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# A BOOK OF WISDOM AND LIES

By Sullkhan Saba Orbeliani  
Translated by Katharine Vivian



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A BOOK OF WISDOM AND LIES

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Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani

Translated from the Georgian

by

KATHARINE VIVIAN

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FOR  
JOHN, ANTONIA  
AND  
IMOGEN MARTINEAU

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## INTRODUCTION



This collection of fables was made by Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani at the end of the 17th century and in the early years of the 18th. He was born, in 1658, into a period of new flowering in the arts, letters and sciences of Georgia after the long blight of wars and schisms that succeeded the devastation of the country by the Mongols. At that time the kingdoms of Western and Eastern Georgia were separate, the West coming within the Turkish sphere of influence and the East being subject to the Shah of Persia. The Orbelianis were a noble family, related to the Georgian royal house, and Sulkhan-Saba's fortunes were closely linked with those of Vakhtang VI, regent and – from 1703 to 1724 – king of Eastern Georgia. Vakhtang, during his short and frequently interrupted reign, proved to be one of the most illustrious of the Georgian kings, an enlightened and progressive ruler who introduced important advances and reforms, both administrative and cultural. *A Book of Wisdom and Lies* was produced, about 1720, on the first printing-press to be set up in Georgia, imported by Vakhtang.

Sulkhan-Saba was Vakhtang's uncle, his tutor in boyhood and his lifelong adviser. He died, in 1725, having accompanied his sovereign into exile. Among his other works was a contribution to Vakhtang's translation of the Persian *Anwar-i-Suhaili* into Georgian, under the title of *Kilila da Damana*. In his middle life he spent some years in a monastery in Eastern Georgia, taking the name of Saba. He returned to active life in 1703, when the Shah of Persia installed Vakhtang on the throne of Kartli as regent of Eastern Georgia. In 1713 – when Vakhtang was banished by the Shah for refusing to embrace the Moslem faith – he was sent as an envoy to the court of Louis XIV in France and to Pope Clement in Rome, to enlist their support in Georgian affairs. Thus his life afforded a variety of personal experience to colour his tales. Like the vizir Sedrak, Sulkhan-Saba was an experienced courtier devoted to his sovereign. Like many of his characters, he had experienced – during his period in a monastery in the desert – the hardships and rigours of a life of poverty. He had travelled in foreign lands – his other works include a volume of *Travels in Europe*. He also compiled the first Georgian dictionary, entitled *A Bouquet of Words*, a vast *Concordance* and other religious works.



Some of these tales can be traced to the ancient Indian *Panchatantra* or *Tales of Bidpai*, the Georgian *Kilila da Damana*. There are stories from the *Arabian Nights*, from Mullah Nasrudin sources, Georgian folklore, and others again of the writer's own creation. His style is cool and laconic, stripped of decoration but for an occasional poetic flourish in the terms conventionally used to introduce a hero or a beautiful woman. The tales based on Georgian traditions and customs – such as *The Rich Merchant and the Innkeeper* – are deeply characteristic of his people with their overflowing generosity and hospitality, their ever-present wit, courage and humour. There are several references to sworn brotherhood – a custom which persists in many parts of Georgia to this day. The last story in the book is a remarkable blend of irony and tenderness, practical wisdom and farce in a lesson on wifely devotion.

The word translated here as *tale* means, according to a Georgian glossary, a teaching-story. Teaching by means of stories, an idea still foreign to the western world, has been widespread in the East for thousands of years. As D. M. Lang points out,\* it is more than probable that Sul Khan-Saba made his collection of tales – which might well be sub-titled *The Education of a Prince* – in connection with his appointment as tutor to Vakhtang in his early years. The book is an anthology of stories and fables, proverbs and riddles exchanged between a group of courtiers to illustrate points in their argument – a setting which, as Gaston Buachidze observes in the Introduction to his French translation,† was common in the East and was also found in European literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The *Canterbury Tales* have a rather similar framework. In Sul Khan-Saba's work, the setting as well as the tales themselves gains the reader's attention. The characters who converse together – the King and his son, the vizir, the prince's tutor and the eunuch – are clearly differentiated; they develop in the course of the story; and the interplay between them reflects the laws of human nature and the pattern of a larger world. The writer brings a special talent to bear in the way he creates tension between his characters, so that a sense of expectation is repeatedly aroused, to be punctured like a balloon by some piece of absurdity or wit.

Gipsies, nomads who cannot load themselves with books, have long brought up their children to be familiar with their history and

\* D. M. Lang, 'Wisdom and Lies': Variations on a Georgian Literary Theme, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies*, 1956, 18, 436–448.

† Gaston Buachidze, *La Sagesse du Mensonge*, Tbilisi, 1978.

tribal traditions through stories, songs and recitations:



‘They memorize what is essential . . . . . the transmission of their Tradition is more willingly made by means of stories, songs, recitations or intoned psalms in the evening, round the camp fire. In this way children hear, for years, of the exploits in a Tradition that has many faces . . . . . their conscience little by little becomes impregnated with the rules which it behoves them to follow in order to become a good Gypsy, and the mistakes which it is important to avoid.\*

Such stories may be used to have an effect that is more subtle and penetrating:

‘The teaching-story was brought to perfection as a communication instrument many thousands of years ago . . . . . It is a part of the most priceless heritage of mankind.

‘Real teaching-stories are not to be confused with parables . . . . . Unlike the parable, the meaning . . . . . cannot be unravelled by ordinary intellectual methods alone. Its action is direct and certain, upon the innermost parts of the human being . . . . . it connects with a part of the individual which cannot be reached by any other convention, and establishes in him or her a means of communication with a non-verbalized truth beyond the customary limitations of our familiar dimensions.’†

Whether or not Sul Khan-Saba’s tales contained, for their original purpose, the potential described above, there is no doubt that they have instructed and entertained many generations of readers. A man of high breeding, the writer was at home in a wide range of situations and well understood the everyday preoccupations and needs of all sorts of people, from princes to beggars. He well observed Aristotle’s precept: ‘To write well, express yourself like the common people, but think like a wise man.’

\* Jean-Paul Clébert, *The Gypsies*, Harmondsworth, 1967.

† Idries Shah, *Caravan of Dreams*, London, 1968, p. 95.



There was once a king whose beneficence was beyond imagining. Out of the goodness and compassion of his heart so many acts of mercy sprang into being that he himself could not have counted them; the fear of God, like a breeze, swept from his mind any impulse towards anger or harshness. His generosity, refreshing as a shower of rain, poured down upon all men a superabundance of gifts as though the heavens overflowed. Men went in awe and dread of him over the whole face of the earth, and the crash of thunder was not more terrible than his countenance in anger. Yet the charm of his presence and his person was such that it drew men to him as infants are drawn to the milk of their mother's breast.

The name of this mighty and glorious monarch was Phinez. He had a vizir whose wisdom soared even to the heavens, whose wits measured the length and breadth of the land and whose knowledge reached to the very depths of the sea, while the courses of the winds and stars were inscribed on the tablets of his mind. His eloquent speech was moving to men and beasts alike; it melted the rocks like wax, and caused birds to speak like men. The vizir's name was Sedrak, and he was very dear to the King.

The King had not a care in his heart, except only that he was childless and had no son. One day he unlocked his treasury and distributed great quantities of largesse to the poor, so that they should pray to God to grant him a son.

The King had a eunuch in his service, the Royal Chamberlain, an impulsive and hot-tempered man who was devoted to his master; his name was Ruka. He said: 'What king has ever given away so much treasure?'

This is the fable\* told by the VIZIR SEDRAK in answer to Ruka:

## 1. *The King of Khorassan*

There was once a king of Khorassan who was noble-hearted, beneficent, wise, generous and merciful. One day he unlocked three of his

\* *Araki*: defined in the Georgian glossary as 'teaching story'.

treasure-chambers and called on all his subjects – great and small, rich and poor – to present themselves at the hour of noon and take away whatever they were given. Everyone came and received his bounty, and still the three stores of treasure were not exhausted.

A banquet was held that day, at which the king demanded of his vizirs whether they had ever heard or known of a monarch such as he, or one more generous. Six of the vizirs swore that they had never heard of anyone like him, but the youngest of them laughed.

The king asked him: 'Why are you laughing?'

Before answering, he begged for an assurance that he would not be killed. The king, swore by his head.\* When the young vizir had been thus reassured, he explained:

'In the country of China there is a Jew named Malkhoz, who has a certain nobleman as his friend. It is said that there has never before been anyone as generous as he, nor will there ever be again.'

The king was very angry when he heard this, but he was bound by his oath and could not have the vizir put to death; he was thrown into prison. The king laid aside his royal robes, put on a disguise and set out to find the man more generous than himself.

He visited this man's dwelling. It turned out to be his habit to conduct any stranger he met to his own house, where he bathed him, clothed him in new garments and let him rest, then gave him a present and sent him away. One day as he was walking about the city he came upon the king in his beggar's guise. He took the stranger to his house and treated him according to his custom. The king, newly clothed, appeared as a personage of great distinction. His host asked him whence he came and who he was, and made him tell the whole story of how he came to be there. When the man learned that his guest was a king, he prostrated himself, then humbly bent his head and begged the king to pardon him. He led him to a house which in no way resembled the royal palace. The furnishings were far out of the common, the carpets and hangings being all of brocade. A feast was given at which all the vessels were encrusted with precious stones. The host offered them all to the king.

The king passed nine days enjoyably in this fashion. Each day he was taken to a more splendid apartment where he received yet more valuable gifts and sat down to a more lavish feast, when his host made him a present of everything. The king marvelled at his wealth and munificence. On the ninth day he was conducted to an apartment so marvellously furnished that it beggared description.

\*I.e., on his life – an oath formerly common in Georgia.



Carpets and hangings, vessels and dishes all sparkled with gems. Beautiful flowers and trees were displayed, fashioned from precious stones and true to their natural colours. All this was offered to the king by his host, who gave him in addition three singing girls more ravishing to the eye and delightful to the ear than any he had seen or heard.

The king then set out to return home. Out of all these priceless gifts he could take with him only a diamond bowl, a jacinth goblet, a flower fashioned from a jewel, and the three singing girls. He said to his host, as he expressed his thanks: 'By the grace of God, I will repay you.'

He went his way back to his own city. There he made honourable amends to the imprisoned vizir, and gave a banquet for him.

That generous man's lord, a Jew, was a sorcerer. When he learned of all these happenings he seized his vassal, stripped him of everything he possessed and gave him into the hands of his executioner. He was led away to be beheaded. He pleaded with the headsman to spare him, and was able to purchase his life with a precious stone that he wore in his epaulette. His guards said to him: 'Our master is a wizard, as you know, and if you walk the earth he will come to know of it through his spells, and have us killed instead of you. This is what we will do -'

They placed him in a chest and buried it in a crypt. The Jew gazed into his magic crystal and could see him nowhere on the face of the earth. He was convinced that his vassal had been killed.

There were thieves abroad at the time who ransacked every house and left not even a grave untouched. They came to the place where the chest was buried, dug in the earth and found it, and brought it out. When they found a man inside it, they let him go.

He set out and wandered over many lands, coming at last unrecognized to the city of the king who had been his guest. The king was feasting on a raised terrace high above the ground, while the lovely girls he had brought back with him were singing. One of them chanced to look down and recognized her lord as he was passing, at which she burst into tears and the harp fell from her hands.

The king asked her what was amiss, and she told him whom she had seen. They sought out the man and found him. They took him to the baths, gave him clothing and let him rest. The next day the king mounted his horse, rode out to find Malkhoz the Jew and slew him. He then gave all the Jew's lands and possessions to that noble man. Thus he discharged his debt and rewarded him for his beneficence.



'I have told you this story to show that no one can give a man what he does not possess, and that no good deed is lost in the sight of God. Ruka! I am surprised to hear such talk from you.'

Several years passed. Then God of His mercy granted the King a son – a being whose radiance roused the sun to envy, while the young moon entreated him for light and the stars were dazzled by one who sparkled as brilliantly as they. His eyes were pools of ink edged with jet, and in his features the rose and the lily bloomed one within the other. His name was Djumber.

When he was grown to manhood the King brought him forth to be seen by his vizir Sedrak and all the people. The vizir embraced him and gave him his blessing, saying:

'O King, may God send him long life! This son of yours is fortunate: may he be blessed this day and for evermore; and may he be granted the wits of an ass, the devotion of a dog and the strength of an ant.'

When Ruka the eunuch heard this he waxed indignant, and said to the vizir:

'Wherefore do you call down a curse on the King's son? A vizir ought to be prudent, show restraint and choose his words well, for a courtier needs to have these five qualities: he should be soft-spoken; he should calm any who are enraged, and not incite others to anger; no evil word should fall from his lips by chance; his speech should always be well timed; and lastly, whatever he says should be agreeable to all men.'

Sedrak looked at him and replied:

'All that you say is true, but when a man is deprived of manhood he takes on the nature of a woman, as appears in his want of a moustache and beard. Three qualities are proper in a eunuch: first, he should be submissive like a woman; secondly, he should guard his tongue from evil speaking; thirdly, he should keep his master's secrets.'

'Now, I have not cursed the King's son. You can easily understand the meaning of my words, if you wish. Lead a donkey into a muddy pool so that he sinks into the mire. Then leave the mud to dry out. If you can make the donkey go through it a second time, he has no sense.'

'Take a poor man's dog, emaciated with hunger, and give it into





the care of a rich man until it grows fat. Then let both men call the dog. If it deserts the first, who starved it, to go to the other who gave it food, it is disloyal.

'Catch an ant and keep it under a glass for twelve days without food. Then let it go. If it cannot carry a load more than four times its own weight, it is weak, and I am wrong. If I am not, why do you reproach me?'

The three tests were made, and each one turned out as the vizir had foretold. The King was greatly pleased by his words and by the fine qualities of his son.

One night there appeared to the King in a dream a comely youth of noble bearing, clear-complexioned, straight as a cypress, fearless as a lion, his fair features lightly shaded with a hyacinth bloom of down. He spoke to the King and said:

'God grant long life to your son! Only – by your leave – unless you entrust me with his upbringing, no one will be able to educate him. If you seek me, you will find me; if you do not, you will regret it.'

He placed in the King's hands a portrait of himself on parchment, saying:

'Seek me and find me, by your head!' Then he vanished.

The King awoke, saw the piece of parchment in his hands, and no one near him. He grieved for the youth who had vanished from his sight as bitterly as though his own son had died, and made a great outcry. Sedrak the vizir came to him and found him lying on his bed in deep distress.

He approached the King and said:

'Sire, I have lived many years in your shadow, but I have never seen you in such low spirits. God keep you from falling ill!'

'I am not ill,' the King replied. 'I have had a dream, and that is what is troubling me.'

The VIZIR did not at first question him about the dream, but related this tale:

## 2. *A Poor Man's Greed*

There was once a man so poor that he had nothing in the world. He dreamed that he was the owner of sixty sheep, which he wished to sell. A man came and offered him five silver pieces each for them.

The poor man demanded six. In the course of his bargaining he awoke, whereupon he began to repent of his greed, shut his eyes again and held out his hand to the buyer, saying:

'You can have them for two pieces each!'

Who was there now to give him any silver, or to buy his sheep?

'Thus it is with dreams and visions, all alike. O King, why distress yourself over what is but illusion, a trick of the devil?'

The King said:

'My dream is not one of that kind.' He recounted it all to the vizir, showing him the piece of parchment. The vizir marvelled at the beauty of the face in the portrait, and said:

'If this man does not come to you of his own accord it will be hard to find him, since we do not know what country he comes from and he did not tell you his name. How are we to find him? Hands cannot grasp the wind, nor an idle man out-distance his own gaze. Whatever fate God appoints for a man, the same will befall him.'

The VIZIR told the tale of:

### 3. *The Miserly Merchant*

There was once a rich merchant. He amassed so much wealth that he had more stores of treasure than he could count. He never in his life spent money on food, drink or clothing. At last one day he said:

'Now that I have made so much profit I will rest at ease, enjoy myself, begin to spend!'

He went to one of his storehouses, but it was locked and he could not open it. It was the same with the second and the third, with all of them: he could not open a single one. Losing his temper, he began to swear. A voice came from within the storehouse:

'Who are you, coming to unlock this door, what do you want?'

The rich man pronounced his name:

'I am the owner of all that is within, and I wish to spend it.'

He heard these words spoken:

'Although it is yours, you have put it to no use until this day, nor have you allowed your wife or your children to benefit from it. All that is here belongs to Nazar the carpenter.'

The merchant was angry when he heard this, and said:

'I will do something to ensure that neither he nor I can lay hands on it.'



He borrowed money and had a number of logs brought to him, and holes drilled in them. He stowed all his riches inside, sealed the holes and cast the logs into the river Tigris.

It happened that Nazar the carpenter was a citizen of Baghdad, through which the Tigris flows. He went down to the river bank at dawn, thinking: 'Perhaps somebody has sent down a raft?' He looked upstream, and saw a great many pieces of timber floating in the river with nobody in charge of them. He paid a swimmer to go into the water and bring the logs to land. They were set down in a pile at the carpenter's door.

The formerly rich merchant had followed his logs on their journey, to discover who was to enjoy this good fortune. When he arrived at the carpenter's house, he inquired:

'Who are you?'

The other replied:

'I am Nazar the carpenter.'

He said to the carpenter:

'Take one of these logs and carry it into your house.'

Nazar did so and the merchant said:

'Chop up that wood and see what is inside.'

When the axe fell on the log a shower of precious stones and pearls poured out of it. The carpenter was astounded, but the merchant told him:

'The other logs are all like that one. God has taken everything from me and given it to you.'

The carpenter said:

'May God restore it to you likewise: take it away with you.'

Such was not the merchant's wish.

'Take half, or a quarter at least!'

But he would not; nor would he accept any money. The carpenter pleaded with him:

'Do at least take three loaves of bread for your journey.'

That he consented to do. The carpenter went into his house and said to his wife:

'Bake three large loaves of bread, and put a few jewels in each one.'

His wife rose and did as he bade her, wrapped the loaves in a cloth and gave them to the merchant. He accepted them and departed. On his way he saw a goatskin tent standing in the desert. When he approached he saw that it belonged to a poor man, an Arab. His wife was in labour, their neighbours had gone to summer pastures

and these two could not follow them. The Arab had nothing, neither bedding nor wrappings for the baby. The merchant felt pity for those poor people, gave them the loaves and said:

'Go to Nazar the carpenter in Baghdad and give this bread to him; he is a pious man, he will give you a cradle and swaddling clothes.'

The merchant went his way, and the Arab took the loaves to the carpenter who gave him everything he asked. The carpenter went to his wife and gave the bread to her, telling her this tale:

#### 4. *The Man with a Sieve*

A man was sitting on the bank of a river. He had a sieve in his hands. He dipped the sieve in the water, and when it did not fill he said:

'When God sends any man a gift, He does it in this way.'

He lifted up the sieve and, as the water ran out of it, he said:

'When God takes something away, He does it thus. God has blessed us and brought good fortune to our door.'

'Sire, if indeed God has destined that man for you, He will bring him to your door; otherwise it will be hard to find him.'

Ruka said:

'He is not like rain or snow, to come to your gates unasked. If we do not know where he lives, how does he know our country? Let us send a man to search for him. Who ever had a crust of bread fall into his mouth without using his hands, or was clothed without toil?'

RUKA told the tale of:

#### 5. *The Stupid Swimmer*

A swimmer was being carried away by a current:

'O God, save me!' he cried.

His companion called out to him:

'Strike out, use your arms: they will save you!'

Let us seek, and we shall find.

The vizir said to the eunuch:

'You are very wise. However, if indeed anything can be accomplished without God's help, why do you not try to recover your missing organ so that you can enjoy yourself at ease with a wife and children?'

The VIZIR then told the tale of:

## 6. *The Ill-Fated Merchant*

There was once a rich merchant who did not believe in God. He sold all that he had gained and bought corn, thinking:

'If it is scarce next year, I will sell it for three or four times as much.'

The following year was one of plenty. Again he bought at a low price, planning to sell at a profit another year. Every year brought increasing abundance. All his corn rotted and he lost all his wealth. There was nothing left. He took all his wife's jewellery and travelled to France. There he traded with such success that he made a great fortune. Greed for gain kept him from returning home. He took passage in a ship, expecting to make more profit. A storm blew up, the ship was wrecked and everything he had was lost. Nothing but a wooden plank was left. He clung to that and it carried him ashore. He set off in a sorry plight and came to a city. There he was taken before the lord of the province and told him all his story. The ruler replied to him in these words:

'Since you, who were a rich man, have come to this pass, you shall remain a year in my domain. I will give you the charge of my affairs, and you will make even more profit than before.'

Thus he was appointed steward of the lord's estates. At first, fearing that he might make too little profit, he stole corn and rice. At the end of the year, however, he found himself in plenty. He said:

'I have done wrong.'

He began taking out of his store what he had stolen, and putting it into that of his master. He was seen by some men as they were going to their master's granary in the evening; they thought he was a thief, and informed their master. The lord in his anger stripped the merchant of all his gains and drove him away.





The merchant went off in tears and came to the seashore, where he saw a ship coming in with ten merchants on board. He told them of all his misadventures. Each of them gave him a precious stone and then they departed, leaving him there. He wrapped five of the stones in a rag which he tied round his leg, and put the remaining five into his mouth. Then he set out, and soon encountered three robbers who accosted him. With the jewels in his mouth he could not speak, and the robbers took him for a mute. One of them said:

'Let us rob him,' another:

'What should we get from him?' and the third:

'There's a saying that twelve men using all their strength could not strip the shirt off a naked man!'

When the merchant heard this he laughed, and two jewels fell out of his mouth. The robbers seized him by the throat and forced him to disgorge the other three. They did not find the remaining five wrapped in a rag. They went on their way and came to a city, where they intended to sell their gems. They fell in with some of the king's merchants, who could see that the jewels were stolen and took them to give to the king. The robbers were bound and sentenced to death.

Now the merchant in his turn came to the city, and unwrapped his jewels to sell them. He was found by the same men, who took away the jewels and led him off to be beheaded. On their way, however, they met with the merchants who had given him the gems a few days earlier. The prisoner pleaded with them:

'Five of the jewels you gave me were stolen by robbers, these men have taken the other five, and now they are going to kill me for a thief.'

The ten merchants swore on oath that the gems were those that they had given to the prisoner, refused to allow the guards to lead him off to execution, and took the whole story to the king. The king said:

'Since he has had so many misfortunes, I will appoint him to be my treasurer. He will gain more wealth than he has ever had before.'

The unfortunate merchant was given the charge of the royal treasury. One day he happened to bend the key. He would not spare two coins to pay a locksmith, but picked up a stone and struck the key to straighten it, holding it against a wall. As it chanced, the thickness of the wall was no more than one layer of brick: it fell down, and an apartment of the king's harem was exposed to view. Eunuchs went running to tell the king what had happened, the merchant was seized and both his eyes were put out.

I have told this story to show that it is only by the grace of God that a man can achieve success. Without that, all his striving will be in vain, and therefore he should entreat God to aid him.

The King said to the vizir:

'You speak well and wisely on all subjects, with your ready wits, and Ruka will never want for conversation. At this present moment, give the soldiers the order to mount, and I myself will ride my gelding. We will go to some beautiful and pleasant spot where we will camp and spend a week hunting!'

When the young men at court heard that the King was going hunting, so many of them came out that the earth trembled beneath their weight. The elders pranced about like striplings:

'Perhaps we too shall be fit to ride out with the King!' And the youths behaved as soberly as old men in the hope that the King might invite them to attend him. The air was filled with rejoicing.

They spent a week in hunting and brought down more game than they could count. As they were returning they came to a place where a magnificent cypress stood with its roots in a flowing stream, in the midst of flowery meadows. It was a sight to banish all care. A young man was lying asleep in the shade of a tree. His horse, saddled and bridled, was tethered close by.

The huntsmen called to the youth, and the King went near to look at him. He exclaimed with an oath:

'His face is like the portrait on the parchment!'

They all marvelled at the young man's beauty. He rose to his feet, greeted the King with a long encomium and kissed his hand. The King bade him mount his horse and ride beside him. He asked the youth who he was, whence he came and whither he was bound.

'Whence I come, I do not know. What can I say to Your Majesty? This I know, that I am called Leon. My father died when my mother was carrying me, my mother died when I was born, and I grew up wandering from place to place.'

Ruka said to Leon:

'By the King's head, what ill fortune has been yours!'

Leon looked at him and perceived that he was a eunuch; he said:

'You are right. If I had had better fortune I would not have met with you today. What a happy chance for you! If you are a man, where are your beard and moustache? If a woman, where are your long tresses? If you are a young man, where is the strength in your arms? If you are a maiden, take me to your soft bosom! You are a

man, yet you have not a man's vigour in your limbs; you have a woman's nature, yet you are not able to bear a child. Ill-fated one! It is your destiny to be unfulfilled. Even if you gain the affections of a woman, she will be compelled to leave you for another. A dark destiny is yours! You cannot play a man's part and, by God, you'll not bear comparison even with a whore! Wherever a eunuch's writ goes, a wife is no wife to her husband!

LEON then related the following tale:

## 7. *The Eunuch of Aleppo*

There was once a nobleman in the city of Aleppo who had a eunuch whom he trusted well. He also possessed another slave who resembled the eunuch in face and form. These two were very close friends. One day they put their heads together.

The eunuch went to his master's wife and said:

'I know that your lord is planning to leave you and take another to wife. Look out for yourself!'

Woman is weak, he knew, and he deceived and misled her until her love turned to hatred. The woman said to him:

'Since you are well disposed towards me, tell me what it is best for me to do if my husband leaves me?'

The eunuch replied:

'I will give you ointment to rub on his feet, which will cause him to die instantly; then you shall marry this friend of mine, who is a good man and comely, if it please you!'

The woman followed the eunuch's counsel: she killed her husband, married the slave in his place and gave him all her husband's property.

I have told this story because anyone of your kind might do even worse, since he neither fears God nor consorts with men.

The vizir said to Leon:

'I find your conversation full of charm, and your courteous demeanour pleases me. Will you not enter the King's service and become chief of his vizirs, over myself, when the King will treat you with the honour due to a brother?'

Leon gave this answer to the vizir Sedrak:



'You speak like a father instructing his favourite son, and I will do as you propose. Let me first tell you this tale.'

LEON told the story of:



## 8. *The King of India's Vizir*

My grandfather – I have been told – was eldest of the five vizirs of the King of India. The king was greatly attached to this doyen of his vizirs, and loved him better than his own kin. The other four vizirs came to hate him, saying among themselves:

'What are we to do, when the king listens to his words and does not consult us on any matter?'

They put their heads together, and one of them went to the king at dawn and reported:

'Last night I had a dream in which the mighty sovereign, lord of India, Your Majesty's dead father, commanded me to inform you that he desires to see the chief vizir. "There is a small matter on which I wish to consult him; it will soon be settled and afterwards I will send him back to you," he said.'

Another of the vizirs went to the king and described the same dream:

'I saw Your Majesty's father in a strange and beautiful place; he asked for the chief vizir to come to him, and will let him return to you.'

The third and fourth vizirs reported their dreams in the same words, as they had agreed between themselves.

Although the king was astonished he suspected nothing, saying to himself:

'If only one of them had told me such a tale, he would certainly have been lying, but when they have all had the same dream it must be true beyond any doubt.'

He sent for the old vizir and told him what had been said. The old man could see that it was all a ruse devised by his colleagues, but what was he to say? If he should speak out, that would but make matters worse. He said to the king:

'May I make this request of Your Majesty, that no oxen or labourers but my own be employed to build the pyre for me? I do not wish to appear before the blessed sovereign as a sinner. Grant me

forty days to have the wood gathered and the preparations made, and to pay my fee, and then I will gladly set forth to meet the great sovereign!

Forty days' grace was granted. He chose four trustworthy slaves and ordered them to dig two holes in the ground. They dug a tunnel beneath the city from the vizir's house to a piece of ground outside. There they heaped up a great pile of wood over the mouth of the tunnel, making a hole in the top through which a man could slide down into it.

When the forty days had passed the vizir went to the king and said:

'Be pleased to come, Your Majesty, and behold the burning of your slave, who is going to your father!'

The king and all the people went out to see the spectacle. The vizir mounted the pyre. Rags sprinkled with naphtha were heaped round it and set alight. When the smoke rose high the vizir slipped down into the hole and reached his own house by way of the tunnel beneath the city. The pile of wood burned out, the ash was scattered and not so much as a bone was found. Ash fell into the hole and filled it up.

The vizir remained in his house, in hiding, for twenty days. Then, robed in white, he took a staff in his hand and went to present himself at the gate of the palace. When the king was informed of his arrival he sprang to his feet, went out to the vizir and fell on his neck and kissed him, thinking he had come from the Beyond. He asked the vizir to give him news of his father, and inquired about his journey and his return.

The vizir discoursed upon what he had seen in Paradise, and many fabrications flowed smoothly from his tongue. Then he improved on his story, and went on:

'Everything that the sovereign had to discuss with me has been concluded. Now he calls for the other vizirs to visit him, for he has certain small matters to settle with them.'

When the vizirs' dreams had gained belief, who could cast doubt on the message brought by their colleague who clearly had returned from the Beyond? The four vizirs were summoned, and the king commanded them to go on the same journey. As they did not know of the chief vizir's ruse, they were cast on the pyre and consumed in the flames. As they had done to another, the same was done to them.

I have told you this tale, Father Sedrak, because envy is common

to all men, and later I may make enemies who will devise some trap for me.

The King was charmed by the young man's eloquent tongue, and said to him:

'If you will remain here as my vassal, I will give you anything you ask except my crown!'

RUKA told the tale of:



## 9. *The Man who Could Not be Sent to Hell*

A certain man who did all kinds of bad deeds was at the same time an earnest worshipper. When he had leisure from his evil-doing he would begin to weep and pray. An angel visited this man and spoke these words to him:

'Because you have done so much evil, Our Lord has not granted you to go to Paradise, but since you are so devout you may have anything you ask except that!'

The man replied:

'Since Paradise is denied me, but any other request that I make will be granted, make me so vast in bulk that there is no room in Hell for anyone beside myself!'

That was not within God's power to do, and so He sent the man to Paradise.

'This young man will weave spells with his magic art and spin tales of things impossible to perform, so that he can seize your crown.'

LEON laughed, and told the tale of:

## 10. *The Old Man and the Youth*

An old and toothless man and a young lad were sitting at meat together. Both began to shed tears, and people asked the old man:

'Why are you weeping?'

The greybeard answered:

'I have no teeth and I cannot chew. This lad has eaten all the food, and I am left to go hungry.'

When they asked the lad why he was weeping, he said:

'While I was chewing a mouthful, he swallowed all the rest and I was left hungry.'

Everybody knew which of them was in the right, yet each of the two blamed the other. In the same way, everyone can see which of us are wicked and which of us good, and with God's help the King also will recognize it.

The King said to Leon:

'How is it that you think it such hardship to enter my service?'

Leon said:

'A man who serves a king is like one who sits by a big fire in winter. If he comes too close, he is scorched by the heat, if he moves away, he is frozen with cold.'

'There are five rules for a courtier, and they are not easy to observe: first, he must see with two eyes more than he could with a hundred, and still be able to turn a blind eye; second, he must listen with one good ear and turn one deaf ear; third, his heart must be more spacious than a caravanserai, to contain and guard what enters through his ears; fourth, he does not repeat anything base or trivial, while he does speak of what is good and fitting for men of sense to hear; fifth, his tongue must be able to drip either honey or venom.'

LEON told the tale of:

## 11. *The Sweetest and the Most Bitter*

A certain king once said to his vizir:

'Go and bring me food sweeter than anything that can be found by land or sea!'

The vizir went away and bought a tongue; he brought it back and it was cooked and eaten. Then he was commanded:

'Go and bring back what is most bitter on the face of the earth!'

He went away, and again he bought a tongue and returned with it.

The king said:

'I asked for something sweet and you gave me a tongue; when I asked for something bitter, it was a tongue again.'

The vizir replied:

'Upon your life, sire, there is nothing in all the world sweeter than a tongue – and nothing more bitter.'

'Sire, a courtier is like a candle, for he himself is consumed in the act of giving light to others; a king's favourite arouses envy in other men, who use their wiles to make the king hate him as they do themselves.'

LEON told the tale of:

## 12. *The Duke and the Nobleman's Son*

There was once a nobleman in the city of Vienna who had one son, adorned with every good quality. He said to his father:

'I wish to enter the Duke's service; I beg you to present me to him and make this request for me!'

His father answered:

'I will give you two pieces of instruction. Swear to obey them, and I will grant your wish!'

His son swore accordingly:

'I will do whatever you command.'

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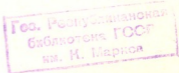
The father's directions were:


'Abstain from fornication in your master's house. When you hear a church bell ring, enter the church and do not leave before the end of the service, however pressing your affairs!'

