

As thou dost know, O leader of the people !”

v. 1689 He spake, stooped to the earth, praised the Almighty,
And said : “Thou Judge supreme ! avert from us
The ills of fortune !”

Thus he made request
Until the sun rose o'er the mountain-crest.

§ 21

How Rustam fought with Asfandiyár

When day came Rustam donned his coat of mail
With his protecting tiger-skin withal,
He tied his lasso to the saddle-straps,
He mounted on his elephantine steed,
And, having bidden Zawára come, held talk
At large about the troops, and said : “Depart,
Be marshal of the host, and take thy station
On yonder sand-hills.”

So Zawára went,
And mustered all the troops on the parade
To lead them to the field. When matchless Rustam
Came from his palace, spear in hand, they all
Blessed him, and said : “May charger, sparth, and saddle
Ne'er lack thee.”

Rustam followed by Zawára,
His second in the state, went to the Hírmund :
The soldiers vaunted but his soul was sad.
His brother and the troops both halted there,
But he advanced toward the Íránian host,
First saying to Zawára privily :—
“E'en at this present I would stay from battle
The hands of that beguiling reprobate,
And make a pathway for his soul to light,
But still I fear that we shall come to blows,
And after that I know not what will be.
Remain thou here and keep the troops in hand ;

I go to see what fortune will bring forth.
 If I shall find him wroth then by that token
 I shall not call chiefs from Zábulistán,
 But shall engage with him in single combat ;
 I would not have one of the army injured.
 Victorious fortune always favoureth
 The man whose heart is on the side of justice."

V. 1690

He passed the river, mounted on a height,
 And marvelled at the process of the world ;
 He called and said : " O brave Asfandiyár !
 Thine opposite hath come ; prepare thyself."

Asfandiyár, when he had heard the words
 Which that old, battle-seeking Lion spake,
 Laughed and replied : " Behold I made me ready
 Or ever I arose from sleep."

He bade

To bring helm, breastplate, spear, and ox-head mace.
 These brought, he clothed his shining breast and donned
 His Kaian casque, then bade his sable steed
 Be saddled and led forth, which when he saw
 He in the might and puissance that he had
 Stood on the ground the butt-end of his spear,
 And vaulted to the saddle as a leopard
 Will leap upon the back of onager
 And madden it. The soldiers marvelled at him,
 And called down blessings on their noble chief,
 Who went and, drawing nigh to peerless Rustam,
 Saw him upon his charger unattended,
 And spake thus from his steed to Bishútan :—
 " I want no friend or mate in fighting him,
 For since he is alone I too will go
 Alone and mount upon yon lofty height."

They both went forth to battle in such wise
 That thou hadst said : " The world hath done with
 feastings."

As they drew near, the old man and the young,

Both noble Lions and both paladins,
 Their steeds neighed; thou hadst said: "The field is rent!"
 V. 1691 And Rustam shouted: "Happy, prosperous prince!
 Be not so wroth and fierce, but hear for once
 A wise man's words: if thou desirest fight
 And bloodshed, and such stir and strife, permit
 That I lead forth the horsemen of Zábul
 With hauberks from Kábul upon their breasts,
 And do thou likewise bid the Íránians,
 That men may know the jewel from the mite.
 Let us bring them to battle on the field,
 And for our own parts tarry for a while;
 Thus there will both bloodshed and fierce fighting
 According to thy wish."

Asfandiyár

Replied: "Why talk so much to no avail?
 Thou camest from thy palace at the dawn,
 And from this lofty hill didst challenge me.
 Why now hast thou befooled me? In good sooth
 Thou hast perceived that thine own fall is near.
 Why should I fight against Zábulistán?
 Why should Írán fight with Kábulistán?
 May no such disposition e'er be mine.
 It is not in accordance to my creed
 That I shall give Íránians to be slain,
 Or crown myself. I go forth first in battle
 Albeit to leopard's claws. If thou hast need
 Of helpers send for them; such help not me.
 God will help me in fight and fortune smile
 Upon mine undertaking. Thou dost challenge,
 And I am willing; let us fight it out
 Between ourselves unhelped, and we shall then
 See if the charger of Asfandiyár
 Will go toward the stable riderless,
 Or if the charger of the challenger
 Will turn toward Rustam's halls without its lord."

The combatants agreed that none should aid.
 Long while they fought together with their spears, V. 1692
 And from their breastplates poured down blood amain.
 Thus they continued till the spear-points brake,
 And they were forced to use their scimitars ;
 They grew more instant, wheeled to left and right,
 And, when their stout swords shivered with the
 strokes,
 Reached out and, drawing sparth from saddle, showered
 Blows as stones shower a-down a precipice.
 Wroth as two lions raging they belaboured
 Each other. When the hafts brake, and their hands
 Were weaponless, they clutched their leathern girdles
 While both their speedy chargers strove to fly.
 Asfandiyár grasped Rustam's belt, and Rustam
 Asfandiyár's. Those two exalted heroes,
 Both men of elephant-body, tugged amain,
 Yet neither Lion budged. Both cavaliers
 Were all distraught, both steeds fordone, with fight.¹
 Within their mouths the blood and dust were blent
 In foam, on man and horse the mail was rent.

§ 22

*How the Sons of Asfandiyár were slain by Zawára
 and Farámarz*

When Rustam, son of Zál, had tarried long,
 Because the heroes fought no little while,
 Zawára led his troops across the river—
 An army seared of heart and keen for strife.
 He cried to the Íránians : " Where is Rustam ? V. 1693
 Why should we hold our peace on such a day ?
 It was to fight with Rustam that ye came,
 Came to the gullet of the Crocodile.

¹ Reading with P.