

Friendship of Sri Krishna and Arjuna.

By 'DĀSĀNUDĀSA'.

आत्मा हि कृष्णः पार्थस्य कृष्णस्यात्मा धनञ्जयः ।
यद् ब्रूयादर्जुनः कृष्णं सर्वं कुर्यादसंशयम् ॥
कृष्णो धनञ्जयस्यार्थे स्वर्गलोकमपि त्यजेत् ।
तथैव पार्थः कृष्णार्थे प्राणानपि परित्यजेत् ॥

“Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the soul of Arjuna and Arjuna is the soul of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Whatever Arjuna wishes Śrī Kṛṣṇa to do, Śrī Kṛṣṇa does it without fail. Śrī Kṛṣṇa can forego the pleasures of a heavenly abode for the sake of Arjuna, and Arjuna can lay down his life for Śrī Kṛṣṇa.”

This was what the Kaurava king Duryodhana said of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna while describing to his father, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the Rājasūya Sacrifice as performed by the Pāṇḍavas. The friendship that existed between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna was a model of all those virtues that characterize, according to the Śāstras, true and ideal friendship. In the love that Śrī Kṛṣṇa had for his friend, we find Him always in the company of Arjuna, whether at meals or at play, doing all that He can, even at the sacrifice of His life, for his welfare, sharing equally his joy and grief, always guarding him against all impending evils, never making any reserve in mutual exchange, raising him always in the estimation of others, ever joyous in rendering even the least service to him, covering his imperfections and bringing to light his good points, freeing him from all his defects, giving him the best of his possessions and raising him to the highest status. These are a few of the characteristics of the love that Śrī Kṛṣṇa bore towards His friend. His playmates of Brindāban, the indigent Sudāmā and the wise Uddhava and others, too, had a share of that wonderful love

from Śrī Kṛṣṇa, but that was only for a short time; and moreover, it was not so fully manifested as it was in His dealing with Arjuna, which covered a very long period. Of that love, we wish to give a bare outline below.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were often seen together at meals and in pastime. In their roamings in forests and in their recreative sports in rivers and lakes and in their walks they often used to be together. In attending choice marriages (स्वयंवर) as suitors, Śrī Kṛṣṇa often used to keep Arjuna by His side. When, after the Khāṇḍava forest had been burnt to ashes, Indra, the Ruler of Heavens, came down and asked Arjuna to have from him any boon he liked, Arjuna sought and obtained various arms and weapons of war from him. Indra then asked the Lord (Śrī Kṛṣṇa) also to have whatever he chose from him. Thereon the Lord said, “Let My love for Arjuna never cease; let it continue unabated for ever.” That the Lord should have asked a boon of love for Arjuna is a clear indication of what His love for Arjuna was like.

(1)

There lived in Dwārakā a Brahman with his wife, who gave birth to a child. But alas! the child was dead no sooner than it was born. The Brahman, with the corpse of the dead child, headed straight to the king's palace and placing the corpse at the gate, began to weep bitterly, saying, “The king being an enemy of the Brahmans, designing, greedy, sensual, and the meanest of the Kṣatriyas, has by his sins been the cause of my child's death; for—

हिंसाविहारं नृपतिं दुःशीलमजितेन्द्रियम् ।

प्रजा भजन्त्यः सीदन्ति दरिद्रा नित्यदुःखिताः ॥

(Srimad Bhagawata X. 89. 25)

"When the king is given to destroying life and is of evil conduct and loose character, then alone his subjects have to suffer poverty and other miseries."

Having said this, he left the corpse there and went away. It is needless to say that no legal action on the charge of sedition or high treason was taken against the Brahman. The Brahman lost eight of his children, one after another, in that way, and the corpses were invariably left by him at the gate of the Royal Palace. The Yādavas, the clansmen of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, tried their utmost to save the Brahman from this mishap, but in vain. When in due course the Brahman came to the Royal Palace with the corpse of his ninth child, Arjuna happened to be there. He was moved at the spectacle and exclaimed, "How is it, sir, that you are weeping? Is there no valiant Kṣatriya here who could save the Brahmans from this plight of having to see their sons die before them? If there are kings who could live in comfort while in their kingdom holy Brahmans engaged in performing sacrifices for the good of mankind and the universe should have to suffer for want of maintenance or for loss of wife and children, they are no kings but clowns in kingly robes filling their bellies and indulging in sensuous pleasures. I do not belong to that class. I shall see that your sons are saved, and if they are not, I shall burn this body of mine to ashes." The Brahman replied, "How can you, O Arjuna, save those whom even Lord Sankarṣaṇa and Lord Vāsudeva and Pradyumna and Aniruddha could not save?" "I am not Sankarṣaṇa or Kṛṣṇa or Pradyumna or Aniruddha*," rejoined Arjuna proudly, "I am Arjuna, the wielder of the Gāṇḍīva bow. I

