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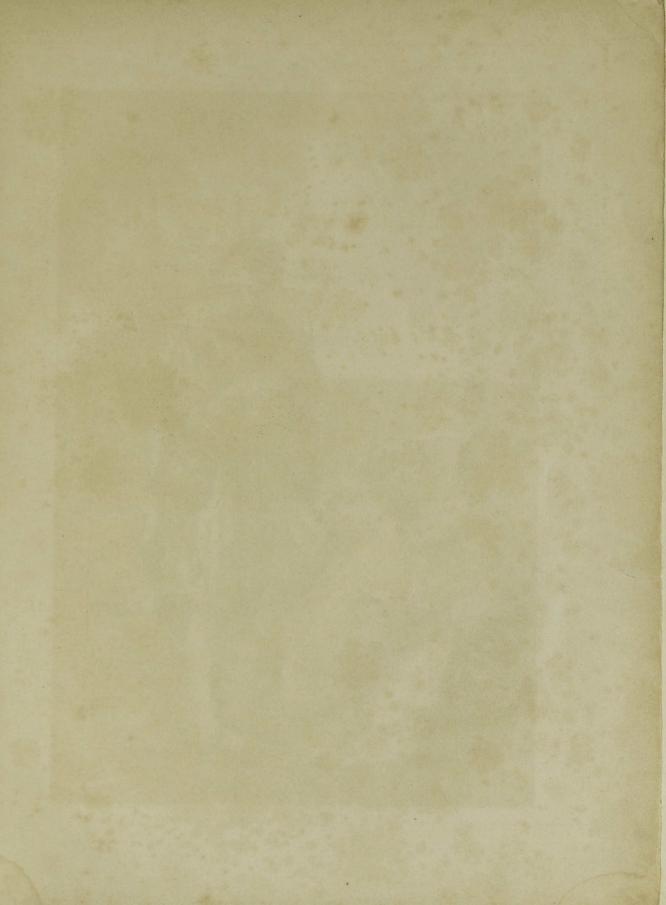
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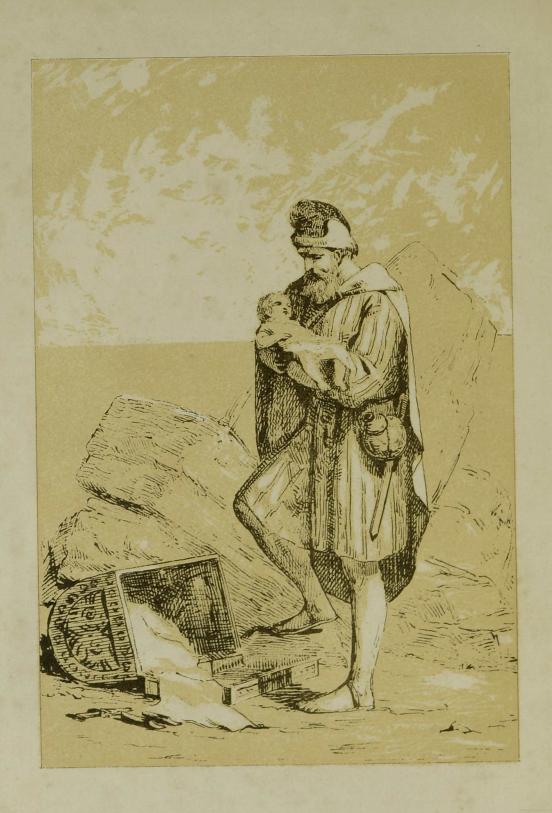
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THE

PRINCESS NARINA,

AND

HER SILVER-FEATHERED SHOES.

A Tale.

BY CHARLES COWDEN CLARKE,

Author of "Riches of Chaucer," "Adam the Gardener," &c.

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN ABSOLON.



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CHAPTER I.

Many ages ago, when the world was younger, and wicked magicians had power; when good fairies, with a busy kindness, went about giving comfort to sorrowing mothers, and weaving lucky spells to keep orphan babes from the harms of the evilone; there dwelt near the shores of the Persian sea, an old shepherd and his wife: their names were Ben Hafiz and Sherzaran. All their wealth consisted in a small flock of sheep, and all their comfort in health, cheerfulness, and two loving hearts. They did not know the pains of hunger, for, like their flock, their food grew at their feet; and the same source brought them clothing. They possessed neither gold nor silver. They arose with the first whistle of the earliest bird, when they constantly went forth to a hill-top that overlooked their little cottage, and, with holy hearts, waited the coming up of the golden sun. After they had said a short and simple hymn of praise and thanksgiving for being allowed to share the glories of another day, they returned to fulfil the duties of it; he to the

When the labours of the day were over, and the rays of the sun began to make long shadows, they sat down to their supper of new milk and household cakes; which having finished, they returned thanks for the comforts that had fallen to their lot; and, when the mountain-tops looked black in the grey sky, both they and the young lamb lay down to sleep.