The young man took these words to heart, and he was presented to the duke, the ruler of Vienna. He served his master so well and gained such favour that the duke set him over his own sons and placed all his affairs in his hands.

One day the duke sent him in the course of his duties into the inner apartments of the house. His handsome looks caught the eye of the duchess and she besought him to share her couch. He refused, however, thus to betray his master.

There was another nobleman's son at the duke's court, and the two young men were friends. The duchess made advances to this second youth, and planned vengeance against the other. On another





occasion the first youth again entered the duchess' apartments and saw the other with her. He left them, and spoke of it to no one.

The duke went to visit his wife and found her in a rage.

'If you were a man,' she said to him, 'your vassal would not dare to lay hands on me.'

She made him believe that she was speaking of the first young man, who had rejected her advances.

The duke went out very angry. In the morning he gave this order to his executioner:

'You are to behead the first man I send to you today who says: "How have you carried out your orders?" Give his head to the next comer and let him bring it to me!'

Then he commanded that innocent youth:

'Go to the executioner and say to him: "What have you done to carry out your orders?"'

The young man set out. On his way he heard the bell ringing; remembering what his father had told him, he turned and entered the church, where he remained until prayers were ended.

In the meantime the duke had sent off the young man who had deceived him. He arrived before the other and gave his message to the executioner, who seized him, cut off his head and set it down nearby.

When the service was ended the first youth went on his way and came to the executioner, who gave him the severed head to carry to the duke. His master was greatly surprised to see him, and said:

'Where have you been until now?'

The young man told him of his father's instructions, and of how he had kept his word and stayed in the church. Then the duke made him swear on oath to disclose everything he knew. When he perceived that the young man was innocent, he gave him a rank equal to his own.

'Sire, when a master loves his servant he should not be ready to give ear to his detractors. There will always be men at the palace gates who fabricate all sorts of stories and visions, and plot and practise trickery to discredit him.'

The King insisted:

'Say what you will, God has sent you to me. Did not you yourself give me a sign, when you visited me in my sleep?'

When Leon saw the portrait of himself he bowed to the earth and made submission to the King, and rode at his side as they proceeded

to the royal city. There a feast was spread for them, and afterwards they rested.

At daybreak, when the dark curtain of night across the sky was torn apart by the blazing sun, whose rays streamed out like shining messengers over the earth, the King called Leon to him and committed his beloved son Djumber to his charge, saying:

'I entrust him to God's care and yours!'

Leon declared:

'This day I behold the sign of my undoing. I am your slave and I will obey you. It is beyond my power to form and train your son. I, who expected that my enemies would falsely denounce me to Your Majesty and bring about my ruin, now find myself the greater sinner in thus accusing them.'

LEON told the tale of:

### 13. *The King and the Artist*

Once in Laodicea there was a one-eyed king. He had a skilled artist at his court, and sought a pretext to be rid of him.

He commanded the artist:

'Paint my portrait, and let it be a true likeness!'

The artist said to himself:

'Now my last hour has come! If I paint him one-eyed, he will slay me – "How dare you?" – and if I give him two eyes he will have my head off – "When did I ever look like that?"'

He thought of a solution: he painted a stag, and showed the king with a rifle in his hands taking aim, with his blind eye closed. When he offered the portrait to his lord, the king could find no fault with it, and the artist's life was saved.

'Now I perceive that this is but a pretext to destroy me, for if I am slain who will suspect you or blame you?'

The King answered:

'It is not by my wish that this has come about, but by the hand of fate who sent you to me.'

Then Leon said:

'Give me your written word that you will not have me put to death on the grounds of what others tell you until you have given me





a hearing, and I will do this.'

The King gave Leon his promise, written in his own hand. Leon took the document away, sealed it with gold and kept it in his head-dress. He had a palace built for himself, and took up his abode in it. He began the training of Djumber, giving him instruction day and night, and only rarely taking him to see his father.

Leon once spent three days and nights at table drinking. He made Djumber pour out wine for him and allowed him neither food nor drink for himself. He kept the boy on his feet until he was so weak that he collapsed, faint with hunger. Then he ordered him to be seated and eat bread.

RUKA was Leon's declared enemy. When he heard of this incident, he recited the following tale:

## 14. *The Thieving Tailor*

There was once a tailor who constantly stole. When he had cloth to cut out, he took a large piece for himself. One night he had a dream in which he saw a tree growing out of his mouth, and every piece of material he had stolen was hanging from its branches. He woke in a fright and said to his son:

'Whenever you see me use the scissors to take a cutting, remind me of that tree!'

A nobleman gave him some very rare cloth of gold to cut out. When he began to steal a piece of it, his son reminded him of the tree. The tailor flew into a passion and thrust the scissors into the boy's mouth, crying:

'Was there any cloth like this hanging on it?'

'Who has ever seen or heard of a king's son being brought up in such a fashion? He has fainted with hunger, and the soles of his feet are raw from long standing.'

He would have told the King what had happened, but Sedrak said to him:

'Ruka, I love you better than my own kin, but I confess that your conduct surprises me.'

The VIZIR told the tale of:



## 15. *The Two Mullahs*

There were once two mullahs living in the same city who were deadly enemies. They could not stay in the same place, eat or drink together. Each of them tried to bring about the other's downfall. One day, one saw the other lying with a married woman. Men came and seized the guilty pair and threw them into a pit. They intended to bring the Qadi next day to see them, together with the witnesses, and have them both put to death.

The second mullah, who was the enemy of the first, heard of this. He ran into the other's house and came out with his wife, whom he lowered into the pit at nightfall. He said to the mullah who was imprisoned there:

'Dress your wife in the other woman's clothing, and send the woman away wearing your wife's garments.'

The captive did as his enemy had directed. At dawn the Qadi and the witnesses arrived. The second mullah was also summoned. They all looked down at the mullah in the pit and the woman beside him.

The other one said:

'Everyone indeed knows that I am no friend of his, but why do you accuse him when he is innocent, since that is his own wife with him?'

The captive was released, and the other said to him:

'You know well that I am your enemy, but I did that for you so that no one should think me to be an adulterer also; I came to your rescue because you are a mullah like myself!'

'Ruka, my brother, why do you say such things if you are not like that man – why do you not distinguish between what is best for your master and what is offensive to him?'

RUKA replied:

'O vizir, how can I fail to desire my master's good? But that man is like the one in the story:'

## 16. *The Fox in Holy Orders*



A fox was prowling about the ruins of what, it seemed, had once been a village. A vat full of indigo dye had been left there, uncovered. As the fox wandered hither and thither he fell into the vat. When after several attempts he succeeded in scrambling out, he was dyed almost black. Starting to walk away he met with a cock, who asked him:

‘What has happened to you?’

The fox said in answer:

‘I have darkened my days with sin, and now at last I have listened to reason and abandoned this world. I have become a monk, and I am going to Jerusalem.’

The cock said:

‘Since you have renounced your evil ways and increased your acts of charity, take me with you, and you will earn a blessing!’

The fox took the cock with him and they set out on their way. They met with a kite, who said to the cock:

‘What have you done, that you are in such company?’

The cock replied:

‘The fox has taken vows and is on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and I am going with him.’

The kite was pleased to hear this, and he too joined the pair. They met with a hoopoe, who also went with them. Thus they were four companions travelling together. The fox led the way to his earth and there in his crafty way spoke unctuously to his fellow travellers:

‘My children, no one can go to Jerusalem unshriven. Make your confession to me, I will give you absolution and then we will go on together.’

They consented. He made them enter his earth, saying: ‘This is the confessional,’ and stationing himself at the entrance. ‘I can pardon each of you two sins, but not a third,’ he told them.

They expressed their gratitude:

‘If you absolve us of two of our sins, who is going to speak of a third?’

They thought themselves innocent, while the fox was only seeking a pretext to accuse them. He summoned the cock as the first of his disciples:

‘God commanded the cock to crow at dawn; why do you often crow after vespers?’



The cock begged for absolution, and promised never again to raise his voice except at the appointed hour. He was pardoned. Then the fox said to him:

'A man has but one wife, while you are not content with ten, and when one of your companions is weaker than yourself you carry off his wife.'

Again the cock gave his promise and received absolution. The fox made a third accusation:

'You are not a knight or an archer: why do you wear spurs, when you have never mounted a horse in your life?'

What could the cock say to this third charge? The fox broke his neck and set the head down before him. Then he said to the kite:

'Why are you for ever screeching, when you are such a poor songster and cannot even pipe or twitter?'

The kite confessed his fault and received absolution. The fox went on:

'God has provided you with lizards and mice for sustenance. When a widow has but one fowl for her living, why do you carry off the chicks?'

That also was pardoned. Thirdly:

'For six months you are a cock, and for six months a hen. What does that signify?'

He nipped off the kite's head and laid it before him.

In the meantime, while the fox had been engaged with those two birds, the hoopoe had been thinking out a ruse to get the better of him. When the fox asked him: 'Who gave you your royal crest?' the hoopoe replied:

'Solomon the Wise crowned me with his own hands.\*'

'Whom have you as witness?'

To that the hoopoe answered:

'One plump goose and one fat duck.'

Carried away by cupidity and greed, the fox lost his head and said to himself:

'This hoopoe will make but a morsel, but a duck and a goose will feed me for a week.'

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. He left the cock and the kite uneaten and went off with the hoopoe, who led him into a ravine and left him there to wait. The hoopoe came upon a hunter with hawks and hounds; he alighted on the ground in front of them, and when the hunter tried to shoot an arrow at him he flew away

\* This belief about the hoopoe was common in Georgia.



and settled near the fox. The hunter followed. The hoopoe contrived to lead him into the ravine. The pointers found the fox's scent; gave chase and did their work so well that not a bone was left unbroken. Torn almost to pieces, the fox barely escaped with his life.

The hoopoe called to him:

'Fox, have I not found witnesses?'

The fox lamented:

'When a priest asks for witnesses to a confession, he merits even worse than this!'

Thus the hoopoe had his revenge, but nothing now could help the cock and the kite.

'That man is a fox on the prowl. You will never be a match for him, however much you rack your brains!'

Leon hunted and caroused without a care in the world. One day he went out hunting. He mounted a pacing horse,\* set a hawk on Djumber's wrist and sent him forward on foot, driving him on until nightfall in pursuit of the hawk and its quarry.

The next day he gave Djumber the charge of a pack of harriers and forced him to run up hill and down dale, until his shoes were in ribbons and his feet bruised and running with blood. On the third day he was sent on in advance as a runner, when he continually fell to the ground in the attempt to quicken his pace. He was driven on without mercy, however, and made to run all the way to his dwelling.

When RUKA learned of this he set out to speak to the King in protest, and told the following tale:

## 17. *The Moon of Ramadan*

There was once a deaf man whose ox was missing, and he went out to search for it. He met with a stranger and began to question him. This man, as it happened, was even harder of hearing than the first;

\* Pacer or ambler: horse trained to raise two legs on each side alternately, giving a smooth gait. This gait is now more often seen in the U.S.A. than in England.

he had found a donkey. He did not understand about the missing ox, and said:

'If this donkey is yours, at least give me a reward for finding it!'

They could not understand each other. A horseman now rode up to them with a woman mounted behind him. One man asked him about his ox, the other about a donkey. As it happened, the horseman was even more deaf than they, and thought that they meant to carry off the woman. He swore an oath and told them:

'My wife has died and this woman here is my slave – do not imagine that she belongs to another!'

None of them could understand anything that the others said. They went together to the Qadi, and each pleaded his case. The Qadi, as it happened, had grown hard of hearing in his old age. It was then the fast of Ramadan, and he thought that the petitioners had come to announce the appearance of the new moon. He said:

'If you have seen the new moon, go out and beat the drum!'

Not one of them could understand anything at all.

'Now we ourselves, great and small, have lost our hearing – otherwise, how can we fail to recognize that Leon is nearly killing that young man?'

The VIZIR, however, persuaded him to say nothing, and told the tale of:

## 18. *The Mountain Dweller in the Orchard*

There was once a man who lived in the mountains and had never seen an orchard. One day he went down into a valley, where he came upon one for the first time. He entered, and saw all kinds of fruit trees and vegetation. This pleased him greatly and he gave thanks to God:

'Thou hast ordered all things well, except only this: Thou hast fastened a melon to a blade of grass, and a walnut to a great tree!'

He walked about the orchard, and then fell asleep beneath a walnut tree. A crow flew down to alight on the tree and knocked off

\* To announce the end of the fast.

a nut, which fell on the man's forehead and bruised it.

He rose to his feet and said:

'O God, truly Thou hast ordered things well: if a bigger fruit had been growing on that tree, it would have crushed my head!'

'It may be that what Leon is doing is right, and it is best done in that way; yet you would speak to the King as though he should be blamed for it.'

Then RUKA told this tale:

## 19. *Building a Village*

A dog and a cock were sworn brothers.

'Let us build a village!' they said to each other.

'How shall we go about it?' the dog wondered.

The cock told him:

'You will bark, I will crow and in that way it will be built.'

They went off into the forest. The dog began to bark, then fell asleep. The cock perched on the branch of a tree and began to crow.

A fox who heard his voice approached and asked the cock:

'What are you doing?'

The cock replied:

'We are building a village.'

The fox said:

'Come down, and measure out a piece of ground to build a house for me!'

The cock told him:

'The headman of the village is over yonder; wake him, and he will make the measurements for you.'

The fox in his eagerness to get hold of the cock no longer thought what he was doing, and started towards the dog. The dog sprang up and bit off his tail. The fox ran away up a hill, torn and bleeding, and cried:

'See what a pass my wits have brought me to: if you build a village in the same fashion, you too will discover your mistake!'

'You and that person are conspiring to ruin me and you will not spare me – that I know; if you do bring up the King's son well, how foolish I shall look.'

This dispute between Sedrak and Ruka came to the King's ears; he laughed to himself at finding them in disagreement, and the vizir speaking in Leon's defence.



One day Leon lost his temper for no reason, seized Djumber and beat him without mercy, giving him fifty blows of his staff. When Ruka heard of this he went to the King in a passion, and this time he did not speak in fables.

'Many and many a time did Your Majesty entreat God to grant you a son, and He was gracious to you. You have given him into the care of a man who is filled with the wrath of God, who has laid hands on him and dealt him a hundred blows of his staff, and for what misdoing? He is so badly injured that he cannot live through the day; and you will adopt Leon to be a son and a master to us.'

He said much more in the same vein, as men do when they fall out with one another; when they have occasion to quarrel, they do not spare their tongues.

The King was deeply perturbed and angered, and as the flame of anger rose from the smoke of his disquiet he trembled with wrath. Ruka added fuel to the flame. In his anger the King dismissed the vizir from his presence and had Leon dragged in and thrown down at his feet. He threatened to kill him. But Leon made bold to say:

'You cannot kill me, sire, you cannot do it! Here is your oath upon it which I requested and obtained from you, for I foresaw that this would happen and I was prepared for it. You cannot have me unjustly put to death!'

The King remembered that he had given his word, and said in fury:

'You are here, and we will hold the trial!'


Leon said:

'Nay, first let the embers of wrath be scattered by the winds of clemency, the flame of it quenched in the waters of loving-kindness, and then make your accusation!'

At these words the King returned to his senses and became calm and composed. Leon remained silent for a long time. When at last he spoke, his voice was sweeter than a nightingale's. It might have been thought that a canary was nestling in his throat, or a twittering swallow. When in his life would he ever stand in such need of all his resources?

He said:

'Sire, I am deeply grateful for the kindness and magnanimity you have shown me. How distressed and alarmed you have been by that



travesty of a man, and still you would not take my life without giving me a hearing! Now I beg Your Majesty to tell me: Do you desire your son to become a king, or a shepherd? There is many a shepherd more worthy than a bad king. A shepherd has to watch over his flock, find them good pasture in pleasant places, tend any that are hurt and drive off marauders. If he cannot do these things, his flock will soon be depleted.

‘Likewise, a king must know the laws and customs, tasks and labours, occupations and affairs, trade, food and drink which are fitting for beggars, slaves, peasants, knights, nobles, princes and overlords.

‘If the youth who is your son had not been kept so long on his feet, how could he have understood the pains of slaves, serving-men and attendants, what toil it is for them to remain standing? The king himself may rise or be seated as he chooses. How can he know what those who serve him have to suffer? They have to stand all day long and bear it. If he himself had never felt the pangs of hunger, how could he ever feel for the poor and infirm, or others who want for food? He himself has everything that is good to eat and drink, and never goes hungry.

‘There is a saying that a man with a full stomach gave a few crusts of bread to a starving man, and then upbraided him for gobbling like a pig!

‘If he had never gone barefoot but was always on horseback, how could he understand what falconers and runners have to endure, or feel compassion for them, when he is mounted on a charger or a pacer, or driven in a carriage? If he had never suffered the blows of a staff, then if he were angry with his slaves and ordered them to receive a hundred or two hundred strokes – more for some, fewer for others – he would think it but a trifling punishment.

‘Now I have taught him what the poor, the weak and the humble have to suffer, and from this you may see, sire, what there is yet to be taught.’

The King indeed had both seen and listened to words put into action, and action expressed in words, and it pleased him greatly; he regretted having maltreated Leon, and embraced him warmly.

‘What was I to do, my son, when men’s evil tongues had filled me with anger and alarm at my boy’s sufferings?’

LEON told the tale of:



## 20. *The Unjust Shirvan-Shah*

There was once a Shah of Shirvan who was unjust in his rule and merciless to his subjects, and was ruining his country. Anyone whom he found petitioning or begging was immediately put to death. He turned his whole kingdom into a waste land.

One day he saw a man coming to present a petition. He ordered the man to be killed.

The petitioner pleaded:

'I am not one who should be put to death, for I know the language of all the birds and beasts.'

This pleased the Shah and, in the belief that the man was telling the truth, he spared his life. He commanded his vizir:

'Learn from this man, and I will learn from you.'

The vizir took the man away with him. He divined that the petitioner had thought of claiming to know the language of animals in order to save his life. The vizir let him go free.

Several days passed, and one evening the Shirvan-Shah was seated at table drinking when two owls were hooting nearby. They reminded him of the man who knew the language of birds and beasts. He said to his vizir:

'Have you learnt the language of birds from that man?'

The vizir replied:

'I have done so.'

The Shah asked him:

'What are the owls saying to each other?'

The vizir told him:

'One of them has a daughter, and the other is asking for her to marry his son. The daughter's father says: "I will give her to you if you will give seven hundred ruined villages when you behold her for the first time."''

'The son's father answers: "I have six more sons. If I pay seven hundred deserted villages for your daughter, how am I to find wives for them?"'

'The first owl says: "Why are you so niggardly and faint-hearted? If the Shirvan-Shah lives long, he will lay waste a great many more!"'

That displeased the Shah, who said:

‘Am I then so unjust?’

The vizir repeated:

‘That is what the owls say.’

After hearing that story the Shah mended his ways.

‘Likewise, as long as your eunuch is alive I shall have to pass many more days like this one!’

The King said:

‘A eunuch’s heart is as weak as a woman’s: think no more of it!’

LEON told the tale of:

## 21. *How the Tongue can Wound*

A man and a bear became as close as brothers. The man invited the bear to a feast. Afterwards the bear took its leave and was ready to depart. The man kissed it, and urged his wife to do the same. The stench of the bear made the woman feel ill, and she said:

‘It is intolerable to have a guest with such bad breath!’

The bear went away. After a time the man was invited in his turn, and took an axe with him when he went:

‘I will cut some wood with this,’ he said, ‘and bring it back with me.’

The bear came to meet him and embraced him, showing as much affection as it had received from him. Then it urged the man:

‘Strike me on the head with your axe, so that you wound me!’

The man refused, but the bear would not let him go. He struck it with the axe and wounded it. The bear ran off into the forest and the man returned to his own house.

When they met again after a month, the bear’s head had healed. The bear said:

‘Brother, my head is whole after the wound from your axe, but my heart still bleeds from that of your wife’s tongue.’

‘Ah, Sire, the tongue alone is enough to kill a man. He whom the tongue has slain untimely, the tongue cannot restore to life, nor will a wound given by it ever heal.’



Leon said:

'It is said that the hiss of an arrow which strikes a man at your side is like the sounding of a horn! Who suffers with me what I have endured this day?'

The KING said:

'When something has been done through a misunderstanding, give it no further thought!'

And he related this tale:

## 22. *News of a Dog*

There was once a king who had a slave with an evil tongue, from whose lips no fair words ever issued. The king was going away for five years on campaign, and said to that foul-mouthed man:

'If you speak one fair word in all that time, I will give you a robe on my return.'

The man replied:

'And if you do not return, who will give me anything? Then I shall have wasted my fair word.'

The king departed. Two years passed. The evil-tongued one could not endure the king's absence any longer, and set out to join him. As he was approaching, the king saw him first. He said to his vizir:

'Here he comes, with his foul speech. Do not ask him for news, for he has an evil tongue. Ask him for news of my dog!'

The man came into the king's presence and kissed the earth before him. The vizir inquired:

'Tell me, poison tongue, how is the king's dog?'

'It is dead,' the man replied.

The vizir asked:

'What ailed it?'

He answered:

'The king's white camel died, it ate some of the carcase and died of that.'

'How did the camel die?'

'The king's mother passed away in a village, the camel had to carry her body to the grave and that killed it.'

The king felt a pang of grief and asked:

'What ailed her?'



The man wept as he announced:  
'The sun-visaged queen departed from this world, and she died of grief.'

The king asked:

'How did the queen come to fall ill?'

'Your Majesty's sons and daughters were carried off by the plague, and her sorrow was more than she could bear.'

The king inquired further:

'Then nothing remains of the palace?'

The slave reported:

'When I was there they were spreading straw; what is being done now, I do not know.'

Everything he said proved to be lies, which he invented solely in order to give pain.

'You see, my dear Leon, the talk of such an individual can do nothing to harm a man if that is not his fate. There is a saying: "Give me a happy fate, then bury me in a dung heap if you will!"'

LEON related this fable to the King:

### 23. *The Caliph and the Arab*

One day when the Caliph of Baghdad was out hunting he became separated from his retinue in the heat of the chase. There was no one with him but one vizir, and he felt very hungry. He saw a black tent in the desert. He rode up to it, looked about, and saw an Arab whose sole possessions were three goats. He dismounted and asked for food. The Arab killed one of the goats, roasted it and offered it to the Caliph. The Caliph ate nothing but the brains. The Arab asked the vizir:

'Why is the Caliph eating nothing?'

The vizir said:

'He never eats any meat but brains.'

The Arab rose and killed his two remaining goats, prepared the brains and offered them to the Caliph.

The vizir said to the Caliph:

'Does Your Majesty in his high position behold what this humble and needy Arab has done? The richest and most generous man could

not do more. By your head, whatever a rich man spends he has a thousand times as much left to him, while this man has killed everything he had and offered it to you, and has nothing more.



The Caliph gave the man the staff from his own hand, and said: 'Come to see me: no one shall close my door to you, and I will show you many favours!'

The Caliph returned that day. On the following day the Arab took up the staff and went to the palace, passed through the gates and went in. The Caliph was at prayer with his back turned to the door, and did not see him. The Arab inquired:

'What is the Caliph doing? First he prostrates himself, then he rises again.'

A slave told him:

'He is praying.'

Not only had the Arab never heard the name of God, he knew nothing about prayer. He asked:

'What is he praying for?'

'He is asking God to send him good things.'

The Arab said:

'If he is asking for more, then how can I ask anything of him?' And he went away, thinking: 'Whoever it is to whom the Caliph prays, I will entreat him on my own account and he will give me whatever I ask.'

The Caliph knew nothing of his visit or his departure. The Arab returned to his tent and there proceeded to do as he had seen the Caliph do. These were his words:

'Whatever the Caliph has asked of you, grant also to me, who am a poor man!'

A few days later the Arab took up his tent and moved to another place. When he began to dig and pitch his tent, he unearthed a large cavity full of gold and silver. He covered it over again, and then with the staff in his hand set out for the palace. He entered and did homage to the Caliph.


The Caliph said to him:

'Why have you not come to see me before now?'

The Arab told him everything that had happened:

'Whatever you prayed for, I asked the same, and I have been given a hole in the earth filled with gold and silver. Now let me have a scribe, and men to carry it to you.'

The Caliph called for a scribe to go with the Arab and write out an inventory of the treasure. The vizir looked at his lord and said:



'That poor Arab had nothing but three goats, and he killed them for you. You promised to reward him, and he has asked nothing of you. What God has sent him, will you now take away for yourself?'

'Ah, sire, I have told you this story to show that every man has good fortune so long as his lord is well disposed towards him; if you had killed me, I should have had a sad fate.'

The King said:

'I acted as I did in a moment of anguish. God send that I never suffer such distress again.'

LEON told the tale of:

## 24. *The Search for a Man without a Care*

There was once a king who enjoyed good living and who was noble-hearted, generous and the terror of the unruly. He had a vizir who was wise and smooth-tongued.

He said to the vizir:

'I have many cares which weigh heavily on me. I wish there could be found a man to relieve me of them, at least in part.'

The vizir answered:

'A man without sorrow or care is not to be found on the whole face of the earth. You are a king, with every kind of pleasure at your command: enjoy them at will!'

The king was displeased by these words. He said:


'How can there be no one free from care?'

The vizir assured him:

'Indeed, there is not one such person, Your Majesty.'

The king would not listen. He gave his vizir the charge of the kingdom, put on a disguise and, taking a small quantity of gold, mounted his horse and rode away; he took no one with him – not a slave, nor a runner, nor any of his nobles. He travelled all over the earth. In time he came to a very beautiful orchard. There were many fine things to be seen there, enclosed within walls of white marble.

He entered, and beheld a meadow green as emerald where fragrant flowers bloomed, nightingales trilled, canaries piped, blackbirds sang and swallows twittered. Never had ears heard sweeter sounds, nor eyes beheld anything more pleasing. In the



centre there stood a splendidly appointed pavilion, with a clear brook running nearby. Ten men – some young, others grey-haired – were seated at a table spread with plenty, feasting with great enjoyment. Sweet-scented flowers, fresh fruits, the singing of birds and the drinking of wine all mingled in harmony. In all this there was no sign of melancholy to be seen. The king went up to them. They welcomed him and gave him a place beside them. The feasting continued for three days, more delightful than anything imaginable.

Then the king said to his hosts:

‘I have been seeking to find men who are free from all cares, and now here I have found you.’

To that they replied:

‘In that case your search has been in vain, for all that we have in the world is what is here.’

Those men then gave the king an account of their misfortunes. The first one told this story:

## 25. *The King of Arabia*

Once I was King of Arabia, and reigned in great splendour. When I was about to go on campaign, my head cook said to me:

‘I have nine thousand camels, but they are not enough to carry all that is needed for your kitchens; I beg you to commandeer more.’ In that, as in other matters, such magnificence was a necessity to me.

The next day we went into battle. The enemy defeated us, laid my kingdom waste, destroyed my army and took me prisoner; they did not recognize me as the king, and I was bound and thrown into a stable. A groom entered, cooked some meat in a small pot and went out of the door. A dog rushed in and began to eat from the pot, and I shouted to drive it off. The handle broke, and the pot fell on its head. The dog ran out with the pot on its head. I laughed loudly. The groom returned and asked me why I was laughing.

I said to him:

‘Yesterday nine thousand camels were not enough to carry my kitchen, and today one dog finds it a light burden: that is why I laughed.’

When it was known that I was a king, I was released. I could not return to my kingdom in the shame of defeat, and I came to this

garden. Now judge for yourself whether I have no cares.



The second told this tale:

## 26. *The King of Kobuleti's Son*

I was the son of the King of Kobuleti, and had everything I could desire. I had one very powerful enemy. I was younger than he, while he had greater wealth than mine. I had a wife whom the morning star could not outshine in radiance; beside her eyebrows, a raven's wing showed pale. May roses would not unfold their petals for envy of her cheeks. Silver turned whiter to emulate the tints of her complexion. The cypress marvelled at her upright, stately form. She was mine, and I rejoiced in her.

When I was out on a hunting expedition my enemy, who was a king's son, came and carried me off. My youth did not avail to save me.

Now I have lost my kingdom: for shame, I cannot return to it, and I have come here. Judge whether I am free from care.

The third story was as follows:

## 27. *The Roman Noble*

I was a nobleman of Rome, high in rank, lord of many lands and cities. I never had a thought for anything but hunting and carousing, eating and drinking, putting on fine clothes and giving presents. The day came to prepare for my wedding, and I went to the baths. While I was washing myself my hand slipped – I was mutilated by my own razor. I could never return to my house in that shameful condition, and I came here. Judge for yourself whether I have nothing to grieve me.

The fourth told this tale:



## 28. *The Grand Duke's\* Son*

'If you will believe me, you will do best to return home and attend to your own affairs, for worse than what has befallen us no human tongue can tell – not even our own.'

The king insisted, however, and urged him to speak, and he said:

I was a Grand Duke's son, and I was so dear to my father that he would have pledged his soul to save me from harm. He gave me a nobleman's daughter to wife, a maiden so lovely that the moon could not rival her in beauty. I loved her passionately. One day I went without warning into her apartments and found her within, in the embrace of one of my slaves. They took to flight as soon as they saw me.

I sent for the slave and gave the woman to him, saying to her:

'You were unworthy of your high position, and now you shall lose it.'

How could I face my father after being thus humiliated? I came to this place. Now you may judge whether I am free from care.

The fifth man's story was:

## 29. *The Defeated General*

I was a general under Caesar. I was sent on campaign, and engaged the enemy in battle. My army was defeated. I alone escaped, and returned. The ruler was angry and condemned me to death. I escaped from his men. While I was in flight, my horse came down. I went back on foot, exhausted. My wife was ugly and garrulous, and had a spiteful tongue. She reviled me bitterly. I could not stay in my house. I came here, and you may judge whether I have no cares.

The sixth said:

\* An Italian title. In the 13th century the Georgians had extensive relations with the Italian city states as well as with the Roman church.

## 30. *The Grasping Stone-Cutter*

I was a stone-cutter, earning a coin each day in wages. With that I bought food and drink for the poor of the town as well as for myself and gave what was left to the dogs, keeping nothing for the morrow. I did the same every day.

One day a man of God passed by. He called me to him, and when he saw how I lived and worked he prayed to God:

'Why dost Thou keep Thy servant in such poverty? Grant that he become rich!'

An angel said to him:

'We know what sort of nature this man has, and if we give him wealth he will not be able to use it well.'

Accordingly, the man of God promised to be my sponsor.

I knew nothing of my coming wealth nor of what had been done on my behalf. One day I was hewing stone when a crack appeared in the rock. I cut into it, and discovered an immeasurable quantity of gold. I carried it away in secret, and went to another country. There I became a great man, so that the king of that country made me his chief vizir. A hundred men with gold staves stood at my gate. I no longer remembered the poor or thought of God. Thus was I led astray by greed.

The angel spoke of this to my sponsor and sent him to visit me. He came to my door wishing to see me and remonstrate with me. But who would let him come near me? He was roughly handled and driven away. The angel said to him:

'What do you say now of the man you befriended?'

He answered:

'I am to blame for this: do to me whatever you will!'

The angel said:

'If it does not displease you, let us send him to take up his pickaxe again; otherwise, he may do even worse. It is not every man who is fit to have wealth and honours, and for this man poverty is best.'

I was not content with my gains. I planned to kill the king and reign in his place. The king was informed of this. He had every one of my men killed, and confiscated all my possessions. I fled the country and tried to return to hewing stone, but I was afraid to stay

there any longer. I came here. Now judge whether I am free from care.



The seventh told this tale:

### 31. *The Merchant's Wife*

I was a rich man in Persia. I had a wife more radiant than the dawn: her tresses were a heavy coil, her body like a reed. I gave her a fine house for a dwelling. Her fame spread so far abroad that it came to the ears of the King of Edessa's son. He disguised himself as a rich merchant and came to me with a proposal:

'Let us take an oath of brotherhood, and if you will sell my goods and make a profit I shall be grateful.'

I thought that he spoke in good faith. I received him with great honour, and gave him a house near my own.

He sought out an old woman who was a witch and began sending her to my house. Woman's heart is tender, and she found her way into my wife's confidence. A king's son had more charms for her than a merchant, and she turned her face from me. He dug an underground passage from his house to mine, took away her ear-rings and brought them to me.

'I have bought these,' he said to me. 'Do you know how much they are worth?'

I recognized them immediately, but gave no sign of it. I said merely:

'You have made a good purchase.'

I returned to my house to look for the ear-rings. While I was on my way, that man passed through the underground passage and gave them back to my wife. I entered and asked her for them. I was astonished when she brought them to me. I told her that I had seen some like them.

The devil had ensnared her heart, it seemed, and she answered:

'One ornament is like another, just as one man is like another.'

The next day my sworn brother brought me a necklace which again I recognized, and again found in my house when I went to look for it. My wife told me the same tale, and I thought that I had



bought one like it. He showed me one object after another in the same way, and I did not say I recognized them.

