

THE STORY OF PRINCE MAHBUB

There was in ancient times a very powerful King of Persia called Mansur-i-Alam (the conqueror of the universe). He was blessed with everything which a man could desire, and had vast treasure and large armies. His subjects were happy and contented under his just and good administration. All praised his great wisdom and noble virtues. But unfortunately he had no son to inherit his enormous riches and extensive domains. One day the king assembled all the astrologers of his realm and asked them to tell him on what particular day, hour and minute, one should be born in order to be a great and powerful king. The astrologers made their calculations and replied :—"Sire ! the child born at midnight on Sunday last will be very fortunate and happy and will be endowed with every royal virtue. So if Your Majesty is desirous of adopting an heir, adopt the child born on that day and that particular hour."

The king hearing this told his prime minister to find out in whose house a son was born at the time mentioned. Messengers ransacked the whole kingdom and brought the news that no male child was born at that particular time, except that the wife of a butcher had given birth to a son. The King calling the butcher asked him to give him his son. The butcher, who was a poor man, gladly promised, saying :—"Your Majesty is the lord of our lives and limbs. You have to command and we to obey." The generous monarch replied :—"Friend, I do not ask as a king but as a

private individual. Do you agree to part with your son out of perfect free will and good intention? For I will not otherwise accept the gift." The butcher replied:—"Sir, I offer you my son with the most perfect good-will and without any compulsion. It is my great good fortune that my son should be adopted in such a royal family." The child was then brought and all the ceremonies of adoption were gone through.

When the butcher's son, now called Prince Qassab, grew up, the king appointed wise and learned teachers, by whom great pains were taken for his education. When he attained majority, the king made him viceroy of one of the richest provinces of his empire. Here when in power, the Prince displayed all the evil propensities of his disposition. For though born under auspicious signs, and brought up under good teachers, the hereditary qualities of a butcher, which were ingrained in his nature, manifested themselves in full force. He tyrannised over his subjects and spread terror throughout the country by his atrocities. Reports of his misgovernment and complaints of the persons ruined by his tyranny or disgraced by his debaucheries daily reached the just king, but he did not, out of his good nature, give much credence to them.

In the meantime, the queen who was supposed to be barren, exhibited signs of maternity, and great was the rejoicing of the king at this discovery. He had despaired of having any issue of his own, but was most pleasantly disappointed. He at once despatched messengers to Prince Qassab with the following news:—"Rejoice, O son, for I soon hope to have an addition to our family. Your mother,

the Queen, is *enceinte*, and the astrologers have predicted that a son will be born to me. O happy news for you that you will get a brother !” As soon as Prince Qassab got the news, he said to himself :—“Now my evil star has appeared on the horizon. When a prince of the royal blood is born, who will care for a butcher’s son though raised so high ? Surely my fall would begin with the rise of my brother. Oh, it is painful to lose such a position and rank as I now enjoy. Had I remained the son of a butcher I should have been contented with my lot, but having tasted the fruits of power and royalty it would be very painful to lay them aside. I must go to the city of my adoptive father and see whether I cannot retain my power.” Thus musing, the Prince riding on a swift horse went in all haste towards the capital. He reached the palace of the king when it was about midnight and getting admission, for everybody knew him and nobody apprehended the evil purpose which had brought him in such an unseasonable hour to the palace, he at once repaired to the apartment of the king. He found him asleep, and with one blow of his sharp sabre cut off his head. He then went with the bloody sabre in search of the Queen, but she had heard of the arrival of the Prince and had disappeared by a secret door out of the palace, with some faithful attendants. They carried her on swift horses, during the night, far away from the capital, till they, at last, reached a forest, where the Queen dismissed them saying :—“Go now my faithful adherents ! and let me remain in this dreary place. If I die of starvation or be killed by some wild animal, I shall have, at least, this satisfaction that I am not murdered by the butcher’s son. Leave



"Art thou some angel, *Peri*, goddess, or spirit?"



me now to my fate and go." The poor servants returned home weeping.

The Queen sat there bewailing her hard destiny, when a *zemindar* (a rich farmer) passed by that way, and seeing her was struck with her extraordinary beauty and majestic air. Coming up to her, he said :—"Art thou some angel, *Peri*, goddess, or spirit? Who art thou?" The Queen replied :—"I am no angel, *Peri*, goddess, or spirit, but a poor daughter of man, in distress. I was the Queen of this country, and am now a homeless wanderer." As soon as the honest farmer came to know the august rank of the lady, he fell on the ground and kissing the dust said :—"Mother, I am a *Jagirdar* of your husband and all these fields and villages which you see around are yours. Come and live with us; we are humble, honest people, and you will find comfort if not elegance in our simpler modes of living. Remain with us, and as I am childless, the child of your womb shall I adopt as my own and bring him up with all due care and diligence." The Queen consented and was taken by the *zemindar* to his house, where she remained in disguise as the cousin of the *zemindar*.