It happened one clear and shiny morning, as Ben Hafiz was searching among the caverns in the neighbourhood of the sea-shore, for a lamb that had strayed from his fold, chancing to turn his eye towards the sea, whose green plain was gently ruffled into white and gold streaks by the morning sun and breeze, he perceived at the distance of two bowshots from the shore, a black object, which, at first, he thought might be a remnant of some shipwreck. After a few minutes' watching, he found that it floated towards the land, and, therefore, resolved to wait its arrival. As it came closer in he observed a silver-winged dove flying round and round it, sometimes stooping towards it like a gull, and at others, hovering over it like a hawk watching for prey. When this thing had come within wading distance from the beach, Ben Hafiz went into the sea to secure his prize; and all the while this silver dove fluttered over his head, singing a low and tender note of joy. No sooner had he secured the object of his curiosity which proved to be a black chest, with holes in the top of it, than the bird changed into a colour of the most dazzling gold, and, circled with a rainbow, vanished into the blue heaven. The old shepherd, with one hand upon the chest, and up to his middle in the sea, stood looking towards heaven, and pondering the glory of this vision, when a small cry proceeded

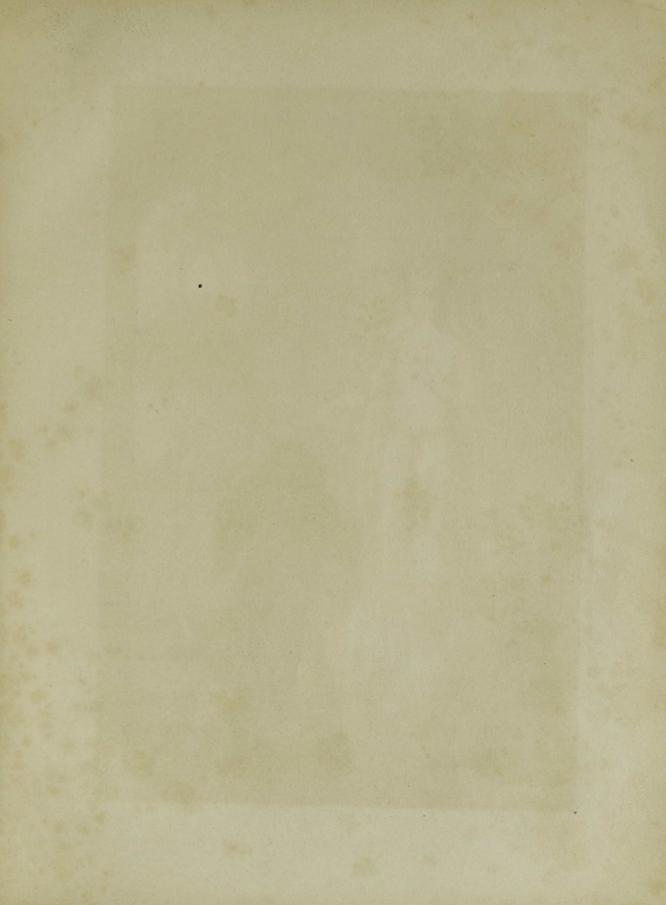
from the ark; and upon dragging it ashore and opening the lid, a female babe appeared, softly cushioned upon the richest silk, and at its feet were a pair of shoes, wrought of silver feathers; a richly chased gold ring, set with one costly stone; and a small dagger, the handle of which was gold, inlaid with diamonds and emeralds.

Ben Hafiz wondered at the strange costliness of the articles, and having soothed the crying babe in his bosom, carried her home with all her dowry to his wife Sherzaran. The old couple resolved to cherish their little foundling, both for its innocent self, and because they believed it to be the offspring of some one, nothing less in rank than a prince.

