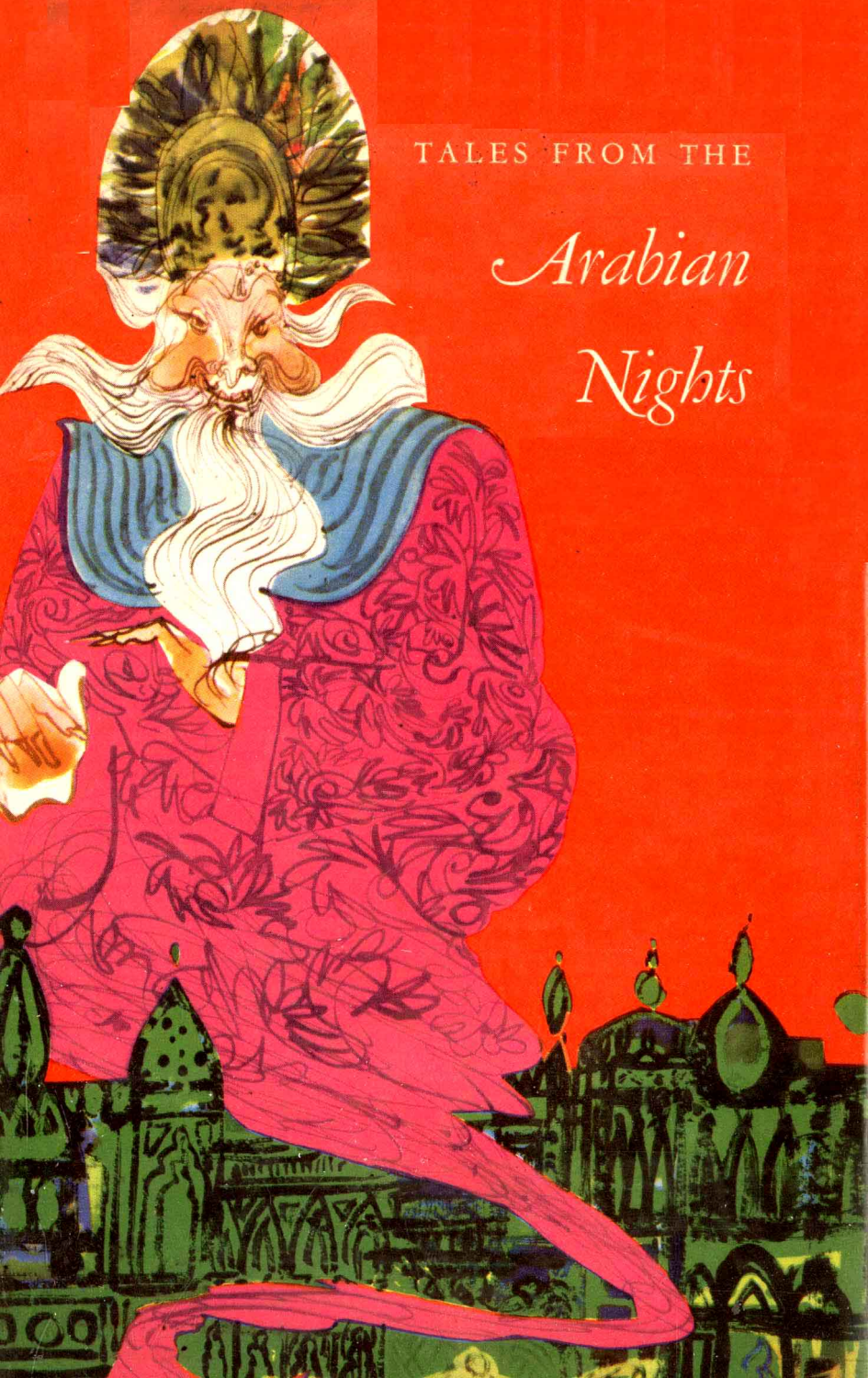


TALES FROM THE

*Arabian
Nights*



Tales from the
ARABIAN NIGHTS

Illustrated by Brian Wildsmith

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Introduction

SINCE the earliest times man has had delight in story-telling, and the traveller or trader who brought new tales with him was sure of a welcome everywhere. The recording and collecting of tales followed naturally on the discovery of the art of writing. Most of the great collections appear to have had their home in the East, and of them all none has been so widely famous or so perennially popular as *The Thousand and One Nights*, more frequently known as *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*.

