



A STORY FOR CHILDREN, FROM THE HUNGARIAN OF MORITZ JOKAI.

[MORITZ JOKAI, the most popular of Hungarian writers living, was born at Kormorn, in 1825. His father, who was a lawyer, intended Moritz for the same profession, and at twelve years old the boy began to drive a quill. But his ambition was to be a painter and an author. Often, after office hours, he would write or paint in his own room till day was breaking. His pictures turned out failures—though he still makes dashing sketches, full of life and colour—but his writings met with a peculiar stroke of luck. One day his master lighted on a bundle of his papers, looked into them, and was amazed to find his clerk a man of genius. He took the papers to a printer, and had them printed at his own expense. The book caught the public fancy, and Moritz, who was now an orphan, took the counsel of his friendly master, and turned from his engrossing to write tales and plays. At the age of twenty-three he married Rosa Laborfabri, the greatest of Hungarian actresses—a step for which his family discarded him, but to which, a year afterwards, he owed his life. The Revolution broke upon the country; Moritz drew his sword to strike a blow for liberty, was present at the surrender of Villagos, was taken prisoner, and was sentenced to be shot. On the eve of the execution his wife arrived from Pesth; she had sold her jewels to raise money, with which she bribed the guards, and the pair escaped into the woods of Buk, where for some time, in danger of their lives, they lurked in caves and slept on heaps of leaves. Thence they stole to Pesth, where they have ever since resided—in summer, in a pretty house, half buried in its vines and looking from a rising ground across the roofs and steeples of the grand old city; in winter, in a house within the town, where Jokai writes among his books and pictures in a room ablaze with flowers. His works amount to some two hundred volumes; indeed, the modern literature of Hungary is almost wholly his creation; and in everything he writes his original and striking gifts are visible, whether it be a novel in five volumes, or the slightest of amusing trifles, like “Barak Hageb and his Wives.”]



BARAK HAGEB had no less than three hundred and sixty-five wives; one for every day in the year. How he managed in leap year with one wife short, remains for ever a

mystery.

But you are not, therefore, to suppose that Barak was a Sultan; he was only High Chamberlain—as the title Hageb shows—at the court of Sultan Mahmoud.

Barak had come into the land in the first instance as ambassador from the great empire of Mongolia, and the Regent, the widow of the late Sultan, who was still a young woman, had entrusted everything to him. Mahmoud was as yet no more than a child.

Barak governed as he thought fit. It was a very thrifty rule. He introduced that

reform in the army by which the soldier's pay was reduced from four half-pennies to three; for he declared that three was a sacred number, if only because there had been three Prophets.

One day the Grand Vizier Darfoor Ali came to visit the worthy Barak Hageb, and while they sipped their coffee the guest spoke: “Verily,” said he, “it is a piece of folly quite unworthy of you to keep so many wives. If, indeed, it were the custom with us, as among the Franks, to give wives for nothing, or even on occasion to pay a dowry to the husband, I should have nothing to say to it, for you would be richer than King Cræsus. But among us the world is topsy-turvy; we buy our wives, and generally pay money down. You have squandered vast sums in this way. If it had been your own money it would have



mattered nothing. But it is the nation's money that you have spent to buy more and more wives—that is where the mischief lies. A hundred warriors could be placed in the field for the price of one of your wives."

"Very true; but would a hundred warriors afford me greater pleasure than one beautiful woman?" replied Barak, with profound wisdom. And Ali was obliged in his soul to admit that he was right.

However, he objected to the multiplicity of wives, saying: "Everyone may gather as many flowers in the garden of the world as he possibly can. This the Prophet allows, and you might have collected every variety: fair and dark, pale and black, blue-eyed and green-eyed women, yellow Chinese and tawny Malays, and, for aught I care, women who dye their hair red and their teeth black; still, I think that one specimen of each would have been enough. By Allah! Why, you could not even repeat the names of all your wives, or the use they are to you."

