

WORLD TALES

The extraordinary coincidence of stories
told in all times, in all places

collected by

Idries Shah

★ ★ ★

How can it be that the same story is found in Scotland and also in pre-Columbian America? What can account for the durability and persistence of tales?

'Shah has given us an engrossing collection of tales, but he has done much more besides. Each tale is provided with an introduction that relates it to the context of its origin and development . . . A delightful book, filled with stories that will appeal to the eye, mind and especially the heart' *New Frontier*

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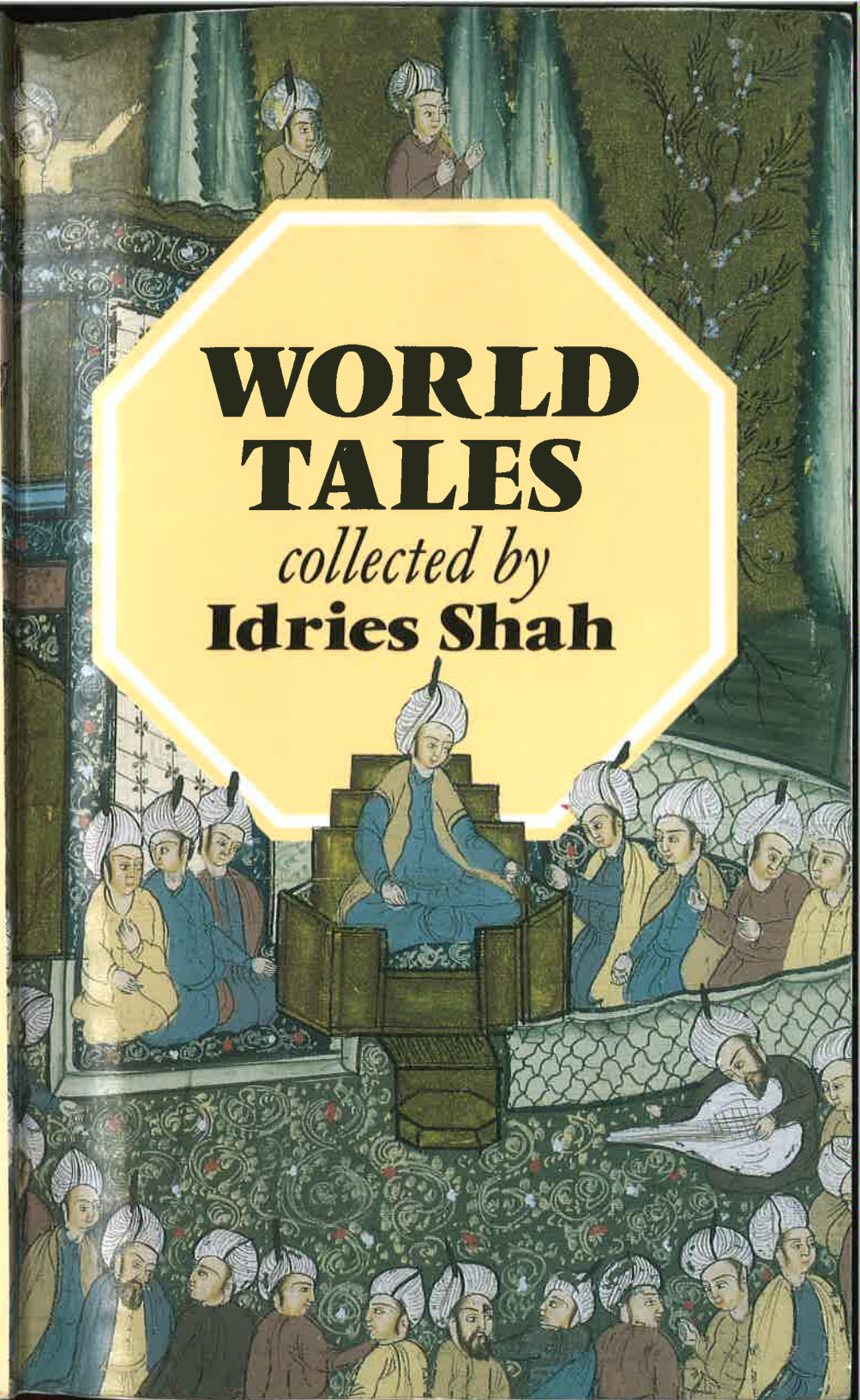
Recommended by Storytellers



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“That lurking air of hidden meanings and immemorial mythical signs which we find in some fables, recalling a people, wise and childish at once, who had built up a theory of the world ages before Aesop was born.”

Ernest Rhys, 1925.

“The content of folklore is metaphysics. Our inability to see this is due primarily to our abysmal ignorance of metaphysics and its technical terms.”

A. K. Coomaraswamy.

“The folk-tale is the primer of the picture-language of the soul.”

Joseph Campbell.

“They (tales) appeal to our rational and irrational instincts, to our visions and dreams . . . The race is richer in human and cultural values for its splendid heritage of old magic tales.”

Dr. Leonard W. Roberts.

Introduction

It is quite usual to find collections of tales arranged according to language or country: *Tales of Belgium*, *Stories from the German*, or *Legends from the Indian Peoples*; some such titles must have met your eye at one time or another. It all looks very tidy, scientific even; and the study of stories is indeed a part of scholarly research.

But the deeper you go into things, the more mysterious, exciting, baffling they become. How can it be that the same story is found in Scotland and also in pre-Columbian America? Was the story of Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp really taken from Wales (where it has been found) to the ancient East; and, if so, by whom and when? A classical Japanese narrative is part of the gypsy repertoire in Europe; where shall we pigeonhole it in national terms?

I have selected and place before you a collection of tales of which one at least goes back to the ancient Egyptian of several thousand years ago. It is presented here not to impress the reader with its age, but because it is entertaining, and also because, although the Pharaohs died out many centuries ago, this tale is recited by people all over the world who know nothing of its origins. This form of culture remains when nations, languages and faiths have long since died.

There is an almost uncanny persistence and durability in the tale which cannot be accounted for in the present state of knowledge. Not only does it constantly appear in different incarnations which can be mapped—as the Tar-Baby story carried from Africa to America, and medieval Arabian stories from the Saracens in Sicily to the Italy of today—but from time to time remarkable collections are assembled and enjoy a phenomenal vogue: after which they lapse and are reborn, perhaps in another culture, perhaps centuries later: to delight, attract, thrill, captivate yet another audience.

Such was the great *Panchatantra*, the Far Eastern collection of tales for the education of Indian princes; the Jataka Buddhist birth-stories believed to date back two and a half thousand years; the Thousand and One Nights, known as 'The Mother of Tales'. Later came the collections of Starapola, Boccaccio, Chaucer and Shakespeare, and a dozen others which now form the very basis of the classical literature of Europe and Asia.

This book contains stories from all of these collections, and many more: because there is a certain basic fund of human fictions which recur, again and again, and never seem to lose their compelling attraction. Many traditional tales have a surface meaning (perhaps just a socially uplifting one) and a secondary, inner significance, which is rarely glimpsed consciously, but which nevertheless acts powerfully upon our minds. Tales have always been used, so far as we can judge, for spiritual as well as social purposes: and as parables with more or less obvious meanings this use is familiar to most people today. But, as Professor Geoffrey Parrinder says of the myth,* "its inner truth was realized when the participant was transported into the realm of the sacred and eternal."

Perhaps above all the tale fulfils the function not of escape but of hope. The suspending of ordinary constraints helps people to reclaim optimism and to fuel the imagination with energy for the attainment of goals: whether moral or material. Maxim Gorky realized this when he wrote: "In tales people fly through the air on a magic carpet, walk in seven-league boots, build castles overnight; the tales opened up for me a new world where some free and all-fearless power reigned and inspired in me a dream of a better life."

When relatively recent collectors of tales, such as Hans Christian Andersen, the Brothers Grimm, Perrault and others made their selections, they both re-established certain powerful tales in our cultures and left out others from the very vast riches of the world reservoir of stories. Paradoxically, by their very success in imprinting Cinderella, Puss-in-Boots and Beauty and the Beast anew for the modern reader (they are

*G. Parrinder, Foreword to *Pears Encyclopaedia of Myths and Legends*, London 1976, p.10.

all very ancient tales, widely dispersed) they directed attention away from some of the most wonderful and arresting stories which did not feature in their collections. Many of these stories are re-presented here.

Working for thirty-five years among the written and oral sources of our world heritage in tales, one feels a truly living element in them which is startlingly evident when one isolates the 'basic' stories: the ones which tend to have travelled farthest, to have featured in the largest number of classical collections, to have inspired great writers of the past and present.

One becomes aware, by this contact with the fund of tradition which constantly cries out to be projected anew, that the story in some elusive way is the basic form and inspiration. Thought or style, characterization and belief, didactic and nationality, all recede to give place to the tale which feels almost as if it is demanding to be reborn through one's efforts. And yet those efforts themselves, in some strange way, are experienced as no more than the relatively poor expertise of the humblest midwife. It is the tale itself, when it emerges, which is king.

Erskine Caldwell, no less, has felt a similar power in the story, and is well aware of its primacy over mere thought of philosophy: "A writer," he says (*Atlantic Monthly*, July 1958) "is not a great mind, he's not a great thinker, he's not a great philosopher, he's a story-teller."

Idries Shah

London, March 1979

While the rogue was away, however, his companions were also thinking. They decided that as soon as he returned, they would kill him, eat the food, and divide the spoils so as to gain the additional third share that would otherwise be his.