In due course she gave birth to a son whose beauty illumined the whole house, and the news spread throughout the village that the *zemindar's* cousin had given birth to an angel. The Queen called him by the name of Mahbub-i-Alam (the beloved of the universe.) When Prince Mahbub grew up, he was sent to the village school, where he read with other boys, sons of the Jats (a caste of cultivators). There he soon surpassed his school mates in learning and physical exploits. While the sons of the Jats took pleasure

in playing with bat and ball, the prince evinced his royal blood by playing at archery. He made a rude bow and rude arrows and would shoot all the time in every direction. Though nobody taught him the art, he soon became a very good archer, and could hit the mark from a long distance.

Once the usurper, the brother of Prince Mahbub, held a great tournament in which all the great archers of the kingdom were asked to attend. There were four prizes for the successful archer. First, a purse of five hundred *mohars*; second, a suit of dress out of the royal wardrobe which the winner might select; third, any horse from the royal stable; and fourth, a suit of armour and arms, weapons, &c., from the arsenal. The news of the great tournament reached even that secluded village and Prince Mahbub hearing of it set out for the city without informing his mother. The poor Queen thought that her son must have gone to school, but the Prince instead of going there had started for the town. Night came and still the Prince did not return; men were sent in all directions to search for him, but to no purpose. The Queen sat disconsolate and weeping, and would not take any food or drink, till her Mahbub should return.

The Prince, on the other hand, in company with other archers reached the city and lodged with them in a *serai* (inn). He soon made friends with them all, and asked them to permit him also to try at the mark in the coming tournament. His gentle appearance and amiable temper prepossessed the archers in his favour and they gladly enlisted his name among the members of the company.

The next day was fixed for the tournament, and the archers and the prince went to the place early in the day. There was a large concourse of spectators, and in a rich and splendid pavillion and on a gorgeous throne sat the usurper to witness the performance. At a signal from him the archers entered the lists and one after another shot at the mark. Some came very near to it, others nearer but none pierced the exact centre. Prince Mahbub, who was the youngest of all the lot, now shot his arrow last and it pierced the very centre of the mark. At once there rose deafening cheers and applause, and the whole assembly praised the wonderful feat of the young boy.

The King gave him a purse of gold containing five hundred *mohars* and ordered his vazir to take him to the royal wardrobe, armoury and stable to select the various articles. The vazir conducted him to the wardrobe and the Prince without any hesitation selected the identical suit of dress which was worn by his father, the late King. And let no one wonder at it, for he was guided in this matter by his royal and innate instincts. Accoutred in the dress of his father he went to the armoury and selected those very weapons which the late King used when going out on chase or war, and then entering the stable rode on the very horse which was the favourite of his father. Thus equipped he came before the assembly, and the whole people with one voice, and as if involuntarily, cried out:—"Behold our favourite and just King come to Life." So exact was the resemblance between the Prince and his father, that the people mistook him for the late sovereign. The acclamation of the people

disconcerted the usurper, and he was mortally enraged, and yelling out to his servants, said:—"Seize that silly boy and hang him." The servants ran here and there, and raised a great confusion, for in fact they were not at all anxious to obey the cruel mandate, and gave Mahbub every opportunity to escape out of the bustle.

When the Prince came out of the city, he assembled all the archers, and throwing down the purse of gold amongst them rode with all haste towards the village. He returned there after full forty-eight hours and found his mother sitting at the door weeping and crying, "Mahbub, Mahbub." As soon as she saw him, she burst forth into a pleasant laugh, and then wept again bitterly. Then the Prince jumping down from his horse, asked her:—"Mother, what is the meaning of your behaviour? Why did you laugh and weep in the same breath?" The Queen replied with a sigh:—"I laughed when I saw you return in this equipment, which belonged to your father. I wept at the thought of the change of fortune which has brought us to this pass. Now you know the secret of your birth, and the reason of my weeping and laughing."

The Prince hearing this replied with deep emotion:—"Mother, I had some faint glimmerings of this since I had been to the tournament and the people exclaimed that I was just like the late King. But your account has confirmed my doubt: mother! we must not stay a second more in this country. Not that I am afraid of anything from the cruelty of the murderer of my father, but I swear not to eat or drink the food or water of this land so long as I do not wreak vengeance on the accursed head of the

usurper. The very air of the country is poison so long as I do not breathe it as a king and avenger of the wrongs of my sire. Mother ! arise, let us be off."

When the *zemindar* heard of the determination of the Prince, he was sorely afflicted and entreated him with tears and sobs to change his mind. But Mahbub was firm as a rock, and would not be prevailed upon, though he, too, was equally grieved to part from the honest *zemindar* and his family. However, bidding them a hasty adieu, the Prince and the Queen went their way, trusting to Providence to guide them out of the kingdom.