At night-fall, when their meal was ended, they passed the short hour before going to rest with talking over the event of the past day, and amusing themselves with the pretty innocence of the babe, that appeared to be but three months old. also examined the quality of the gorgeous dagger, the elegant shape of the silver-feathered shoes, and the exceeding lustre of the ring. No sooner had Sherzaran taken this into her hand, than both perceived the room to be filled with a gracious odour, as of the breath of violets, and they felt an uncommon joy of heart; but when she gave it to the little Narina to play with, the eyes of the babe were suddenly enlightened to an awful brilliance, her countenance became fixed for a moment with an intent look, and then broke into one of those radiant smiles that children are wont to do when they recognise their mother; and all the while a hushing low murmur was heard in the room; like the far-off tender note of the turtledove in a silent wood at sunset. Both noticed the sweet look and smile of the child, and Sherzaran reminded her husband,

that "children are said to see angels when they smile." "And if my old eyes are not going, wife," said Ben Hafiz, "I saw, over the head of the babe, while seated on your knee, a countenance of one of the shining ones, that looked upon her with a love and fondness that I can never forget. A blessed spirit watches over the child, and over us; for the breeze before sun-rise, coming from a garden of roses, never gave to my heart such a feeling of quiet joy, as the heavenly things I have seen this night."

Some time after this event, as Ben Hafiz was seated at the door of his cottage, watching his flock, that were eating their evening meal in the valley that lay before him, and the little infant, whom he had named Narina, was crawling on the grass around him, pulling the flowers, and laying them at his feet, and then looking up in his face with a playful smile, a desire came upon him that he would again prove the power of the wondrous ring; so, turning into the cottage, he brought it out, and placed it upon the forefinger of the child, when it instantly closed to the proper size, and her face and eyes became bright as before, while she laughed and struggled with outstretched arms. Upon removing the ring, it as suddenly increased to its original dimension. The marvel of this circumstance prompted Ben Hafiz to try whether it would fit one of his own fingers. It glided on to the forefinger of his right hand as though it had been made of the softest silk; and at the same moment he heard a soft and sweet voice in the air bidding him look up without fear. He raised his eyes and beheld, over the mountain ridge that enclosed his little valley, a bright spot in the heavens which quickly gathered up the rays of the setting





sun, and stretched forth into the blue sky, and increased and increased till he felt that he himself and the child were in the midst of the glory. In the deep and purple centre of the brightness he saw the winged form of an angel, and no sooner had he discovered it than his heart leaped at hearing again, close to his side, the same mild and sweet voice calling him by name. He turned his head, and there stood before him a female of a stately form, and beauty not to be described. Her eyes had a pensive look, which told that sorrow and anxiety had once been her portion. Her dress was white as the newly-opened lily, and it trembled like a vapour in the heat of noon-tide. The old shepherd prostrated himself to the earth before the vision.

"Ben Hafiz (said the being of that golden eternity) thou hast done well in protecting the babe that was cast upon the waters: continue the good work, and follow strictly the instructions I am about to give thee. The ring thou must preserve constantly hung round the neck of Narina, or thine own; and whenever thou requirest instruction or guidance from heaven, thou hast need only, as upon the present occasion, to put it upon the forefinger of thy right hand, and immediately thy wants shall be supplied. The dagger must always be kept in thy bosom next to thy heart; and the silver-feathered shoes thou must desire thy wife Sherzaran to place every day at the foot of the little Narina's bed, and never remove them from that spot. But above all things I charge thee (and here the voice of the spirit faltered with solemnity and earnestness), if a strange man with light golden hair, and straw-coloured beard, ever chance to seek the child in this place, allow him no communion with her,

and should he claim her as his own, resist his will to the uttermost, as if she were the last begotten of thy old age, the cherished one of thy bosom. Thou hast but to summon me with the ring, and I will be present with the performance of the act: that ring alone links me with the earth; preserve it, therefore, and I can ever attend to guard thee and the babe; lose it, and all power is for ever taken from me to hold converse with mortality. A dreadful gulph will then be drawn between me and all on earth, whom in the spirit I love as when my dwelling was among them in the flesh. Farewell—be constant to your trust, and you will be happy."

"O sacred companion of my father's spirit," said Ben Hafiz, "grant to thy servant the knowledge of thy former state." At this moment the shade of evening fell upon them, as of a cloud passing over a field: the glory dispersed; and looking up he saw nothing but a bright spot above the mountain head, and in the centre of it the same silver dove he had before beheld, speeding her way. Ben Hafiz on his knee, and the child holding fast his hand, remained fixedly gazing till the golden light had melted into the dark blue.

CHAPTER II.

