

Bahman rejoined: "Not thus must we delay,
And slight the mission of Asfandiyár."

Zál chose a warrior that knew the road,
And sent him with Bahman forth to the chase.
That veteran, hight Shírkhún, went first as guide,
Just pointed to the spot and homeward hied.

§ 8

How Bahman gave the Message to Rustam

V. 1650

A mountain lay before the youth who urged
His gallant charger thither, then looked down
Upon the chase. The captain of the host
Appeared in sight—a man like Mount Bístún.
He held a sapling in one hand whereon
An onager was spitted. By his side
Were placed his iron mace and other gear.
Within his other hand he held a goblet
A-brim with wine; his son was in attendance;
Rakhsh roamed about the meadow. There were trees,
Grass, and a stream withal.

"'Tis either Rustam,"

Bahman said, "or the rising sun, for none
In all the world hath looked on such another,
Or heard of such from famous men of old.
I fear me that the brave Asfandiyár
Will not stand up to him, but quit the combat.
So let me kill him with a crag and make
The hearts of Zál and of Rúdába writhe."

He loosed a flinty boulder from the height,
And sent it downward from the lofty peak.
Zawára from the hunting-ground beheld it,
And heard the rumble that it made withal.
He shouted: "Paladin and cavalier!
A stone is rolling from the mountain-top!"

But Rustam to Zawára's wonderment
Ne'er moved nor laid aside the onager;
He waited till the stone was close to him,
While all the mountain darkened by its dust,
Then with a kick dispatched it far away,
Whereat Zawára praised him joyfully.
Bahman was sick at heart at Rustam's deed
And, marking both his majesty and mien,
Said: "If the glorious Asfandiyár
Should fight against a man of such renown
He would be vanquished vilely. It were better
For him to deal with Rustam courteously,
Who, if he overcame Asfandiyár,
Would seize on all the country of Írán."

He gat upon his wind-swift steed and quitted
The mountain in a muse, informed the archmages
About the wonder that he had beheld,
And quietly proceeded on his way.
When he was hard upon the hunting-ground
The peerless Rustam spied him as he came,
And asked an archimage: "What man is this?
I take him for a kinsman of Gushtásp."

V. 1651

Then Rustam with Zawára and the rest,
Both great and small, went forth to meet Bahman,
Who swift as smoke alighted from his steed,
Exchanging greetings and all courtesies,
And Rustam said to him: "Until thou tellest
Thy name thou wilt not get thy will of me."

The youth replied: "Renowned Bahman am I,
Son of Asfandiyár, that upright prince."

The paladin embraced him on the spot,
And made excuses for his tardy coming.
Then both with their respective retinues
Set forth for Rustam's camp. Now when Bahman
Was seated he gave greetings for himself
And for the Sháh and the Íránians.