



THE
STORY-BOOK OF THE SHAH
OR
LEGENDS OF OLD PERSIA



THE HE-GOAT



Frontispiece.

KING JEMSHED AND THE GENII.

80121

THE STORY-BOOK OF
THE SHAH
OR
LEGENDS OF OLD PERSIA

BY
ELLA C. SYKES
AUTHOR OF "THROUGH PERSIA ON A SIDE-SADDLE"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY CLAUDE COOPER
AND DECORATIONS BY ETHEL R. SYKES
FROM PERSIAN SOURCES

LONDON
JOHN MACQUEEN
49, RUPERT STREET, W.

1901

These Stories
ARE
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
TO
MY LITTLE GOD-DAUGHTERS
ENID, JOAN AND KATHLEEN

72
8.
5985



PREFACE

THE old legends re-told in this book are as well-known to the Persians of to-day, as were the Siege of Troy or the adventures of Odysseus to the Athenians in the time of Pericles.

Some eight centuries have now passed since the poet Firdausi, the Oriental Homer, collected these ancient tales of Kings and Heroes, and embodied them in a fine epic poem, the "Shah Nameh," which has been called the "Iliad of the East."

This, alas! I have not read in the original,

but I have endeavoured to make such characters as Jemshed, Rustem, Sohrab, and others, interesting to English readers, and have given local colour to my book by depicting, from my own experiences, gained during a two years' residence in the country, some of the aspects of Persia, and the different manners and customs of its inhabitants, as they are at the present day.

In many cases I have taken only the bare outline of the story, filling it in with suitable incidents, and have tried to avoid the repetition and verbosity of the original, which would not appeal to the Western mind, as it does to the Eastern.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I	
THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED,	I
II	
THE STORY OF KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÙN,	45
III	
THE STORIES OF ZAL AND THE CHILDHOOD OF RUSTEM,	73
IV	
RUSTEM, THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD,	95
V	
RUSTEM AND SOHRAB,	119
VI	
THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH,	143
VII	
SOME OF THE FEATS OF RUSTEM,	169
VIII	
THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR,	189

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
KING JEMSHED AND THE GENII,	<i>Frontispiece</i>
KING JEMSHED AND THE SLAVE-GIRL,	<i>Facing</i> 23
FERIDÛN AND THE GOOD GENIUS,	" 54
ZAL AND RUDABEH,	" 82
RUSTEM FIGHTS WITH KING AFRASIYAB (FROM A PERSIAN PAINTING),	" 101
RUSTEM AND THE WHITE DEMON,	" 114
KING KAI-KAUS TRYING TO FLY,	" 122
RUSTEM AND SOHRAB,	" 138
MANÍJEH IN HER TENT,	" 150
THE COUNCIL OF THE WISE MEN,	" 183
ISFENDIYAR CONQUERS THE KING OF INDIA (FROM A PERSIAN PAINTING),	" 190
ISFENDIYAR AND THE DRAGON,	" 204



I

The Story of King Jemshed

CHAPTER I

It has seemed to me that perhaps some English children might like to hear the stories that have delighted boys and girls in Persia for so many hundreds of years.

We ourselves know all about "Jack the Giant-Killer," "Puss in Boots," and a host of those friends of our childhood, and, later on, we make acquaintance with Hercules, and Jason, and much-travelled Ulysses, but few of us have come

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

across King Jemshed, the white-haired Zal, or mighty Rustem, and it is of these and others as renowned that I propose to tell you.

The Persians relate that many hundreds of years ago their ancestors dwelt in the Elburz mountains, a lofty range to the north of their country. They were wont to sleep in caves on the hill-sides, and were clad in the skins of the animals which they had slain for food with their bows and arrows, each man living for himself, and owning no allegiance to anyone. But after a while they chose a king, Kaiumers by name, and he was so wise that even the animals assembled to do him homage. The lions and tigers came from their lairs in the distant forest, and wolves and leopards crouched before the monarch in company with the fierce wild boar and the fleet-footed ass of the desert.

Kaiumers prospered and grew great and strong, but, unfortunately, he had an enemy, who was the King of the Divs or Demons,

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

the Persian soldiers fled in terror to their mountain fastnesses.

Kaiumers grieved bitterly for the loss of his son, and his pride as a king was severely hurt, for the Demons overflowed the Persian lands, and, in the insolence of their triumph, treated the lawful inhabitants as their slaves.

But the Gods above, who always guard the right, would not suffer this state of things for long, and one day a mysterious and awe-inspiring voice was heard by old Kaiumers in the remote cavern where he lay hid from his enemies. "Cease thy wild despair," it said. "Summon the bravest of thy subjects to thy standard, and victory shall crown thy arms." So the monarch roused himself, and, resolving to fight yet once again for his kingdom, commanded his dearly-loved grandson, Husheng, to lead his forces. This youth did not trust to human help alone, but called the wild beasts to assist him, and it is said that even the birds

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

of the air gave valuable aid in confusing the foe by flying in their faces and making swoops at their eyes.

The great army of Demons was a terrible sight, enveloped as it was in flames and clouds of smoke, but the heroism of the Persians won the day, Husheng particularly distinguishing himself by slaying the Demon King and various members of his family in single combat. As was always the case in those days, the whole army was routed on the death of its leader, and the panic-stricken Divs were pursued by the tigers and wolves and panthers, which tore them to pieces as they fled.

From now onwards the kingdom of Persia was secure, and civilization grew apace, and reached a climax in the long reign of Jemshed, the grandson of the valiant Husheng.

Persians speak of the wisdom and power of this mighty monarch as we do of that of King Solomon. The Demons were subservient to

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

his will, and he made them build magnificent palaces for him. They also launched vessels on the Caspian Sea, and even went so far as to transport Jemshed on his throne from one city to another in less time than it takes to write it. For seven hundred years Persia enjoyed a Golden Age under this king, so highly favoured by the Gods. During that time no one died or was ill, and Jemshed, along with his subjects, was in the very heyday of youth and strength, old age being unknown.

But the greatness of his prosperity inflated the monarch with pride, and he forgot the gratitude due to the Gods to whom he and his people owed all their happiness.

There came a day when he commanded everyone of his subjects to assemble in the great square in front of his palace. Now this mansion of the king, built by the Demons, was like a fairy dream. All the outside walls were covered with beautifully-painted tiles, and

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

the many windows and balconies were made of fretted stonework, which was encrusted with bits of looking-glass, so that the whole building glittered and sparkled as if it had been besprinkled with diamonds.

And we can still see this kind of ornamentation in Persia to-day, because the Persians have never quite forgotten the manner in which the Demons made King Jemshed's palace.

Inside, there were lofty halls with springing fountains, and silk carpets covering soft divans on which to lie. The walls were hung with pictures and embroidered silks and jewelled hangings, everything much like a Persian palace of to-day, but, of course, far grander, mere men not being able to make things as well as the Genii can.

The palace stood in the midst of the city, to the north of which rose the Elburz range, covered with snow, the great Volcano

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

Demavend sending up its smoke, lazily curling into the clear blue sky of a Persian winter.

In front of the palace was placed the throne of mighty Jemshed, on which he could be carried from place to place in his kingdom in the twinkling of an eye. It was the handiwork of Demons, and was studded with every precious stone you have ever heard of, and a great many that you have not. As the brilliant sunshine lit it up, it was almost too dazzling for mortal eye to gaze on, and around it stood a great array of cat-headed Divs, gigantic Afreets, and fearsome-looking Jinns, while graceful Peris, a kind of fairy, held a magnificent awning over it.

After a while the brazen trumpets blew, the toms-toms were beaten by men's hands, and the vast crowds became all agog with impatience to see their mighty monarch, and to hear for what purpose he had commanded them thus to assemble.

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

At last Jemshed, surrounded by his mightiest warriors and the most learned of his subjects, came forth from his palace and mounted the throne, while all the people fell on their faces before him, and did obeisance.

He wore many silken coats, one over the other, and a fur mantle outside all the rest ; his gorgeously-embroidered trousers were tight at the ankles, and his slippers were of pure gold, while on his head was a big, many-coloured turban with a huge diamond blazing in front of it.

At the present day the Shah of Persia wears several coats, one over the other, but, as they are usually of buff or dark cloth, and his trousers like those of a European gentleman, you would not consider him very fine in appearance.

On this occasion Jemshed looked so magnificent that from his loyal subjects arose a loud and prolonged "Bah! bah!" of admiration, and the Persians still show their astonishment and pleasure in the same manner.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

After a moment the great King raised his sceptre and commanded his people to rise and be silent. In an instant there was an intense stillness, and one could almost "hear Demavend smoking," as the saying went, so eager were all to listen to the "Shelter of the Universe," the "Asylum of the World," as Persians call their ruler.

"Subjects of the greatest monarch on the earth," Jemshed began, "it is well for you to understand whence comes all your prosperity. Why is it that Disease and Poverty and Death are driven from this land? Why is it that you are always young and fair, and need never fear the approach of old age? The kingdoms on our frontiers are not favoured as we are. Famine and Pestilence visit all other nations, Death garners them in by thousands, and those he spares grow old and feeble. What is the reason of this difference?"

Here the King paused for a moment, and

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

shouts of "Hail to the Mighty Gods!" arose from the great concourse, and then ensued silence, for his subjects saw with surprise a dark frown gather upon the brow of their monarch.

"You say your welfare is a gift from the Gods!" he cried out in anger. "Not so, you foolish ones, blind as moles or worms. Know you not that all the good gifts you enjoy proceed from me myself? Know you not that it is I, the King, who have driven away Death and Sickness and Poverty from among you? Are you too ignorant to understand that Jemshed himself is the source of all your joy and rest, that all goodness and greatness proceed from him?"

This impious speech was at first received with great acclamation by the vast crowd, but, even as they shouted, a cry arose among them of "Look at Demavend!" and all eyes turned to the mountain. The snow-covered

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

volcano had suddenly become of a dusky red hue, and a huge black cloud issued from the crater and was wafted down towards the plain, until it hovered over the awe-struck people who turned to Jemshed for aid in their terror.

But, even as his subjects gazed upon him, the grandeur of the proud King vanished away. The gorgeous palace fell into a heap of unsightly ruins, the gem-studded throne, the wonder of the world, crumbled into dust, and Jemshed's royal robes became fluttering rags such as the very beggars would disdain.

Along the ground glided venomous snakes, and loathsome lizards crawled among the populace, while the black cloud rained down a veritable army of huge scorpions, yellow and black, of fat-bodied, hairy tarantulas and swiftly-running centipedes.

On all sides were clear signs of the anger of the Dwellers in the High Heavens, and as the people shrank away from the horrible reptiles

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

and insects, they cried out that they would no longer obey Jemshed as their King, because he had lost the favour of the Gods through his impious pride.

Poor monarch! He paid bitterly for his arrogance, and to the last day of his life he regretted that he had ever made that boastful speech. His regrets, however, came too late. The nobles and warriors, seeing that the Gods were against him, respected him no more, and many actually gave their allegiance to Zohak, an Arab King, who was a slave to Iblis, the Spirit of Evil.

Accordingly, Zohak determined to conquer Persia, which was far larger and richer than his own kingdom, and sent a large army into that country.

Jemshed did his best to guard his land from the hordes of wild Arabs that flowed into it, but, alas, in vain. His power was gone, and his very soldiers, who used to think they

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

could never be conquered if only their King were with them, now cursed him openly, as he rode at their head on his milk-white charger.

At last came a terrible day when all was lost. The entire Persian army refused to fight. The archers would not draw their bows, the slingers threw their stones on the ground instead of putting them into their slings, and the officers left their swords in their sheaths, and did not unfasten the heavy battle-axes from their saddles.

Jemshed galloped to and fro among them, whirling his huge, spiked mace, and threatening to kill them if they did not make ready against the Arabs. But not a single man cared for the King's anger, though once every subject would have prostrated himself at the monarch's feet until commanded to rise.

At last Jemshed saw that all his efforts were useless; and as he did not wish to be made

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

prisoner by the Arab hosts, now thronging close upon him, he dug the corners of his shovel-shaped stirrups into his steed and disappeared across the plain in a cloud of dust. As his horse was the swiftest in Persia, the King soon out-distanced the Arab riders sent after him, and became a wanderer on the face of the earth, without a friend and with many foes.

Where could he go? To the North, on the far side of the Elburz mountains, lay the fertile slopes of Mazanderan, but this country was inhabited by Demons and Genii, who would assuredly kill him now, though only a short time back they had trembled at his frown, and obeyed his lightest behest. On the West were the Arab hordes, and far South ran the Persian Gulf, which report said was full of crocodiles and sharks and many other sea monsters, which were in the habit of coming inland to devour the wretched inhabitants.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

On thinking over all these things, Jemshed decided to make his way towards India, and, if possible, take service with some powerful king there, and perhaps in time obtain his aid in reconquering his lost kingdom.

You would not think travelling in Persia, even at the present day, a very comfortable process. As there are no railways and very few roads, everyone has to get from place to place on horseback, and all the luggage is carried on the pack-saddles of mules. And when the day's march is over, you reach no comfortable hotel, but must do the best you can in a perfectly bare and often very dirty room in a *caravanserai* unless the weather is warm enough for you to pitch your tent.

Jemshed, however, had no baggage and no tent, and he did not dare to enter the *caravanserais* for fear of being recognized. All the shelter he could get was in some peasant's small hut, made of mud. Day after day he

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

would traverse broad plains, riding along a scarcely-defined track towards a range of barren hills, which he would painfully cross; and every now and again a dreary expanse of desert had to be passed.

These deserts in Persia are no light matter to the traveller. Water is only to be found at long distances apart, and there is no food of any kind for man or beast.

On one occasion Jemshed nearly died of thirst in these terrible wastes. The water-skin, hanging from his saddle, was emptied to the last drop, and yet he had not reached the holes, which he had been told would contain the precious liquid. It was still winter, and the nights were bitterly cold, but during the day the sun blazed straight down from a turquoise sky on mounds of yellow sand, which his tired horse would avoid as far as possible, but which often had to be crossed as they rose in long chains before him.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

At last the milk-white steed could carry its rider no further, and the king struggled along wearily in the loose sand, his faithful companion stumbling after him.

Two miserable days went by, and Jemshed, who had once quaffed the choicest wines of Shiraz, now suffered all the agonies of thirst, his swollen tongue seeming to fill his parched mouth.

On the morning of the third day, the poor horse had not the strength to stagger to its feet, and the King went on his way, feeling a great despair overwhelming him. But, lo, and behold, as he surmounted the crest of a chain of sand hills, he saw a little tamarisk scrub growing at their base, and some shallow depressions in the ground below him.

Water at last! He threw himself down, and dug with his hands in the sand, which became moister and moister as he flung it out of the hole, and, in a moment or two, the precious liquid began to trickle slowly into this primitive well.

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

When he had quenched his thirst, and felt his dried-up body expand again with the blessed moisture, his first thought was for his faithful horse. With some difficulty he filled up his astrakhan hat with water, and hurried back lest he should be too late.

The poor animal lay stretched out and gasping, but when Jemshed poured the liquid down its throat, it was able to get up and follow him to the holes, where it drank and drank as if it would never stop.

Eastward, ever eastward, day after day, week after week! The glorious Persian sunsets flamed in the sky behind Jemshed, and lit up the ranges barring his way with gorgeous rose and purple tints, while every night the moon sailed across a sky of darkest sapphire in which the stars shone with a brilliancy unknown in England. Long before morning the curious "False Dawn" would often wake him, and then darkness would fall on the world again until a

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

crimson streak in the East appeared and grew broader and broader. Then, all at once, the eastward sky would be sown broadcast with flocks of tiny rosy clouds, and the sun himself would leap into the heavens to begin a new day.

But even the longest journey has an end, and at last Jemshed found himself in the kingdom of Zabulistan. This realm, which now forms part of India, used to send tribute every year to the once proud King of Persia, who was now entering it as a homeless wanderer, in fear of his life.





CHAPTER II

GURENG, the King of Zabulistan, had a daughter, Ferooze or Turquoise by name, so beautiful that all the Court poets worked their hardest to find similes to describe her exceeding loveliness. They compared her figure to the cypress, her walk to that of the pheasant, her face to the full moon, her lips to sugar, and her cheeks to the rose or the tulip; but all confessed that no words could do justice to the brilliant splendour of her glorious eyes.

As was only natural, this fair maiden had many lovers, but, so far, she had not cared for any of them, and her devoted father said that

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

he would never force her to marry unless she herself wished to do so.

She had an old nurse from Kabul, a woman skilled in all the enchantments of the Afghans, and who was able to foretell the future, besides reading many hidden secrets of the universe from the moon and the stars. This aged crone had prophesied often to her lovely mistress that she would become the wife of King Jemshed, whose power and achievements had been the talk of every tongue, and the Princess was so proud at the brilliant prospect that she was scornful and haughty to the princes who came from far and wide to woo her. And, indeed, King Gureng himself was deeply impressed by the prophecy of the Kabuli nurse until the evil tidings reached him of the conquest of Persia by Zohak, and the disastrous flight of its monarch.

Now it came to pass that Jemshed arrived at the city of Zabul in the month of May,



CC

To face page 23.

THE SLAVE-GIRL SEES KING JEMSHED.

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

when the roses were in full bloom, and all the world was rejoicing in the delicious sunshine, which would too soon become of almost unbearable strength. The poor refugee wished to enter into a big walled enclosure, outside the city-gate, shaded by trees and cool with running water, to repose after his long journey. But to his surprise he found guards posted at the entrance, who informed him that the Princess was inside, disporting herself with her maidens, and, therefore, no intruder might enter the garden. Jemshed was too tired to go further, so threw himself down in the shade of a tree outside. His marvellous youth and beauty, undimmed by the hundreds of years that he had dwelt on the earth, and uninjured by his terrible misfortune, at once attracted the notice of a slave-girl who chanced to come out of the gardens. To her inquiries the dethroned King answered that formerly he was rich and powerful, but that now he was too poor even to

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

buy wine, and he begged the girl to give him some of his favourite drink, as it would lessen his miseries both of mind and body.

The Princess and her train of girls inside the garden had been finding the time pass somewhat slowly that day, and all listened in great excitement when the slave-girl rushed up to them, and, prostrating herself, informed her royal mistress that the most beautiful youth in the world was resting outside the gate, and had begged her to give him wine as he was weary with travelling.

Ferooze, who was not lacking in curiosity, at once rose and hastened to the entrance, and as soon as her eyes fell on the stranger she felt a strong affection for him and invited him to come into her garden. Jemshed hesitated to comply, as he feared his disguise might be penetrated, and even when the lady told him who she was, and that her every wish was law to her father, he still hung back. But when she

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

gazed at him with her melting eyes and held out her hand to him, he could no longer resist such charm and loveliness, and, entering the garden, he walked beside her along the shady avenues. Soon they came to a leaping fountain, around which fine carpets and soft cushions were spread, and the Princess bade the stranger seat himself beside her, clapping her hands as a signal to her slaves to bring the noon-day meal.

The food was not like that to which we are accustomed, and was served on golden trays placed on a silken cloth laid on the ground.

There was a great mound of *pillau*, which is boiled rice and butter mixed with chopped meat and vegetables; also *kabob-i-sikhs*, which are bits of mutton and onion roasted on long wooden skewers, and *chilav kabob*, a very favourite dish, where tender pieces of meat are laid on a big pile of snowy rice and are eaten with butter and raw eggs. Plums

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

and apricots flanked the meats, and there were so many kinds of sweetmeats, that it would only tire you were I to describe them, and would be unkind on my part, as you cannot taste them for yourselves. As there were no knives and forks, the Princess and her guest had to eat with their fingers, as the Persians do at the present day, and you would be quite astonished to see how neatly they do it. It is not at all an easy matter, as you will soon see, if you try to eat boiled rice in that way. Ferooze drank only water in a cup filled with snow, but the slave-girl handed Jemshed a brimming goblet of wine, and as he quaffed it his melancholy vanished, and he told the Princess that the ruby-tinted juice of the grape helped him to forget his enemies and misfortunes, and inspired him with courage to face the world again. As he spoke his eyes glowed, and he held the golden cup with such a grace that the royal girl was convinced he could be

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

none other than King Jemshed himself, and she secretly sent a slave to the palace for a portrait of the once mighty monarch, in order to compare it with the features of the stranger.

Meantime two doves fluttered near where they sat, and, perching on a fragment of broken wall, began to bill and coo with one another. The Princess perceiving them, and anxious to show the stranger what she could do, sent for her bow and arrows.

