

In marching from the frontiers of Túrán,
 And in a swift retreat to your own borders,
 Ye will behold your reputation saved ;
 But if not we will close with you in fight ;
 Ask not for any armistice henceforth."

He gave a robe of honour to Ruhhám,
 One suited to a man of his repute,
 And brave Ruhhám conveyed to Faríburz
 A letter like the one that he had brought.
 When Faríburz had gained a month's delay
 He clutched in all directions like a lion.
 They loosed the fastenings of the money-bags,
 They gathered bows and lassos from all sides ;
 They went about, reorganised the host,
 And partially regained what had been lost.

§ 30

How the Íránians were defeated by the Turkmans

When with the ending of the month came war,
 For they observed their compact honourably,
 The soldiers' shouts went up on every side,
 And all set forward to the battlefield ;
 The din of trumpet, drum, and bell shook heaven,
 While what with chargers' crests, reins, hands, and
 swords,
 Bows, battle-axes, lances, maces, bucklers,
 And lassos, gnats could find no way. "The world,"
 Thou wouldst have said, "is in the Dragon's maw,
 Or heaven level with earth!"

V. 850

Upon the right
 Was Gív son of Gúdarz, an archimage
 And marchlord, on the left the skilled Ashkash,
 Who shed blood in a river when he fought ;
 Before the standard at the army's centre

Was Fariburz, the son of Sháh Káuś,
 With men of battle. He harangued his troops,
 And said: "Till now our prowess hath been hidden,
 But we will fight to-day as lions fight,
 And make the world too narrow for our foes;
 Else will our maces and our Rúman casques
 Laugh at the host for this disgrace for ever."

They made a heavy rain of arrows fall
 Like autumn tempests beating on a tree.
 For arrows and the dust of shouting troops
 No bird had room to fly, the falchions shone
 Like diamonds and flamed amid the dust.
 Thou wouldst have said: "Earth is a negro's face;
 The stars are warriors' hearts." The multitudes
 Of maces, spears, and trenchant scimitars
 Brought Doomsday on the world. Gív from the centre
 Advanced with lips a-foam and raised his war-cry.
 He with the noble kinsmen of Gúdarz,
 With whom the issue lay for good or ill,
 Stroved with their spears and arrows, showering sparks
 From steel. Gúdarz fought fiercely with Pírán,
 And slew nine hundred of his kin. Lahhák
 And Farshíward saw how their mighty host
 Was going up in dust and charged on Gív,
 Upon his mace-men and his valiant troops.
 Shafts fell in showers from the chieftains' bows
 Upon those famous warriors clad in mail
 Till none could see the surface of the ground,
 Earth was so hidden by the mass of slain,
 While no man turned his back upon another
 Or left his post. At length Húmán spake thus
 To Farshíward: "We must attack the centre,
 And, routing Fariburz, deprive the host
 Of his support; it will be easy then
 To beat the right wing and to seize the baggage."

They fell upon the centre, Fariburz

Fled from Húmán, the fighting line was broken,
 The haughty chiefs gave way, each took his course,
 Not one Íránian warrior stood his ground.
 They saw the drums and standard in position
 No more, and so with eyes bedimmed with fighting
 They turned their backs upon the enemy,
 And in that action only grasped the wind.
 The tymbals, spears, and standard were o'erthrown,
 Men could not tell the stirrup from the rein,
 For they had lost all stomach for the fight ;
 The mountains and the plains were drenched with blood.

V. 852

Then Fariburz, as foes were gathering
 On every side, made for the mountain-skirt
 With those Íránians whose life was whole,
 Although for such a life one needs must weep.
 Gúdarz and Gív with many warriors
 Of fame among the troops still held their own ;
 But when Gúdarz observed the centre bare,
 No flag of Fariburz, no chiefs or troops,
 He turned with heart afire as if to flee :
 'Twas Doomsday for the kindred of Gúdarz.
 Gív said to him : " O ancient general !
 Much hast thou seen of mace, and sparth, and arrow,
 And if thy purpose is to flee Pírán
 I needs must scatter dust upon my head.
 Of chieftains and of veteran warriors
 There will remain not one alive on earth.
 For thee and me there is no cure for dying.
 Death is the very last calamity,
 And, since our ruggéd hour hath come upon us,
 The foe should see thy face and not thy back.
 I will not quit my post, let us not shame
 Thy father's dust. Hast thou heard never then
 This ancient saying from some man of lore :—
 ' When buttressed back to back two brethren stand
 A mountain-mass is but as dust in hand ' ?

Thou art alive with seventy valiant sons,
 And thou hast many Elephants and Lions
 Among thy kindred. Break we with our swords
 The foe's heart and uproot him though a Mountain."

Gúdarz, when he had heard the words of Gív,
 And marked the helmed heads of his warrior-kin,
 Repented of his cautious rede and took
 A firmer stand. Guráza, Gustaham,
 With Barta and brave Zanga came to them,
 And made a compact by a binding oath :—

v. 853 "Though maces stream with blood we will not quit
 This field, but, back to back, strive to retrieve
 Our honour lost."

They took their stand and plied
 The mace. Full many a noble foe was slain,
 But fortune favoured not the Íránians.
 Then old Gúdarz said to Bízhan : " Depart
 Hence quickly, take with thee thy mace, and arrows,
 Direct thy horse's reins toward Faríburz,
 And bring me Káwa's standard. It may be
 That Faríburz will come with it himself,
 And flush the face of earth with violet."