shall conquer even Death and bring the child back. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa kept quiet except for a significant smile, and decided on the future course of action. Now the time of delivery approached. Arjuna, as soon as he received the information, washed his hands and feet and, drawing his bow, invoked celestial missiles and covered the lying-in chamber with arrows. This cage of arrows was a fortification so strong and impregnable that none could enter it. But mysterious are the ways of the Lord. The Brahman lady gave birth to a child; the child wept for a while and immediately disappeared. The Brahman, overtaken by grief, went to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and said, "What a great fool I was to have put my faith in those self-extolling words of that coward of an Arjuna! Fie on that charlatan making an empty show of his valour and vainly extolling his bow." Arjuna was sitting close by. His mind was still full of egotism. Without speaking a word to the Lord, he, with the aid of his occult powers, headed straight to the abode of the king of death. But he did not find the Brahman child there and thence went to the abodes of Indra, Agni, Nirṛti, Chandra (Moon), Vāyu (Wind-god), Varuṇa (god of water) and others, and thence to the lower regions as well as to the seven heavens of the upper hemisphere and so also to other places; but the child could not be found. Consequently, he had no alternative left but to fulfil his vow by raising for himself a funeral pyre and burn himself to death, and got ready for the purpose. Now the Lord could not remain unmoved. He caught Arjuna by the arm and said:—

दर्शये द्विजसूनुंस्ते मावशात्मानमात्मना ।
एते हि कीर्तिं विमलां मनुष्याः स्थापयन्ति नः ॥

(Srimad Bhagavata X. 89. 46)

"My friend, do not think so low of yourself as to think that you are

* He means to say, "I am a devotee of Sri Krishna. By His strength I can do what even Sri Krishna Himself cannot; for my sake He has to transgress His own laws and do things for me which He otherwise would not."

impotent. (You have certainly not tried your strength to the full as yet. Your counterpart in Me—your bosom friend is still with you); wake up and follow Me, I shall presently show you all the ten children of the Brahman. This will spread our fame throughout the world.’

The pride of Arjuna had to be smitten and his way to Bliss made secure. That done, how could he be allowed to die ? The Lord took him along with Himself and, seated in His heavenly car, drove fast towards the west. Crossing over the seven continents with the mountains and the seven seas, they got beyond the Lokāloka Mountain and reached the Dark Region. There the horses of the Car—Śaibya, Sugrīva, Meghapuṣpa and Balāhaka—lost their track and began to wander here and there. Thereon the Lord of the Lords of Yoga (महायोगेश्वरः) placed in front of His chariot His Sudarśana Chakra (the divine Discus) shining like a thousand suns. In that light the car moved on till it crossed the Dark Region and reached the plane where Arjuna saw the dazzling splendour of a vast light emanating as if from innumerable suns shining together, all around him. Arjuna could not keep his eyes open before that Higher Light, he had to close them. Thereafter they entered into an endless ocean of water within which was situated a temple full of light and extraordinary splendour and studded with precious stones of dazzling brilliance and supported by thousands of golden pillars. Within the temple was seated the wonderful Śeṣa Nāga like a white mountain. His thousand heads were glittering with heavenly gems. He had two thousand eyes. His throat and tongues had a bluish colour. And on that bed of Śeṣa Nāga was lying the All-pervading, Transcendent Supreme in His own perfect Peace and Bliss. His yellow garment below the belt

(पीताम्बर) was shining like lightning on the cloud-like colour of His body. His face looked perfectly cheerful and His big reddish eyes were blooming like lotus flowers and were simply charming. His diadem adorned with bunches of heavenly gems, and earrings were shedding a unique lustre. Endowed with eight hands, the Supreme had on His breast the Śrīvatsa (a symbol of the Goddess of wealth) and wore round His neck the Kaustubha (the Divine Gem) and on His shoulders the captivating wreath of wild flowers. His attendants and associates, Nanda, Sunanda and others, as also the Chakra (the Discus) and other weapons, the power of nourishment (पुष्टि), prosperity (श्री), fame (कीर्ति), Māyā and the eight Siddhis (occult powers), all were serving the Supreme Lord in person. Both Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, having reached there, bowed their heads with all reverence to their own Self, the Infallible Lord (अच्युत). Then the All-pervading Lord said, “O Nārāyaṇa and Nara (God and Man), it was only to see you both who are Mine own forms that I had sent for these children of the Brahman. Your part of the work is now finished. Now come to Me at once. You are self-contented, with all your desires fulfilled. It is to maintain the moral order and to lead on the people towards Me that you are following the path of *Dharma*.” Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then came away with the children of the Brahman. Arjuna restored them to the Brahman and made good his promise. The Brahman got back his children to his utter surprise and delight. Thus Śrī Kṛṣṇa fulfilled what Arjuna promised.