NEARLY four years of the life of the little Princess Narina had passed away since we last left her with her old guardian, following with their eyes the flitting form of her preserving angel. During all this while the store of Ben Hafiz had improved and multiplied wonderfully; the valley in which

he lived was watered abundantly with the dews of heaven; the grass was greenest in all the country round; his sheep were always healthy—he never lost one either by straying or rapine—the jackal and the vulture came not near his fold—a heavenly Shepherd watched over and preserved the flock. Their wool was so fine, that it was purchased for the king of that country and the lords of his court. Ben Hafiz, with his wife Sherzaran, and their little child of the sea, were the happiest creatures in the world; his daily labour was a pastime; her duties in the cottage were never so quickly and pleasantly performed as since the time she had fostered the outcast and stranger child; while the days of Narina were spent either with the good dame at her spinning-wheel, or in her own little garden of roses, which bloomed as no roses ever bloomed before; or with the nightingales, whose songs she loved to hearken to, and whose wings she longed to have, that she might fly away with the blessed silver dove which daily made a circuit of their valley, and ended with three times fluttering round the cottage, and then darting off with the quickness of thought. She also passed a large portion of her time with gentle old Ben Hafiz, from whose simple wisdom she learned, that kindness to everything that breathes returned to the giver the truest and greatest happiness.

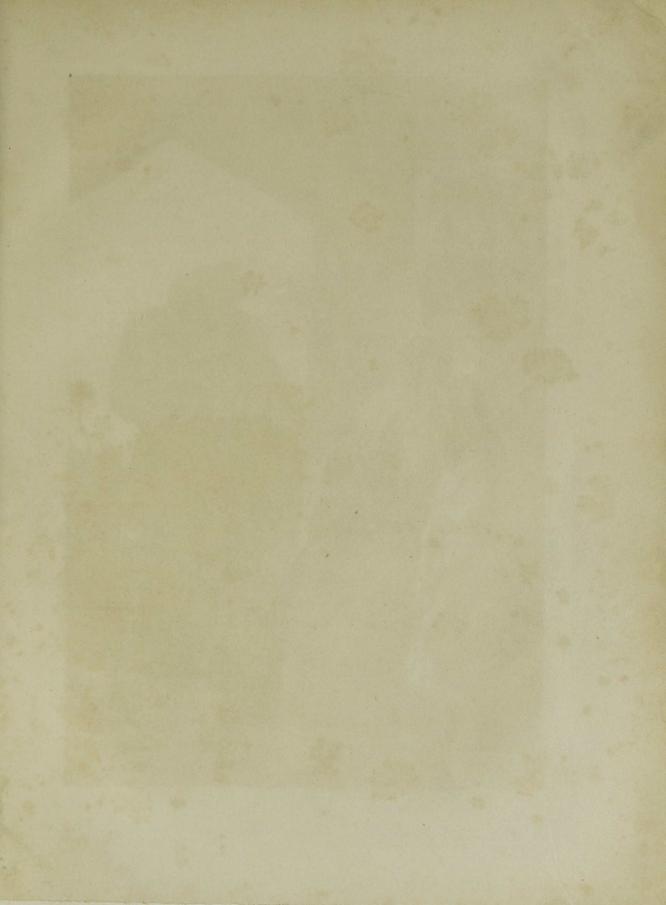
One evening, towards sunset, while he was mending the wattles that were to fold his flock for the night, and was humming a little hymn of thanks to the sinking sun for the blessings he had enjoyed through the day, he was startled at hearing the voice of one close to his side, and, upon turning round, he saw an old pedlar, who entreated him to purchase some of his wares. Ben Hafiz, at first, wondered how he

could have come upon him so suddenly without his having noticed his approach; continuing his occupation, however, and taking but slight notice of the stranger's appearance, he told him that he himself wanted none of his articles, but that, perhaps the dame in the cottage hard by might take a fancy to some of them. The pedlar turned upon his heel towards the hut, and the good old shepherd pursued his even-song.

"A fair evening to you, dame," said the traveller, "and many of them," as he cautiously thrust his head and shoulders into the room: "do you please to want any good wholesome medicines and drugs, or good oil of roses, or knittingneedles, or any choice necklaces? I have a large assortment. And if you have any fleece to dispose of I will exchange with you. I know your wool fetches a good price at market, and you will find my wares as fine of their kind. If once you deal with me, I am sure I shall have you for a regular customer. I have been many years a travelling merchant about this part of the country, and all the great folks buy of me."

"What you tell me may be very true," said the worthy old Sherzaran, "but I never deal with strangers for my fleeces; I can always sell them at a good market, and I am not fond of changing about. You may be no stranger in this country, but—" and then she looked him steadily in the face—"you are quite a stranger to me. No, good man, I do not want any of your wares."

At this moment the little Narina came trotting in, and the old dame observed that the pedlar's face changed to a frightful wolf-like expression as he caught sight of her. Then, in a moment, smoothing his brow with an innocent





smile, he inquired whose child she was; "For," said he, "she cannot be your grand-daughter, as I know you never had any children, and you have long since been too old to become a mother."