One day he said to me:

'I have bought a woman, and I wish to marry her. Come and see her, and if you think well of her I will make her my wife.'

When I went and saw that woman, I was dumbfounded. I said to myself:

'He has shown me many things and I have told myself that they resembled others; can this be a woman like my wife? If I question him, and then find my wife at home, I shall be a laughing stock.'

The woman did please me, and I returned to my house. In the meantime she had crept back through the tunnel. Since the entrance to it was beneath a carpet, how could I know where she had gone? I went into my house and found her there; I was perplexed, and told her about her double. She appeared displeased, and said to me:

'There is no one like me – even the dawn does not resemble me. Some harlot has distorted your vision if you compare me with her.'

I left the house, and my sworn brother took his leave of me, saying:

'Come with me and be my groomsman!'

I made ready, and left provision for my wife in the house. He took the woman with him, and myself as groomsman. We set off. I did not realize what had happened. When I went back and found my wife gone, what was I to do? What sort of face could I put on it if I stayed? I came here. Now judge for yourself, am I free from care?

The eighth told this tale:

### 32. *The Ill-Fated King's Son*

I was the son of the King of Wallachia. I was given the upbringing customary for a royal prince. My father proposed to marry me to a nobleman's daughter. When she heard about it, she died. He proposed for another bride, and when the marriage was agreed she died also. The third he approached was a king's daughter. She died when I appeared at the betrothal ceremony. He asked for a fourth, and brought her to court. She was like Cronos in beauty, her cheeks lovelier than a cut jacinth, her eyes like a falcon's. After the marriage

was celebrated, she died. The fifth bride was even more beautiful. She conceived and bore a son. She and the infant both died.

My father said to me:

'What can I do, my son? I wished to give you my throne, but fate has turned against you and no one can undo her work or unravel what is your destiny. Go away now, and leave me!'

I left my country and came here. Now whether I am free from care, judge for yourself.

The ninth related the tale of:

### 33. *The Bughdan Nobleman*

I was a nobleman of Bughdan, with nine sons and riches beyond reckoning. I possessed a fortress that was impregnable. I feared God, but no man: from whom should I look for treachery? Eight of my sons obeyed me, but the ninth was unruly and had an evil disposition.

Illness visited my household. My wife, my daughters and eight of my nine sons died. Only my accursed rebel son was left to me. He was my child, I could not have him put to death. He gave away my treasure to others and gained their support to rid himself of me. I could not stay there any longer, and I came here. Now judge for yourself, am I without cares?

The tenth was malicious:

'If you are a king,' he said, 'why have you left your kingdom to wander idly about the world? If you have any shame, have you not heard shameful things enough? Are such things proper for a king to hear?'

'Leave us. I shall tell you nothing about myself as long as I live, nor can anyone compel me to do so. It is better that you should return to your kingdom.'

One of the guests said:

'If you are a king, as you say, why have you left your kingdom?'

The king replied:

'I have been searching for a man free from care.'

The second speaker said:



'If you are indeed a king, how do you not know this: that no man born of woman is free from care?'

The king observed:

'My vizir said that to me many times, but I would not listen to him.'

The third said:

'Since you have such wise ministers, let them reign and yourself be their servant.'

The fourth said:

'Then you have wandered far and wide to seek prosperity for your kingdom, and yet you did not listen to your vizir?'

The fifth said:

'If you rushed hither and thither on such a vain errand, why did your father not make you a runner?'

The sixth said:

'If you were really a beggar, would you dare to go about leading such a useless life?'

The seventh said:

'If he were really a king, he would have sent a man out to search and himself stayed calmly in his kingdom.'

The eighth said:

'Why do you accuse him and distress him? He has been without occupation, and come here in the course of his travels. The proverb says: "Work ill done is better than none."'

The ninth said:

'May you meet with the same reception from a host as you, his hosts, are giving him! We have a king as our guest, and you put him to the question.'

The tenth said:

'In justice he should be given a beating – yet you believe in questioning him?'

The king left them and returned to his own kingdom, where he treated his vizir with great honour and related all that he had seen and done.

Leon said to the King:

'Sire, there is no man without a care. If, whenever you are troubled, you withhold attention from a man who is in need of it, what will become of him and what will be said of you?'

'God loves three things in kings: an even temper, self-restraint and magnanimity.'

'Three things in a sovereign are pleasing to the Lord: impartial justice, clemency and a great love for mankind.

'A country looks for three things in a monarch: peace with honour, justice without corruption and munificence without fail.

'Nobles demand three things of a king: reasonable indulgence, sympathy in good and evil fortune, a plentiful table.

'Warriors desire three things from their king: a swift horse, strong weapons and recognition of their service.

'The poor ask three things of a monarch: an open door, to have their petitions granted and to be sent away contented.

'Those who serve kings entreat three things of them: enough to eat, steady wages and unwillingness to believe their detractors.

'Vizirs look for three things in their sovereign: readiness to listen, regard for their words and reliance on their counsel.

'Petitioners hope for three things from a king: to be given a hearing, to be heard without haste and to be judged impartially.

'Merchants desire three things in kings: that they should have a knowledge of jewels and objects of value, that they should give a fair price and allow free trading.

'Travellers beg for three things from sovereigns: protection from robbers, lawful taxation and safety in the caravanserai.

'Those who are denounced ask three favours from kings: to confront their accusers, to have an unprejudiced inquiry and the right to defend themselves.

'Prisoners beg for three things from kings: pardon for their wrongdoing, mercy in place of wrath – and to see the king in person.

'That is the law of kings, that is their gift to their subjects, the citadel of warriors, the ramparts of cities! He who observes it sets himself and his kingdom on firm foundations.'

Ruka the eunuch said to Leon:

'Since you know so much concerning the governing of a kingdom, would it not have been better to teach it all to Djumber rather than beat and starve him?'

LEON told this tale:

## 34. *The Story of the Beardless Man* \* ქართველი ზნობრივი

There was once a beardless man who lived in a village. He was very poor and had one fat cow. He said to his wife:

'I am going to sell the cow, and perhaps I may buy clothing for you and myself.'

He took the cow to a town. There he met another beardless man, traded with him and was offered three pieces of silver. He demanded four. They could not agree. The beardless citizen went away, made a round of the markets and said to all the butchers:

'A beardless man is coming to sell a well-fatted cow; all of you tell him it is a goat, and say: "We will give you the price of a goat for it."'\*

He went and confided his plan to the Qadi and promised him the hide.

When the butchers saw the beardless owner of the cow approaching, they each offered him half a silver coin, saying:

'Sell me that goat!'

The beardless man was angry and said:

'Would I sell you a cow as big as a camel for the price of a goat?'

'It is a goat!' they said.

They took their dispute to the Qadi and asked him to judge between them. The Qadi also pronounced the animal to be a goat. Since he was to get the hide – enough leather for a pair of slippers – what sort of judgment would he give to the beardless man?

They paid him half a piece of silver, took away the cow and killed it. Downcast, the beardless man said:

'There is a saying that he who owns a goat has neither goat nor tail!'

He took the tail, and went away. A short time afterwards the Qadi's wife died. The beardless man heard of it. He took his own wife's veil and clothing, dressed himself as a woman, girdled himself with the cow's tail underneath his garments and went to the Qadi's house.

The Qadi came out, saw the figure of a woman, and took it to be somebody come to bring a petition; but the visitor said:

'I am not a petitioner, but a widow. I am left without a master and I will serve anyone who will provide for me.'

\* A familiar character in Georgian popular tales.





The Qadi was well pleased to hear this, for he no longer had a wife. He took the 'widow' into his house and said to his slaves: ԳՐԱԳԵՆՆԱԿ  
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'You may go off for the night, give yourselves a rest!'

He wished to take the newcomer to his bed.

When the Qadi approached, the 'woman' said to him:

'You cannot lie with me unless you are completely naked, for that is what I am accustomed to.'

The Qadi fell into the trap and undressed. 'She' unfastened the cow's tail and asked him:

'Qadi, what is this tail?'

'It is a cow's,' he replied.

The beardless man said:

'Then why did you make me sell it as a goat?'

He knocked the Qadi down and gave him such a thrashing with the cow's tail that he appeared to have breathed his last. The slaves were far away and there was no one to come to his aid. The beardless man left the house and went away. The slaves loitered, and the Qadi did not come out. When they entered the house, they found their master lying on the floor covered with bruises, with no woman near. With great difficulty they succeeded in bringing the Qadi back to life, and he told them of the beardless man's deception.

When the Qadi had recovered, he expressed a wish to go to the baths and have his wounds treated with healing oils. The beardless man came to hear of this. He went to the keeper of the baths and said to him:

'I am a highly skilled hairdresser and barber, and I have come to offer you my services.'

The man was pleased, and said:

'You are fortunate, for today the Qadi is paying us a visit.'


The beardless man fastened the cow's tail round his waist underneath his clothing, and took up his station at the baths. The Qadi arrived, and he began to attend him most skilfully. The Qadi was delighted, and ordered the barber to give him a massage. The barber said to the bath attendants:

'I am going to massage him. His bruises are still painful and he will groan and cry out, but let no one enter. If he wishes for something I will come out myself to ask for it.'

Thus the attendants were taken in; the barber drew out the cow's tail and said to the Qadi:

'What is this?'

The Qadi pleaded with him and offered him a large sum of



money, but the beardless man would not let him go, and beat him within an inch of his life. Then he went out and said to the attendants:

'He is asleep; do not go in and waken him. I am going to bring more of the ointment.'

The beardless man put on his own clothes and went away. When at last the attendants went in they found that the Qadi's bruises, far from being treated with salves, were inflamed and sore, and they laid him on his bed.

When he came to himself he said:

'I will not stay here for that beardless man to return and trap me into further torments. Make my camels ready: I shall go to the Kaaba.'

While the Qadi's men were inquiring about camels, the beardless man paid for three days' hire and led the camels to the Qadi's gate. When he was questioned about them, he said:

'I will give them to any man who wishes to hire them.'

The Qadi's men were pleased at this, and went to inform their master. They hired the camels and equipped one with a litter. The Qadi took his seat in it and they set off. He took with him everything he possessed.

The camel-man entertained them with stories on the way, which the Qadi enjoyed. He said to his slaves:

'Go on in advance and find a lodging in a village inn with barley, straw and provisions. I will follow more slowly with my camel-man.'

When the slaves had gone some distance ahead, the beardless man recounted as one of his tales the story of what had befallen himself and the Qadi. The Qadi said:

'I have heard that story many times before; tell me another one.'

'I speak of what touches me deeply,' the beardless man replied, 'how should I speak of other things?'

Then he dragged the Qadi down from the camel and beat him with the cow's tail until he breathed his last. He turned back, took the camels and all the Qadi's possessions, and went his way.

'I know, sire, that this Ruka of yours has something of the sort in mind for me, and I beg you to spare me that and let me go.'

The KING told a tale:

## 35. *Strength in Unity*

There was once a great king, who had thirty sons. When he felt the approach of death he called his sons to him and made each one take an arrow, all of which he bound together tightly and then strove to break them. He could not do it. Then he untied them and broke them all, one at a time.

He said to his sons:

‘If you close your ranks and show the enemy a common front he cannot break you, just as a moment ago I could not break that bunch of arrows; if you become divided, the enemy will destroy you as I broke them, one by one; stay together in love and friendship.’

Now, your case is like theirs. If you would all speak with one voice, my kingdom would rest on a firm foundation. Since you are at odds with each other, you will be the cause of its destruction.

It is the rule for vizirs, however many they are, to speak with one voice. The wits and counsel of one man alone are not equal to those of several; however wise he may be, he may make a wrong move and from that one false step others will follow. Two or three heads are always better than one. Vizirs ought to be on good terms with one another. Those who are given to malice and animosity are of no value to their master. A vizir who is loyal to his master should seek to turn an enemy into a friend, forgiving an insult to himself, so that there is accord between them and his master’s authority is reinforced.

A vizir should be able to keep a secret. If he falls out with another, the secret will be disclosed and betrayed in the course of their quarrel, and each will blame and accuse the other: ‘He swore not to speak of it.’

A vizir should desire the well-being of his sovereign and his country. When a king shows favour to one man, envy will turn another into a traitor.

A vizir should be pious, quick-witted and of good counsel; yet when a man looks on one who is his enemy, his heart is filled with wrath and his wits desert him.

A vizir should consider others’ words and judge for himself what

is best. Men never pay due regard to an enemy's opinions; if they do so, they become friends.

It is within the power of vizirs to make their king and country strong and stable, or to destroy them.

LEON observed:

'Your Majesty speaks truly, yet that eunuch causes me to regret that I have entered your service.'

He told the tale of:

### 36. *The Wolf as Farrier*

A wolf came upon a donkey and wished to make a meal of it.

The donkey said:

'I know you are going to eat me. Grant me one last favour: a piece of nail is wedged in the cleft of my hoof – pray take it out for me!'

The wolf opened his mouth to pull out the nail. The donkey struck out with both feet and smashed his teeth in, so that he was unable to crunch up the animal for meat.

The wolf said:

'My father was a shoemaker; why did I try to become a smith?'

RUKA told the tale of:

### 37. *The Thief's Son of Tabriz*

There was once a thief in the country of Tabriz. When he had nothing better to do he would dig up corpses and remove the shrouds from them, which he dyed and sold. He spread alarm and disquiet throughout the land, and everyone wished that he were dead.

The thief died, leaving a child. This boy took to stealing in a fashion altogether unheard-of: he dug up corpses, removed the shrouds and impaled the bodies. The people of that region began to

call down blessings on his father:

'He took the shrouds, but at least he did not impale the bodies!'



'By the King's head, you will give us cause to bless your father as they blessed the thief, for you have outdone him.'

LEON told the tale of:

### 38. *The Thieving Corpse*

In the province of Klarjeti\* there was a village crier, a cross-grained individual who was the scourge of his village. He harassed the people and bled them white: he made false accusations and denounced men to the Tatars, who exacted heavy fines from them.

The day came for this crier to meet his death. He called the men of the village together and addressed them:

'I have done you many wrongs, and since you could not harm me while I was alive, swear to God that when I am dead you will tie a rope round my neck, drag me out and hang me to a tree!'

The people were taken in, and after he died they did as he had directed. A Tatar saw the crier hanging from the tree, went away and told the Qadi:

'They have hanged our village crier!'

A man was sent to the village and forced the villagers to pay him a thousand silver pieces. They began to abuse the crier:

'When he was alive he made us poor, and now that he is dead he has ruined us!'

'Like that man, you plan to ruin me while you are alive, and do still worse after you are dead. I know that I cannot escape you.'

Ruka said to Leon:

'I do not desire your death or banishment. I wish only for what is best for my lord, and if you remain in his service it will be most injurious to him.'

RUKA told the tale of:

\* Formerly a Georgian province, under Turkish rule since the 16th century.

## 39. *The Oyster and the Lobster*



As a lobster moves about the sea-bed it may see a gaping mouth before it. When the oyster sees the lobster, it closes its shell. But the lobster goes nearer and touches the shell with its claw. If the mouth opens by even the smallest crack, the lobster gets its claw inside and little by little draws out and devours the living flesh.

'You would like to do the same, but until you can find an oyster with its mouth open you speak with a smooth tongue.'

LEON related a tale:

## 40. *Greed for Fruit*

In the city of Baghdad it is the custom for a man to give a fruit-grower two copper coins when he visits an orchard, and then to eat as many dates as he pleases.

A shepherd coming in from the country went and paid the customary fee, seated himself on the ground and ate half a silver piece's worth of dates.

The fruit-grower said to him:

'Brother, do not eat too much, for it will give you heartburn.'

The shepherd replied:

'Do not trouble about me – I know whose heart will burn!'

'Now, I know very well who finds my presence here harmful or beneficial, to whom it is vexatious or agreeable.'

The King said to Leon:

'I know that your words flow smooth as honey, and you enjoy conversation. This I have observed; but concerning my son, I do not know how much he has learnt from his master. Let me see him!'

Leon replied:

'Sire, if you will send a man to bring him and question him yourself, then you will find out.'

The King dispatched his mace-bearer to summon his son Djumber, but he did not come. He sent the Master of the House-

hold; he returned alone. Next he sent the Master of Ceremonies, with no more success. He sent the vizir, but his son did not come with him. Finally he sent his Treasurer, and his son came to him mounted on an elephant.



He sprang to the ground, unfastened his belt and laid it on the elephant's back, took some earth in one hand and a stone in the other and offered these to his father. He bowed to the ground and kissed his hand.

The King said to his son:

'O life of my heart and light of my eyes! I sent a man to bring you; why did you not come?'

Djumber replied:

'I have committed no crime.'

The King said:

'You did not come with the Master of the Household.'

Djumber said:

'I am not one of the slaves: he has no authority over me.'

The King said:

'When I sent the Master of Ceremonies, why did you not come with him? He is highest in rank among my nobles.'

Djumber said:

'If I came as a guest, who would be the host?'

The King said:

'Why did you not come with the vizir?'

Djumber replied:

'Am I making an attempt to seize the throne? God forbid! A vizir should never leave the king's side.'

The King then asked his son:

'Why did you at last accompany my Treasurer, who is unsatisfactory in his office and a youth of little worth?'

Djumber answered:

'He may be worthless to others, and he would not have been sent to them, but it is most proper to send your Treasurer for me: I am your treasure, your riches and your gain.'

The King was pleased with his son's answer. He asked Djumber:


'Why did you mount the elephant and ride it here?'

'On account of my noble rank, for those of royal blood and high position should have a lofty seat.'

The vizir asked Djumber:

'Why did you take off your belt and lay it on the elephant's back?'

He answered:



‘Whenever a king or a great personage rises from his seat in haste, he should leave something of his own on the seat in token of its exalted usage; otherwise it would be pulled down in his absence. There is a saying: “A stone weighs heavy when it is at rest, but grows light when it is in motion.”’

His father asked him:

‘Why did you offer me a stone and a handful of earth?’

He answered:

‘The meaning of the earth is this: even though you are a great and powerful king, you are of the earth and to that you will return. It is better that you should find favour with God than with men. The meaning of the stone is: however much wealth you have, if you do not make use of it, stone and gold are of equal worth to men.’

DJUMBER told this tale:

## DJUMBER’S TALES

### 41. *Buried Treasure*

A certain man buried a large quantity of gold in the ground. He went to visit the place every day. Another man saw him do this and said to himself:

‘What if I were to go and dig in the place that man visits so often, and find out what is there?’

He went out by night, dug up the gold, took it away and left a boulder buried in its place. The other man went to look at his gold; he dug and found the boulder there instead. He began to weep and lament.

The man who had stolen the gold went to him and asked:

‘Why are you weeping?’

‘I buried some gold, for I did not wish to spend it, and now it has been stolen and a boulder left in its place.’

The other said:

‘What a misfortune! Yet why do you weep? What is it to you whether there is gold in the ground, or a stone, since you will not spend it?’



‘Such is the case, sire, with treasure lying idle, if it is not spent and used to good purpose.’

The father said:

‘You are saying, then, that there is no value in keeping a store of wealth?’

DJUMBER said:

‘There is no value in being without possessions, but there is even less in hoarding what one has.’

Then he related this tale:

## 42. *The Drunken Heir*

There was once a rich merchant who had an only son. When he was dying, he gave his son directions as to the proper conduct of his affairs. He left three hundred pounds of lead to one of his slaves and made him understand that he was to keep it in safety and conceal it from his son until the son should be in need of it.

The merchant died. His son came into his inheritance and he and his boon companions drank as much wine as they pleased. He squandered all his father’s gains, and sold his wife’s jewellery. He became a poor man. When his slaves could see that nothing of his former wealth remained, their loyalty to him weakened.

He bethought himself of the lead, and asked his slave:

‘What have you done with it? My father entrusted three hundred pounds of lead to you: bring it to me!’

The man went away and returned with tears in his eyes. He said:

‘I buried it in the ground and a mouse has eaten it!’

His master did not believe him and consulted his companions, who told him:

‘It may well be true.’

He became very poor indeed. When he wished to drink with his companions, he had nothing now to contribute. He went away, took his wife’s veil and sold it to buy a loaf of bread and a little cheese. He took these with him and returned to his companions, who were carousing in a garden. When he came to the gate, he felt the need to relieve himself. He put down the bread and cheese and stood facing the drinkers as he did so. A dog came past and ate up the bread and cheese. The young man went in and joined his



comrades. They had forgotten how lavishly and at what expense he had entertained them, while they had done nothing in return, and now they reproached him:

‘Why have you come empty-handed?’

He was embarrassed, and replied:

‘I did bring some bread and cheese, but a dog has eaten them.’

That slave of his was drinking with them. He laughed, and said:

‘He is lying, how could a dog have eaten them?’

The young man, now reduced to tears, cried out:

‘The wrath of God be upon you! If one mouse could eat three hundred pounds of lead, how should a great mastiff not have the strength to finish off a piece of bread and a little cheese?’ And he went away in tears.

His slave rose and followed him and said:

‘How foolish you have been! Why did you throw away so much wealth? Who gives you any thanks for it? Now listen to me and do not drink any more. Come to your senses! I have the lead still. I knew that this day would come, and if I had given it to you earlier you would have squandered it. God grant that you now make proper use of what is yours.’

Thenceforward he employed it well, learned to trade and became once more a successful merchant.

It is well for a man to have great possessions as long as he makes use of them, otherwise a poor man is better than a bad rich one. There is an old story that a poor man said:

‘I am better off than kings because I am content with what I have and it is enough for me; but they are never satisfied, even when they are lords of all the earth.’

The King asked:

‘Since you claim to have learnt wisdom, tell me what is most pleasing to men and what is most vexatious?’

DJUMBER recited the following tale:

### 43. *The Clever Prince*

There was once a great king who had three sons. The king said:

‘I will test my sons, to discover which of them has the quality of mind to be a ruler.’

He put the same question to all three:  
'What is the fairest thing of all, what is the fattest and what is the swiftest?'

The eldest son replied:

'My wife is comely, my horse is plump and my goshawk is swift. There is nothing anywhere to excel them!'

The father said:

'You will never make a king!'

The second son said, to flatter his father:

'There is none more beautiful than the queen, better conditioned than the King's horse or swifter than the King's falcon.'

To him the king said:

'The throne is not for you.'

He asked his youngest son, who answered:

'On all the face of the earth there is nothing fairer than spring, more opulent than autumn or swifter than a glance of the eyes.'

That pleased his father, who made him heir to the throne.

'I know that you are testing me; but if I am found wanting, where will you find another son or a brother to succeed you?'

The King said:

'Well said; I should indeed have to look far.'

Djumber said:

'The pleasure of wrongdoing is short-lived, and turns sour and poisonous; one enjoys it in the beginning and regrets it in the end. There is nothing harder than to resolve on a good and gracious action, but as soon as one puts one's hand to it all goes smoothly; at first one is reluctant, and in the end one takes great pleasure in it. Wrong and evil actions come to an early and painful end, while good and gracious ones are enduring.'

DJUMBER told the tale of:

## 44. *The Affectionate Brothers*

Once there were two brothers. The elder had a wife and child, while the younger was unmarried. They could not live together, so they parted and divided everything they had between them. When they shared out the corn, they stored it one on each side of the threshing-floor.



The elder brother took some corn in secret from his store and put it into his brother's, saying to himself:

'God has granted me a wife and child, and I am making a profit. My brother has nothing. Let him have this and not go hungry.'

The younger brother took corn from his store and put it into his brother's:

'I am single, and it is easy for me to gain my bread wherever I go; but my brother has children and he must provide for them. He shall have this.'

The brothers did this every day. God gave them both an abundance of good things, and they never went short of food.

God turns a good and gracious action to increase.

The King said:

'Why did they put the corn into each other's store furtively in secret? What was to prevent them from giving it openly?'

Djumber laughed, and said:

'Men are narrow-minded; the division of property provokes ill-feeling, and generous acts cannot be done openly. It is better therefore to do such things in secret, and God moreover rewards them in greater measure: if someone who does you a service is boastful and patronising – you will feel insulted!'

DJUMBER told the tale of:

## 45. *The King who was Thrown down a Well*

There were once two kings who quarrelled. One of them overcame the other and threw him into a well. After a time a learned man passed by, who wished to rescue him and set him free. He called down into the well:

'Shall I not do well to set you free?'

The king expressed his gratitude.

The scholar let down the rope and pulled the king up. Again he said:

'Have I not done well to pull you out?'

The king again expressed his thanks. A third time the scholar said:

‘Have I not done well?’

The king lost patience and shouted:

‘Hola! Guards! This man has let me go!’

Guards came up and laid hands on the two of them. They asked the king:

‘Why did you give yourself away, and not make your escape?’

‘While he was pulling me up he repeatedly reminded me that he was doing me a favour; if he had gone with me on my way he would have suffocated me with talking of it, and I preferred to stay here.’

Thus one should do good in such a way as to please either God or men.

The King said:

‘I am glad to find such virtue in you. How have you, who are so young, come to know so much?’

Djumber answered:

‘All things come from God, and there are three things in particular which have led to it. First, I am the fruit of good stock; in the second place, I have been tended by a skilful gardener; thirdly, I have been in the charge of a careful guardian.’

‘Who are they?’ the King asked him.

His son answered:

‘The stock – yourself, from whom I was born; the gardener – the Vizir Sedrak, who brought me up: and my guardian Leon, who is educating me.’

Ruka went up to Djumber and said:

‘In two cases you have spoken truly, but in one you are wrong.’

Djumber asked him:

‘Which one is that?’

Ruka replied:

‘The stock and the gardener – there you are right and speak truly, but as for your guardian – he who cultivates the growing plant – he is wicked and false.’

Djumber said:

‘Even if I am wrong in one case out of three, I have still two that are right; while in you, two things are wrong: in manhood you are a woman, and in womanhood – you cannot be a real woman.’

Ruka said:

‘It is Leon who has put that into your head.’

DJUMBER told the tale of:

## 46. *The Foolish Donkey*

A camel and a donkey, both saddle-sore, became brothers, escaped from their master and ran away to summer pastures, where they grew fat up on the mountains. They forgot what it was to be starved and ill-treated. The donkey said to the camel:

'Brother, I would like to sing a song.'

The camel protested:

'Nay, brother! Do you not remember our piteous state before? No men come near us here, but if one were to hear your voice they would take us away and treat us even worse.'

The donkey did not believe him, and brayed. His voice was very loud. It happened that some travellers were passing nearby, whose camels and asses had broken down. When they heard the ass braying they were greatly pleased and said:

'Let us go and see if there is a building or a caravan near, perhaps we can hire a horse.'

They rode on, and saw a camel and a donkey, both sleek and well-conditioned, without an owner. They led them away and heaped them with heavy loads. After they had gone a long way the ass, exhausted by its burden, came to a halt. The travellers then lifted up both donkey and load and set them on the camel's back. They continued their march and came to a narrow path along the edge of a precipice.

The camel said to the donkey:

'Brother, I would like to caper about and dance the *samaya*.\*'

The donkey protested:

'What sort of place is this for dancing the *samaya*?''

The camel rejoined:

'There was a place for you to sing and there shall be a place for me to dance!'

Vengefully he reared and pitched the donkey into the abyss, where he was smashed to pieces.

'Your words should have an answer like the camel's, since everyone knows that all the knowledge I have has been taught me by Leon.'

\* *samaya*: Georgian women's dance, traditionally performed by three girls on festive occasions.

'Woe is me!' Ruka cried. 'At first Leon was alone, but now that he has taught the King's son to share in his designs and trained him as he wished, what will become of me?'



RUKA told the tale of:

## 47. *The King who Did Not Fear Death*

There was once a king who swore an oath:

'Death cannot slay me without my slaying him in return!'

He held himself in readiness with armour, sword and shield, and waited for Death. When the day came, and he fell ill, he took up the arms lying beside him.

Great was his distress when he put out his hand to the sword but could not draw it from the scabbard.

He cursed Death, saying:

'What sort of valour is this? First you deprive a man of his strength and then you slay him. If you have any courage, fight me man to man!'

'Leon has done the same to me, and now that he has won over my master's son, how am I to stand against him?'

DJUMBER told this tale:

## 48. *The Power of Wine*

Sultan Selim demanded of his vizir:

'Why do they drink – the drinkers of wine – when wine and intoxication are the cause of every kind of evil?'

The vizir replied:

'Greater good than evil may come of drinking wine. Blind men's eyes are opened, cripples walk and poor men become rich.'

The Padishah called for a blind man, a cripple and a beggar to be

brought before him, and wine was poured out for them. When the blind man had drunk deep, he said:

'God bless the sovereign, who has given us such good red wine!'

The cripple waxed indignant and said to the blind man:

'Who are you talking to? By our sovereign's sun, I'll give you such a kick as'll crack your ribs!'

The poor man said:

'If you kill him, I'll pay the blood money!'

The vizir said:

'See, O fortunate one, what wine can do! Without it how could this man see, or that one use his feet, or the other pay for the shedding of blood?'

'Now, Ruka! You are like those three unfortunates and like them, I'll wager, you drink wine, otherwise what could prompt you to say such things?'

RUKA told the tale of:

## 49. *The Shrewish Sister-in-Law*

There was once a poor man who had a shrewish sister-in-law. She used to scold him and say:

'Go out, steal something and bring it back.'

The poor man pleaded with her, but the woman gave him no peace. One day he was weeping from the blows she had given him, when he saw seven camels without an owner carrying a load of silk. He led them away and concealed them in a forest. Then he set out to return to his dwelling. On the way, he met a man who was searching for the camels, who said to him:

'I have seven camels missing, and if you can tell me anything of their whereabouts I will give you the price of one.'

The poor man replied:

'I have not seen them, but I have powers of divination greater than any sorcerer.'

Now it chanced that he had found a book of spells, which he had put in his pouch; he took this out and consulted it, and said:

'Now I do know.'

He conducted the owner of the camels along a different path, saying, 'There are the men leading them away!' and talking of one



thing and another that he saw. When they came near to the place where he had left the camels, he said:

'Those men got wind of our approach, they have abandoned the camels and run away; my magic powers have revealed this to me.'

He led the way to the place and showed the camels to their owner, who gave him a load of silk. He took it back to his dwelling. His sister-in-law was very pleased, and said:

'You are a good brother-in-law: continue to be so!'

At that time it happened that the king lost a priceless jewel, and men searched for it far and wide. The owner of the camels presented himself to the king and said:

'A short time ago I lost some of your camels, and a certain sorcerer found them for me.'

A man was sent immediately to bring the poor man before the king. There were many soothsayers in the audience chamber, and the poor man, who came without his black book, was given a place at the end of the waiting line. A slave went about among them carrying something in a golden casket, and saying:

'Whoever can divine what is in this casket will find the missing jewel.'

There were many guesses: some said it was a precious stone, others a pearl, others thought it to be various different objects. When it came to the turn of the new soothsayer the poor fellow found himself at a loss for words, sighed and said:

'Alas, sister-in-law, you have caused my death when I am innocent!'

He had said simply what he felt, but the king laughed:

'He speaks in riddles!'

For it happened that in the casket was a cricket, and he thought that the poor man was making a pun.\* He was taken away, robed in court dress and shown into the royal bedchamber to rest, with bed coverings like the king's; noblemen's sons stood guard at the door, and thus he was treated with great honour. The soothsayer, however, planned to make his escape if the young princes should fall asleep. The missing jewel had, as it happened, been stolen by one of them, and while the others were sleeping he clasped the soothsayer's feet:

'I stole the jewel: do not give me away!'

The poor man was well content to hear this, and said to the prince:

\* *mkali*, a cricket or locust; *mamkali*, you have killed me.



'I had divined as much this morning, but I spared you on account of your youth; I was moved to pity and could not bring myself to speak of it. Now go into the king's goosery, take a goose and make it swallow the gem, break one of its wings, and then go to your house and rest.'

At dawn the new soothsayer, in high spirits, took up a position in the middle of the parade-ground. The king rode out with his troops and questioned him about the jewel. He drew out his book, consulted it and said:

'Bring me all the king's geese!'

He examined them, but the marked goose was not among them, for it had been left in the goosery. He said to the poultry-men:

'There is one missing which has a broken wing.'

Everyone marvelled at this, and sang his praises. The last goose was brought.

'Cut open its belly: it has swallowed the jewel.'

The goose's belly was opened and the jewel taken out. The king was delighted: he loaded the soothsayer with presents and gave him one of his own horses with trappings of gold. The poor man had never ridden a horse in his life, and this horse had been trained to carry the king across the *maidan* and then to return with him. When the man mounted, therefore, and rode across the *maidan*, the horse turned when it came to the end and started to gallop back. He could not hold it, and cried out in terror:

'Help, help!'

As he arrived at the stables his horse came to a halt; the buildings collapsed, and all the king's horses were killed. The new soothsayer said:

'When I reached the far end of the *maidan* I knew what was about to happen and called for help; but nobody came to my aid.'