"You are quite mistaken," replied Barak Hageb. "I will enumerate them all in order. First, there is Ildibah, who can prophesy, and is indispensable to the fate of the country; then there is Hafitem, a ghost-seer, who calls up the spirits of the dead; Nourmahal, who understands the language of birds better than I understand yours; Alpaida, who tells tales which would send even a Sultan to sleep; and Mahaderi and Assinta, who dance a *pas de deux* to perfection. As to Mangora, she makes cakes fit for a King, and Sandabad prepares such a miraculous sherbet that when you



"I WILL ENUMERATE THEM ALL."

have drunk it, it makes you sad to wipe your moustache. Via Hia, my Chinese wife, has a way of arranging cock-fights which are more amusing than a battle; and Haka, the Hindoo, can subjugate wild beasts, and tame even lions to harness to her chariot. Roxana is an astrologer, and can tell you the day of your death; Aysha understands the culture of flowers; Kaika to be sure is hideous, but to this peculiarity she adds the power of rubbing the gout out of my limbs. Jarko, my Tartar wife, is an accomplished horsewoman, and teaches the others to ride. Abuzayda, who is highly educated, writes the letters I dictate to her; Josa reads to me out of the Koran; Rachel sings psalms, in which she is assisted by Kadigaval and Samuza, for a man of any position at all must have a trio. Of Tukinna I need only say that she is a rope-dancer, while Zibella can cast a knife with such precision as to divide a human hair at twelve paces. Barossa is skilled in medicine, Aliben embroiders in gold, Alaciel binds my turban



admirably, and Khatum of Bagdad interprets my most interesting dreams. Mavola plays the harp, Zebra the tom-tom, and Hia the tambourine, a quite celestial harmony. Ah, and then Sichem——”

The Grand Vizier had begun by counting the list of ladies on his fingers, and then on his toes; but when the number already exceeded thirty, he cried “Hold, enough!” for he began to fear that he should remain all night, and still that his friend would not have done.

“Well, well,” he broke in, “I have heard enough. No doubt you require all the three hundred and sixty-five. Each of them has her admirable side, but beware lest some day the bad side should be turned outwards.”

And the Grand Vizier was right, as we shall see in the sequel.

Sultan Sidi Ahmed, of Herman, the ruler of an adjacent State, had received information that the people in Mahmoud's territory were ill-content, and he determined to set the oppressed free. To cure the diseases of his neighbour was in all ages a favourite undertaking with every Oriental Sovereign.

Sidi Ahmed was master of a vast army.

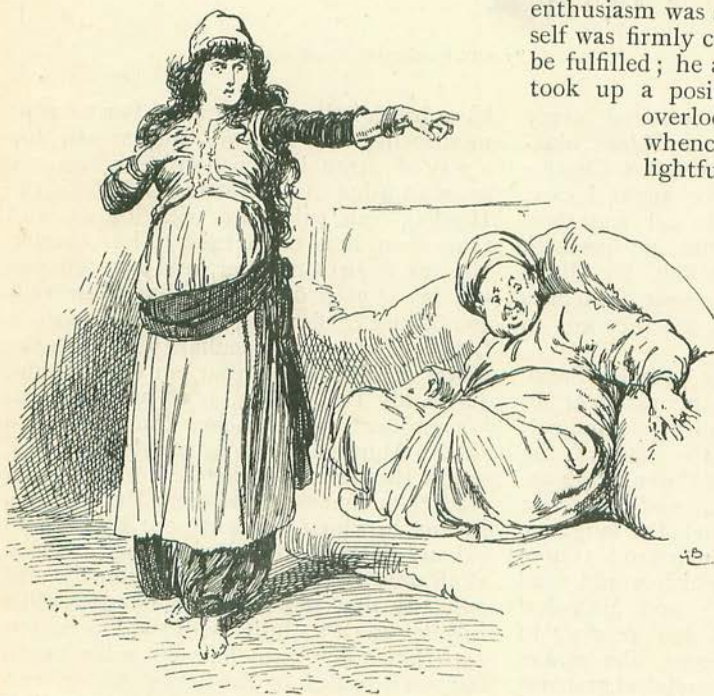
Some Persian writers affirm that he had ten thousand soldiers, while other historians estimate them as at least a hundred thousand. Something between the two is probably nearer the truth. He had three hundred horsemen; that much is certain.