They travelled on and on without food or drink till they had left behind the kingdom of the usurper. Afflicted with many days' hunger and thirst, and fatigued from their long journey, they now began to search for a hospitable roof where to beg some bread and water, and rest their weary limbs. But the outlook was very gloomy, the place where they had come was a mountainous district that showed no signs of human habitation, far or near. However, after much search, they saw a humble musjid at the foot of the hill. They dragged themselves exhausted and almost lifeless into the house of prayer and saw an old *faqir* lying on a tattered and worn out mattress. The Prince then humbly besought the *faqir* to give them some food and drink as they were dying of hunger. The old man pointing to a niche said :—"Young man, there is a bit of bread in that hole, take it out and eat you both." The Prince going to the place, found there a small slice of cold and mouldy bread not enough to make one mouthful. Then taking it to his mother and presenting the slice to her he

said :—"Mother, eat this and support your strength. It is not sufficient for us both, but you stand in greater need of sustenance than my young and vigorous frame. Eat it, mother." But the Queen would not take it, saying :—"Son, I am old and have enjoyed the pleasures and suffered the pains of this transitory life ; I am prepared to meet death. Let me die, as it will make no difference. But live thou, and do thy great work." The Prince paid no heed to all this but went on pressing the bread on her. She refusing and he insisting, they squabbled on for a long time. The *faqir* seeing this observed :—"Travellers, why do you fight for nothing? You both eat this slice, and you will not be able to finish it." Then mother and son ate of the bread, but still the slice remained the same as before, and was not diminished even by an inch. They were fully satiated and the bread was the same as before. Never had they found anything so delicious as this crusty and mouldy piece of bread. Then the *faqir* pointing to another niche, said, "there is the water." The Prince approaching it saw a small earthen jar of water. The contents of the vessel were not sufficient even for a single person, and there was altercation between them as to who should drink, and again the *faqir* said :—"Children of the road, drink you both in the name of the great Allah." And they both drank out of the vessel, and were fully satisfied, and yet the water in it was not diminished by a drop. Then the *faqir* asked them :—"Whence are you coming and whither will you go? You cannot go beyond this mountain; for on the other side of it is a tempestuous and fathomless sea. No ships have ever ventured to sail in its turbulent waters. Return home."

But the Prince replied :—"O holy *faqir*, we have vowed not to return to the land of our birth. The polished mirror of your pure heart has already received the reflection of our sad history on it. We need not say who we are. Help us now in our journey, O holy saint, for nothing is impossible for the divine austerities of your prayers." The *faqir* replied :—"True, O traveller, prayers are accepted, by Allah when they rise from pure hearts. What can a sinful creature like me do ? However in my travels I have discovered some of the properties of natural objects. I will see whether I can help you."

Then telling them to remain in the musjid and await his return, the *faqir* went out into an adjacent forest. After a short time he returned with two pieces of wood, freshly cut from the branches of some trees, peculiar to those parts. With one piece, he made a short stick about a cubit in length and with the other a torch. Then addressing them, he said : "Here are the things that will carry you across the dangerous forests and vast seas. This torch when lighted will frighten away all fierce animals of the wood or the deep. And this rod, a cubit long, is your ship. Wherever you may put it in the sea, the water of that place, however deep, will at once become fordable, and will never rise higher than the top of this stick. The waters before or behind or around you may be thousands of fathoms deep, but within a radius of fourteen yards from the place where you will hold this stick, the water will never rise higher than a cubit." Then lighting the torch the *faqir* showed them the way over the mountains and conducted them to the sea. There he bade them adieu and returned to his cottage.

The Prince taking the rod in his hand, jumped into the water and placed the rod over the surface of the sea. At once the waters became calm for a radius of fourteen yards, and all of the uniform depth of a cubit, though beyond the magic circle the sea was fathomless and very turbulent. The Queen carrying the torch followed behind and waded through that sea, the water never rising higher than their knees. They saw also the unrevealed wonders of the sea-bottom, such as corals, pearls, sea-flowers and trees. Inexpressible were the delight and admiration of the Prince at seeing these beautiful things, and whenever a new animal or natural object came within the range of his vision, he would cry out most joyously to his mother and running up to it would take it up and show it to her. Thus they went on admiring the wonders of the deep and praising the wisdom of the Almighty. When they had reached almost the middle of the sea, the Prince saw a current of water flowing from a certain direction, and carrying in its flow innumerable rubies of the purest and brightest water. Mahbub, who had never seen rubies, cried out in an ecstasy of boyish joy :—"Mother, mother, behold how beautiful are these pebbles. Of what a glorious red colour they are ! O mother, let me pick up a few of them to play with." The mother, who knew the value of these precious stones, the least of which would fetch a lac of rupees or so, was afraid to touch them. She feared that so many valuable and extraordinary rubies in such a strange place boded no good. It must be some temptation of Satan to cause their ruin. So, she strongly dissuaded him, saying :—"Why child, you are the best of all precious stones or pebbles; your love has



Prince Mahbub and his mother crossing the sea,



brought me to this pass ; love not these, lest they bring greater misfortunes." The Prince desisted for a while, but he was strongly tempted to disobey his mother's commands, which he had never done before, for the glowing colours of the rubies constantly appealed to his fancy. At last unable to resist the impulse, he secreted one of the biggest of these stones in his pocket unperceived by the Queen. Sometimes good comes out of evil, and this act of disobedience of the Prince, though entailing many difficulties on him, led at last to unexpected results.