He gave the horse back to the king, who bestowed on him numberless valuable presents. When he returned to his own house he put off his fine robes, took with him what he needed and left the country, for he knew that in the end his imposture would be discovered; thus he escaped exposure.

'O King's son, it is better that your Leon should leave us now in secret, as that man did, before you discover for yourself that he is a deceiver.'

Then DJUMBER told the tale of:

## 50. *The Two Brothers*

Once there were two brothers, one of whom had a position at court while the other toiled at home. The courtier was a liar. He was close to the king, and was well rewarded. The brother who stayed at home was ignorant; one day he said to his brother:

'I ought not to live on the lies you tell; for if the king rewards you for it, could not I too think of something to say to him, so that he would show favour to me also?'

His lying brother said to him:

'I tell him such things as please him, and bring you a fair share of what he gives me; there is nothing to trouble you, and I do not reproach you; stay at home and be content.'

But he would not be hindered, and went to gain audience of the king.

'I hear dogs barking up in the air!' he said.

The king would have had him put to death:

'How dare he tell such lies!'

But his brother, the liar, came to his rescue and said to the king:

'That man, my brother, is an ignorant shepherd, but he would not tell a lie; it may be that an eagle carried off a puppy and bore it high into the air, and he heard its yelping. He has not the sense to tell one sound from another, and so he announced that a dog was barking.'

The king was satisfied with this explanation; he did not kill the simpleton, but gave him a robe of honour. He returned to his house, and his brother said to him:


'I have saved you from death: now stay at home, for you do not know how to speak at court.'

When the witless man put on the robe, however, he was filled with desire to tell an even greater lie. He went back to court, and told this story to the king:

'I was hunting a stag, and pierced its ear and its foot with a single arrow. It fell down, it was roasted in a sharp sauce and I ate it.'

The king, incensed at his lying, again commanded that he should be put to death. His brother took pity on him and spoke to the king:

'A little while ago I presumed to inform Your Majesty that this man is ignorant and uncertain in his speech. He knows how to



shoot, however. It appears that he drew his bow as the stag was scratching its ear, and thus the arrow struck both ear and foot. The stag fell. The arrow was tipped with steel. It may be that a flint was lying there and the point of the arrow falling against it struck a spark, which set fire to the dry grass so that the stag was roasted; perchance a currant bush laden with berries was growing there which was crushed by the stag in its fall, so that when my brother tasted it he thought the roast meat had a sharp sauce.'

Thus the brother's life was spared and he was released.

'How does it concern you whether or not Leon is a liar, if his converse is pleasing to the King? The proverb says: "If your master is fond of snakes, keep a snake in your pouch." A courtier should have regard to three things: First, never denounce a man who is a favourite with the king, for you will not be heeded and will harm no one but yourself; secondly, praise any man whose converse the king enjoys, for if you abuse him none will listen and you will fall from favour; thirdly, seek the friendship of one who is trusted by the king, otherwise your life will be short.'

RUKA told the tale of:

## 51. *The Three Comrades*

Three men met who were comrades: one from Ispahan, one from Gilan and the third from Ganja. Each of them spoke in praise of his own province. The man from Ispahan said:

'In my province, if you put an old melon beside a new one, you cannot tell which is this year's and which is last.'

The man from Gilan said:

'In my province, if you lay a corpse in a bed beside a living man who is asleep, you cannot tell which of the two is alive.'

The man from Ganja said:

'In my province, a man walks for six months after his death and goes down into his grave in the seventh month. If he falls ill of a fever in the spring, he does not die until the autumn.'

There was little to be said for any of those three provinces, yet each man was pleased with his own.



'This Leon of yours is a very wicked man, but the good and evil in him alike appear to you as good. Why do you prevent me from speaking to him, yet speak to me yourself?'

Djumber said:

'You lost your moustache and beard when you were made a eunuch; why have you kept the hair round your missing organ?'

Ruka said to Leon:

'You have bewitched him, as well you know.'

DJUMBER told this story:

## 52. *Seeing and Unseeing*

A man with twenty silver pieces was walking along a road. He came upon a blind beggar without a guide who was feeling his way with a stick. The traveller said to himself:

'I will test this blind man, to find out what sort of a fellow he is.'

He went on and came face to face with the blind man, jostled him, and complained loudly:

'Who are you, stumbling into a blind man without a guide and assaulting him? Have you no fear of God, to treat me thus?'

The sightless man rejoined:

'I too am blind, and get about with a stick. I stumbled against you unawares, do not blame me for it!'

They sat down and began to converse together, and became friendly. The man who had his sight said to the other:

'I have been lent some twenty pieces of silver, and I do not know which of them are pure silver and which are alloy.'

The blind man said:

'Before I lost my sight I was a silversmith, and I used to strike coins. Give them to me; I shall be able to tell you by touch which are pure silver.'

The other gave all his money to the blind man, who tucked it into his belt and crept away to lie down in a ploughed field, thinking that he would be hidden in the furrows. As the hour grew late, the other man raised his voice:

'What are you doing, why are you taking so long?'

Then he began to plead:

‘Do not take money from a sightless man, who earned it with such toil in many places; you cannot wish to have such a sin on your conscience!’

The beggar took the other man to be blind, and stayed in hiding. The other ceased his pleading, picked up a stone and said:

‘God, if that man is not justified in taking from me what is mine, let this stone strike his foot.’

He flung the stone, and it fell on the beggar’s foot. The blind man rose from where he lay and moved to another place, thinking that he could not be seen. The other took a bigger stone and prayed aloud to God:

‘If he has wrongfully taken my hard-earned gains from me, who have lost my sight, may this strike him on the shoulder.’

He hurled the stone at the blind man and struck him on the shoulder. He bore this second blow also without uttering a sound, and slipped away to a new hiding-place. The other picked up a third stone and said:

‘God, let this stone strike him on the forehead.’

The blind man said to himself:

‘Two of them have found their mark, and if this one strikes my head it will kill me: who then will have the silver?’

He cried out:

‘Have no fear, brother: I will separate the good coins from the false, and give them back to you.’

The man who could see abused him roundly and said:

‘You are a wicked man! You, who are blind, would steal from me, who have my sight!’

‘You are as blind as he in spirit, and you think that everyone is like yourself.’

Ruka said:

‘You are young and foolish, to be taken in by Leon’s words; you have no discrimination, and a man who cannot discriminate will not fail to be trapped by misfortune.’

RUKA told the tale of:

### *53. The Donkey and the Tiger*

A wretched, starved donkey belonging to a poor man escaped from his master and ran away. He made his abode in a place high up on a



hillside, where tall trees grew along the banks of a great river at the foot of towering rocks; beyond them were green meadows sprinkled with flowers. As it happened, the donkey had come to a place where a tiger made his home. The tiger was away hunting, and when he returned he saw the donkey. He was greatly surprised and alarmed. When the donkey saw the tiger he thought his last hour had come, pricked up his ears and brayed with all his might. The tiger was so terrified that he did not pause to find the trail but leapt over the rocks and fled. A fox crossed his path. Seeing that the tiger was in some distress, he bowed respectfully and said:

'O king of beasts, where are you going and what is troubling you?'

The tiger answered:

'A strange giant has arrived in my kingdom; fear has driven me out, and that is why I am troubled.'

The fox questioned him, and he described the strange creature: his whole appearance, his four legs, large ears, loud voice, colouring and everything about him.

The fox told him:

'That is a donkey. Do not flee, I will drive it away and you shall rest undisturbed.'

The tiger would not listen: he went on his way, and the fox went with him. They encountered a wolf, who bowed low and asked the fox:

'Why is the tiger distressed, and where is he going?'

The fox told the wolf everything:

'An ass has made him take to flight; I have tried to prevent him, but he will not turn back.'

The wolf said:

'Do not be alarmed, that is my dinner and I am very hungry. Let us go, and I will settle his affairs!'

The tiger said:

'If you are not plotting to deceive me and are speaking the truth, bring me a rope and we will tie it round us, myself in the middle with one of you on each side. We will go forward together, and whatever may befall us, will befall us all three!'

The fox ran off and stole a piece of rope which he brought back; they bound themselves together and went forward as one. When the donkey saw them coming towards him in this fashion his terror was extreme and he began to bray at the top of his voice. The tiger, in a panic, no longer heeded his two counsellors but took to his heels,

leaving them strangled with the rope. After a time he said to himself:

'I cannot live and sustain myself in any other place: I will go back and offer my services to that giant, possibly he will spare me and I shall see my dwelling place once more.'

He turned back and approached the donkey with great deference, and begged to be taken into his service. The donkey was afraid of him, and he was even more afraid of the donkey. The donkey said:

'Since you are to serve me, you shall live well; I will make you my steward; I will pardon you two offences, but beware if you commit a third!'

Thus they lived together in amity. After some time had passed the donkey was asleep one day when the tiger felt playful and bounded across the river; he thrashed the water with his tail and splashed the sleeping donkey; the donkey, annoyed at being woken, upbraided him severely. On another occasion the donkey went down to the water where it was deep, tumbled in and began to drown. The tiger plunged in to go to his master's aid, and pulled him out. The donkey was seeking a pretext to be rid of the tiger, and he pretended to be angry and abused him:

'I was fishing for trout: why did you drag me away?'

In fear of committing a third offence, the tiger departed from those haunts, and the donkey was left in possession.

'Son of a king! The meaning of this fable is, do not bind and strangle those who counsel you as the tiger did, do not make rogues your vassals, consider well before you act – otherwise you will regret it.'

DJUMBER told the tale of:

## 54. *The King of India and the Barber*

The King of India was at the baths, and the barber was shaving him. He held his razor to the king's throat, and said:

'Give me your daughter to wed!'

The king, in astonishment, promised to do so. When he left the baths, he asked his vizirs:



‘How can a barber presume to ask for my daughter?’

They replied:

‘Doubtless he has come into wealth, and that has emboldened him to speak.’

They took up the tiles in the baths and found a quantity of gold and silver buried beneath them.

‘Ruka! either you have stumbled on a store of riches, or God has condemned you to death – otherwise why do you repeat such idle tales?’

Then RUKA told the tale of:

## 55. *The Ploughman, the Weaver and the Tailor*

Once upon a time there were three brothers: one was a ploughman, one a weaver and the third a tailor. The eldest, the ploughman, was advanced in years. His wife died, and he wished to marry again. His brothers tried to dissuade him, but he would not listen to them. When nothing could be done to deter him, an old woman was found of an age suited to his. The marriage was celebrated. On the same night a camel loaded with treasure came to halt outside their door. The newly-wed pair killed the camel, threw it into a pit and hid the load. They consulted together:

‘If anybody comes searching for the camel, we will spin him a yarn.’

When the wedding festivities were at an end, the owner of the camel arrived. The old man was working on the land, and when he saw the newcomer approaching he guessed that this was the camel’s owner. The latter called out:

‘God speed the plough!’

The ploughman replied:

‘I am sowing spelt.’

The camel-man was surprised, and said:

‘I have lost my camel. I will reward you well if you can tell me where it is.’

The old man said:

'If it were summer, I could sow plenty of corn for the autumn.'

The camel owner said:

'I am inquiring about my camel, not about crops.'

'The black bull is beyond anyone's control.'

The camel owner went away in vexation. He came to the outskirts of the village, where the weaver was weaving a warp, and went up to him to ask:

'I have lost my camel: tell me if you know anything of its whereabouts.'

The weaver said:

'I am a skilled weaver; I weave two of these in a day.'

The camel owner said:

'I am inquiring about my camel, not about weaving.'

The weaver replied:

'This is for another man – otherwise I would sell it to you.'

The camel man was perplexed, thinking:

'I am in a country of madmen!'

He left the weaver and went on into the village, where he questioned the tailor. The tailor replied to him:

'I am paid six coppers.'

The camel-man exclaimed:

'Young fellow, I am inquiring about a camel – a camel!'

The tailor said:

'I have no time to spare, ask somebody else to make it.'

The camel-man left him and went on. When he came to the river, he met with the newly-wed old woman. He questioned her. She told him the whole story, and described the camel:

'Such and such a camel came to our door; my husband and brothers-in-law killed it and hid the goods it was carrying.'

The owner of the camel asked:

'When did that happen?'

The old woman told him:

'On the very night of my wedding.'

The man said:

'Both men and women in these parts are out of their minds! It was yesterday that I lost my camel, and now this old woman tells me it was her wedding day!'

He left the village, and returned empty-handed to his dwelling. The old woman had spoken the truth, but the camel-man did not believe her.

'I likewise am telling you the truth, but my truth appears to you more false than a lie, and when I speak fair words you hear them as worse than evil speech. You are young, and think yourself endowed with wisdom; you are a lord and you find eunuchs hateful, a king's son and you will have but one man to attend you. Since you are so wise I will set you a riddle, for you and your Leon.'

'What is it?' Djumber demanded.

RUKA said:

## 56. *The Wolf, the Goat and the Hay*

I will throw a narrow bridge for you over a stream, and on it there will be a wolf, a goat and a truss of hay. You are to bring them across one at a time in such a way that the wolf does not kill the goat nor the goat eat the hay.

The King's son consented, and Ruka set up a bridge, and at his command a wolf, a goat and a truss of hay were brought. Djumber came and led the goat over the bridge. Leaving it on the opposite bank, he returned to bring the wolf across, left it on the bank and crossed the bridge again taking the goat with him. Then he left the goat on the nearer bank and took up the hay, which he carried over the bridge and set down beside the wolf. He crossed the bridge once more to the nearer bank, and led the goat across to join the wolf and the hay.

Then he said:

'Ruka, there is your problem solved, and now you shall solve one of mine. I have answered you with action: you shall answer me in words.'

Ruka said:

'What is your riddle?'

DJUMBER replied:

'Since you are a eunuch, it is your calling to be a guardian of women: by your nature you should be able to guess my riddle.'

## 57. *Melas, Metur and Marasan*



Three men who were strangers to each other met on the bank of a broad river. All three were accompanied by their wives. They found a small boat in the water, not large enough to carry more than two of them.

'Take those six persons across the river, contriving it so that none of the men can lay hands on another's wife!'

Ruka puzzled over the riddle and found it hard to solve; he could not arrive at the answer and was much disheartened. There was a long discussion between the King, the vizir and Ruka:

'No, that is not the way; no, it should be done thus!'

Nobody could reach the right conclusion. Ruka swore:

'It is ill-conceived, an idle fabrication, for it is one that the wisest of men cannot solve.'

Djumber said:

'Like the hare among wild animals and the kite among the fowls of the air, you know yourself for what you are among men: do not belie yourself!'

But Ruka repeated what he had said.

Leon urged Djumber:

'Pray lead them over yourself, otherwise he will never take back what he said.'

Ruka agreed to this, and Djumber said:

'The names of the three men are: Melas, Metur and Marasan. Melas pulled the boat in to the bank, stepped in, placed his wife in it and crossed to the further side; he landed his wife on the opposite bank and took the boat back. The other two women crossed the river together and joined the first. Melas' wife then took the boat and ferried herself back to her husband. Metur and Marasan embarked together and joined their wives. Metur and his wife now returned to Melas; Metur and Melas left their wives on the nearer bank and took the boat over to land beside Marasan. Marasan's wife entered the boat and crossed over to bring Melas' wife back with her; finally, Metur took the boat, ferried his wife across, and they all went off together.'

The King laughed, and said:

'I would never have believed those women could be brought across the river.'

The VIZIR SEDRAK said:

'If Leon is a wicked man, you cannot wish him to live! Slay him, if he has brought up your son to be ignorant! What father could beget such a child, what tutor bring up one like him – a son humbly besought of God, born by the grace of God, with a tutor beheld in a vision and designated on account of his wisdom – Leon? Djumber cannot be without Leon, nor Leon without Djumber!'

## 58. *Sharing Out Goats*

Three brothers appeared before the king to present a petition. They wished to divide their possessions equally between them and live apart. They had shared out everything except for thirty goats, about which they could not come to an agreement. They explained to the king this matter of the goats:

'Ten of the goats have each one kid, ten have two each and ten have three; we wish to share them out in such a way that no one brother has more than another, and the kids are not separated from their dams.'

There was a long discussion. No one could arrive at a solution. They consulted Djumber, the King's son, and he said:

'There are thirty goats with sixty kids. Give the ten goats that have two kids each to the eldest brother, that is ten goats and twenty kids. Give five of the ten goats with three kids each to the second brother, and five to the youngest – that is five goats and fifteen kids to each of these two brothers. Divide also the ten goats with one kid equally between the second and youngest brothers. Thus each of the brothers will receive ten goats and twenty kids, so that none has more than his brothers, and the kids are not parted from their dams.'

The King was vastly pleased when the question was settled in this way. In gratitude he gave Leon a robe of honour and many valuable presents, and mounted him on his own charger.

Ruka commented:

'He has earned high praise by instructing Djumber in the art of sharing out sheep and goats. If he had taught him how to rule a kingdom and how to comport himself as a young man, would His

Majesty have offered Leon his kingdom?’  
RUKA told the tale of:



## 59. *The God-King and his Angel*

There was once a king who gave himself out to be God, and nobody dared to contradict him. He had a good and quick-witted vizir, who said to him:

‘Since you are God, grant me the honour to be your angel!’

The God-King appointed the vizir to be his angel. After some time had passed, the king said to his angel:

‘Come, let us perform a miracle!’

His angel said:

‘If you will hearken to me, I will cause a strange and splendid miracle to be performed.’

The king consented. The vizir had everything removed from the royal apartments; they were then filled with dung and entrails from goats, sheep and cattle, and the doors were shut. It was summer. They waited ten days, and on the eleventh they went to the palace:

‘Let us see what miracle we have achieved.’

They unfastened the doors and looked in. Maggots, worms and dung-beetles were swarming everywhere and a fearful stench came forth. The king said to the vizir:

‘What sort of miracle is this?’

And the vizir replied:

‘For us, this is a great miracle indeed! With you as God and myself as your angel, what better could have been expected?’

‘For a prince such as Djumber with Leon for his tutor, it means much that he has been taught this lesson of the goats and kids, and everyone should recognize its value; for if we reproach Leon he will be abashed and cease to instruct his pupil in the rearing of cattle and buffaloes.’

The KING related this fable:

## 60. *The Tortoise and the Scorpion*



A tortoise and a scorpion became sworn brothers and set out on their travels. Their path led to a river, which they had to cross. The scorpion was discouraged because he could not swim.

The tortoise said:

'Climb on my back and I will carry you across.'

The scorpion seated himself on the tortoise's back. When the tortoise was swimming in the river, the scorpion began to sting him. The tortoise asked him:

'Brother, what are you doing?'

The scorpion answered:

'I have no wish to do it, but that is the way with my family: we have to sting everybody, friend and foe alike.'

The tortoise dived down into the water, shaking off the scorpion, and said:

'Brother, I too have no wish to do this, but in my family, if we do not wash poison off our bodies we swell up and die.'

'Ruka, you and all your like snap at friends and enemies; nevertheless, heed my words and do not bite off more than you can chew, or find yourself left to drown. A fox is only a beast, yet it has the sense to know that too many fleas lodging in its coat will cause it discomfort. It fastens its teeth on a piece of old leather and dips its tail in a stream; when the fleas run up its body towards its head, and on to the piece of leather, it plunges its head in the water and lets go of the leather with the fleas on it.

'If many fleas are harmful to a living creature, what does the enmity of many men mean to a man? It is bad indeed if a man has not a single friend among all those round him.'

Ruka said:

'Do not give an evil man a place at your court, and I shall have no enemies.'

The King replied:

'If I were to appoint no bad men, you would be the first to be dismissed. Be assured that kings are well acquainted with the doings of eunuchs and other such persons, while nobody can understand the problems of kings unless he himself has reigned, — a throne is too lofty to be viewed from below.'

## 61. *The Sage and the Rich Man*

There was a certain wise man who had lost all his wealth in trading. He set out and travelled to all the countries of the earth until he came to India. There he inquired who was the most God-fearing among the richest men of that country. When he had learned this and discovered where the rich man lived, he went to his house and said to him:

‘Brother, a little time ago you borrowed some silver from me, forty pounds in weight; now I am in great need and I beg you, in God’s name, to repay it!’

The rich man denied the debt: he owed nothing, why should he pay? He asked:

‘When did I lend it, who is your witness and where is the bill of exchange?’

The sage replied:

‘You had matters to attend to at the time, and you said: “I have no time at present but come back tomorrow, and I will give it to you.”’

‘I trusted you and took you at your word. Then other matters demanded my attention, I had to go away and I forgot to return to you. Now I beg you to repay me. If I am lying, swear in the name of God that you owe me no silver, and I will go away.’

That wealthy and God-fearing man said to himself:

‘Wherefore should I invoke God’s name over such a trifling amount? He has given me so much, enough for many men; if I give this man forty pounds of silver, I shall not incur God’s wrath if I spend the rest of my riches on myself.’

He did not take an oath, but gave the other what he asked. The wise man took the silver and departed, and he said within himself:

‘O God who art just and true! Thou knowest that I have done this on account of my poverty. Now if I am successful in trading, I will give all my gains to that man and tell him the whole story.’

He set forth and journeyed to China. There he carried on trade until he grew rich and had more wealth than any other merchant. Several years later he returned to the city in India, sought out the rich man and invited him to his house. Although the sage knew him,





the rich man did not recognize the sage. He led his guest to his treasure-chamber and showed him all his possessions. The rich man marvelled at the splendour and profusion of precious things. He expressed his admiration with many compliments. Then his host drew out the key of the chamber and presented it to him, kissing his hand and saying:

‘All this is yours. May God be your guide!’

The rich man had forgotten what had gone before, and he asked the sage who he was and whence he came. The sage told him the whole story, and said:

‘It was because of my poverty that I invented the tale: you owed me nothing. I had nothing left of what was mine. Now everything here is for you to take and enjoy!’

The rich man was amazed at the other’s uprightness and generosity. He chose a belt and the material for one shirt, and said:

‘I take these only in token that I do not reject your generous present. God be with you and aid you. Now that I have seen this proof of your magnanimity, all that I have is yours also.’

‘My son, it is God’s will that I do likewise for you and bestow on you my throne and kingdom: reign over all so that no man shall be your enemy!’

RUKA told the tale of:

## 62. *Two Cups of Wine*

A certain vintner went down into his cellar to inspect his wine. He saw a cup standing beside a wine-jar, and questioned his cellarman:

‘Why is that cup standing there?’

The man answered:

‘Whenever I come in here, I take a drink of wine.’

The vintner was put out, as he thought: ‘My wine is going down that man’s throat.’

He appointed a second man as overseer, to keep the first from drinking so much. When next he visited the cellar he saw two cups standing beside the wine-jar. He asked the cellarman:

‘What is the meaning of this?’

The man said:

‘One of them is mine, from which I drink, and the other is for my

comrade whom you have appointed.'

'Just so, Your Majesty! You have given a fine kingdom to your son, and you will have given one equally fine to Leon, for one kingdom will not be enough for the two of them.'

DJUMBER was very angry, and told this tale:

### 63. *The Tinker and the Donkey*

There was once a tinker who loaded his donkey with corn and took it to the mill. He was returning with the flour, when the donkey came to a standstill. When it would not go on he took some ammonia crystals from his pocket, crushed them on a stone and rubbed the powder under the donkey's tail, thinking it might sting it into moving faster. The donkey galloped off at such a pace that the tinker could not keep up with it. Fearing that his donkey might be lost or stolen, he applied a little of the salts of ammonia to his person:

'Now perchance I can catch my donkey.' Indeed, thus goaded, he overtook his beast and ran on through the village and past his own house. He called out to his wife as he went:

'The ammonia is burning me, I cannot stop! See to the donkey!'

'Ruka, you too have excited yourself with ammonia and that is making you reckless, for otherwise how could you dare to speak thus in the King's presence, saying things that are unseemly for you or any man to utter?'

Then Djumber bowed low, prostrated himself before his father and kissed his feet, and said:

'Blessed be He who created you, joyful and exalted be your destiny, may your name be ever glorious! From your noble heart you yet deign to speak with humility, while I am not worthy so much as to behold you face to face, still less to receive such favour. For me, to hear your gracious commands appears as the greatest of all honours. Any virtue that I have, I receive from you, for who has ever seen a harvest of wheat reaped from a sowing of millet, or persimmons gathered when thorn-trees were planted? A good tree bears good fruit, for there is no good fruit without sound stock, neither can watering or skilful care restore a sickly plant. As the proverb says:



“A hawk is hatched from a hawk’s egg, a kite chick from a kite’s.”

‘Do not let me boast of my virtues or think of them as mine. When a mason has built a house with good workmanship, is its excellence in the house or in the builder? When a horseman breaks in a foal, does the bridle win praise, or the rider? I am flesh of your flesh, and Leon’s pupil; what is good in me is not my own: my physical form I owe to you, and what I have learnt, to Leon. I do not say, therefore, that you have not heaped gifts and favours on Leon, or that he is worthy of a tenth part of them; but he has many enemies: let them not defame him at Your Majesty’s court.’

DJUMBER related this fable to his father:

## 64. *The Christian and the Jew*

A Christian and a wealthy Jew living in Istanbul were enemies. From time to time the Jew used to bribe the Turks to throw the unfortunate Christian into prison. Sometimes he was beaten, sometimes bound, and he suffered greatly. One day the Christian asked the Jew:

‘How many prophets were there?’

The Jew answered:

‘Twenty-four.’

The Christian said:

‘Write down their names!’

The Jew wrote them all down. The Christian said:

‘Why have you not written down Mohammed?’

The Jew said:

‘When was he ever one of the saints?’

The Christian, because the Jew was his enemy, had called on a Turk to be witness to his questioning. The Turk went away and informed the Qadi. The Jew was seized and hanged.

Thus every enemy is on the watch for the moment to bring down his foe.

If you have a powerful enemy you must either make peace with him or take to flight; if he is your equal, come to terms with him, or otherwise be on your guard; beware most of all the foe who is mean



and insignificant. He is like a smouldering fire, hidden and unseen beneath the ashes, that burns your groping hand. The 'little' enemy comes upon you like death, imperceptibly, and neither bribes nor force nor entreaty can prevail against him. When once he has you in his power he will never release his hold, for fear that you might escape him. A 'little' enemy is like a pit covered over with hay; when you step on the hay, you fall into the pit. Thus every man should beware of an insignificant enemy, for such a foe is his ill fortune!

It is shameful to meet with either good or evil fortune at the hands of an evil man; whereas from a good man there is glory in good and evil alike, for if there is no evil in you, how can a wicked man overcome you, and if you are not worse than he, what do you need to ask of him? Likewise, if you are a good man he will treat you well, for good comes of what is good; and if he uses you ill, that is because he excels you in three things – goodness, wit and strength – and so he will overcome you. But man's highest virtue is not to let his mind dwell on evil, but to overcome it with goodness.

RUKA said:

'O king's son, with these tales of yours you seek to bring about my downfall and raise Leon to favour; but through his hostility to me Leon will bring the same thing upon himself as befell the man in this fable:

## 65. *The Reapers of Derbend*

Some reapers set out from the village of Derbend to cut hay, mounted on horses and carrying scythes in their hands. A dispute arose between them concerning the hay. One set the handle of his scythe on the ground and said as he leant on it:

'Up to this point it is mine!'

Another said:

'Nay, it is mine; the boundary is here!'

Another grew very angry. It happened that the handle of his scythe was short, and when he leaned down from his horse to make his claim the blade sprang up and struck him on the neck, and cut off his head. His share of the hay went to another man.

'Beware that your Leon's glory does not fall to me, and he does not come to grief!'

DJUMBER told the tale of:



## 66. *The Mullah of Gilan*

There was once a mullah in Gilan who had sown some rice, when wild hogs threatened to ruin the crop. The mullah dug a large pit in the path of the hogs, covered it with reeds and went away. The hogs came along their usual trail, and when they trotted over the pit the reeds gave way and a big boar fell in. The mullah returned and saw the boar trapped in the pit. He picked up a yoke and began to jab at the boar below him, cursing it the while, until one end of the yoke caught him on the neck and he fell into the pit beside the boar. The animal attacked him with tusks and teeth until all his bones were broken. The more the mullah begged for mercy, the more savage the boar became.

'Like that mullah, you will fall into the trap that you have set and your cries for help will go unheeded.'

Ruka said to Djumber:

'Since you liken your Leon to a boar, my cup is full and I ask for nothing more!'

RUKA told the tale of:

## 67. *The Two Rich Men*

There was once a man of great wealth, and another who was widely reputed to be amazingly rich. The first man said:

'I have treasure beyond reckoning – even kings have not as much as I; yet I hear that that man's wealth is greater than mine, and I will go to see for myself what possessions he has.'

He went to that man and asked to see his store of treasure. The rich man conducted him to it, showed him countless vast granaries filled with wheat and barley, and said gaily:

'What favours God has shown me!'



His wealthy visitor abused his host and abused also those who sang his praises, and added:

'I have as many pearls as you have grains of corn, but I do not count myself rich,' and took his leave.

The following year there was a famine so severe that no bread was to be had and everybody was starving. The rich man went to the other whose wealth was stored in grain, and offered him pearls in exchange for bread. He received no answer. Then in desperation he sent camel-loads of goods and gems. These were returned to him with the message:

'Do not think that I will sell you bread for any of your valuables, but if you send me your wife you may take as much as you will!'

The rich man was most sorrowful when he heard this, and said:

'If I part with my wife, what can I say to my friends, or for whom shall I be buying bread? On the other hand, if he gives me no bread, my children will starve to death.'

He could think of no other way out of his dilemma, so he set his wife on a horse and sent her away. The other man went to meet her when she arrived, and said:

'You are like a mother to me. Since your husband, who was so arrogant and abusive when I saw him, has humbled himself thus far, take as much as you wish and return to your house!'

He gave her a large load of corn, and let her go.

'Djumber! Since you hold Leon in such contempt that you compare him with dogs and swine, what have I now to fear?'

Djumber laughed, and said:

'A plague on your gloating! Is a bad mullah any better than a hog? Since it gives you so much pleasure, I will call him a hog again, if you will. Only, how will that benefit you?'

Ruka said:

'Indeed, if you call him a hog, I will become his friend.'

Djumber said:

'Half-man that you are, why do you put on the airs of twenty? The wren is such a foolish bird that when the heavens thunder it lies down on its back, thinking to hold up the sky with its feet so that the heavens will not fall and the earth collapse beneath them; while the haughty crane never stands with both feet on the ground but keeps walking, for fear that the earth might give way beneath its weight. What do you take yourself to be?'

DJUMBER told the tale of:

## 68. *The Fox and the Crane*

A fox invited a crane to sup with him, and offered him a brew of lentils in a copper dish. Both began to eat. The fox lapped the food with his tongue, but the crane – how could he feed? He pecked at it, taking a grain at a time. Next day the crane entertained the fox and served peas, which he poured into a narrow-necked jar. Both addressed themselves to the food. The crane dipped his bill into the jar and began to eat. The fox could not get even his lips inside: how was he to make a meal? He lost patience, quarrelled with his host and insulted him. The crane lost his temper and flung dirt into the fox's eyes. Were their courtesy and good fellowship more real than their anger and hostility?

'What do your friendship and affection mean, or your malice? Certain men, when they receive some favour from their lord, think it is themselves who are the occasion of it, and do not see that it comes from him. Being a eunuch, it is your duty to serve the King loyally day and night; while that young man is attached to me and his duty is to serve the King and to teach and train me. What quarrel have you with him, or he with you?'

RUKA told the tale of:

## 69. *The Qadi and the Mule*

Two men were travelling together. One of them struck his foot on a stone, and cursed the devil. The other man said:

'Why are you angry? Is it he who made you stumble? You all curse him thus without reason.'

When the two companions parted the devil came up and spoke to the man who had been his advocate:

'Since you came to my defence, I will reward you. I will turn myself into a fine specimen of a mule; you mount me and ride to the

city of Aleppo; the Qadi there is preparing to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and wishes to buy a mule; do not sell me until he offers a hundred florins, and then go on your way!

Then the devil changed into a mule, the man mounted it and rode past the Qadi's door. The mule was well-conditioned, with a dappled coat, and it was a smooth pacer. The Qadi's servants questioned its owner and he told them it was for sale. They immediately went into the house and gave this news to the Qadi. They bought the mule for a hundred florins. The Qadi was delighted with it, and had it tethered in front of his house. After two or three days, when the servants were absent about various duties, the Qadi was gazing admiringly at his new purchase when the mule slipped its halter, tossed its head and plunged into a ewer standing nearby.

The Qadi gave a loud cry. The servants came running, and he told them what he had seen. They said:

'Something has given him a fright and he is out of his mind, or how could he prate of a mule squeezing itself into a ewer!'

They fell upon the Qadi, tied him up and tortured him severely.

He swore:

'I am not mad: what I told you is the truth!'

