

Be censured not on his account if he
Will fight with dragons."

So he called Bahrám,
Told stories of the mighty men, and said :—
" God, Author of the soul, hath led thee hither
Out of the country of Írán to purge
The ills of Hindústán as is the way
Of men of name. A matter fraught with pain
And travail is confronting us, of travail
At first but treasure in the end. If thou
Accomplish this depart on thy return
With my good wishes home."

The Sháh replied :—
" I may not leave the way of thy behests,
But will perform thy bidding faithfully
Unless the heaven itself shall turn awry."

§ 31

How Bahrám slew a Dragon

C. 1569

Shangul said to Bahrám : " Within my realm
There is a dragon—an exceeding bale—
Which fareth both by land and stream to hunt
The lashing crocodile. Thou mayst devise
A scheme to rid thereof the realm of Hind,
Whose tribute thou shalt carry to Írán,
For all the country will assent thereto,
And likewise gifts therefrom of aloe-wood,
Of swords, and goods of all kinds, with the tribute."

Bahrám replied : " Great king and sovereign,
Whose word is law in Hind ! by God, the Just
And Holy One's, command I will cut off
The footing of the dragon from the earth,
But must be shown its lair whereof I know not."

Shangul accordingly dispatched a guide
 To show it to Bahrám who went his way
 With thirty horsemen, nobles of Írán
 And swordsmen. Hasting to the stream he saw
 The dragon mid the gloom, its form, its writhing,
 And furiousness, fire flashing from its eyes.
 The nobles of Írán with loud exclams,
 And shrewdly troubled at that dragon, said :—
 “ Hold not this dragon as thou didst the wolf,
 O king ! the other day. By one mishap
 Give not Írán up to the wind, rejoice not
 Thy foemen here.”

The bold Bahrám replied :—
 “ I must entrust my life to all-just God.
 If I am doomed to perish by this dragon
 My time will be not lengthened or decreased
 By hardihood.”

He strung his bow, he chose
 Shafts dipped in bane of milk,¹ and 'gan to shower them
 Down on the dragon, wheeling all the while,
 Like horsemen in the fray, to left and right.
 He sewed up with steel points the dragon's mouth,
 Whose venom scorched the brambles, then he shot
 Four arrows at its head, and blood and poison
 Poured down its breast. The dragon's body failed
 By reason of those shafts, and all the ground
 Ran with its gore and bane. Then lightly drew
 Bahrám his sword of watered steel and pierced
 The dragon's heart right dourly, hacked its neck
 With sword and battle-ax, and flung to earth
 Its lifeless form. The dragon overthrown,
 He turned in duty to the Lord and said :—
 “ O Judge who judgest righteously ! 'tis Thou
 That slewest this great dragon, for who else

¹ *Corruptio optimi pessima*. We shall have an instance later on, in the reign of Nûshîrwán, of milk being turned to poisonous uses. See p. 320 *seq.*

Hath might enough ? Thou art Thy servants' refuge
From every ill."

He sought the king of Hind,
The noble chieftain of the Sindian host,
And said : " The king is freed from these attacks
By His decree—the Judge and Nourisher's."

Shangul grieved, hearing this, because Bahrám
Was in the saddle still. He bade that wains
And oxen should convey the dragon's carcase
To plain from forest, while all Hindústán
Invoked upon Írán the All-Just's blessing :—

C. 1570

" For there a cavalier like this was born
To fight with dragons. One who hath such limbs,
Such stature and such bearing cannot be
But equal to the king in his degree."

§ 32

*How Shangul became troubled about Bahrám and
gave a Daughter to him*

All men rejoiced except Shangul whose heart
Was pained, the matter made his visage wan,
And when night came he summoned his wise men,
Both those of his own kin and aliens,
And thus he said : " This man of Sháh Bahrám's,
Who hath such might, such limbs, and mastery,
Do what I may, is worsted by no toil !
Now if he goeth from us to Írán,
And cometh to the monarch of the brave,
He will depreciate my host and say
That here in Hindústán there is no horseman,
And so my foemen may grow insolent.
I will behead the envoy, will destroy him
By stealth. What say ye ? What do ye advise ? "