The Prince and the Queen, with the help of the *faqir's* rod and torch, succeeded in crossing that vast sea without any serious trouble. They at last landed on the coast of the kingdom of India. Having rested for a while, they proceeded to the capital town of the country, which was situated not far from the coast. They halted at a *serai* outside the city, and the Queen giving some copper coins to the Prince asked him to fetch some eatables from the Bazar. The Prince took the money and went to the shop of a sweetmeat-seller, and fearing lest the Queen should come to know that he had secreted the ruby, thought it better not to keep it on his person ; therefore, he gave it to the shop-keeper, saying :—"Brother, give some sweetmeats in lieu of this." The shop-keeper, seeing the stone, examined it closely and finding that it was a ruby of the purest and best kind, could not help admiring it. So weighing out five *seers* of sweetmeats he bound it in one corner of the cloth given by the Prince, and in the other corner he bound five *seers* of *mohars* of the purest gold and gave it to the Prince. Mahbub returned to the *serai* with the heavy load of sweetmeats and

gold and put them all before the Queen. Her astonishment might well be imagined than described, when she saw so much gold, and fearing lest he might have obtained them by unlawful means cried out in great anxiety :—“Son, whence have you got so much gold and sweetmeats? I gave you only five copper coins; so if you have done anything wrong, go at once and restore all this money to the person wronged, for good never comes of evil.” Mahbub then falling on his knees implored pardon of his mother, saying :—“Yes mother, I have done wrong, but not what you fear. It is not against any inhabitant of this country but against you, most dear and kind mother. In disobedience to your command I picked up one of the red pebbles which we saw in the middle of the sea and all this is in exchange of that.” At first the Queen angry with the Prince for this, but then finding that he had been deceived by the sweetmeat-seller she went to his shop accompanied by the Prince. Finding him in the shop, the Queen said :—“Brother, if my son was blind, were you also blind? If he was ignorant of the value of the precious stone, did not you know that it was a *nau-lakhahar*, a ruby worth nine lacs of rupees? How could you deceive a simple boy like this?”

The sweetmeat-seller finding that he had done wrong in thus taking advantage of the ignorance of the boy and being ashamed of his conduct, for to give him his due, he was on the whole the most honest of all the shop-keepers, now implored mercy of the Queen, saying :—“Mother, forgive me my oversight. Look at these coffers and iron chests, you see them full of gold *mohars*. Take them all away;

they will be about seven or eight lacs, and let me retain the ruby." The Queen seeing that it was not a bad offer, consented to the bargain, took the money and went back to the *serai*.

Here the sweetmeat-seller sold the ruby to the vazir at a large profit and the latter in his turn sold it to the king at a large profit. The king taking the ruby went into the inner apartment, and gave it to his only and beloved daughter *Gulrukh*. She wore it round her neck and with great elation of spirits ordered a carriage to be made ready and went out to her garden to enjoy the scene and her happiness in silence. She paced here and there with great joy, and after a long ramble, sat down in a mango grove. On the top of a tree there were sitting a pair of birds, a parrot and a *myna*. The *myna* said to the parrot:—"Friend parrot, relate some interesting story to beguile our time." The parrot replied:—"Ah lady, I fear my speech will enrage you, for I have some hard truths to utter." "Be sure, I shall not be angry with you," answered the lady bird; "go on with your story." "Oh lady, strange are the freaks, the whims of your sex. Once there was a princess, very beautiful and good-natured. Her father one day presented her with a ruby of the costliest kind. The princess who had never possessed such a precious stone was filled with pride and vanity. She wore it and went about showing it to every person. But the vain princess did not know that it did not suit her, that a single ruby was not as good as many; that to wear it, one required a dress befitting it, for without such concomitants it appeared that she was not the rightful owner of the gem. But, however, the foolish

princess wearing it, paraded it among all, and never knew her error."

The princess heard all this talk of the birds, and understanding that it was addressed to her, hastened at once towards the palace, rushing to her rooms, threw aside the ruby, and closed the doors and refused to eat or drink, but wept all the time. The king hearing of the sudden grief of his daughter, went to her and entreated her much, saying:—"What ails you, my child, that you are lying down so disconsolate and sad? Has anybody said anything to you, or has anyone looked at you with improper eyes? Are you angry with anybody or has anyone offended you? Tell me what is the cause of your sorrow?" The princess after much entreaty replied with sobs and sighs:—"Father, no one has offended me or cast an improper look on me. I am the most miserable princess on earth. Why did you give me this ruby that has brought down on me the ridicule even of the birds of the air? It does not singly befit me. To be worthy to wear it, I must have a dress befitting it, and a dozen more such gems. Let me know what kind of dress they wear who have got such stones. Get me such stones and dresses." The king promising to fulfil her desire went out.