“Now, which bird shall I shoot?” she playfully asked Jemshed. “Perhaps you are not aware that no warrior in the kingdom has so strong an arm or so sure an aim as I have?”

But Jemshed held out his own hand for the bow, and the royal beauty, falling ever deeper in love, yielded it to him. “Now, if I hit the mate,” he cried, “shall the lady whom I admire most in the world be mine?” Ferooze bowed her head in sign of assent, and marvelled to see with what ease the handsome

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

stranger handled the bow, which not one of her father's men of war could bend. The poor dove was slain, and then the lady took the bow, and asking whether she should have as husband the man whom she loved if her aim were true, she transfixed the other dove through the heart. As Jemshed and the Princess were gazing at one another with love shining in their eyes, the old nurse from Kabul hobbled up to them, and pulled her mistress aside to inform her that the beautiful youth was no other than the King of Persia himself, whom Destiny had led to this spot to be her husband. And to make assurance doubly sure, a slave appeared carrying the portrait of the once mighty monarch, which the Princess invited her guest to look at.

At the sight of the likeness of the King, clad in gorgeous robes, crowned with jewels, and seated on his wondrous throne, the masterpiece of Demons, Jemshed burst into tears, so

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

bitter was the remembrance of his past splendour as compared with his present wretchedness. But even then he would not confess that he was the original of the portrait, and long did he evade the inquiries of both the lady and her nurse, so fearful was he of being captured by the myrmidons of Zohak if he betrayed his name.

However, the great love of Ferooze prevailed at last, and he poured out to her the whole history of his misfortunes and the downfall of his kingdom.

The maiden, as she listened to him, made one of the fairest of pictures. She wore a loose-sleeved jacket of silver gauze richly embroidered with gold, her long full trousers of silk were a very marvel of the loom, and the thick plaits of her black hair were crowned with a little jewelled cap.

You must not think that she and Jemshed sat on chairs as we do, for such things were

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

unknown then in Persia, and even now there are but few of them. No, they sat on their heels, and if you try to sit in that way, you will find it very uncomfortable, and you will get cramp in your legs if you do it for long. But, all the same, every Persian sits like that at the present day, and they don't find an English chair at all a pleasant kind of seat.

When the royal wanderer had finished the recital of his woes, he was lost in gloomy thoughts for awhile, and forgot that the love of the fairest woman in the world was his, should he care to accept it.

Then the Princess laid her hand upon his arm, and, looking into the depths of his eyes, said: "The anger of the Gods has been kindled against you, but it will not endure for ever. Even now they give you a sign that their wrath is cooling. They have brought you here, and if you will wed with me, you will become King of Zabulistan when my

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

father is no more, for he has no son to succeed him."

Jemshed answered, however, that he dreaded lest misfortune should come upon Ferooze, should he marry her, and he felt that he ought never to allow her to join her lot with a being accursed of Heaven.

So they argued with one another until they were interrupted by the old Kabuli nurse, who came limping up to them. "It is written in the stars that you, my mistress, are to wed with King Jemshed!" she exclaimed. "No mortal power can keep apart those whom Destiny has ordained shall be one. Strive and struggle as you may, it will be all in vain." The words of the aged woman convinced Jemshed, and, bowing low before the Princess, he vowed to love and serve her to the best of his power and all his life long.

The *mollah* or priest, who had taught Ferooze to read and write, and to understand

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

the mysteries of her religion, was now summoned, and he married the royal pair according to the customs of Zabulistan.

But the Princess sent no messenger to tell her father, King Gureng, of what she had done, as she feared his anger greatly, and was glad to think that he was away in a distant part of his dominions.

The women now came to dance and sing before the newly-wedded couple, piling up great couches of fresh pink roses on which they reclined and listened to the music.

You would not have considered the dancing a very interesting performance, for it was not at all brisk or lively.

Two slave girls shuffled backwards and forwards, and threw themselves into various attitudes, one woman being able to bend right backwards until her head touched the ground, and then to raise herself slowly again, very red in the face. Some of the slaves beat tom-toms

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

or drums loudly with their hands, while others played on instruments looking rather like guitars, and all the rest sang. *You* would have thought that the singing was a succession of yells and screeches, somewhat resembling the sounds in the Zoo when the animals are going to be fed, but, of course, Jemshed and the Princess enjoyed it greatly.

When the singing and dancing were over, the attendants sprinkled the young couple with rose-water, and summoned one of the Court poets to amuse them with tales of old Kaiumers and his grandson, the valiant Husheng.

I daresay Ferooze would have been much surprised had she known that her story and that of King Jemshed would be related in Persia hundreds of years after both of them were dead, and that Persians of to-day would crowd round some Dervish in scores, listening eagerly to the oft-repeated tale.

But so it is, and the names of the proud

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

monarch and his fair bride are as familiar to the boys and girls of far-off Persia as are those of "Dick Whittington" or "Jack the Giant-Killer" to us.

* * * * *

The weeks of the honeymoon glided by like a delicious dream, and Jemshed loved his wife more dearly than he could ever have done in the old days of his pride, when he cared for no one but himself.

The Princess was far happier than words of mine can describe, though the news that King Gureng was coming back to his capital cast a shadow over her great joy.

"Whatever may befall us in the future," she would say to herself, "nothing can take away from me these weeks of peerless happiness. If I must pass all the rest of my life in misery, I shall not feel that I have paid too high a price for Jemshed's love."

When King Gureng returned to his palace,

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

and was informed that his daughter, the apple of his eye, had married without his permission, his wrath was great, and he summoned her and her nurse into the royal presence, and reproached her for having united herself to a mere stranger. At this the Princess could no longer contain herself, and, reminding her father that he had always promised that she should wed the man she loved, she astounded him with the news that her husband was Jemshed, the greatest king the world had ever known.

The old Kabuli nurse then explained how her prophecy had been fulfilled, and how the marriage that she had foretold long ago had now come to pass, and as she spoke King Gureng's face gleamed with satisfaction. "Is it really Jemshed who is here and in my power?" he exclaimed. "I owe you hearty thanks, my daughter, for having captured such a noble prize for me. I shall send him bound

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

to Zohak, his deadly enemy, and the King of the Arabs will give me a fine kingdom in exchange for him." But the girl threw herself at her father's feet and wept exceedingly. She lamented without ceasing, bidding Gureng remember that such a deed of treachery would be severely punished at the great Day of Doom, and telling him that she would die if harm were to befall her husband, and her words had some effect on the monarch.

To console her, he promised to give up his cruel design, and said he would do what he could for his son-in-law, even to giving him an army with which to re-conquer his kingdom. So the Princess rushed off joyously to Jemshed to tell him the good news.

But, as often happens, King Gureng, on thinking over the matter, changed his mind again, and, knowing full well that Zohak would destroy the kingdom of Zabulistan if he knew that his enemy had taken refuge there, he

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

called a council of his chief men and told them of the matter.

They were horrified when they understood that Jemshed was in the country, and counselled their master to seize him at once, and imprison him, as, if not, the Arab King would most certainly invade Zabulistan.

But Ferooze, whose suspicions had been aroused by the calling together of this council at an unusual hour, had hidden herself behind one of the silk carpets which draped the walls of the chamber, and had thus heard every word of the discussion.

As soon as the last man had left the room she glided out, swathed in her white *chaddar* (mantle), and rapidly made her way to her husband, for not a moment was to be lost. "Light of my eyes!" she exclaimed, as she hurried up to him, "you must leave me at once, and perhaps for ever, for my father is resolved to send you under a strong guard to the cruel Zohak."

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

She was not a woman to give way to her grief when there was anything to be done, therefore she wasted no time in laments, but sent her most trusty slave to get a peasant dress for her husband. Then she stained his white skin with the juice of the walnut, sewing all the gold and jewels that she possessed into a belt, which she fastened round his waist.

When he was ready to go, she saw with joy that few would recognize him for mighty Jemshed, and she kissed him once with all her heart, saying, "Go now, my lord; I keep back my tears until you are gone out of my sight, for before me lie many grey and sad years, in which they will flow without ceasing." But he could not leave her without pressing her again and again to his heart. And then, once more, he set out as a wanderer on the face of the earth.

From place to place he travelled, and so great was his misery that he hardly ever slept, and

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

became more and more exhausted as the days dragged out their weary length. "To what end have I been born into the world?" he exclaimed one day, as he lay in the shade of a great tower in the fertile land of India. "Am I, whose glory once reached to the Heavens, to perish thus miserably? Oh, that I had never been granted the gift of life!" And while he thought and wept, soft sleep overcame him and hid from his eyes the approach of Destiny.

A cavalcade was passing near the tower, headed by an envoy from the court of Zohak, and the noble looked carelessly down at the sleeping man as he rode by him. In spite of the disguise, he recognized Jemshed at once, and, springing from his horse, he called on his soldiers to secure the royal prize, and led him in chains back to Persia.

The cruel Zohak was delighted to hear of the capture, and ordered the prisoner to be

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

dragged before his throne, that he might gloat over the man whom he had for so long tried in vain to get into his power.

The wicked monarch taunted his helpless captive as he stood bound before him. "Where is now your crown, where is your kingdom, and where are all your loyal subjects?" he asked, mockingly, and his rage grew greater as Jemshed boldly defied him.

He then gave the once mighty King his choice of various painful modes of death, but the Persian laughed at him disdainfully, daring him to do his worst; and at the last, after cruel tortures, died with a smile on his lips.

Meanwhile the poor Princess wept and waited, eagerly interviewing every *fakir* who had begged his way from Persia to Zabulistan. But the weeks and months passed by without bringing her any news, so at last she began to hope that her husband had made good his escape. Alack, her hopes were but ill-founded! One

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

day she heard a Persian beggar chanting in a sing-song voice :—

“Khoda guft bidde,
Shaitan guft nidde,”

which means, in English, “God tells you to give, but Satan says, ‘don’t give.’”

At once she summoned him to her presence, and questioned him as to the fate of King Jemshed. The long-haired, wild-eyed *fakir*, with a leopard-skin hung over his shoulders, had come direct from the Court of Zohak, and had been among the crowd which had gathered round the hapless Persian monarch to see him pant forth his last breath in anguish.

Therefore, hoping for large alms, he gave the unfortunate Princess a detailed account of the way in which her husband had been put to death.

It was too much. Ferooze fainted back on the cushions of her divan, and no sooner had she come to her senses than she drank a

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

draught of deadly poison, telling her sorrowing maidens that it was impossible for her to live any longer, so great was her misery.

King Gureng, alas, repented too late of his treacherous conduct towards Jemshed, and mourned his lovely daughter all the rest of his days, dying a broken-hearted man.

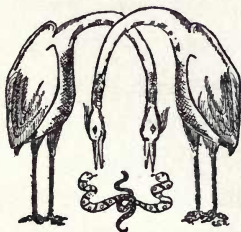
* * * * *

This is the story of great King Jemshed, which every boy and girl in Persia has heard a score of times.

And when to-day some wandering Dervish relates the tale, and then passes round his carved gourd for alms at the end of the narrative, he never fails to impress the moral on his crowd of listeners. He will say, "Lo, King Jemshed was as a man who seeks to hide from his enemies, and yet rides a lofty camel, thinking, in his folly, that if he leans forward on its neck he will be unobserved. Or, again, he was as the partridge of Azerbaijan,

THE STORY OF KING JEMSHED

which imagines it is secure from the hunters in winter-time if it do but bury its head in the snow. The great monarch had offended the mighty Gods by his overweening pride, and no long journeys, no disguises could hide him from their all-seeing gaze, and avert the just punishment of his presumption. Even so,"—and here the *fakir* will turn slowly and look fixedly at the people,—“if there be some evil-doer among you who gather around me, do what he may, he can never escape from the terrible Eye of Allah.”





II

The Story of King Zohak and King · Feridùn

IN this story I am going to tell you about the cruel tyrant Zohak who murdered King Jemshed, and whose name is still quoted in Persia as a type of all that is wicked. Zohak's father was King of the Arabs, and of so charitable a disposition that the Gods greatly multiplied his flocks and herds to reward him for his continual almsgiving. His son led a blameless life until the day when he was tempted by the Evil Spirit Iblis, who appeared to him as a holy man, and discoursed so beauti-

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

fully of high matters, that the young Prince was completely deceived by him.

As soon as Iblis saw what an impression he had made, he ceased talking, and when Zohak implored him to continue, he said that he could not say another word unless the Prince would swear to grant him one wish.

The young man, feeling sure that the desire of so pious a Dervish must be righteous, assented; but he was thrown into an agony of mind when Iblis revealed to him his horrible plan. "Thy father is now old and no longer fitted to be King," said the Evil Spirit. "Thou must kill him and sit on the throne in his stead." And when Zohak refused to consent to such wickedness, Iblis forced him to his will by saying, "Then I will kill thee myself, for thy oath has placed thee in my power." The Prince was not brave enough to face the idea of death, and actually allowed the Evil Spirit to dig a deep pit as a trap in the middle of the private path

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÛN

which led from the palace to the House of Prayer. This Iblis covered over with grass, and when the good King went that evening to perform his devotions, he fell headlong into the hole, and perished miserably.

His son now ruled in his stead, but was completely in the power of the Evil One, who promised to make him king of the whole world if he would obey him in all things. And so he grew more and more wicked every day. Up to this time Zohak and his subjects had fed only on bread and fruit; but Iblis made savoury dishes from many kinds of birds and beasts, and each day delighted the King with some fresh exhibition of his skill.

One evening this clever cook appeared with roast pheasants and partridges, and Zohak found his meal so appetizing that he begged Iblis to ask him for whatever he desired. "I have but one small wish, oh, noble King," said the wily Spirit, "and that is to kiss thy shoulder."

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

The monarch, only too glad to gratify such an easy request, at once drew up his loose Eastern sleeve, and Iblis pressed his lips to the shoulder, and vanished immediately. But, lo, and behold, in the twinkling of an eye, two horrible black serpents grew on the spot touched by the Devil's mouth.

All the wise men of the kingdom—the doctors, magicians, and astrologers—came to see the wonder, but none of them could cure the unfortunate Zohak, and the snakes writhed to and fro on his shoulder as if hungry for food.

Iblis alone could have removed the spell, and he was nowhere to be found. But one day a reverend-looking doctor came to the palace and craved to see the King. It was really Iblis in disguise, and he informed Zohak that it had been foretold long ages ago in the stars that the Arab King was to be afflicted with these terrible serpents which would make him miserable throughout his life.

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÛN

At these words the luckless monarch nearly swooned with horror, but was roused by the pretended doctor, who said that if two human victims were offered up to the serpents every day, the spell would soon be broken. And Iblis went away, hoping that Zohak, in following his advice, would slay a great part of the human race.

And now began a time of terror and anguish for the unfortunate subjects of the Arab King, because every day two youths were slain, and Zohak's cruelty and tyranny became greater than words can describe. In fact, so dreaded was his name throughout his own and the adjoining lands, that when King Jemshed fell from the favour of the Gods, the Persian nobles offered their master's throne to Zohak, saying that they would rather have the slave of the Evil One for a friend than for an enemy. And as we have read, Zohak captured and cruelly put to death the unfortunate Jemshed, and

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

ruled over Persia in his stead, taking his beautiful sister for his wife.

But yet more punishments were in store for the man who had sold himself to the Power of Evil, and one night he was visited by a terrible dream.

In it he was attacked by three warriors, and the youngest of them hit him on the head with an iron mace, and then bound him with ropes and dragged him along to some fearsome doom. At this point he woke up with yells of terror, and immediately called together the wise men of his Court, although day had not yet dawned, and demanded of them the meaning of the dream.

But the magicians, fearing lest the King might slay them were they to tell him the interpretation, pretended that they must have time to study the question thoroughly. Zohak, however, was too much frightened to wait long, and on the fourth day insisted that they should speak.

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÙN

Trembling with fear, the wise men then told the meaning of the dream. "Oh, mighty King," they said, "a child shall be born called Feridùn, who shall slay thee and take thy crown."

The Arab King was nearly mad with terror when he heard the fate in store for him, but resolving to do what he could to save himself from sure-footed Destiny, he ordered that his spies should discover whether there were any child in the kingdom called by the name of Feridùn.

After many conferences with his magicians, he learnt that his destroyer would proceed from a particular family, and accordingly commanded all the members of the tribe to which it belonged to be bound and brought before him.

The father of Feridùn fled on hearing this ominous command, but was captured, and at once put to death. His wife, however, managed to make her escape with her infant,

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

which she left on one of the slopes of the Elburz Range in charge of a herdsman, a pious man, who feared the Gods, and who gave away the milk of his cow in charity. The poor mother felt that her child was safer in the herdsman's cottage than with her as she wandered among the pathless mountains, moving from village to village in her flight.

At the end of three years she returned to the herdsman, saying that the Gods had told her in a dream to remove her son from his care; and, indeed, it was well that she did so, for on the very next day Zohak and his soldiers appeared at the pasturage and killed the herdsman and all his tribe—nay, even the cow herself—to punish them for their share in sheltering Feridùn. But the boy, the object of their expedition, could nowhere be found, for the mother and child had taken refuge with a wise Dervish who lived in a cave on the side of the fire-belching Volcano Demavend.

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÛN

If you ever go to Tehran, the present capital of Persia, you will be sure to see Mount Demavend, the tallest peak in the high Elburz Range, and it will become quite a friend to you, as you look at it many times a day, and notice how it glows rosy-red at sunset. But in the time of Feridùn it was not quiet as it is now. Smoke was for ever belching forth from its summit, and every now and then great flames would burst out, and broad streams of melted metal, called lava, would pour down its sides in fiery floods. These terrible rivers were red-hot, and destroyed everything in their path. Sometimes awe-inspiring rumblings would be heard, shaking the earth for miles around, and occasionally making all the dwellings near the mountain totter and fall.

And none, save perhaps some holy Dervish, would ever dare to climb to the summit, for it was the chosen home of many Genii and Demons.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

Here also the souls of the good were wont to rest during their flight to the other world; for the Persians thought that the top of Demavend reached almost into the Heavens.

When, however, Feridùn and his mother took shelter with the pious hermit, the boy, who was bold and feared nothing, began to wander about the great mountain. One day he heard a voice near him which said:—"The Gods have decreed that you will destroy the wicked Zohak and become King of Persia in his stead."

Feridùn started a little, and looked round in some surprise, for he had imagined himself alone. But as he gazed, a sort of floating mist seemed to be rising from the ground, and slowly became a form like a gigantic man. "Fear not!" the figure continued, "I am a benevolent Genius, and wish to help you to become a worthy King of Persia."

And the Spirit was as good as his word. He taught the boy how to ride, how to draw

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÙN

the bow and wield the sword, and instructed him in many hidden mysteries which were to prove of much use to him hereafter.

At the age of sixteen, the young Feridùn, with the face of a falcon and the eye of an eagle, had the air of a leader of men, and one day he told his mother that now the time had come for him to avenge the death of his father.

His poor mother wept bitterly, and did her best to dissuade him from the attempt. "How can you, a mere boy, fight against the powerful King Zohak?" she exclaimed. "He will take your life with cruel tortures, and I shall rue the day that you were born. Why leave me desolate and wretched? I cannot bear to part from you."

But Feridùn answered that the Gods would help the right; and having bade farewell to the good Genius, who aided him greatly, he descended Mount Demavend and made his way to the haunts of men. If you

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

had seen him on his white horse, the gift of the Genius, the animal breathing smoke from its nostrils and harnessed entirely with gold, you would have said he looked a Prince at the very least. (*Jiridin*)

He was clad from head to foot in golden chain-armour; his helmet and shield were studded with gems, and in his hand he carried a huge cow-headed mace, in memory of the animal whose milk had nourished him in his early years.

Following the counsel of the Genius, he boldly approached the magnificent city where King Jemshed had formerly reigned in such pomp. As he came near one of its twelve gateways, all covered in burnished tiles, he observed a great crowd issuing forth, and at its head marched a brawny man holding a spear, from the point of which waved a leather apron. This was Kavah, the blacksmith, whose two sons had been seized that very morning

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÙN

by the emissaries of Zohak, to be offered up in sacrifice to the serpents growing from the King's shoulder. Their father, half-mad with grief, had rushed into the Bazaars, and stirring up the people to a sense of their wrongs, called upon them to fight for freedom.

"Let us find Feridùn the Deliverer!" he cried. "It is prophesied that he has been appointed by the Gods to free us from the cruelty of this Arab usurper," and tearing off his leather apron, he hoisted it as the standard of revolt, and thousands followed him out of the city.