The ancient Persians were a singularly gifted, witty, and humorous race, with a unique aptitude for story-telling. Centuries before Christ they were diligent in the collecting of narratives of every kind from every source. Their kings gave them ample encouragement, and at a very early date they possessed an unrivalled collection, the *Hazār Afsāna* or *The Thousand Tales*. This book was immensely popular and was in due course translated into Arabic. Round the Persian nucleus there gradually accumulated many city stories of a more sophisticated type, tales of love and intrigue in Cairo and Baghdad under the caliphs, especially the renowned Haroun al Raschid. This Arabian-Persian collection, which reached its final form about the time of our Queen Elizabeth I, was known as the *Alf Layla wa Layla* or *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, and in its turn it found universal favour in the eastern world. It was not known to Europe, however, for another hundred years or so, when, about the time of Queen Anne's accession, a selection from it was translated into French by Professor Antoine Galland and took the West by storm.

The unknown compiler of the *Hazār Afsāna*—on whom be peace!—adopted an ingenious device for linking the tales together and giving the collection unity and coherence—a device made use of later by Boccaccio in the *Decameron* and by Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*. He set the separate narratives into the framework of another story, which formed, as it were, the thread on which one after another the beads were strung. This arrangement was preserved in the Arabian version.

Introduction

The first chapter of *The Thousand Nights and a Night* relates the framework story in the following form: There was once a Persian King called Shahryár who was greatly attached to his beautiful and gifted Queen and trusted her implicitly. She, unhappily, was an unprincipled woman and was habitually unfaithful to her husband during his absences from home. When the King was convinced of her treachery beyond all possibility of doubt, he was torn with grief and rage, which were not lessened by the fact that his worthless wife had fallen in love with a hideous Negro slave. He slew them both and fled from his kingdom, blind with fury, to travel about as a beggar, hoping to dull the edge of his sorrow by finding another man more unhappy than himself. His various adventures led him to the conclusion that all women were essentially evil and ought to be exterminated. So he returned to his kingdom to put into execution a diabolical plan for avenging himself on the perfidious sex. He compelled his courtiers to furnish him daily with a beautiful girl to be his bride. He would then marry her today and cut off her head tomorrow. This continued till the land was filled with mourning and terror, and parents with grown-up daughters were fleeing from the capital.

Now King Shahryár had a favoured counsellor, his prime minister or grand vizier, whose friendship he greatly valued. This man had two lovely daughters, but the King had so far abstained from demanding either of them. The elder was an exceptionally accomplished girl, witty and of winning manners. In addition to this, she was extremely learned, well versed in poetry, philosophy, mathematics, and the arts. She had read, moreover, all the histories and romances that she could lay hands on, till she knew all the stories of the world, and these she loved to retell with zest and humour. The indiscriminate slaughter of her friends and contemporaries had greatly disturbed her mind, and she pondered long and deeply whether by any means the King might be won from his madness. At last she devised a scheme which seemed to offer at least a chance of success, and to carry it out she enlisted her sister's co-operation.

One day she approached the vizier, her father: 'Go and tell the King that I wish to marry him,' said she. The poor vizier was much distressed, but neither by prayers nor by reasonings could he prevail on her to change her mind. Even threats were powerless to alter her resolution; obstinately she repeated: 'I intend to marry the King. It may be that I shall be able to prevail on him to cease this slaying of his brides; if so, well. If not, I can but die.' The King was gratified when

he learned that the vizier's beautiful daughter had volunteered to marry him, but he magnanimously paused to remind his friend: 'Nevertheless the next day she shall surely die.' Sadly the vizier replied: 'I know it, sire, and I have told her so, but she repeats: "Notwithstanding, I will marry the King."' Whereupon the King gave orders that the bride should be brought to him that evening.

After the wedding had been solemnized, the new Queen said to her husband: 'Since I am to die tomorrow I should dearly like to bid my sister a last farewell.' The King gave his consent, the younger sister was summoned, and in due course, as night drew on, all three composed themselves for sleep. When midnight was passed the Queen roused her sister and reminded her of the part she was to play. It happened that King Shahryár was restless, and the sister took advantage of his wakefulness to say: 'None of us seems to be sleeping overmuch; could you not, my sister, while away the time with one of your delightful tales?' 'Nay,' said the Queen, 'the King, my husband, might not wish it so.' 'Pray let us hear you,' said the King.

