

Sank to the ground and perished in a breath.
The manner of this ancient sky is so,
At whiles like arrow and at whiles like bow!

§ 2

How Rustam fought with Afrásiyáb

When Rustam saw the doings of Káran,
And what war is, he went to Zál and said:—
"Tell me, O paladin of paladins!
Where doth malevolent Afrásiyáb
Stand in the fight? Describe his garb and banner.
I see a fluttering flag of violet.
Describe him that I may encounter him,
And so exalt my head among the chieftains.
To-day will I lay hold upon his girdle
And bring him hither haled upon his face."

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Zál answered: "Hearken unto me, my son!
And run no risks to-day. He is a Dragon,
Whose breath is fire—a Cloud of bale in war.¹
His flag and mail are black, his helm and brassards
Of iron flecked with gold, his plume is sable.
Avoid him, he is brave, his fortune sleepless."

"Be not concerned for me," was Rustam's answer.
"With God mine aid, heart, sword, and arm my ramparts, V. 302
Although he be a Dragon and a dív
Yet will I bring him by the belt, and thou
Shalt see me make him lifeless in the mellay,
So dealing that Pashang's troops shall bewail him."

That lion-youth—the shelter of the host—
Urged on his steed—Rakhsh of the brazen hoofs—
And shouting mid the trumpet-blare approached
The army of Túrán. Afrásiyáb
Beheld amazed the lad not fully grown
And asked: "Who is he, for I know him not—

¹ Cf. p. 53.

Yon Dragon broken loose in such a fashion?"

One said: "The son of Zál the son of Sám.
Dost thou not see him with his grandsire's mace?
He is a youth and eager for distinction."

Then like a vessel lifted by the waves
Afrásiyáb came forth while Rustam clipped
Rakhsh firmly, shouldering his massive mace,
But hung it to his saddle when he closed;
Then, having caught the monarch by the belt,
And dragged him from his poplar saddle, hoped
To carry him to Kai Kubád to tell
The story of this first day's fight; but through
The chieftain's weight and Rustam's grasp the girdle
Snapped, and the king came headlong to the ground,
Whereat his cavaliers surrounded him,

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While Rustam, when the chief escaped his clutch,
Gnawed at his hand's back in chagrin and cried:—
"Why did I take him not beneath the armpit
And simply make him handfast with his girdle?"

While from the elephants' backs the sound of bells
Rose, and the drums were heard for miles, men brought
The Sháh glad tidings: "Rustam," they reported,
"Brake through the centre of the Turkman host
And reached their general whose standard now
Hath disappeared, for Rustam seized his girdle
And flung him easily. The Turkmans yelled,
The valiant chiefs formed round their fallen king,
And bare him off. When vanquished thus he mounted
A fleet steed, fled toward the plain, and left
His host to save his life."

At this good news
The Sháh gave orders to his troops to fall
In mass like wind upon the enemy
And utterly o'erthrow them, fruit and root.
He rose himself like fire, and all his host
Heaved like a stormy sea. Zál and Mihráb,

The Lion, went forth keen and valorous;
 The din of battle rose with falchion-flash
 And thud of shaft, while heads grew dazed as axes V. 304
 Crashed on gold helm and shield. Thou wouldst
 have said:—

“A cloud somewhence hath risen and is flecking
 Yon oranges with magic cinnabar!”
 Upon that day of battle sank and rose
 Blood to the Fish and dust-clouds to the Moon,
 While through the horse-hoofs on that spacious plain
 One earth flew up to make another heaven!¹
 Heroic Rustam in the fight that day
 With dirk and lasso, mace and scimitar,
 Clave into pieces, rent and brake and bound
 The heads, breasts, feet, and hands of warriors,
 For eight and fifty score of gallant chiefs
 That Lion slaughtered in a single charge.

Zál gazing on his son illustrious
 In Grace and might felt his heart throb with joy
 To see such prowess, while the Turkmans pressed V. 305
 Thus by the Magian host sought Dámaghán,
 And thence fled toward Jíhún with stricken hearts,
 With din and dudgeon, with their weapons broken
 And girdles snapped—a trumpless, drumless mob.

The paladins that led the Íránian host
 Turned from pursuing and drew near the Sháh,
 All plunder-wearied, bringing band on band
 Of captive Turkmans. When the troops were back
 In camp again the mighty men approached
 The monarch of the world, extolling him,
 While Rustam also went before the Sháh,
 Who seated him on one side of the throne
 And famous Zál upon the other one.

¹ Literally, “The earth became six and the heaven eight.” Firdausí is speaking of the Seven Climes, and of the heavens of the Seven Planets only, in this passage. Cf. vol. i. pp. 71, 72.