When the crowd saw a youth of such beauty and magnificence riding unattended, and evidently about to enter the town, everyone wondered who and what this gorgeously clad personage might be.

Every eye was fixed upon him, when suddenly the rumble of thunder was heard in the cloudless blue sky, from which pealed a mighty

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

voice. "This is Feridùn!" it cried. "Persians, behold your King! He will deliver you from the tyrant Zohak."

With one accord the multitudes prostrated themselves before the youth, and hailed him as their monarch with loud acclamations, marching in his wake, as he proudly rode through the fine gateway, confident of victory.

He made his way slowly through the Bazaars, and the workers in brass and copper, the men painting on fine vellum or wood, the enameled and jewellers, in fact everyone whom he passed, left their business and followed Feridùn with great joy.

And so he came to the Palace, but here a disappointment awaited him, for the wicked Zohak had been conveyed by the power of Iblis, the Spirit of Evil, to the city of Bagdad, on the River Tigris.

There was nothing for it but to pursue him thither. It was not a very easy journey for a

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÙN

people not accustomed to marching. If you glance at a map of Persia, you will observe that they had to go through the provinces of Hamadam and Kermanshah, which are hilly countries, and then came a stretch of desert before they reached the great River Tigris. However, such was the power of the good Genius who befriended Feridùn, that the Persians reached Bagdad in an incredibly short time. On their march the stony paths became level, the heat of the sun did not affect them, and at every camping place they found hundreds of tents, with clear streams running beside them, and actually enormous trays of *pillau* ready for the multitude to eat. Zohak was awaiting them, in a huge, strongly fortified tower built on the opposite bank of the river, and he felt confident that here he was safe, as he was guarded by strong enchantments and a talisman of magic virtue.

But the Powers of Good are ever far

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

stronger than the Powers of Evil, and so it proved in this case. The question was, how were Feridùn's followers to cross the Tigris, for there was no bridge, and the boats of the city were but few and small?

Feridùn, himself, was not in the least dismayed. First, calling upon the Gods to help him, he rode his white horse into the water, which suddenly became of such miraculous shallowness that all waded across in perfect safety, and proceeded to assault the tower.

The stronghold was not, however, to be taken by human means, and Feridùn's good Genius appeared to him at this crisis, giving him a wonderful wand which would destroy everything that opposed him. At its touch the walls of the once impregnable fortress tottered and fell, the magic talisman which guarded the tower was destroyed, and many evil Demons and Genii shrivelled up like dead leaves, and became mere handfuls of dust.

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÙN

But the wicked Zohak was nowhere to be found, for Iblis had transported him to far-off India, together with the entire Arab army.

Therefore, when Feridùn had taken all the treasures of Zohak, and had freed countless fair damsels, who had been imprisoned in the fortress by the cruel tyrant, he and his followers started in pursuit of the Arab King.

Before they had gone very far, they were joined by the usurper's soldiers, who declared that they would no longer obey their cruel master, so Zohak was deserted by all, and wandered a homeless fugitive in fear of his life.

Being a man of great courage, he determined to be avenged on Feridùn or perish in the attempt; and one night he approached the camp of the young Persian King in a carefully thought-out disguise.

A Persian camp is almost noisier by night than it is by day. The horses neigh a great deal, and every now and then one breaks loose

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

from its picket-rope and at once rushes to fight with its especial enemy. You would hardly believe what a disturbance this makes, as the horses squeal loudly and strike at one another with their hoofs, while the grooms with cries and shouts try to separate them before they hurt themselves. And all the time the little donkeys, which carry the bedding of the soldiers, never cease from braying, and the soldiers sit in parties round crackling camp fires, and enliven the dark hours with wild songs, some of them playing "*sitarrahs* or thumping *tom-toms*, and it really seems as if no one ever went to bed at all.

Into such a camp as this, Zohak made his way and at once knew where Feridùn was, because in front of a fine tent, made of scarlet cloth embroidered with pheasants, stood the royal standard of Persia. This was still the old leather apron that had once belonged to Kavah, the blacksmith, but now it was so

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÙN

covered with jewels and embroidery that you would not have recognized it, and for many centuries it was to Persia what the Union Jack is to Great Britain.

Zohak crept softly up to the tent, and cautiously pulling back the flap just an inch or two, he saw Feridùn lying on a pile of silk carpets. He felt that Fate had at last delivered his foe into his hand, and glided swiftly inside with his sword drawn.

But the good Genius, who was never long absent from the Persian King, aroused him just in time, and Feridùn sprang up and dealt his enemy a terrible blow with his iron-headed mace. He was about to kill him outright when a supernatural voice commanded him to forbear.

“Stay thy hand, Feridùn! Thou, oh Zohak, must now suffer the penalty of thy horrible crimes. The Gods have sentenced thee to be bound with chains, and to be cast into a dark

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

cavern of Mount Demavend, there to drag out thy miserable days."

And even at that moment, Zohak was seized by invisible hands and carried off through the air to his doom.

Feridùn now reigned over Persia, and for many years the country flourished exceedingly under his wise rule; but, unluckily, he did not manage his sons as well as he did his subjects.

When the three young Princes were of age, he married them to the beautiful daughters of the King of Yemen, and then divided his empire into three parts. To Selim and Tur, his elder sons, he gave the barren and uncivilized provinces of Rum and Turan, but to Irij, his youngest and best beloved, he gave Persia, and he himself dwelt with this son to advise and support him in his kingdom.

However, this division by no means pleased the elder brothers, and the two conspired

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÙN

together to oust Irij from his kingdom and to take it for themselves.

When the news of their design reached Persia, Feridùn, who appears to have greatly changed in old age, advised Irij to give up everything to his brethren, telling him that he could not resist them successfully, and that, life being so short, it really was not worth while to trouble overmuch about anything.

Irij agreed entirely with his father, and set out to visit his brothers, and to assure them that his kingdom was theirs, and that he himself only desired a quiet life. He alluded to Jemshed's cruel fate, saying that it had not greatly availed that monarch to have had the whole world at his feet. And when he arrived in the kingdom of Turan, travelling with a band of his friends in a simple way without any pomp or ceremony, the hearts of his brothers were touched by his prompt submission.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

But, as it happened, Irij was possessed of great personal attractions, and wherever he moved all eyes were upon him, and the soldiers of Selim and Tur invariably broke out into applause as he passed them. This not unnaturally aroused the jealousy of the two brothers, and when they heard the warriors saying that Irij was far more kingly in appearance than their own princes, and that they would gladly march to battle under his banner, Selim told Tur that their brother must be put to death.

And the very next day Tur began to blame Irij for having accepted Persia instead of one of the two barren kingdoms to the north which were perpetually harassed by the Turks. He refused to listen to the soft words of his peaceably-inclined brother, and, working himself up into a fury, ran upon him with a dagger and slew him.

Then these cruel brothers embalmed the

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÙN

head of the young prince, and sent it to old Feridùn.

This monarch was waiting in some anxiety for the return of his favourite son, and his loyal subjects had arranged a splendid reception for their young ruler. Many bands of music, fair damsels moving in the slow Persian dance, and processions of men on horseback leading riderless steeds, were ready to welcome Irij; but who can picture the dismay when the horrible truth was known?

Poor old Feridùn, nearly crazed with grief, ordered all his subjects to drape themselves in black. The parchment of the cheerful drums was broken and the flaunting banners were rent asunder, as the monarch interred the head of his beloved son, and called on Heaven for vengeance.

And the mighty Gods heard the prayer of the agonized father, although perhaps to Feridùn the day of retribution seemed long in coming.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

Irij had no son to avenge him, but when his little daughter grew up and was married, she became the mother of Minuchihr, and her child was said by all to greatly resemble both Feridùn and his ill-fated heir.

The old monarch adored his great-grandson, and did everything to fit him to rule over Persia, and the boy was beloved of the whole nation, the soldiers frequently telling him that they were ready to follow him to the death.

Feridùn had not been idle during all these years, for he had collected a vast army and had trained it to such a pitch of efficiency that his wicked sons became seriously alarmed.

From time to time reports reached them of the bravery of the young Minuchihr, and, thinking that discretion might be the better part of valour, they sent a messenger with magnificent presents to Feridùn, but the old man looked at the costly offerings coldly, and

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÙN

inquired of the envoy with what message he was charged by his masters.

The nobleman then explained that Selim and Tur were deeply penitent on account of the murder of Irij and begged for pardon, as the Evil Spirit had persuaded them to do the wicked deed against their will. They asked their father, as a proof of forgiveness, to send his great-grandson to them; and, if Feridùn wished, they would resign their kingdoms to him.

But the aged king was not to be deceived by fair words. He bade the envoy tell his masters that Minuchihr intended to visit them, but at the head of a great army, and, to let him see that this was no idle boast, he showed the nobleman a host of the mightiest warriors of his kingdom, and then sent him and the presents away with angry contempt.

The brothers were much vexed, but, having decided to strike the first blow, marched forth

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

at the head of their armies towards Persia. Feridùn was in nowise perturbed at this move. He said that the invaders were but as lions walking straight into the traps prepared for them, and he exerted himself to see that all was ready in his own powerful army.

And the great forces met face to face, and fought desperately from sunrise to sunset, the army of Minuchihr winning the day, for the Gods were on the side of the Persian host. Both Selim and Tur were slain, and after the battle the armies of the two wicked brothers gave in their allegiance to the conqueror, who returned with great triumph to old Feridùn. And when that monarch died, Minuchihr ascended the thrones of Persia, Rum, and Turan, and observed all the counsels of his great-grandfather, being ever most devout in the worship of the Gods who had helped him in all his dangers.

And the Persians see in these tales of olden

KING ZOHAK AND KING FERIDÙN

days, that however much an evil man may prosper at the outset, the Gods will surely punish him in the end, while they never forsake those who trust in them and do their will.





III

The Stories of Zal and the Childhood of Rustem

AND now I want to tell you something about the two greatest Heroes of Persia, whose names at the present day are applied to any man who is especially brave or strong.

The most powerful warrior at the court of King Minuchihr was called Sam, and he longed greatly for a son to carry on his mighty name. But when the Gods granted his desire, the warrior was much grieved, because the child, though beautiful and strong, had snow-white hair.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

All the Persians, who admired Sam for his valour, pitied him on account of the boy, saying that the child must be of the race of the Demons, and would bring his father nothing but misfortune.

And the general, hearkening to the voice of the people, fell into much distress and determined to make away with the baby, who was called Zal. Accordingly, he took the poor child right up to the top of the Elburz mountains and there left him, far from any living creatures except the ibex, the hill leopard, the wild sheep, and the birds of the air.

But the Gods were not minded that Zal should perish. The Simurgh, a marvellous creature, half bird, half beast, and endowed with great wisdom, was flying over the mountains, and, perceiving a little baby lying on the barren rocks, swooped down and carried it off to its nest.

According to the story, a supernatural voice

ZAL AND THE CHILDHOOD OF RUSTEM

addressed the Simurgh, telling it to cherish the young Zal, who in time would be the father of the Champion of the whole world, and the worthy Bird in consequence was kinder than ever to the deserted child, and taught him many languages as he grew up.

The years passed by, and old Sam often felt very lonely and forsaken, for the Gods had not given him another son in place of the one whom he had deserted. He thought sometimes that in spite of all his high position and his riches, his life had been a failure, and one night he fell asleep in a more melancholy mood than usual, and had a strange dream.

When he awoke he went straightway to the magicians, who told him that the interpretation of the dream was that his son was alive, instead of having been eaten by wild beasts as all had supposed, and the father, feeling his heart burn with love towards the once despised child, sent his servants to search for Zal on

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

the mountains, but they returned to him empty-handed.

And yet again old Sam had a dream. He saw a young man of a beautiful countenance but with snowy hair, on horseback at the head of a great army. At his right hand rode a holy man who addressed Sam in reproachful accents, saying that the warrior was his deserted son, and that Heaven had protected him, and would make his name famous throughout the world.

‘This time the father himself set off to the Elburz mountains, and on their gravel slopes knelt in prayer to the Gods, begging them to forgive his crime and restore to him his son. And as he wept and lamented, the Simurgh heard his cries and understood the situation at once.’

‘Telling Zal that his father had come to seek him, and that he must now go to his own people, the marvellous Bird bore him on its

ZAL AND THE CHILDHOOD OF RUSTEM

broad wings down to where the broken-hearted Sam was weeping.

It was not without many tears that Zal said good-bye to the good Simurgh, which had trained him so wisely, but his beloved foster-parent consoled him by giving him as a parting gift a feather from its wing. "“Whenever thou art in danger burn this token,”" it said, "and I will at once come to thy aid."

Thus Zal found himself leaving the Simurgh and returning to the haunts of men in the company of his rejoicing and repentant father, who treated him with the utmost affection.

The Persian King was deeply interested in the strange upbringing of the young Hero, and received him graciously, presenting him with a helm and mace of gold, while the wise men of the court, being summoned to read his horoscope, foretold that he would be the greatest warrior of his generation. This information

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

greatly delighted the monarch, who gave him fine horses and much wealth, and appointed his father to the government of the provinces of Zabulistan, Kabul, and Ind.

The youth spent his time in improving his mind, seeking ever to converse with the wisest men of Zabulistan, so that when Sam was obliged to go with an army to subdue the troublesome Demons of Mazanderan, he found that his son was well able to rule over the kingdom during his absence.

And all the people praised the wisdom and justice displayed by the young governor, and Zal, finding that everything was quiet in Zabulistan, made a tour through the provinces under his sway, arriving at last at Kabul, where he pitched his camp by a river not far from the city.

Mihrab, King of Kabul, was of the detested race of Zohak, but, as his grandfather had submitted to Feridùn, he was permitted to hold

ZAL AND THE CHILDHOOD OF RUSTEM

his kingdom on condition of paying tribute every year.

All the talk of Kabul was of the daughter of the king, a wonderfully beautiful maiden who had many suitors. Zal soon heard that this Princess, with skin whiter than ivory, hair dark as the raven's wing, and cheeks rosy as a pomegranate flower, was living in the fortress-like palace of the town, and very naturally he longed to see her.

But he could not well become friendly with her father, as he knew that the King of Persia would be angry were he to accept hospitality from a descendant of the wicked Zohak. So he said to himself that probably there were far fairer girls in Persia than this much-praised Afghan woman, and resolved to think of her no more.

Mihrab, however, had been wonderfully impressed with the beauty and bravery of the young governor, and he gave his wife and

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

daughter such an account of Zal, that the lovely Rudabeh fell straightway in love with the Hero, and horrified her maidens by telling them of her affection for this white-haired youth whom she had never seen. They did their utmost to make her forget him, but everything was in vain, for she said that she would die if she could not marry Zal, and implored her attendants to help her to a sight of the object of her affections.

When they saw that she was really in earnest, they determined to assist their beloved mistress, and at once went to the camp of Zal, and began to gather roses, which were growing by the stream close to the tent of the Hero.

Zal did not like this intrusion, and sent a servant to ask their business. The man returned to his master and told him that they were the slaves of the lovely Rudabeh, and that should it be found that he was equal in

ZAL AND THE CHILDHOOD OF RUSTEM

birth to the Princess, she was ready to be his wife.

All Zal's former desire to meet this beautiful lady burned up afresh in his heart, and he loaded the slaves with presents and sent them back to their mistress.

Rudabeh was much pleased with the jewels and silken garments, but she did not see her way to meeting the Hero, for it was impossible for him to come to the palace without the knowledge of her father and mother.

Her servants, however, soon arranged a plan. Their mistress asked leave of her parents to go for a few days to a beautiful castle in the country, and to this retreat young Zal came after sunset and stood under the balcony of his lady-love. Rudabeh leant over the balustrade, and they talked together eagerly, but soon the darkness of evening fell and they could no longer see each other. Then the Princess let down her magnificent hair and invited Zal to

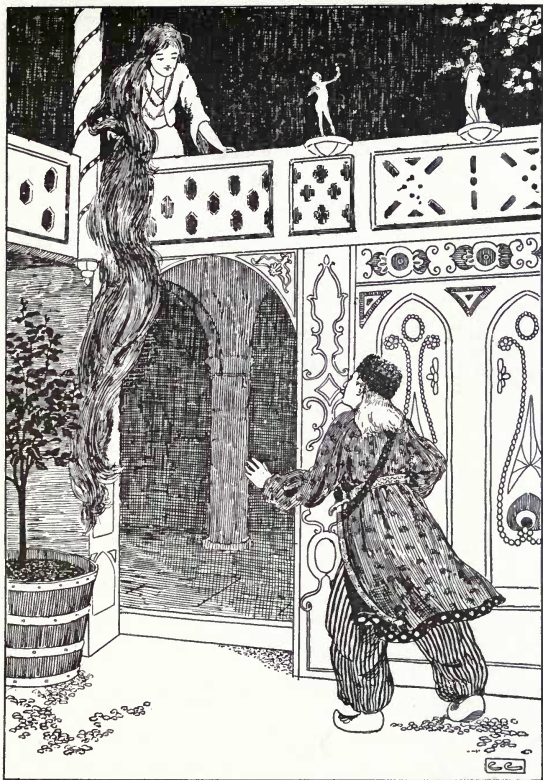
THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

climb up by it to the balcony, and when the lovers were together they became lost in admiration of one another's beauty, their affection growing from a small stream into a mighty flood.

Zal said to the Princess: "Thou alone, oh, Rudabeh, shalt be my wife. Our love, alas, must be kept secret, for thou art of the hated race of Zohak. I must ask advice of my councillors, before demanding thee from thy father." Rudabeh answered, "My own beloved, all my happiness is in thy hands. The mightiest kings of the earth shall woo me in vain, for my heart belongs in life and death to thee."

Then Zal, after tenderly embracing her, tore himself away, and the next morning assembled a council of the wise men of Zabulistan, and told them of his intended marriage.

They were astounded to hear that their young chieftain wished to wed a maiden of the hated race of the Serpent King, and advised him to send a messenger with a letter



ZAL AND RUDABEH.

To face page 82.

ZAL AND THE CHILDHOOD OF RUSTEM

at once to his father. Zal was very angry but he followed their counsel, and his envoy arrived some weeks later, hot and dusty, at Sam's camp in far-off Mazanderan.

The old chieftain was at first thunderstruck at the news, but, having called the magicians to his aid, he became overjoyed when they told him that the Gods would bless the marriage of his son with Rudabeh, and would give them a child who would be the greatest warrior the world had ever known. So he sent a kind letter back to the impatient Zal, but said that the betrothal must be kept a secret until the war with the Demons was over, and he could himself lay the matter before King Minuchihr.

Therefore, the lovers did not venture to meet again, but wrote one another letters every day.

Now this sounds a simple matter, but it is not nearly as easy to write a letter in Persian as it is in English. It really is quite a serious business. First of all the writer has to choose a large sheet

I wish this stupid writer would stop interpreting things from Persia of 5000 years ago with his own knowledge of the country which apparently belongs to the worst period of Persian history, the period late 19th century!

totally agree
his interpretations are also quite childish - too bad, because I read love Persian prose, as I can an American - L.T.W.

P.S. The author is surely stupid in the greatest sense, unfortunately!

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

of paper out of a tied-up roll, and when he has smoothed it a little, he takes a pair of scissors and cuts off a piece the size he wants, and then sets to work. As there are no tables or chairs in Persia, the scribe sits on his heels, holds the paper up in his left hand, and dipping his pen into a tiny bottle of ink on the floor, begins to *draw* in the letters very slowly, going from the right to the left, just the opposite way to what we do.

He has an odd habit of writing his letter all over the sheet, so that the reader is obliged to look at the top, the bottom, and the sides of the paper, as well as in the middle; and even a well-educated Persian takes quite a long time to read even a few lines of writing.

The ink stands up on the shiny paper used, and does not sink into it. This is convenient for the writer if he makes a mistake. He never crosses out a wrong word as we do, but he licks the offending letters out with his

At least the author is erasing out of ignorance rather than being deliberately deceitful like so many Persians are.

← Write your own book of legends and then, as Andrew Dice Clay would say, "Blow Me!"

ZAL AND THE CHILDHOOD OF RUSTEM

tongue ; and when the epistle is at last finished, it has to be signed with a seal, which is first rubbed over with ink, and then pressed down on the paper.