Before declaring war, the Sultan raised his soldiers' pay from four halfpennies to five. This announcement fired the whole army with enthusiasm. At the head of the troops was the Sultan himself. He and his horse were a blaze of jewels, a sight which filled his bare-foot troops with honest pride. The most costly delicacies were carried in his train, and the thought that he alone would feast on these dainties brought great consolation to the hungry warriors.

Mahmoud, too, fitted out a great army; of how many men history does not tell, but at any rate they were twice as many as the enemy could put into the field. The Grand Vizier Darfoor Ali led them in person.

On the eve of the first battle one of Barak's wives, the above-named Ildibah, foretold that the neighbouring realm would be brought to nought; and the lady Roxana, who was also a soothsayer, solemnly declared that on the morrow Sidi Ahmed must die. Barak Hageb had these prophecies proclaimed in the capital, and the enthusiasm was soon general. Barak himself was firmly convinced that both would be fulfilled; he and all his wifely following took up a position next day on a hill overlooking the field of battle, whence they could enjoy the delightful prospect of the enemy's defeat.

The struggle began at daybreak, but it did not last long. The historians before quoted, or rather alluded to, differ widely in their accounts. Persian chroniclers assert that Mahmoud's army lost forty-five thousand men, and that the enemy only left three for dead; another writer, on the contrary, says that Mahmoud's troops lost not even a slipper, much less the man belonging thereto, while the dead on the other side may be reckoned in round numbers



ILDIBAH PROPHECIES.



at thirty-three thousand. In this case, again, perhaps the truth lies between the two. But by fairly trustworthy accounts the worthy Mahmoud's army—the men whose pay had been so liberally reduced—at the first onslaught took to their heels, seizing the opportunity of showing that no one could catch them up. What wonder? Who would care to sell his life for three halfpence? Sidi Ahmed's troops thereupon announced that they were masters of the field, and their first business was to plunder the villages in the neighbourhood,

his choice collection of wives; and when he was told that Barak and his women had taken to flight he thought he could not do better than start at once in pursuit. Till late at night two clouds of dust might be discerned scudding along one behind the other: the foremost raised by Barak and his wives, the second by Sidi Ahmed's horsemen.

"By the apron of the Prophet's wife!" Barak growled, "Roxana's prognostications have not proved true. It is I who shall be a dead man this day, and not Sidi Ahmed."



"A TALL WARRIOR RODE FORTH."

at that time a favourite way of setting a people free.

"By the beard of the Prophet!" cried Barak Hageb, as he saw his countrymen take to flight, "I almost fancy that Ildibah's prophecy will not be fulfilled; on the contrary, our side seems to be losing.

"Patience," said Ildibah, to comfort him, "the sun has not yet sunk in the sea."

This observation was true, no doubt, yet did Barak Hageb tarry no longer to philosophise, but set spurs into his horse and rode away. His wives followed his example.

Sidi Ahmed, the conqueror, had heard many fine things about the fabulous wealth of Barak Hageb, and more especially about

"The stars are not yet risen," replied the sage Roxana, and she added: "But there, by that tank, we will rest awhile. There you can perform your evening ablutions. Leave the rest to us."

But never had Barak so little enjoyed his bath.

The women meanwhile were plotting a stratagem. They cut off the horses' tails and made themselves false beards, so that they looked quite terrible. They cut bamboo canes in the neighbouring thicket, and fastened their dainty little daggers to the end of them; thus they contrived excellent lances. When Barak Hageb returned from



his evening devotions, instead of his troop of docile wives, he found an army of bearded warriors! He started, for they really looked very dreadful.