(2)

On receiving the news of the Pāṇḍavas having been burnt to ashes in the house of shellac erected by the Kauravas for the Pāṇḍavas to live in, Śrī Kṛṣṇa started in search of them and

after a long search reached the capital of Drupada, where the choice marriage of the princess Draupadi was about to take place. There in that assembly of princes gathered for the purpose Śrī Kṛṣṇa recognized Arjuna, who was there in the guise of a Brahman, and pointed him out to Śrī Balarāma. There He helped the Pāṇḍavas as against all the rival princes who were defeated in the struggle. The poverty-stricken Pāṇḍavas were at once lifted up by Him and given immense wealth by way of presents. The author of the *Mahābhārata* says:—

Śrī Kṛṣṇa gave them as token of His love jewels of gold studded with rubies and emeralds, pieces of cloth, indigenous as well as foreign, of rare quality, garments and raiments, shawls and wrappers, deer-skins and beddings, various kinds of precious stones, stools and boards, huge tents and pavillions, palanquins and other conveyances, various kinds of vessels studded with gems and diamonds, shrewd and obedient maid-servants who were comely, youthful and decked with ornaments, well-trained and good-looking elephants, golden cars with flags and bejewelled horses of the best species, millions of gold sovereigns and heaps of gold and other valuables.

Then at the time of the Rājasūya Sacrifice (the coronation of Yudhiṣṭhira), Śrī Kṛṣṇa helped the Pāṇḍavas in various ways and brought the function to a successful close. And during the function itself Śrī Kṛṣṇa personally attended and rendered all sorts of services including the washing of feet of the visitors. In the opinion of some, Śrī Kṛṣṇa went even so far as to remove the leavings in the dishes of those who dined. In spite of the fact that the whole work was accomplished solely through the help and influence and support of Himself, Śrī Kṛṣṇa did not lag behind other princes in making respectful and valuable presents

to Yudhiṣṭhira, to whom He presented fourteen thousand elephants as a token of loyalty to the Emperor and in order to please His friend Arjuna.

वासुदेवोऽपि वाष्णेयो मानं कुर्वन् किरिटिनः ।
अददद्भजसुख्यानां सहस्राणि चतुर्दश ॥

(*Sabha-Parva* 52. 30, 31.)

(3)

When Sañjaya returned after seeing the Pāṇḍavas, Dhṛtarāṣṭra asked him as to how it was going on with them. Sañjaya narrated all that he saw and felt, with special reference to the extraordinary love and close companionship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. He said, "I entered their inner apartment with great reverence and humility to see and have a talk with them. I saw them there dressed in valuable garments and seated on golden thrones studded with gems. Arjuna bore the feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in his lap while in the lap of Draupadi and Satyabhāmā were stretched the feet of Arjuna. Arjuna shifted on from under his feet the golden foot-stool and bade me have my seat thereon. I respectfully touched the stool with my hand, bowed before it and squatted near by on the floor. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then paid a tribute to Arjuna, pointing him out to be His own likeness, and said:—

देवासुरमनुष्येषु यक्षगन्धर्वभोगिषु ।
न तं परयाम्यहं युद्धे पाण्डवं योऽभ्ययाद्रणे ॥
बलं वीर्यं च तेजश्च शीघ्रता लघुहस्तता ।
अविषादश्च वैर्यं च पार्थान्नान्यत्र विद्यते ॥

(*Udyoga-Parva* LIX. 26, 29.)

"There is none among the gods or Gandharvas (celestial songsters), the Titans or Yakṣas (demigods), human beings or Nāgas, who could face Arjuna in battle. I do not find anyone else than Arjuna possessing strength and valour, splendour and speed and skill, an indomitable spirit and patience, all in one."

Śrī Kṛṣṇa thus offered praise to Arjuna and gladdened his heart and

asked me to bring this home to you.