They would not listen. For forty days they gave him no rest but forced him to dance and put him to the torture. When at last his strength failed, he said to them:

'Now I am cured!'

They released him. He was sitting alone, when he saw two ears prick up from the mouth of the ewer. He called out:

'Help, help! Here it is again!'

The men ran up and seized him, and treated him even more cruelly than before. Again he assured them:

'Now I am entirely restored to health!'

Again they released him. He was resting peacefully, when again those ears rose out of the ewer. The Qadi said:

'I do see you, but I dare not speak for fear of being tortured.'

The Qadi had truthfully related what he had seen, but nobody believed him.

'I too speak of what I see, as he did, and tell the truth, but nobody will listen: what can I do?'

DJUMBER replied with this tale:



## 70. *The Blacksmith of Shami and the Devils*

There was once a blacksmith in the city of Shami who was always cursing the devil. This gave offence to all the devils, and they devised a plan to trick the smith. One of them approached the smith in the guise of an old man, accompanied by another who took the form of his son, and offered him twenty florins:

‘Will you teach your craft to my son here?’

The smith was pleased and agreed to take charge of the boy, promising to instruct him well in his trade. Two months later the devil changed himself into a feeble old man, went to the blacksmith and offered him two hundred florins, saying:

‘I have grown old and I have no strength left. Accept this in payment and melt me down, change me into a man thirty years old!’

The blacksmith swore at the devil:

‘How is it possible to do such a thing?’

Then his apprentice said:

‘Take the money; I am a smith’s son and I am well able to do it.’

A devil indeed is versed in devilry. They bound the greybeard and laid him in the furnace, heaped it with coal and blew it into a blaze with the bellows. He cried out and made much ado:

‘I am burning, pray do not let me burn!’

They blew even harder. How could they burn a devil? After a short time, a man thirty years old emerged from the fire. Everyone was amazed, and the story of the miracle spread:

‘That blacksmith is so skilled in his craft that he can transform a man two hundred years old into a youth of twenty!’

The Qadi of Shami came to hear of it; he was a very old man, and he brought the blacksmith two hundred florins:

‘Make me young again!’

The smith agreed, for he thought he could perform the same miracle a second time. They bent the Qadi in two, bound him, and threw him into the furnace, and began to use the bellows. When after a time they raked out the embers not even his bones could be found; the flames had entirely consumed him. The unfortunate

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# A BOOK OF WISDOM AND LIES

By Sulkhan Saba Orbeliani  
Translated by Katharine Vivian



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blacksmith was seized, and hanged. Thus did the devils take their revenge.

‘The devil looks after his own! You are one of them, and you traffic with your own kind. Swear what you will – who will believe you?’

RUKA told the tale of:

## 71. *The Persian and the Indian*

A Persian merchant travelled to India, and came to the city of Kashmir. He entered the chamber where the leading merchants sat in council, took a place at the head of the assembly, removed his turban and set it beside him, and squatted on his heels. He gave himself an air of greater consequence than any man there present. You will have heard tell of the great wealth of India.

A certain man was looking on at the council from without, for he was not of high enough standing to be admitted to the chamber, still less to take a place among the merchants seated there. When he saw the Persian with his haughty bearing he summoned one of the attendants:

‘Go and inquire of him how many thousand stores of treasure he possesses.’

When the Persian was questioned, he answered boastfully:

‘I have three hundred *tumans*.’\* When the Indian outside the chamber heard this, his spleen rose until he cried out, unable to contain himself:

‘I possess three hundred houses built of amber, and besides my other riches I have eight silver ingots standing at my gates to serve as seats for passers-by; yet I am not good enough to enter and present my greeting to the principal merchants, while that good-for-nothing sits at the head of them all in that indelicate posture!’

When the Persian came out, the Indian accosted him in the doorway and said:

‘Doubtless you do not know the way trade is carried on here. If you are agreeable, let us put our resources into a common fund and

\*A *tuman* here = about £1 sterling.



trade together, and share the profits and losses equally between us.'

The Persian was pleased by this proposal, and he and the Indian each contributed three hundred *tumans*. The Indian advised that they should buy only garlic and onions for the six hundred *tumans*, and they rented storehouses where they deposited their purchase. The Indian said:

'In three months' time the price will rise and we shall sell them at a ten per cent profit.'

After three months the vegetables were rotting. The Persian said: 'Our profits have gone to waste!'

Following the Indian's counsel, they borrowed money, hired a labourer to pick out the rotten vegetables and kept the rest. The Indian again assured his partner:

'You will make a big profit!'

After three months all the onions and garlic had decayed and there was not one onion left. The Persian wept and began to blame the Indian, who retorted:

'What sort of talk is this? We agreed to share our gains and losses; both of us alike have lost!'

The Persian merchant was now too poor to buy bread; the Indian took him to his own house, gave him three hundred *tumans* and said:

'Brother, I have lost six hundred *tumans* through envy at seeing you given a place among the rich merchants!'

'Like that Indian, I will do something to make all men marvel, for envy of your Leon!'

DJUMBER told the tale of:

## 72. *The Storks and the Geese*

A number of white storks built their nests in a certain place. A man came and stole the eggs from one of the storks and put a goose's eggs in the nest. The stork hatched these and brought up the chicks, believing that they were her own. When they were fully grown the male stork returned and saw that they did not resemble him. He called together all the storks in those parts and showed them the fledgelings. They seized the innocent mother stork, killed her and sucked out her brains.

‘Now, what injury has Leon done to you, is he your faithless wife or an enemy who has killed your son? Have you a wife whom he has debauched, or did he mutilate you? What has he done to you? Tell me! By the King’s head, I will not defend him or favour him more than you: but I will speak the truth. There is no cause for you and him to quarrel.

‘Three things may reasonably provoke a quarrel: first, one man attempting to cross another’s boundary; secondly, one man invading another’s land, so that the owner cannot regain it without slaying the usurper; thirdly, one man bringing dishonour on another.’

Ruka said:

‘I cannot conceal it – I am Leon’s enemy.’

Djumber said:

‘In these three cases men ought never to be enemies: a passenger and the captain of a ship; a valley-dweller and the inhabitant of a fortress; one who lives at the mouth of a river and one who dwells at its source.’

Ruka said:

‘You are the King’s son – speak of something to charm and please us!’

Djumber replied:

‘Men in three conditions ought to please one another: the garrison of a stronghold, heirs of the same lord and guests at a feast.’

Ruka said:

‘My effort was wasted!’

Djumber said:

‘Three men’s efforts are wasted: a night-watchman who is a coward, one who expects a mule to foal and one who tries to grasp the wind.’

Ruka said:

‘What volubility!’

‘Volubility is needed by people of three kinds: first, a penniless beggar; secondly, an itinerant preacher; and thirdly, a contentious man.’

Ruka said:

‘I will take flight and escape from your reach.’

Djumber said:

‘A man should take flight in three cases: when he is rejected by his

people; when he is married to a contrary woman; and when he has betrayed his lord.'

Ruka said:

'I wish that I might die!'

Djumber said:

'Three sorts of men wish to die: he who has lived a sinful life; he who suffers from a long and incurable sickness; and he who has a sure hope of Paradise.'

Ruka said:

'There is no doubt that you mean to drive me away.'

Djumber said:

'Three sorts of men are driven away: a vintner who steals from the vineyard; a physician who is ignorant of healing; and a discourteous stranger.'

Ruka said:

'I see that you are growing angry.'

Djumber said:

'Three sorts of person provoke a man to anger: first, a disobedient and heedless son; secondly, a shrill-tongued woman; and thirdly, a chattering slave.'

RUKA told the tale of:

### 73. *The Philosophers*

There was once a great philosopher who was exceedingly wise. He retired from the world and went to dwell in the remotest desert, where he prayed in solitude. There were six other philosophers who earnestly sought after knowledge. They fell into dispute over the meaning of a certain word. They went to visit the hermit and consulted him. For a long time he did not speak. They repeated their question. At last he replied:

'You have sacrificed what you have gained in order to learn eloquence, while I have given up all I had and abandoned the world in order to attain silence.'

He would say nothing more, and his visitors went away abashed with their question still unanswered.

'I too, if I can escape you – I will abandon not only this world but

eternal life, only to be at peace!

DJUMBER told the tale of:



## 74. *The Bear and the Hunters*

Two companions were hunting together. They were in a ravine, crossing it from one side to the other. One of them encountered a bear, which knocked him to the ground. His companion called to him:

'Leave that bear alone and come over here, we have other things to do!'

The other called back:

'It is the bear that will not let me go, otherwise I would certainly have left it before now!'

'You leave nobody in peace, although you neither please nor entertain us with your talk.'

RUKA told the tale of:

## 75. *The Orphan and his Mother*

There was once a boy who was an orphan. When he grew up, he asked his mother:

'Mother, every man has a father: why have I no father?'

His mother replied:

'My son, you had a father once, but he was drowned in the river.'

Her son said:

'Was there a bridge over the river? Did he not cross by a bridge?'

The mother answered:

'There was a bridge, but it was a long way away.'

The son asked:

'Was it so far away that if he had walked towards it until this moment he would not have reached it?'

His mother smiled as she said:

'If he had thought it out in such detail, he would be with us still.'

'I have told you this tale to ask how it is that you, who weigh your words so well, converse with someone you detest without considering the best means to avoid it?'

Leon, wise and eloquent, then entered the debate with his mellifluous tongue and said to Djumber:

'O King's son! You seek the path of utterance and the more you desire it the more it is hidden from you, as the king in the story lost his way when he sought it.'

'How was that?' the King demanded.

LEON told the tale of:

## 76. *The King of Langaruth and the Blacksmith*

There was once a king of Langaruth who earnestly sought to discover the alchemist's stone in his kingdom – that which can turn base metal into gold – or at least to find a man skilled in the art of alchemy. There was a smith in that city who made an axe and sold it. The man who had bought it went out to cut firewood. The axe struck a stone, which spoiled the blade. It happened that that was the very stone which turned any metal that touched it into gold. The man looked at his axe, which had turned to a yellow colour and had a dulled edge. He said angrily:

'The smith has cheated me and sold me an axe made of copper.'

He went back to the smith and complained to him. The smith, who was a shrewd fellow, asked him:

'What was it you struck with the axe when you blunted it?'

The man led the smith to the place and pointed out the log he had been splitting:

'I was chopping wood here and I struck that stone.'

The smith gave him back his money; the woodcutter handed over the axe and went away. The smith took the stone away with him; anything of iron that he touched with it turned to gold. He became increasingly rich, until he did not know how much wealth he possessed.

The king pondered this:



‘God has shown favour to that smith, and he is a wealthy man. I will ask his daughter’s hand in marriage for my son.’

He did so, and the wedding took place. The smith thought:

‘What larger or better dowry can I give my daughter than this stone?’

He placed the stone in a casket, which he sealed and gave to his daughter for her dowry. He gave her nothing else besides. The king was seated on the balcony of his palace overlooking the sea. He said:

‘Show me what my daughter-in-law has brought for her dowry.’

The casket was brought and shown to him:

‘This is all that she has brought with her.’

The king opened the casket and saw the smooth stone lying inside. He was furious.

‘I married my son to a peasant’s daughter because he was well-to-do and she would bring me a large dowry!’

And he hurled the stone into the sea. Then the smith came to present himself, and explained everything. They searched for the stone, but it was not to be found. The king had desired that stone with all his heart, had it cheaply and lost it for lack of care: lightly come, lightly go!

‘If you seek wisdom, do not make yourself hoarse with talking to that fellow; if you wish to study, here is Sedrak, your father’s vizir, who has no equal on all the earth; if you would learn the conduct proper to a king, here is the King of Kings, your father, whose like has never been born; and if you wish to hear stories, no one has ever seen as much of joy and sorrow, of wondrous doings in foreign lands, as I have. Wherefore then do you waste words on such a witless, ignorant, base, uncouth creature? What do you see in him to please you? Whether you enjoy conversing with him or loathe it, why do you not rather turn away from such a man?’

The King said to Leon:

‘You speak truly. For a long time I have wished to ask you about yourself: whence you come, who are your parents, how you came hither, what you saw on the way: tell me everything.’

LEON answered the King:

## 77. *The Clumsy Barber*



I have already had the honour to tell Your Majesty that I know nothing of the place of my birth or of my parents. As I was journeying hither I came to a village. Five companions were sitting together and making merry. They invited me to join them, and I took a seat beside them. They wished to have their heads shaved. It happened that there was a barber in that village who claimed to know his craft well although he had little skill, and he came to offer his services. He began on one of my companions' heads, and appeared to be causing him great pain. A camel was bellowing not far away, and the barber's victim said:

'No doubt somebody is shaving that camel, and that is why it complains so bitterly.'

We laughed, and made another take his turn with the barber, who hurt him so badly that he took out five pence and gave them to the man, saying:

'I know that I cannot escape from you with my life, so I wish to pay your fee and not to be in your debt when I arrive in the next world.'

He began to shave another man, grazed his scalp and stemmed the flow of blood with cotton-wool, then cut him in another place and again dabbed wool on the cut. He grazed that man's head in some ten places, dabbing each one with cotton, before he had shaved half of it. The man would have no more of his head shaved, and said:

'You have sown cotton on half my head; leave the other half and I will sow melons there.'

We laughed, and when anyone refused we made the barber shave his head by force. When my turn came, I suffered sorely at the barber's hands, but did not lose all the skin off my head. When he had finished I gave him his fee and thanked him:

'May the spirits of your parents enjoy such peace as I have known in your hands!'

My companions jeered at me:

'Even a dried-up donkey's hide would have screamed in protest – and you thank the man!'

I replied:

'If I had refused to be shaved, you would still have made me submit to it, and while I have satisfied the barber I have laid a curse

on his parents.'

'How so?' they asked me.

I told them:

'If the spirits of his parents are enjoying such rest as I did under that barber's knife, what worse torments could they suffer in hell?'

We spent some time at our ease drinking wine, and I took my leave of them.

## 78. *The Italian Painters*

I journeyed to a city in Italy, where I met a painter who invited me to his house. He was the oldest of all the painters there. I stayed a month with him. Whenever he was invited by other artists, I accompanied him. One day we visited one who had painted an inkwell on a window sill, with a pen standing in it. It was so life-like that one would have thought an inkwell actually stood there. There was an accomplished painter present who regarded himself as a great artist. His host said to him:

'Brother, if you will pass me that inkpot, I will do you a service later.'

The painter rose to his feet and put out his hand to take the inkwell, thinking it was real. When he found that he was touching the sill, he was greatly put out. We all laughed at him.

The next time, we were invited to this painter's house. Our former host had forgotten the episode of the inkwell, and the second artist had painted the picture of an open door on the wall. One would have thought that this led to another apartment. We were drinking wine, and discussing the meaning of a word.

Our host said to the painter of the inkwell:

'No question about it, the real meaning is written in a book of mine.'

The other asked:

'Where is the book?'

Our host pointed to the door:

'It is in that room. Bring it, and look.'

The other rose immediately to go through the door, but collided with the wall and cracked his head. The painter of the false door said:

'I am a bad host! But it is in just such a room that the art of drawing inkwells may be learnt!'

We drank and were merry together. Another artist invited us to his house. In a room next to that where we were seated, a pool of metal had been constructed which appeared to be filled with water. The painter called to each of his guests in turn, gave him a glass and said:

'Come, brother, you will find water in there, fill your glass and bring it back!'

Each man was taken in, broke his glass on the metal surface, and all in their embarrassment crept out of the house, through another door. There was one painter, however, who had his wits about him. When he was called he came forward, was given a glass and passed into the adjoining room. He suspected trickery, leaned down to touch the surface of the pool and found that it was made of metal. Paints and brushes were standing beside it. He painted the carcass of a dog upon the metal, looking as though it had fallen into the water. Then he returned to the other room, and said:

'Somebody has thrown a dog's carcass into the pool. It has spoiled the water, and I could not fill my glass.'

We went to look, and were delighted by the painting. We drank wine. I found great pleasure in the skill of these artists. Another one invited us. Since he had chanced to see the wife of one of his companions, he had painted a portrait of her which was a perfect likeness. We seated ourselves beside the portrait, and he invited the woman's husband to his house. When he arrived, he saw his wife in our midst. He was a hot-tempered man. Believing it to be actually his wife who was there, he flew into a rage, ran to the portrait and struck it with his fists – only to find that he was striking the wall. We laughed heartily, and passed a month there in such diversions.

When I went on my way I came upon three men sitting in a meadow near a crossroads. They also had met on that same day and become sworn brothers. They were weeping and complaining of their wives. I approached them, and asked:

'What is your trouble?'

And they replied:

'Dismount, sit with us and we will tell you.'

One of them told me of:



### 79. *The Jealous Sister-in-Law*

I had a brother whom I loved dearly; he was devoted to me and we were the closest of friends. His wife was fairer than mine, and this caused her to hate my sister-in-law:

'How can she be more beautiful than I am?'

And she pestered me:

'Unless your brother will divorce his wife, you and he must part.'

My brother would not send away his wife, and so we parted, and I wander about the country in poverty.

The second told his story:

### 80. *Gruel*

We were four brothers, all married. My wife was always plaguing me:

'Leave your brothers: I am a good housewife who can give you bread to eat with bread.'

From morning to night she gave me no peace, until at last I left my brothers. Then I said to her:

'Did you not say that you would give me bread to eat with bread?'

She made some wheat gruel and set it before me, and put a piece of bread in my hand:

'There is bread for you to eat with wheaten meal. I hated your brothers' household, and now we are free of them.'

The third man told the tale of:

### 81. *The 'Backwards-and-Forwards' Fire*

There were eight of us brothers. My wife continually urged me to leave my brothers:

‘If you will leave them, I will light a backwards-and-forwards fire in your honour.’

I could not hold out against her, and parted from my brothers. It was winter, and she made me sit by the hearth and kindled a fire. From time to time she brought in straw and heaped it on the fire. When the straw blazed up I moved backward, away from the heat, and when the flames subsided I moved forward again. That is what she did for me, and I asked her:

‘What does this mean?’

She answered:

‘I promised to light a backwards-and-forwards fire for you: there it is.’

Now I wander about the land bewailing my lot.

Then the three men said to me:

‘Tell us now about your wife and brothers.’

‘I have neither the one nor the other,’ I said.

They turned on me in anger and drove me away:

‘Why then did you listen when we told you how we were put to shame?’

I went on my way, and came to the city of Muqami. There I met a healer who was chief of all the physicians. He took me to his house and gave a banquet for me. He invited all the physicians, and said to them:

‘It may please and interest our guest to hear of the most serious cases any of you have observed or treated.’

## THE TEN LEARNED PHYSICIANS

This was the first physician’s tale:

### 82. *The Artificial Skull*

A certain man was surrounded in battle and wounded. His frontal bone was shattered and the fragments could not be put together. I

removed the whole of the bone and inserted a copper plate in its place. The wound healed, and the man lived long afterwards.

The second physician's tale:

### 83. *The Blood-Letting*

My uncle was highly skilled in healing. He was sitting on his balcony one day; the market was in the street below. A young man on horseback galloped past his house. My uncle looked down on him as he passed, then called one of his servants and sent him with a message to the horseman:

'Have your arm bled – otherwise blood will be the death of you!'

The youth swore at the messenger, and jeered at the physician who had sent him. When he reached his house he had a rush of blood to the head which brought him near to death. My uncle waited a little time, then went to his house, where people were weeping. He entered the house, sent away the mourners, opened a vein in each of the young man's arms and bled him freely. The patient recovered, and my uncle was widely praised for his wisdom and skill.

The third physician's tale:

### 84. *The Ass's Bone*

One of my neighbours was a dexterous surgeon. A neighbour broke his leg and the bone was crushed into such small fragments that it could never knit together again. The surgeon made an incision, removed the broken bone and replaced it with the shinbone of an ass. He applied a salve, the bones knit and the wound healed.

The fourth tale:

### 85. *The Wise Physician*

My master was a great physician who knew how to cure every kind



of illness. There came a day when he himself fell gravely ill. Many healers came to see him. Whenever one of them entered the sick man's apartment to cure him, he raised one finger. None of them could guess why he did so, and he would not allow them to attend him. As time went on this became widely known. Another physician came to see him. When the sick man held up one finger, the newcomer held up two. That satisfied him; he called the physician to his bedside and bade him feel his pulse. The physician cured his sickness and he was restored to health. I asked him:

'Why would you not allow the others to treat you?'

He answered:

'I put them all to the test. There was not one wise man among them, and a physician without wisdom is one who sows poison.'

'When you raised your finger, what did that signify?' I asked him.

He replied:

'I held up one finger to convey this: "If you have not cured a hundred patients, you are not a perfect physician." The others did not understand. When the last one showed me two fingers, he was saying: "I have healed two hundred." I was glad that he had such knowledge, and so I was cured. When something gladdens a sick man's heart, he will undoubtedly recover.'

The fifth tale:

## 86. *The King of Basra and the Physician*

When the King of Basra was at meat, a bone stuck in his throat. None of his physicians could do anything to relieve him. They summoned my grandfather. When he was admitted to the king's presence he saw clearly how matters stood. He asked the king:

'Have you a son?'

The monarch replied:

'I have one son of nine years, and he is like the sun.'

The physician told him:

'If you will permit me to kill him, and if you will then eat his liver, you will be cured; there is no other remedy.'

The king utterly rejected such a cure; but the physician insisted.



When everyone was at his wits' end, the vizirs gave their counsel:

'If Your Majesty dies, your enemies will kill your son, also and destroy the kingdom; whereas if you live, you may have other sons.'

The king called for his son, took him on his knee and kissed him, and said:

'Child, I can only be cured – they say – if I kill you and eat your liver.'

His son answered:

'If it will benefit you, let my head be forfeit. I am here, slay me now! A father begets his child – not the child his father!'

He was given into the physician's hands to be killed. The healer said:

'Hang a curtain before me, so that the king may not witness the slaying of his son.'

Behind the curtain, he made them bring a goat. When the knife pierced its throat the animal uttered a loud cry. The king thought it was his son's voice. Stricken to the heart, he cried out:

'Alas, my son!' with such force that the bone flew out of his throat. When he saw his son still alive, he said to the physician:

'What have you done to me?'

He answered:

'Would your Majesty have cried out so loudly for a goat, if I had not used a little guile – and thus rid yourself of the bone?'

The king was restored to health.

The sixth tale:

## 87. *The Tumour Upside Down*

A sick man came to see my eldest brother. Physicians were all baffled by his illness. My brother said to the others:

'There is a tumour in this man's body which is the wrong way up: it will not drain of itself, it cannot be reached by a lancet, a salve cannot be applied to it; what is to be done?'

Nobody had anything to suggest. He ordered five leeches to be brought and made the patient swallow them. He appeared to be on



the point of death. Then it seemed that the leeches fastened on the tumour and pierced it. After a certain time my brother injected a substance into the patient's body to make the leeches fall off. Much blood and pus were discharged, and the man recovered.

The seventh tale:

### 88. *The Son of Kirman-Shah*

Kirman-Shah's son was gravely ill. Many physicians were summoned to his bedside, but none could do anything to cure him. Abdul Japhar was brought to see him, but however many remedies he essayed, none was effective. Then he looked carefully at the faces of the young man and his parents. A certain doubt entered his mind, for their features were not alike. He took the youth's mother aside and asked her in secret:

'If you wish your son to live, tell me, who is his father? He is not the Shah's son, as I can see.'

At first she denied it, swearing by all that was sacred, but when he continued to press her she admitted it and said:


'As my husband was childless and had no kinsmen, the inheritance would have fallen to a stranger. I took a miller to bed – somebody it would be absurd to suspect – and the boy is his.'

Now that he knew the truth, the physician kept the patient away from his mother and the Shah; he changed his bedding, made him lie on a couch of straw and gave him no more medicines. When he asked for something to eat, Abdul Japhar spoke to him roughly and gave him unleavened bread. It became evident that he had his father's constitution, and could not tolerate costly medicines. He regained his health, and was restored safe and sound to his parents.

The eighth tale:

### 89. *Sleeping Sickness*

My son-in-law and an old man were close friends, greatly devoted to



one another. One day my son-in-law, who was a physician, went to a village to attend the sick. While he was on his way his old friend died. The physician returned home on the day of the old man's burial. He was deeply grieved when he heard that his friend had died. He asked:

'What was the disease that caused his death?'

They told him how the old man had fallen ill. He went out in secret, taking a man with him who carried a spade and dug in the earth to remove the dead man's body from the grave. It turned out that he suffered from sleeping sickness, and had been buried alive. A sufferer from that disease has all the appearance of a corpse, and everyone had been taken in. The physician stripped the man's body and opened all the veins with a lancet; then they closed the grave again and sealed it, leaving all as it was before. They carried the old man to his house, where the physician bled him and tended him until he was well; then he concealed him in his own house.

The old man's son mourned him deeply and invited the physician to all the funeral feasts. The physician, however, now being happy on his friend's account, had no more tears to shed. The son was astonished at his demeanour:

'He and my father were such close friends: how can he rejoice now when his friend is dead?'

At the ceremonial banquet held on the fortieth day after the old man's death, the physician said to the son:

'I have had a dream in which I saw your father rise from his grave.'

The son did not believe him. They went out and dug up the grave and saw nothing there. He began to weep and lament. The physician took him back to his house and said:

'What value is there for you in a corpse, whether it is lying in a grave or elsewhere?'

The old man's son wept even more bitterly. Then the physician took him back to his own house, where he found his father:

'See, what a skilled physician I am!'

There was great rejoicing as father and son were reunited.

The ninth tale:

## 90. *Healing by Treachery*

I had a neighbour who fell ill and spent all that he had on remedies, but no one was able to cure him. He heard that there was a physician in the city of Shiraz who could diagnose a disease immediately he set eyes on the patient, and foretell whether he would recover. If there was hope of recovery, he gave the sick man a prescription for medicine which would not fail to cure him. If there was no hope, he turned away without speaking. Upon hearing this, my neighbour set forth to visit the physician in Shiraz, taking one slave with him. When the physician saw him he said nothing, and immediately turned away. The sick man, who had grown very weak, went out of his house and said to his slave:

‘You know how many medicines I have taken, and none has made me well. I am dying; go and buy me some yaourt – I have a feeling that I shall die after I have eaten it.’

The slave led him into the garden and left him lying there while he went away to buy the yaourt. He brought it to his master, but the sick man could not eat it all. He gave what remained to the slave, and told him to place it at the foot of a tree. The slave kept watch while his master slept. Soon an asp glided up to the bowl, dipped its head in and drank all the remains of the yaourt. The slave was too frightened to drive it away. The snake raised its head, vomited into the bowl and disappeared. Now, the slave was finding his master’s illness wearisome and exacting, and he thought:

‘If he eats that he will die, and I shall be free!’

The sick man awoke and asked for the yaourt, and his slave brought him the bowl. He ate all the contents, even licking the bowl; then he lay down and slept. He perspired freely: he was cured. He awoke and rose up in good health, with no disease of any kind. He said to his slave:

‘Let us go and ask that physician what he meant by thinking I was going to die, when I have regained my health without any treatment!’

He went to the physician’s house, but before he could speak the healer demanded:

‘Who gave you a snake’s vomit to eat? That was your cure!’

The other said:

‘What nonsense! You are an ignorant fellow and knew nothing about the cause of my illness.’

They had an altercation, until the slave sprang up and, in fear and trembling, told them what he had done. The physician said:

‘I knew from the outset that you could be cured only by an asp’s vomit; but, brother, what was I to do? How could I obtain it? Even if I could succeed in catching a snake, how could I cause it to vomit? Now this has come about by the grace of God, and you are cured!’

The tenth physician’s tale:

## 91. *The Fungus Patient*

I was a guest of the ruler of Kurdistan, who took me to visit his mother. She was very old, and I was told that she had been in the same condition for twenty years and no physician had been able to make her well. I went and saw her; she was very weak, emaciated and withered; the flesh had shrunk away from her bones, her colour had faded, she could not digest her food, could scarcely walk, and found even speech difficult; and yet she still had her wits about her. I examined her with great care, and when I had considered her condition I divined what was the cause of it. She was suffering from a fungus that attacks the liver. This was a difficult case, and I gave it the most careful thought. I said:

‘This is a disease that is hard to cure, even in younger people; but I will use my utmost skill, and trust in God!’

I was given permission to take whatever measures I thought necessary. I hung a felt cloak over the entrance to the baths, covering it closely, and a curtain within to keep out draughts and prevent the steam from escaping. Then I brought the patient in, asked her to lie down and gave her a sleeping-draught. I made an incision in her belly and removed the internal organs, excised the fungus from the liver and all the parts affected, and applied healing ointment and salves. Then I replaced the organs within her body, stitched up the wound and bound it firmly. When she awoke I gave her medicine to

revive her. I had made her well, and she recovered. Everyone praised me highly for my skill.



As long as I stayed in that country I was well feasted and entertained, and heard many a merry tale before I went away.

## 92. *The Man with the Rolling Stone*

I passed through a valley where the climate was mild, and as I came to the end of it I saw a man descend the long slope of the hillside, heave a boulder on to his back, then climb the hill and set the stone rolling down; he did this several times. He panted and groaned all the way upward, and laughed gaily as he rolled the boulder downhill. I asked him:

'Brother, why do you toil like this, and what makes you laugh?'

He told me:

'In this stone I behold both joy and sorrow. This one small thing is all that I possess, and yet my joys and sorrows are great; while many men have a thousand gold ingots and hoard them uselessly, knowing nothing of happiness or woe.'

That pleased me greatly. With a few simple words he had drawn an excellent moral.

## 93. *Hospitality with Two Loaves of Bread*

I left the man with his stone and went on my way. Soon I came upon two men drinking water at a spring. They welcomed me, and sat themselves down to eat, inviting me to join them. They had nothing but two loaves of bread. Each took one loaf, leaving nothing for me. Then each broke his bread in two and gave me one half. Thus my share was bigger than theirs. After we had eaten they were still hungry, and turned on me in anger:

'He has cheated us! We ate one loaf between us, and he had a whole one for himself.'

How could I defend myself against the two of them? They seized and bound me, and each gave me a hundred blows with his stick. There was no one to come to my aid. I begged and pleaded with them, but they paid no heed. At last I said:

'May you be treated as you have treated me!'

They left me lying on the ground in my bonds and went off in haste. A certain compassionate man passed that way; he asked what had befallen me, and I told him my story. He said:

'Brother, I will give you five precepts. Learn them well and commit them to memory:

"Never trust fully in a stranger;

"Never bow to a display of insolence;

"Always be on your guard, even in your own house;

"Never accept hospitality from a hungry man;

"Do not look for presents from a poor man.'"

I thanked him warmly. He freed me from my bonds, and said:

'Many others have been taken in by those rogues.'

He gave me food, and took his leave of me.

## 94. *Djizi Gurgen*

There was no reason for me to stay in that place, and I went on my way and came to the sea. I took passage in a ship. A storm blew up, the vessel was battered to pieces and everyone aboard went down with everything they possessed. I clung to one of the ship's timbers and stayed afloat, alone, for seven days and nights. On the eighth day the waves washed me up on a beach. Painfully I got on my feet, exhausted by the buffeting of the breakers, walked a little way and came to the foot of a hill. I climbed to the top and looked about me. It was winter, and snow lay knee-deep on the ground. I went further, in the hope of finding some habitation where I could obtain food and shelter.

I saw a youth come striding towards me, noble and fearless in his gait, comely and well-knit. He wore nothing but a shirt and breeches of fine linen; his head was uncovered, his feet and legs bare. There



was a golden belt round his waist, with two arrows in it. He was carrying a bow. As he came nearer he perceived that I was a stranger. He asked me who I was, and I told him my story. He said:

'I am called Djizi Gurgen. Follow this path, and it will lead you to a village. Tell the people there in my name that they are to treat you as an honoured guest until I return.'

He went his way, and I followed the path until I came to a large and splendid city. As soon as I uttered the young man's name, people pressed round me and treated me as though I had been their lord. They showed me every attention, and gave me food and clothing. Djizi Gurgen returned in the evening with a deer on his back that he had killed. He set it down at his door, entered the house and soon rejoined us handsomely attired. He was a truly well-conducted man. He seated himself beside me; he made me stay and rest for two weeks, and then said to me:

'Come with me, and let me show you all the ways and customs of my house.'

I rose and went with him to his house, where he took me into every apartment, each one furnished according to its use. Then he showed me a hall in which there was a large pool filled with cold water. There was ice on the surface. Several children were there, infants of two or three months and others of two or three years. Some were running about, others playing in the pool. I came out and asked my host:

'Will not those children perish of cold?'

He answered:

'Death comes from the hands of God. They will die in the bath, if that is their fate. We do as our grandfathers did, our bodies are accustomed to it, and he who is fated to die will die! Those who survive will grow up to be men like myself, as you saw me a short time ago.'