Thereupon the Queen began to tell an enthralling story that held her hearers spellbound; but when she came to the most exciting moment of it all, she stopped. 'Pray go on,' said the King. 'I can tell no more now,' said she. 'It is a pity you must put me to death tomorrow, for the next part of the story is better.' 'Indeed it is,' chimed in the sister, 'the best part is to come.' Then the King bethought him: 'There is no need to execute her tomorrow. The day after will do, and I should like to hear the end of the story.' Next morning the grand vizier and the courtiers were amazed to find that there was no talk of putting the Queen to death. On the second night the King called for the rest of the story, and the Queen told on, but again she contrived to pause at a critical moment, and again the King thought: 'I shall wait to hear the end of the tale and put her to death on the morrow.'

Thus it went on from day to day till they had been married nearly a year, and a beautiful boy was born to the royal pair. The King was very proud of his heir, and had learned, moreover, to love his beautiful and brilliant wife. And still the stories went on till there were over two hundred of them, spread over a thousand and one nights. By this time the King had come to his senses and knew that there were good and evil women even as there are good and evil men, and he realized that his Queen had voluntarily risked her life to cure him of his insensate hate.

Introduction

The courageous Queen had meantime won also the love and gratitude of her people, and they named her Sheherazade, that is Shahr-ázád—the Saviour of the City.

There have been many English translations of *The Arabian Nights* at various times, some merely at second-hand from the French, some direct from the Arabic. One of the best-known is that of Edward William Lane. It is based on an abbreviated Arabic edition and covers about half the tales. The most complete and scholarly translation is that of Sir Richard Burton, one of the first scientific anthropologists and the founder of the Royal Anthropological Institute. He had travelled widely in the East, knew several oriental languages well, and was intimately acquainted with eastern manners and customs. He had even ventured to penetrate in disguise the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina, where his life would not have been worth a moment's purchase if he had been discovered to be a white man and a Christian. Burton translated the whole of the most complete Arabic original, adding invaluable illustrative and explanatory notes. But his twelve large and costly volumes supply rather more than the average reader requires, unless he is a folk-lorist or anthropologist by profession.

The present book contains some of the best and best-known of the stories, adapted from Lane's translation.

E. O. LORIMER

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The Story of the Magic Horse

THERE was, in ancient times, in the country of the Persians, a mighty king of great dignity, who had three daughters, like shining full moons and flowery gardens; and he had a male child, like the moon. He observed two annual festivals, that of the New Year's Day, and that of the Autumnal Equinox; and it was his custom, on these occasions, to open his palaces, and give his gifts, and make proclamation of safety and security, and promote the chamberlains and lieutenants; the people of his dominions also used to go in to him and salute him, and congratulate him on the festival, offering him presents and servants; and he loved philosophy and geometry.

And while the King was sitting on the throne of his dominions, on a certain day during one of these festivals, there came in to him three sages: with one of them was a peacock of gold; and with the second, a trumpet of brass; and with the third, a horse of ivory and ebony; whereupon the King said to them, 'What are these things, and what is their use?'

The owner of the peacock answered, 'The use of this peacock is, that whenever an hour of the night or day passeth, it will flap its wings and utter a cry.' And the owner of the trumpet said, 'If this trumpet be placed at the gate of the city, it will be as a defender of it; for if an enemy enter the city, this trumpet will send forth a sound against him; so he will be known and arrested.' And the owner of the horse said, 'O my lord, the use of this horse is, that if a man mount it, it will convey him to whatever country he desireth.'

Upon this the King said, 'I will not bestow any favour upon you until I make trial of the uses of these things.' Then he made trial of the peacock, and found it to be as its owner had said. And he made trial of the trumpet, and found it as its owner had said. He therefore said to the two sages (the owners of the

peacock and the trumpet), 'Request of me what ye will.' And they replied, 'We request of thee that thou marry to each of us one of thy daughters.' Whereupon the King bestowed upon them two of his daughters.

Then the third sage, the owner of the horse, advanced, and, having kissed the ground before the King, said to him, 'O King of the age, bestow upon me like as thou hast bestowed upon my companions.' The King replied, 'When I shall have made trial of that which thou hast brought.' And upon this, the King's son advanced and said, 'O my Father, I will mount this horse and make trial of it, and obtain proof of its use.' So the King replied, 'O my Son, try it as thou desirest.'