"Too old or too young," said the kind old Scherzaran, "she is mine, and so you may go about your business; I want nothing of you, and you shall have nothing from me."

"That," said he, "remains to be seen; I have come all the way from the furthest territory of the kingdom of Arabia, at the command of my sovereign, to discover, by my magic art, where his only child has been secreted, who was stolen from his palace one night by her false hag of a mother, and committed to the mercy of the waves in a cedar chest. It is of little use your attempting to deceive me; you know that your husband found her at sea. I am sent to bring her back, and my gracious lord and master has commanded me to reward with a chain of inestimable price the person who should have protected her." At these words, thinking to dazzle the eyes of the simple cottager, he drew from his bosom a superb gold chain, studded with the most rare and precious jewels, whose lustre seemed to turn back the declining light of the sun to broad noon. But good old Sherzaran was not to be put from her purpose; her great love for the little Narina, and the strong desire she had to fulfil her duty to the child, made her faithful to the sacred charge she had undertaken. "Your gold and your diamonds," said she, "are no proof that what you tell me is true; the child may be, and I doubt not is, the offspring of some great king or noble; but if he desire to have her restored to him, he must send some one very different in appearance from you to

fetch her." A thought then suddenly came into her head, for seeing that, during this conversation, the old pedlar had entered the cottage door, and as he stood in the room that there was no passage out but by him, she in a low voice told Narina to go to her little bed-room, and put on her silver-feathered shoes. The moment the villain heard these words he made a spring at the child; but Sherzaran, watching him all the while with the tender jealousy of an ewe over her lamb when an enemy is near, struggled between them. In an instant the little foundling was at her bed-side, and as soon the silver-feathered shoes were on her feet. old dame called for help to her husband without, who, hearing the noise, looked up, and saw his infant charge spring from the window like a terrified bird, and, softly alighting on her feet, speed away towards the mountains, over their valley, with the skimming motion of a swallow when a raincloud is singing in the wind. Ben Hafiz immediately ran to the cottage, and bursting open the door, beheld his trusty partner on the ground, across the passage leading to the little Narina's room, and the old pedlar, whose form had now changed to that of a bird, huge and hairy, on the legs of a beast, striding over her, to follow the object of his pursuit. At the entrance of the shepherd he turned round, and was preparing to seize him in his talons, when the precious ring that hung round the neck of Ben Hafiz caught his eye. The charm of this jewel held him fixed so long as he remained looking upon it (for he could not approach him), but all the while, like a chained fury, he vented the most bitter curses upon the shepherd and his wife. This circumstance first brought Ben Hafiz to remember his ring, and the injunction

he had received from the guardian angel; but before he could pass it on to his finger, the horrid shape rushed through the door of the cottage, with the scream of a flock of vultures that are scared from their meal, leaving the faithful couple swooning on the ground at the horrid vision.

Upon returning to their senses, Narina was the first object of their thoughts, and inquiries of each other. Where to seek for her they could not tell, for the last glimpse that the shepherd had of her was, when she was darting through a pass in the mountains with the swiftness of an arrow. He however arose, and went forth, directing his steps towards the quarter whence he had caught the last appearance of her little form. He took care, at the same time, upon leaving his cottage, to look behind and around him, lest the dreadful object of their late trouble should be watching his motions. He had scarcely reached the boundary of his valley, when, in the deep gloom of that eastern evening, he perceived a light, as of a summer meteor, flit past him, and before he could turn to follow its course, it had increased to a splendid, yet mild radiance, in the midst of which he beheld the wellknown form of his angel-visiter, while at the same moment his hand was clasped by the sweet little object of his search. "Go on, Ben Hafiz," said the gentle dweller of eternity; "be faithful to your trust, and you will be happy. No one was ever miserable in your world (the world I have left) who loved the truth, and performed what he felt to be his duty. In that world I had my sorrows, and they were of the deepest die; yet was I never wholly stricken down; I wept at the weakness and injustice of others, but never experienced that greatest of all afflictions - the reproaches

of an upbraiding heart. Hold on the same course you have hitherto done, and you will hereafter dwell in the mansions of tranquil felicity, and partake of the same blessed thoughts that have happily fallen to my lot. One more charge I leave with you, and that is, never to allow the finger of a stranger to be laid upon your little foundling. She is safe so long as the enemy who seeks her life cannot touch her. Farewell—be faithful—be happy."