The moment the first thief arrived back at the cave with the provisions, the two others fell upon him and stabbed him to death. Then they ate all the food, and expired of the poison which their friend had bought and put into it. So the gold, after all, did indeed spell death, as the hermit predicted, for whoever was influenced by it. And the treasure remained where it had been, in the cave, for a very long time. ■

The Ghoul and the Youth of Ispahan

Episodes from the English 'Jack the Giant-Killer' are found in favourite folktales about encounters with ogres all over the world. In 'Jack', the Giant roars "Fee, fi, fo, fum!" or "Fe, fa, fum!" And, in the Indian version, the Rakshasas say: "Fee, faw, fum!" The Albanian variant of this story is very close to that of the Norse lad and the Troll; and the Sicilian 'Brave Shoemaker and the Giant', is almost identical. Several incidents from Grimm's 'The Brave Little Tailor' appear in this cycle of stories. It is known in South America, where the Chilean adaptation is that of Don Juan Bolondron.

The following is the Persian recital, given by the Shah's personal story-teller to Sir John Malcolm. Parts of it may also be found in the Sanskrit 'Seventy Tales of a Parrot', in the Nordic Edda of Snorro, and varieties have been noted in Cornwall and Kashmir.

Once upon a time there was a clever young lad of the ancient city of Ispahan, in Persia. He was out one day when he came upon a Ghoul, a sort of ogre-giant, terrible in size and horrible in temper. "What can I do?" he asked himself. And well might he ask, for Ghouls love to enslave and destroy people, and even

eat them up. All that the young man—Amin the True was his name—had with him was an egg and a lump of salt, both in his pocket.

Now, as everyone knows, the best form of defence is attack, so Amin approached the Ghoul, which was looking at him with frightful fury, and said:

“Ho! Ghoul—let’s have a contest of strength.”

For a moment the Ghoul was puzzled, because human beings never spoke like that to him, and, like all Ghouls, he was not brilliantly intelligent. Then he said:

“You don’t look very strong to me.”

“I may not *look* strong,” said Amin, “but have you not heard that appearances can be deceptive? Here is a proof of my tremendous strength.”

He picked up a stone. “Now I challenge you to squeeze water out of this.”

The Ghoul took the stone and tried. Then he said:

“No, it is impossible.”

“Not at all—it is easy,” replied Amin. While the Ghoul had been squeezing, Amin had placed the egg in his own hand. Now he took the stone in the same hand and squeezed.

There was a crushing sound as the egg broke and the Ghoul saw what he thought to be the liquid from the stone running between Amin’s fingers: and all this was done without Amin showing any sign of strain at all.

Luckily it was not completely light, so the details of what was happening were not entirely visible to the monster.

Then Amin took up another stone and said:

“There is salt in this one, just crumble it between your fingers.”

The Ghoul looked at the stone, and saw that it was quite beyond his power to crush it, and he admitted

that he could not.

“Oh, give it to me,” said Amin. He took it into the hand in which he had already hidden the lump of salt, and crumbled the salt into the hand of the amazed Ghoul.

“Now”, said the giant, “you must stay the night with me”, and Amin agreed, for he guessed that he would always be able to get the better of him.

When they arrived at the immense cavern which was his host’s home, the Ghoul threw Amin an enormous bag made from the hides of no less than six oxen, and said:

“Go and fill this with water, while I make the fire ready to cook.”

He went away in search of wood.

Amin wondered what he could do about the water, and then an idea occurred to him. He could hardly drag the bag more than a few feet, so he abandoned it and went down to the stream and started to dig a small channel.

Soon the Ghoul appeared and cried:

“Why are you taking so long? Can’t you lift a little bag of water?”

“No, my friend,” said Amin, “since you are being so hospitable to me, I have decided to dig a channel to bring the water to you, so that you always have a supply—see, I have started already. There is no point in feats of strength for their own sake; that is just a waste of time and effort.”

The Ghoul was hungry, so he said:

“Leave the water; I shall carry it.” And he picked up the bag as if it had been a feather and filled it at the river.

“Finish the channel tomorrow, if you want to,” he said.

The Ghoul ate a huge meal, and, in the darkness of

the cave, Amin pretended to eat as well. Then the Ghoul pointed to a sleeping-place, and told Amin to lie down on it for the night.

But there was a crafty look in the Ghoul's eyes, and Amin placed a large pillow in the place where he should be sleeping and hid himself in a corner.

A little before daybreak, the Ghoul woke up. Seizing an immense tree-trunk, he smashed it down on Amin's bed. There was not even a groan, and the Ghoul grinned as he thought that he must have crushed Amin to pulp. Just to make sure, he pounded the bed seven times.

Now the Ghoul went back to sleep, but he had hardly settled himself again when Amin, who had crept back into his own bed, cried out:

"Friend Ghoul, what insect could that be which disturbed me by its flapping? I counted the beat of its wings seven times. Although such things cannot hurt men, they can be disturbing to someone who is sleeping."

The Ghoul was aroused to such heights of fear at hearing that this was a man who felt a shattering blow, seven blows, only as the wings of an insect, that he fled headlong from his cave, leaving Amin its master.

Amin took up a gun which had been left by some victim of the Ghoul, and went out to scout. He had not gone very far when he saw the Ghoul coming back. In his hand he held a large club, and beside him was a fox.

Amin realized that the cunning fox had explained matters to the Ghoul; but he was equal to the challenge. Aiming the gun, he shot it through the head.

"Take that!" he shouted, "for disobedience." To the Ghoul he said:

"That liar," pointing to the fox, "had promised to bring me seven Ghouls, so that I might put them in

chains and lead them back to the city of Ispahan: but he brought only you, who are already my slave!"

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the Ghoul took to his heels. Using the club to help him, he leapt over rocks and precipices, and he was soon far out of sight. ■

called out to one of his men: "Give that man a blow or two, and get some sense out of him!"

At this the wife could not restrain herself: "Please, kind officers" she cried, "do not strike him—he is my husband!"

"I won!" shouted the fool immediately, "so you have to shut the door!" ■

Childe Rowland

*How can an ancient Inca story have been current in Shakespeare's time as an English folk tale, mentioned in **King Lear**? A Guatemalan Indian provided the traditional materials for the **Popul Vuh**, for the Spanish conquerors, containing this story. It was described by Lewis Spence as 'the only native American work that has come down to us from pre-Columbian times'. It features a game with a ball and the penetration of the underground headquarters of magically-endowed people who capture mortals by two young heirs to a gracious lady, for the purpose of a battle. An adviser warns of the essential taboos to be respected, and the evil ones are vanquished. Each one of these ingredients and incidents, in the same order and down to the detail of the ball-game being the cause of the trouble, is preserved in the Scottish version of **Childe Rowland**, recited by a tailor in 1770 and preserved in the version given here by the folklorist Joseph Jacobs. As if this were not enough, Childe Rowland also has illustrious literary relationships. In addition to Shakespeare's reference, Browning wrote a poem with this title; and the plot of the story is almost identical with that of Milton's **Comus**. Jacobs noted the affinity with **Comus** in 1899, and averred that the resemblance could hardly be a coincidence. He would perhaps have been equally surprised if he had noted the South American version. It was published by Spence in 1913, and although Jacobs died in 1916, apparently he did not see it. When I mentioned the resemblance to Lewis Spence in the nineteen-forties, he had not seen Jacobs' version either.*

Childe Rowland and his brothers twain
Were playing at the ball,
And there was their sister Burd Ellen
In the midst, among them all.

Childe Rowland kicked it with his foot
And caught it with his knee;
At last he plunged among them all
O'er the church he made it flee.

Burd Ellen round about the aisle
To seek the ball is gone
But long they waited, and longer still,
And she came not back again.

They sought her east, they sought her west,
They sought her up and down,
And woe were the hearts of those brethren,
For she was not to be found.

So at last her elder brother went to the Warlock Merlin, the magician, told him all, and asked him if he knew where Burd Ellen was. "The fair Burd Ellen," said the Warlock Merlin, "must have been carried off by the fairies, because she went round the church 'widershins'—the opposite way to the sun. She is now in the Dark Tower of the King of Elfland; it would take the boldest knight in Christendom to bring her back."

"If it is possible to bring her back," said her brother, "I'll do it, or perish in the attempt."

"Possible it is," said the Warlock Merlin, "but woe to the man, or mother's son that attempts it, if he is not well taught beforehand what he is to do."

The eldest brother of Burd Ellen was not to be put off by any fear of danger, from attempting to get her back, so he begged the Warlock Merlin to tell him

what he should do, and what he should not do, in going to seek his sister. And after he had been taught, and had repeated his lesson, he set out for Elfland.

But long they waited, and longer still,
With doubt and muckle pain,
But woe were the hearts of his brethren,
For he came not back again.

Then the second brother got tired of waiting, and he went to the Warlock Merlin and asked him the same as his brother. So he set out to find Burd Ellen.

But long they waited, and longer still,
With muckle doubt and pain,
And woe were his mother's and brother's heart,
For he came not back again.

And when they had waited and waited a good long time, Childe Rowland, the youngest of Burd Ellen's brothers, wished to go, and went to his mother, the good Queen, to ask her to let him go. But she would not at first, for he was the last and dearest of her children; and if he were lost, all would be lost. But he begged, and he begged, till at last the good Queen let him go; and gave him his father's good brand [sword] that never struck in vain, and as she girt it round his waist, she said the spell that would give it victory.