This was a wonder to me. Next, he led me into a spacious chamber. Indeed, he dwelt in splendour! In the centre was a pillar of silver, to which an old man was fettered with a golden chain. The chain was long enough to allow him to move about the apartment and the chamber adjoining it, where there was a bed on one side and on the other a table covered with dishes of all kinds of food, wine, and sets of chess and backgammon. The old man was able to take his choice and eat, drink, sleep or play games, as he pleased. I asked my host who he was.

'He is my father,' he replied.



'Why do you keep him chained?'

He said:

'Brother, when a man grows old his mind weakens and he may offend people. There are bad men hereabouts who would have no patience with him, and I would not allow them to have their way; that would lead to a dispute, and thence to fighting and killing. Here, he is well attended and has all that he could wish for; only he cannot pass through those doors.'

Djizi Gurgen took me away and we entered another sumptuous apartment, where he bade me be seated. He called, and a beautiful woman appeared. I had never seen anyone so lovely. She was tall and slender as a cypress, and decked with pearls and precious stones. Something round and golden, also studded with pearls and gems, hung down from her head and trailed behind her. I did not question the young man again, for I thought that she might be one of his kin. He told me:

'That is my wife, and it is a man's head that she trails after her.'

'What is the reason for that?' I asked him, and he answered:

'One day I returned unexpectedly and found her in a man's embrace; she was saying to him: "Would that I might never be parted from you!"'\*

'I could not bring myself to have her put to death. You see how beautiful she is; she has a fine nature besides, and an unrivalled wit and understanding; and so I spared her. I cut off the man's head, set it in gold and bound it to hers; thus I did not deny her her desire. May God never part them! He is bound to her for the rest of her life.'

Then he continued:

'Do not think less of me for speaking to you of my shame. If I had not told this strange story to you, a stranger, you would not be able to repeat it to the people of a strange land.'

He gave me five hundred florins, and one of his men conducted me to the seashore where I took ship and departed from those shores.

I came to a country called Didora where there lived a race of men who are excellent people and good-hearted; only they never speak the truth. Everyone there tells lies, from the highest to the humblest. I was presented to the king. While I was there nobody spoke the truth – or, if anyone did so, he was an object of scorn. The king

\* A play on words, *Thavi*, 'self', also means 'head'; the above could read 'parted from yourself' or 'parted from the head'.

invited us to a banquet and the guests began to tell stories of the chase.



## HUNTING STORIES

A nobleman told this tale:

### 95. *The Falcon and the Crane*

I cast my falcon at a crane, which she caught and brought to the ground. Going towards it, I saw that the falcon had no head.

'Can the crane have taken her head off?' I wondered. I searched round about, but could not find the head. Then I looked in the falcon's hood: the head was there. It appeared that I had cast the bird without loosing the jesses, and the sharp movement had torn off her head. She was such a fine hunter that even headless she caught the crane before she died.

### 96. *The Blind Cheetah*

I had a cheetah left me by my father, which never let its prey escape. It fell sick and lost the sight of both eyes; nothing would cure it. I was greatly put out, for I could not find another like it. A certain man said to me:

'Tie a cat on its head and send it hunting: the cat will use its eyes, and your cheetah its claws.'

I followed his counsel, and once again my cheetah never lost its prey.

## 97. *The Falconer*



I can train a hawk to take a crane or a pelican on the wing.

At first the other sportsmen were impressed; then they asked how it was done. He told them:

I set two of my birds down among the reeds, and when I hear the cry of a crane approaching I cast them at it and one of them strikes at each of its eyes, so that it is blinded and falls to the ground.

The vizir was displeased by this tale, and said to the King:

'Sire, such tales do not merit your attention! It is possible, indeed, that this might be done and that he is speaking the truth. A gadfly might bring down a crane, as it drives an ox to the slaughter! By your head, sire, a man like that should not be admitted to your presence!'

## 98. *The Pheasant and the Whip*

I was out hawking one day when a cock pheasant flew up and I cast my hawk. Then the hen rose into the air. I had no means of taking her, and flung my whip at her. The thong slipped over the bird's head like a noose, and she flew away with it. The next year I was in the same place again, and saw some pheasant fledgelings: each one had a tiny whip hanging from its neck.

The physician's tale:

## 99. *A Saucepan for a Head*

I know nothing of hunting, but this I do know. I was once physician to the King of Armenia. I was with him when a criminal was brought in. The king commanded that he should be beheaded. I persuaded him to delay the execution long enough for me to prepare a certain

medicament. When the man's head was cut off, I poured this down his throat and set a saucepan on his neck. The man did not die, but went on living with the saucepan for a head. He had three or four children after he was beheaded, and each of them was born with a tiny saucepan in place of a head.



## 100. *The Key of the Wine-Cellar*

My dwelling was on the border of the lands of darkness. My wife and my house were all that I possessed, and I lived in poverty. One day I was wandering in the fields when I saw a wolf carrying off a little boy in its mouth. I shouted, and the wolf dropped the child and ran away. I helped the boy to his feet and asked him who he was.

'I am the son of a Kadji',\* he told me. 'The wolf carried me away. As you have saved my life, pray hide me now, and when my father comes he will give you my weight in pearls and jewels. Do not restore me to him, however, until he has given you the key of his wine-cellar. That will be enough for you.'

I hid him in a hollow tree and covered him with my cloak. The Kadji appeared and said to me:

'A wolf has run off with my child; if you can tell me where he is, I will give you as much gold as you will ever need.'

I delayed answering him on all sorts of pretexts, and did not reveal the boy's whereabouts until the Kadji had given me the key of his cellar. He yielded it at last with great reluctance, and reproached his son:

'You knew of it – you told him!'

Then he pointed to a rock, and said:

'Press that rock, and a door will open.'

He departed, and I went over to the rock and pressed it so that the door opened as he had told me. I went in. There was nothing in the cave but a tethered donkey. I felt indignant, and said to myself:

'He is a Kadji, and he has tricked me. Instead of a handsome reward I am left with nothing but this key.'

In my vexation I struck the ass with my staff, at which it let fall pieces of gold and silver. That was a pleasant sight, and I took the animal home to my wife. We placed a trough beneath it, beat it and gathered up gold and silver as it fell. Time passed, and I began giving

\* A race of demons with magic powers.

myself airs. I decided to ride the donkey to the baths. My wife sought to prevent me:

'Do not take the donkey away!'

I paid no heed to her. I mounted and rode away, tethered the donkey at the door of the baths and went in. It happened that the bath attendant was away at the time. When he returned and saw the donkey standing at the door, he cursed me and struck it with his staff. The ass let fall its treasure. The man was overjoyed when he saw this. He led the animal away, leaving another one like it tied up in its place. I finished my bath and came out, mounted the donkey and rode home. However hard I struck the beast, it yielded nothing but dung. My wife began to upbraid me. I left the house and made my way once more to the cellar among the rocks, wondering whether there was something still to be found there. I came to the place and entered the rock wall; all that I could see there was a hand-mill. I took it away with me for want of anything better, thinking that it might be of some use. When I came to my house I found that I had only to turn the handle in one direction for the mill to produce whatever meat and drink I desired. I lived on what I had from the mill. Pride soon rose up in me again, and I decided to invite the king to dine. My wife urged me against it, but I would not be gainsaid. I invited the king, and as you may imagine I entertained him well. He discovered the secret of the hand-mill, and took it away with him. I was left looking foolish. Once more I set out for the cellar; something seemed to urge me to it. I could see nothing in the cave but a pumpkin hanging up. I took it with me and set off for home. Soon, weary and dispirited, I sat down by the wayside. I sighed in self-reproach:

'What am I doing? Why did I ride to the baths, why did I invite the king to my house? That is how I lost the donkey, and afterwards the hand-mill. Would that four men with staves would come and beat me soundly, fool that I am!'

Immediately four men sprang out of the pumpkin and beat me until I was prostrate. When I had recovered enough to think of what had happened, I rejoiced. I carried the pumpkin with me to the city walls, and uttered these words:

'Let twelve thousand men stand forth! Let them take the donkey from the man who stole it, and the hand-mill from the king!'

The men came forth in their thousands. They recovered the donkey and the mill and brought them back to me. Then my wife said:

'Let us move to another country: we cannot stay here any longer.'

We went down to the sea and took ship. Our vessel was broken up in a storm. The donkey and the hand-mill, the pumpkin and my wife – everything was lost. Everyone in the ship went to the bottom with all that they had. I alone survived, clinging to a plank until a wave washed me ashore. Thence I started out again, and became successful in life as I am now.

The KING's tale:

## 101. *Abdul-Azim the Dervish*

My father's father, Abdul-Azim, was a dervish and travelled to the far ends of the earth. He was so skilled in his magic art that nothing could stand against him. He performed many strange and wonderful feats. Wherever he divined that there was treasure to be found – in the earth, in rocks or walls – he would not leave it undisturbed, but by means of sorcery he brought it out and distributed the riches among the poor. One day he saw a secret sign at the entrance to a cave, and began to explore it. The further he went, the more fantastic things he saw. First, there were some revolving swords, which he broke in pieces. He went deeper into the cave and came to a river of boiling water, impossible to cross; he caused it to dry up. Next there was a bronze monkey, a fierce fighter, and that also he broke. Then his way was barred by a lake of mercury. The path beside the rock did not lead to any magic sign here, nor circle the edge of the lake. There was no way to cross it. Mercury is difficult to destroy; yet he succeeded, and made it disappear. He saw a small house, and a sealed chest within. He opened this and took out the contents. There was a hat woven of hair and straw, a shoe and a candlestick. He said in astonishment:

'What can this mean? Are these objects so valuable that it needs strange and powerful spells to protect them?'

He left the cave and went on until he came to a city. He was wearing the straw hat. Men to whom he spoke gave him no answer, to his great surprise. As soon as he took off the hat, everybody spoke to him. It appeared that while he wore it he was invisible – that was



the special property of the hat. My grandfather said to himself, 'I can understand what sort of hat that was, but what were the other objects?'

He entered the house, took out the candlestick and lit the candle. A tall, strong, dark youth sprang up, kissed his hand and stood before him. My grandfather said:

'What service can you perform?'

'I am the slave of the candlestick,' he replied, 'and I serve the man who has it in his possession.'

My grandfather repeated:

'What service can you perform?'

'I can do whatever I am asked, however difficult.'

My grandfather set him a number of tasks. Whatever he desired to have, the slave of the candlestick brought to him; whatever he commanded to be done, the young man did. Then my grandfather said:

'I wish to travel to India. Take me there immediately.'

'I am the slave of the candlestick, and I can perform more difficult tasks than that; but travel to another country is a matter for this shoe. Put it on, stamp your foot on the ground and go wherever you wish.'

My grandfather put the straw hat on his head, the candlestick in his pouch and the shoe on his foot, and stamped on the ground.

'Take me to India!' he commanded, and that same instant he found himself at his friend's door. Then, when he knew what the shoe, the candlestick and the hat could do, he travelled all over the earth. When he came to this country a powerful monarch was on the throne; he sent the slave of the candlestick to attack him, and became king in his place.

It angered me greatly to hear such a lying tale. He told many more of the sort; I could not learn them, and they were not fit for a king to hear.

## 102. *The Raven with Second Sight*

I left that region and journeyed until I came to the country of Elat. There I had no means of obtaining bread. The people were miserly, impious and wicked. After going hungry for two days I thought of a

stratagem: I threw a stick at a raven and broke its wing; then I slipped it into my pouch, and was able to make it croak. By this means I became a soothsayer.



I went to a house where a woman was alone. She would not open the door or allow me to enter the house. By nightfall my strength was failing, so that I leaned against the door. The woman took some loaves of bread from the oven and placed them in a bin. After a little time the headman of the village arrived, bringing a jug of wine and a seasoned goose. These he placed on the window-sill. He seated himself beside the woman and they began to embrace. A horseman rode up to the door. When the headman heard the clatter of hooves the woman concealed him beneath a basket, and herself lay down on the bed. I could see all that took place. Evidently the cavalier was the woman's husband, who had been absent on business and returned sooner than expected.

'Who are you?' he asked me. I replied:

'I am a guest sent by God, but no one bids me welcome to the house.'

The man called out. The woman was slow to answer, making it appear that she had been asleep. She lit the fire, and her husband brought me into the house. Both of us were hungry. He asked his wife for food. She complained as she set two loaves of maize bread before us:

'Where am I to find food at this hour – it is midnight!'

I pressed the raven in my pouch with its broken wing, and it croaked.

'What is that?' the man asked. I told him:

'It is a raven which has second sight. It knows everything, and I understand its language.'

My host was delighted, and asked me what sort of harvest there would be that year. A good one, I told him. Then I squeezed the raven again, and he asked me:

'What is it saying?'

'It says, why are you eating maize bread when there are two white loaves in the bin?'

Then I made it speak of the goose, and that also was brought out. I made it croak once more, and the woman was forced to give us the jug of wine. Her husband chided her:

'When you had all this in the house, why did you not set it before us?'

She sought to defend herself:



'I was going to visit my parents and wished to take them some delicacies.'

When I had eaten and drunk as much as I wished, I made the raven give a last croak. My host asked me what it was saying.

'It says, while you are at table the headman of the village goes hungry underneath that basket; will you not have the courtesy to invite him to join you?'

When the headman heard this he threw off the basket and rushed out of the door with the man of the house in pursuit. I left them and went on my way.

### 103. *The Man who was Buried Alive and the Country of the Giants*

I found myself in a foreign land with strange laws and customs. I went on until I came to a city. I was hungry, and asked for five copper coins' worth of meat. People said to me:

'Surely you are a stranger here, for what you ask would scarcely feed a falcon.'

They took me to one of their elders who was seated on a gold camp chair, and told him what I had bought. He asked me whence I came. I told him a little about myself, and said that I was a stranger. He said to me:

'You have the look of a good man. I have no son to be my heir, only a daughter; I will give her to you, and you shall inherit my lands and everything I have.'

I agreed to this, and met his daughter, who was very beautiful. She was given to me in marriage. The old man continued to live in his house and gave me his gold chair; it became my duty to supervise the purchase of meat. After ten days my bride fell ill, and four days later she died. They put strange clothing on me, the finest they had, adorning it with pearls and precious stones. They clothed my dead wife and myself in gorgeous robes. I said to them:

'What are you doing? I have to weep and beat my breast, and you put this splendid raiment on me!'

How was I to know what they intended? They said to me:

'That is the custom with us, and we have to do it in this way.'



They brought out copper-drums, tabors, tabourines and kettle-drums; the corpse was borne away to a lively measure on the horn, and I accompanied it. The procession marched to a great fortress built high on a hill. Within its walls there was a graveyard – a large, deep cavity with two platforms. They let down the corpse into it and left me beside it, with provisions for seven days. Then they took away the ladder and I was left alone. I rose and walked about to see what I could. That graveyard was the burial place for the whole city; all the best and finest weapons in the land, all its treasures and ornaments were collected there. Women's finery and young men's armour were lying beside them with all that had been theirs. It was an extraordinary sight.

Four days passed. I heard the sound of drums and tambourines. They came nearer. It turned out that a nobleman, newly married, had died. He was followed by his young widow, who was lowered with the corpse into the grave beside me. Seven days' provisions were given her. Even in her grief the young woman was lovely beyond measure, and I marvelled at her beauty. Her companions removed the ladder and departed. I asked her:

'What does this mean – why are we being treated in this way?'

I told her about myself, and she answered my question:

'It is the custom in this realm. If a man's wife dies he follows her down here, and if a man dies his wife goes with him. They are given enough food for seven days, and then the survivor must go to join his spouse. He may not go on living, nor ever again see the light of day.'

I was overcome with horror, and cried out from the bottom of my heart:

'Alas for this inglorious end to my days! Wherefore did I take to myself wife or riches, when they were so soon to be my undoing?'

However bitterly I railed against my fate, it did not help to set me free. I began speaking to the young woman in a different tone, and said to her:

'What can benefit the dead? See how many corpses are lying here rotted away. It was God's will that you and I should meet: now let us hearken to the desire of our hearts.'

I embroidered on this theme; we had joy of each other, and during our embrace I observed that a porcupine larger than a pig had found its way into the cavern. It must have dug beneath the walls, burrowed through the earth and come to feed on the flesh of the corpses. I was overjoyed to see it, and said to my companion:

'Now God has delivered us from hell!'

There were silken cords lying there; I found the opening of the porcupine's tunnel and set a trap. I caught the creature, tied cords to its hind legs and let it go. It crawled into the tunnel. I pulled it back, and it began burrowing in the earth with its paws. I repeated this several times, until it had dug a hole big enough for us to enter. I cleared the earth from the hole and swept it clean. We loaded ourselves with as many pearls and jewels as we could carry, and crawled along the tunnel. When we came to the end of it we were outside the fortress walls. We stayed in hiding during the day, and moved about only at night. For a week we lived in this way; then we bought two horses and rode to the country of Sistan. We met with an exceedingly tall man who stood barring our way, and demanded:

'Who are you and where are you going?'

I was too terrified to speak. Perceiving my fright, he said:

'Have no fear; I wish you no harm. If you will give up this woman I will welcome you as a son; otherwise I will carry her off by force, and give you cause to regret it.'

I said to myself:

'I would give him more than that to escape without a fight.'

And I yielded the woman to him. He was well pleased, put me in his pouch and carried me away. How can I describe the size of that giant? We went up a mountain, where two giants were fighting. They were taller than I, but not as tall as he. Their quarrel was about a wine-skin that one of them was carrying on his back as he climbed, making heavy work of it, when the other came up with him and said:

'If that is too heavy for you, put it on my back. I will carry it to the top, and then you shall give me a sip of wine.'

The owner of the wine said:

'If you take it to the top I will let you do more than sip – you shall have a good long draught.'

When the bearer reached the summit he put the wine-skin to his lips and drank all the wine in a single gulp. The owner upbraided him:

'Why have you drunk it all?'

But he demanded more:

'You promised me a mouthful, and I have not yet had as much as a sip.'

My giant settled the dispute by seizing both combatants and putting one into each of his boots. He went to his house. His wife

welcomed us; she was a giantess, a comely woman. The giant said to her:

'Take off my boots!'

She pulled them off, and found a man in each one. Then her husband took me out of his pouch. He was pleased with himself, and boasted to his wife:

'Have you ever seen a man like me?'

And he presented her with the woman he had taken away from me. As it happened, he had abducted his wife and had never seen her native land. She said to him then:

'You cannot be compared with my father.'

The giant was greatly put out when he heard this; he put me into his pouch and set off to visit his father-in-law. I can only describe the size of that man by telling you this: he was watering a cornfield, and his son-in-law began crossing the irrigation channel. The water was so deep that horse and rider were carried away. When we had been swept along to where the giant's father-in-law stood, he lifted us out with his spade and set us down with the horse on dry land.

'Who are you?' he asked. When his son-in-law had made himself known, he said:

'A narrow escape! You are my son-in-law, and I nearly killed you!'

He dried his son-in-law and made him rest. Some minutes passed, and his wife came out and brought us food. They dined together, inviting me to join them. I was no bigger than one of the mice in that country! Then the mother-in-law went back to her house, asking her son-in-law to go with her. He followed. The woman went on foot, carrying a basket of provisions on her back. Her son-in-law, mounted, galloped behind but could not overtake her. She looked round and saw that he had fallen, turned and set him back on his horse, then put them both in her basket and took us all on her back; thus loaded, she reached her house. There she made us welcome. At nightfall a one-eyed man came to the house, who appeared to be her lover; he began walking about on the roof.\* The woman, however, was ashamed to go out to him while her son-in-law was with her. The one-eyed man became impatient and came down into the house. He stared at the woman's son-in-law, and then began to kiss her. Her son-in-law in anger wrenched at the pillars to make the house fall down, and rushed out of the door. The giantess lifted up both feet and made pillars of her legs to support the roof. When the one-

\* People could walk from one house to another over the flat roof-tops.



eyed man had had his fill he replaced the pillars so that the house did not collapse; then he came out to pursue us. We fled from him. The giant's son-in-law saw a man sowing beans. He had a harrow bound to one of his feet, and was harrowing as he sowed. He put some beans in the hem of his tunic and tossed a handful into his mouth, saying:

'That is it – yes.'

Then he scattered a handful for seed, and said:

'That is for you – yes, or no.'

The giant begged him for aid:

'Help us, pray – a one-eyed man is after us.'

The sower lifted up the horse and its rider and dropped us all into his tunic with the beans. When he put beans in his mouth, he put the horse and the giant in with them. One of his lower teeth was broken; he tucked the horse into the gap, and we were saved. The one-eyed man came up and questioned him, and he answered:

'He has not passed this way.'

The other turned and went away. The sower looked in the hem of his tunic, but could not find us. He began to lament, thinking that he had swallowed us. Then the giant called out from the gap in his teeth:

'We are here, still alive!'

He took us out and set us down on the earth. The giant then asked him how he had broken his tooth. The sower told us about himself, and said:

'There were twelve of us; they were all bigger and stronger than I was. We were out to rob. The wind rose and there was a blizzard. It was a broad open plain, and there was nowhere for us to shelter. We saw a man's skull on the ground. It was big enough to hold all the twelve of us. We climbed in, and breathed more easily. Then it happened that a wolf ran off with a kid, and the shepherd went after it, throwing sticks and stones. When he came up to us, he was such a giant of a fellow that he lifted the skull – with us twelve inside it – and threw it at the wolf. The wolf, needless to say, was crushed to pieces, my eleven companions were killed, and it was then that I lost my tooth.'

Huge though he was, even my giant was astonished by the great size and strength of these others in his father-in-law's country; while I marvelled even more. He went back to his wife, and said to her:

'You were perfectly right.'

He gave me a mule and rode with me to India, where he turned

back, saying:

'May nobody do you harm.'



## 104. *The Indian Acrobats*

As I journeyed through the country of India I saw many unusual things – trees and fruits, animals, birds – it would take many words to describe them, and the King would soon grow weary. There were many mountebanks who came to perform at court, but I marvelled at the extraordinary feats of three acrobats.


One man came forward and took up his position, followed by forty of his pupils. One of them sprang up to stand with a foot on each of his master's shoulders; he pulled up the next to stand on his shoulders, and each in turn did the same until all the forty were balanced thus – and not one of them fell or wavered, while the man on the ground gave no sign of feeling the weight he was supporting. He even walked about, sat down and stood up again. Finally he took a run and leaped into the air, and his pupils all came to the ground. None of them fell on his back, but all landed upright on their feet.

Now the second acrobat entered the ring. He had two pieces of wood which he bound to his arms like the wings of a bird. He soared into the air, now flying up to a mountain peak, now hovering above the fields, so that everyone took him to be a bird. An eagle could not have rivalled him in flight.

The third acrobat appeared, carrying a ball of twine. Holding one end in his hand he tossed the ball into the air. It flew upwards until the whole length of twine was unwound and the end of it lost to view. The acrobat pulled on the string, but he could not recover the ball; again he did this, again he failed. He said:

'I will climb up and look for it!'

He ran and sprang into the air, rising higher and higher until he was out of sight. After a short time cries were heard, and sound of gunfire and a deafening explosion. A man's head fell from the air; then severed hands and feet were scattered about. We then saw our acrobat come down in two pieces. The king was displeased, and everyone was unhappy. The acrobat's wife entered the ring with two children. They threw themselves into the flames and were consumed, and their ashes were scattered, as it is the custom in



India. Not long afterwards the acrobat appeared out of the air, sliding down his length of twine. They told him what they had seen, and that his wife and children had been burned. He said:

'I have not seen any fighting, or heard any cries.'

The king expressed his sympathy, and gave the acrobat a robe of honour and a sable stole. He prostrated himself and thanked the king. Then he shook out the hem of his garment, and his wife stood living beside him; and he shook it again, and there were his children with her. All the people were astounded. They said:

'No one has ever seen an acrobat like this.'

The king sent him away loaded with presents.

## 105. *The Magicians of Tunisia*

I left that land and continued on my way, coming to the country of Tunisia. Many of the people there are skilled in magic and sorcery. No traveller can learn their secrets, however perceptive he may be. In olden times a certain man bored into the rock-face of a great mountain. In the darkness within he hollowed out a vaulted passage a day's march in length and closed it with a heavy iron door on which he laid a spell: it opened only once in a year, remained open for six hours and then closed again of itself. Inside he kept a book with leaves of parchment on which spells and magic runes were inscribed in Arabic. Any man who wished to study this book must take food and candles enough for a year, and stand at the door. He goes in when it opens, and stays there for a year. He may search for any spell he wishes, even the most difficult, and copy it down when he finds it. He will learn there all the magic lore he desires. At the end of the year the door opens and he comes out of the cave, with the power to do anything he pleases. When I was in that country I heard talk of this miracle, although I did not witness it myself.

## 106. *The Hindu Physician*

A certain physician was training an apprentice. It appears that the



physician had been to visit the enchanted cave, and his pupil had gone there afterwards and learned even more marvels than he did. Both were Hindus. The apprentice went to the capital city, where he met a youth whom he liked well. This young man was handsome and well made, but very pale and emaciated; he had lost his bloom, and the roses in his cheeks had turned to saffron. The physician's apprentice asked him::

'What is your complaint, brother? Whatever ails you, I can cure it.'

The young man answered:

'Neither you nor all the physicians in the world together can give me relief; pray leave me as I am, and go.'

The other swore that there was no disease he could not cure. Finally the young man said:

'What can you do for me? One day the king's daughter went to the baths. I beheld her beauty through the window and fell in love with her. My heart went out to her, and that was my undoing. How can you be of aid to me? You cannot gain access to her or ask her hand for me in marriage; and I cannot live without her.'

The healer said:

'If you will swear to me to go no further than kisses and caresses, I shall soon be able to cure you.'

He uttered an incantation and performed some magic rites, and when night fell the princess came to them wrapped in a sheet. The young man seated her beside him, embraced and caressed her. At daybreak she went away. In her own apartments again she came to herself, wept and cried aloud. The king and queen came in and asked her what was amiss. She told them everything. They were deeply disturbed. The king asked his vizirs for their counsel, and they said:

'Sire, that man is not of this country; he has come from a foreign land. Now, if your daughter is carried off again this night, tell her to dip her hand in ink and leave its imprint on the door of his house. Tomorrow we shall find the door with the ink-print of a hand; we will seize him, and you shall do with him as it pleases you.'

Their counsel was followed. That same night the princess went out, and left a print of ink on the young man's door. When morning came the physician said to him:

'Son, let no one see what we do, but rise and look outside to see whether there is any sign.'

The young man went out of the house, saw the print on the door and returned to tell the physician. He pronounced a spell, and





immediately the print of a hand appeared on the door of every house in the city. The vizir summoned many men with staves to search for the prints, and when he went home again he saw the print on his own door. He was astonished and alarmed. When he went to the palace, there was the hand again, and wherever he went he saw it printed on the door. He gained audience of the king, and reported to him:

‘Your Majesty’s daughter has gone round the whole city this night.’

The vizirs conferred together and said to the king:

‘This evening, let your daughter take some millet in her handkerchief and strew it along her path; then tomorrow we will follow the trail and find the man.’

The princess did this. Next day the young man went out, saw the millet and returned to tell the physician:

‘Millet has been scattered all the way to our door.’

He pronounced a spell, and a flock of sparrows flew down and ate up every grain. The vizirs could not understand what had happened. They dressed the princess as a youth and made her go through all the bazaars, accompanied by twenty guards.

‘As soon as you see that man, whom you will certainly recognize, point him out to these men and they will arrest him.’

Soon after they set out they saw the young man sitting in the market. The physician was not there. The guards laid hold of him and took him to the king. The king gave the command:

‘Let him be hung from a gibbet, and let every one of my subjects go out and have at him with gunshot and arrows until he is hanging in ribbons!’

Everybody went out, and the physician among them. When he saw the young man hanging from the gibbet he was filled with pity, and used his magic powers. When any man fired a gun, the bullet turned back in its course and struck him dead; likewise with those who shot arrows. A great many soldiers were killed. The vizirs said to the king:

‘We shall never get the better of that man; we must find other means – let us keep him in prison for a time, and afterwards do as best we can.’

The king commanded that the young man should be taken down from the gibbet and kept under guard. The physician went to the prison, gave the gaoler a florin and said:

‘That man is a debtor of mine; open the door for me and I will go in and see him for a minute or two. I do not want to lose my money.’

Then I will come out again.'

The gaoler let the physician in, locked the door on the outside and went about his business. When he returned and unlocked the door, he found the prison cell transformed into a garden by the physician's magic arts. There were many fine fruit trees, wondrous flowers were in bloom, the air was fragrant with sweet odours, pools brimmed with water, and two men were seated on a lofty golden throne. He shut the door again immediately and ran to the vizir, who reported the news to the king:

'We can believe anything of those men, even this! Let us go and see.'

The king and his vizir set out together; when they entered the prison, the scene before them was beyond description. They gazed at it all. There was a peach tree growing beside a pool. The king plucked a peach and began to peel it. As he did so the vizir bathed his face in the water and was changed into a woman, a certain man's wife; her husband came in, abused her and dragged her away. The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son, a boy who was beginning to walk. The woman still had the vizir's nature. She returned to the prison, taking her son with her, and there she was turned into a man again. The king was still peeling his peach. The vizir asked him:

'Is that peach this year's fruit, or last year's?'

'What do you mean?' the king said. 'We have only this moment entered the place.'

The vizir disputed this, however, and told the king of his transformation into a woman and the birth of his son. The king was astounded. They said to each other:

'Since we have little choice in the matter, we will marry the princess to that young man, and the vizir's daughter to the physician.'

The weddings took place amid great rejoicing. Some time passed. The vizir had not forgotten his humiliation. When he gave his daughter away in marriage he told her:

'When the physician is having water heated for the bath before he goes to you, tell me when he is about to enter the bath.'

When the physician began to heat water his bride spilled it, and went to tell her father. Men came and laid hands on him before he could perform his spells. The vizir went to the king, and they decided that both men should be put to death. The king consulted his daughter. She would not hear of it, and said:

‘Since you have given me to one man who is wicked, I shall never submit myself to another.’

As the king’s daughter would not have him killed, and as some said of the physician that he had been killed, others that his life had been spared – there was talk of powerful spells – I was inclined to believe that both were dead; for sorcery such as theirs is not within the realm of men, while tales gather round the name of any man of repute. Doubtless they were killed. Those who believe the contrary, however, say that they were driven from the kingdom, the report of their death was a lie and the truth was that they were banished.

When the apprentice physician’s master heard of his pupil’s prowess as a sorcerer he was very angry and set forth to kill him before he could do anything worse. When he arrived, they warned his pupil:

‘Your master has come and he means to kill you.’

He took fright, changed himself into a dove and flew away; his master took the shape of a falcon and pursued him. Just as he was about to overtake him the King of China went past on a hunting expedition; the dove suddenly became a crown on the king’s head. His followers rejoiced that a crown had descended from above. The master turned into a fiddler and went to present himself at court. The king was seated at table when strange sounds and sweet melodies greeted his ears.

‘Whence have you come?’ he asked the fiddler. He answered:

‘I come from the same place as Your Majesty’s crown did, and there I have my abode.’

The courtiers were even more delighted. The fiddler begged a favour of the king:

‘Permit me to kiss the crown, since we both come from the same place!’

As soon as the king gave his consent the crown was transformed into a pomegranate and rolled to the ground. The fiddler turned himself into a knife and cut it in half. The seeds were scattered about. The knife – the master – now became a cock and began to peck at the seeds. Everyone was dumbfounded. A man rose out of the pomegranate skin and clasped the king’s knees:

‘Save me from my master, or he will kill me!’

There was a dispute. The cock changed into a man. The king heard the whole story. The apprentice sorcerer was made to take an oath that he would never practise magic arts again.

When Leon came to the end of his tale of sorcery, Ruka did not allow him time to begin another, but said to the King:

'Until this day I have been wrong to bear malice to Leon. Since he is so learned and has taught so many interesting subjects, and seen so many countries, he is a man we ought to keep with us: do not send him away. What he says, he is able to do, and he has given us proof of it.'

DJUMBER told the tale of:

## 107. *The Poor Man and the Jar of Florins*

Once upon a time there was a very poor man. He prayed to God every day to make him rich. Time passed, and he began to suffer from stomach pains and looseness of the bowels. He was in such pain that he dug his fingers into the earth. As he did so he found a jar of florins buried in the ground. He gave thanks to God, saying:

'Thou hast been most gracious to me, but Thou showest favour to a man only after he has passed blood!'

'I have told you this story because you did not come to Leon's aid, although on three or four occasions you had almost been the cause of his death, and only now do you take pity on him!'


Leon said to Djumber:

'O King's son, you are young and you believe him when he says that he will give me his support, when in fact he has now completely ruined me. When a man cannot defeat an adversary by opposing him, he feigns friendship and achieves his purpose by other means.'

