

# THE PRINCE AND THE LIONS

FROM THE  
PERSIAN.



A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

**I**N an Eastern city there once lived a young Prince named Azgid. He was virtuous and accomplished, but had one fault—he was a bit of a coward!

Prince Azgid's father had recently died, and he was looking forward to his coronation. A few days before the day fixed for the ceremony, the old Vizier called upon the Prince and informed His Royal Highness that before he could ascend the throne he must, in accordance with an ancient custom, fight a certain huge red lion which was kept in a den within the precincts of the palace.

The Prince, upon hearing this, was so frightened that he made up his mind to run away. He rose in the night, dressed himself hastily, mounted his horse, and left the city. Thus he journeyed for three days.

In the course of the third day, as he rode through a beautiful, thickly-wooded country, he heard the sound of exquisite music, and presently overtook a handsome youth, who

was leading a few sheep, and playing upon a flute.

The young man having courteously saluted the stranger, Prince Azgid begged him to go on playing, for never in his life before, said the Prince, had he listened to such enchanting strains.

The player then told Azgid that he was the slave of a wealthy shepherd named Oaxus, to whose abode, which was close at hand, he offered to conduct the traveller.

The Prince gladly accepted this invitation, and in a few moments was entering the house of Oaxus, who accorded him a hearty welcome, and placed food and drink before him. When Azgid had finished his meal, he felt it incumbent upon him to make some sort of explanation to his host.

"Doubtless," said he, "you wonder who I am, and what is my errand in coming hither? I can tell you this much—that I am a Prince whom trouble has driven from home. Pardon me if I do not divulge my name; that is a secret which must be securely locked within

my own breast. If convenient to you, I would gladly remain in this delightful spot. I have ample means, and can remunerate you for your kindness."

Oaxus assured his guest that nothing would give him greater pleasure than to entertain him for as long a period as he cared to stay, and he begged him not to think of offering any remuneration.

"And now, Isdril," added Oaxus, addressing his slave, "show the Prince our fountains and waterfalls, our rocks and vales, for I perceive that he is one who can appreciate Nature's beauties."

The youth took up his flute, and went out with the Prince.

After wandering awhile amidst romantic scenery, the two young men sat down to rest upon a rock in a shady valley. The slave put his flute to his lips, and began to play. The Prince loved music passionately, and the idea had already occurred to him that, if ever he left this fair retreat, he would like to purchase from Oaxus his accomplished slave.

Suddenly Isdril broke the spell of the Prince's enjoyment by rising to his feet, with the words: "It is time for us to be going."

"Wherefore?" queried the Prince. "Why should we quit this delicious spot so soon?"

"Because," replied the other, "the neighbourhood is infested with lions. It is well, therefore, to retire early within our abodes, and close the gates. Upon one occasion I lagged behind, and see the consequence!"

He rolled up his sleeve and revealed a big

scar upon his arm. Azgid turned pale, and, upon reaching the house, informed his host that he had changed his mind, and found himself obliged to ride on further. He thanked Oaxus, bade farewell to him and to Isdril, and galloped off.

Again he journeyed for three days, and came to a vast desert, in the midst of which he beheld an Arab encampment.

Thankfully he rode up to the black tents, for both he and his horse were worn out with hunger and fatigue.

He was received by a dignified Sheik, to whom he made the same speech that he had made to the kindly Oaxus.

Sheik Hajaar, like the shepherd, answered to the effect that he desired no other remuneration than the pleasure of the Prince's society, and that he should be delighted to keep his guest for ever, if so it might be. He introduced Azgid to a large number of his friends, and provided for his use a magnificent steed.

A week passed. Day by day the Prince accompanied the Sheik in his antelope-hunting expeditions, which he enjoyed exceedingly. He quite thought that he was now happily settled for life, when one night, after he had retired to rest, Sheik Hajaar approached his couch, and said:—

"My son, I have come to tell you how pleased my people are with you, more especially with the spirit you have shown in the chase. But our life is not wholly taken up in such easy recreations; we



"HE ROLLED UP HIS SLEEVE AND REVEALED A BIG SCAR."

frequently engage in hard fighting with other tribes. All my men are seasoned warriors, and before they can have perfect confidence in you it is necessary that they should have some proof of your prowess. Two leagues to the south is a range of hills infested with lions. Go, then, early in the morning, mounted upon your horse, and armed with sword and spear. Slay one of these fierce beasts, and bring us his skin; so shall we know that we may rely upon you in the day of battle."

When the Sheik had left him, Azgid rose, dressed himself, slipped quietly out of his tent, and bade a sorrowful, affectionate farewell to the horse which the Sheik had allowed him to use, now tethered with the others. Then he mounted his own steed, and rode forth into the night.

By the middle of the next day, he was rejoiced to find that he was leaving the desert, and entering a fair region of hill and dale, meadows and streams. Soon he came to a splendid palace, built of porphyry, and standing in the midst of a magnificent garden.

The owner of the palace, a rich Emir, was sitting in the porch, with his golden-haired daughter, Perizide.

Here, again, the Prince was most kindly received. The interior of the building proved to be even more beautiful than the exterior. The rooms blazed with gold and precious stones; walls and ceilings were covered with valuable paintings; the windows were of the costliest stained glass. The Emir set before his guest a collection of delicate viands.

The Prince made his accustomed speech, avowing his rank, but concealing his name. He added also his customary request, that he might be allowed to remain for a time in the house of his present entertainer.

The Emir replied politely that the Prince was heartily welcome to remain until the end of his life, if he chose to do so. Then he begged his guest to excuse him for a few minutes, as he was expecting some friends, and wished to make preparations for their reception.

