *The Strangling of Vasantasenā*. Fourth day.—A Buddhist monk, the shampooer of the second act, enters the park. He has difficulty in escaping from Sansthānaka, who appears with the courtier. Sansthānaka's servant drives in with the cart which Vasantasenā had entered by mistake. She is discovered by Sansthānaka, who pursues her with insulting offers of love. When she repulses him, Sansthānaka gets rid of all witnesses, strangles her, and leaves her for dead. The Buddhist monk enters again, revives Vasantasenā, and conducts her to a monastery.

ACT IX., entitled *The Trial*. Fifth day.—Sansthānaka accuses Chārudatta of murdering Vasantasenā for her money. In the course of the trial, it appears that Vasantasenā had spent the night of the storm at Chārudatta's house; that she had left the house the next morning to meet Chārudatta in the park; that there had been a struggle in the park, which apparently ended in the murder of a woman. Chārudatta's friend, Maitreya, enters with the gems which

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Vasantasenā had left to buy Chārudatta's son a toy cart of gold. These gems fall to the floor during a scuffle between Maitreya and Sansthānaka. In view of Chārudatta's poverty, this seems to establish the motive for the crime, and Chārudatta is condemned to death.

ACT X., entitled *The End*. Sixth day.—Two headsmen are conducting Chārudatta to the place of execution. Chārudatta takes his last leave of his son and his friend Maitreya. But Sansthānaka's servant escapes from confinement and betrays the truth; yet he is not believed, owing to the cunning displayed by his master. The headsmen are preparing to execute Chārudatta, when Vasantasenā herself appears upon the scene, accompanied by the Buddhist monk. Her appearance puts a summary end to the proceedings. Then news is brought that Aryaka has killed and supplanted the former king, that he wishes to reward Chārudatta, and that he has by royal edict freed Vasantasenā from the necessity of living as a courtesan. Sansthānaka is brought before Chārudatta for sentence, but is pardoned by the man whom he had so grievously injured. The play ends with the usual Epilogue.

Footnotes

[xv:1](#) For an illuminating discussion of these matters, the reader is referred to Sylvain Lévi's admirable work, *Le Théâtre Indien*, Paris, 1890, pages 196-211.

[xvi:1](#) In his *Mālatīmādhava*, i. 8, he says: "Whoever they may be who now proclaim their contempt for me,—they know something, but *this* work was not for them. Yet there will arise a man of nature like mine own; for time is endless, and the world is wide." This seems prophetic of John Milton.

[xvi:2](#) *Prasannarāghava*, i. 22.

[xvi:3](#) *Mahāvīracarita*, i. 4.

[xvii:1](#) *History of Chinese Literature*, by H. A. Giles, pages 145-146.

[xvii:2](#) *Shakuntalā*, i. 15.

[xvii:3](#) *Latter Acts of Rāma*, v. 17.

[xix:1](#) *Prakarāṇa*.

[xix:2](#) *Dhūrtasamkula*: *Daçarūpa*, iii. 38.

[xix:3](#) *Sāhityadarpaṇa*, 428.

[xix:4](#) As in *Mālatī-mādhava*.

[xix:5](#) *Daçarūpa*, iii. 33.

[xix:6](#) In Kālidāsa's *Shakuntalā*.

[xix:7](#) In Bhavabhūti's *Latter Acts of Rāma*.

[xx:1](#) See page [128](#).

[xx:2](#) *Aryaka*, *Darduraka*, *Chandanaka*, *Sharvilaka*, and the courtier.

[xx:3](#) See x. 27.

[xx:4](#) See v. 46 and the following stage-direction.

[xx:5](#) In Kālidāsa's play of that name.

[xx:6](#) In Bhavabhūti's *Latter Acts of Rāma*.

[xxi:1](#) See viii. 43.

[xxi:2](#) See pages [65-66](#) and page [174](#).

[xxi:3](#) See viii. 38; and compare the words, "Yet love bids me prattle," on page [86](#).

[xxi:4](#) Page [87](#).

[xxiii:1](#) Stanzas of the latter sort in *The Little Clay Cart* are vii. 2 and viii. 5.

[xxiv:1](#) This statement requires a slight limitation; compare, for example, the footnote to page [82](#).

[xxv:1](#) But the combination *th* should be pronounced as in *ant-hill*, not as in *thin* or *this*; similarly *dh* as in *madhouse*; *bh* as in *abhor*.

[xxv:2](#) Except in the names *Aryaka* and *Āhīnta*, where typographical considerations have led to the omission of the macron over the initial letter; and except also in head-lines.

[Next: Dramatis Personae](#)