But we must return to Zal and Rudabeh. Everyone knows how hard it is to keep a secret ; and one unlucky day the Princess' mother found out that there was some mystery in the air. She went to her daughter's room and questioned her, and the girl at once said that she was engaged to be married to Zal, and that she loved him more than all the world.

Her mother was not angry when she knew that Sam approved ; but when Rudabeh's father was informed of the matter, he fell into such a passion of rage that he might have killed his daughter if her mother had not held him back.

He said that the Persian King would most certainly deprive him of his kingdom, and that perhaps he would be put to death, all on account of Rudabeh's folly. At last, however, his wife

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

soothed him, and he promised not to hurt his daughter if she would come into his presence. And Rudabeh appeared, proud and without fear, in her most costly garments, laden with all her jewels, instead of coming in mean attire as a penitent. "I am betrothed to the noblest man in the world!" she exclaimed, and her face was so full of gladness that her angry father hardly dared to blame her for thus giving her heart away without his consent.

But things did not go smoothly for some time. When Sam returned in triumph from conquering the Demons of Mazanderan, he told Minuchihr about his son's betrothal, and the King was greatly angered. He explained that all the work of the good Feridùn would be brought to nought if the descendants of the Serpent King got the mastery in Persia; and he requested Sam to lead an army against Kabul and utterly destroy the city and its inhabitants.

The chieftain of Kabul heard of the King's

ZAL AND THE CHILDHOOD OF RUSTEM

design through spies, and his hatred again rose against his daughter, for he knew that he had but a small army and could never resist the vast hosts of the Persian monarch.

Again he threatened to kill poor Rudabeh, and this time he thought of putting her mother also to death. But his wife succeeded in calming him, and in the end persuaded him to send her to Sam at Kabul with splendid gifts of horses, jewels, and beautiful slaves.

Sam was amazed at the riches brought to his feet, but for some time he would not accept them, because he feared the anger of King Minuchihr. But soon he remembered the great love he bore his son, and, saying that Zal's happiness was more to him than the displeasure of many monarchs, he told the anxious mother he would do his utmost to arrange the marriage.

Then Zal went to the court of the King of Persia to plead his own cause, and when

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

Minuchihr heard that the astrologers were all in favour of the wedding, he gladly gave his consent, and Rudabeh became the happy wife of the white-haired Hero.

After all their fears and disappointments they belonged to one another at last, and their great love seemed only to become stronger and stronger as the weeks and months glided quickly by.

But, as nothing endures for ever on this earth, so Trouble, an ever unwelcome guest, once more visited the happy young couple. Rudabeh became so ill that all the doctors and magicians could do nothing for her, and her husband was in despair at the thought of losing his beloved wife. The days passed by, and she became ever thinner and paler, too weak to move from her couch; and the whole kingdom of Zabulistan mourned her approaching end.

And one day as Zal sat beside her he burst

ZAL AND THE CHILDHOOD OF RUSTEM

into a flood of tears, and beat his breast, and tore his rich garments, calling out in his anguish: "Ah, why did not the Simurgh leave me to starve on the mountains in my childhood! Why did it save my life for such a wretched fate!"

Even as he spoke, the name of the wondrous Bird brought back a host of memories to his mind, and he suddenly bethought him of the feather, its parting gift, which he had kept by him unheeded till now. And to Rudabeh's astonishment he sprang up and rushed from her room like a madman, returning in a few moments with something in his hand, which he threw upon the fire.

And all at once there was a great darkness, but Zal held his wife in his arms and told her not to be afraid, as the Simurgh, about which he had often talked to her, was coming to make her well again. And in a moment the room seemed to be filled with a huge, winged

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

creature which spoke with the voice of a man: "Why give way to all this unmeasured grief?" it inquired of Zal. "I can cure your wife, and, moreover, you will ere long be the happy father of a boy, who will be called the Wonder of the World. Follow my advice and all will go well."

And after telling the Hero what to do for Rudabeh, and presenting him with another feather from its wing, the marvellous Bird departed as mysteriously as it had come, and the young Princess soon recovered her health and spirits.

And the prophecy of the Simurgh came true, for a child was born to the beautiful Rudabeh, so big that he looked a year old on the day of his birth, and it is said that at eight years of age he was as strong as the most powerful warrior in the kingdom.

Rustem was his name, and the whole world rang with praises of the wonderful boy who was

ZAL AND THE CHILDHOOD OF RUSTEM

of such beauty and strength that the Persians used to compare him to the Gods themselves.

Old Sam and Mihrab, his two grandfathers, came in pomp to visit their grandson, and were greatly amazed to find that he sur-passed all the warriors in their armies in valour and might. The boy said to them, "I care nought for feasting and wine, for fair women and music, but I long to be always on horseback in full armour, leading brave men to battle." But as yet all deemed him too young to go forth into the world, and his fond mother did what she could to keep him at her side.

Now it happened that Zal had charge of the great white elephant belonging to King Minuchihr. It was a savage beast, and was always kept fastened with a heavy chain; but one night it got loose and ran about the town killing all whom it met.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

The cries and shrieks of the poor townsfolk woke up Rustem, and, seizing his iron mace, he rushed to the castle gate to ask the soldiers on guard what was the matter. They told him, but implored him not to venture forth; and so angry did he become that he knocked one man down, and then broke the heavy lock of the door, and ran out into the streets.

Yells of terror guided him quickly to the spot where the elephant was trampling men and women in the dust, and in another moment the enormous brute charged straight at the boy, waving its trunk angrily and roaring aloud. Rustem waited until it was quite close to him, and then struck it with his iron mace, and, to the amazement of the spectators, the huge creature, after staggering for a moment, fell down dead in a great heap. Then the grateful people returned fervent thanks to the Gods who had sent them such a Champion in their need.

ZAL AND THE CHILDHOOD OF RUSTEM

Zal now felt that after such an achievement it was high time for Rustem to begin his public career as a Hero. So he told him to go and take a fort on Mount Sipund, held by evil men who had slain the father of Sam. This castle, besides being well-nigh impregnable, was surrounded by a vast desert, and the warrior Sam, try as he might, had never been able to get possession of it. But Rustem and his men determined to accomplish by guile what force had failed to do. They disguised themselves as merchants, and, loading a string of camels with bags of salt, set out for the fort.

The inhabitants of Sipund were luckily in want of salt at the time, and they welcomed the caravan warmly, buying largely from the pretended merchants, and giving them lodging for the night.

But as soon as it was dark, the Persian warriors threw off the long robes which they wore as merchants, and advanced to the house

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

of the governor. The alarm was given, and a desperate fight ensued between the townsfolk and Rustem's followers; but the son of Zal did such marvellous deeds that not a man escaped from the fortress, everyone from the governor downwards being destroyed. The Persians found wealth beyond their wildest dreams in the palace, and, loading up their camels with it in place of the salt, they burnt the castle down to the ground, and returned home to Zabulistan.

Thus did Rustem avenge the death of his great grandfather, and Zal and Rudabeh welcomed their son with exceeding joy, for they felt that this was but the first of many mighty deeds that the young Hero would perform.

And now you have heard what Rustem did as a boy, and if the story has pleased you, I will tell you another time what he did after he was grown up.



IV

Rustem, the Champion of the World

IN my last story I related how young Rustem killed a furious elephant, and, indeed, it was well for Persia that the Hero was growing up, for very soon she would have sore need of his strength and valour. Pious King Minuchihr, at the age of a hundred and twenty years, passed away, and his son, Nauder, reigned in his stead. In spite, however, of all the wise advice of his father, the new monarch ruled so unjustly that the nation nearly rose in revolt, and, to make matters

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

worse, the King of Turan, seeing how badly things were going in Persia, raised a large army to invade the country, and put his son, Afrasiyab, in command.

The Turanians marched across their frontier in high spirits, because they heard that old Sam, the invincible warrior, had just been summoned by the mighty Gods to his last rest, and they knew that the white-haired Zal was hardly equal in prowess to their own General, Prince Afrasiyab.

Their hopes of victory were realized, for a terrible engagement soon took place, in which the Persians were utterly routed, their King, Nauder, falling into the hands of Afrasiyab, who put him to death at once, thus becoming monarch of Persia.

Zal, however, had no intention of letting the Turanian conqueror have everything his own way, and, hearing that a descendant of the good Feridùn was living in retirement on

RUSTEM, THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

the slopes of the Elburz mountains, he sent Rustem to offer him the crown. This Prince, Kai-Kobad by name, was endowed with every virtue. He was not at all surprised at the object of Rustem's visit, because the Gods had sent him a curious dream on the previous night. He dreamt that two white Persian hawks had flown down to him, carrying a golden diadem in their beaks, which they had placed upon his head, thus signifying that he was to reign over Persia. Accordingly, he accompanied Rustem to Zabulistan, where Zal had gathered a large army, and the soldiers received him with great enthusiasm, hailing him as their king with loud acclamations. Kai-Kobad at once appointed young Rustem one of his generals, and the boyish Hero was highly delighted at the honour, but told his father that he must have a mace and a horse before he could feel properly equipped for his new post. Zal, therefore, gave him the enormously

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

heavy iron club always used by old Sam in his battles, and told him to take his choice of a steed. But this was not an easy matter, for none of Zal's horses could bear the weight of the Hero when armed with his mace, and Rustem spent several days in roaming about the grassy uplands where the steeds fed, but found no animal that would suit him.

At last his eye fell on a beautiful roan foal, following its mother, but the grooms advised him to proceed with caution, as the mare killed anyone who attempted to seize the young one, which had Demon blood in its veins. Rustem, however, paid no attention to their warnings, and, swinging his lasso, soon caught the roan Rakush by the neck. As he did so, the mare rushed at him in a fury, biting and kicking wildly, and the beholders thought that his last hour was at hand.

But the Hero, who had faced a raging elephant, was not to be dismayed by a mare,

RUSTEM, THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

however infuriated, and with one blow of his clenched fist the animal dropped dead at his feet.

Then Rakush, bounding about wildly, half-mad with fear, and so strong that he pulled Rustem along after him, had to be subdued, and this is the way in which Rustem got his famous horse. The Persians tell almost as many tales about this marvellous animal as about the Hero himself, indeed they hardly ever speak of one without mentioning the other.

Perhaps some of you may like to know how Rustem looked when he rode with Kai-Kobad at the head of the Persian army to fight against Afrasiyab.

He was much taller and broader than anyone in Persia, and the only man who could compare with him in size was the Turanian prince. He had straight features, a white skin and gleaming teeth, while his black hair hung

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

down to his shoulders in silky locks. In face, indeed, he was much like any handsome, well-born, young Persian of the present day. But though nearly everybody in Persia possesses a pair of fine dark eyes, yet no one has such flashing eyes as those of Rustem.

The soldiers used to say that they shot out sparks of fire when the Hero was in the midst of battle, and that they expanded to nearly double their ordinary size, striking the foe with as much terror as did the blows of the great iron mace.

The young warrior disdained to wear armour when fighting, and always dressed himself in silks as gorgeous as those worn by bridegrooms going to their weddings. His coats and full trousers were usually of striped tissues from Bokhara, rivalling the rainbow in their colours, and round his jewelled skull-cap he wound a gay scarf as a protection against the sun.

RUSTEM, THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

Rakush was equally fine, as his harness was encrusted with gold, and his saddle-cloth of richest Resht embroidery. His master usually guided him by means of golden shovel-shaped stirrups, leaving the reins over the high pommel of the peaked saddle, which was covered with exquisite needlework made by the fair Rudabeh and her maidens.

Rustem was naturally very eager to engage Afrasiyab himself in single combat, and in spite of Zal's remonstrances he singled out the huge leader of the Turanian army. Afrasiyab, clad all in black chain armour, riding a great sable charger, and with his black banner carried before him, was an alarming figure, but Rustem at once spurred Rakush towards him, waving old Sam's battle-mace in a threatening manner.

The two Heroes fought for nearly an hour, and Fortune seemed to smile on Rustem, who felt that his foe was given into his

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

hand, ~~As~~ he caught Afrasiyab's belt and lifted the Prince right out of his peaked saddle. But the time for Afrasiyab to die had not come as yet. The girdle broke, and he was rescued by his warriors, the battle going on with renewed fierceness.

And no words can tell of the deeds of the youth, Rustem.

Wherever he rode, brandishing his sword, the Turanians were slain in scores. It is even affirmed that he slew more than a thousand men on that day, and old Zal hailed him with joy as the Champion of the whole world when, towards evening, the enemy fled back to their own country.

Then ensued a period of profound peace. Kai-Kobad ruled wisely for a hundred years, which must have seemed very dull to Rustem, but on his death the Hero had plenty of employment again. Kai-Kaus, the new monarch, was a vain and foolish man. His pride was so

RUSTEM, THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

great that he deemed there was no one in the whole earth equal to him, and so became an easy prey to the wiles of the Demons who hated mankind.

One day an Evil Spirit, disguised as a minstrel, sang before the king, and gave such an alluring description of Mazanderan, the country of the Demons, that the monarch determined to set forth and conquer it at once.

“It is the abode of spring, oh, mighty sovereign!” chanted the Div. “We never know the great heat of summer which forces the dwellers in Persia to take refuge in the hills, nor have we ever the intense cold during which snow lies upon the ground, and everyone huddles round the iron pots of burning charcoal. The roses and tulips bloom the whole year round, and the *bulbul* never ceases to pour forth its little soul in ravishing melodies. Believe me, that he who has never been to Mazanderan does not know what happiness is.”

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

As he ceased Kai-Kaus sprang up, and, with a mighty oath, swore that before many moons were set he would be a truly happy man, for that kingdom should be his.

His warriors looked at one another in dismay, for the Demons were greatly dreaded as foes; but as the foolish Kai-Kaus considered that he was far greater than King Jemshed or the good Feridùn, he paid no attention to anyone, and even old Zal's words of warning fell on his ears in vain.

Therefore, in a short time, the monarch and his army set out on the long journey to Mazanderan, leaving Zal and Rustem to guard Persia during their absence.

Things went smoothly at first. The Persians defeated the army of the King of Mazanderan, and were about to enter his capital in triumph, when the White Demon and his myrmidons emerged from their caves in the Elburz mountains. After this the whole campaign

RUSTEM, THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

failed disastrously. A pitchy darkness enveloped the Persian army, and such huge hailstones fell upon the soldiers that thousands of them were killed. The rest with their monarch were taken captive by the Demons, who, depriving them of sight, gave them to the King of Mazanderan to be locked up in his dungeons.

When the sad news of the overthrow of the Persians reached Zal and Rustem, the latter at once saddled Rakush and started off alone to X Mazanderan to free his King. The way he chose was short but full of dangers, and while he slept in a forest on the first night, he was awakened by a great noise and hurly-burly, and starting up he found that the faithful Rakush had been attacked by a huge lion, which, however, he had killed with his hoofs and teeth. Rustem was angry with his beloved horse for having run such a risk by fighting the lion alone, and told him in future to neigh

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

in his ear so as to awake him at the first sign of danger.

During the next three days the two friends painfully toiled across a trackless desert. The fierce Eastern sun glared down upon them from a cloudless blue sky; there were no trees, no water, and, as the slow hours passed, the Hero and his steed were at the point of death from thirst. Kneeling on the burning sand Rustem besought the Gods to assist him in the work of rescuing his King, and, even as he prayed, the Dwellers in the High Heavens sent him an answer of hope.

A wild sheep trotted by, and the warrior, taking it to be a good omen, followed it and caught it up at last as it drank from a pool of brackish water in a little grassy oasis. Night was coming on apace, and after the Hero had slain and devoured a wild ass, which came to drink at the pool, he wrapt himself up in his long mantle and prepared to go to sleep on the

RUSTEM, THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

sand, first, however, bidding Rakush awake him if any evil thing should approach.

At midnight a monstrous dragon of appalling aspect crept silently up to the Hero. Rakush neighed loudly, the dragon retreated swiftly, and Rustem, springing to his feet, saw nothing. Exactly the same thing happened again as soon as the warrior had dropped off to sleep, and Rustem became exceedingly angry with his horse, because he had roused him on two occasions when there was no danger. He even threatened to kill his faithful friend should he disturb him again unnecessarily, and poor Rakush was grieved to the heart at his master's unkindness. Dawn was breaking when the monstrous dragon made its third appearance. The noble horse woke up his master once more, expecting a torrent of abuse, but, luckily, this time Rustem perceived his foe, and rushed at it with drawn sword. The conflict was so terrible, that had it not been for the aid given

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

by Rakush, who tore at the dragon's hide with his teeth, and kicked it violently, the Hero might have fallen a prey to the fearsome beast. However, the Gods helped him; the dragon was at last overcome, and Rustem offered up hearty thanks for their protection before he proceeded on his way.

He had now to cross the Elburz Range by difficult and stony passes. Sometimes Rakush had to clamber up places almost as steep as the sides of a precipice, and Rustem would walk behind holding on to the horse's tail. And here and there the steed and his master slid down long gravelly slopes, stopping themselves at intervals on little projections of rock which jutted out. Once poor Rakush went over the side of an abyss, but his fall was checked by a patch of tamarisk scrub, and he lay without any movement, neighing to his master for help. Rustem quickly unwound the long silk *cummerbund* or waistcloth which

RUSTEM, THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

every Persian wears, and in which he carries money and all sorts of things, and managed to slip it round Rakush and then haul his faithful comrade up to firm ground again.

Luckily there was plenty of food for both man and beast in these mountains, as the ibex and moufflon roamed about in small herds, and easily fell victims to the unerring aim of Rustem's bow, while in the valleys were patches of grass and plenty of little streams.

It was a very tiring ascent with constant climbing, and it was indeed a pleasant change to be free of the mountains at last, and to drop down into the charmingly wooded country of Mazanderan.

That evening the Hero found a meal ready cooked and a flask of wine, together with a mound of barley laid on the bank of the stream where he halted for the night. Naturally, both he and Rakush were highly delighted, and as they ate and drank their fill,

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

a beautiful lady approached, and sat down close to Rustem.

Wondering whether it was to her bounty that he owed the appetizing food, he handed her a cup of the ruby-coloured wine, asking a blessing on it in the name of the mighty Gods as he did so. To his horror and amazement his lovely companion was at once turned into a Demon, jet black in colour, which, luckily, he slew before it had time to vanish. And by this Rustem knew that he had now crossed the frontier of the haunted country of Mazanderan, and, when he had struggled with Rakush through a region where darkness reigned both by day and night, he emerged into a beautiful district, rich with waving corn.

Here he came into conflict with Aulad, the governor of the province, and, having routed his troops and seized their leader, he demanded that Aulad should lead him to where King Kai-Kaus was imprisoned, and should show

RUSTEM, THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

him the entrance of the cavern inhabited by the great White Demon.

Aulad was amazed at the idea of a single man daring to fight with the White Demon and his hordes, but, thinking to punish the Persian for his boldness, he led Rustem to the fatal battlefield just outside the capital, on which the chivalry of Persia had been routed so disastrously. Some hundreds of the Demon warriors were still encamped on the ground, and the Hero, having now somewhat rested from the fatigues of his long journey, challenged their general to single combat.

Whenever Rustem put his hand to anything he usually succeeded, and this instance was no exception to the rule. The Demon chieftain was slain, and his terrible-looking followers fled to the mountains, leaving the city unguarded.

The conqueror at once passed through the great gateway of the town in triumph, Rakush

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

being so much pleased with his master's prowess that he neighed incessantly with joy. And the blind King and his warriors heard the voice of the mighty war-horse even in their dungeons, and, knowing that Rustem had come to free them, shouted with all their might to guide their deliverer to where they lay, bound in chains. And the inhabitants, fearing Rustem's heavy mace, led the warrior to the underground vaults where Kai-Kaus and his soldiers had been locked in, and helped him to break down the doors of their prisons.

A great crowd of pale, haggard-looking men rushed out, and surrounded him with cries of joy, but the Hero was horrified to perceive that every one of them, from the King downwards, was stone blind. Was this the result of all his perils and hard fighting? Of what use to Persia would a blind monarch and a blind army be? And he, who had never flinched from any foe, however terrible, wept

RUSTEM, THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

from sheer despair and sorrow. Kai-Kaus now spoke, and the Hero, listening to his words, took hope again. "Rustem," he said, "you who are rightly named the Champion of the World, we call upon you for yet another deed of prowess. The great White Demon has deprived us of sight, and the only way in which we can see again is by bathing our eyes in the blood of the monster. He lies hid in a vast cave on the side of Mount Demavend. Son of mighty Zal, grandson of Sam the invincible, we call upon you to slay our foe!"