With these words, the form melted into the night breeze, and the worthy Ben Hafiz returned home with his fosterchild, who trotted by his side, one hand holding his, and the other her silver-feathered shoes. Their talk all the way was of the ugly old pedlar, and of the pretty shoes which saved her from his wicked intention to take her away. She never spoke of the blessed vision. No conversation on the part of her old foster-parents, whom she loved tenderly, could ever draw from her an observation concerning that heavenly guardian. She would at times sit for hours, her eyes glistening with delight, and features kindled into inexpressible loveliness and serenity, to all appearance listening to some sweet speech; and then she would suddenly turn to her amusements in her flower-garden, or to attend to the affectionate Sherzaran in the simple duties of the cottage. These hours of silent communion most frequently occurred before she went to rest for the night.

CHAPTER III.

Time had rolled on since the last adventure of the little Narina with the ugly old pedlar-magician, and she had now attained the age of seven years. Pen cannot describe, and tongue cannot tell, the rare beauty of her face, or the delicacy and lightness of her form. In pretty timidity, restless playful action, and gentle demeanour, she resembled the antelope of the desert; while the mild and purely innocent expression of that almost perfect creature's eyes still continued the resemblance between them. Those of Narina were of that rich and deep azure which can be likened only to the heavenly sky of a southern climate. They were a deep, deep blue, and, when minutely examined, they impressed the beholder with a sensation amounting to awe; for the sweet wisdom of infinite goodness and benevolence had kindled them with that divine ray which distinguishes His immortal image from the limited and perishable beast of the field. She was a thoughtful and serious child in the midst of all her sweet playfulness and winning little pranks. She would retire, as it were, within the sanctuary of her mind, and fold up every outward appearance of consciousness, like a flower at nightfall, and commune with her own fancies. Who has not observed and felt the deep beauty of an infant, when serious and thoughtful?

Narina loved her guardians with more than common affection, and she was dutiful in proportion to her love; for affection, with obedience to the wishes of those we love, always go hand in hand. But Narina never felt that she was the child of Ben Hafiz and Sherzaran. Her frequent communings with that heavenly visiter, and the strange yearnings of unerring nature, had taught her at this early age, that she had other alliances than with those kind old protectors;—much as she was bound to, and would fondle them. This constantly returning sensation imparted a dignity to her demeanour: she looked like a little lady, and not a humble peasant.

One evening, as they were seated round their fire, preparing their last meal of the day, while a storm of thunder and lightning, mingled with a furious wind and rain, was raging without, they heard, amid the stillness in the pauses of the blast, a low rap at the door, and a female voice imploring help and shelter from the hurricane. The old dame, with the consent of her husband, rises to give assistance to the wayfarer; when, upon opening the door, a tattered beggar, drenched with rain, steps over the threshold, and begins earnestly to demand some food and an asylum till the storm shall have ceased; also a direction to the nearest town. Her sudden manner of entering the cottage did not escape the observation of Ben Hafiz: he, however, desired his wife to give her some of their own supper, and to assist in drying her clothes at the fire; while he drew his seat close to the little Narina, keeping his eyes steadily fixed upon the stranger.

The storm continued to rage, and the guest having finished her meal and dried her garments, related to her entertainers the history of her travels, and concluded by informing them that she was then upon her way to the court of the King of Persia, where she had a message of great importance to deliver from the king of her own country, which nearly

concerned the welfare of the Persian monarch, and which her master was unwilling to entrust to his ambassador for fear of betrayal; that she was her sovereign's chief confidant, and had assumed this disguise that she might pass to the place of her destination unnoticed and unmolested. She concluded by thanking them for their hospitality, which she said should be richly rewarded upon her return from the palace; when a very different garb from that in which they then beheld her would be her portion; and moreover that a numerous retinue of attendants would be at her command. Before she departed, however, she requested leave to present to the little Narina the only gift she had at that time in her possession. It was a whistle of very ordinary appearance, but its qualities were described as greatly surpassing its humble pretensions. By the use of this instrument, the possessor would be able to charm the fiercest beast, or the most deadly human foe; and if at any time she wished to know the true thoughts of any person who might address a speech to her, one simple note on this ill-favoured little pipe, would explain to her the secret intention of the speaker. By means of it, also, she could hold conversation with any friend, though separated from her in the most distant part of the world.