So Childe Rowland said good-bye to the good Queen, his mother, and went to the cave of the Warlock Merlin. "Once more, and but once more," he said to the Warlock, "tell how man or mother's son may rescue Burd Ellen and her brothers twain."

"Well, my son," said the Warlock Merlin, "there are but two things, simple they may seem, but hard they are to do. One thing to do, and one thing not to do.

And the thing you do is this: after you have entered the land of Fairy, whoever speaks to you, till you meet the Burd Ellen, you must out with your father's brand and off with their head. And what you've not to do is this: bite no bit, and drink no drop, however hungry or thirsty you be; drink a drop, or bite a bit, while in Elfland you be, and never will you see Middle Earth again."

So Childe Rowland said the two things over and over again, till he knew them by heart, and he thanked the Warlock Merlin and went on his way. And he went along, and along, and still further along, till he came to the horse-herd of the King of Elfland feeding his horses. These he knew by their fiery eyes, and knew that he was at last in the land of the Fairy. "Can'st thou tell me," said Childe Rowland to the horse-herd, "where the King of Elfland's Dark Tower is?" "I cannot tell thee," said the horse-herd, "but go on a little further and thou wilt come to the cow-herd, and he, maybe, can tell thee."

Then, without a word more, Childe Rowland drew the good brand that never struck in vain, and off went the horse-herd's head, and Childe Rowland went on further, till he came to the cow-herd, and asked him the same question. "I can't tell thee," said he, "but go on a little further, and thou wilt come to the hen-wife, and she is sure to know." Then Childe Rowland out with his good brand, that never struck in vain, and off went the cow-herd's head. And he went on a little further, till he came to an old woman in a grey cloak, and he asked her if she knew where the Dark Tower of the King of Elfland was. "Go on a little further," said the hen-wife, "till you come to a round green hill, surrounded with terrace-rings, from the bottom to the top—go round it three times 'widershins', and each time say:

'Open, door! open, door!

And let me come in.'

and the third time the door will open, and you may go in." And Childe Rowland was just going on, when he remembered what he had to do; so he out with the good brand, that never struck in vain, and off went the hen-wife's head.

Then he went on, and on, till he came to the round green hill with the terrace-rings from top to bottom, and he went round it three times, 'widershins', saying each time:

"Open, door, open!

And let me come in."

And the third time the door did open, and he went in, and it closed with a click, and Childe Rowland was left in the gloom.

It was not exactly dark, but a kind of twilight or gloaming. There were neither windows nor candles and he could not make out where the twilight came from, if not through the walls and roof. These were rough arches made of a transparent rock, incrustated with sheepsilver and rockspar, and other bright stones. But though it was rock, the air was quite warm, as it always is in Elfland. So he went through this passage till at last he came to two wide and high folding doors which stood ajar. And when he opened them, there he saw a most wonderful and gracious sight. A large and spacious hall, so large it seemed to be as long, and as broad, as the green hill itself. The roof was supported by fine pillars, so large and lofty that the pillars of a cathedral were as nothing to them. They were all of gold and silver, with fretted work, and between them and around them wreaths of flowers, composed of diamonds and emeralds, and all manner of precious stones. And the very key-stones of the arches had for ornaments clusters of diamonds and

rubies, and pearls, and other precious stones. And all these arches met in the middle of the roof, and just there, hung by a golden chain, an immense lamp made out of one big pearl hollowed out and quite transparent. And in the middle of this was a big, huge carbuncle gem, which kept spinning round and round, and this was what gave light by its rays to the whole hall, which seemed as if the setting sun was shining on it.

The hall was furnished in a manner equally grand, and at one end of it was a glorious couch of velvet, silk and gold, and there sat Burd Ellen, combing her golden hair with a silver comb. And when she saw Childe Rowland, she stood up and said:

“God pity ye, poor luckless fool,
What have ye here to do?”

Hear ye this, my youngest brother,
Why didn't ye bide at home?
Had you a hundred thousand lives
Ye couldn't spare any a one.

But sit ye down; but woe, O, woe,
That ever ye were born,
For come the King of Elfland in,
Your fortune is forlorn.”

Then they sat down together, and Childe Rowland told her all that he had done, and she told him how their two brothers had reached the Dark Tower, but had been enchanted by the King of Elfland; and lay there entombed as if dead. And then after they had talked a little longer Childe Rowland began to feel hungry from his long travels, and told his sister Burd Ellen how hungry he was and asked for some food,

forgetting all about the Warlock Merlin's warning.

Burd Ellen looked at Childe Rowland sadly, and shook her head, but she was under a spell, and could not warn him. So she rose up, and went out, and soon brought back a golden basin full of bread and milk. Childe Rowland was just going to raise it to his lips, when he looked at his sister and remembered why he had come all that way. So he dashed the bowl to the ground, and said: “Not a sup will I swallow, nor a bit will I bite, till Burd Ellen is set free.”

Just at that moment they heard the noise of someone approaching, and a loud voice was heard saying:

“Fee, fi, fo, fum,
I smell the blood of a Christian man,
Be he dead, be he living, with my brand,
I'll dash his brains from his brain-pan.”

And then the folding doors of the hall were burst open, and the King of Elfland rushed in.

“Strike then, Bogie [goblin], if you darest,” shouted out Childe Rowland, and rushed to meet him with his good brand that never yet did fail. They fought, and they fought, and they fought, till Childe Rowland beat the King of Elfland down on his knees, and caused him to yield and beg for mercy. “I grant thee mercy”, said Childe Rowland; “release my sister from thy spells and raise my brothers to life, and let us all go free, and thou shalt be spared.” “I agree” said the Elfin King, and rising up he went to a chest from which he took a phial filled with a blood-red liquor. With this he anointed the ears, eyelids, nostrils, lips, and finger-tips of the two brothers, and they sprang at once into life, and declared that their souls had been away, but had now returned. The Elfin King then said some words to Burd Ellen, and she was disenchanting, and they all four passed

out of the hall, through the long passage, and turned their back on the Dark Tower, never to return again. So they reached home and the good Queen their mother, and Burd Ellen never went round a church "widershins" again. ■

The Tale of Mushkil Gusha

*Traditional tales were felt, in the 18th century, to be "an affront to the rational mind" as the illustrious Iona and Peter Opie remind us in **The Classic Fairy Tales**, (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). Nowadays, of course, the work of psychologists makes people more open-minded, sometimes even to the point of agreeing with the famous folklorist Joseph Campbell that the folk-tale is "the primer of the picture-language of the soul."*

Never having been through a phase of believing in the complete sovereignty of the intellect at the expense of other sides of humanity, people in the Middle East have for long regarded certain traditional stories as having a real function, and effect on the mind and on the community.

*Such a tale is that which is sometimes called *The Tale of Mushkil Gusha—the Remover of All Difficulties*. It is known in both major and minor communities in India and Pakistan, in Central Asia and Iran, in the Near East and even in Africa and the Yemens. It is believed that if this story is recited on Thursday nights, it will in some inexplicable way help the work of the mysterious Mushkil Gusha, Friend of Man.*

Once upon a time, not a thousand miles from here, there lived a poor old wood-cutter, who was a widower, and his little daughter. Every day he used to go into the mountains to cut firewood, which he brought home and tied into bundles. Then he used to have

with her father's choice, for she had seen Ahmed from afar and secretly loved him from the first glance.

The wheel of fortune had taken a complete turn. At dawn Ahmed was conversing with the band of thieves, bargaining with them; at dusk he was lord of a rich palace and the possessor of a fair, young, high-born wife who adored him. But this did not change his character, and he was as contented as a prince as he had been as a poor cobbler. His former wife, for whom he now had ceased to care, moved out of his life, and got the punishment to which her unreasonableness and unfeeling vanity had condemned her. Thus is the tapestry which is our life completed by the Great Designer. ■

The Two Travellers

The moral and magical tale of 'The Two Travellers' is found in a twelve-hundred-year-old Chinese book: and also in Norway, Africa, North America, and Siberia. Its incidents are almost always very closely similar.

There are two men, one is treacherously blinded by the other. Deserted, he finds out (usually supernaturally) how to cure both himself and someone else who is in trouble. He does this and is rewarded: and then, in his honesty, tells the villain how he came about his fortune. The evildoer tries to copy his formula, but something dreadful happens to him instead.

*In some versions (the African and one Gypsy telling) it is a bird or birds that save him. But, as often happens in traditional tales, the figure intervening changes according to cultural taste. In the Kirghiz form, it is a tiger, a fox, and a wolf. In the Norse—where no tigers are to be found—the animals become a wolf, a fox, and a hare. In the **Thousand and One Nights** we find demons, as also in Bengal—and a spirit turns up again in Portugal. In south India, the secret knowledge comes from the goddess Kali, ordinarily a tutelary of destruction; but the Persian narrative softens the figure into that of a poor shepherd with special insights.*

*In addition to folk versions, the story has a formidable literary pedigree. In Tibet, it is in the **Kanjur**, in India it figures in the **Panchatantra**; in Iran the classical Nizami embodied it into his **Seven Portraits** of 1197. The Hebrew **Midrash Haggadol**, of about the 14th century, also has the story. Balkan Gypsy versions are known; and it was so popular in Russia that Afanasief's important collection contains no less than seven variants of the plot. This account embodies the usual common features of the tale.*

There were once two men, one good and one bad, who went on a journey together. They were in quest of their fortune. The good man shared his food with his companion until it was all finished.