The King's son accordingly arose, and mounted the horse, and urged it with his feet; but it moved not from its place. He therefore said, 'O sage, where is its rapidity of pace of which thou boastedst?' On hearing this, the sage came to him, and showed him a turning-pin, by which to make it ascend; saying to him, 'Turn this pin.' And the King's son turned it, and lo, the horse moved, and soared with him towards the upper region of the sky, and ceased not its flight with him until he was out of sight of the people; whereupon the Prince was perplexed at his case, and repented of his having mounted the horse. He said, 'The sage hath made use of a stratagem to destroy me, and there is no strength nor power but in God, the High, the Great!'

Then he began to examine all the members of the horse; and while he was doing so, he saw a thing like the head of a cock on the horse's right shoulder, and the like on the left shoulder; so he said, 'I see not any indication excepting these two buttons.' And he turned the button that was on the right shoulder; upon which the horse bore him upwards with increased velocity into the sky; so he took off his hand from that button, and, looking at the left shoulder, and seeing the button that was there, he turned it; and the movements of the horse became lessened in velocity, and changed from ascending to descending.

It ceased not to descend with him towards the earth by little and little, while he continued to exercise caution for his safety; and when he saw this, and knew the uses of the horse, his heart

was filled with joy and happiness, and he thanked God (whose name be exalted!) for the favour that He had shown him in saving him from destruction. He ceased not to descend for the whole of the remainder of the day; for in his ascent the earth had become distant from him; and he turned about the face of the horse as he desired, while it descended with him: when he would, he was carried downwards by it; and when he would, he was borne by it upwards.

Now when he had obtained what he desired with respect to the horse, he proceeded on it towards the earth, and began to look at its countries and cities, which he knew not; for he had never seen them before during the whole of his life. And among the objects that he beheld was a city constructed in the most excellent manner, in the midst of a land beautifully verdant, with trees and rivers; upon which he meditated in his mind, and said, 'Would that I knew what is the name of this city, and in what region it is.'

He then made a circuit around the city, viewing it attentively, right and left. The day had nearly departed, and the sun was about to set; so he said within himself, 'I have not found any place in which to pass the night better than this city: I will therefore pass this night in it, and in the morning I will return to my family and my royal residence, and acquaint my family and my father with that which hath happened to me, and inform him of the things that mine eyes have seen.'

Accordingly he began to search for a place in which he might feel secure of the safety of himself and his horse, and where no one might see him; and while he was thus engaged, lo, he beheld, in the midst of the city, a palace rising high into the air, surrounded by a large wall with high battlements; whereupon he said within himself, 'This place is agreeable.'

He turned the button that caused the horse to descend, and ceased not to be carried downwards on it until he descended steadily on the flat roof of the palace, when he alighted from the horse, praising God (whose name be exalted!), and began to go round about the horse, and to examine it, and said, 'By Allah, he who made thee thus was an expert sage; and if God (whose

name be exalted!) extend the term of my life, and restore me to my country and my family in safety, and reunite me with my father, I will assuredly bestow every favour upon this sage, and treat him with the utmost beneficence.'

He then sat upon the roof of the palace until he knew that the inmates had betaken themselves to sleep. Hunger and thirst pained him; for since he had parted from his father he had not eaten food; and he said within himself, 'Verily such a palace as this is not devoid of the necessities of life.'

He therefore left the horse in a place alone, and walked down to look for something to eat; and finding a flight of steps, he descended by them to the lower part of the building, where he found a court paved with marble; and he wondered at this place, and at the beauty of its construction; but he heard not in the palace any sound, nor the cheering voice of an inhabitant. So he paused in perplexity, and looked to the right and left, not knowing whither to go. Then he said within himself, 'There is no better course for me than to return to the place in which is my horse, and to pass the night by it; and when the morning cometh, I will mount and depart.'

But while he was addressing himself with these words, he beheld a light approaching the place where he stood, and, looking attentively at that light, he found that it was with a party of female slaves, among whom was a beautiful damsel, of a stature tall and graceful, resembling the splendid full moon.

That damsel was the daughter of the King of this city, and her father loved her with so great an affection that he built for her this palace; and whenever her heart was contracted, she used to come hither, together with her slaves, and to remain here a day, or two days, or more; after which she returned to the palace where she generally resided. It happened that she came that night for the sake of diversion and dilatation of the mind, and she walked among the slaves, attended by an officer of her household armed with a sword; and when they entered the palace they spread the furniture, and gave vent to the odours from the perfuming-vessels, and sported and rejoiced.