Jarko the Tartar and Zibella the Indian commanded the light cavalry; and on this occasion the wonder was wrought, that one woman would obey another's orders. To be sure, the times were evil.

The little army formed in three divisions, and awaited the enemy's onslaught. Sidi Ahmed came rushing on in hot haste. But when he saw this force, with beards flowing down to their stirrup-irons, his heart sank into the depths of his baggy pantaloons. Before he had quite recovered from the shock, a tall warrior rode forth and called to him: "Sidi Ahmed! if you are not a coward, come out and try your strength with me in single combat."

This hero was Zibella, so greatly skilled in casting the knife. Nor did her cunning betray her. She flung her javelin, and Sidi Ahmed was that instant a dead man; he had not time to drop from his horse.

The rest of the Amazons, under the com-

mand of Jarko, now pressed on the enemy. But Sidi Ahmed's followers did not like the look of things. Five halfpence are indeed a handsome sum, but even for such a guerdon as this a man will not give his skin to be punctured *ad libitum*. So each man flung his shield over his back, which he turned on the adversary, and the horsemen fled as fast as feet could carry them, shouting as they went: "The Tartars are on us, the barbarians are at our heels! Ten thousand—twenty thousand—a hundred thousand fighting men have risen up to protect Barak Hageb! Ride for your lives—ride! The Tartars shoot with lightnings!"

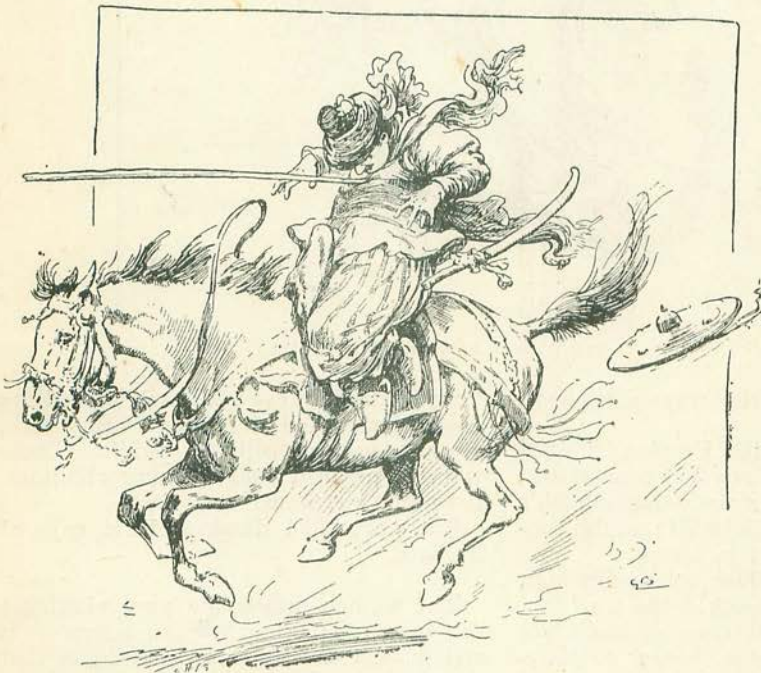
"Now you see that my prophecy is fulfilled!" said Roxana to Barak Hageb. "Sidi Ahmed lies dead before you."

"And mine, too, will yet come true," said Ildibah. "Our enemy's realm will perish. Let us hasten to Kerman!"

So they cut off the dead Sultan's head, and set it on a lance. With this badge of victory they rode in triumph to Kerman, their followers increasing from hour to

hour. The soldiers who had ran away came out of their hiding-places, and joined the array, so that it was a large force by the time they crossed the frontier. The gates of the towns were flung open joyfully, for every one was now ready to say that Sidi Ahmed had, in truth, been a tyrant, and Barak Hageb was hailed as a deliverer, and was finally proclaimed as Sultan.

This conclusion, which is so strange that no one will believe this history, though it is the literal truth, happened in the year after the flight of the Prophet 612.



"HE HAD NOT TIME TO DROP FROM HIS HORSE."