The good man then asked: "May I have some of your food?"

"Certainly not" said the other, and he became so irrationally infuriated that he plucked out the eyes of his unfortunate partner, robbed him of everything he had, and left him alone and helpless in the wilderness.

The blinded good man became aware of some birds singing, and decided to climb, feeling his way, into the tree in whose topmost branches they were, to be safe from any prowling wild beasts, at least until the morning, when he might be able to think of some way of continuing his journey.

Now it so happened that he found that he could understand the language of the birds. As he listened, he learnt from their discussions that any blind person who bathed his eyes in the dew of that place would have his sight restored. Further, the birds said that the daughter of a certain King was ill, but could be healed by the use of a flower which grew nearby. The same flower had the power of locating water and restoring fertility to gardens.

The blind man immediately bathed his eyes in the dew and found that he could see. Then he plucked the plant. He made his way to the place where the Princess was ill and, having gained admittance, cured her. When he made the King's garden flourish again and found water which was badly needed, he was rewarded by being given the hand of the Princess in marriage.

He continued happily in this life, until the villain who had blinded him turned up again, having heard of his inexplicable good fortune. The miscreant asked

him how he had arrived at such a happy and prosperous state.

"It was quite simple, in fact" said the honest man, for he was one who bore no ill-will, "All I did was go up a certain tree, and I heard what to do from the birds, whose speech I suddenly understood."

The bad man thereupon hurried to the place where he had blinded his companion, and waited. Presently the birds arrived and perched on the top of the tree. He found that he understood their speech. They said:

"Someone has overheard our conversation, for the King's daughter is now well, the garden is blossoming, and water has been found!"

They looked all around to see whether an eavesdropper was about, saw the bad man, flew down—and pecked out his eyes. ■

A fox, while crossing a river, was driven by the stream into a narrow creek, and lay there for a long time, trapped.

He was covered with a multitude of horseflies, which had fastened themselves upon him.

It so happened that a hedgehog, wandering in the area, saw the unhappy condition of the fox, and called out to him:

"Would you like me to drive away those flies, which are tormenting you so much?"

But the fox begged the hedgehog to do nothing of the sort.

The hedgehog was surprised. "Why not?" it asked.

"Because," replied the fox, "the flies which are sticking on to me now are already full, and are not drawing very much more blood. If you were to remove them, a swarm of fresh and hungry ones would descend—and they would not leave a drop of blood in my body!" ■

The Bird Maiden

*From Japan to South America, from the Smith Sound Eskimos to the reciters of the **Thousand and One Nights**, the theme of the maiden who becomes a bird through wearing a magical costume—and how she can be trapped by stealing it—is a part of folklore, defying all attempts at tracing it to a single source. There are few myths in which so many of the details accord with such mysterious consistency: the maiden alights from the sky, usually to have a bath; she puts off her bird-cloak and is seen to be wondrously beautiful. The young man steals her dress, courts her, and she marries him. Many of the subsequent adventures of the couple are also similar, especially her flight escape and return to her human home.*

*The greatest German epic, the **Nibelungenlied**, of the 13th century, features the swan-maidens, both magical and wise, later the subject of the mighty Wagnerian epic, **The Ring**. Once again, at the very heart of a national literature, we find the humble folktale: read and studied as a classic, admired as a great literary and artistic work: yet still recited by Swedish hunters, Japanese fishermen and American Indians.*

Race, religion, customs, social organization, and almost every mental attitude may differ among the world's peoples, but the odds are that they will know the Bird-Maiden tale. You may not speak Swahili, Magyar, Tamil or Russian, Persian or the Erse of Ireland but the people who do, and who know nothing of each other, know this story. According to the best anthropology, many of them have not been in cultural contact, at least for many thousands of years.

In a number of versions, the magical instruments of the cloak of invisibility, the cap of knowledge, and the shoes of swiftness are included in the saga. The maiden is very often supernatural: though she may be, as in the Syrian cognate, merely the possessor of a magical (green silk) robe. Varieties also have her

transforming herself by means of a wolf-skin, as in Croatia; a sealskin, as in the Shetland Islands; or with white robes, as in Sweden.

In Kurdistan, the daughter of the magical bird Simurgh is the heroine; in Greece it is the Nereids; in Bulgaria, the Samodivas, and in Hungary, Fairy Elizabeth. The mysterious maiden is often the daughter of a king of spirits, and comes from the skies. She may be disguised merely as an unspecified, beautiful bird. Sometimes, as in Russia, she is a swan; sometimes, as in Finland, a goose; in both the Celebes and Bohemia, she is a dove: to the Magyars, a pigeon.

Our version is the famous one of Hasan of Basra, from the Arabian Nights. Perhaps one of its oddest coincidences is that the home of the mysterious lady is in the Islands of Wak-Wak: which does not sound totally unlike "Arawak", the name of the widespread community of South American Indians—who have a legend of a strangely similar sort. In this, there is a magical bird-maiden, daughter of the King of supernatural beings, flying warrior birds who accept the young man who finds them as one of themselves. Is there a relationship between the medieval Arabian story and the very ancient and at that time undiscovered Arawak people of America? If not, how do they come to share the same tale, even if the Wak-Wak/Arawak similarity is a coincidence?

Once upon a time there lived, in the city of Basra, a young jeweller who had inherited enough from his father to set himself up in a good way of business. He was sitting in his shop one day, looking at a book, when a stranger entered. Hasan did not know it, but this man was a magician, and he had a deep plot in his mind.

First he gained Hasan's friendship by praising the workmanship of the jewellery on display. Then, looking at Hasan's book, he said: "I have another book here, something which will be of great interest to you as a goldsmith."

He took out an ancient tome, with a silver clasp and

gold edges to the pages.

"What does it contain?" asked the jeweller.

"The secret of how to make gold!" said the magician.

"Could you teach me how to make it?" asked Hasan, who, of course, was by now deeply impressed and interested.

The magician put his fingers to his lips and said:

"Hasan, as I like you, and I have no son of my own, I shall teach you. I will come tomorrow, and we can talk again."

The young man could hardly believe his ears, and he could scarcely sleep for thinking about the magician. He seemed such a venerable old man, surely there could be no harm in just seeing whether he could make gold or not, Hasan asked himself.

The following day, when it was time for him to open his shop, Hasan saw the magician standing outside. Hasan let him in and sent his servant for tea. Then the magician whispered: "Start a fire and put a crucible on it, and we will start the goldmaking."

Hasan did as he was told, and the magician asked him for some copper. He heated and then melted the metal in the crucible; then he took a small paper packet from his turban and sprinkled powder from it onto the liquid copper. This powder was a golden yellow, and Hasan worked the bellows with all his might and main to keep the fire's heat strong enough to maintain the liquid nature of the alloy.

As he watched, it turned into the colour of pure gold.

As soon as it was cold, the magician said:

"Now for the test. Take this lump of gold to the market and see what an independent goldsmith will give you for it, after he has applied all the necessary tests. Then you will know whether I tell the truth or not. Sell the gold, and bring the money back here."

Hasan took the gold, and received twenty thousand pieces of silver for it, such was its great mass and purity. When he went back to the shop, the magician said: "Keep the money, and do what you will with it."

Hasan, overjoyed, took the money and gave it to his mother, who, however, warned him:

"Foolish boy! Have you not remembered what I have always told you about greed and trusting total strangers who say they have something to give you?"

But Hasan would not listen, and he rushed back to his shop, where the magician was sitting.

Hasan and the magician became great friends, and the old man again demonstrated, this time at Hasan's house, how the gold was made. Eagerly, Hasan asked him for a supply of the powder.

"Alas!" said the magician, "that is the last of the powder. But I will give you the list of ingredients."

He recited a number of names of chemicals and herbs, and Hasan memorized them. Then the magician gave Hasan a piece of drugged sweetmeat—and he fell, insensible, to the floor.

As soon as he saw that Hasan was unconscious, the magician filled some empty chests with everything he could lay hands on in the room, and cried out: "Dog of an Arab! At long last I have found you and now you will do my will!"

He called porters and they removed the chests containing the valuables—and one with Hasan inside—to the docks, where a chartered ship lay at anchor.

"Captain!" shouted the magician, "Up anchor and away! We have attained our desire." Before long they were far away from the port of Basra.

When Hasan's mother returned and found the house empty of valuables and her son gone, she knew it was something to do with the magician. When neighbours

came in to console her, for she was weeping and wailing, she said "I shall never see my son again, I will make a tomb here in the courtyard, with his name upon it, and mourn him the rest of my life." She tore her clothes, lamenting continually.

On board the magician's ship, Hasan slowly came to his senses.

He was kicked and cuffed by the crew, scarcely knowing where he was. Suddenly the magician appeared before him, shouting excitedly, "By the moon and the stars! I have wonderful work for you to do when we reach land! Now, have no fear, for you are as my son."

"Where are we going?" asked Hasan, but he was given no reply.

Hasan was fed on bread and water, and after a few more days at sea, felt no fear, but waited for what fate had in store.

The voyage lasted for several months; Hasan knew that by the waning and waxing of the moon, and finally they all disembarked in a beautiful green harbour.

"My son," said the magician, "forgive me for abducting you. It was for your own good." The captain and crew were paid off, and sailed away. Only Hasan and the magician were left on the shore. The old man played a tattoo on a small drum; and at once, from a cloud of dust, three she-camels appeared.