Now while they were thus engaged, the King's son rushed

upon that officer, struck him a blow which laid him prostrate, and, taking the sword from his hand, ran upon the slaves who were with the King's daughter, and dispersed them to the right and left. And when the King's daughter saw his beauty and loveliness, she said, 'Perhaps thou art he who demanded me in marriage yesterday of my father, and whom he rejected, and whom he asserted to be of hideous aspect. By Allah, my father lied in saying those words: for thou art none other than a handsome person.'

Now the son of the King of India had requested her of her father, and he had rejected him because he was disagreeable in aspect; and she imagined that the Prince now before her was he who had demanded her in marriage.

The slaves, however, said to her, 'O our mistress, this is not the person who demanded thee in marriage of thy father; for that person was hideous, and this is handsome; and he who demanded thee of thy father, and whom he rejected, is not fit to be a servant to this person; but, O our mistress, verily this young man is one of high dignity.'

After this, the slaves went to the prostrated man, and roused him; whereupon he sprang up in alarm, and searched for his sword, not finding it in his hand. So the slaves said to him, 'He who took thy sword, and laid thee prostrate, is sitting with the King's daughter.'

Now the King had charged this man with the office of guarding his daughter, in his fear for her from misfortunes and evil accidents. He therefore arose, and went to the curtain, and when he raised it he saw the King's daughter sitting with the Prince, and they were conversing together. As soon as he beheld them he said to the Prince, 'O my master, art thou a human being, or a genie?' To which the Prince replied, 'Woe to thee, O most ill-omened of slaves! How is it that thou regardest the sons of the Persian kings as of the unbelieving devils?'

Then, taking the sword in his hand, he said to him, 'I am the son-in-law of the King, and he hath married me to his daughter.' So when the officer heard these words he said to him, 'O my master, if thou be of the human species as thou hast asserted, she

is suited to none but thee, and thou art more worthy of her than any other.'

The officer then went shrieking to the King; and he had rent his clothes, and thrown dust upon his head. And when the King heard his crying, he said to him, 'What hath befallen thee, for thou hast agitated my heart? Acquaint me quickly, and be brief in thy words.'

He therefore answered him, 'O King, go to the assistance of thy daughter; for one of the genii, in the garb of a human being, and having the form of a prince, hath got possession of her: therefore seize him.'

When the King heard these words from him he thought to slay him, and said to him, 'How came it to pass that thou wast neglectful of my daughter, so that this event befell her?'

He then went to the palace wherein was his daughter, and on his arrival he found the slaves standing there, and said to them, 'What is it that hath happened to my daughter?'

They answered him, 'O King, while we were sitting with her, suddenly there rushed upon us this young man, who resembleth the full moon, and than whom we have never seen anyone more handsome in countenance, with a drawn sword in his hand; and we inquired of him respecting his business, and he asserted that thou hadst married to him thy daughter: we know nothing more than this; and we know not whether he be a human being or a genie; but he is chaste and well bred, and doth not addict himself to that which is disgraceful.'

So when the King heard their words his rage was cooled. He then raised the curtain by little and little, and looked, and beheld the King's son sitting with his daughter, conversing; and he was of most comely form, with a face like the shining full moon.

The King could not control himself, through his jealousy for his daughter. He therefore raised the curtain and entered, with a drawn sword in his hand, and rushed upon them as though he were a ghoul. The Prince, on seeing him, said to her, 'Is this thy father?' She answered, 'Yes.' And upon this, he sprang upon his feet, and, taking his sword in his hand, shouted at the

King with an amazing cry, which terrified him, and was about to attack him with the sword; but the King, perceiving that the Prince was stronger than he, sheathed his sword, and stood until the King's son came up to him, when he met him with courtesy, and said to him, 'O young man, art thou a human being or a genie?'

The Prince replied, 'Were it not that I respect thy right and the honour of thy daughter, I had shed thy blood. How is it thou derivest me from the devils, when I am of the sons of the ancient kings, who, if they desired to take thy kingdom, would make thee totter from thy glory and dominion, and despoil thee of all that is in thy dwellings?'