Speaking of the identity of Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Grandfather Bhīṣma said on one occasion:—

एष नारायणः कृष्णः फाल्गुनश्च नरः स्मृतः ।
नारायणो नरश्चैव सत्त्वमेकं द्विधाकृतम् ॥
(Ibid. LIX. 29)

“Śrī Kṛṣṇa is Nārāyaṇa Himself and Arjuna, the sage Nara. Nara and Nārāyaṇa are, really speaking, two aspects of the one and the same Spirit”.

(4)

When the Mahābhārata war was imminent and both Duryodhana and Arjuna went to Śrī Kṛṣṇa at Dwārakā to take help from Him, Sri Kṛṣṇa was tactful enough to offer a regiment of His forces to Duryodhana and accepted the role of a charioteer to Arjuna. Arjuna really won the battle the very moment Śrī Kṛṣṇa offered to drive his chariot. Droṇāchārya once spoke to Yudhiṣṭhira thus:—

यतः कृष्णस्ततो धर्मो यतो धर्मस्ततो जयः ।

“Wherever there is Śrī Kṛṣṇa, there is *Dharma* (righteousness); and wherever is *Dharma*, there is victory.” In order to ensure the victory of His friend, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Support of all Dharmas, accepted the role of a charioteer to Arjuna.

(5)

Abhimanyu, the eldest son of Arjuna, was slain by Jayadratha in conjunction with six other mighty warriors, and a deep gloom was cast over the Pāṇḍava camp. The heart-rending bewailings of Subhadrā (Arjuna's wife) and Uttarā (Abhimanyu's wife) none could bear to hear. At the request of His friend Arjuna, Śrī Kṛṣṇa came to console and condole with His sister Subhadrā. He gave her many exhortations.

“My sister,” He said, “Your son was valiant and brave and a mighty warrior, as sturdy as his father; he has attained that status which is the cherished goal of all valiant Kṣatriyas. He conquered many a foe, despatched them to the abode of Death and has now attained the state of immortality. The highest status which the saints and sages aspire for and for which they practise austerities and lead a life of celibacy and for which they study the Vedas and follow the path of knowledge—that highest status has your son attained. Sister dear, you are the mother of a hero, the wife of a hero, the daughter of a hero and the sister of a hero; grieve not at all. Your son having laid down his life in battle has reached the highest goal. It is my earnest desire that all the males of our family should attain the same blissful state which the valiant Abhimanyu has done. Now rest assured that Arjuna will without doubt slay Jayadratha to-morrow.” Śrī Kṛṣṇa thus exhorted her and left for Dwāraka.

“The ways of Providence are indeed so strange;” said Subhadrā, “Abhimanyu who till yesterday was always backed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa, has alas ! met his death to-day like a forlorn child ! But, O my darling, mayest thou attain that blissful state which comes as a reward to the performers of sacrifices, to the givers of charities and to the wise Brahmans and to those who follow the discipline of *Brahmacharya*, who bathe in the sacred waters, who are grateful and high-minded, who serve their Gurus, who bestow large gifts on the Brahmans and who give away cows, who make gifts of furnished houses with food and other necessaries of life, who give wealth to the Brahmans and those who seek protection at their hands, who have given up all and cut off all connection with the world and live as recluses and Munis (ascetics), to those ladies who are wholly devoted

to their husbands; to those kings whose character is above suspicion; to those men who follow successively all the four periodical disciplines of life(आश्रम); to those who are kind to the poor and the helpless, who make an equitable distribution of wealth, who never bear tales, who are righteous, who never refuse help to the needy, who remain calm and unmoved in adversity, who are devoted to their parents, who are exclusively attached to their wives, who abstain from adultery, who copulate only during the days prescribed by the Śāstras for conception, who are not jealous of others, who are of a forgiving nature, who never utter caustic words, who abstain from meat and wine and are free from arrogance, untruth, hypocrisy and egotism; to those who never mean any ill to others, who feel shame in committing any sinful act; and to those who are well-versed in the scriptures and rejoice in their knowledge of the Divine and are always above the lower desires." What an ideal mother Subhadrā was!