At once he sent for the vazir and asked him whence he had procured the ruby. The vazir pointed out the shop-keeper, who was asked to find out the travellers from whom he had got the ruby, within twenty-four hours or it would not be well for him. The poor sweetmeat-seller went with a throbbing heart to the serai but found no trace of the mother and son there; then he searched the whole city; and



"What ails you, my child?"

when he did not succeed, he went out and began to search in the suburbs. At last, cast down with despair he was returning sorrowfully homewards when he remembered that he had omitted to enquire at a certain new palace which was said to have been built by some unknown merchant in a very pleasant and romantic spot outside the town and on the sea-coast. He at once ran towards the palace, and as he was about to ask the door-keepers to whom such a grand building belonged, whom should he behold but the Prince Mahbub issuing out of it on a beautiful steed followed by a company of riders gallantly dressed and going out to hunt? The shop-keeper who had seen him in another and worse plight was struck dumb at all this grandeur and splendour. He with a deep bow addressed the Prince :—"My Lord, His Majesty the King has called your honour." The Prince, stopping a moment, haughtily replied :—"Go and tell your King, I am not his servant nor his subject that I should obey his summons. If he has got any business with me, I am always to be found at home. He can see me here."

The shop-keeper returned to the king and informed him that the seller of the ruby would not come, but had asked His Majesty to go there. The king, though enraged at this message, however, thought it expedient to go himself to Prince Mahbub. For the Princess *Gulrukh* was breaking her heart for more rubies, and a dress befitting such jewels and it was no time for anger. The king, therefore, himself went to the Prince of Persia and was received with great honour by the latter. They were introduced to each other, and the King of India now learned that the

host also belonged to a royal family. The King of India after the usual salutation and greeting opened his message thus :—"Prince, I have come to trouble you for some more such rubies as you sold once to a shop-keeper. Have you got any more?"

"Thousands," was the ready answer; "how many hundreds does Your Majesty require?"

The King was aghast at this reply. All the wealth of his kingdom, and a most wealthy empire it was, could hardly purchase ten such stones, and here was a young man in exile from his own kingdom, possessed of thousands of such costly rubies. Surely he must have got hold of the hidden treasures of Qarun, thought the King, for never had he heard of any king or emperor possessed of so much riches. So with great humility, the King replied :—"Prince, I have neither the inclination nor the means to buy so many, I want only half a dozen such stones, as well as a suit of dress worn by those who adorn themselves with them."

The Prince replied :—"Your Majesty shall have these rubies as well as the dress on the fourth day from this. I must pay a visit to my treasury. Rest assured that you will get them on that day." The King returned full of wonder and amazement at the interview, and anxious to know the hidden sources of such riches.

Here Mahbub taking leave of the Queen, and telling all his attendants that he was going on a private business from which he would return within four days, started alone on his journey, taking of course, with him the magic rod and torch. On a lonely part of the sea-coast where no one

could observe him, he lighted the torch and entered the sea. Carrying the light in one hand, and the rod in the other, Mahbub walked through the waters rapidly, unhesitatingly and boldly as if he was a creature of the sea. He dashed through the sea, without stopping to observe the many wonders which met him on every side, and never stood even for a moment to take breath till he reached the middle of the sea and found the current that carried the rubies. He was going to pick up some, when a sudden thought occurred to him :—"Whence are these rubies ?" Eager to investigate and clear up the mystery, the Prince began to trace the current to its source. The higher he went, the more wonders did he see, and found that the stream was becoming narrower and narrower, though he could not measure its depth, for the magic rod kept it everywhere at the uniform depth of a cubit. On and on he went and now the current which was a mile in breadth before dwindled down to a small streamlet a few yards broad. But there was instead, as if to compensate for the loss of width, an inexpressible and delightful odour issuing out of these waters. Never had the Prince smelt such scents in his life ; it appeared as if thousands of maunds of *attar* were floating on the waters and spreading a delicious perfume all round. Exhilarated with the balmy air, Mahbub waded through the stream and at last found that it had its origin in a whirlpool, the waters of which were foaming, boiling and bubbling and were circling round and round with tremendous velocity, and making a deafening noise, as if thousands of water-giants were struggling underneath and were fighting for dominion over the deep.

Out of this whirlpool there rose in a column many yards high a spout, whose waters were calm and of the purest white and made a strong contrast with the black and boiling waters of the main stream from which it arose. It was laden with rubies and emitted a strong sweet smell and appeared as if some huge monster underneath was spirting it up with immense force which carried it up to such a height. At every gush thousands of rubies were thrown up along the spout, which after dancing in it for a while, fell into the current beneath. The Prince watched this display of whirlpool, spout and gems with absorbed admiration and awe. His courage wavered only for a minute, but his faith in the wand was like adamant. Shaking off all doubts he jumped into the raging pool.

Down and down he went, through the hole, the waters parting above and below him, and becoming perfectly calm and tranquil. For many minutes he fell through the chimney of the whirlpool, till at last his feet touched the solid ground. He saw before him a huge gateway of massive iron, on the northern side of the cave, and a stream of water flowing out of a drain beneath it, carrying rubies and precious perfume along with it. Mahbub seeing that the entrance was closed, entered through the hole of the drain, which was sufficiently large for the passage of a human body, into the interior.