The King, on hearing his words, dreaded and feared him; but said to him, 'If thou be of the sons of the kings, as thou hast asserted, how is it that thou hast entered my palace without my permission, and dishonoured me, and come unto my daughter, asserting that thou art her husband, and pretending that I had married thee to her, when I have killed the kings and the sons of the kings on their demanding her of me in marriage? And who will save thee from my power, when, if I cried out unto my slaves and my young men and commanded them to slay thee, they would slay thee immediately? Who then can deliver thee from my hand?'

The Prince, however, when he heard these words from him, said to the King, 'Verily I wonder at thee, and at the smallness of thy penetration. Dost thou covet for thy daughter a husband better than myself; and hast thou seen anyone more firm of heart, and superior in requital, and more glorious in authority and troops and guards than I am?'

The King answered him, 'No, by Allah: but I would, O young man, that thou demand her in marriage publicly, that I may marry her to thee.' The Prince rejoined, 'What I propose to thee is this: either that thou meet me in single combat, and he who killeth the other shall be more deserving and worthy of the kingdom; or else that thou leave me this night, and when the morning cometh, that thou send forth to me thy soldiers and troops and young men, and acquaint me with their number.'

The King replied, 'Their number is forty thousand horsemen, besides the slaves belonging to me, and their followers, who are equal in number.'

And the Prince said, 'When the day beginneth, send them forth to me, and say to them, "This person hath demanded of me my daughter in marriage on the condition that he will meet you all in combat; and he hath pretended that he will overcome and subdue you, and that ye cannot prevail against him." Then leave me with them to combat them; and if they kill me, the result will be more proper for the preserving of thine honour; but if I overcome and subdue them, then am I such a person as the King should desire for his son-in-law.'

And when the King heard his words, he approved of his advice and accepted it, notwithstanding that he wondered at his saying, and was struck with terror at his determination to meet in combat all his army, such as he had described it to him. Then they sat conversing.

And after this, the King called the officer, and commanded him to go forth immediately to his vizier, and to desire him to collect all the troops, and order them to equip themselves with their arms, and to mount their horses. So the officer went to the vizier and acquainted him with that which the King had commanded. Upon this the vizier summoned the chiefs of the army, and the grandees of the empire, and ordered them to mount their horses, and to go forth equipped with the weapons of war.

Meanwhile, the King continued to converse with the young man, being pleased with his conversation and sense and good breeding; and as they were talking together, the morning dawned. The King therefore arose, and went to his throne, ordered his troops to mount, and caused an excellent horse, one of the best that he possessed, to be brought before the Prince, commanding that it should be equipped for him with handsome saddle and trappings.

But the young man said to him, 'O King, I will not mount until I take a view of the troops, and observe them.' And the King replied, 'It shall be as thou desirest.' Then the King proceeded, with the young man before him, until they arrived

at the parade-ground, when the young man looked at the troops and their number.

The King called out, 'O companies of men, a young man hath come unto me demanding in marriage my daughter, and I have never beheld any handsomer than he, nor any stronger in heart, nor any greater in intrepidity than he; and he hath asserted that he alone will overcome you and subdue you, and pretendeth that ye, even if your number amounted to a hundred thousand, would be in his estimation but few. But when he cometh forth to combat you, receive him upon the points of your spears, and the edges of your swords; for he hath undertaken a great enterprise.'

The King then said to the young man, 'O my Son, do as thou desirest with them.' But he replied, 'O King, thou hast not treated me equitably. How shall I go forth to combat them when I am on foot and thy people are mounted on horses?'

So the King said to him, 'I desired thee to mount, and thou refusedst. Take then of the horses and choose of them that which thou wilt.'

He replied, 'None of thy horses pleaseth me, and I will mount none but the horse on which I came.'

The King therefore said unto him, 'And where is thy horse?'

He answered him, 'It is on the top of thy palace.'

'In what place in my palace?' asked the King.

He answered, 'On the roof of the palace.'

And when the King heard his words, he said to him, 'This is the first instance that hath appeared of thine insanity. Oh, woe to thee! How can the horse be upon the roof? But now will thy veracity be distinguished from thy lying.'

Then the King looked towards one of his chief officers and said to him, 'Go to my palace, and bring what thou shalt find upon the roof.' And the people wondered at the words of the young man; one saying to another, 'How can this horse descend the stairs from the roof? Verily this is a thing the like of which we have never heard!'

Now the person whom the King had sent to the palace ascended to its roof, and beheld the horse standing there; and