The Persians upon hearing this broke forth into shouts, and Rustem, ever ready to fight, and never so happy as when the odds were a hundred to one against him, salaamed to his sovereign, mounted Rakush and galloped off to the mountains. At last he found the entrance to a dark cavern which seemed to lead into the very heart of the awe-inspiring volcano, Demavend.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

This was filled with Demons of fearsome aspect, but the Hero rushed among them, slaying as he went, until he passed right through the cave and stood on the brink of a seemingly bottomless abyss. When his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he saw a huge monster below him, covered with white hair and fast asleep. It was the White Demon, and Rustem knew that the fate of Persia was now about to be decided. "Come forth and meet thy doom!" he shouted, clanging his sword upon his brazen shield, and suddenly the enormous creature stood before him armed with a great millstone.

"Art thou tired of life," the Demon retorted, "that thou darest to invade my lair? Tell me thy name, so that I may know from whence comes the rash being I am about to destroy."

But when Rustem spoke of his mighty grandfather, Sam, the subduer of the Demons, the monster was terrified, and for a moment



- RUSTEM AND THE WHITE DEMON.

To face page 114.

RUSTEM, THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

staggered back at the dreaded name. When he recovered himself, he hurled the millstone, which fell short of its aim, and in another second he and Rustem were struggling together in mortal combat, the Hero calling again and again upon the Gods to aid the right.

Of that fearful conflict the Persians talk to this day, for such a fight never raged since the world began. Now the Persian Hero and now the Demon appeared to get the mastery, and both man and monster received many wounds, until it seemed as if both must die.

But the Gods did not desert their faithful worshipper. Miraculous strength was vouchsafed to Rustem, just as he began to feel that he must give up the combat from exhaustion. Once more he seized his savage foe in his arms, and this time hurled him with such terrific force on to the stone floor of the cavern that the monster expired, rending the air with shrieks.

Thereupon many hundreds of lesser Demons,

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

that owed their existence solely to the White Demon, dropped dead in the cavern, and the rest fled far away from the haunts of mankind.

Rustem now offered up fervent thanksgivings, and, collecting in his helmet some of the blood of the White Demon, he made his way back to King Kai-Kaus and his warriors, triumphantly giving them the horrible fluid, with which they bathed their eyes, and all saw as well as ever they had done in their lives.

Before the soldiers could return to fair Persia, a battle had to be fought against the King of Mazanderan, who was a sorcerer, and had the Demon hosts in his employ. It is said that the armies struggled with one another for seven days, and at the end of that time neither was victorious.

However, on the eighth day, Rustem made up his mind to attack the King, because he felt that if that great Magician were destroyed

RUSTEM, THE CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

his followers would have no more heart for fighting.

Therefore, he specially singled out the monarch and made a fierce attack upon him with his drawn sword. Just as he was about to pierce him to the heart, Rustem and all the Persians saw with amazement that the King of Mazanderan was quickly turning into a great mass of rock.

So heavy was it that even a hundred soldiers could not move it, and, as usual, Rustem had to come to the rescue. Amid ringing cheers he lifted up the enormous boulder, and staggered with it to the tent of King Kai-Kaus, and then addressed it thus:—
“Return to thy human form at once, oh, King of Magicians! If thou refusest to do so I will break thee into a million atoms, fine as dust, and scatter thee to the four winds of Heaven.” Upon this the King resumed his human shape, and Rustem bound and led

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

him to Kai-Kaus, who commanded his instant execution.

And then, laden with treasure, the army returned home in triumph; and if you care to hear more of the doings of mighty Rustem, you have only to look at the next page and begin a new story.





V

Rustem and Sohrab

IN my last story I told you that Rustem went home after his great exploit of killing the White Demon, and he and everyone else thought that Persia would now be at peace for a considerable time.

But Kai-Kaus was such a stupid king that he was perpetually falling into trouble of one kind or another, and you will scarcely believe me when I tell you that before long he was taken prisoner again. It happened in this wise. He conquered the King of Hamaveran, and captured his lovely daughter for his wife, and

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

after doing these things, he was foolish enough to go and stay with his father-in-law, who at once threw him into a deep dungeon. His beautiful Queen, who had done her best to dissuade him from partaking of her father's hospitality, was cast into the same cell as her husband, as she declared that she would rather die than be separated from him.

X You can hardly imagine the terror and commotion caused in Persia by this second imprisonment of the monarch, for Afrasiyab at once seized this opportunity to invade the kingdom with a large army.

X Everyone felt that Rustem alone could save his King and country, and that Hero, remarking that he did not fear meeting a host of a hundred thousand men as long as he had the Gods on his side, mounted his faithful Rakush and started off to the rescue.

As usual, the great Champion of the World was assisted by the Dwellers Above, and soon

RUSTEM AND SOHRAB

set Kaus at liberty, routed the armies of Afrasiyab, and replaced his King on the throne.

But, indeed, Kai-Kaus was not worth all the trouble he gave to his faithful warriors, for no sooner was he delivered from the fear of wars and invasions than his heart swelled with foolish pride. The wily Iblis, Spirit of Evil, pondered for long how he could take advantage of the ambition and vanity of the King, and one day sent a Demon to him, disguised as a servant, who persuaded him to fly in order to explore the secrets of the heavens.

The magicians, after much consultation, hit upon a novel plan of flying—balloons not having been invented in those days. They fixed four javelins in an upright position at the corners of a light raft, and put a piece of meat on the point of each javelin, and the monarch sat in the middle. Four strong and hungry eagles were then tethered to the corners, and, as each bird flew upwards to seize the meat, the Persian King

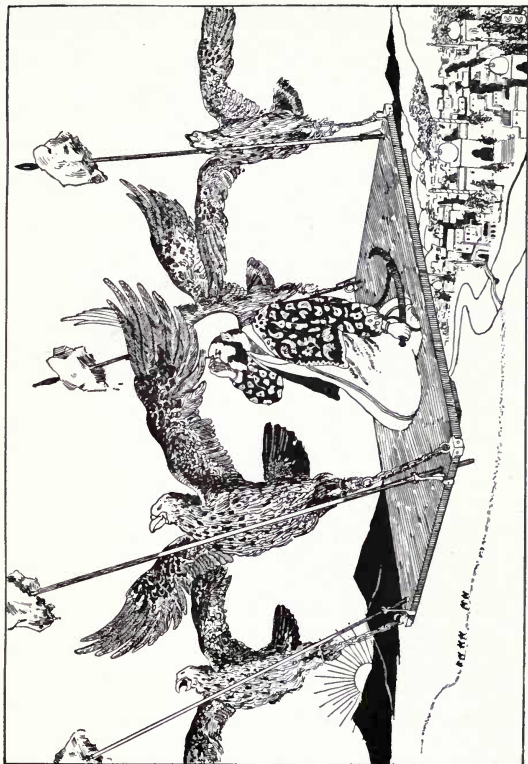
THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

was carried higher and higher into the air and far away from his kingdom.

At last, however, the poor eagles became exhausted, and King, birds, and raft all fell down together, and found themselves in a dreary desert. Here the monarch was discovered by Rustem and some of his warriors when he was at the point of death from starvation, and their plain speaking brought him to a sense of his folly. After spending forty days in seclusion and penitence, he became a changed man and ruled wisely and piously all the rest of his life.

X Now that Persia was free from wars, Rustem had but little to do, and employed his leisure in hunting the wild ass in the salt desert.

X On one of these expeditions he came to the far-off, little kingdom of Samengan, and during his mid-day sleep, while the sun was at its height, his beloved Rakush was stolen from him. All the inquiries he made were in vain, the frightened



KING KAI-KAUS TRYING TO FLY.

To face page 122.

RUSTEM AND SOHRAB

peasants affirming, just as Persians do to-day, that they had not even "seen the colour" of the horse.

Accordingly the Hero went in high indignation to complain to the King of the country, who received him with great honour, begging him to spend the night in the palace, while men scoured the neighbourhood for the missing steed.

When Rustem was alone, to his astonishment the curtain at the entrance to his room was raised, and a most lovely maiden entered, attended by a slave. The great warrior, who had never cared for women, and had never wished to marry, was much taken aback at this vision of beauty, and inquired of the lady what she wanted. "Is there some gallant feat of arms to be done?" he asked; "do you wish me to free some prisoner from the power of the Demons?"

"No," she replied, "I want none of those things. I am Tamineh, the daughter of the King, and have heard so much of Rustem's

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

mighty deeds that I am resolved either to marry that great Hero, or die unwed. I, it is, who stole mighty Rakush, hoping to lure you to the palace." She then fell on her knees and besought Rustem to demand her hand in marriage on the morrow.

The Persian Hero could not help being touched at her extreme beauty and earnestness, and, promising to wed her if her father would give his consent to the match, sent her away rejoicing. And on the next day the lovely Tamineh became his bride, and there was great gladness throughout the kingdom for many days.

But Heroes do not care to spend much time in ease, and Rustem, hearing that the Demons were invading Zabulistan, left his fair wife, at an hour's notice, in order to go to the help of Zal. As he parted from her he gave her a talisman, telling her to bind it round the arm of her boy, if the Gods should grant them a son, and to give him news of her welfare as often as possible.

RUSTEM AND SOHRAB

Poor Tamineh was very unhappy at first when her husband left her, but rejoiced greatly when her son was born—a child strong and mighty, who grew up the very image of his Hero-father. The boy was everything in the world to the Princess, and when Rustem sent her presents and asked whether the Gods had granted him a son, the neglected mother said that a daughter had been given to them, so afraid was she that her husband would take young Sohrab from her if he knew the truth.

The Hero was at first disappointed to hear that he had no son to follow in his footsteps as the Champion of the World, but very soon he nearly forgot all about his visit to Samengan, and how he had wedded beautiful Tamineh. Indeed, before many years had past, he married a second wife, as was permitted by his religion, and a son was born to him, Feramurz by name, who became a mighty warrior when he was grown up.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

But young Sohrab grew stronger day by day, and when his mother used to tell him about the mighty deeds done by his renowned father, the boy's eyes blazed with pride, and he said that he must go to Rustem to seek his blessing. The tears and entreaties of the Princess could not keep him long by her side, and as soon as he could master every man and every horse in Samengan, the youth, mounted on a steed of the race of Rakush, rode out into the world to find his father, announcing that he intended to conquer Persia and put Rustem on the throne.

Afrasiyab, Persia's deadly enemy, heard of the young Hero and his intentions, and sent an army to help him, saying that his greatest wish in life was to subdue King Kaus.

But Afrasiyab had no intention whatever of handing over Persia to Rustem if his soldiers succeeded in conquering that country, for he wanted to rule over the land himself. He,

RUSTEM AND SOHRAB

therefore, told the two generals of his army that they must on no account let Sohrab know which of the Persian warriors was his mighty father, as he hoped that the two Champions would kill one another in ignorance, and that he himself would then be able to seize the kingdom.

Accordingly, the vast Turanian army set out to invade Persia, and on its way passed a great fortress guarded by a mighty warrior.

This doughty soldier sallied forth to test young Sohrab, of whose prowess he had heard, saying that he would very soon lower his pride, but the result of the fight was not what he expected, as he was speedily thrown from his horse and taken prisoner. However, the daughter of the governor of the fortress, a maiden brave as a lioness, was so angry at seeing the downfall of her Champion that she herself, clad all in armour, issued from under the stone portcullis of the castle and challenged Sohrab.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

Rustem's son thought that a mere boy was defying him, and, rushing towards his foe, he flung his noose round her neck and pulled the lady from her horse. But what was his amazement to see masses of beautiful black hair as the supposed boy's helmet fell off! Before he had recovered from his astonishment the maiden implored him to let her go free. "Noble Hero," she said, "I beg of thee to release me. I am as the apple of my father's eye. He will give thee much gold and many jewels for my ransom, if thou wilt let me return to the fortress."

Sohrab consented, but was sorry for his good-nature, for the entire garrison slipped away during the night, and at daybreak when the young Hero went to demand the ransom, no one was to be seen, for the party had fled in haste to the Persian court, and told such tales of Sohrab's wonderful valour that King Kaus sent for Rustem to come at once to the aid of Persia.

The Persian monarch had not treated the

RUSTEM AND SOHRAB

Champion of the World well of late years. He seemed to have forgotten how the warrior had delivered him from the power of the White Demon, had also rescued him from death by starvation in the dungeons of the King of Hamaveran, and again had found him in the desert, where the eagles which carried him thither had dropped him.

He gave no further honours to Rustem, almost ignored him when he came to court, and heaped benefits upon unworthy favourites, who would never strike a blow in their King's defence were he in peril.

The Hero, though deeply hurt at this ingratitude, was far too proud to complain, and spent his days in far Zabulistan, where he and old Zal instructed the young Feramurz in all the arts that make a mighty warrior.

However, when the messenger galloped into the courtyard of Zal's palace with the news of Persia's danger, Rustem never hesitated for a

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

moment. He called to his grooms to saddle Rakush, and bidding a servant ride with him, and lead a third horse on which were wraps and provisions, the great Champion bade good-bye to those dearest to him and mounted his beloved steed.

In the days of his youth, the Hero was wont to ride into battle, clad all in gay silken attire, but now that age was creeping upon him, he did not disdain armour, and on this occasion was equipped from head to foot in black mail.

When he arrived at the Persian camp, he was greatly interested in the descriptions of Sohrab, and wondered sometimes if the youth could possibly be his son, and whether Tamineh might perchance have deceived him.

Indeed, when the two armies came in sight of one another, and halted for the night, Rustem, in disguise, made his way into the Turanian camp, and managed to catch a glimpse of young Sohrab as he banqueted in a fine tent

RUSTEM AND SOHRAB

with the generals. For a moment, he was astonished at the likeness of the youth to old Sam, but he soon felt that the resemblance must be merely due to his own imagination, and he made up his mind to kill his rival as speedily as might be.

The youthful Hero, on his side, was keenly anxious that Rustem's tent should be pointed out to him, and the Turanians having captured a Persian soldier, who had foolishly lingered behind the main body of the army, Sohrab eagerly questioned this man. He asked him to tell him to which warriors the different pavilions belonged, but when the prisoner observed how interested he appeared to be as to the position of Rustem's encampment, he assured him that the Champion of the World had not as yet arrived from Zabulistan. This he did fearing that Sohrab might slay the Persian Hero by subtilty if he knew that he were in the Persian camp.

* * * * *

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

On the morrow, the drums beat and the trumpets brayed as a signal that battle was about to commence, and when the Persian and Turanian hosts stood fully armed opposite one another, young Sohrab stepped into the open space between them, and loudly challenged King Kai-Kaus to single combat.

Everyone was thrown into a panic at Sohrab's boldness, for, indeed, it was well known that the Persian monarch, as a consequence of the life of pleasure he led, could not bend the bow or draw the sword as in former years.

Moreover, Kai-Kaus, caring only for luxury, had not encouraged his warriors to excel in feats of arms, so that one and all feared to lose his life if he went forth against the youthful Champion.

Therefore, everyone cried out that Persia was lost unless Rustem would come to the rescue.

Now there is a Persian proverb regarding friendship, which says that if broken it can be

RUSTEM AND SOHRAB

mended again like a piece of string that has been cut, but that the knot will ever remain.

And so it was with the King and the Champion of the World. Rustem had not delayed for an hour to go to the help of his country, but when, mounted on Rakush, he arrived at the Persian camp, there was such a feeling of constraint between him and Kai-Kaus, in spite of the monarch showing him every kind of favour, that the Hero soon retired to his tent, which he ordered to be pitched at the rear of the army. Here he lay on the quilts, padded with cotton, which formed his bed, as they do the couch of every Persian nowadays, and he smoked countless *kalian*s or water-pipes while awaiting events.

A confused murmur of voices reached him after awhile, and a crowd appeared to be coming in the direction of his tent, which was easily recognized because of the huge Simurgh embroidered on its curtain by Rudabeh.

“Rustem! Rustem!” he heard voices calling,

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

“Champion of the World, come forth to the rescue of thy country!”

And as he emerged from the pavilion, wondering at the excited cries, he was surrounded by an eager throng begging him to hasten and save the honour of Persia, as Sohrab was taunting the King with cowardice.

The Hero had not intended to fight so soon, but when he understood that there was not a single warrior who dared to face the youthful Sohrab, he quickly donned his black suit of mail, and, telling everyone on no account to let the enemy guess his name, he went forth, followed by Rakush.

But when he stood face to face with his boyish opponent, he was touched with pity at his extreme youth, and urged him to give up the combat.

“I will yield at once if thou art Rustem,” young Sohrab replied. “Tell me, I beseech thee, if thou art he.”

The Champion replied, “I am but the servant

RUSTEM AND SOHRAB

of that mighty Hero. He himself would never stoop to fight with such a boy as *thou*." When the youth heard this taunt, he rushed towards Rustem, and the fight began.

So fierce was the encounter that their spears were broken, their swords bent, their chain armour torn, and they themselves bled from many grievous wounds. But neither would give way, and after awhile they threw aside their shattered clubs and their bows, having shot away all their arrows, and began to wrestle together. But neither could get the smallest advantage, and, as night was fast approaching, they agreed to postpone the combat until the next day, both Heroes being somewhat weary with their twelve hours' struggle.

Rustem thought of the morrow with deep foreboding, feeling that his youthful foe was superior to him as a warrior, and Sohrab implored the Turanian generals to tell him whether his enemy were Rustem or not, as if

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

it were that Champion he would be fighting against his father. But the generals obeyed the commands of Afrasiyab, and insisted that the Persian warrior was not Rustem at all.

Therefore, as soon as day broke, the two Champions met face to face, but Sohrab felt such an overwhelming affection for his adversary that he begged him to be his friend and talk with him in peace.

This, however, Rustem declined to do, and the two began to wrestle mightily, and after awhile the youth hurled his foe down upon the desert sand. He was about to despatch him when Rustem called out, "It is against the customs of Persia to kill an enemy until he has been thrown to the ground twice." Sohrab at once stayed his hand, moved by a strange love for his adversary. As it was now the hour of sunset the combatants decided to finish their fight on the morrow, and retired to their different camps for the night.

RUSTEM AND SOHRAB

The Turanian generals were very angry with Sohrab for having spared his opponent when he had him in his power, saying that the Persian would by no means have been as forbearing had the cases been reversed, and, indeed, they were right.

Old Rustem passed many hours in fervent prayer to the Gods that night, imploring their help, for he perceived that the Turanian Champion was stronger and more active than he was. Age was slowly taking from the Hero his once boundless strength, and little by little was stiffening his limbs, so marvellously supple in former years. He understood all too well that the renewal of the combat would be the end of his life, unless supernatural help were granted him.

And he, who had never failed in devotion to the Dwellers Above, was not forsaken in his dire distress.

When the two Heroes stood face to face again in the early morning, suddenly a marvellous

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

strength flowed into Rustem and he felt even stronger than he had ever done in the old days. With a glad outcry of gratitude to the Gods he fell upon Sohrab, and the combatants swayed this way and that, interlocked in a deadly embrace. Now one seemed to get the advantage and now the other, and the two armies watched this wrestling match with bated breath, knowing that on its result hung the fate of two kingdoms.

At last Rustem noted that his enemy's grasp was getting weaker, so, putting forth all his strength in one stupendous effort, he hurled Sohrab to the ground, and at once drove his dagger into his side.

A cry of terror and indignation rose from the Turanians, while the Persians shouted and yelled with joy, but Rustem noted none of these things, for he was suddenly overcome with shame for his unchivalrous deed.

What was his horror when he heard the dying youth murmur, "I invaded Persia solely



RUSTEM AND SOHRAB.

To face page 138.

RUSTEM AND SOHRAB

to find my mighty father, Rustem. He will most assuredly avenge my death. Remember," young Sohrab continued, "that the Champion of the World is the soul of honour, and he will kill you for having ended my life before you had thrown me a second time to the ground as is the rule of Persia."

X When the awful truth dawned upon the old Hero, he, who had never shed a tear and never known pity, fell fainting to the earth with the horror of it all.

After a time sense returned to him, and he asked Sohrab whether he had any token to show that he was the son of Rustem, and then confessed he himself was that great Hero. The young Champion, faintly murmuring that he had felt a strange love for his father from the moment he saw him first, besought him to strip off his coat of mail, and he would find on his son's arm the amulet given long ago to the Princess of Samengan.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

And when Rustem knew by the token that his child lay before him, and that he himself had killed him, he exclaimed, "I can live no longer! My sword shall end my miserable life." But this Sohrab would not permit. "Destiny," he said, "has ordained that things should thus fall out. Thou, oh, father, must live to be the bulwark of Persia."

