

That carpet gave an opportunity
For mirth : they called for wine and minstrelsy.

§ 60

*The Story of Sarkash and Bárbad, the Minstrel, and
Khusrau Parwíz*

There was a minstrel who was named Sarkash—
An expert—who acclaimed the king of kings
With all felicitations on the harp,
While nobles showered jewels over him,
And hailed him as the Grace of majesty,
What while the Sháh grew greater year by year.

Now in the nine and twentieth of his kingship,
When none fared ill at court, Bárbad heard tell
Thereof, for all folk said to him : "The world-lord
Affecteth minstrelsy in private life,
And thou, if thou wert introduced to him,
Wouldst overtop Sarkash."

Thereat the man
Became ambitious and though well to do
Departed to the Sháh's court from his province,
And noted all the minstrels there. Sarkash,
On hearing him perform, was vexed at heart,
And, all confounded at such minstrelsy,
Approached the audience-chamberlain, bestowed
A present on him of dínárs and drachms,
And said : "There is a minstrel at the gate,
Who is my better both in years and skill.
He must not come before Khusrau Parwíz
For I am waxing old and he is young."

The keeper of the door, on hearing this,
Refused the new musician audience,
And so Bárbad, whenever he approached,

Found his employment and his profit nil.
When he despaired of being heard he sought
The royal pleasance with his harp. The gardener,
A man by name Mardwí, revived his hopes,
Because at the New Year the Sháh was wont
To hold a two weeks' feast within that pleasance.
Bárbad approached Mardwí forthwith, became
Friends that same day and said : "Thou wouldst say
That we are soul and body. I desire
A boon—the merest trifle. When the world-lord
Shall come to revel hither give to me
The means of seeing him, myself unseen."¹

Mardwí replied : "I will ; my love for thee
Shall oust reflection."

When the Sháh took order
For visiting the garth the gardener's heart
Was like a shining lamp. He went and told
Bárbad : "The Sháh is coming to the pleasance."

Bárbad dressed all in green and took his harp,
Prepared to sing of glory and of war,
And went to where the Sháh would be who had
Each Spring a fresh spot for his festival.
There was a verdant cypress full² of leaf,
Whose branches, like the battle of Pashan,
Extended far and wide. With harp on breast
The minstrel climbed it and abode until
The king came from his palace to the pleasance :
The gardener had the spot in readiness.
There came a fay-faced reveller with wine
While in the monarch's hand there was a cup ;
The world-lord took the liquor from the youth ;
Its crimson made the crystal disappear.
Now when the sun turned sallow, but abode

¹ Couplet omitted.

² Gashan. Firdausí might have used this adjective as a rhyme-word in his alleged competition with the three poets (see Vol. iii. p. 15) but preferred the more erudite Pashan.

Until night turned to lapis-lazuli,
 The minstrel in that cypress took his harp,
 And sang a royal ditty. In that tree
 He sang a lay so charming that the Sháh,
 That man of wakeful fortune, was amazed.
 The melody which that sweet voice gave forth
 Was that which now thou callest *Dádáfríd*.¹
 The company were in astonishment,
 And everyone had his own view thereon.
 The playing made Sarkash like one insane;
 He recognised the source, but held his peace,
 And thought: "None but *Bárbad* can play like this,
 Or knoweth thus the song of paladins."

The Sháh gave orders to his lords: "Search all
 The pleasure."

They searched long and came again,
 While shrewd Sarkash observed: "No marvel 'tis,
 So fortune-favoured is the Sháh, that rose
 And cypress-tree should serve him as musicians.
 For ever may his head and crown endure."

Then the cup-bearer brought another cup,
 And as the king received it from the youth,
 So fair of face, the minstrel preluded
 In other fashion and forthwith began
 A different song—that called *Paikar-i-Gurd*,²
 A name suggested by the words. The minstrel
 Sang and the Sháh gave ear, drank to the voice,
 And bade: "Produce this man and all within
 The garden."

So they searched the garden through,
 And carried lights beneath the trees, but saw
 Naught but the willows and the cypresses,
 And pheasants pacing underneath the rose.

¹ "The Source of Justice."

² "The Battle of the Brave." This and the preceding are musical terms.

The king of kings called for another cup,
 And raised his head to hear the voice. Again
 There came the singing to another tune
 Upon the harp—the tune called *Sabz dar sabz*,¹
 A melody employed in magic arts.
 On hearing it Khusráu Parwíz arose,
 And that adorer of the garth demanded
 A cup of wine that held a man.² He drank
 The sparkling wine off at a draught and cried:—
 "An angel this, all musk and ambergris,
 For if he were a div he would not sing,
 Or know to play the harp!"³ Find out the player.
 Search all the garden and the flower-beds
 To left and right, for I will fill his mouth
 And lap with gems, and he shall be chief minstrel."

Now when the singer heard the monarch's voice,
 And speech so kind and welcome, he descended
 The branches of the straight-stemmed cypress, fared
 Glad and triumphant, came and laid his face
 Upon the dust. Khusráu Parwíz said: "Speak.
 What man art thou?"

"O Sháh! a slave am I,"
 He answered, "and live only by thy voice."

He told all that had happened from the first,
 And who had been his friend. The king rejoiced,
 Like roses in the Spring-tide to behold him,
 Then spake thus to Sarkash: "Unskilful one,
 Like colocynt while he is sugar-like!
 Why didst thou bar his access to me thus?
 Thy harp is banished from this company."

Then while *Bárbad* sang on the monarch quaffed,
 And drained the jewelled cup until his head

¹ "Green on green," anticipating Marvell's "green thought in a green shade." Also a musical term.

² See Vol. i. p. 290 note.

³ In the earlier parts of the *Sháhnáma* divs sometimes are represented as being accomplished. See Vol. i. p. 127, Vol. ii. p. 31.

Inclined to sleep, whereat with watered pearls
 He filled the singer's mouth. Bárbad became
 Chief minstrel and renowned among the great.

The epoch of Bárbad hath past and gone :
 May ill be never thy companion,
 For since the day will pass alike of chief,
 And underling, why should the sage eat grief ?
 Full many have gone—both chief and underling—
 And I from slumber wish no wakening.
 When six and sixty years have passed of life
 It is not good for one to be at strife.
 When I have ended these my famous lays
 The country-side will echo with my praise.
 Thenceforth for me not death but life shall last,
 For I have flung the seed of words broad-cast,
 And all of Faith, of counsel, and sound lore
 Will sing my praise when I shall be no more.

§ 61

How Khusrau Parwíz built the Palace¹ of Madá'in

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I will retell the tale of Madá'in,
 Tell of the palace of Khusrau Parwíz.
 A Persian shrewd of heart, o'er whom had passed
 Years four times thirty, said : Khusrau Parwíz
 Sent men to Rúm, Hind, Chín, and other lands
 Inhabited, and from all climes there came
 Three thousand famed artificers, of whom
 He chose two hundred—masters of their craft,
 Who knew the use of bricks and mortar well—
 Out of Írán, Ahwáz, and from the Rúmans.
 Of these he next chose thirty and from them

¹ City in text.