No sooner had he effected his entrance, than he found himself in a strange and wonderful region. He looked back for the gate, but found no traces of it anywhere. He was in a garden of wonderful trees and birds, and saw before him a large palace. He entered it boldly and saw beautiful

rooms and halls tastefully and elegantly decorated, but silent and lifeless. He passed from one room to another admiring the grandeur of the scene, and the wealth of the owner of such riches. At last he came to a room which was illumined by twelve waxen and perfumed candles, and from the roof of which, suspended by a chain of steel, hung a human head freshly severed from the body. The twelve candles were placed in a circle round a basin of water placed just underneath the head. Large drops of blood fell drip, drip, drip, into the basin and as every drop fell into the water, it splashed up to a tremendous height and fell in a nice curve into a drain beneath. As it fell every drop became a beautiful ruby and flowed out of the drain. The Prince stood long looking at the wonderful scene of the transformation of the blood into rubies. How long he remained in that reverie cannot be said, but at length he was roused from it by the sound of some approaching footsteps of some dozen persons or so. The Prince hearing the noise hid himself in a corner in order to observe better what passed in that subterranean hall of mystery.

Mahbub saw from his place of concealment twelve *Peris* of the most elegant shape enter the room. One of them took down the head, another brought from a hidden recess the body. They placed the two parts of the body on a golden bed, and joining the head to the trunk, the twelve *Peris* took up the twelve burning candles, and began to move round and round the bed in mystic circles, singing a sweet but sad song all the while. By degrees their movements round the bed became more and more rapid till the velocity became so great that the Prince could distinguish no forms,

but saw a circle of light round the bed. Now the Prince saw that round the circle in which the *Peris* were moving there was flowing a small ring of water of such a strong and overpowering sweet smell that the Prince became almost faint. The perfume which he had smelt in the sea was nothing in comparison with the richness of the odour which this circle of water emitted. Then the dance ceased and the Prince saw that the *Peris* were profusely perspiring owing to the exertions of the dance and the ring of water was formed by the odorous perspiration of these children of the air. This ring of water also joined the drain into which the water of the basin fell, and thus carried out of this mysterious palace precious stones and delicious scent, one the produce of human blood, the other the perspiration of *Peris*.

The *Peris* then stooped over the bed, and every one kissed the face of the dead man and cried out in deep wails:—"How long, O Lord, how long! Nights and days, nights and days for the last fourteen years, have we waited and waited. O when will the sun of hope arise on the darkness of our despair! Arise, O King, arise, how long will you remain in this deathlike trance?" Thus they moaned and lamented, but in vain.

Suddenly there arose sounds of sweet and joyous music, and the Prince and the *Peris* were all startled at this strange interruption. The music pealed louder and louder and the *Peris* recognising the voices of the heavenly choristers trembled with joy, hope and suspense, while the Prince stood enchanted by the ravishing strains that fell on his ears. Then the floor of the room burst open, and out there-

Plate XXXIII.



The Prince doing obeisance to Kwajah Khizr.

of rose the venerable form of the *faqir* whom the Prince had met in the Musjid by the mountain in the kingdom of Persia. He was now clad in garments of light. The *Peris* all prostrated themselves before him, crying: "Khwaja Khizr, Khwajah Khizr, is the hour come?"

The Khwajah Khizr, for such in fact was the seeming *faqir*, said in a deep voice:—"Yes, the time is come and no more shall ye weep." Then turning to the corner where Mahbub lay concealed, he said:—"Prince, come out." The Prince instantly emerged out of his place of concealment and prostrated himself at the feet of the great and immortal saint Khwajah Khizr.

The holy and all-knowing seer, then said as follows:—"Prince, you see before you the corpse of your father." As soon as he was murdered by Qussab, the *Peris* brought his remains to this subterranean palace, the cemetery of the kings of Persia. Know that your ancestors belonged to a race of beings called the *Magi* and commanded the *Peris* and the genii by their wisdom. No son of theirs ever died but his remains were buried in this place by the faithful races that inhabit the fire and the air. But the body of your royal sire was not buried, since no one had performed the funeral rites. Now that destiny has brought you here, perform the said ceremonies to lay at rest his hovering spirit."

The Prince hearing this sorrowful speech, shed bitter tears, and approaching the dead body prayed fervently to Allah for the soul of the murdered King. But as soon as he had done praying, and laid his hands on the body of his father, behold! there burst forth another peal of music from

invisible sources, and to his extreme joy and wonder, the head was joined to the body, and the King of Persia sat up restored to life on the bed by the touch of his son. Oh, who can now describe the happiness of the *Peris*? Khawjah Khizr then introduced the father to the son and there was great rejoicing in the land of the *Peris*. Then the holy saint vanished by the same way he had come, and the genii and the *Peris* transported the King and the Prince to the palace of the latter in the kingdom of India. The meeting between the King of Persia and his Queen was full of tears and tenderness and might better be imagined than described.