LEON told the tale of:

## 108. *The Two Enemies*

There were once two men who were enemies. Neither of them could succeed in doing any harm to the other. After a time they became close comrades, went on journeys together and took four companions with them. One day they went to stay in another man's



house. The guests slept on one side of the room, and their host with his wife on the other side. When the fire burned low, one of the guests rose stealthily and attempted to lie with the wife of their host. She cried out and wakened her husband, and the man crept back to his own bed and lay down. The master of the house rose, crossed the room and searched his guests, feeling each one's breast with his hand. In the darkness, he had no other way of knowing which one of them was guilty than by feeling whose heart was beating fast. He put his hat on the guilty man's head as a mark, and lit the fire in order to see who he was. While he was lighting the fire the man took the hat from his head and put it on his erstwhile enemy and new-found friend. This man was sleeping deeply and knew nothing of what was afoot. When the fire blazed up, their host saw his hat on the innocent man's head and took him to be the guest whom he had marked as guilty. He struck him on the head with an axe, thus killing an innocent and blameless man.

'Thus do all men's enemies. What good has Ruka ever done me? He has made me out to be a sorcerer and a trickster.'

Again LEON told a tale:

### 109. *The Idle Man*

Once there was a man who was idle and feckless. He could not set his hand to anything. One day he took it into his head to dig up earth and sift it. For three or four months he did nothing but this, and had no other thought in his mind. Then the steward sent a man to see him to ask him to work at the harvest; but he refused to go:

'I have work to do here; why should I leave it to work elsewhere?'

Another man came on behalf of his neighbour, whose father had died, and invited him to the funeral feast. He would not go. Another came to invite him to a wedding, and he said:

'At last I have set my hand to a task; until I have finished it I have no time even to go to court; I cannot attend funeral feasts or wedding banquets. When I have finished my present work I will do all those things.'

'Like that man, until Ruka has done with me, he has no time or

wish to hear of weddings or funerals, sovereign or people; afterwards he may concern himself with other things; but for the present nothing troubles him or gives him pleasure but what has to do with myself.'

Ruka said:

'This is nothing new. As it was said of old, nobody repays one good deed with another, but rather with an evil one: what other reason can Leon have to bear me ill-will? He was an outcast to whom no one would give shelter, and so he came here. I brought him to the King, who showed him great favour. What is he plotting against me now?'

RUKA told the tale of:

## 110. *The Man and the Snake*

A man was going along the road when he saw a thorn-bush on fire, with a snake caught in it. Unable to escape, it was writhing and hissing. The man pitied it when he saw it, and said to himself:

'If I save the life of that snake it will be grateful to me.'

He went up to the bush and held out the point of his spear. The snake coiled round it, slid on to the man's shoulder and twined itself tightly round his neck. He asked it:

'What harm have I done you, that you should do this to me? Have I not saved you from death?'

The snake said:

'Nobody ever repays one good deed with another, and neither shall I.'

The man pleaded with it:


'Spare me until we come to that plane-tree yonder, and we will ask it to judge: if the tree takes my part and forbids you to harm me, you shall let me go; otherwise, do with me as you will!'

The snake loosened its hold a little and they went on and approached the plane-tree. The man said to it:

'I have saved the life of this snake, and now it is about to strangle me.'

The plane-tree said:

'I, who am a tree, stand here alone in the heat of the plains; there is nowhere for travellers to rest but in my shade. They come to



refresh themselves, and I provide this cool shelter for them. Then they break off my branches; some of these they burn, others they make into little boxes, and say: "This is a fine piece of wood!" No good deed is repaid with another. Serpent, tighten your hold!

The snake squeezed the man's neck more tightly, so that he begged it again:

'Loosen your coils a little! Here is an ox grazing: let us put our case to it.'

They went on, and consulted the ox. It said:

'I plough, harrow and thresh the corn, from summer to winter I labour for men; and they throw me to the ground and slaughter me because "a guest has arrived"! No one ever returns a good deed for another: serpent, tighten your hold!'

The snake clasped the man's neck still more tightly. He pleaded with it:

'Spare me yet a little longer and let us ask that fox over there!'

They went on, and spoke to the fox. The man complained of the snake's ingratitude, and the snake repeated the verdict of the plane-tree and the ox. The fox said to the snake:

'I have been appointed Supreme Judge by the lion, the king of beasts. How can I give judgment while you are coiled round this man's neck? Release him, and both of you go down on your knees!'

As soon as the snake obeyed and glided to the ground the fox struck it on the head with a piece of wood and killed it.

'That is snake justice!' it said.

Then the man's thoughts turned to the fox, and he decided to strike it with his spear, thinking:

'It has a fine pelt.'

The fox divined what was in his mind and took to its heels, saying to itself:

'I was wrong to save him!'

'I have done you a service, Leon, just as the man did for the snake, and you are strangling me – what am I to do? Now it is for Leon to speak.'

LEON told the tale of:

## 111. *The Good-Hearted Snake*



A certain poor man was going on his way when he saw two snakes fighting, one black and one red. The black snake was getting the best of it. The poor man said to himself:

'The red snake is in need of help: I will go to its aid.'

He struck the black snake with his stick and slew it. The red snake glided to his feet, knocked its head on the ground and took the hem of his garment in its teeth, pulling him after it. The man followed and it led him to a cave in some rocks. There it showed him a store of treasure, more than the king himself possessed, and so made him rich.

'Ruka! You are a man like the snake in your story, for who else would repay good with evil?'

RUKA told the tale of:

## 112. *The Rich Man and the Poor Man*

A poor man was sitting in his house, wishing for wealth:

'O God,' he prayed, 'send me five hundred pieces of silver – not one piece less!'

It happened that a rich man was walking over the roof\* of his house, and heard the poor man's prayer. He said to himself:

'I will go and put him to the test, to see what sort of man he is.'

He went into the house and counted out five hundred silver pieces, took away ten, sealed up the rest in a packet and dropped them down from the roof-top. The poor man counted them, and found that there were ten pieces short of five hundred. He said:

'God, thou art indeed gracious! If Thou hadst given me but one piece of silver I should have been thankful, and not asked for more.'

The rich man came down from the roof and said to him:

'The money is mine. I only sent it to test you. Pray give it back to me.'

The poor man did not respond.

\*See note, p. 119.



'I did not ask you for it. I prayed to God, and He has sent it to me.'

They could not agree, and decided to put their case to the Qadi. The poor man said to the other:

'How can I appear before the Qadi when I have no cloak, while you are wearing such fine clothes? Lend me that fur cloak of yours, and I will go with you.'

The rich man added to his good deeds by lending his cloak. The poor man put it on, and they set forth. They presented their petitions to the Qadi. Then the poor man said:

'This man is so avaricious that you will see him even try to take the cloak off my back!'

The other said:

'Indeed, have I not just lent it to you?'

At that the Qadi lost patience and gave the rich man a sound thrashing. Thus did the poor man give the rich his answer, and had him beaten and humiliated.

No man ever repays one good deed with another.

LEON told the tale of:

### 113. *The Caliph and the Arab*

There was once a Caliph of Baghdad who was widely famed for his knowledge of horses, and known to pay a high price for a good horse. An Arab came to show him a courser, for which he asked two thousand pieces of silver. The Caliph immediately sent for the full sum. The Arab said:

'Pray have it put in a sack so that I can carry it away.'

The silver was given to him in a sack. Instantly he flung it on to the horse's back, mounted, used his spurs and galloped away, outstripping all the Caliph's troops on their best coursers. They could find no trace of him, and turned back defeated. Three days later the Arab returned, bringing the horse with him. They asked him:

'Why did you take away the horse, and then return with it?'

He replied:

'My dwelling is far from here, I have no pack animal and the silver was too heavy for me to carry: I rode the horse, and now I have brought it back.'

'No one could overtake you and no one knew who you were,' they

said. 'Why then did you bring back the horse?'

The Arab laughed at the question, and said:

'If I had done such an ill turn to somebody who had treated me fairly, what would God have done to me?'

'If an Arab knows that one good turn deserves another, how should another man not know the same? Who but a wicked man does an evil deed? What good did those two men do to each other, the rich man and the poor? God took from the one and of His mercy bestowed it on the other.'

RUKA told the tale of:

## 114. *The Young Man and the Brigands*

A young man went out on his horse, gallant and fearless, his good sword belted to his waist, his armour and weapons all of the finest. His bride rode beside him, a fair and virtuous young woman. As they went on their way they came to a place which was the abode of brigands. Five of them were there, who had robbed a great many wayfarers. The young man went forward unwary and unsuspecting, and noticed nothing untoward until they laid hands on him. They stripped him of all he had, bound his hands and led him away. One of the band who had taken a liking to his sword said to him in low tones:

'I will arrange for you to distribute your armour and possessions among us, and if you will give me your sword for my share I will set you and your wife free.'

The young man gave his word:


'If I share out the spoil, I will see to it that my sword goes to you.'

They took him to a stronghold, a place where they used to lie in ambush, and halted there. There were ten men lying bound, and a great quantity of spoil. The robber who had struck a bargain with the young man said to the others:

'Today it appears we have captured a man of spirit: come, let us charge him with the sharing out of our booty.'

The other brigands agreed to this, and the captive's hands were unbound. He began to distribute the spoil, setting his wife aside as one portion and his shield with his naked sword on it as another.





Suddenly he seized the sword and slew with a single blow the robber to whom he had promised it. He killed another man, and the remaining three took to flight. He released the captives from their bonds, and gave them swords; they chased the fugitives and slew them all. The young man then recovered his armour and weapons and took his bride away with him. All that remained he gave to the men he had found there, saying that he had enough for his needs.

'After one of the brigands had treated him so well, trusted him, freed his hands and restored his wife to him, how could he do right to kill him? A good deed is never repaid by another, whatever you may say or believe!'

Leon said:

'You are right to blame that man for his conduct towards the brigands. They had carried off his wife and robbed him, and he seized an opportunity to kill them: indeed he treated them badly, and I blame him myself, but rather for his heedlessness at the outset. If he had done nothing to save himself afterwards, he would have been turned into a man like you.'

LEON told the tale of:

### 115. *The Rich Merchant and the Innkeeper*

At the foot of the mountain of Bolnisi, on the path leading up to the pass, a fine caravanserai had been built and a keeper appointed to it. He was such a man as would offer a wayfarer food and drink in the evening when he arrived, give him barley and straw for his horse, accept no payment and entertain him the following day. One day a large caravan arrived and halted there. The innkeeper treated them well that evening. There was a heavy fall of snow, which closed the path; they could neither go forward nor turn back. They passed the winter in the caravanserai. The keeper asked for no payment, and fed both men and camels at his own expense. The rich merchant and the innkeeper became friends, and the merchant asked the keeper whether he had any children.

'I have none,' he replied, although he did in fact have a son; but he

kept him hidden away, for the boy was a leper, and he feared that the sight of him would be distasteful to his guest, who would no longer enjoy his good cheer. He never allowed the boy to cross the threshold as long as the caravan was there. Spring came, and the pass was open. The rich merchant took his leave of the innkeeper, wondering how he could repay his hospitality. Now he allowed his son to come out. The boy was in an ill humour, and he said:

‘I know you hate me, and I am going to run away.’

He ran after the caravan and overtook it. The rich merchant asked him who he was, and he told him:

‘I am the innkeeper’s son. He told you he had no children, for if you had asked to see me – disfigured as I am – you would have had no pleasure in staying there. Now I am angry with my father, and I am leaving home. Somewhere I may find work to do and support myself; or I may perish.’

The merchant swore an oath:

‘If there is any way to cure you, I will find it!’

He took the boy with him and went on his way. When he reached his house he sent for a physician; but he could do nothing. Another healer said:

‘Find a man who has an only son of two years old, a fine healthy boy, whom his father is prepared to sacrifice. Kill the child and smear this boy with his blood, and he will be healed.’

The merchant was sorrowful when he heard this, for how could such a man be found? It chanced that he himself was the father of just such a child, his only son. He said to himself:

‘If I do not sacrifice my own child, how can I ever repay the kindness of this boy’s father?’

He told some story to his wife and sent her away on a visit, so that he was alone in the house. He killed his son and sprinkled the leper with his blood. The boy’s skin fell away like the bark of a tree, and he was healed. The father laid his child’s body in its cradle and covered it with a shroud. His wife felt a burning in her breasts and belly. She hastened home, and said to her husband:

‘My breasts are burning: has something happened to the child?’

‘What should have happened? He is sleeping soundly,’ he answered. The mother went to the cradle and gave the child her breast, and he started to suck. She lifted him in her arms, safe and sound, and he began to gurgle and smile at his mother. There was a mark like a circlet of gold on his neck. She asked her husband what it was. When the father saw that his son was alive he prostrated



himself and gave thanks to God; and he told his wife all that had passed.

‘You who say that no man ever repays a good deed with another, consider what that man did out of gratitude, not sparing himself to cure the leper, and how God showed him great mercy. An evil man thinks that all men are like himself, and that is how the saying arose.’

RUKA told the tale of:

### 116. *The Three Blind Men*

There was once a poor youth who set out to make his fortune. After a year of wandering about the country he had gained nine florins. At the end of the year he returned to his own province. When he was near the city he came to a river, stripped to the skin and washed himself, then put on his clothes again. He went on his way; when he remembered his florins, he found that he had left them on the river bank. He made a vow to God:

‘If I find the coins I will give one to a beggar in Thy name.’

He went back to the place where he had bathed, and there he found his money. He went on into the city, and met a poor man to whom he told his story:

‘My vow is on my conscience: here is a florin!’

The poor man was blind in both eyes. He said:

‘Since you give it to me in God’s name, give me all nine coins and I will choose one for myself.’

The young man trusted him, and did so. The beggar put all the coins in his pouch. The other begged him to return them, at which the beggar raised an outcry:

‘Help! What will this man do to me?’

There were no witnesses, and the blind man kept the money. The poor man followed him, deep in dejection:

‘What will he do with my florins?’

When the beggar entered his house he took up a jar full of coins and dropped in those he had taken from the young man:

‘Aha, my five hundred florins, here are ten more to join you!’

Three times he tossed the jar in the air and caught it. The fourth

time, the young man stretched out his hand to catch the jar, and hid it. The blind man searched for a long time, but of course he could not find his jar. He went out of the house and burst into tears. Another blind man came past, and asked him why he was weeping. He related how he had lost five hundred florins. The second blind man said:

‘Is that the way to keep your money? I have six hundred florins in this crooked stick of mine, and wherever I put it down somebody finds it and brings it to me.’

The first blind man begged the other to show it to him. The young man was standing near, and he put out his hand and took it. The blind man waited, and after a time asked the other to give it back to him. The other said:

‘What did you give me?’

A quarrel broke out between them. They were joined by a third sightless man, who asked them what it was about. One of them said he had lost a jar, the other a stick. The third blind man said:

‘Ah, you men of resource, how well you guard your fortunes! Now, I keep a thousand florins in this old cloak. Wherever I leave it, it is always brought back to me.’

This time again the poor youth was not far away. He listened, then went away and bought some honey and spread it on the blind man’s cloak. Bees swarmed over it. The blind man took it off and laid it on the ground, and that also the young man took away. The three blind men wept and wailed until their lamentations reached the king’s ears. He sent out a herald to proclaim:

‘Whoever has done this deed, let him come forward and give an account of himself. Otherwise, I shall have no mercy on him!’

The young man feared that another might be accused and put to death. He went to court and related all that had passed:

‘I did one good deed, and this good fortune has come to me in consequence.’

The king pronounced judgment:

‘Since no one does good in return for good, and since you promised in the name of God to give one tenth of your gains to a beggar, you shall give a tenth part of five hundred florins to one of them and a tenth of six hundred to the second; to the third, give one tenth of a thousand florins, and thus do not break the vow that you made to God, so that your life may be long. Keep the rest for yourself, and God be your guide!’



Leon said:

‘That is not an instance of an evil deed returned for a good one. The poor man fulfilled his vow to God, while the blind men were a prey to avarice. All their gains were wrongfully acquired, and God bestowed them on that young man.’

RUKA told the tale of:

### 117. *Caesar’s Magister\**

There was once a young *magister* in Caesar’s service, comely and of good repute. Caesar sent him on an embassy to France. He was a very charitable man, and did good by stealth. He set out, and came to a place on his way where he saw a naked corpse lying on the ground. He drew back a few paces and said to his attendants:

‘Continue on the way and do not wait for me.’

After they had gone forward some distance he turned back and took off his clothes. He was wearing two shirts, and he put one of them on the corpse. Then he dressed again and went on to join his retinue. They came to a city, where he saw a cripple lying in the mire of the market-place. There was nobody to carry him away or to give him alms. The envoy himself dismounted and lifted up the cripple, set him down on dry ground and gave him a florin. He went on his way and took ship for France. A storm arose at sea, the ship was battered to pieces and he was swallowed up by the waves. Suddenly a man appeared who took him by the hand and brought him to dry land, and said to him:

‘I am the beggar whom you lifted out of the mud, and I have done this to repay you!’

He did all that Caesar had charged him to do, turned back and reached Constantinople; he was galloping across the big square when his horse fell and he broke his leg. The king and all his troops rushed to his aid. They lifted up the *magister* and carried him into the palace, put him to bed and sent for the healers. Nobody could find a cure for him. He had a devoted slave who never left his side. This man listened to the surgeons, and his master asked him what they were saying. When they departed the slave followed them, and heard them say:

\* Court official; in Sulkhhan-Saba Orbeliani’s time, the title of a Grand Master.



'We will return on the morrow. If he permits us to amputate at the knee, we will treat him and he may recover; if not he will die, and we shall not lift a finger!'

The slave returned and reported to his master what he had overheard. The young man listened, and said:

'I would rather die than live with one leg!'

He wept bitterly, and at last fell asleep. The slave lay down at his feet. At midnight a man in a white shirt entered through the window and sat himself down beside the patient. He gave him a greeting and inquired about his leg. Then he said:

'Show me your leg: what state is it in?'

He uncovered it and took a small box of ointment from his pouch. He rubbed a little on the patient's leg with his finger, and said:

'Move it about!'

He would not let the sick man rest until he moved his leg; and it now moved freely. Then he applied the ointment again, and said:

'Stand up and lean on me!'

Again the *magister* refused, but the healer would not leave him alone; he made him get upon his feet, and supported him. Then he laid him down again and for the third time rubbed the ointment on his leg, saying:

'Rise up and walk. You are cured!'

He walked about, now once again a man in full health. His visitor said:

'I am the corpse that you saw lying in your path and covered with your shirt; that is my answer to your act of kindness!'

'Now, brother Ruka, every man – great and small – knows that one good turn deserves another, as the beggar and the merchant, the corpse and the cripple all proved. How is it then that you maintain that good should be met with evil, and like not rendered for like?'

RUKA told the tale of:

## 118. *The King of Anakopia*

There was once a king of Anakopia who reigned over many people. All his subjects were dear to him. He would say of one who was loyal:





'Whatever I might do to offend him, he has such a loyal nature that he would not turn against me. To the disloyal, I am so magnanimous that I transform them into loyal subjects.'

Time passed. Traitors did not become loyal, and those who were loyal became disaffected. The king's enemies rose in revolt. The throne was in jeopardy and the king was forced to flee to another country. Two of his vassals went with him – one who was faithful and one who was treacherous. When after a long time in exile he found himself in great want, and gave an order to his disloyal servant, the man retorted:

'What are your favours worth to me? I have left my home and native land to follow you. Now once again you would send me running hither and thither to serve you.'

The loyal servant, on the contrary, obeyed his master's orders and said nothing. Time passed, and the difficulties became even greater until no solution could be found. The faithful servant said to the king:

'You have fallen on evil times. All your wealth is exhausted and you have no means of supporting yourself. Sell me, so that you and others may live on what I bring in.'

The king was greatly distressed and would not agree; but when he came to the end of his resources he did sell his faithful servant and spent the money he made. After this man had been sold and taken some distance away, he escaped and returned to his master. Whenever the king was in want he sold his servant, who again escaped and came back to him. Circumstances change, opportunities arise, and in time the king returned to his realm and regained his throne. He gave his loyal vassal no reward for his services and even annexed his estate, while he heaped favours on the faithless one, saying to the other:

'He is bold and resourceful, while you are feeble and faint-hearted.'

'From that story you may see that no man repays one good deed with another.'

Leon said to Ruka:

'What can one say to you? You are out of your mind, so that you even tell the King, to His Majesty's face, that he cannot return good for good, or evil for evil. By the King's head, from this day onward I will never speak to you again!'

Then he whose words flowed smooth and sweet, he of the melli-

fluous tongue, the VIZIR SEDRAK, spoke to Ruka like a teacher and said:

'Ruka, since I entered the service of a mighty sovereign more exalted than the clouds, and since I learned to know you, you have become dearer to me than my own kin, and I have no better friend than you. Therefore I would tell you and would have you learn that when one man has an aversion to another he is blinded by malice; and that is where you go astray. Whatever malicious and hurtful things you may wish to say, you ought to show love to all men; for otherwise, if men become enemies, they weaken and exhaust themselves in strife.'

## 119. *The Indian Bird*

There is an Indian bird called the *tatvali*, bigger than a falcon, a bird of prey. On a day when it has caught nothing it looks for the bones of its prey of the day before; it settles on the ground, picks up the bones one by one in its beak and pushes them in under its tail. When a bone goes in without breaking, the bird takes it out in its beak and swallows it, knowing that the bone can be passed out if it is not digested. When a bone will not go in the bird puts it aside without attempting to swallow it.

'If even a bird has the intelligence to act with such foresight, how can you – a man – who have grown up at the court of our sovereign, be so unseemly in your conduct? Why do you not restrain your tongue from evil speech?

'A good friend is hard to find: he is not met by chance on the road, he cannot be cheaply bought. A good friend is a stronghold watered by a stream, a lofty rampart, towering and impregnable. A friend is a lavish feast, a wealth of joys, an adornment to a festive table. A friend is the heart's light, the eyes' glance, the arms' strength, the shoulders' power. A friend is he who fights our enemies, gives comfort to our comrades, impresses strangers well and is of service to learned men. A friend takes the part of the solitary, gives help to many and is boon companion to a few. A friend is an ally in time of trouble, a healer in sickness, and will lay down his life for his friend. What can you find of greater value than a friend? Wherefore do you



hate, wherefore bear malice, wherefore seek a quarrel? I have known many good men parted from parents, children and brothers who were true to their friends. In friendship there is love and not discord.'

RUKA told the tale of:

## 120. *The Salamander*

In India there is a creature called the salamander. Where there is a brick-kiln alight, or a bath oven or a lime-kiln burning, it will be found in the fire; it is born there. It thrives on the heat of the flames. When the fire burns low, it dies of cold. The king of that country clothes himself in the skin of salamanders to keep him cool. The creature is so made that if the fire burns out it dies, when any other being would die of the heat. Just as birds differ in their nature one from another, so are men different in kind. It is your nature to love all men, and mine to hate them. And yet, I hate no one – it is I who am hated by everyone on account of my loyalty to the King. I think of no one but him and seek no one's favour. As long as the King lives I wish for no one else. All of you have other bonds, you are of a different species from mine; if that is not so, what have I done to offend you and why do you treat me as an enemy?

RUKA told the tale of:

## 121. *The Three Comrades*

Once upon a time there were three comrades. One was honourable, loyal to his master, giving offence to nobody, a just and upright man; the other two were false and treacherous. These two proposed to the first to join them in some act of deception, but he replied:

'Nay, brothers, no good will come of it; he who betrays his master is hateful to God and men: do not do wrong.'

They fell out with him and made false accusations against him to their master; but they could not make him believe them. Under cover of darkness they threw a rope over their comrade's head one night and strangled him.

‘That is what you are plotting against me: do you think I cannot see it? You praise friendship, and indeed I wish that I had just such a friend, someone sympathetic who would be helpful and kind, would not wish me harm, and would stand well with the King – not ill-natured or quarrelsome, not setting out to ruin me. May God send you just such friends as you are to me, and the sort of friendship that you promise me!’

The VIZIR told the tale of:

## 122. *The Poor Man and the Pot of Butter*

A poor man was going along the road when he found a pot of butter lying there. He picked it up, hung it on his stick and carried it over his shoulder. As he went on his way he said to himself:

‘It is God’s will that I should grow rich. I will go into the city and sell this butter for half a piece of silver; with that I will buy a dozen cockerels and take them home with me, rear them, cut them, fatten them and sell them for a silver piece each. I will spend that money on piglets which I will cut and fatten, and sell for two pieces each. Then I will buy steers and rear them for the plough, till the land – and I shall make my fortune.’

Deep in thought, he saw himself taking a load of wood to the city to sell. He came to a bridge, and said:

‘The ox will not cross it – I must urge it on,’ and he shouted: ‘Hey-up!’

He waved his stick, the pot of butter fell on the bridge and broke, and the butter was spoiled. All the riches of his dream vanished in a single moment.

‘You also are rich in plans and ideas in your own mind; but even if by God’s will you achieve them, these things that you dream of are of a sort that will be your undoing.’

RUKA related this fable in reply:

123. *The Two Dervishes and the Shah*



Two dervishes were on their way to Ispahan. One of them went to present himself to the Shah, who asked him:

‘You have travelled in many lands. What is the most remarkable thing you have seen?’

The dervish answered:

‘I have seen many strange things, but nothing more extraordinary than that which I saw last night in this very place. It was midnight, and a great bird came down, seized a whole caravanserai and carried it away – men and camels, apartments, walls!’

The Shah was displeased and sent the dervish away:

‘What sort of lying tale is that, a bird seizing a caravanserai and carrying it off with everything in it?’

The dervish departed in disgrace, returned to his friend and told him what had passed. The second dervish cursed him, and said:

‘I was waiting for you to bring something back, and here you come empty-handed and disgraced, on account of telling those lies! What made you talk of a caravanserai being carried away? You could have told the same story of a camel, or a horse.’

And he said to himself:

‘I will go and make good the lies that my friend told the Shah.’

He went to the palace and was received by the Shah, who asked him:

‘You have travelled in many lands. What is the most remarkable thing you have seen?’

The dervish answered:

‘I have seen many strange things, but something that I saw here two days ago is more extraordinary than anything I have ever known. At cock-crow a camel’s head fell down out of the air, then its feet, then parts of a horse, then pieces of brick and mortar. I could not sleep until dawn.’

The Shah was amazed, and said:

‘It appears that the other dervish was telling the truth two days ago, and I sent him away.’

He believed the dervish’s lies and loaded him with presents.

‘You three likewise are in collusion, and when one of you tells a lie the others bear him out, so that the King believes you and I am in

disgrace.'

LEON told the tale of:



## 124. *The Peasant and the Three Snakes*

A certain man was reaping a field of corn. He saw two snakes at play. One of them pushed the other to the ground, made a ring round it and glided away. Another snake appeared. It saw the first snake lying in the ring, and would not break the circle but coiled itself and sprang: it sprang into the ring and killed the snake lying there, then cleared the circle again and glided away. The second of the snakes returned and saw that its playmate had been killed. It slipped into a truss of hay that the man had cut for his horse, and hid there. When the peasant had finished his reaping he went home, carrying the hay on his back. That night the snake came out of the hay and poisoned all the dishes and drinking vessels, and returned to its hiding-place.


The next day the peasant told his wife about the snakes. The snake in hiding heard, and when it learned that the man was innocent of killing its comrade it knocked down all the pots and dishes that it had covered with poison, and left the house. The husband and wife understood that the snake had followed the man and, discovering that he was innocent, had given them warning of the poison and disappeared.

'Ruka, my brother! You are a very good fellow, and you should be guided by that tale: even a snake endeavours not to harm an innocent man, while you are one of Adam's race. We have done you no wrong: do not then use poison against us, for God does not turn His face from the innocent, nor do to them as you seek to do.'

RUKA replied with this tale:

## 125. *The Three Brothers*

There were once three brothers, two of whom were wicked and



avaricious and the third upright and God-fearing. They separated. The wicked brothers took up their abode together, and the good man lived alone. When he went out one day he found in a certain place a big jar full of florins, too heavy for him to lift. When he went home that night he said to his wife:

‘I found some money in that place, and tomorrow I will take the donkey and bring it back.’

It happened that this man’s brothers had been watching from the roof-top and were filled with greed. They said to each other:

‘Our brother shall not be before us!’

That same night they went to the place with a lighted torch; but when they found the jar it appeared to be full of snakes and scorpions. They said:

‘Our brother has deceived us. He meant us to overhear him, and knew that we would come here to look and would be bitten and stung. Otherwise, why did he tell such a tale in our hearing?’

They covered the jar tightly and carried it away on their backs, saying:

‘That brother of ours sought to kill us, so we will kill him and his wife and children.’

They let down the jar from the roof-top. They said:

‘The jar will break, so that the snakes and scorpions will infest the whole house and everyone in it will be killed.’

When the third brother awoke the next day he saw the florins he had found the day before piled up in his house. His brothers had set out to destroy him, but God had brought him riches without any toil on his part.

‘You have something of the sort in store for me, but you must know that God will not do to me as you intend.’

DJUMBER told the tale of:

## 126. *The Man who was Married to a Sorceress*

There was once a poor man who lived in Ispahan. He was married, and his wife was so deceitful and so deeply versed in witchcraft that

there was nobody like her. She could make her husband see what was not there. She was constantly reading the Koran, never failed to pray five times a day, never washed her hands in drinking water and gave herself out to be a pious woman. Her husband said:

'Since my wife is so devout, I will make the pilgrimage to the Kaaba; then without doubt both of us will go to Paradise.'

One day the man joined a caravan which was setting out for Baghdad. It halted not far outside the city, and he said:

'As we are still so near, I will go home tonight and leave in time to rejoin the caravan early in the morning.'

His wife, thinking that he had departed, had invited her lovers to a feast. They were drinking wine late at night when her husband came to the door; he heard the sound of tambourines, dancing and singing. He crept away without a sound, so that no one knew of his coming or going, rejoined the caravan and travelled with it to Baghdad. There he became a water-carrier. Day and night he carried water, and earned enough to provide for his needs. There was an outbreak of robbery in Baghdad, and no house was spared. The whole city was pillaged. People protested. The Caliph grew wrathful, and the market guards were seized and brought before him; he said to them:

'If you do not find the thieves for me, I swear by my head I'll have you disembowelled, every one of you!'

The men went away, and it came into their heads to arrest the man from Ispahan. He asked them:

'Why are you taking me away? What have I done wrong?'

They told him:

'All the treasures in the city have been stolen and you are to be put to death, for you are certainly the thief.'

The man began to plead with them:

'Grant me one week's grace, and if I cannot find the thief you shall kill me.'

They demanded surety – but whom could he find to stand bail? He called on God to be his witness, and started out. Two or three days passed. He met the Chief Judge, whom they call the Sadri, and who was preceded wherever he went by twenty men sweeping the road. The man from Ispahan inquired:

'Who is that man, and why are they sweeping the road before him?'

'He is the Chief Judge of this country,' he was told, 'a personage of such merit, such purity that the people owe their existence to his



prayers; his prayers bring rain and cause the crops to grow.

The water-carrier said to himself:

'There is the thief who is ravaging the city.'

He mingled with the Sadri's bodyguard. The Sadri went to call on the Caliph and then returned to his dwelling. The water-carrier followed him into the house and concealed himself. When night fell the servants were dismissed. The carpet was rolled back to reveal a door. This led to a vast cavern under the house in which all the treasure of the city was stored. Twelve thieves came up out of the cavern, wine was brought in golden ewers and they seated themselves to drink. The Sadri said to them:

'Brothers, what is your next target?'

They said:

'Nothing remains now but three chests of treasure, and we will bring them to you: one belongs to the Caliph, one to the vizir and one to the steward. Tonight we will pay a call on the steward.'

Then the thieves went out to do their work. The man from Ispahan crept out of his hiding-place and told his story to the market guards. They did not believe him. He said to them:

'Follow me, and you shall see for yourselves.'

After the Sadri had paid his visit to the Caliph he returned to his house. Two of the guards followed him, concealed themselves in the same hiding-place and looked on through a small hole. That night, thieves broke into the vizir's treasury. The two men went to the Caliph, made him swear not to have them put to death and then told him what they had seen. The Caliph was angry. They said:

'If you will deign to put on a disguise, you shall behold it with your own eyes.'

The Caliph disguised himself and followed them. They hid in the same place, and he could see that everything they had told him was true. That night the thieves set out to plunder the Caliph's treasury. He returned to the palace and called for the Sadri. He said to him:

'You put yourself to the trouble of coming to visit me every day. Why do you not invite me to your house?'

The Sadri expressed his gratification and invited the Caliph to visit him. When the Caliph arrived he was offered dinner. He asked for wine. The Sadri was taken aback:

'How can you talk of wine in my house?'

Then the Caliph spoke of the robberies:

'There is so much thieving; what am I to do?'

The Sadri said:



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‘It goes on because you do not take strong action.’

The Caliph rolled back the carpet, exposed the secret door and made the thieves come out. The Sadri was dragged away in disgrace and received his deserts. Then they asked the poor man from Ispahan:

‘How did you discover this? What did you observe?’