When the armies saw their Champions lying prone on the desert sand, they believed that both were dead, and a bitter wail of woe arose into the still air, mingled with the sad neighs of Rakush.

After awhile some of the Persian warriors galloped to the scene of the fight, and found Rustem supporting Sohrab's head and weeping terribly. The boy was trying to console his father, but was himself filled with bitterness at the thought of how short his life had been. "I came like the lightning and I go like the wind! I have been torn from the Banquet of Life before I have been permitted to do more

RUSTEM AND SOHRAB

than sip of the Wine of Existence," he said, sadly; but his last words were for others. "Father," he gasped, slowly and painfully, "let the Turanian army depart in peace and unmolested. It was owing to my burning desire to seat you upon the throne of Persia and not to the wish of Afrasiyab that it came hither. Mine, and mine alone, was the fault."

This Sohrab said in ignorance of the guile of the Turanian King, who had hoped to obtain the fair Persian land for himself, and had used the young Hero merely as his tool.

And when Rustem had given his promise, the youth drew the dagger from his side and breathed his last.

There was no further thought of fighting. The two camps broke up, and everyone returned to his own home, while Rustem, after burning his armour and weapons, carried his son back to far Zabulistan to be buried with great pomp and lamentation.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

And when the sad news arrived at Samengan poor Tamineh was nearly mad with grief, feeling that her son owed his death to her deceit. Day and night she wept and made moan for her cherished child, until at last the Gods in mercy took her to rejoin him whom she had so fondly loved.

* * * * *

This is the famous story of Rustem and Sohrab, and there is not a boy or girl in all Persia who has not heard it often and often; and I hope you will enjoy it as much as they do.





VI

The Story of Byzun and Maníjeh

DURING the reign of good King Kai-Khosrau, who succeeded the foolish Kai-Kaus, a deputation of the inhabitants of Amàn came to the Persian court to beg for assistance. They told the sovereign that their country was overrun by herds of wild swine, which trampled down and devoured their crops of barley and millet, and were reducing the population to a state of famine. Moreover, the boars were exceedingly fierce, with long tusks, and would at once attack and kill any one who attempted to drive

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

them from the fields. Kai-Khosrau was ever ready to assist those in distress, his heart being open to all his subjects, so at once he called a council of his nobles to discuss what would be the best way of helping the unfortunate Armanians.

While the matter was under consideration, the heroic young Byzun, grandson of mighty Rustem, started impulsively to his feet and begged leave to speak. "Mighty Kai-Khosrau, Shelter of the Universe!" he began, "will you permit me, the humblest of your servants, to undertake this adventure? I am, as all know, among the youngest of your Majesty's warriors, but the blows of my arm have sometimes been compared, not unfavourably, with those of my mighty grandsire."

The King smiled kindly upon the enthusiastic youth, but a murmur of anger rose among the older warriors, who thought Byzun overbold and presumptuous. However, after a good

THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH

deal of discussion, the young noble was given leave to go, but, as he was inexperienced and rather rash, the tried old warrior, Girgin, was commanded to accompany him.

So off they started at daybreak the next morning, riding their mettlesome horses with flowing tails and manes, while their servants jogged along behind on mules, which carried provisions for the journey and the *lahafs*, or thickly-padded quilts, in which they would roll themselves up during the nights spent in the open air.

After some days they reached the outskirts of the forest where the wild boars dwelt, and were about to set to work when Girgin unluckily met with an accident. A huge boar suddenly dashed out at them from behind a tree, and Girgin's horse, taken by surprise, shied violently away from the alarming-looking animal, throwing the old warrior to the ground. Byzun galloped to the res-

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

cue with his spear, and killed the boar, but not before it had torn Girgin's leg so badly with its tusks that the servants had to carry the veteran to a booth of boughs, and lay him down upon a couch of *lahafs*.

As poor old Girgin could not move, Byzun had perforce to do all the work. He was so excited at the prospect of distinguishing himself that he sometimes rose with the "false dawn," or "tail of the wolf" as the Persians call it, though, of course, he soon saw his mistake when darkness fell again upon the world, until the first gleam of the real dawn heralded in the day. Armed with a great spear and his bow and arrows, he waged a deadly war against the savage beasts until sunset. These creatures were accustomed to inspire such dread that they had no fear of any man, and would rush to the attack as soon as they saw Byzun approaching them. But now they had found their match, and discovered to their cost that

THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH

one of the bravest warriors in Persia was a very different opponent to the terrified and unarmed peasants.

So hard did Byzun work that in the course of a short time most of the herds were exterminated, and, in order to destroy them utterly, the forest which they inhabited was burnt to the ground, hundreds of boars perishing in the flames.

Those that escaped are probably the ancestors of the herds that are to be seen in the north of Persia at the present day, and which increase and multiply, because the Persians look upon pork as an unclean food, and will never eat it on any account.

Naturally, the young Hero wanted to give Kai-Khosrau a proof of what he had done, so he commanded the grateful peasants to cut off the heads of all the boars he had slain, and told Girgin that he was going to take this huge trophy to the King.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

The old warrior's temper had not been improved by the enforced idleness, while his junior was doing the work and getting all the glory, and he felt that he would be the butt of countless sneers and jibes at the Persian court, when everyone knew that he had not killed a single boar.

Therefore he did his best to persuade Byzun to leave the heads where they were, and, when the young warrior refused, his jealousy grew to such a pitch that he determined, if possible, to get him out of the way.

That evening as they sat on their heels in their leafy tent, eating their fill of savoury *pillau* and drinking goblet after goblet of the wine of Isfahan or Shiraz, Girgin seized his opportunity. "Have you ever heard of the glorious Manijeh, the best-loved daughter of Afrasiyab?", he began. "The poets of Turan hail her as the most beautiful woman in existence. Tall as a cypress, with skin white as

THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH

ivory and eyes glowing like the narcissus, she captivates all hearts, and he who has never seen her does not know what the word loveliness really means."

Byzun set down the silver cup which he was raising to his lips, and inquired of Girgin whether it would be possible to get a sight of this paragon among women.

"Nothing is easier," the wily old warrior answered. "Here, as you know, we are almost on the frontier of Turan, and the peasants tell me that it is Maníjeh's custom to spend the spring months in a fair garden very few *farsakhs* (leagues) from this place. Let us ride there to-morrow, bribe the servants to allow us to have a glimpse of her surpassing beauty, and then make our way back to Persia."

This Girgin said, hoping to lure Byzun to destruction, for he well knew that King Afrasiyab would kill any Persian who might dare to

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

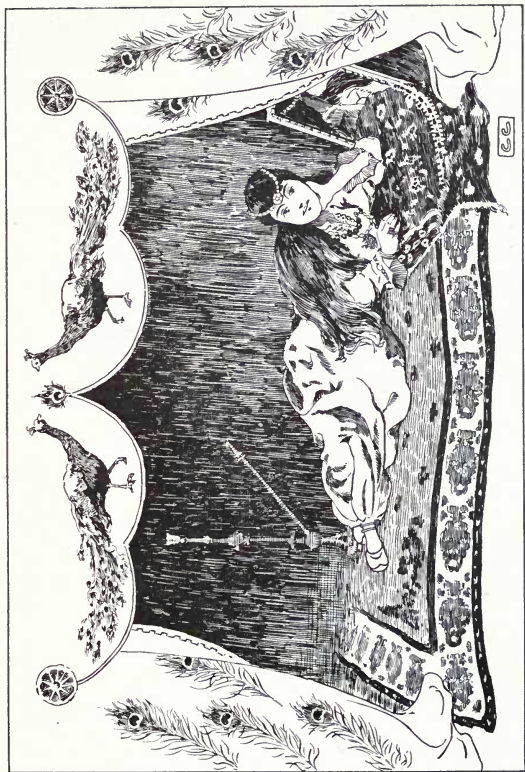
make love to his daughter, which thing he hoped the young Hero would do.

On the morrow, therefore, they rose early, and rode off towards Turan, bidding their servants load the mules and wait for them at a certain stage on the road to Persia.

Before many hours were past, they reached the camp of the Princess, pitched in a grove of huge walnut trees, and noticing one tent larger than any of the others, and made of scarlet cloth embroidered with peacocks, they boldly advanced towards it. This was, of course, the pavilion of Manijeh, and as the two Persians passed the entrance at a foot's pace, they saw a most beautiful woman reclining on a pile of silk carpets. She glanced at them inquiringly, and Byzun, bowing low from his saddle, gazed into her wondrous eyes with a look of adoration, and rode on slowly with Girgin.

Now the young Persian noble was the hand-

MANJEH IN HER TENT.



THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH

somest man at the court of King Kai-Khosrau, so perhaps it is not surprising that the fair Maníjeh loved him at first sight, and calling for her old *baji* or nurse, she told her to follow the stranger and inquire who he was. On his side Byzun, directly he saw the Princess, knew that she was the only woman in the world for whom he could ever care, so he answered all the nurse's questions fully, and gave the old woman precious jewels, on condition that she would allow him to speak to the beautiful Maníjeh.

The lovers met that same day, and were secretly married by a *mollah* or priest, because the Princess greatly feared the wrath of Afrasiyab if he were to discover that she were wedded without his leave, and, above all, to one of the hated Persian race.

Girgin rejoiced greatly that Byzun would, in all probability, return no more to Persia, but he was somewhat alarmed when the young

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

noble came to the side of his couch in the cold grey dawn of the next morning, saying that he had something to confide to him. Before he could speak another word, Girgin started up, and began to sneer at him. "You look afraid, oh, Byzun," he began. "Does your heart fail you at the thought of the wrath of Afrasiyab, who has slain so many of Persia's bravest warriors? Do you dread an adventure which would have rejoiced the heart of King Jemshed or the good Feridùn? How your comrades at court will mock when I tell them that you have won the heart of the fairest woman in the world, and then was afraid to hold her as your own!"

The young warrior was stirred to anger at this speech, and replied that he had never had the least intention of giving up his beloved wife. He merely wished to entrust Girgin with messages for the King and his parents, because he felt that his joy in the love of

THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH

Maníjeh might have a tragic ending, and it was possible that he might never see Persia again.

The old warrior, therefore, bade farewell to his companion, and went off on his way rejoicing, while the honeymoon passed in great happiness in the grove of walnut trees. At last, the day arrived when it was necessary for the Princess and her retinue to return to the court of Turan. Byzun, who saw clearly that by this move he would be walking into the very jaws of the lion, as it were, begged his wife to let him go back to Persia, and try and arrange matters with King Afrasiyab from there.

But Maníjeh could not bring herself to part from her husband, and that evening, during the interminable dinner, which often began at nine o'clock and did not end till midnight, she offered him a draught of wine from her own goblet. "Drink to our happiness, Light of my soul!"

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

she exclaimed. "May our love endure strong as now until the grave closes over us. May we have one life and one death!" And she gave him a long look of deep affection as he drained the cup to the dregs.

Almost immediately he became very drowsy, as the wine was drugged, and he slept hour after hour, while the tents were struck, and the caravan journeyed through the summer night to the city of Turan.

He woke the next day to find himself in the *anderoon* or women's apartments of the palace, and at once sprang to his feet in a terrible rage, reproaching Manjeh loudly for her treachery.

But she bore all his hard words so patiently, and looked so beautiful as she knelt weeping at his feet, saying between her sobs, "I could not let you return to Persia. You might have forgotten your wife, and have never come back to her. If you forsake me I shall die! I

THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH

cannot live without you!" that he was forced to forgive her.

But, indeed, Byzun had good cause for his anger, because as soon as Afrasiyab learned that his favourite daughter had married a Persian youth, he sent his soldiers to seize him.

When the young warrior was led, bound with chains, into the presence of the King, Afrasiyab's rage knew no limits. "Son of a dog," he shouted, "you whose ancestors have been jackals from remote ages, how dared you raise your eyes to the fairest flower of my kingdom? Do you not know that I slay without mercy any of the accursed Persian race who venture here without good reason, and how much more *you* who have thus presumed to insult me? Prepare, therefore, to die before an hour be past."

But the fear of death did not make Byzun quail before the anger of the King of Turan.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

He drew himself up to his full height, and, looking boldly into the face of the monarch, he answered, "Kill me if you will, but remember that I am the grandson of mighty Rustem, who will not fail to avenge my death."

By this speech Afrasiyab was made yet more furious, for he looked upon the Champion of the World as his deadliest enemy. He beckoned to the executioners, who were standing near at hand, and commanded them to hang Byzun without delay from a great tree that grew opposite the palace.

And the sentence would have been carried out if one of the wisest of the King's councillors had not happened to pass by just at that moment, and pleaded urgently with Afrasiyab for the life of his captive. "Oh, mighty monarch," he said, "your kingdom is now at peace, and all your subjects enjoy prosperity. But if, in your righteous anger, you take the life of this descendant of great Rustem, you

THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH

will bring war on Turan. The Persians will immediately despatch a large army to avenge young Byzun's death, and remember, oh, King, that among all the warriors of Turan there is none to compare with the Champion of the World and his son, young Feramurz."

These words made Afrasiyab resolve to imprison poor Byzun, but when you hear what his captivity was like you will perhaps think that hanging would have been better.

He was chained, head downwards, in a deep pit, so that he might never see the sun or the moon again, and over the mouth of the chasm the Demons placed an enormous mass of rock.

At first Afrasiyab said that Maníjeh should share the punishment of her husband, but all her maidens implored the King so piteously to have mercy on their beautiful mistress, that she was only stripped of all her jewels and left beside the horrible pit.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

Fortunately, there was a hole in the stone placed over the chasm, so that Manjeh could pass down food to Byzun, and she did her best to comfort him, promising that she would never forsake him as long as life lasted.

Perhaps some of you may have wondered what sort of a story Girgin invented when he returned to the Persian court without young Byzun.

He feared to tell the truth, lest the King should say that he ought to have prevented the young warrior from such a dangerous adventure, so he made up a wonderful tale about a Demon Wild Ass. He averred that they came across this creature on their homeward journey, and that it had hoofs of steel, the strength of a lion, and the swiftness of lightning. He said that he advised Byzun to have nothing to do with so uncanny an animal, but the headstrong Hero at once threw his lasso and caught the Demon by the neck.

THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH

Thereupon a terrific storm arose, the sky became dark as ink, thunder boomed, lightning flashed, mocking voices were heard, and, when the heavens were clear again, Byzun was nowhere to be found.

Girgin went on to relate that he and the servants searched for many hours, and only came across the young noble's horse, which was galloping about wildly and neighing in a very frenzy of terror.

But when the old warrior made up this false story, he had quite forgotten that King Kai-Khosrau possessed a Magic Cup, in which he could see everything and everybody in the whole world. This wondrous Goblet had formerly been the property of King Jemshed, and had been made for him by the Demons. You can imagine Girgin's dismay when the monarch sent for his magicians, and commanded them to make suitable incantations, while he gazed into the enchanted Bowl! In a flash

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

Kai-Khosrau saw poor Byzun, bound with chains, in the horrible pit, and unhappy Manjeh weeping beside the Demon-stone.

The whole Persian court rejoiced to know that the brave young noble was still in the land of the living; but the King commanded Girgin to be imprisoned in a deep dungeon, there to stay until poor Byzun was free once more.

Then he commanded Rustem to come to the rescue, and the old Hero hastened to the court from his retirement in Zabulistan. He told Kai-Khosrau that he did not need an army, but would go in disguise with a thousand warriors, all of them pretending to be merchants and camel-drivers. This was an old ruse of Rustem's, who captured the fortress of Sipund many many years ago in this manner. Therefore, a great troop of camels was laden with jewels, silks, embroideries, and carpets, the animals divided into long strings, the tail of

THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH

the leading camel being tied to the head of the next, and so on.

The caravan made a great stir when it reached the city of Turan, as such rich merchandise had never been seen there before, and all the inhabitants were very eager to buy.

When Maníjeh heard of its arrival, she became greatly excited, and thinking that Rustem, from his appearance, was the chief merchant, she asked him whether King Kai-Khosrau knew that one of his bravest warriors was cruelly imprisoned in Turan.

But the Champion of the World did not want to disclose his plans too soon, so he answered the Princess, roughly: "What do I, a mere merchant, know about the Persian court? I have never even heard the name of Byzun, so how can his fate matter to me?"

But at this downfall to her hopes, Maníjeh wept so bitterly that Rustem's heart was softened, and he said to her, kindly, "Poor maiden,

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

I perceive that you are in some great trouble. Perchance I may be able to help you, though I am neither a warrior nor a courtier."

The unlucky Princess caught at the sympathy in her misery and desolation, and told her whole story with many a tear.

Rustem listened with much interest, and gave Manjeh a roast fowl to take to the prisoner, for the Demons, who watched over him, allowed him only bread and water.

In the body of the bird was concealed the Hero's own signet-ring with his name engraved upon it, which, when Byzun saw, he gave an exclamation of joy.

"Beloved, what is it? Why do you smile?" inquired the Princess, as she peered at him through the hole in the stone, but at first Byzun would not tell her.

All Persian boys are taught their lessons by the *mollahs* or priests, and these men usually give their pupils one particular piece of advice.

THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH

They say, "Never trust a woman with a secret on any account. If she gives you counsel, always do the contrary thing to what she advises, and never be guided by her in anything."

Now, of course, every girl who reads this will see at once how wrong and stupid the *mollahs* must be to say such things, and no one will wonder that Maníjeh thought so too.

She reproached her husband for his unkind conduct, saying that in all his misery she had never forsaken him, and had done her utmost for him; therefore it was hard that he would not trust her when she had proved her love so thoroughly.

Byzun thereupon felt quite ashamed of himself, and, having begged for her forgiveness, said: "Let us rejoice! It was Rustem with whom you spoke. He is come to release me. Go to him in haste and ask of him his plans."

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

The Princess, now filled with hope, betook herself to the Champion of the World, who told her to light a fire beside the pit as soon as it was dark, in order to guide him and his soldiers to the spot. She, on her side, bade him beware of the Demon-guards, and, above all, of their leader, who cherished a terrible hatred against Rustem, the slayer of his father, the White Demon.

Then she returned to her husband, and they beguiled the time until nightfall with talk of all that they would do when Fortune smiled upon them again, and Manjeh also collected a big heap of camel-thorn for the bonfire.

When the time came for it to be lit, she stood beside it in fear and trembling, feeding it at every moment, for camel-thorn blazes up fiercely and goes out quickly.

At last she heard the tramp of Rustem and his warriors, and the fight that ensued between them and the Demons was such a fierce one that

THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH

at times it almost seemed as if Byzun might never be released. Rustem and his followers fought with swords and spears and bows and arrows, flinging their nooses round the necks of the Demons whenever they could.

In the midst of all the tumult of the fight, a terrific roar was suddenly heard, and the leader of the Divs, a monster most hideous to look upon, sprang to the front and rushed at the Champion of the World. "Murderer of my father, thy last hour is come!" it yelled, and, armed with a great tree torn up by the roots, it challenged Rustem to single combat. Oh, how poor Maníjeh prayed! How she implored the Gods for their help, and how she shuddered when the Demon vanished again and again, just when the Champion seemed about to get the better of it.

At last, however, the rage of the Div grew to such a pitch that it forgot all caution, and made a headlong dash at Rustem with the

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

tree trunk. The old Hero leapt nimbly aside to avoid the charge, and plunged his sword deep into the side of the monster as it passed, and the victory was to the Persians.

They pursued the vanquished Demons for some miles, and then Rustem managed, by a great effort of strength, to push away the Demonstone over the mouth of the pit, and to haul up poor Byzun by means of his lasso.

The whole release had been done so secretly that King Afrasiyab had no idea of what was going on outside the city during that night, and was much alarmed when he heard a voice, loud as thunder, shouting through the palace, "Awake, oh sovereign! Byzun is free, and Rustem is here to avenge him!" The Persians had slain all the guards, and were swarming into every room, killing all who resisted them, and gathering up jewels and gold and fair maidens.

Afrasiyab, without losing a moment, fled

THE STORY OF BYZUN AND MANÍJEH

through a secret passage which led from his chamber to the barracks of his soldiers, and hastily summoning his army he encountered the invaders at daybreak.