Relying on the unfailing support of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna took a vow to kill Jayadratha. He said, "I shall surely kill him to-morrow before sunset, if he does not in the meantime surrender his arms to me or to King Yudhiṣṭhira or to Lord Puruṣottama (Śrī Kṛṣṇa). If I do not fulfil this vow, I shall forfeit my claim to all those blissful regions which are open to the brave and the righteous. Nay, I shall willingly share the destiny of those who are guilty of patricide or have violated the marriage-bed of their preceptor, the slanderers of saints as well as of ordinary men, those who are given to carrying tales or those who have misappropriated others' funds which were entrusted to their care, those who have committed breach of faith or those who have married an unchaste woman or murdered a Brahman or a cow. I shall willingly reside in hell with those

who treat with disrespect the students of the Vedas or those leading pure and disciplined lives. I shall share the fate of those who offer insult to the aged, the saints and the *Guru* or touch with their feet the Brahman, the cow and the fire, who discharge urine or stool in water or even spit there, who bathe without any clothes on the body or send back guests empty-handed, who take bribes and tell lies or practise swindling and hypocrisy, who blame others and partake of dainty dishes without sharing them with their wife, children and household servants, who neglect their duty towards those ascetics who are their benefactors and depend on them, or speak ill of those who always do good to them, those who are cruel-hearted and addicted to drinking or violate the sanctity of moral laws, who are ungrateful, and slander those who feed and nourish them, who take food with the left hand, who shirk their moral and religious obligations, who sleep at dawn or do not bathe for fear of catching cold or those who, in spite of their being Kṣatriyas (members of the warrior class), take to their heels in battle, or who live for more than six months at a time in a village where one does not hear the chanting of the Vedas or which contains not more than one well, who abuse the Śāstras and indulge in sexual intercourse or sleep during the daytime, who set fire to a dwelling house or administer poison, who have no fire in their house and do not receive guests who debar the cows from drinking water or copulate during menstruation or, who sell their daughters or go back on their promise of making a donation*. Besides this, I take a further vow that if I do not kill Jayadratha before sunset to-morrow, I shall leap into burning fire

* One should carefully note the virtues and vices enumerated by Subhadra and Arjuna respectively and try his level best to cultivate the virtues and give up the vices.

—Editor.

and burn myself to death." On hearing this vow, Śrī Kṛṣṇa blew His Pāñchajanya conch. Filled with the divine breath, the conch set a tumultuous uproar as is heard at the time of Cosmic destruction, that shook to their depth the worlds above and the worlds below, as well as the four quarters.

* * * *

Śrī Kṛṣṇa took Arjuna aside and said, "Brother, I have obtained intelligence from the Kaurava camp through the spies. Jayadratha and others were at first terrified to hear of your vow, but now they have resolved that the six great warriors including the preceptor Droṇa will be guarding Jayadratha, and unless they are subdued it will be difficult to find him. Why should you have taken such a vow without consulting Me?" Arjuna said in reply, "My Lord, I do not at all mind these great warriors. I shall conquer them all."

तव प्रसादाद्भगवन् किं नावाप्तं रणे मम ।

(Drona-Parva 76. 21)

"O Lord, what is there for me unobtained in battle through Thy grace?"

Even Jayadratha himself meant the same thing when he said to Duryodhana:—

वासुदेवसहायस्य गाण्डीवं धुन्वतो धनुः ।

कोऽर्जुनस्याग्रतस्तिष्ठेत्साक्षादपि शतक्रतुः ॥

(Drona-Parva 76. 20)

"None can face Arjuna who wields the Gāṇḍīva bow and is aided by Śrī Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva; not even Indra can."

The fact was also the same. It was due to Śrī Kṛṣṇa that the Pāṇḍavas were victorious. He foresaw everything and provided against all contingencies. How and where and

in what way Arjuna and his vow and his life and his honour were to be saved, was more the concern of Śrī Kṛṣṇa than of Arjuna, and the reason was obvious. He had already handed over the reins of his horses to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and He in His turn had assured him of His full support by saying, 'मा शुचः' (Do not grieve). Thus Śrī Kṛṣṇa had taken the whole responsibility in respect of Arjuna.

The next day, a hot fight ensued and it took Arjuna a long time to smite and slay those who confronted him and break through the surging sea of the hostile army so as to be able to reach the place where Jayadratha stood secure, fortified by the mighty warriors who stood around him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa whispered to him, "Brother Arjuna, it is very difficult to subdue these warriors and reach Jayadratha in time to strike him before sunset. All right, I shall presently devise another plan." Saying so, Śrī Hari (Kṛṣṇa), the Lord of Yogis, in Yoga unified, spread out a thick veil of darkness to cover the sun. Which done, the world imagined that the sun had gone down. The Kaurava camp was filled with joy to see the sun set. Jayadratha, thinking himself to be out of danger now, came near and looked up towards the sky. Śrī Kṛṣṇa whispered, "Arjuna, this is the moment, sever his head at once with your sharp arrows and fulfil your vow." Arjuna took aim at Jayadratha. He and his guards were taken aback. Arjuna showered his arrows on them and they all had a full bath in the stream of blood that flowed. Meanwhile Śrī Kṛṣṇa lifted the veil of darkness and the sun was seen descending in the western horizon. Śrī Kṛṣṇa said, "Make haste now, but take care that his head does not fall on the ground, for he has secured a boon from his father to the effect that whosoever severs his head and throws it on the ground shall have his own head