Thus Azgid was left alone with Perizide, with whom he was already in love. She took him into the garden, after exploring the beauties of which the pair returned to the house.

The palace, now illuminated from top to bottom, was full of company. The evening passed merrily. Observing a lute which lay upon a couch, the music-loving young Prince begged Perizide to play to him. In

the midst of his enjoyment, however, he was startled by a strange, loud sound, and asked his fair companion what it might be.

"Oh!" replied she, with a laugh, "that is only Boulak, our black porter, indulging in a yawn."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Azgid; "what uncommonly good lungs he must have!"

After the other guests had left, and Perizide had gone to bed, the Emir and the Prince chatted and smoked together for some time. By-and-by, the former offered to conduct the latter to his sleeping apartment. When they came to the foot of the grand staircase, which was of white marble, Azgid, looking up, was horrified to behold an enormous black lion stretched upon the topmost landing.

"What is that?" faltered he.

"That," returned his host, "is Boulak, our black porter. He is a tame lion, and will not harm you if you are not afraid of him. He knows when anyone fears him, and then becomes ferocious."

"I fear him greatly!" whispered the Prince.

As he could not be persuaded to mount the stairs, he had to return to the saloon, and repose upon one of the divans.

After the Emir had left him, Azgid carefully locked the door and fastened the windows. Then he lay down, but not to sleep. For he could hear the lion walking about, and once the beast actually came to the door, and, uttering a terrific roar, sprang against it with his fore-paws.

The poor Prince made sure that the door would burst open, and that he should be devoured. Nothing of the kind happened, however. In a few moments, Boulak went upstairs, and came down no more that night.

Azgid lay thinking. Evidently he had flown in the face of Providence when he had fled from the lion at home. Since then, lions had met him at every turn. He resolved to submit to what was so clearly his destined duty—to return home and fulfil the condition required.

In the morning, therefore, he told the Emir the whole truth. The kind old man had been acquainted with Azgid's father, the King Almamoun. He highly approved of the young man's resolution, and, with a parting blessing, sped him on his way. But the Prince had no opportunity of making his adieus to the fair Perizide.

Then Azgid rode back to the Arab camp, and confessed all to the good Sheik Hajaar. He also inquired after the beautiful horse.

"He is well," replied the other, "and I should be gratified if you could stay with us, and use him again. But it would be wrong to hinder you in your pious undertaking. Return to your home, and do your duty like a man!"

Azgid next visited Oaxus, to whom, as to the others, he revealed his name and parentage,

shepherd, "and may Heaven give you strength to persevere in your laudable resolution!"

"Farewell!" answered Azgid; "greet Isdril from me, and tell him that I hope some day to return and listen to his sweet music, in spite of the lions."

Without further interruption, the Prince rode straight home, and announced to the old Vizier his intention to fight the lion.

The old man wept tears of joy at his Prince's return, and it was arranged that the combat should take place in a week's time.

When the hour came, and the Prince entered the arena, the lion gave a loud roar, and approached his opponent slowly, with fierce looks. Azgid did not quail. With steady gaze he advanced, spear in hand. Suddenly the lion bounded forward, and, with another roar, sprang clean over the Prince's head. Then he ran joyously up to him, and began licking his hands with every demonstration of affection.

The Vizier called out to the Prince that he had conquered, and bade him leave the arena. The lion followed like a dog.

"As you now see, Prince Azgid," said the old Minister, "the lion is a tame one, and would injure no one. You, however, were ignorant of this fact, and have satisfactorily proved your courage and valour by your readiness to fight him. Now, all will know that you are worthy to ascend the throne of your heroic ancestors."

Two men—one old, the other very young—came forward to congratulate the Prince. They were Oaxus and Isdril.



"I FEAR HIM GREATLY!"

confessed his fault, and expressed his repentance.

"Go, my friend!" said the kindly



"THE LION SPRANG CLEAN OVER THE PRINCE'S HEAD."

"Prince Azgid," said the old shepherd, "as a memento of this happy day, allow me to make you a present." So saying, he pushed forward his slave, Isdril.

"I heartily thank you, Oaxus!" said the Prince, "and you, Isdril, are no longer a slave. From this moment you are free; but you shall be my companion, and delight me with your skill upon the flute."

Presently another little group presented itself. It was composed of Sheik Hajaar, some of his Arabs, and the horse which the Prince had learned to love.

"Azgid!" said the Sheik, "I congratulate you heartily, and beg your acceptance of this steed."

The Prince thanked and embraced the Sheik, and kissed the beautiful creature, who returned his caresses.

The Emir was the next person to appear upon the scene. He was surrounded by a brilliant retinue, with music and banners.

"I have come to congratulate you," said he to the Prince. "I have brought you no present, but I and all my belongings are yours."

"I am rejoiced to see you, noble Emir!" replied Azgid. "And how is your lovely daughter? As soon as I am crowned, I intend to set off at lightning-speed to visit her!"

"That will be needless," said the Emir; "come with me." And he led the young man to a veiled lady, who sat upon a white horse. It was Perizide!

Then, by order of the Vizier, the whole procession wended its way towards the palace.

Many thoughts and emotions stirred within the breast of the young Prince. "When I fled from duty," reflected he, "everything went against me; now that I have fulfilled it, fresh happiness meets me at every step."

The coronation—and also a wedding—took place on the same day. Azgid and Perizide reigned long and happily. By the King's command, his adventures were recorded in the annals of the kingdom. And over the door of his palace were inscribed, in golden letters, these words: "*Never run from the lion.*"