"Mount", cried the magician, "We have far yet to ride." Then with Hasan on one camel, the old man on another, and the third loaded with provisions, they set off.

After days of hard riding, they dismounted at a stream to water the camels, and Hasan saw a fine palace with gold cupolas.

"What is that place?" asked Hasan, as he and the

old man ate.

"Do not ask me, it is the home of an enemy of mine. Come, we must go," said the magician shortly, and soon they were travelling again.

For seven more days they rode, and at last reached a towering mountain, crested with snow.

"Here we are, the Mountain of the Clouds" said the magician, "There, on the mountain, grows something which helps me to make gold. I need some of that, and you will get it for me. Together we shall make enough gold to fulfill all our desires."

"Yes," agreed Hasan, for now he had fallen completely under the old man's spell.

There was a place on the mountainside, and the magician said "See that place, it is the home of spirits: the Jaan, Ghools, and Devils!"

The old man then killed one of the camels and wrapping Hasan in its skin, commanded him to stand on the open mountainside.

"But what will become of me?" Hasan asked, with a tremor of fear.

"The Rukhs will come, and carry you up to the top of the mountain, to a great nest, and you can cut your way out of the camel-skin with this knife. Frighten the Rukhs, and you can then do as I will tell you."

"What are the Rukhs?" Hasan wanted to know.

"Enormous birds, who can easily bear you up there, they will think you are a camel, and wish to feed on you. However, scare them off when you get there by waving your arms and shouting, and throw me down some of that wood in the great nest so that we can make gold again," said the magician, then he hid behind a boulder. "Remember! I am depending on you, my dear son!"

When Hasan was apprehensively waiting, a great bird flapped down: and carried him to its nest on top

of the mountain, as easily as if he had been a mouse.

He cut himself out of the skin, and drove off the bird. The voice of the magician came to him, "Throw down the wood! Throw all you can!"

Soon Hasan had thrown down all there was in the gigantic nest. "Good, that is all I need," shouted the magician, "I will go now, and you can rot up there, for all I care!" His mocking laughter echoed in Hasan's ears.

Mounting his camel, the magician rode off, leading the second camel with panniers of the precious wood on its sides.

Hasan was horrified. How was he to get down the mountain, and would the great bird attack him if he did? He made his way painfully down before the Rukhs came back, and at last found himself beside the wonderful palace where the magician had said there were Jaan, Ghools, and Devils. If they were enemies of the magician, perhaps they would help him. The great gates were open, and Hasan made his way from one courtyard to another, until he finally arrived at a room where two beautiful maidens were playing chess.

They did not seem the least bit alarmed by his appearance.

"Who are you?" asked one, while the other smiled at him pleasantly.

"Hasan of Basra, a jeweller," he replied, and told them his story.

"You must stay here with us and be our brother," said the second girl, "We rejoice that you are safe, for did you not pass here a short time ago with that dreadful magician who is our enemy?"

"Yes," said he, "He left me on the mountain to die." Then said the youngest girl to him:

"Let us tell you our history, for we are not demons or devils, but the daughters of a king.

"Our father is one of the Kings of the Jaan, who are good spirits; he has troops, servants and guards without number. We are seven sisters, and five others are at the moment out hunting. Here in this place, which is in one of the loveliest parts of the world, we live in complete security, placed here by our father, who wants us to meet no humans nor jinn, for he loves us too much to let us get married."

"Are you all happy here?" asked Hasan.

"Of course, for we have everything which our hearts desire, and when there are weddings or festivals of the Jaan we are taken there and brought back here in all pomp and ceremony, as befits our position and birth." they answered. Then the other sisters, each more lovely than the last, returned, and they accepted him as a brother, begging him to live with them for a while.

The days were wonderful for Hasan after that, and he began to feel he had never lived anywhere else. Each day he walked and talked with the Princesses, and they gave him a secret room for himself. One day, to his horror, he saw the magician approaching (along the same road he himself had been brought) this time dragging a young man. The seven maidens dressed Hasan in armour, and he set out to do battle with the magician. The old man was too busy skinning a camel to notice him until Hasan cried "Villainous wretch! I am alive and will avenge myself!" With one blow of his sword he cut off the magician's head.

The young man, who was shackled to the Magician's second camel, was amazed at Hasan's appearance. "How can I thank you enough?" he asked, as Hasan released him. "Go home in peace, brother," said Hasan, and gave the young man the camels, bidding him make speed to his own country as fast as he could.

The maidens were delighted with Hasan's bravery, and they all returned to feast at the palace. But while

the meal was at its height, a cloud was seen on the horizon.

"Hide, Hasan, hide," cried the maidens, "The troops of our father the King have come to take us on a visit!"

So he hid himself in the private room, and for three days and nights the troops of the King of the Jaan feasted in the hall of the palace.

On the third day, the youngest princess came to Hasan and said, "Brother, now we must go to a wedding at our father's command, and we shall be away for two months. During that time, treat this as your home and enjoy all its pleasures. But—and be careful of this or great misfortune will occur—do not open *that* door," and she pointed to a small door set in the wall of the secret room.

After the princesses and the troops had gone, Hasan felt lonely. But, after a while he hunted, and caught game, making himself his own meals. But, the forbidden door again and again caught his eye, until he was no longer able to ignore it. He turned the key in the golden lock, and opened it. There was a dark passageway beyond the door.

He went up some dark steps, and then came out onto a fine balcony at the top of the palace.

He looked out upon beautiful fields, flowers and fruit-trees, with singing birds the like of which he had never heard before.

It was such a wonderful place that he felt the exotic flower scents going to his head. There was a great silver lake, like a sheet of glass, and upon it he saw ten elegant birds alighting.

He watched with bated breath, from behind a shrub, as the exquisite birds drank and preened themselves, and sang. They uttered strange and wonderful cries, and flew onto the grass, plucking at their shimmering feathers with their talons. And Hasan, to his great

amazement, saw them turn into beautiful women before his eyes. Nine birds were beautiful beyond belief, but the tenth bird-woman made Hasan mad with desire. Then, leaving their feather cloaks behind, they leapt into the lake and swam like swans.

Hasan watched, his heart in his mouth, and they came out of the water, drying themselves on their feather robes, the loveliest of them all taking great care to dry herself delicately with the feather-robe, like a wild bird that has always been free.

After they had talked and laughed a while, the chief damsel said "O daughters of kings, we have spent enough time here, let us fly away, for we are late indeed."

Then they became birds and rose in the air. The swishing of their wings was all that Hasan heard as he looked to see them circle, then they were gone.

Hasan returned to the inner rooms of the palace. His heart was stricken with love such as he had never known before, and he could neither eat nor sleep. He wandered about for days, not caring if he lived or died.

Each day he unlocked the door which had been forbidden to him, to gaze at the lake and wait for the sound of the bird-maiden's wings, but they did not come.

Beautiful small wild birds sang in the acacias, but they could not soothe the pain in his heart.

Then from the roof he saw the dust-cloud approaching, which told him the princesses were returning from the wedding surrounded by the troops of the King of the Jaan.

Hasan hid himself again till the soldiers rode away and the youngest princess came to tell him he could feast with them again. Hasan's eyes were lacklustre with grief as she looked into his face, and the youngest princess cried "Hasan, are you unwell? What has

happened to you? You know that we are never ill here, for the water which flows from that river heals every ailment!"

Hasan said "I am dying of love for the leader of the Bird-Maidens; forgive me, I opened the door, and now I have to pay for that deed."

"Please do not tell my sisters," she said, "For they might punish you terribly!"

"I cannot be punished worse than I am now," murmured Hasan, lying back on his bed.

So the youngest maiden went and told the others that Hasan had pined for them while they were gone, and would soon be better now they had come home.

But day by day, Hasan seemed to get weaker.

Soon it was time for the sisters to go hunting, so they left Hasan in the care of the youngest, promising to bring him some fine game to tempt him. "Look after the Human" they told her, "For he is our beloved brother."

No sooner had they gone than the youngest princess came to Hasan and said "Come, show me where you saw the bird women. I would dearly like to see them myself," and Hasan managed to raise himself up. Leaning on the girl, he at last arrived with her at the top of the palace.

"There they landed," he said, "and there they divested themselves of their feathers, and there I saw *her* in all her great beauty, and fell hopelessly, utterly in love, sister."

Then the princess became very pale and said:

"Brother, you have fallen in love with one of the daughters of a King of the Jaan who is like our father; and, like him, immensely powerful.

"The eldest, whom you have described, is distinguished above all of us in magical guile and wisdom. You are in great trouble if you love her, for you can

never have her. Her father is the most powerful of all our Kings."

"But I must have her, or I will die." said Hasan.

"Then," said the youngest princess, "This is what you must do: if you would have her, you must wait till she puts off her feather robe, and possess yourself of it. You must keep it somewhere safe, hidden, and then you can marry her."

"I shall come every day until she is here again!" Hasan cried, "She *shall* be my wife, for I can never love any other in the world!"

The girl told him: "Remember, never give her back that dress once you have taken it, or she will take wing and escape. When you catch her, hold onto her by her long black hair, and her sisters will fly away. Then you will have gained possession of her."

Day after day, Hasan returned secretly to the spot where he had first seen the bird-maidens.

He ate and drank with the youngest sister, for now he had something to live for, and he daily grew stronger.

At last, when he had almost despaired of seeing them the air was full of the rush of wings, and the bird-maidens landed on the lake. They came to the bank, and began to take off their feather robes. The one princess of whom Hasan was so enamoured left hers within a few feet of him, as he stood hidden behind a flowering shrub. With a little cry of joy she joined the rest in the water.

