

§ 6

How Surkha led his Troops to fight with Rustam

A runner came and told Afrásiyáb:—

“The elephantine Rustam hath come forth
To war, the Íránian chieftains are assembled;
They have, alack! beheaded Warázád,
And robbed the marches of Túrán of breath;
His army they have utterly o'erthrown,
And given up his country to the flames.”

Afrásiyáb was grieved and called to mind
The ancient prophecy that he had heard
From wise archmages and astrologers;¹
He summoned all the nobles, paid his troops,
Gave largess from his treasures, and brought home
All herds of horses that were on the waste.
He took his minister's and treasurer's keys
To ope his magazines, and furnished swords,
Horse-armor, maces, and artillery,
Dínárs, gold, gems, crowns, torques, and golden belts,
And strewed the palace and the ground with drachms.
With troops equipped and treasure lavished on them
He sounded kettledrum and Indian gong,
And then the horsemen turned their thoughts to war.
He marched from Gang, and, having reached the open,
Called Surkha and spake much of Rustam, saying:—
“Lead thirty thousand Sabres swift as wind
To Sipanjáb, ignoring rest and pleasure,
For Farámaz is there. Send me his head;
But ware the son of Zál! Thou hast no peer
In fight save him, yet where the pard would combat
What will the dog of war avail in battle?
Thou art mine own son and my loyal subject,
The Pillar of mine army and my Moon;
Be so alert and circumspect that none

V. 689

¹ See p. 234.

Will venture to attack thee. Lead in person,
Be vigilant, and guard the host from Rustam."

V. 690

When Surkha left the presence of his sire
He took the troops and standard to the plain,
And marched along like wind to Sipanjáb,
Intent on war. The outposts saw the dust,
Turned round, and hurried in to Farámarz.
The din of drums rose from the Íránian troops,
Whose dust transformed the earth to ebony ;
The clamour of the cavaliers and chargers
Rose from the plain, out-topping Sol and Venus ;
The bright steel falchions flashed like diamonds,
The spearpoints fed on blood. Thou wouldst have
said :—

" An exhalation riseth from the earth,
And giveth fuel to the flames of war."
The earth from end to end was heaped with slain ;
Their severed heads were scattered everywhere.
As Surkha marked the progress of the fight
He saw the spearhead of prince Farámarz,
Then gave the rein to his high-crested steed,
And, giving up the bow, charged with the spear,
While Farámarz, abandoning the centre,
Came forth with lance in hand to counter him,
And by a thrust swift as Ázargashasp
Laid him unseated on his horse's neck,
While with the impetus and that rude shock
The lance was shivered. Then the Turkman chiefs
Advanced intent on battle and revenge,
While Surkha in the anguish of defeat
Fled. Farámarz, like some mad elephant,
Pursued him, brandishing an Indian sword.
The Íránian horse rushed after him like dívs,
And shouted. Farámarz came up with Surkha
And, like a leopard springing, seized his girdle,
Unseated him, and hurled him to the ground,

V. 691

Then, driving him afoot, brought him to camp,
 Disgraced. With that the flag of matchless Rustam
 Was seen approaching mid the tramp of troops
 And elephants; the prince went to his father
 As quick as dust and told of his success.
 In front was Surkha with his hands in bonds,
 There lay the severed neck of Warázád;
 The plain and hollows were all filled with slain,
 The foe in full retreat. The soldiers blessed
 The brave, young paladin, while peerless Rustam
 Gave blessings to him also and bestowed
 Great largess on the poor. Of Farámarz
 Spake elephantine Rustam: "He whose head
 Is raised o'er others must have noble nature,
 Instruction, prowess, and befriending wisdom:
 His nature using these will bring the world
 Beneath his feet by virtue of his manhood.
 Thou seest naught but brightness in a flame,
 Yet he is burned that toucheth. 'Tis not strange
 That Farámarz should triumph, for the heart
 Of steel is full of fire, and when steel fighteth
 With flint the secret of its heart is shown."

V. 692

Then elephantine Rustam looked on Surkha—
 A noble Cypress of the garth was he,
 His breast was like a lion's, and his cheeks
 Were like the spring, cheeks where black musk was
 traced

On roses—bade men bear him to the plain,
 And executioners with bowl and dagger,
 To make his hands fast in the lasso's coils,
 To throw him like a sheep upon the ground,
 Behead him as was done to Siyáwush,
 And let the vultures be his winding-sheet.
 When Tús the general heard he went in haste
 To do the bloody deed. Then Surkha said:—
 "O most exalted king! why slay me guiltless,

For Siyáwush was of my years, my friend ?
 My soul was full of pain and grief for him,
 By day and night my eyes o'erflow with tears ;
 I ever oped my lips to curse the man
 By whom the prince's head was stricken off—
 The man that brought the dagger and the bowl."

The heart of Tús was very pitiful
 For that illustrious but luckless prince.
 He went to Rustam and repeated to him
 The pleading of the Turkman monarch's son,
 But Rustam answered : " If there be a king
 Who should be thus heart-seared and sad, then may
 The heart and spirit of Afrásiyáb
 Be ever full of pain, his eyes of tears.
 This youth, engendered by those recreant loins,
 Will but employ fresh stratagems and guile.
 As Siyáwush was laid upon the ground
 With shoulders, breast, and hair bedrenched with
 blood,

So by the head and life of Kai Káús,
 The glorious, noble ruler of Írán,
 I swear that every Turkman that I find
 Throughout my life, be he a king or slave,
 So he be of these marches and this folk,
 I will behead."

And therewithal that Lion
 Looked at Zawára and commanded him
 In peremptory tones to do the deed
 Of blood. He took the dagger and the bowl,
 And gave the youth to executioners,
 Who cut his throat—a cry, and all was over.
 What wouldst thou, world ! with those whom thou
 hast fed ?

Fed ! Say thy broken-hearted slaves instead !

Then Rustam took the head off, hung the trunk
 Feet upward on a gibbet, and flung dust

In vengeance on the corpse, which afterwards
The soldiers hacked to pieces with their swords.

§ 7

How Afrásiyáb led forth the Host to avenge his Son

When the Túránian troops returned from battle,
Their bodies bloody and their heads all dust,
They said: "The noble chieftain hath been slain,
His eager fortune hath been overturned,
And they have set his severed head and body
Blood-boltered upside down upon a gibbet!
The people of Írán are all in arms,
Their hearts ache with revenge for Siyáwush."

Afrásiyáb hung down his head and crown,
Plucked out his hair, shed tears, and rent his robes,
Cast dust upon his head, and cried aloud:—
"O prince! O gallant heart! O warrior!
O chief! O man of name! O hero! King!
Woe for that moonlike cheek of cercis-bloom!
Woe for that royal breast and mien and stature!
Thy sire shall ne'er seek rest unless it be
Upon his charger's saddle on the field."
Then to his men: "Our ease and feasts are over.
Keep ye your eyes wide open for revenge,
And make your jerkin and cuirass your bed."

Rose at his gate the din of kettledrums:
His warriors armed. Upon the elephants
The trumpets blared, the world was like a sea
Of indigo, and when they bound the drums
Upon the elephants heaven kissed the earth.
Then said the king: "Ye chiefs and warriors!
When both sides sound the drum he is no soldier
That laggeth. Let our hearts be full of vengeance,
Full as the bodies of our foes with javelins!"