All this while Ben Hafiz had never withdrawn his eyes from the stranger, and consequently had observed that, from the moment she had taken her seat, her glances were from time to time directed towards Narina with a strange expression of fierceness and malignity, although all the time the other features of her face assumed a smiling and alluring form. When, therefore, at the close of her description of the virtues of this whistle, she reached forward to give it to his little darling,

he put forth his hand to receive it of her. The stranger, however, withdrew the present, saying that it must be placed in the hand of the person for whom the gift was intended. "Then," answered Ben Hafiz, "it shall be equally useful to her, for as we are never separated, I can give her all the knowledge she may wish, respecting those who are removed from us, as well as the secret thoughts of her foes: and if ever we should be surprised by any wild beast coming into our valley, I can equally well protect her as she can herself." Still the beggar woman sought to urge the gift upon the little Narina, and her kind protector as steadily and firmly resisted her endeavours. "Nay, then," said the stranger, "my purpose must be fulfilled;" and with these words she darted forward to seize the child, but the worthy Ben Hafiz was prepared for her, and at that same instant he had slipped the ring on to the finger of his foundling. With this action, the whole scene in their cottage underwent a total change. The apartment was instantly filled with a blaze of light, and between the child and the stranger stood the form of the silver dove glittering in the golden flood, while that again was instantly transformed to the same heavenly attendant who had constantly answered their summons. The countenance and habit too of the beggar woman vanished, and instead of them appeared the figure of a man with fierce grey eyes, and yellow hair and beard. The spirit, with a face of deep anguish and resentment, uttered some words in a melancholy tone not understood by the shepherd and his wife. And all the while the countenance of the stranger (who against his will was compelled to look at the vision) was alternately filled with rage, disappointment, and shame. When the strange words were ended, the light increased to a more intense degree, accompanied with a roaring as of a great conflagration, and in the midst, a loud yet mild voice was heard, which dismissed the enemy of the little Narina; for although neither door nor window of the cottage had opened, the three inhabitants found themselves alone with their heavenly guardian, who, turning upon them a countenance glowing with love, gentleness, and approbation, again comforted the shepherd with these kind words:—

"I now find, good Ben Hafiz, that you are to be trusted with the preservation of the little Narina. You have followed my instructions, and it is well that you did so. The stranger whom you received and kindly entertained this night, has been the bitterest enemy of my life, and is now, if not the only one, the cruellest persecutor of your lovely charge. Keep your faith with me, and hereafter you shall know more of our history. Happy was it for her and for me, that you so steadily followed my commands. Had you allowed that stranger to present the whistle to the child, he would have touched her; and from that moment she would have been in his power; and then my spirit shrinks to think what her fate would have been. You would have lost the comfort of your old age, your worldly prosperity would have departed from you; and what is worse than all, you would have forfeited your honour, and lost your own self-respect; and then, good Ben Hafiz, you could not have been happy. You have been too long in communion with the good Being that gave you life, and from whom you have received every gracious and holy thought, not to know that they are the happiest people who are the most virtuous and kind. Had your little charge received the stranger's present without being touched by him, the gift would still have proved fatal to her; for, at the moment of using it, she would have been transformed to some loathsome reptile, and been doomed to inhabit that shape one hundred years; and so to creep about the earth doing nothing but whistling. The same misfortune would not have happened to you, because the malignity of the enemy is not directed against you; on the contrary, had it once come into your possession, you would in an instant have discovered the character of the giver of it. The full extent of its power can injure those only who are the objects of its maker's bitterest hatred. Well, therefore, have you acted, Ben Hafiz, in following my injunctions so strictly, and great shall be your reward if you remain faithful to the end. Farewell!—again I say, be faithful—be happy."

With these words, the glory of the vision suddenly diminished; the heavenly form had departed, and the room was lighted only by the sinking embers of the wood-fire, and the small flame of the table-lamp, which, from the contrast, scarcely relieved their eyes from a feeling of total darkness. The little Narina covered her face for some time with both hands, and then gravely and silently returned to her supper: and when the meal was finished, Ben Hafiz closed the labours of the day with a hymn of praise and thanksgiving.

CHAPTER IV.

Two more years in the life of Narina had passed since the last adventure, during which time she had increased—if that were possible—in beauty of face and person, as well as in gracefulness of action. The powers of her mind, too, had considerably augmented: with the slender assistance that the old shepherd and his wife could render her, she quickly attained the means of reading their language, and with this advantage at her command, a week rarely passed without her persuading her kind protectors, one or the other, to accompany her to the neighbouring town, that she might select some new book of poetry, or history of a great and good king and queen; and these she would read over and over again, learning by heart favourite passages of the poetry.