Hasan snatched the robe and put it inside his shirt. After they had swum around for some time, the maidens returned to the bank and began to dress. All except Hasan's beloved. She searched in the grass for her robe and her face was very close to his. He caught her by the hair and held her, in spite of her weeping. The others dressed quickly and flew up into the air, and soon they were gone. Hasan begged the beautiful

maiden to forgive him, saying, "I love you, dearest lady, with a pure and true love, come with me and be my wife!" She kicked and bit, but he put his arms around her, and wrapping her in his cloak, carried her gently to his private room.

After a while, she quietened and he opened the door to the youngest sister of his hostesses.

"I have found her," he cried, "I have caught her!"

Then the youngest damsel bowed herself down before the beautiful Bird-Maiden, and kissed the ground in front of her, and blessed her.

The daughter of the Jaan King said icily:

"Is this how a daughter of a King of the Jaan is treated here in your domain? Do you either of you realise how mighty and powerful is my father? Come, give me back my feather robe, and I shall be back home before my sisters have missed me!"

But the youngest Princess talked long and soothingly to the Bird-Maiden, and told her how Hasan loved her, and how he had been their dear brother for many months, never being other than kind and thoughtful to them.

The Princess of the Jaan began to be more at ease, and ate and drank with Hasan when food was brought to the room.

At last she actually smiled, and Hasan, dressed now in his finest clothes, bowed low over her hand and said "Oh Lady of Loveliness, be my wife and I will love you for ever, and you will never regret one moment of our life together!"

Then the other sisters returned from hunting, and sent for Hasan to eat with them.

He went to the eldest and kissed her brow, saying: "Dear sister, while you were away I opened the door which is forbidden; but I found the loveliest woman in the world to be my wife. Please forgive me for disobeying

your command, and let me enjoy life with she whom I adore!"

At first the sisters were most angry and said "Ah, so you are like all the sons of Adam, after all! You people can never be trusted!"

"Sisters," said the youngest damsel, "Can you blame him, after we left him completely and utterly alone so far away from anywhere? Let us be glad he has caught his beloved, and now has become well again, for he was wasting away!"

"What is she like?" asked the other sisters, full of curiosity, not so displeased with Hasan now that they scented a true romance.

Then, the Bird-Maiden came to them, in the main hall, and they were amazed at her beauty and dignity.

"O daughter of the Supreme King of the Jaan!" said the eldest sister, "Take this human being, and be happy together, for we can vouch for his character. He has told us he has burned the dress of feathers, and we beg you to forget your native land."

Then, one of the damsels deputised for her in the matter of the marriage-contract, and she and Hasan became man and wife.

For forty days and nights they celebrated the wedding in the palace, and at last, Hasan and the Bird-Maiden set out for Basra so that they could live together for the rest of their lives.

"Visit us sometimes," said the seven princesses of the Jaan, as they said goodbye to the newly married pair, now at the head of a vast caravan of laden camels carrying gifts of great price, "and let us not wonder what happens to you, Hasan, for you will always be our dear brother."

Then they threw flower petals on the couple, and Hasan and his bride agreed that they would never forget them or neglect them in the years ahead.

At last, Hasan arrived in the courtyard of his old home, his camels were tethered to the posts outside, and he knocked loudly on the door.

When the mother of Hasan opened it, she could scarcely believe her eyes. "My son, I had given you up for dead," she wept, "But now I am happier than I ever have been in my life."

"This is my beautiful wife from a far land," said Hasan, "Let us come in and we will show you many rich presents which we have been given."

So the mother of Hasan was enchanted by the beautiful young wife, and took her to her heart.

But soon, the mother-in-law said to her son: "Hasan, we must go to the great city of Baghdad so that you may have a big shop befitting your new dignity; let us leave Basra and become important in Baghdad!"

So Hasan moved his belongings and established himself in a new shop which sold fine gold ornaments, and his wife and mother were both pleased.

The house of a minister of the Royal court was to be sold, as the minister needed a larger one, and Hasan bought it. After one year of happily married life, Hasan's wife bore him a son, Nasir, and again a year later, another son, Mansoor.

Hasan's happiness was complete. Never, he felt, had a human being had so much joy on earth.

Three years had passed since the damsels of the Jaan had begged Hasan not to forget them, and one day he said to his wife: "My dear, I will go now and see my seven sisters again, and tell them how things have prospered for us."

Sweetly, his wife agreed to his going, and he loved her even more.

Then he went to his mother and told her the secret of his wife's feather-cloak, and bade his mother keep it safely in the chest buried in the courtyard. "For," he

said, "if my wife were ever to find that she would fly away and leave me, and I could never get her back."

His mother agreed to keep the cloak safely hidden, and Hasan rode away, with many presents for the seven damsels.

For the first three days after Hasan's going, the Bird-Maiden showed her mother-in-law great respect, and they exchanged all sorts of confidences.

Then, wheedlingly, the young wife said:

"Mother, let us go to the Baths today. All the time I have been in Baghdad I have never been. Will you take me and the children? I have always wanted to go."

So, they went.

After an hour, the older woman wanted to return home, but the younger one was enjoying it so much that she asked if she could stay on longer. The mother of Hasan gave permission, and left.

Now, a favourite of the Commander of the Faithful happened to be in the Baths that day, and took back to the Princess Zubeydeh all the gossip from the Baths. She mentioned that a beautiful woman, with two children as lovely as moons, were at the Baths, and the Princess wanted to know who she could be.

"Ah, Princess, I went home with her to find out," said the favourite, "And she lives in the house of the minister of my lord's court, which now belongs to a goldsmith from Basra. But, my Lady Zubeydeh, if my lord could only see her, I am sure he would want her to grace the harem!"

"As beautiful as that?" said the princess reflectively; "I would like to see her. Send a message that she must come to me, and bring the children, too." The Princess Zubeydeh was always looking for suitable slaves as presents for her lord, and this strange woman seemed to have possibilities.

So, Mesroor, a trusted eunuch of the royal harem, was sent to the house of Hasan the Goldsmith of Basra.

"The Lady Zubeydeh, wife of the Commander of the Faithful, sends an invitation for the lady of the house to visit her," said the eunuch when the mother of Hasan opened the door, "and she should bring her two children with her also," he added.

Hasan's mother was greatly worried, as she felt they should not go in the absence of her son, but the eunuch smoothly explained that it was a courtesy extended as a great favour, and so the Bird-Maiden and her children went to the Royal harem.

The Princess Zubeydeh was delighted with the looks of the fair stranger and her children, and showed her many of her finest garments. "Have you any to match these in your country?" she asked, as priceless silks and brocades were paraded before her.

"Yes, I have a feather robe so fine and so delicate it has all the colours of the sun and the moon!" said the Bird-Maiden with much pride.

"Indeed!" said the Princess Zubeydeh, "I should like to see that—a robe made of feathers! Show it to me!"

"My husband's mother keeps it hidden, and will not let me have it," replied the Bird-Maiden. She had overheard her husband telling his mother to keep it safe before he left. "You, dear Lady, ask her to give it to me, and I will show it to you with great joy."

"No, no, there is no such thing as a feather robe!" said the mother-in-law. "She exaggerates; why, how could there be a robe of feathers all the colours of the sun and moon?"

But the Princess felt that the girl was telling the truth, and sent the eunuch Mesroor to find it. Find it he did, after a short delay, and soon the beautiful robe, with not one feather missing, was once more in the

young wife's hands.

She took it with trembling fingers from the eunuch, while the mother-in-law bit her lip, and put it on. It fitted just as it had three years before, and she put her sons inside the robe, singing like a bird, walking like a bird, fastening the feathers around her. She preened and pirouetted before the ladies of the court, and the Princess especially was delighted at the sight of so much loveliness. "Truly it is a wonderful dress," said the Princess Zubeydeh, "Can you show us how to fly in it?"

No sooner were the words out of her mouth than the Bird-Maiden shook out her wings and flew away, taking her children with her. She called to her mother-in-law as she went: "If my husband wants to find me, tell him I am going to the Islands of Wak-Wak!" Then she was lost from sight.

When Hasan returned, his mother was not long in telling him the story, ending with the last words of his wife as she flew away.

"The Islands of Wak-Wak!" shouted Hasan in his grief. "Where are they? The only ones who would know are my seven enchanted sisters, I will ask them," so he turned about and returned to them.

They listened to the tale without speaking, even as he cried "Where are the islands of Wak-Wak, for find her I must, even if I lose my life in the attempt!"

But the seven sisters would not tell him, saying "Be patient, you will be cured of your love in time, for you cannot go to those islands."

However, the younger sister pleaded, as usual, with the six others, on Hasan's behalf, and at last they told him.

"Your wife must want you," they said, "Or else why should she tell your mother where she had gone?"

Now they had a powerful uncle, and his name was

Abdelqoodoos. He loved the eldest damsel best of all, and came to see her once a year, bringing many presents.

They had told him about Hasan the Goldsmith, on his last visit, and he was delighted when they gave him the news that Hasan had cut off the head of the villainous magician.

"If anything evil should ever happen to that young man," he said, "Let someone put a few grains from this pouch on the coals of a brazier, and I will come at once to help."

The eldest damsel said to the youngest "Quickly, get that pouch my uncle gave me, and let us summon him."