He told them about his wife.

‘I could recognize somebody who was false as she was – that is how I knew.’

‘You are as false as that man’s wife, and make yourself out to the King to be a good man; but your own deeds, in the end, will show you up for what you are.’

RUKA told this tale in answer:

## 127. *The Learned Physician*

There was once a skilled physician. When he went to visit the sick he would have a glass of the patient’s water brought to him; by looking at it he could diagnose the ailment, give the remedy and cure the sick man. He was told that a certain man was ill. He sent for a glass of his urine. Two of the patient’s friends were tending him at the time, and both added their own water to his and sent back the glass. The physician laughed when he saw it, and said:

‘I am not so easily taken in! The sick man will be on his feet within two weeks. One of his two healthy friends has a wife who is with child and will give birth to a boy, while the other will fall ill in three days and die before the week is out.’

And all came to pass as he foretold.

‘Like those men, you all mix your water in the same glass. Do not think me such a dupe as not to know it. The whole country will see what you are doing.’

The VIZIR told the tale of:

## 128. *The Shrewish Wife*



There was once a poor and honest man who had an ill-tempered wife. He used to sit on the river bank to eat his bread, and would eat some of it himself and throw some into the water. After some time had passed, a man rose out of the river one day and said to him:

'For a long time I have lived on your food. Now if I put my tongue into your mouth you will learn the language of all living creatures. I will do this to make you some return; but if you speak of it to anyone, be sure that you will die.'

He put his tongue into the poor man's mouth and drew it out again, then dived into the river and disappeared. The poor man went to the outskirts of the village and lay down to rest. A crow flew over to a barn and perched there with its young. The nestling said to its mother:

'That man is dead; I will go and peck his eyes out.'

The mother bird said:

'Do not go, child, human beings are full of guile and he might catch you.'

The little one said:

'I will go and touch his foot with my beak, and if he moves I will fly away; if not, I will strike at his heart and then put out his eyes.'

The man had heard it all. The little bird flew down and pecked at his feet, then at his knee, but he did not stir. When it settled on his chest he closed his hand round it and caught it. The bird cried to its mother for help, but she said:

'What can I do? Did I not try to prevent you, but you would not listen? Now if that man knew my language I could soon set you free – otherwise how can I save you?'

The man called out to the crow: 'Say what you please – I understand your tongue.'

The crow in delight led the way to a place where there was a large store of buried treasure, and showed it to the man. Thus she saved her little one. The man returned to his house. One day he wished to go to a shrine to say his prayers. His wife insisted on going with him. When she would not be deterred, he saddled a mare that was in foal and had a colt running beside her. His wife also was with child. She mounted the mare, lifted up a child to sit behind her, took a sack of provisions and set off. When the path began to climb the foal fell

down exhausted and called to its dam:

‘Wait for me!’

The mare called back:

‘I am carrying one load in my belly, and three on my back with their fodder. If I can walk, how is it that you fall down?’

The man laughed loudly when he heard the mare’s answer. His wife said:

‘Tell me why you are laughing.’

He said to her:

‘I cannot tell you.’

His wife plagued him to tell her, although he swore that he would die if he did so. She persisted, and would give him no peace until at last he said:

‘Since you are determined to come with me, we will go and say a prayer. Then go home and prepare my shroud and make ready a funeral feast, and I will tell you.’

His wife was well content; she hastened out to perform her devotions, went home to prepare the shroud and the funeral meats, and then urged her husband to speak. He had a little dog. It ran out of the door with tears in its eyes, and met a cock outside which asked why it was weeping. It told the whole story to the cock:

‘The master’s wife will be the death of him – that is why I weep.’

The cock said:

‘Go into the house and send your master to me.’

In the meantime the cock gathered all the hens in the village together. When the man came out it stood in the midst of them and said to him:

‘Why are you going to kill yourself?’

‘My wife will not let me alone – what can I do?’ he said.

The cock spoke to the hens and ran round them all in a circle. Not one of them moved. Then it said to the man:


‘I have sixty wives, and none of them will peck at their food until I give the word; yet you would let one wife be the death of you!’

‘But what shall I do?’ the man asked. The cock replied:

‘Cut yourself a stick of dogwood, and when she says, “Tell me,” take hold of her and beat her within an inch of her life – after that she will give you no more trouble.’

The cock’s words persuaded him. When his wife asked him to tell her his secret he beat her senseless, and so his life was saved.

‘You are like that woman, and until someone takes a dogwood

stick to you there will be no silencing your vicious tongue.    
 RUKA's answer was the tale of:   
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## 129. *The Goat and the Fox*

A goat and a fox became close friends, and sowed a field of corn together. It grew, and yielded a good crop. They reaped it, threshed and winnowed it, and made a heap of the grain on one side of the granary and the straw on the other. The fox said to the goat:

'I will have the grain, and you the straw.'

The goat said:

'Nay, it would be more just to divide both between us.'

The fox said:

'Then I will go and bring my uncle to share it out for us.'

He started out, and while he was on his way the goat led two big sheep-dogs away from their flock and hid them in the straw. The fox returned bringing such a huge wolf with him that the goat's eyes glazed with terror. The wolf said to the goat:

'What complaint have you against my nephew?'

The goat answered:

'Since you have come with him to see justice done, know that my kinsmen are buried here. If you will stand here on their grave and breathe the odour of it, you will be a just judge.'

The wolf, in his eagerness to taste the flesh of the goat, suspected nothing and trotted up to stand on the sheep-dogs' hiding-place. The dogs sprang out and attacked the fox and his accomplice with such ferocity that they forgot the harvest past and present, and never had a share of it.

'You three are like kinsmen, and if I had but an uncle or a cousin at my side I would cut myself a dogwood stick and a willow wand for good measure – but alone, what can I do?'

LEON told the tale of:

## 130. *The Workman and his Fate*



In a certain village there was an exceptionally good workman; no one knew the extent of his wealth. One day he announced:

'I will give a hundred florins to the man who will go to seek my Fate and give him news of me.'

No one offered himself. At midday he made the same announcement, promising twenty florins. Again no one appeared. In the evening he reduced the reward to one florin, and a poor man presented himself and said:

'I will go!'

He had no knowledge of trading or work of any sort; all that he could do was play the two-stringed lyre and sing to its notes. The rich workman sent the lyre-player on his mission, first giving him directions:

'In a certain place a number of tents are pitched, and there is a great crowd of people. One tent is bigger than the others; it belongs to a man who looks like myself, and streams with sweat when he is working, as I do. Give him this message from me: "May God be gracious to you! Do not toil any longer, for I have the means to support myself. Rest now, and let me rest also!"'

He gave the man a florin, and he set out. He went on until he came to the place of the tents, where he saw the man who resembled the workman. He delivered his message. The man was pleased, thanked him and gave him shelter for the night. The next day, the messenger asked him:

'Who is my Fate?'

'The player of the two-stringed lyre sitting at the foot of the wild rose bush.'

The messenger went up to that man and greeted him.

'Are you my Fate?' he asked, and the other said:

'I am.'

'Why did you not tell me that I was promised a hundred florins this morning?'

His Fate replied:

'My lyre was broken and I was mending it.'

'And when it was twenty florins, what were you doing?'

'I was tying on a new string.'

'Where were you in the evening, when one florin was promised?'

the poor man asked.

'Then I had repaired my lyre, and I sent you to accept the offer.'

The messenger asked his Fate to let him try his instrument. When he had the lyre in his hands he broke it, and struck the player on the head. His Fate said to him:

'Why are you angry with me? I taught you what I knew myself – I could not do more. God Himself does not ask the impossible of any man.'

'Why do you blame us for your lack of friends? Our Fate shuns solitude and loves companionship. Yours is like yourself, and sends you whatever falls to its share.'

RUKA answered with the tale of:

### 131. *The King and the Gardener*

There was once a king who had a very fine garden. His gardener came to him and said:

'A nightingale has built its nest in a rose tree.'

The king said:

'It will be made to pay for that!'

Time passed, and again the gardener made his report to the king:

'The nightingale hatched out some little ones, and a snake came and ate them up and the mother bird as well.'

'The snake will not escape punishment!' said the king. Later the gardener came to report:

'I was cutting the reeds, and I happened to slice the snake in two with my scythe.'

'You also will be punished!' said the king. One day he dismissed his servants, wishing to enjoy a family gathering in the garden. The gardener climbed a tree and hid himself in the branches. He was seen by the eunuchs, who brought him before the king. The king sentenced him to death. The gardener said:

'Since we have all been punished at your command, you in your turn will be made to pay for my death!'

The king laughed, and spared his life.

'I hope that with God's help you will be made to pay for causing

my downfall, for I can see well what will become of me.'  
DJUMBER told the tale of:



## 132. *The Hermit and the Child*

There was once a saintly man who lived in seclusion. One day he decided to go out into the world. He set forth and came to a city, where he entered a nobleman's house. He was made welcome with the honour due to him, and given a lodging. The nobleman had a son of eight years who was his greatest joy. Time passed. One day a sound of weeping was heard at the door; a funeral procession was passing. The nobleman said to his son:

'Go out, my son, and see whether the dead man they are taking away has gone to be damned or to be saved.'

The boy ran off, and came back to answer joyfully:

'He is saved!'

The next time a corpse was borne past the door and the boy was sent out, he came back and told them sadly:

'That man has gone to hell!'

The hermit asked him:

'I have lived forty years in the desert and an angel brings me food; yet I cannot tell who is damned or who is saved. How can this boy know?'

The boy said:

'I know when a man is saintly through listening to what people say as they follow the procession. A short time ago, they were saying: "He was a good and worthy man, innocent and devout," and I knew that he would be saved, for that could be seen from his acts. The second time, everyone complained: "He was a wicked man, merciless and unjust, a liar who neither feared God nor was a friend to men." And so I understood that a man is to be known by what he does.'

'So it is with you: it is clear from your words and deeds that you are an evil man, and we have observed the many evil things that you have done.'

RUKA answered with the tale of:



### 133. *The Lion Reared by a Cat*

A cat was on the prowl when it saw a dead lioness with her cub alive beside her. It took away the cub and began to rear it. It grew to be very big, and began to hunt and eat game. One day when it had caught nothing it thought of eating the cat who had brought it up. As soon as the cat was aware of this it climbed a tree. The lion lay down at the foot of the tree, and said:

'O mother, dearer to me than any mother, foster-mother who have fed and nurtured me and taught me all your lore – why did you never teach me to climb a tree?'

The cat answered:

'I kept that piece of knowledge for myself, in case I should be in dire need of it.'

'I have taught you all that I know, and kept back nothing for myself. Now I have no resource left to me, I am in your hands and you may do me much harm.'

The VIZIR told a tale of:

### 134. *Laughter and Tears*

Once upon a time there were two men living in a city, one of whom was constantly in tears, while the other was always laughing, so that no one ever saw him in low spirits. Somebody asked the man who wept:

'Good things and bad, droll things and sad – why do you weep through all alike?'

He answered:

'How can I do otherwise? This life is brief, all men are attached to the things of this transitory world and forgetful of eternal punishment, and I weep for all who are preparing a purgatory for themselves.'



The other man was asked why he was laughing, and he said:

'Life is fleeting, all men are drawn towards evil and do nothing good. I have preached to each and every one and offered them counsel; but I could not make them heed, and now I have taken to laughing: what good will it do to them or to myself, if I give way to despair on their account?'

'Like that man I have given thought to your case, been troubled and grieved on your account, taught you but never succeeded in making you learn; now I shall laugh.'

RUKA told this tale in answer:

### 135. *The Fox and the Harriers*

Two harriers were out hunting. They saw a fox in a field which had caught a mouse and was playing with it, letting it go and pulling it back, tossing it in the air. They crept up to the fox and took hold of it. The fox said to the hounds:

'My last hour has come. God has delivered me into your power. How can I escape from you in this open field? Grant me this request – you know that we foxes are hunters of mice – set me free to catch one last mouse and play with it, then do with me as you will!'

The harriers were taken in, and they released the fox. It caught a mouse and played with it, throwing it up and catching it, running first one way and then another in its gambols. In this way it drew near to its earth, and finally bolted down it. The harrier rushed up to it, calling:

'Fox, come out! Come and play with the mouse, since you enjoy that so much, and then go indoors again!'

The fox replied:

'I am weary still from the sport that I had last year, without wishing to come out again now to play!'

'Likewise I am weary of all the talk we had last year. If you would but leave me in peace, I should have no more to say to you.'

LEON told the tale of:

## 136. *A Donkey as Qadi*



There was once a poor man whose donkey was very thin. One day it escaped and ran away into the mountains to put on flesh. It returned to its master radiant with health. The poor man was delighted, and said to his wife:

'Bring me a load of corn to take to the mill.'

She said:

'If our donkey is so clever that it goes off to fatten itself when it is too thin and then comes back of its own accord, can it not carry the corn without a man to go with it, and bring it back when it is ground?'

The poor man did as his wife suggested, loaded the donkey with corn and sent it off with a blow of his stick. The ass started out. Whether another man came and led it away, or what became of it, who can tell? After a week it had not returned. Its master went to the miller, and said:

'I sent my donkey to you with corn to grind. What has become of it?'

'Who came with it?' the miller asked. The donkey's master replied:

'My donkey is so clever that it needs nobody to go with it.'

The miller was a crafty man, and he knew the poor man to have little sense. Higher up the path there lived another miller, a beardless man full of guile. He said to the poor man:

'Go to that miller, and you will not have to wait your turn. Tell him that I sent you.'

He was sure that the beardless miller would spin the poor man some piece of fantasy. The donkey's owner went on up the path to see him and told him his story. The miller answered:

'The donkey came here bringing corn to be ground, and I have never seen one so intelligent! A man came past on a black mule with gold trappings; your donkey bought his mule in exchange for the flour, mounted and rode it to Zanga. The Qadi of the city had died, and your ass was appointed to be the new Qadi. That is where you will find it!'

The poor man did not question this, and took his way to Zanga. He saw the Qadi seated on a black mule with gold trappings, and bethought himself of the beardless man's words: here was a black mule. He said to the Qadi:



‘Do you not recognize me?’

As the Qadi did not know the man, he made no answer; but the other insisted:

‘You are my donkey; why do you give yourself such airs?’

When people nearby heard him speak thus to the Qadi they fell upon the poor man, beat him soundly and drove him away with a broken head. The Qadi went to call on the judge, and the poor man went also and made a complaint:

‘That man is my donkey, he bought the mule for the price of my flour, then ran away and was appointed to be Qadi here.’

The Qadi protested:

‘What is he saying? Do not all the people know me? My father and grandfather were born here – why do you not send this man away?’

The poor man said:

‘Pray, judge, examine this Qadi: my donkey is branded on both legs. If he bears those marks he is certainly mine and you must give him to me; if not, I am a liar.’

Now, the Qadi suffered from gout and had plasters on his legs. When they took off his breeches they found that he did have marks. The Qadi was found guilty, and judged to be in truth the poor man’s donkey! He was handed over to the owner. The Qadi pleaded with him:

‘You know very well that you have no claim on me and no rights over me; but I will give you the mule with all its harness – it is worth more than your ass – and do not make a fool of me any longer!’


He gave the mule as a bribe to the poor man, who took it and departed.

‘Everybody well knows that, like that ignorant man, you have no reason to quarrel with us; you are only making mischief, and we also will give you a bribe and beg you to leave us in peace.’

RUKA told this tale in reply:

### 137. *The Donkey, the Magpie and the Wolf*

There was once a man whose donkey was badly chafed. He led it out



to pasture and tethered it, while he found a seat nearby and looked on. A magpie flew down and perched on the ass's back, and began to tear at the raw flesh. The donkey was tied and could not defend itself, and kicked out. Whenever the donkey threw up its heels its master split his sides with laughing. A wolf watching them from the forest said:

'If I had been found attacking that donkey, all the men and dogs in the village would have set upon me; yet that magpie is making a meal of it and its master merely laughs.'

'Likewise with me: when I raise my voice you all set your teeth and attack me, you conspire against me and your plots are clear to see.'

DJUMBER told the tale of:

### *138. The Two Hunters and the Bear*

Two friends were out hunting together. They saw a she-bear in milk go past, and followed her to her den. They said:

'The bear's cubs will be in the den; let us take them out!'

One of the hunters went in, while the other stayed outside. When he saw the bear coming he took fright and climbed a tree. The bear began to enter her den. The man in the tree said:

'If she goes into the cave she will kill my friend.'

When the bear was half way in he came down from the tree, took a firm hold of her tail and braced his feet against the mouth of the cave. The bear growled and clawed at the ground, filling the cave with dust. The man within called out:

'Do not raise so much dust – it is choking me!'

His friend outside replied:

'If I let go of the bear's tail I shall soon find you turned into dust!'

'If I did not hold on to them by the tail, they would soon make mincemeat of you!'

RUKA told this tale in reply:

## 139. *The Kazan-Shah and his Wife*

There was once an illustrious Shah of Kazan who had a beautiful wife. She bore him a son, and while he was a child his father and mother used to play with him. One day the Shah asked his wife to let him have the boy, and as she was passing the child to him she involuntarily let a slight sound escape her. The Kazan-Shah was deeply affronted, turned out his wife and child with no one to attend on them and took to himself another wife.

The Shah's first wife went away, hid all her jewellery and put on ragged clothing. She was given shelter by a miller. He had a son of the same age as the Shah's son, and they grew up together as playmates. The miller's son made little windmills, millstreams and water-wheels as his forefathers had done; the Shah's son built a throne, took his seat on it and said to his friend:

'Kneel down before me and present your petition!'

They had many such childhood games. When the Shah's son was seventeen, one of his father's captains was taking a count of the people in the region and halted in a beautiful orchard near the miller's house. He chanced to see the young man, and was pleased by what he saw. He inquired who he was.

'He is the son of a poor woman,' he was told.

The captain took the woman and her son into his train when he departed. He grew to love the young man better than his own son, and thought highly of him. One day the youth asked his mother:

'Who am I, and who is my father?'

His mother answered:

'You are the son of the Shah; he turned me out of the palace for a certain reason, and you with me.'

'If you have done nothing worse than that,' her son said, 'it is easily put right.'

His mother swore that she had committed no other sin. The young man took his mother's jewels and sold them in exchange for gold, which he gave to a goldsmith and ordered him to turn into golden grains. He gave these to vendors in the market – the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker – as a pledge that he would pay them in three days. By this means he bought food and wine and

invited the captain to dine with him. The day came when his debts fell due, but he did not redeem the golden grains. The merchants brought them back to him and asked for their money, but he took a haughty tone with them.

'Where should I find coin? In my country we sow grain like this, harvest and sell it. I have nothing else.'

The merchants went to lay their complaint before the Kazan-Shah. The young man was summoned and questioned. He told the same story. The Kazan-Shah had all the golden grains brought and heaped up before him, and then he asked the youth:

'Could wheat like this be grown here?'

'It can be grown anywhere,' he answered. The Shah forthwith commanded men to plough up his garden, in order to sow the grain; but the young man said:

'It cannot be done in that way. A man must be found who has never broken wind – otherwise the seed will not germinate.'

Everyone began asking where there was such a man. There was no one. The young man asked the Shah:

'If Your Highness would deign. . . .'

'It has just happened to me.'

'Do not distress yourself. Inquire within your household. Perhaps the Shah's wife would condescend to sow the grain?'

The Kazan-Shah went into the inner apartments, but there was nobody there. He returned, and said:

'What am I to do? There is no one to be found.'

Then the young man said to him:

'Was it then a sin in my mother – or myself – that caused you to turn us out, when no one can be found who has not done the same?'

When the Shah learned that the young man was his son, he instantly clasped him in his arms. He took back his wife and declared his son to be his heir.

'If I have committed no worse sin than to be fluent and quick in repartee, why do you set those men on me to lash me with their tongues? Tell me, what man is there on earth who lacks the power of speech and the use of words?'

The VIZIR told the tale of:

## 140. *The King's Testament*

There was once a king who called for his son when he was about to die and said to him:

‘My last request to you is none other than this: see that you carry it out. Never allow a beardless man within the bounds of your kingdom!’

The king died, and his son began his reign. He had such an aversion to beardless men that nobody dared to speak of one in his presence. One day a beardless man brought him a gift of flowers. He was enraged, and had the man so severely beaten that he fell down senseless. The king then took pity on him, and said:

‘Do not kill him – that would be wrong – but take him into the house, and send him away if he recovers.’

The chief cook carried him away. The beardless man had only feigned to be badly injured, and he did recover. He was given better food than the king himself enjoyed. The chief cook grew to like him, and treated him with consideration. He played chess with his comrades, and was such a good player that no one could beat him. The vizir came to hear of him; he dearly loved a game of chess, and he also was a good player. The vizir took the beardless man to his house and they began to play; the beardless man won. His praises reached the king's ears. He had both players brought before him and set them to play a game. The beardless man again beat the vizir, and the king took him to his heart. After some time had passed the king deposed the vizir and appointed the beardless man in his place. He was in such high favour that the king did nothing without consulting him.

A time came when the king's enemies attacked in such force that his army could not withstand them. He had two horses loaded with pearls and precious stones; he mounted one and the beardless man the other, and they fled the country. They came to another kingdom. The beardless vizir offered this counsel:

‘You are a young man and I an elder, yet you are the lord and I your vassal. That will not look well, and we shall not be treated with honour. If you will be guided by me, you will give yourself out to be my vassal and me to be your lord.’





The king said:  
'So be it. A man should suffer a worse fate than this when he fails to carry out his father's dying request!'

'I know that you are like that beardless man, with his smooth tongue; you speak so well that you persuade men to believe you. Yet you would do as he did, if you had the opportunity.'

RUKA answered with a tale:

### 141. *Pomegranate Juice*

There was once a gardener who was well-conducted and of a pious disposition. He offered fruit to everyone who came to see him. He would squeeze one pomegranate and fill a cup with the juice, whatever its size. One day the king went to visit him in disguise. The gardener did not recognize him, offered him fruit and squeezed the juice from a pomegranate. The king was surprised to see how much juice it yielded, and said:

'If one pomegranate has so much juice in it, how is it that my servants give me so little? I shall ask them!'

Next day the king again went to see his gardener and asked for pomegranate juice. The fruit yielded only a thin trickle. He said to the gardener:

'Yesterday's pomegranate was full of juice. What has happened today?'

The gardener replied:

'Brother, our king used to be magnanimous and open-handed, and gave proof of it in many ways; but now it seems that some care has entered his heart, and he is less generous.'

The king understood his meaning, and went away.

'It appears that your venomous tongue has turned the heart of my gracious sovereign against me and that is why you take this tone with me, when otherwise you would not speak to me as you do.'

LEON told the tale of:

## 142. *The Butcher and the Customer*

A certain man went to a butcher and said:

‘Brother, I have no money on me, but if you will let me have half a sheep I will pay for it tomorrow.’

The butcher said:

‘It would not be proper for you to go away carrying a piece of raw meat; if you will return to your house, and send me a strand of your hair by the hand of a slave, I shall recognize the token and give the meat to him.’

The man went away and sent the butcher a lock of his hair by the hand of a slave, with the message:

‘Here is my hair: pray send the meat.’

The butcher said to the slave:

‘My good fellow, your master was here himself with his beard and moustaches, and I did not give him a morsel; why should I now give a large piece of meat to a man who brings me only one strand of hair?’

‘You prate as he did. Does the King’s regard for you change according to how you are treated by his son and the vizir?’

RUKA answered with this tale:

## 143. *The Man who Overpowered the Kadjis*

There was a village in a rocky gorge with steep, precipitous sides at the foot of a mountain. A bridge spanned the ravine and the people of the region used to go across it. Kadjis had taken up their abode there. Sometimes they threw large stones at men crossing the bridge, sometimes they frightened them so that they lost their footing. They caused great distress to the people of that region and their king.



They could think of no way to rid themselves of the Kadjis, until a certain man said to the king:

‘Command me, and I will obey!’

The king accepted his offer of service, and the man went away and obtained two two-stringed lyres, two woollen rugs, a jar of wine, a sleeping-draught, two bowls and a rope of pigs’ bristles. He went on to the bridge, spread out one of the rugs and set down a lyre, a bowl and the sleeping-draught. He spread the second rug at the entrance to the bridge, coiled the rope underneath it and seated himself on the rug. He took a drink of wine, touched the strings of the lyre and began to sing. He drank wine and sang melodiously in praise of solitude.

The Kadjis were looking on. Two of them came and seated themselves on the rug and began drinking and playing the lyre. The sleeping-draught took effect, and both of them fell asleep. The man rose, rolled up the two Kadjis in the rug, bound them tightly with the rope of bristles and carried them to the king. The Kadjis awoke and the king asked them:

‘Are you Kadjis?’

They answered:

‘It is not we but this man of yours who is a Kadji and a devil into the bargain!’

‘Like him, you do all kinds of evil things, and you have corrupted the King’s heart; formerly he was gracious to me beyond measure.’

DJUMBER told the tale of:

### 144. *The Habit of Poverty*

There was once a poor man who became rich, and asked the hand of a rich man’s daughter for his son. The rich man said to himself:

‘If I refuse I shall make an enemy of him, but I cannot marry him to my daughter: I will find a means of escape from this dilemma.’

He said to the father:

‘If your son will live as a poor man for a year and go begging from door to door, I will give him my daughter in marriage.’

When the son heard this, he went out and begged for a year. At the end of the year his father renewed his suit. The girl’s father said:

'Now if he will give up begging he shall marry my daughter; if he will not, how can I marry her to a beggar?'

When the father repeated this to his son, the young man would have none of it:

'Even in a year I have scarcely learnt this trade. How can I suddenly abandon it?'

He would not give up his begging, and the rich man never gave him his daughter

'You have formed a habit, as he did: you speak with a sharp, malicious tongue and will not give it up on any account. Even the habits of a year are hard to break, and have you not spent every day of your life in forming this one?'

RUKA answered with this tale:

### 145. *A Search by Candlelight*

There was once a headman in a village who was a good and upright man, and yet he was much disliked by those who served under him, who made false accusations against him to the king. He was dismissed from his post, which was given to another man. The new headman had an evil disposition and was very powerful. The people were oppressed, and they said:

'How can we ask the king to give us another headman, when one has so lately been appointed?'

All the villagers, men and women, met together and set a candle on each of their ten fingers, lit them and marched through the streets. The king asked them what they were doing. They said:

'We are searching for our headman who was dismissed, and we cannot find him.'

'You have brought about my downfall, and I know that you will do whatever you please with me. Only see if you do not come searching for me by candlelight!'

The King listened to these exchanges. Sometimes he laughed; at times he was merry, at times displeased, and he showed no sign of favour to any. In the end, however, he appeared to have formed an aversion to Ruka.

The KING related this tale:



'Illustrious sovereign! Your Majesty who is all-powerful knows that I am a friend to Ruka and wish him well; but I know that my fate has turned against me. Whether I restrain him or instruct him, he will not listen; if it were otherwise, I would have no reason to oppose one man or another.'

The KING related this story:

## 148. *The King and the Crown Prince*

Once there was a king who was just and merciful, and had great riches and more treasure-chambers than he could count. His only son was good and just, and when the king grew old he gave up the throne to him and said:

'My son! Reign in my place, and do not lay a finger on my treasure-chambers while I am alive; when I die, give my treasure to the poor so that my soul may be at peace.'

His son listened to his words. He showed himself so just and beneficent that his father's rule was soon forgotten, and he began his reign well. He never went out mounted in the daytime but rode only at night; he had torches carried behind him, but none going before. Everyone found this surprising, but no one presumed to question him. His father inquired of people about his son's rule. They told him everything; they praised his son highly and spoke of his nocturnal rides. His father sent for him and said:

'My son, I hear great things of you! If it pleases you to ride out at night, pray have a torch carried before you; that would be better than having it behind!'

His son answered:

'Until today I have not ventured to speak of it, but I beg you to consider: would it not be better for the light of your wealth to shine before you and benefit the poor, than to follow after you as I am followed by a torch?'

These words pleased the king, and he gave away all his wealth. He said, in gratitude to his son:

'It is better to do all the good one can in one's lifetime, than leave it until after one is dead.'

'Sedrak! Do I not know this? Yet Ruka here thinks it better to do



as he does, and leave our good actions for a later time. He does not know how short is this fleeting life, and how little time we have. Our time is measured. The evil we have done and the failure to do good remain with us, and when the end comes we take nothing with us but our evil deeds.'

The VIZIR told the tale of:

### 149. *The Hawk, the Duck and the Partridge*

A hawk caught a duck and held it on the ground still alive. A partridge driven up by some sportsmen flew overhead. The hawk flew up to pursue it, thinking to catch it as well. The duck escaped from the hawk's talons and flew away, while the hawk could not catch the partridge. Thus it lost them both.

'Now that your Ruka has renounced his evil ways and taken to the pursuit of good, his quarry will escape him; it will be with him as it was with the hawk, and like the hawk he will find himself in a sorry plight.'

The KING related this tale:


### 150. *The Duck and the Toad*

A small pool of stagnant water was left on a mountainside after the rain. A duck came and settled on it, and stayed there. A toad made friends with the duck, and they lived together and amused themselves as best they could. Under the heat of the sun in summer the water evaporated from the pool. The duck said to the toad:

'Come, let us find another place.'

The toad said:

'You are accustomed to trailing about from one place to another, but I could not leave my ancestral home.'



The duck flew away to dwell in a place where there was a broad stream. The toad would not leave his family dwelling. Some time later the duck said:

‘I will go and visit my friend and see how he fares.’

She went back, to find that the pool had dried up altogether and the toad was dead. She said:

‘Brother, it is better to be a wanderer as I am than to be too much attached to one’s birthplace.’

‘Since Ruka is so firmly set on the path of evil-doing, do not follow his example, but do good, and he will suffer the fate of the toad.’

The VIZIR told the tale of:

### 151. *The Physician and the Two Sick Noblemen*

Once upon a time there was a king of high renown, who was both merciful and powerful. He had a physician for whom no illness was incurable. Two of the king’s courtiers fell gravely ill. One was extremely constipated, while the other suffered from continual diarrhoea. The physician essayed all his remedies, but without success. The king constantly asked for news of the sick men. One day the physician fell on his knees before the sovereign and said:

‘Sire, if you wish to vent your anger upon me, kill me and make an end of me. If you wish to be merciful, spare me the task of attending those two patients. My days are turned into night as I strive to dam the flood for the one while I wait for the dam to burst with the other. I entreat the king to give me riches, and God to save my life. Thus I will end my prayers, in the hope that one or the other may be granted.’

‘I beg Your Majesty to spare me their talk and their barbed exchanges!’

The KING related the tale of:



# 152. *The Devoted Husband and Wife*

In the city of Constantinople there lived a husband and wife who loved each other deeply. One day the husband went to market to sell various goods, when a woman's glance lighted upon him. She walked about the market showing herself off, but the man was not aware of her advances. Then she filled a cup with water, covered it with plane-tree leaves and set it down before him. He was surprised, but could make nothing of it. Soon after this he fell ill, and said to his wife:

'A certain woman did thus and thus; it was not long afterwards that I felt unwell, and I have never recovered.'

His wife said:

'That woman has fallen in love with you, and that is the cause of your complaint. Why make yourself ill – go and visit her!'

Her husband said:

'I do not know where she lives.'

His wife said:

'Look for a house with a plane-tree growing outside, and a pool at the foot of the tree: seek her there and you will find her!'

The man searched, and found just such a house. The door was shut, and nobody opened to him. He went home and told his wife, who said:

'She does not wish you to enter by that door. Go to another.'

The man went out again and entered the house by another door. He met the woman, they made merry and embraced. The market guards came to the door and barred their way. They offered the men large bribes, but they would not yield. The man gave one of them a florin and sent him to tell his wife what had happened to him. The guards led them off to prison, intending to bring them before the Qadi the next day and have them sentenced to death. The man's wife wrote a letter to the Qadi:

'Dispenser of justice! Have you ever in all your life had a husband and wife seized and imprisoned for the sole offence of being together?'

She wrapped herself in a sheet and went to the prison where her husband and the lewd woman were being held. She begged the gaoler:





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'That man is my debtor: let me in to see him.'

Entering the cell, she gave the sheet to the whore to cover herself, sent her away and stayed with her husband. Her letter roused the Qadi to wrath. He sent men to bring the prisoners before him with their guards. The guards swore that they had come upon the couple in the act of fornication. Then the woman said:

'Go, ask my father or the man who paid court to me whether I am not the wife of this man here! If you accuse me of adultery you must impute it to another man, for when I am with my husband there is no end to our love-making!'

'Ah, Sedrak, I am deeply saddened that there is such animosity between you. It is my view that you cannot come out of this affair unhurt – neither you, nor I, nor any of you – and for this reason, that the flow of words from one of you to another is of a sort that will never run dry. Listen when I say this: let the many jeers and insults you have exchanged suffice for you, and let there be an end now to your talk.'

Հ. 16478



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