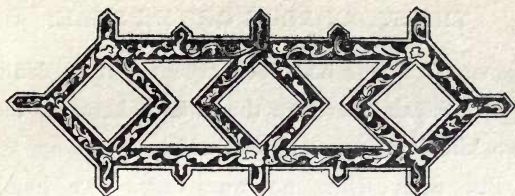
Certainly the Persians only numbered a thousand, but, with Rustem at their head, it was as if they were a host tenfold that strength, and the Champion of the World never distinguished himself more than on that day.

Of course, the Turanians were utterly routed, and their conquerors returned to Persia laden with spoil.

Byzun and Manijeh were received with great honour at the court, King Kai-Khosrau feeling that he could hardly do enough to make up to them for all their sufferings, and it is related that they lived happily together all the rest of their days.







VII

Some of the Feats of Rustem

AFTER the mournful death of young Sohrab, Rustem retired for a long time to his own kingdom of Zabulistan, telling everyone that he had quite done with fighting and intended to dwell henceforth in peace with all men.

But while King Afrasiyab lived, the services of the great Hero could not be dispensed with, and again and again he was called from his retreat to do battle with the Turanian forces.

A new King, Kai-Khosrau by name, had succeeded the foolish Kai-Kaus, and this

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

monarch's father had been cruelly put to death by Afrasiyab, therefore the enmity between the two kingdoms was unquenchable.

But even when no wars were on hand, X Rustem's services were frequently required. One day, for example, the King's grooms were in the utmost terror, as a creature in the form of a wild ass had burst into the royal stables and had killed or seriously injured many of the best horses. Everyone agreed in thinking that this disagreeable visitor must be an evil spirit in disguise, and the courtiers and officials advised the king to send for Rustem at once, as, from the fact of having killed the White Demon, he had had considerable experience of such monsters.

Rustem arrived in haste, and searched the neighbouring forest for the pretended wild ass, but found that he had no easy task before him, for whenever he came in sight of the strange animal and galloped up to it, it invariably

SOME OF THE FEATS OF RUSTEM

vanished immediately, and even Rustem could do nothing against an enemy which took such an unfair advantage of him.

For three days and three nights the great Champion pursued a shadow as it were, and he and his horse, Rakush, became completely exhausted with the chase and despaired of success.

Thoroughly tired out at last, Rustem lay down near a stream to take a little much-needed rest, and as soon as he had fallen asleep, the Demon appeared in the form of a monstrous giant, and, digging up the earth round him, took up the soil and the Champion together and marched off with this strange burden poised on his head.

The Hero presently awoke to find himself in this perilous position, and was not greatly re-assured when the Demon offered him the choice of two modes of death. "Wouldest thou prefer to be left on the summit of Great

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

Demavend, far from any human habitation," said his captor, "or wilt thou be thrown into the waters of the Caspian Sea?"

Now the wily Rustem knew that the Evil Spirits loved to act by contraries, and that if a mortal begged them to do a special thing they would at once do the opposite. Therefore, considering that it would be better to risk drowning than starvation, he besought and implored the Demon to leave him to the mercy of the wild beasts on the mountain, as he had a horror of being devoured by the denizens of the deep.

The result was just what Rustem hoped. The Demon flung him headlong into the sea, and down he went into unsounded depths.

The Champion of the World was no mean swimmer, however, and when he rose to the surface, he knew that he could soon reach the shore. He had to contend with various monsters (none of which are to be found in the

SOME OF THE FEATS OF RUSTEM

Caspian to-day), all exceedingly eager to make a meal off him, but his good sword speedily rid him of these enemies, and he came safely to land and found faithful Rakush waiting for him on the shore. His first act was to gallop back to the haunts of the Demon, who appeared in his giant shape, and was greatly surprised at seeing the Hero again, scoffing at him for his folly in braving the anger of a Demon twice.

Rustem, however, had the laugh on his side this time. He threw his lasso as the Evil Spirit spoke, and the monster, entangled in its coils, became an easy prey. Then the Champion cut off its head and sent it as a trophy to King Kai-Khosrau, who was amazed at its size and terrific expression, and who lavished yet further honours and riches on Rustem, the bulwark of his realm.

* * * * *

King Afrasiyab often felt bitterly that as

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

long as Rustem lived he himself could never be secure in his kingdom, but one day a gleam of hope fell across his path. In passing through a village not far from Turan, he was astonished to see a young peasant of extraordinary stature and of a most awe-inspiring countenance, and at once thought that he might employ this youth to slay Rustem in single combat and so rid the world of that mighty Champion.

The young villager said that his name was Barzu, but that his parentage was surrounded by a mystery which his mother had always refused to reveal. He was, of course, greatly flattered when Afrasiyab loaded him with presents and promised him all kinds of honours and riches if he would only overthrow Rustem in battle, and the Turanian King on his side was well pleased with his bargain, when he found that Barzu could easily overcome eighteen of his strongest warriors at once.

SOME OF THE FEATS OF RUSTEM

Afrasiyab, therefore, got together an army to invade Persia, and put Barzu at the head of the vanguard, which speedily engaged the Persian forces under Tus, and routed them utterly.

In this emergency Rustem was sent for as usual, and at once came to the rescue, fired with hatred against Afrasiyab, his life-long enemy. And when the morrow dawned, and Barzu stalked out from the Turanian host, defying the Persian generals to single combat, Rustem came forth to encounter the youth. Hour after hour they fought together without any result, until Barzu managed to strike Rustem such a terrific blow that his arm was completely disabled. The wily Champion, however, concealed the intense pain that he was suffering, and remarking that as the sun was about to set, it would be better to postpone the combat until the next day, he returned to the Persian camp. Here he fell into despair, as his wound

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

was too severe to allow of his fighting on the morrow, and all night long besought the Gods with many tears that they would come to the assistance of Persia in her dire need.

And even as dawn broke he received an answer to his fervent petitions. His son, the young Feramurz, who was almost, if not quite, equal to his mighty father, arrived unexpectedly, and at once proposed to wear Rustem's armour and pretend to be the warrior with whom Barzu had fought on the previous day.

The Turanian Champion had some doubts as to whether Feramurz was his adversary of the day before, although he was wearing the same armour and using the same weapons and horse. The Persian, however, did not allow any discussion on this point, but rushing upon him with an indescribable fury, so confused Barzu with the blows of his battle-axe that he easily secured him with his lasso and dragged him in triumph to Rustem.

SOME OF THE FEATS OF RUSTEM

And, strange to say, it was revealed to the Champion of the World that Barzu was none other than his own grandson, the child of the ill-fated Sohrab. Thereupon the would-be destroyer of Rustem became one of his dearest friends, and accompanied him and Feramurz back to their kingdom in far Zabulistan.

Afrasiyab, naturally, was bitterly grieved at the ill-success of his plan for ridding the world of Rustem, which had only resulted in the loss of Barzu, his own Champion. But one day, as he lamented, a beautiful woman was brought before him and requested to speak with him quite alone.

She then told him that she was a wonderful sorceress, and was confident that her witchcraft would soon bring Rustem into the King's power, as no living man could resist her charms. Afrasiyab consented to the plan she proposed, gave her plenty of money, and sent her off to Zabulistan in company with Pilsam, his bravest

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

warrior, the witch giving out that she was the wife of a rich merchant. She bought a large house and fortress close to Rustem's palace, and offered food and wine to all who passed by her dwelling. Before very long a day arrived on which three of Persia's bravest warriors entered her hall. Her beauty was so great that these Heroes gazed at her with rapture and joyously drank enchanted wine from the golden goblets which she handed them. Thereupon they all sank helpless at her feet, and Pilsam bound them with stout ropes and locked them up in the fortress.

The aged Zal came by not long after this, and, being curious to know who this lady might be, he accepted her pressing offer of hospitality and entered her house.

But the spells of the fair sorceress had no effect upon him, because the image of fair Rudabeh, now in her grave, was seldom absent from his mind. He had loved his wife so

SOME OF THE FEATS OF RUSTEM

well that he never cared to look upon the face of any other woman, therefore the enchanted wine did him no manner of harm.

He left the lady after awhile, with a courtly thanks and a *khoda hafiz-i-shuma*, which is the Persian way of saying good-bye. However, he was stopped outside her gate by a water-carrier who had been resting in the shade, as the skin he bore, filled with water, was a heavy one. "Deliverer of the poor," so the man began, "may I, unworthy son of a dog, speak to your Highness?" And when Zal bade him tell what was in his mind, he said that he had noted how the beautiful lady had lured three warriors into her dwelling, and that they had never come out again. This aroused Zal's suspicions, for he had not seen the warriors in the house, and he had, moreover, noted how a narrow flight of stone steps led up to the fortress, and had been surprised to see a couple of Persian helmets lying near by.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

He rushed back to capture his hostess, but when she perceived him on her threshold, she fled up the staircase and so into the tower. Zal pursued her hotly, and breaking down the door with mighty blows, he found Pilsam behind it, and entered into a terrific combat with him. Things might have gone badly if the water-carrier had not summoned Rustem to come to the help of his aged father, and the Persian Hero speedily killed Pilsam and released the three prisoners. The sorceress, the cause of all the mischief, escaped during the fighting, so you see she never had the chance of trying her spells on the Champion of the World.

She did not dare to return to Afrasiyab to tell him of her ill-success, but took the money he had given her and went to live in one of the great cities of India.

When Afrasiyab heard that his mightiest warrior had been killed by Rustem, and that

SOME OF THE FEATS OF RUSTEM

his plan to entrap the latter had come to nought, he fell into a terrible rage. Indeed, so angry was he that his servants feared to approach him, lest he should order their instant execution. He refused to eat or drink, flung his beautifully-jewelled *kalian*s or water-pipes at the fretted ornaments of his hall, tortured many of his slaves, and threatened to kill his once beloved wife and the sons of whom he was so proud.

After three awful days, during which no one in the palace felt that his head was safe on his shoulders, Afrasiyab became a little calmer, and summoned his doctors and magicians to a council.

When they were all standing in their long robes and white turbans with bent heads before his throne, he thus addressed them: "Learned men, who for long years have been nourished by my gracious bounty, now is the time to show your gratitude to your monarch. All of

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

you know that I have a deadly enemy. All of you know that this kingdom of Turan is never safe from invasion while Rustem lives. I have summoned you here in order that you may, with the aid of divination and having consulted the course of the planets, predict the death of the Champion of the World. You must inform me whether I, the King, or whether Rustem departs first to the Lower World, and you must also tell me in what manner it is ordained that we make our several exits from this life." Here Afrasiyab ceased for a moment, and then, waving them away haughtily, he cried: "Begone now to your studies, and return at this time three days hence to tell me the result!"

The learned men were by no means happy during the interval allotted to them; for, read the stars as they might, they always saw the same evil prediction written, which was that Afrasiyab would be fleeing for his life but a



THE COUNCIL OF THE WISE MEN.

To face page 183.

SOME OF THE FEATS OF RUSTEM

few weeks hence, and would meet a violent death. When they turned to the horoscope of Rustem, they found that a long span of life and much honour and riches awaited that Hero, though his latter days were clouded with sorrow and ended in blood.

On the morning of the third day, the trembling magicians met in secret as the dawn broke, and nervously whispered together. Their lives hung in the balance, for they well knew if they told Afrasiyab the truth that not a man among them would in all probability see another sun rise.

At last he who was the boldest amongst them spoke out. "Brothers," he began, "it is written in the stars that our royal master is to die. Nought that we can do or say will save him. Who can set aside the decrees of Destiny? Let us, therefore, conceal the truth, for of a surety our lives will be sacrificed, and that speedily, if we do not do so. Shall we not all

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

agree that Rustem is to die by the sword before another moon has waned, but that our monarch is to be the light of his faithful subjects for uncounted years?"

The speaker had but put into words what each man felt in his heart, and he was answered by a murmur of *khub äst* (it is good), while one old grey-beard said, solemnly, "*Kismet* (it is fate)."

Afrasiyab was naturally much pleased at the predictions of the magicians when they came into his presence. He was particularly curious to know the exact manner of the supposed death of Rustem, and could not be satisfied until the learned man, who had counselled the others to deceive, declared that he had had a vision of the Champion of the World dying of wounds in the midst of battle.

This decided the Turanian monarch to invade Persia yet once again and for the last time.

But things by no means turned out as he ex-

SOME OF THE FEATS OF RUSTEM

pected, for his army was utterly routed by Rustem and he himself captured. He was led in chains to King Kai-Khosrau, who at once put him to death, thus avenging the cruel murder of his father, who had formerly married Afrasiyab's daughter.

Now that the Turanian monarch was dead, Kai-Khosrau felt that the work of his life was done, therefore he announced to his sorrowing people that he intended to leave the kingdom to his son-in-law, and devote himself entirely to prayer. He said, moreover, that he had seen a certain fountain in a dream, and knew that when he should find it the Gods would take him to themselves. Accordingly, he set the affairs of his empire in order, and, accompanied by many of his warriors, went forth into the desert in search of this water.

The party rode across a trackless waste for some days, but were in no fear of losing the way because a *chikor* or partridge ran ever

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

in front of them acting as a guide, and seeming, by its incessant cry, to be telling them to follow it. At last, to the astonishment of everybody, except Kai-Khosrau, they came to a very large and deep pool of water, which the King told them was the spot he had seen in his dream.

Here Zal, Rustem, and all the other warriors dismounted and fell on their faces before their monarch, weeping bitterly at his approaching departure, so greatly was he beloved by all.

Kai-Khosrau himself was moved at saying good-bye to so many faithful friends, but begged them earnestly to start on their homeward journey as soon as he should disappear from their eyes. It had been revealed to him, he said, that a most terrible storm would shortly arise, which would overwhelm any who remained in the vicinity of the fountain, and which would, moreover, cause the pool to vanish away, so that it would never be seen again.

After these words he stepped into the water

SOME OF THE FEATS OF RUSTEM

and immediately sank from their view, leaving not even a ripple on the surface, and all wept for a time, quite overcome with grief.

Zal, however, roused himself before long, and urged a speedy departure, as he noted black clouds beginning to gather in the sky, and thought on the storm which Kai-Khosrau had predicted.

Accordingly, he and Rustem, with the greater part of the warriors, mounted their steeds and rode off in haste, calling on the others to follow them.

But several of the generals and many soldiers were so overcome with grief that they could not tear themselves away from the mysterious spot, and, sad to tell, were all frozen to death by the terrific snow-storm which shortly broke upon them.

* * * * *

It is related that at this time Rustem was four hundred years old. He felt, therefore, that

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

it was fitting for him to give place to younger Heroes, among whom was his son Feramurz, and, accordingly, he left Persia and went to reside for the remainder of his days with old Zal in their kingdom of Zabulistan.

Things, however, did not go so smoothly with the Champion as one would have wished. Perhaps he had lived too long, or perhaps, and I myself believe that this was the cause, he had become so puffed up with all his prosperity that he had forgotten the Gods to whom he owed everything.

Be that as it may, a King ruled over Persia who recked nothing of the great deeds done by Rustem in former years, and endeavoured to subject him to cruel insult ; but you must read the next story to understand how it all came about.





VIII

The Story of Isfendiyar

ISFENDIYAR, the son of King Gushtasp, was a youth of surpassing valour, and, what was perhaps more uncommon in that age, he was profoundly pious.

It was at this time that the Persians adopted a new religion, and called themselves henceforth Fire Worshippers. The sun was now the object of their adoration, which was not perhaps surprising, as they saw how its light and heat brought life and health to the whole world.

They thought that the Earth, Air, Fire, and Water were all sacred and must never be

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

polluted, therefore they did not bury their dead in graves as we do, but placed them on the tops of high towers.

Moreover, they feared to defile the Fire if they blew out a flame with their breath, therefore they always extinguished a candle with their fingers.

And the Fire Worshippers in Persia have these customs at the present day, and many others which perhaps you will read about when you are grown up.

Isfendiyar wished all the nations on the borders of Persia to adopt this religion, but, as he knew that persuasion would not be of much use, he asked his father to give him command of a large army.

Then began a sort of Holy War. The young Prince conquered kingdom after kingdom, and even the King of India, who came out against him with hundreds of elephants, was forced, like all the others, to become a Fire Worshipper



ISFENDIYAR CONQUERS THE KING OF INDIA, (TAKEN FROM A PERSIAN PAINTING.)
To face page 190.

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

and accept the Sacred Book or Zendavesta.

King Gushtasp was so delighted at the victories of his son that he made a solemn promise that he should succeed him on the throne of Persia.

But, unluckily, the Prince had an enemy. This was one of the generals of the army, who was such a cowardly soldier that Isfendiyar refused to take him on his Holy War, and left him behind in the capital.

The warrior was deeply offended, and thought day and night how he might do some injury to the Prince, and his opportunity was not long in coming.

While Isfendiyar was gaining victory after victory, this man kept on telling King Gushtasp that his son was plotting to take the crown of Persia from him, and had even resolved to murder him as soon as he returned home.

Of course, none of you can possibly under-

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

stand how a father could think that his children were trying to harm him, but it is one of the commonest things in the East, even nowadays.

The Shahs or Kings of Persia are usually afraid of their sons, and keep them as ignorant as possible. They never allow them to travel, and surround them with spies in order to discover whether they are plotting to seize the throne. They are particularly alarmed if they hear that one of their sons is gathering many soldiers around him, or interesting himself in military matters, and, in such a case, they at once send a message to the Prince, commanding him to adopt more peaceful pursuits.

Therefore, you see that it was not so very strange for Gushtasp to believe all that the general told him, although he ought to have known that his son was far too honourable a man to have even thought of such things. He became at last so frightened that when Isfen-

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

diyar returned home after all his victories, he ordered him to be bound with chains, and cast into a deep dungeon.

However, it is well known that a person who does a wicked act can never be really happy, and so it was with Gushtasp.

On all sides he heard murmurs of reproach from his subjects, who were very angry at the cruel way in which he had treated his son. As he rode through the Bazaars on a horse with golden trappings, followed by his nobles in magnificent clothing, he would hear voices crying: "Give us back Isfendiyar! Release our heroic young general!" but he never could find out who spoke, because the crowds were too great. The people did not give vent to loud "bah! bah's" of admiration, as they had hitherto done when they saw him, and he noticed that their low tones and prostrations proceeded from fear and not from love. In the army matters were even worse, and the King

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

saw discontent, if not hatred, written plainly on every soldier's face, for the men idolized their heroic leader.

All this made life somewhat unpleasant, and Gushtasp, thinking he would like a change, put the kingdom in charge of his Vizier, and went off on a visit to old Rustem in far-away Zabulistan.

X The Champion of the World received his King with great joy, and everything was done to show honour to the royal guest.

One day camels, laden with tents and every possible luxury, would be sent off across the vast plains towards the mountains, and when the King and his followers rode out from Zabul on their fleet horses late in the afternoon, they would find the camp pitched by some running water, and all made ready for their reception.

The next morning, shortly after daybreak, they would go off to hunt the gazelle.

These pretty creatures still roam about the

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

plains in small herds, and the riders try to surround them at a long distance and then draw closer and closer in upon them. When the antelopes see that the horsemen are getting nearer they become much startled and try to escape by rushing between them.

The hunters now gallop wildly after them, shooting right and left, and their comrades run great risk of being wounded instead of the gazelle. Moreover, it is very easy to have a bad fall, as the horses go at a great pace over the stony plains, and the riders are too busy using their weapons to be able to guide their steeds.

Gushtasp, however, killed many antelopes and had no falls, and had also good luck in pursuing the fleet wild ass across the *Kavir* or Salt Desert. He spent a few days at intervals in climbing about the barren mountains, and brought down many a fine ibex or moufflon with his bow and arrows, and when he needed

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

less fatiguing sport, he would roam among the low hills, shooting the pretty *kabg* or partridge.

But you must not think that these were the only amusements provided for Gushtasp. Magnificent banquets were laid on silken carpets under the trees of fair gardens; beautiful girls were always ready to sing and dance before the King; feats of wrestling and horsemanship were performed in his presence, and clever Dervishes were ever at hand to relate long stories, some so sad that all who heard them wept, and others so merry that the sovereign and his courtiers laughed till their sides ached.

As all these pleasures delight the Shahs of Persia at the present day, you will be able to judge how little change there has been in the land since the time of King Gushtasp.

The weeks passed so quickly in this round of enjoyment that the monarch actually stayed two years with Rustem, and there is no saying

The author doesn't realize that the meaning of pleasure doesn't have to change with time.

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

how much longer he might have stopped if bad news from Persia had not forced him to return home in haste.

In those turbulent days it was not prudent for a king to leave his kingdom for long, and no one can be surprised that Arjasp, one of the sovereigns whom Isfendiyar had conquered and compelled to become a Fire Worshipper, thought it an excellent opportunity to take his revenge.