As soon as the grains were burning on the coals, a puff of smoke appeared on the horizon. It turned out to be the girls' uncle, riding upon an elephant.

"What do you require, O daughters of my brother?" asked the old man, as soon as they had greeted him.

"Uncle, our interest in Hasan the Goldsmith has prompted us to request your help," was the reply, "Will you kindly assist him?"

"I will," said the uncle, "But no doubt this man is in a very dangerous situation. Is that not so?"

"It is," said they, "But what is he to do?"

"Mount up behind me on the elephant," said he, and after kissing them all goodbye, Hasan did so. The animal took them on for a very long way, until they arrived at a sapphire-blue mountain.

The uncle dismounted, and so did Hasan, and Hasan was given these instructions. "Stay here until I can have some conversation with one within, and come in when you are sent for." The old man then dismissed the elephant with a magical phrase, and it disappeared. Abdelqoodoos knocked three times on the rock, and a gigantic slave with a sword appeared.

He kissed the sheikh's hands, and opened the door. The sheikh said to Hasan "I will be as quick as I can, have patience." He went through the door with the apparition, and the door clanged shut.

It seemed an age to Hasan before the sheikh returned, but he was smiling.

He took Hasan by the hand through another door, but this time it opened out onto a vast desert. Outside that door stood an Arab steed, saddled and bridled.

"Take this horse," said the old man, "And ride as far as it will let you. When it stops, knock upon the door of brass, and there will come out to you a sheikh all in black.

"Here is a letter; give it to him. He will take it away. If he comes back himself, you may proceed further. If one of his young men comes, sword in hand, you will know your mission has failed. Here is the letter. If you need to escape, call upon the elephant—his name is Fil. He will take you back to safety with the daughters of my brother, and you shall have a better wife than this one which has flown from you now."

"By all that is Holy!" cried Hasan, "I shall never love another! How can I go to these Islands of Wak-Wak that I may see her and my children again?"

"The Islands of Wak-Wak are seven islands, and the inhabitants of those islands are many thousands of virgins, like a great army," replied the sheikh, "I do not know how you can find the island where your wife is now hidden, but if you must go on, then you must. Farewell!"

Before Hasan could thank him, he thrust a letter into his hand, and disappeared. Hasan drove his own steed forward.

Finally Hasan, in great anguish and uncertainty, arrived at the place of which the sheikh had spoken. The horse stopped, neighed, and pawed the ground

with its front right hoof.

Hasan dismounted, placed the reins on the pommel, and the horse kicked the sand. Hasan knocked at a great brass door, and the sound echoed strangely.

After a few moments, an old sheikh dressed all in black came to the door and opened it. Hasan saluted him. "Father, please will you read this letter and tell me if I am allowed to proceed further?" said he.

The old man bowed his head and smiled, taking the letter. "Wait here," he said in a low voice. The door opened again. It was the sheikh himself, all dressed in white, instead of the young man to kill him. Hasan felt jubilant, and his heart soared.

Inside the cave, Hasan looked around him. It was as large as any palace hall he had ever imagined, gleaming like purest crystal. Everywhere, great lamps of brass hung from the roof of the cave.

They went through this area, and at last came out to an open garden, where fruits and flowers grew in profusion. Birds sang, and the sound of water gushing from fountains was everywhere.

The sheikh signed to Hasan to sit with him on a seat of marble, and four sheikhs similar to himself approached.

"Recite the tale of your doings to these sheikhs and myself," said the man in white, "and take your own time about it. There is no hurry."

So Hasan told his story.

"Is that the vile magician who caused you to be taken to the top of the mountain, whom you have slain?" one cried.

"Yes, it was," said Hasan.

Then the four sheikhs looked at each other and pursed their lips and said: "O Sheikh of Sheikhs, this young man has suffered enough." They looked at Hasan and with the kindest expression in their eyes

said: "He should be reunited with his wife. O Aburruweysh, for the sake of your brother Abdelgoodoos, give him further help."

Then, the sheikh in white wrote a letter with his own hand, and gave it to Hasan. "Take this, and I shall summon transportation for you." He clapped his hands, and a gigantic Jinn appeared, one of the Flyers, who stood before the sheikh with an expression of the deepest respect.

"You are Dahnash?" asked the sheikh.

"Yes, master, Dahnash, son of Faktash," he replied.

"Take this human being to the Land of Camphor, so that he may give this letter to its King," said the sheikh.

Hasan then was lifted up onto the broad shoulders of Dahnash the Flyer. "One last word," said the old man, "When you are taken into the heavens, on the shoulders of this efrit, and you hear the praises of the angels, utter not a word, or you will fall."

"I promise," said Hasan, and thanked the old man from the depth of his heart.

"Whatever the King of the Camphor Land asks you to do, you should do," said the sheikh, "and may your affairs prosper!"

As he spoke the efrit rose high into the air, and Hasan heard the angels at their prayers, but he kept his mouth shut, and remained safe on the shoulders of Dahnash.

A night and a day they flew, and then came to a land that was as white as snow, the Land of Camphor.

Hasan dismissed the efrit, and took the letter to the King's palace.

Now, the King of the Land of Camphor was a magnificent ruler, called Haroon, and he received Hasan kindly. "Come to me tomorrow morning," he said, "now go and rest."

A court official took Hasan to the house reserved

for guests, and he slept like the dead all night. At the early morning court of the magnificent King, Hasan was the first admitted. The King was reading the letter, and shaking his head over it.

"What is your condition?" the King asked Hasan. "Ill," replied Hasan, "But I seek to remedy that."

"I send ships to the Islands of Wak-Wak, and sometimes they send ships to me," said the King.

"Tomorrow one of their ships will come here," he continued, "and you shall embark upon it, I will have you placed on board under my protection."

"King, may you live for ever!" said Hasan, fervently, "I would give my life for even one glimpse of my wife!"

"Take great care, or you may be in danger beyond estimation," warned the King, "You are lucky that you arrived at this time; I hope that your luck will hold."

So, next day, Hasan was sent on board one of the ships bound for the Islands of Wak-Wak, under the King's protection, and the ship set sail.

For the next ten days the ship went on, through shark-infested seas, till its anchor was thrown out, and Hasan stepped ashore.

On the dockside there were a thousand or more beautiful divans, with cushions and fine cloths draped on them, as if a huge concourse of people were in the habit of using them to rest.

He hid behind one of the divans, and waited silently. When evening came, there arrived a great company of female soldiers, converging upon the place where the divans were arranged.

Each soldier threw herself upon one divan, and discoursed with her neighbour. They were dressed in chain-mail, with swords in their hands. Hasan saw they were all tall and most beautifully formed, notwithstanding their rough attire and warlike equipment.

They wore steel helmets, with intricate designs, and had thongs binding their legs.

Hasan waited until he saw one approach his divan, and called to her in a low voice, "O help me, I beg you not to kill me!"

She looked at him with great blue eyes full of fire, her sword in her hand ready for action.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"My name is Hasan," he answered, "Take under your protection one who has lost his wife and children, and does not want to lose his life in search of them without putting up a fight!"

She was intrigued, and he heard her say "Hasan my son, you are fortunate you have chosen an old woman, for I fear one of my young officers would have killed you! Hide under this divan, and wait; what is to be, will be."

Hasan concealed himself, and the time passed with stories of war and battles far too bloodthirsty for his tender heart. The female army desported themselves, and told tales and laughed loudly like the soldiers they were.

Now, the woman he had spoken to appeared in the darkness and handed him coat of mail and chain-mail trousers just like those which the women wore, and signed to him to put them on over his own clothes. She then gave him a steel helmet and beckoned him to follow her.

He did so, and she led him to a tent which was obviously that of the commander, from the pennants fluttering outside.

He saw her, now that she was without her armour, to be old and hideous, pockmarked with smallpox, grizzled of head, and bold of face. The only thing good about her was her candid blue gaze.

Appealing to her humorous eyes, Hasan begged for

sanctuary. She asked him "How in the world did you get here, and why and how long do you expect to live, now that you have arrived?" and she slapped her hip, laughing.

Hasan answered as best he could; and she was so impressed by his replies that she promised him her protection as commander of the army. Hasan thanked his lucky stars that he had chosen her.

The commander then sent instructions to her officers to take the army out in battle order, and to rehearse for their next foray. None was to remain in the camp, under pain of death.

As soon as they had all marched away, the old woman told Hasan that she was called Shawahee, and that she was in possession of news for him.

"Your wife, of whom I have heard, is on the seventh island of the Islands of the Wak-Wak. The distance from here is very far, and fraught with danger," she said.

"I must go, whatever the perils," said Hasan. She nodded approvingly. "You must go past the island of the hyenas, the place where the lions roar; the Island of Birds, where terrible birds of prey utter horrible cries continually; then you must pass over the Land of the Jinn, where the flames rise from the ground, and no man can live in peace. But I will take you, and we shall pass all these places, and more, till we come to a great river, and this river extends to the Islands of Wak-Wak. Do you understand the dangers?"

"I do, but I would go to the ends of the world," said Hasan fervently, "For I love my wife, and I believe she loves me."

"Do you realise that you may lose your life?" asked the female commander.

"Yes," said Hasan stoutly, "And if you will help me, I am ready to go now."

"Those islands get their name from the trees which have heads fixed upon their branches, which continually raise their eyes to Heaven and cry "Wak-Wak!" she told him, "I will make all arrangements, and we shall go when my soldiers return."

"So be it," said Hasan, and prayed to Allah that he might be successful.