Bízhan on hearing this urged on his steed,
 Came like Ázargashasp to Faríburz,
 And said to him : " Why art thou hiding here ?
 Employ thy reins as warriors use to do,
 And stay no longer on the mountain-top ;
 But if thou wilt not come entrust to me
 The flag and horsemen with their blue steel swords."

But Faríburz, no mate for wisdom then,
 Cried out : " Away ! Thou art in action rash
 And new to war. The Sháh gave me the standard,
 The host, crown, throne, and leadership. This flag
 Becometh not Bízhan the son of Gív,
 Or any other warrior in the world."

Bízhan laid hand upon his blue steel sword,

Struck at the standard, clove it in the midst,
 Seized half thereof and, rushing from the throng,
 Made off to bear the banner to the host.
 Now, when the Turkmans saw it on the way,
 A band of lion-hearted warriors
 Went toward Bízhan and drew their iron sparths,
 And blue steel swords, to fight for Káwa's standard.
 Then spake Húmán: "Yon is the violet flag
 Wherein is all the virtue of Írán;
 If we can take it we shall make the world
 Strait to the Sháh."

V. 854

Bízhan strung up his bow
 As quick as dust, discharged a shower of arrows
 Upon his foes, and, as he drove them back,
 Prepared a banquet for the ravening wolf.
 The cavaliers hard by said unto Gív
 And Gustaham: "The Turkmans are retreating;
 Perchance Bízhan is coming with the standard."

The brave chiefs of the Íránian host advancing
 With massive maces slew the Turkman horse
 In numbers. Famed Bízhan arrived apace,
 And thence the chieftains held the ground for him
 Up to the host. Like lion fierce he came
 With Káwa's flag, the soldiers gathered round it,
 And air grew violet-dim with horsemen's dust.
 Once more the Íránian host advanced to fight,
 And in the foremost rank Rívníz was slain,
 Who was as dear as life to Kai Káuś,
 A younger son, a prince who wore a crown,
 Beloved by Faríburz. When that head fell
 Full many a noble hero rent his clothes,
 And Gív exclaimed: "Chiefs, valiant warriors!
 Upon this field of battle Faríburz,
 The son of Sháh Káuś, esteemed Rívníz
 Above all else. The grandson and the son
 Of old Káuś—Farúd the son of Siyáwush

And now Rívníz—have perished all in vain!
 What greater wonder hath the world in store?
 v. 855 We must not let his crown fall to the foe
 Amid the ranks of war, for that would be
 Disgrace upon disgrace through it and through
 The slaughter of Rívníz."

Now brave Pírán,
 The noble chieftain, heard the words of Gív,
 And o'er that crown the battle rose afresh.
 On both sides many fell and fortune quitted
 The Íránians, yet Bahrám the warrior
 Charged lion-like the foe and carried off
 The crown upon his spear-point, while both hosts
 Stood wondering, the Íránians full of joy
 At rescuing that crown so late assumed.
 The combat waxed more fierce, none turned aside,
 They raged and smote each other on the head
 Until the day grew dark, and eyes were baffled.
 Eight of the kinsmen of Gúdarz survived;
 The rest had fallen on the battlefield.¹
 Of Gív's seed there had perished five and twenty—
 Men who were fit for diadem and treasure—
 With seventy of the offspring of Káuś,
 All cavaliers and Lions in the fight,
 Besides Rívníz that crownèd warrior,
 No unit merely in the reckoning.
 Nine hundred horsemen, kinsmen of Pírán,
 Were missing in the battle on that day,
 While of the lineage of Afrásiyáb
 The fortunes of three hundred slept, howbeit
 The field, the day, and therewithal the standard—
 The lustre of the world—were with Pírán:
 v. 856 'Twas not the Íránians' day for combating;
 Their combat-seeking ended in mishap,

¹ See Vol. ii. p. 4. The eight survivors include Gúdarz himself and his grandson Bízhan.

They turned their faces from the battlefield,
Abandoning the wounded to their fate.

Now Gustaham had had his charger killed
As fortune turned away, and he in mail
Went spear in hand afoot like one bemused.
Bízhan, approaching him as day grew dark,
Said to him: "Ho! Get up and ride behind me:
There is none dearer to me than thyself."
So both of them bestrode a single charger.

When day was done they sought the mountain-skirt,
Abandoning the battle in a rout.
The Turkman cavaliers, with joyful hearts
Released from travail and anxiety,
Returned to their own camp with haughty mien
And fit for fight, while on the Íránian side
The ears were deafened by heart-rending cries,
As all mourned on the mountain friend or kinsman.

Such is the process of this ancient sky!
Turn as it may there is no remedy,
And still it turneth o'er us loving none,
But treating friend and enemy as one,
Well may it be a cause of dread to all
Whose fortune's head is bending to a fall!

§ 31

*How Bahrám returned to look for his Whip on the
Battlefield*

That night, when both the armies were at rest,
Bahrám came to his sire in haste and said:—
"O mine illustrious sire and worshipful!
When I retrieved that crown, and raised it cloudward
Upon my spear, I lost a whip of mine.
Those villain Turkmans, when they pick it up,
Will break their jests upon the great Bahrám;
The world will be all ebon in mine eyes.