Here when four days were over, the King of India again came to the palace of Mahbub for the rubies. What was his fear and astonishment when he saw that large strange-looking creatures with horns on their heads guarded the gate, and it was with great difficulty that he got admission. He was conducted to the Durbar room where the Prince and the King Mansur-Alim were seated, and as soon as Mahbub saw him he greeted him with great cordiality, and said:—"Your Majesty, I have not forgotten my promise. Allow me to thank you for the happy result which resulted from your commands. As for the rubies, you will get as many as you require." He then ordered a servant in attendance to bring a cup of water, and then taking a sharp needle pierced his finger, and let fall ten or twelve drops of blood into the water and they all sparkled forth as rubies. The King of India was bewildered at this, but the Prince quickly replied:—"Let it be known to Your Majesty, that every drop of blood that flows in the veins of the princes and kings of Persia is more

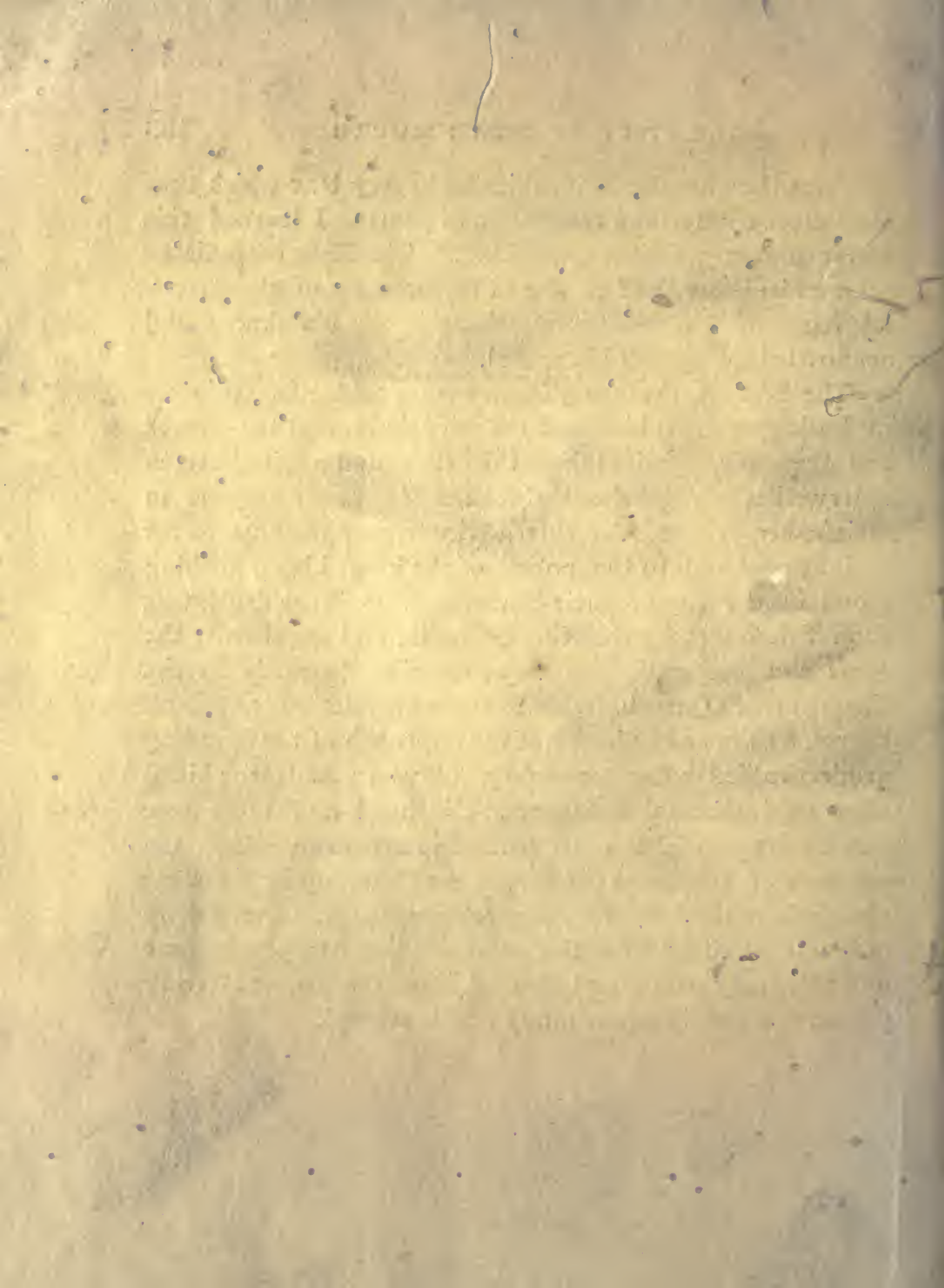
Plate XXXIV.