shattered into pieces.* So, you have to sever his head and send it through the air by your heavenly arrows to where his father is offering his evening prayers to the sun-god and drop it into his lap. Arjuna did as he was directed. He cut off the head of Jayadratha, sent it through the air by his heavenly arrows into the lap of his father, who was shocked to see it and rose from his seat in utter bewilderment so that the head dropped on the ground from his arms and his own head was immediately broken into a hundred pieces. It was the foresight and vigilance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa which saved Arjuna's life from both the perils.

(6)

Karna had an unfailing dart (शक्ति) with him, which he had secured as a boon from Indra, the Lord of Paradise. Indra had told him that he could use it only once when he found his life in peril and that whosoever was made a target of it would be instantaneously killed, but that it could not be used twice. Karna had kept it reserved for being used against Arjuna. Duryodhana and others asked him every day as to why he did not use the dart and finish Arjuna. And the usual reply that Karna gave was that he would use it the instant Arjuna appeared before him. But it so happened that whenever he and Arjuna came face to face with each other, Karna always forgot the thing, and never used the missile. This was due to the fact that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was always there in the car of Arjuna as the charioteer. The moment Arjuna's chariot appeared before Karna, it was the divine figure of Śrī Kṛṣṇa that came to his view first. And on seeing Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he was so completely overpowered by His hypnotic influence that he always

forgot to use the missile. Arjuna had no knowledge of the existence of this weapon with Karna, but Śrī Kṛṣṇa knew it as also so many other things, and He was always on the alert to protect him from all sides and vouchsafe victory to him. He Himself explained the thing thus to Sātyaki:—

“Sātyaki, it was I who kept Karna spell-bound so that he could not use his singular weapon, given by Indra, against Arjuna and kill him. Possessed of this weapon, Karna appeared to Me as the very death of Arjuna and this made Me sleepless during night and restless all the time. I do not care so much for the protection of My parents, nay, not even of you all, or of My own brothers, or even of My own life as I do for the protection of Arjuna on the battle-field. Sātyaki, if there is anything more valuable even than the kingdom of the triple universe, I would rather not have it than part with Arjuna.”*

It was for this reason that Śrī Kṛṣṇa sent Ghaṭotkacha, one of Bhīma's sons, to proceed to the field of battle during night. Ghaṭotkacha, who was born of a demoness, by his illusive titanic power wrought a general massacre of the Kaurava forces, thereby causing a havoc that utterly discomfited Karna and all others including Duryodhana. All of them in a desperate mood called upon Karna and said, “This midnight is going to see a wholesale massacre of us all at the hands of this titan leaving nothing for Bhīma and Arjuna to deal with. It is, therefore, high time for you to use the weapon obtained from Indra and kill this demon, so that our lives may be saved.” Thus Karna was compelled to use that

*धरण्यां मम पुत्रस्य पातयिष्यति यः शिरः ।
तस्यापि शतधा मूर्खा फलिष्यति न संशयः ॥

(Drona-Parva. 146. 112)

* न पिता न च मे माता न यूयं भ्रातरस्तथा ।
न च प्राणास्तथा रक्ष्या यथा बीमत्सुराहवे ॥
त्रैलोक्यराज्याथत्किञ्चिद्भवेदन्यत्सुदुर्लभम् ।
नेच्छेयं सात्वताहं तद्भिना पार्थ धनञ्जयम् ॥