By dawn, the entire army returned, and Hasan heard the commander address them, and tell them that she was leading them on an expedition to the dreaded Islands of Wak-Wak. Each woman raised her spear in the air and cheered. The Commander was a popular one with the troops. Dressed in mail, Hasan left at the side of the female chief, full of courage and strength of purpose. The jingling of the harness, neighing of horses, the rattle of swords in their scabbards was music to his ears.

Sometimes they travelled by road, sometimes by sea, suffice it to tell that at long last Hasan looked upon the green Islands of Wak-Wak, where the heads, impaled upon the branches of trees, continually cried out "Wak-Wak!" and those pitiful cries pierced the hearts of whoever heard them.

"Now, Hasan," said the commander, pointing to a wondrous palace, "there lies the place where your wife lives. Wear this cap of invisibility. It will take you safely into the very midst of her father's guards.

"Go, and blessings upon you." Then she turned her troops about and departed.

Lean as a greyhound, sunburned as dark as a Moor, still as strong as when he began his search, Hasan went to the palace. It was guarded by heavily armed men, soldiers of the King of the Jaan.

But, with the magic cap, he was able to enter the gate, and penetrate to the room where, on a bed covered with a cover of gold brocade, his wife lay

asleep.

After the long campaign, his gruelling marches and long rides on horseback, voyages by sea and land, Hasan felt he could have shouted aloud at seeing at long last that beautiful face.

But, having a care for his safety, he bent over the bed, and whispered in her ear "I am here, my Beauty of Beauties, here is Hasan, come to take you away!"

When she woke, and looked around, he took off the cap of invisibility, and she saw him.

The Bird-Maiden cried out "Hasan! It is not safe for you to be here! You will be killed if you are seen!"

"I have got so far without being killed, my love, and I shall get you away safely, too," he said. He quickly told her the story of the last few months' journey.

"I never thought to see you again," she murmured, "It has been so long since I returned here."

"Is it not enough that I have come?" he answered, "I shall take you and the children away with me."

"You cannot! It is impossible," she said, "You do not know how well-guarded we are. My father would never let me escape. Go now, and save yourself, forget about me."

"You cannot take from me the spoils of my victory!" answered Hasan, boldly, "I have won my way to you, and as you are my wife, I shall take you!"

"You must know what we would have to face, on the way back, and it may be death for you any moment now!" cried the Bird-Maiden.

Then his two sons came into the room, and knew their father, and he played with them a while.

The Queen, the Bird-Maiden's mother, then knocked on her daughter's door saying "What is this I hear, a man's voice? Open to me that I may punish you, for no one of the human sort may be allowed in this holiest island of all our Islands!"

So Hasan straightaway put on his cap of invisibility, and hid from the Queen's sight, and she went away satisfied that there was no one there.

That evening, as dusk came, Hasan came out of the closet of his wife's room, and said to her:

"Come, my love, you take one child and I will take the other, and we will go from here, for I am strong, and you must go with me."

So, they each took a child in their arms, and Hasan with his cap of invisibility, led her through the guards, who lay on the palace floors, in twos and threes, like sleeping dogs.

Just as they got to the palace grounds, they met an old woman.

"Let me help you," she said, "O daughter of the Jann, I see your husband, who is human, though he has a cap of invisibility on his head. Take this reed, and strike it three times upon the ground, and Efrits will come to bear you away."

The Bird-Maiden thanked her, and gave her a jewel from her finger. The Bird-Maiden struck the reed three times upon the ground, and two gigantic efrits came, bowing low in homage.

"We obey the owner of the Magic Reed," they said, "Give us your orders and we shall perform our duty."

"What distance is there between here and Baghdad?" asked Hasan.

"Not far, if we take you upon our shoulders," said the efrits, and Hasan said:

"Then let us go to Baghdad, now!"

One efrit took the Bird-Maiden and one child, and Hasan was lifted upon the shoulder of the second, his younger son in his arms.

The air was filled with a strange rushing sound, the night became black, without a star in the sky, and Hasan felt himself being carried at great speed through

the air.

In less time than it takes to tell, the two efrits landed safely in Hasan's garden in Baghdad, and placed Hasan, his wife and the children safely on the ground.

Dismissing the efrits, Hasan loudly knocked on his own door, calling his mother with joyful anticipation. His wife, standing beside him, looked at him with her eyes shining with love.

In a few moments he heard the bolts being drawn, and his mother opened the door.

The moment she saw them, the old woman shrieked with happiness. Then she clasped them in her arms, one by one. Hasan vowed to himself that never again would he ever leave his home, or his family. His wife went to her own apartments, and dressed herself and the children in their finest clothes.

"Husband," said she, when Hasan went in to her, "I swear I have learned by being parted from you that I love you with all my heart, and will never leave you again. Light the fire," she continued and when he did so, she dropped the feather robe into the flames. Then she returned shyly to Hasan's arms.

Within a few weeks, Hasan once more became the Goldsmith of Basra, and they lived happily the rest of their lives. ■

The Three Imposters

One hundred years before the European invention of printing, Prince Manuel, nephew of the Spanish King Alfonso the Wise, wrote 'The Fifty Pleasant Stories', one of the real gems of early Spanish literature. He died in 1347, and the book was not printed until over two hundred years afterwards, when it appeared in Seville. It lay forgotten until the Madrid edition of 1642, and these two impressions are today among the rarest books in the world. After nearly another two centuries it came out in Stuttgart (1839) and then in Paris the following year. This story, 'A King and Three Imposters', is said by Prince Manuel to come from a Moorish source. It is, of course, undoubtedly the basis of Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Emperor's New Clothes.'

Three imposters came to a king and told him that they were weavers, and could produce a cloth of such a strange kind that a legitimate son of his father could see it, but nobody else could, even if they were believed to be legitimate.

Now the King was much pleased at this, thinking that by this means he would be able to distinguish those who were the sons of their supposed fathers from those who were not. So he ordered a palace to be set aside for the making of this cloth. The three

men, to convince him that they were genuine and sincere, agreed to be shut up in this building until the cloth had been made; and this satisfied the King.

The weavers were given a large quantity of gold, silver and silk and many other things to work with. They set up their looms in the palace and pretended that they were working all day at the cloth.

After some days, one of the men went to the King and told him that the cloth had been started, and he told him all kinds of things about it, and asked him to visit them, but asked that he should come alone.

The King was very pleased, but thought that he would get another opinion of the magical fabric first, so he sent the Lord Chamberlain to have a look. The Lord Chamberlain duly went and could see nothing, but he dared not admit that the wonderful cloth was invisible to him, so he returned to the King and said that he had really seen it.

The King then sent someone else, and received the same report. Now the King decided to see for himself.

When he entered the Palace, the King found the men there, and they described the cloth in detail, including its design. They all agreed on these details, and even the origin and method of making of the cloth. The King could not see anything at all, for there was no cloth there. But he began to feel very uneasy, fearing that he might not be the true son of the King who was supposed to be his father. "If I cannot see it," he thought, "I might have to lose my kingdom, which depends upon inheritance". So he started to praise the cloth, and repeated the details which the imposters had outlined.

When he returned to his own palace, the King continued to speak of the cloth as if it were real, though at the same time he inwardly suspected that something was wrong.

After a few days, the monarch asked his Wakil, the officer of justice, to go and see the cloth. Exactly the same thing happened to the Wakil. He went into the palace of the weavers, who described the pattern, though he could see nothing of any cloth of any kind. Naturally the unhappy Wakil immediately imagined that he could not be the true son of his father, and that that must be the cause of the material remaining invisible to him. Fearing that the discovery of this fact about him would mean the loss of his important position, the Wakil set about praising the non-existent cloth in even more extravagant terms than the King and the Lord Chamberlain.

He went back to the King, and told him that he had, indeed, viewed the cloth, and that it was the most extraordinary tissue in the world. The King was deeply distressed: there could now, he thought, be no doubt that he himself was not the offspring of his father. But he hastened to agree with the rapturous descriptions of the wondrous fabric brought him by the law officer. And he did not forget to add unstinted praise for the inspired workmen who were weaving it.

The King continued to send people to see the cloth, and they, not unnaturally, all came back to him with the same impressions as everyone else.

This tale continued in just the same way until the King was told that the cloth was finished. He ordered that a great feast be prepared, where everyone should be dressed in clothes made from the miraculous material. The weavers thereupon presented themselves, with 'some of the cloth' rolled in fine linen, and asked his Majesty how much would be required; and the King told them the quantity and what kind of clothes were to be made.

The feast day arrived, and the clothes were reported to be complete. The weavers came to the King with

the magic robe which he himself was to wear. The King, of course, did not dare to say that he could not see it, or even feel it.

Now the imposters pretended to dress the King in his new clothes; and he mounted his horse and rode into the city. Luckily it was summer time! People who saw the King pass were very surprised at what they beheld. But word had got around that only the illegitimate were unable to see the cloth, so people kept their distress and amazement to themselves.

All of them did, in fact, except a black man who was among those lining the streets. He immediately approached the King and said:

"Sire, it is of no interest to me whose son I am. So I can tell you that in fact you are riding about without any clothes on!"

At first the King struck the black a blow, saying that he must be illegitimate and that was why the cloth was invisible to him. But other people, once the spell of silence and fear had been broken, saw that it was true, and said the same. Even the King and his court now realized that they had been tricked.

The false weavers, of course, when they were sought, were found to have fled with the things which the King had given them 'to make the cloth from'. ■