

But in that, though thy grandsire in old age  
 Had banished craft and ill will from his heart,  
 Since they shed his blood thou hast shed theirs too,  
 And closed with them like lions when they fight,  
 For that be ever fortunate and happy,  
 And do the dictates of thy soul and wisdom.  
 I long to look upon thy face and mind  
 So doughty and so shrewd. On reading this  
 Bid thy troops mount, and come back with thy chiefs  
 To court."

The speedy dromedaries went,  
 And all Írán re-echoed with the news.  
 Now when they had returned the cameleers  
 Came to the exalted chief who had no peers.

V. 1627

## § 15

*How Asfandiyár returned to Gushtásp*

Asfandiyár, when he had read the letter,  
 Distributed dínárs and made an end,  
 Reserving but the treasure of Arjásp,  
 While lavishing the treasures of his kinsmen :  
 The troops were all enriched beyond compute.  
 On plain and mountain there were steeds and camels,  
 All brand-marked by the monarch of Túrán.  
 Ten thousand head of these Asfandiyár  
 Collected from the plain and mountain-top,  
 And bade his men to load of them a thousand  
 With gold out of the royal treasury,  
 Three hundred with brocade and thrones and casques,  
 Five score with musk, with ambergris, and jewels,  
 Five score with crowns and splendid diadems,  
 One thousand with brocaded tapestries,  
 Three hundred with the native stuffs of Chín,  
 With hides both raw and tanned and painted silks

V. 1628

He furnished litters with brocaded curtains,  
 And carried off from Chín two troops of girls,  
 With cheeks like spring and tall as cypress-trees,  
 With reed-like waists and pheasant-like in gait.  
 A hundred ladies, beautiful as idols,  
 Went with the sisters of Asfandiyár.  
 Five ladies of the kindred of Arjásp—  
 His mother, his two sisters, and two daughters—  
 Toiled on in misery and wretchedness,  
 In pain and grief and stricken to the heart,  
 And, finally, he fired the Brazen Hold ;  
 The tongue of flame ascended to high heaven.  
 He razed the castle-ramparts to the ground,  
 And sent the dust up from the land of Chín.  
 He gave his three young sons a force each, saying :—  
 “Take various roads, and fortune be with you.  
 If any shall insult you on your way  
 Cut off the head of such remorselessly.  
 March ye in haste toward the desert-track,  
 And raise your spear-points to the shining sun.  
 I shall myself go by the Seven Stages  
 To hunt the lion. Make what speed ye may,  
 But I shall take my time, shall occupy  
 The road's end, and expect you in a month.”

Asfandiyár went with his famous troops  
 To hunt along the Seven Stages' route.  
 As soon as he approached the frozen stage  
 He saw his baggage lying all about.  
 The air was sweet, the earth was beautiful :  
 Thou wouldst have said : “'Tis spring in summertime !”  
 He gathered all the goods that he had left,  
 And marvelled that he was so fortunate.  
 As he was drawing nearer to Írán—  
 The land of Lions and of warriors—  
 He whiled away two weeks with hawks and cheetahs,  
 Distressed with travail and the longsome road,

And kept a watch for his three noble sons,  
 Whose long delay in coming angered him,  
 But when the armies and the sons arrived  
 He smiled on all, and said : " My journey done,  
 I was anangered at your tarrying."

The three sons kissed the ground and made reply :—  
 " Who hath a father in the world like thee ?"

He went thence toward Írán and bare off all  
 The treasures to his valiant countrymen.  
 The folk decked all the cities of the land,  
 And called for wine, for harp, and for musicians.  
 They draped the walls with hangings and showered  
 musk

And ambergris from overhead. The air  
 Resounded with the voice of minstrelsy,  
 And earth was full of horsemen armed with spears.

V. 1629

Gushtásp made merry when he heard the news,  
 And pledged the tidings in a cup of wine.  
 At his command all that were with the host,  
 And all the great men of the provinces,  
 Assembled at the palace-gate with drums.  
 The chiefs went out to meet Asfandiyár.  
 His sire, moreover, with illustrious sages,  
 The great, the wise, and the archmages, went  
 With beaming countenance toward his son,  
 And all the city talked of little else.  
 Now when the prince beheld his father's face  
 His heart grew merry and his spirit bright.  
 He urged his black steed forward from the ranks,  
 That steed which set a-blaze the flames of war,  
 And, having lighted down, embraced his sire,  
 Who, wondering at his exploits, praised him much,  
 Thus saying : " Ne'er may time and earth lack thee."

Thence went they to the palace of the Sháh  
 In popularity with all the world.

Gushtásp prepared the palace and the throne ;

His great good fortune made his heart rejoice.  
They spread the banquet in the halls. The Sháh  
Said to the chamberlain: "Invite the lords."

The boon-companions came from every side  
To that imperial Sháh. The royal wine  
In crystal goblets gave to those that quaffed  
A lustre like the sun's; upon their cheeks  
The flush of wine was burning, and the hearts  
Of evil wishers died and were consumed.  
The son drank modestly his father's health,  
The father in like manner pledged his son,  
And asked him how he passed the Seven Stages.  
Asfandiyár replied: "Nay, ask me not  
Such questions in the banquet-hall. Tomorrow  
V. 1630 Will I relate the story in thy presence,  
Wise king of men! Tomorrow thou wilt hear  
In soberness and own that God hath triumphed."

Each one among the guests that grew bemused  
Went homeward clinging to a moon-faced page.<sup>1</sup>

Told is the story of the Stages Seven,  
Peruse it in His name—the Lord of Heaven,  
Lord of the sun and of the shining moon,  
Him who alone hath power for bale or boon.  
If this tale please our conquering monarch's eye  
I set my saddle on the circling sky.

The time to quaff delicious wine is now,  
For musky scents breathe from the mountain-brow,  
The air resoundeth and earth travaileth,  
And blest is he whose heart drink gladdeneth,  
He that hath wine and money, bread and sweets,  
And can behead a sheep to make him meats.  
These have not I. Who hath them, well is he.  
Oh! pity one that is in poverty!

The garth is strewn with rose-leaves and each hill  
With tulip and with hyacinth, and still

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 150.

The nightingale complaineth in the close,  
And at its plaining burgeoneth the rose.  
At night it never ceaseth to complain ;  
The rose is overcharged by wind and rain.  
I see the cloud's sighs and its tears, but why  
The narciss should be sad I know not I.  
The nightingale bemocketh rose and cloud ;  
Perched on the rose it carolleth aloud.  
I wist not which of them it holdeth dear,  
But from the cloud a lion's roar I hear.  
The cloud's robe sundereth and from its form  
Fire flasheth, and the tear-drops of the storm  
Bear witness for themselves upon the ground  
Before the imperious sun. Who shall expound  
The descant of the nightingale, disclose  
The purport of its quest beneath the rose ?  
But mark it at the dawning of the day,  
If thou wouldst list to its heroic lay,  
Bewailing dead Asfandiyár, for he  
Surviveth only in that threnody.  
A-nights the cloud with Rustam's voice doth flaw  
The heart of elephant and lion's claw.

V. 1631