missile against Ghaṭotkacha, who died instantaneously. The Pāṇḍavas shed tears of grief at the death of their valiant son Ghaṭotkacha. But Śrī Kṛṣṇa was mad with joy; He clasped Arjuna to His bosom over and over again. Arjuna could not understand the meaning of this strange behaviour on the part of the Lord and in utter surprise asked Him what He meant thereby. He could not reconcile His over joyous mood with the solemnity of the occasion when all of them were plunged in grief and had lost their patience. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then explained the whole situation to Arjuna and said, "Pārtha, it was for your sake that Indra took back from Karṇa the armour and the ear-rings and gave him instead a missile which he had kept reserved for killing you. So long as that missile remained with Karṇa I always regarded you, Arjuna, as no better than dead. I swear by truth that even to-day, when he has been divested of that missile, he cannot be killed by anyone else than yourself. He is a devotee of the Brahmans, truthful, and given to austerities and religious practices, and is kind even to his enemies. It was for this reason that I sent Ghaṭotkacha to offer battle to the Kauravas. It is for you alone, Arjuna, that I do all these things. I personally killed or brought about the death of Śiśupāla, King of Chedi, the Bhīl Ekalavya, King Jarāsandha and others through various contrivances only to deprive the Kauravas of the latter's help in the great war. Were they living to-day, your victory would have been something very difficult. Moreover, this Ghaṭotkacha was a sworn enemy of the Brahmans as well as of sacrifices, a transgressor of the divine laws and a great sinner. I would have killed him Myself, but that would have offended you and so I refrained from doing so. And to-day if he is killed, it is because I have got him killed. For—

ये हि धर्मस्य लोभारो वध्यास्ते मम पाण्डव ।
 धर्मसंस्थापनार्थं हि प्रतिज्ञैषा मया कृता ॥
 ब्रह्म सत्यं दमः शौचं धर्मो ह्यीः श्रीधृतिः क्षमा ।
 यत्र तत्र रमे नित्यमहं सत्येन ते शपे ॥

(Drona-Parva. 181, 28-30)

"Whoever transgresses the moral laws deserves to be killed by Me. I have taken a vow to this effect simply with the object of establishing *Dharma*. I stand by your side and that is why I swear by truth that wherever there is spirituality, truth, self-control, purity, respect for shyness (in committing evil deeds), grace, forbearance and forgiveness, there I verily dwell." What I mean to say is that you possess all these qualifications, that is why I have disowned the Kauravas; otherwise I am absolutely impartial and look upon all with an equal eye. Why, then, should you grieve for Ghaṭotkacha? One should have nothing to do with a sinner, even if he is one's real brother.

Thus Śrī Kṛṣṇa saved Arjuna's life and honour.

(7)

On the day Jayadratha was killed, the horses of Arjuna were overworked and wounded and racked with thirst, and therefore seeing that Jayadratha was still at a safe distance, the horses were unharnessed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Arjuna alighted from the chariot, and drawing his Gāṇḍīva bow, he stood unmoved like a mountain. Then in an instant he pierced the earth with his arrows, carved out a beautiful tank and by its side erected a beautiful house of arrows, supported by pillars made of arrows with an arrow-wall around it. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then engaged Himself in taking out the arrows from the bodies of the horses, washing and bathing and helping them to drink water. When the horses were thus refreshed, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was glad to yoke them again to the chariot. Thus it will be clear that Śrī Kṛṣṇa felt

no hesitation in rendering the most menial services to His friend and companion.

(8)

Karna and Arjuna were engaged in a mortal combat. Having overheard the talk between Karna and Śalya, Arjuna asked Śrī Kṛṣṇa as to what Śrī Kṛṣṇa would do if Arjuna were killed at the hands of Karna, to which Śrī Kṛṣṇa gave the following reply, with a smile on His lips:—

पतेद्दिवाकरः स्थानाच्छुष्येदपि महोदधिः ।
शैत्यमक्षिरियाच्च त्वां कर्णो हन्यादन्त्रजय ॥
यदि चैतत्कथञ्चित्स्याल्लोकपर्यासनं भवेत् ।
हन्यां कर्णं तथा शल्यं बाहुभ्यमेव संयुगे ॥

(Karna-Parva 87, 105, 111)

“The sun may drop from the heavens, the seas may dry up and the fire cool down; but never, O Dhanañjaya, can Karna lay his finger on you. And if somehow it comes about, the whole world will turn upside down and I shall kill both Karna and Śalya with My own hands.”

Karna had carefully kept with him a shaft with its head shaped like the hood of a serpent for being used against Arjuna. It was very fierce, very sharp and burning like fire and terrible in its effect. When Karna fitted it to the bow-string, it seemed as if the whole world below and the skies above were ablaze with fire. Hundreds of meteors began to fall in broad day light. Indra and the regional gods were seized with consternation and looked upwards in utter helplessness. Aśwasena, a highly poisonous serpent of the Khāṇḍava forest, who had turned a deadly enemy of Arjuna ever since the forest was set on fire and had been marking his time all the while to take revenge on him, had also housed himself in that arrow. Karna took aim at the head of Arjuna and with great velocity discharged the arrow. Swift was the arrow of Karna, but swifter still was the working of the

resourceful brain of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who even before the arrow could reach its mark pressed the high and heavy chariot with His heels so forcibly that its wheels stuck deep into the earth. The four horses were brought on their knees and the arrow came buzzing with full velocity but missed its aim, the head of Arjuna. Karna discharged that unfailing serpent with great confidence and vigour; but the chariot having been brought to a lower level, it struck the celestial diadem received by him from Indra and felled it on the ground burning; it failed to strike Arjuna. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then pointed out to Arjuna the serpent Aśwasena flying above and got him killed. Thus Arjuna was saved from a fatal crisis.