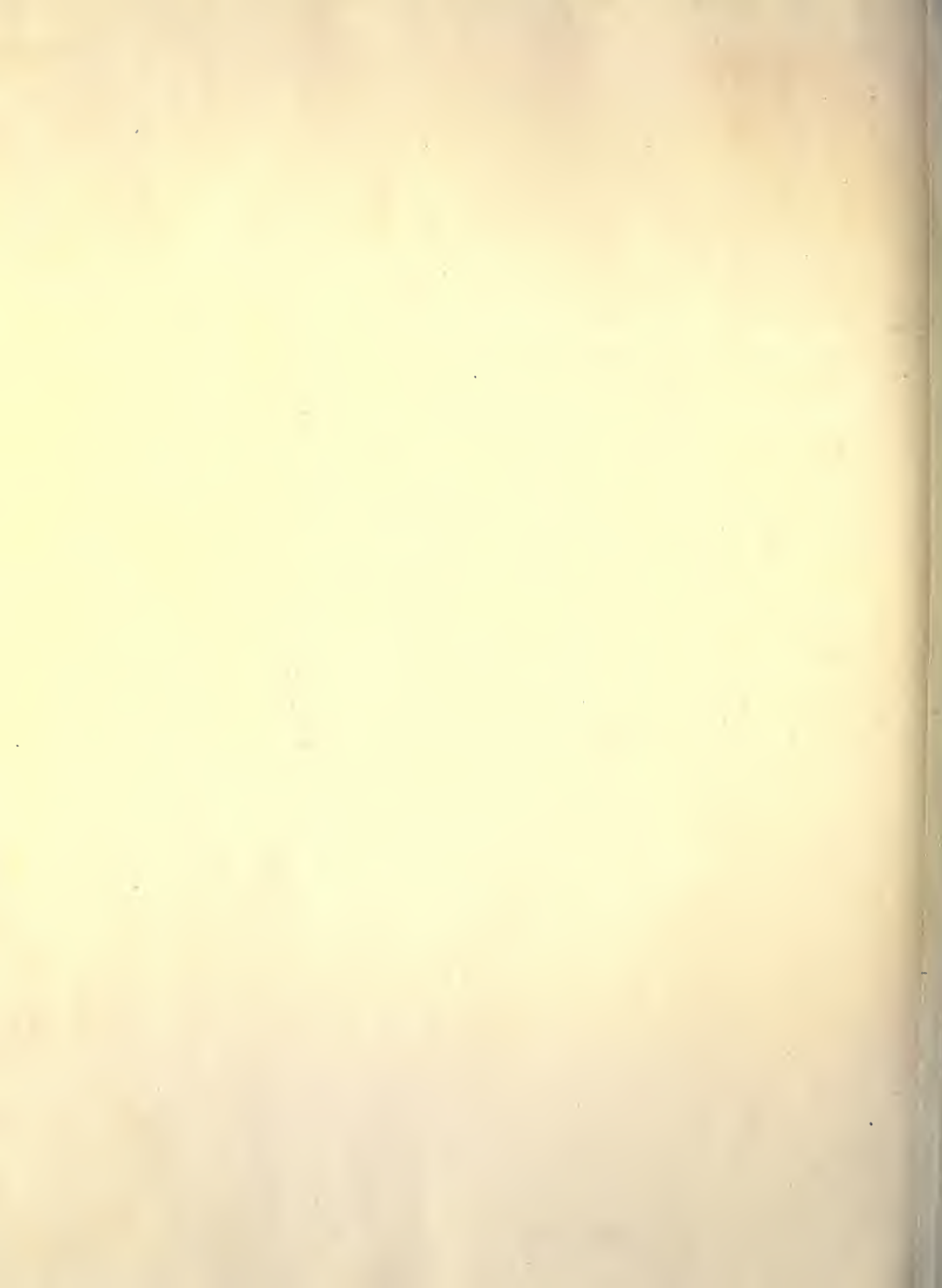
The usurper's blood changing into toads.

precious than hundreds of rubies and every tear which they shed more costly than thousands of pearls. I learned this secret from my father, the King." The King of India as soon as he knew that he was in the presence of the powerful King of Persia threw himself on his knees and acknowledged himself his vassal.

The rest of the story is very soon told. The princess of India got the rubies and the fairy dress, and the parrot and the *myna* praised her this time and advised her to marry the Prince who had taken so much trouble to satisfy her whims. As this advice was agreeable to her inclinations and to the policy of the great kings, nothing stood in the way of their connection. A large army was soon fitted out by the King of India, and another by the *Peris* and the *genii* and they proceeded towards Persia. The usurper Qassab, whose tyranny had alienated all hearts, as soon as he heard of the approach of the invading armies, rallied some mercenary followers and was killed after an ineffectual resistance. His head and body were carried by the *Peris* to the Subterranean Hall, the cemetery of the kings of Persia, and hung up in the same place where the former corpse was suspended. Every drop of blood which fell from the head of the usurper became a deadly ugly toad and floated into the sea scattering poison and putrid odour many a mile around.







GR Vasu, Srisa Chandra, rai
305 bahadur
V27 Folk-tales of Hindu-
1913 stan

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