He entered Persia with a large army, slaying and burning in all directions, and Gushtasp's soldiers could not withstand him, but were routed in every battle. Arjasp even got possession of the capital of Persia, and carried off the two Princesses, the King's only daughters, to a brazen tower in his dominions.

Gushtasp in despair called a hasty council of his magicians and astrologers, and asked them what was to be done. They cried out as with one voice: "Release thy son Isfendiyar, oh

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

King! Put him at the head of thy army and all will go well.”

The poor Prince was at once brought forth from his dungeon, and it is said that he was so weakened by all his sufferings that he could hardly stand.

Gushtasp felt very penitent when he saw him, and promised that he should succeed him on the throne of Persia if he could drive Arjasp from the country. He also put to death the wicked general who had caused him to believe such false stories of his son.

Isfendiyar let bygones be bygones, and when he saw his faithful soldiers, and heard their shouts of joy at his appearance, he seemed to get back his former strength, and performed such feats of valour as made the Persians compare him with mighty Rustem, and all yelled “*shahbash!*” till they were hoarse.

He soon drove Arjasp from the land, and King Gushtasp begged him to take the crown

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

forthwith, and said he would go into retirement and spend the rest of his days in prayer.

It would have been a good thing for Isfendiyar if he had agreed to his father's request, but he became quite indignant at the idea. "Continue, oh, noble monarch, to be the Shelter of the whole Universe," he said. "As for me, your unworthy son, I desire neither thrones nor diadems. My one wish in life is to invade Arjasp in his own kingdom, and to deliver my dear sisters from their captivity."

These words greatly pleased Gushtasp, who fondly embraced his son, and told him to start for the territory of Arjasp as soon as he and the soldiers were sufficiently rested.

This expedition is always spoken of as the *Heft-Khan* or "Seven Stages" of Isfendiyar.

✓ Rustem had accomplished *his* seven feats of valour when he made his famous journey into Mazanderan to deliver King Kai-Kaus

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

from the White Demon, and now the young Prince was following his example.

During the campaign against Arjasp, the Persians had captured a gigantic Demon warrior called Kurugsar, and Isfendiyar promised this creature his liberty if he would help to rescue the poor Princesses.

The Demon explained that there were three roads to the stronghold of Arjasp. The best would take three months, the next two; but the third, the *Heft-Khan*, was only seven stages in length. "This is by far the shortest way, oh, noble Prince," said Kurugsar; "but on each day some fearful obstacle must be overcome. Wild beasts of every kind, monstrous dragons, death-dealing enchantresses, and the dread Simurgh all haunt this district; and so full of perils is the path that no mortal has ever passed along it in safety."

Isfendiyar, following the example of mighty Rustem, betook himself to fervent prayer, and

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

finally announced, that come what might, he would go by the short road. Kurugsar thereupon implored to be left behind, saying that the Prince could never reach the kingdom of Arjasp, and would involve himself and all his followers in a common destruction. This greatly displeased Isfendiyar who imagined that the Demon meant to betray him. Accordingly, he ordered him to be bound, and forced him to act as guide to the great army of twelve thousand men which now set out on this journey so full of danger and horror.

As soon as the soldiers had crossed the Persian frontier, they reached a dreary desert, and Kurugsar bade them advance cautiously, because the place was infested by two enormous wolves, larger than elephants, and with poisonous teeth over a foot in length.

The Demon had scarcely spoken when the monsters made their appearance, rushing upon the Persians with indescribable fury, and caus-

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

ing a regular panic. Man after man fell wounded and dying, and it seemed as if the thousands of arrows shot by those who stood firm had no effect at all.

At last Isfendiyar saw his opportunity, and with a blow of his battle-axe cleft open the skull of one gigantic beast, and, after a terrible struggle, managed to pierce the heart of the other with his sword.

Kurugsar was amazed exceedingly at this feat of arms, which did not please him however, because he hoped that the Prince would have lost his life in the encounter with the wolves, and that he himself would then have been set free. However, he feigned great joy, and said: "Now, oh royal general, I will accompany you with a light heart, for I see clearly that the Gods have bestowed their favour upon you and that they are guiding your steps."

The Demon-guide repeated these same words on the second day, when Isfendiyar, quite un-

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

aided, slew a lion and lioness of supernatural size and ferocity.

But he warned the young Hero that the fearsome Dragon, that haunted the third stage, would be a far harder creature to subdue than the wolves and lions. It was a fire-breathing monster, with a mouth so vast that it swallowed men and horses whole, and a roar so appallingly loud that it made the earth vibrate, and caused avalanches of stones to come tumbling down the sides of the mountains.

Isfendiyar perceived at once that this monster was not to be overcome by ordinary means, but, being full of resource, he soon found out a way. He ordered his *takht-i-ravan* or litter to be brought out. This is a kind of long box, in which women and sometimes men of rank are carried in Persia when travelling. It has a pair of shafts at either end, to which a couple of stout mules are harnessed, and, as they jog along, the whole thing sways to and

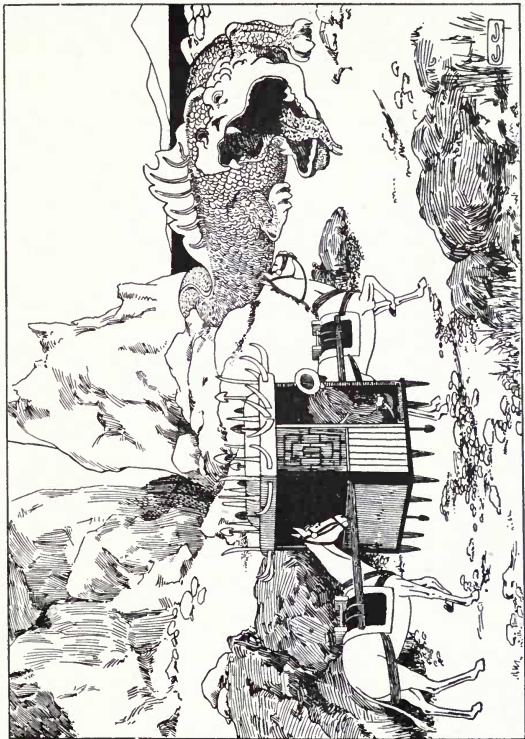
THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

fro in a most uncomfortable manner to anyone who is not a good sailor.

Isfendiyar commanded this litter to be studded all over with sword-blades, javelins, and spear-heads, and when they reached the country of the Dragon, he got inside it, shut-to the little door, and somehow managed to guide the mules by means of ropes which he held. He had no easy task to induce the poor animals to approach the monster, which gave a terrific bellow when it saw them, and rushed forward, great flames bursting from its nostrils.

In less time than it takes to write, this terrible creature had taken the mules and *takht* into its enormous mouth, but it sorely repented of its haste. The sword-blades and spear-heads wounded it so cruelly that it spat everything out again in its dying agony.

Isfendiyar then leapt out of the litter and finished off the Dragon with his battle-axe,



To face page 204.

ISFENDIYAR AND THE DRAGON.

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

while the mules galloped away quite unhurt, though in a terrible fright.

The young Prince himself was nearly drowned in the great stream of the monster's blood, but was fortunately rescued by his brother, and thanked the Gods heartily for this third great deliverance.

The Demon-guide was the only one who was not pleased at Isfendiyar's success. He said, with a scarcely-concealed sneer, "To-morrow, royal Champion, a harder task than any that you have accomplished hitherto awaits you. A most beautiful Sorceress will appear who can turn herself into any shape she pleases, and in a moment can change this desert into a stormy sea or a lovely garden, according to her caprice. Moreover, she is attended by a huge Ghoul of malignant aspect."

"He who puts his trust in the Gods has no fear," answered Isfendiyar, and when, on the next day, the beautiful Enchantress advanced

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

towards him, he met guile by guile, and invited her to sit beside him on a pile of silken carpets from the looms of Kashan.

And as they talked, he caught the Sorceress suddenly round the waist with his running noose, and held her fast, though she turned into different animals, and even into a very aged man who begged for mercy. "Kill her, as you value your life!" shouted Kurugsar. "She will turn this place into a deep lake and drown us all if you hesitate." Therefore, Isfendiyar slew the Enchantress, and had then to do battle with the enormous Ghoul. The flames which burst forth from this monster were so fierce that they burnt the young Prince badly; but, in spite of all his pain, he persevered and managed to despatch this adversary, thus completing his fourth labour.

"So far success has attended you," remarked the Demon-guide; "but I have many fears as to the result of the morrow! Your way lies over

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

the mountain-pass, where dwells the dread Simurgh, half-bird, half-beast, and as large as the monstrous Dragon."

Isfendiyar, nothing daunted, determined to try the cunning plan that had succeeded so well with the Dragon.

He again ordered the mules to be harnessed to his litter, which was stuck all over with sword-blades and spear-heads, and, getting inside, went on up the pass, ahead of his army. As soon as the Simurgh espied the *takht* it swooped down upon it, with beak and claws, intending to carry it off bodily to its nest in the mountains. It is hardly necessary for me to tell you that the sharp points injured the bird so terribly that Isfendiyar was able to kill it quite easily, and then, amid the cheers of the whole army, he told the Demon-guide that he was ready for whatever might befall on the next stage. "Do not be too sure of yourself," Kurugsar made answer. "To-morrow

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

you will encounter a fall of snow so heavy that you and your warriors will lose the way, and a wind so bitter that it will chill all of you to the very heart, thousands perishing from the intense cold. How can you venture to fight against the elements? It is as if you braved the great Gods themselves. Have you forgotten how many nobles and soldiers were overwhelmed by a snowstorm when they lingered by the fountain in which King Kai-Khosrau disappeared? Why must we all suffer from a like fate?"

These words excited the whole army, which implored Isfendiyar to return. Up to now the soldiers had not been greatly dismayed by any of the perils of the road, as they saw from the first that their brave young general bore the whole brunt of them. But this sixth stage was a very different matter, because everyone would have to share the danger.

The Prince, addressing the army, said that

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

through the favour of the Gods, he had overcome five of the obstacles on the road, therefore he was convinced that the Dwellers on High would enable him to pass the last two stages in safety. "Comrades in arms!" he exclaimed, "I have pledged my honour to deliver my sisters from the Brazen Fortress. Rather than break my oath I will go alone. Farewell! Return in safety to fair Persia, and tell King Gushtasp that his son did his utmost."

These words made the soldiers ashamed of themselves, and with one voice they said that they would follow Isfendiyar to the death. They had no great reason to repent of their decision, for they reached the shelter of some great caves in the mountains before the storm began. Though it lasted for three days without ceasing, yet the fervent prayers of the entire army prevailed with the Gods, so that on the fourth day the Heavens were again clear.

The Demon-guide, however, made one last

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

effort to dissuade Isfendiyar from attempting the seventh stage. He said it lay across a waterless desert, the sands of which were red-hot and would burn-up anyone who ventured upon them, and, moreover, discharged such poisonous vapours that even the vultures never dared to hover over them.

But the Prince was not to be daunted, for he and all his men had soaked their boots in the blood of the Simurgh. Isfendiyar had commanded this, knowing that the precaution would enable them to pass through fire unhurt. So in due time the Persians reached the Brazen Tower, where the poor Princesses were imprisoned, and Isfendiyar inquired of the Demon the best way of entering the fortress.

He was astounded when the guide replied in a burst of rage: "May you never succeed in your attempt! May the Demons repulse your onslaught, and drive you into the desert to perish miserably! Curses on my head that I have shown you the way hither!"

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

On this, Isfendiyar immediately slew Kurugsar, and then approached the castle cautiously to try and discover its weak points. As it was made entirely of brass, he saw that he must use guile instead of force, especially when he heard that it had abundance of food and water and was garrisoned by thousands of warriors.

Remembering some of the feats of mighty Rustem, he resolved to try the well-worn plan of introducing himself and his men, disguised as merchants, into the tower.

He loaded twenty camels with rich merchandise, and eighty with two big chests apiece, in which he stowed his picked warriors. A hundred soldiers, clad in blue cotton shirts and full trousers and felt skull-caps, acted the part of camel-drivers, keeping their weapons carefully hidden.

King Arjasp at once allowed this caravan to be admitted, and was so much pleased with the splendid gifts which Isfendiyar presented to

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

him that he gave the merchants leave to visit the palace whenever they liked.

Isfendiyar soon found his poor sisters, who were forced to do all kinds of rough work in King Arjasp's kitchens. He was afraid to discover himself to them, lest they should, in their joy, betray him, and when they addressed the supposed merchant with a glad "*khosh amadīd*" of welcome, and asked whether no plan was afoot in Persia for their rescue, he replied in a feigned voice.

But the elder Princess recognized him directly, so he was forced to unfold his design, but bade them do their work as usual in order not to excite suspicion.

That night he invited the King and his warriors to a grand banquet, saying that when darkness came on he would light a huge bonfire which would give as much illumination as a thousand torches.

This he said, because he had arranged with

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

his brother, who was with the army, that when he saw flames rising from the fortress he was to attack the tower without delay.

Everything fell out as Isfendiyar hoped. The King and his nobles drank so much of the strong Persian wine that they became sleepy, and when the Prince had released his eighty warriors from the chests, and had lit the bonfire, he opened the gate of the fortress to the Persian soldiers lying in wait outside.

After a long fight, in which Arjasp and his entire army were slain, Isfendiyar with his sisters and soldiers returned to Persia by the *Heft-Khan* or Seven Stages, now a perfectly safe road.

King Gushtasp received them with much honour, and was greatly interested in their wonderful adventures. You will, however, hardly believe me when I tell you that very soon the monarch became again so jealous of his noble son that he told his magicians and astrologers to find out in what manner Isfendiyar should meet his death.

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

After much consulting of the oracles, the learned men informed Gushtasp that his son would very shortly perish miserably, transfixed in the eye by an arrow from the bow of Rustem. This news was a great relief to the wicked father, who bade the Prince go without delay to Zabulistan, and bring the old Champion of the World back to Persia in chains. Isfendiyar was greatly astonished and most indignant at being sent on such a shameful mission, and at first refused to perform it. The King, however, threatened to have him thrown into a deep dungeon if he disobeyed, therefore he was obliged, though most unwillingly, to set out.

When only a league from the city of Zabul, he was received with a great istakbal, or procession of men on horseback leading riderless horses, the whole headed by Shughad, Rustem's brother, and young Feramurz his son, and was conducted with royal honours to the spot where the aged Hero awaited him.

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

This splendid reception so overwhelmed Isfendiyar with shame that he could hardly deliver his message, and you will understand that he was not at all surprised when the Champion of the World utterly declined to be bound on any pretext whatever.

Rustem, in a voice choked with indignation, related how well he had served all the Persian sovereigns from King Kai-Kobad downwards, and asked what he had done to merit such undeserved disgrace and degradation.

Isfendiyar felt very sorry for the old Champion, but he dared not return home without him, so at last the two resolved to fight one another and thus settle the question.

Rustem's loyal soul was extremely averse to taking the life of the heir to the throne of Persia, but as there did not seem to be any other way out of the difficulty, he put on his armour and rushed to the attack.

During the whole of one day, the combatants

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

fought with all their might, but when darkness came on after sunset, neither had got the mastery; therefore they separated, intending to renew the struggle at sunrise the next morning.

Both were terribly exhausted, but the aged Rustem was so desperately wounded by the arrows of Isfendiyar, that he told his father his fighting days were ended, and that at last ruin had come to the proud house of Sam.

Zal, however, did not lose hope so easily. Suddenly he bethought him of the long-hoarded feather of the Simurgh, and when he had thrown it upon a pot of burning charcoal, the miraculous Bird made its appearance, greatly pleased to see its foster-son again.

The enormous creature speedily healed Rustem's wounds, but declared that it could not help the Champion to conquer Isfendiyar, because on the fifth stage of the *Heft-Khan*, the young prince had killed a Simurgh, and thus rendered himself invulnerable. It, therefore, advised

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

the Hero to give up the contest. "This, oh wondrous Bird, I cannot do," answered old Rustem. "If I, the bulwark of Zabulistan, be slain, my father and my son will be dragged down to destruction, for I see plainly that King Gushtasp is resolved to exterminate our race, and seize all our possessions." Hearing this the Simurgh begged Zal and Rustem to be silent for a quarter of an hour, and it folded its wings over its head and pondered deeply, the two Heroes hardly daring to breathe, so anxious were they not to disturb it. At last it spoke: "Far, far from here, in a remote corner of the Chinese Empire, grows a certain tree. From remote ages it has been known to our race that an arrow made from its wood will kill without fail the person at whom it is shot. I will now go to seek this tree, and bring you back a branch ere daylight dawns."

In the flash of an eye the Simurgh vanished into the darkness, and Zal and his son waited patiently and full of hope. Sure enough,

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

with the first streak of red in the East, they saw it again, bearing a small branch in its beak. "Fashion this into an arrow," it said to Rustem, "and it will pierce Isfendiyar in the eye, and cause his death. It rejoices me to have been of service to you in your need, but I must hasten back to my home on Great Demavend ere the sun springs into the Heavens. Farewell!" and the Simurgh became in a second a mere speck in the grey sky.

Everything happened as the wondrous Bird had foretold. When Rustem fitted the magic arrow to his bow, it flew straight into the eye of Isfendiyar, and the young Prince sank to the ground mortally wounded.

But he bore no anger against Rustem, and, with his dying breath, besought him to be as a father to his son, saying he would far rather trust him to the Champion of the World than to King Gushtasp.

* * * * *

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

It was not very long before Rustem himself followed the noble Isfendiyar to the grave.

Terrible to relate, it was his own brother, the wicked Shughad, who compassed his destruction.

Shughad had always been very jealous of Rustem, who was so much stronger and braver than he was, and he hated to hear all the people of Zabulistan applaud the Champion of the World, while no one ever took any notice of him.

This feeling grew and grew as the years went by, until one day he discovered that his cousin, the wicked King of Kabul, disliked Rustem as much as he did, and longed to do the old Hero some deadly injury. Thereupon, the two conspired together, and laid a cunning plot to kill the greatest warrior that the world has ever known.

The King invited Rustem to hunt with him, and he ordered great pits to be dug across the road and filled with swords, the points of which

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

were sticking upwards. These were covered over lightly with earth and grass so as to look like solid ground, and, when the party came to the fatal spot, the King arranged that the Champion should ride on a little ahead of the others.

Rakush, however, who on this occasion was far cleverer than his master, refused to go on, and stopped dead, neighing and snorting violently.

Rustem, getting into a rage, gave his faithful horse several hard blows, and the poor animal, starting forward in its pain, fell with its rider right into the first pit. Terribly wounded as both of them were, yet they struggled out of the first pit, only, alas, to fall into another. Again they managed to get out, but the Gods did not come to the aid of Rustem as in the days when he was young and pious. Blinded with pain and faint from countless wounds, he and Rakush fell from one death-trap into another, and at last both lay dying, the King of Kabul and Shughad watching them with cruel glee.

THE STORY OF ISFENDIYAR

The old Champion requested his treacherous brother as a last favour to hand him his bow and arrows in order that he might scare away the wild beasts, which would otherwise tear him and his horse to pieces.

Shughad gave him the weapon with a mocking laugh, and the expiring Hero, making one mighty effort, drew the bow and pierced his wicked brother to the heart. Then he turned to his faithful horse, and said, "Farewell Rakush, thou and I have lived and toiled together for many years. We have tasted of the joy of battle and the excitement of the chase. We have been friends as were never man and horse before. It is meet that we should die together." Thereupon, he fell back quite dead, and his beloved steed drew its last breath at the same instant.

This was the sad ending to the life of mighty Rustem, the Hercules of Persia.

In spite of all his great deeds and his

THE STORY BOOK OF THE SHAH

honours and riches he perished miserably, his death compassed by the foulest treachery, instead of taking place in the rush and excitement of battle as he would have wished.

Now all my stories are finished, and those who have cared to read them know almost as much as do the Persian boys and girls about the Heroes of that far-off land.

I hope that my boy readers may be as brave and loyal as Rustem, the Champion of the World, and the girls as beautiful and faithful as Rudabeh, his lovely mother, and I will bid you all *Khoda hafiz-i-shuma*, the Persian for good-bye, and the little bird below is saying the same thing.





THE HEAVENLY TWINS.

PRINTED BY
NEILL AND COMPANY, LIMITED
BELLEVUE, EDINBURGH

MS