(9)

In the Mahābhārata War, the Pāṇḍavas came out victorious. When they reached their camp after victory, Śrī Kṛṣṇa said to Arjuna, “O Paragon among the descendants of Bharata, get down from the chariot with your Gāṇḍīva bow and the two inexhaustible quivers; I shall alight afterwards. This is for your good.” This was indeed a departure from the usual practice, but Arjuna had to obey and alight first as directed. Then Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of the Universe and the Source and Support of all promptings and impulses, left the reins and got down. And as He got down, the divine Monkey on the flag-staff disappeared and the huge chariot with its wheels and axle and reins and horses was seen in flames even without fire and in an instant was burnt to ashes. All those who saw it were filled with wonder. Arjuna with folded hands asked Śrī Kṛṣṇa to explain the mystery and Śrī Kṛṣṇa in reply said:—

अस्त्रैर्बहुविधैर्दग्धः पूर्वमेवायमर्जुन ।
मदधिष्ठितत्वात् समरे न विशीर्णः परन्तप ॥
इदानीन्तु विशीर्णोऽयं दग्धो ब्रह्मास्त्रतेजसा ।
मया विमुक्तः कौन्तेय त्वद्यच्च कृतकर्मणि ॥

(Salya-Parva 62, 18, 19)

"O Arjuna, the scourge of the foes, this chariot had already been burnt by the various weapons and missiles to which it was exposed. But since I was seated on it and sustained it, it could not be burnt to ashes during the fight. Now that after having crowned your efforts with success I have left My hold on it, it has been reduced to ashes, having already been burnt by the glow of the *Brahmāstra* (a missile presided over by the Creator, *Brahmā*). Had I not sustained it in battle or had you not alighted from it before I did to-day, you would have also been burnt to ashes along with it."

The Pāṇḍavas were delighted to see and hear of this miraculous deed of the Lord.

(10)

The *Mahābhārata* as well as the *Purāṇas* abound in instances that go to show the unique character of the friendship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Only a select few of those instances have been briefly narrated here. Those who may like to have a fuller dip in these Divine Līlās would do well to go through the literature mentioned above.

While Parīkṣita, still in the womb of Uttarā, was killed by Aśwatthāma, and Uttarā was weeping and wailing before the Lord, the latter spoke these pregnant words intended to be conveyed to the whole of humanity:—

"Uttarā, I never tell a lie and so whatever I say must be true. Let all the embodied souls see that the child is brought back to life by Me. Just as I have neither told a lie even in jest, nor turned my back on the enemy in the battle-field, even so I shall not

lag behind in bringing this child to life. If I love righteousness and particularly the Brahmins, I say, let this dead child of Abhimanyu come to life again as soon as it is born. If it is true that I have never consciously *turned hostile* to Arjuna, let this child come to life. Truth and Righteousness are always firmly established in Me; it is on their strength that I say, let this child of Abhimanyu come to life again. If I have killed Kamsa and Keśī in order to vindicate righteousness (and not out of hatred), let this child come to life again." No sooner did the Lord utter these words than the child was alive again.

The above utterances of the Lord are worthy of note, embodying as they do a declaration by the Lord Himself of His veracity, heroism, love of justice, fidelity to the Brahmins, freedom from attachment and repulsion, etc.; but it is all the more important inasmuch as it gives an indication of the infinite love that the Lord bore towards Arjuna.

The love that Arjuna bore towards Śrī Kṛṣṇa cannot be ordinarily expressed in words. Who can measure the greatness of Arjuna whom the All-knowing and All-blissful Presence made the occasion for singing His wonderful song of the *Gītā*, which leads beyond the world, dispels all fear of rebirth, opens wide the gate of knowledge, shuts the door against perdition and delivers from all bondage and guides through this dark and dreary forest of the world as a living immortal light of the Divine Himself? And therefore it is that Arjuna, the friend of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, has always to be remembered along with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Nara with the Nārāyaṇa.—नरञ्चैव नरोत्तमम् ।