By the assistance also of such instruction, added to her own pretty taste and search, she had become perfectly acquainted with the forms, names, and different virtues of the flowers and herbs which in profusion adorned the valley where she dwelt. Her sweet and harmless manners had charmed the wild natures of the most unsocial birds; and the timid quadrupeds that haunted the most inaccessible precipices encircling the valley, had become accustomed to her approach, and only flew away in sport, to lure her on to the race. The previous adventure of the pedlar had taught her the virtue of her silver-feathered shoes, and she would now turn them to constant use: by their means she would cross the plain with the fleetness of a ring-dove, and lead on, or pursue

the antelope to the giddiest heights; then would she glance down the crags, leaving her playmates breathless behind. It was the prettiest sight to behold her with one arm round the neck of a gazelle, keeping pace with it at its greatest speed, all the while her feet scarcely appearing to move.

The liberty, however, which these wondrous shoes had afforded her, gave great uneasiness to the old shepherd and his wife, and no persuasions could induce them to allow her this wide and free range so far from her nest in the cottage, till she had seriously promised never to pass to the other side of the mountains surrounding the valley, or to allow any human being under any pretence whatever to approach her. She was therefore constantly before their eyes, and had any danger approached, Ben Hafiz could apply to his ring, while she, with her shoes, could have outstripped the wind.

An event shortly happened which proved the wisdom of their caution and watchful care over their precious charge. One morning, as the shepherd was seated in the porch of his cottage, fastening on the head of his crook, while his flock were scattered on the plain before him, "cropping their hasty meal," and at his side the busy Sherzaran dressing a fleece for the market, the silver dove suddenly flew past them, uttering a plaintive cry of alarm, and was seen hurrying away towards the brow of one of the distant mountains. Ben Hafiz instantly guessed that all was not right, and upon going forth to the front of his cottage, he perceived the little Narina afar off on the steep declivity of a mountain. One moment she was seen springing from crag to crag, and then for a moment was lost to sight; a third brought her to the plain, and at the same time placed her by the side of her fond old pro-

tectors. They quickly discovered the cause of her hasty and alarmed return, and had reason to congratulate themselves that the blessed dove and her magic shoes had restored her to her asylum; for, in a few minutes, they perceived, coming over the brow of a hill, several horsemen, who were galloping backwards and forwards, and scouring hither and thither, as if in search of something, or to discover the readiest path down to the plain. After a short lapse of time others arose in greater number, and waited for a signal from those who had preceded them to move forward. And now there was another pause, when a still more numerous band came up; and as they spread over the brow of the hill after issuing through the narrow pass, it was discovered that the whole company was the advance-guard of an army; for, in descending towards the plain, the rays of the morning sun played upon their armour and spears; and as the whole mass moved in different directions, one while it appeared dark, and then suddenly gleamed forth like flashes of lightning. And now a far-off blast of trumpets was heard, which was answered by another so remote as scarcely to reach the ear. This last troop having descended half way down the mountain, the wondering cottagers beheld a fourth and still more numerous company rise into view; and, as they approached the plain, the sound of a thousand musical instruments filled the air, with the clashing of cymbals and the chiming of bells. The multitude had by this time all descended, and the peaceful little valley was disturbed with the mingled sounds of trumpets, and neighing of horses, and the rushing hither and thither of soldiers in rich caparisons.

While nothing less than the thought of an approaching

war had occupied the thoughts of the cottagers, a horseman, more splendidly dressed, and mounted upon a roan charger, attended by a select band, all accoutered in golden tissue, studded with precious jewels, issued forth from the main body of the army, and rode up to the cottage porch where Ben Hafiz and his wife were standing, the little Narina being within the doorway, gravely contemplating the wonderful

change that had taken place in her beloved valley.

"Ben Hafiz," said the chief, "I am the king of all the territory which extends from that part of the earth where the blessed sun first darts his fiery beams, to the borders of the great sea, in which he allays the scorching heat of the wheels of his golden chariot. From that distant clime I have come to visit the monarch of your own country, as well as to claim my long-lost child, who was charmed away from me by a false and malignant sorceress, that I had the ill-fortune to call my queen. I have with great pains discovered that my child is not only an inhabitant of this valley, but that you have been her faithful protector from the hour that she was charmed away from her father's arms. It is, therefore, my determination, not only to carry her back to my own court, but also to make you the richest man in my kingdom, as a reward for the care and fidelity with which you have guarded my daughter."

"Great prince," answered the good Ben Hafiz, "it is most true that I have been a father to a most beauteous child, whom, when an infant, I rescued from yonder sea; and to the best of my humble wit, I have protected and educated her. She is dear to me as the precious gift of sight; and no less calamity, now in my old age, than the destruction of these eyes, would be the bereavement of my dearly beloved little

Narina. And so tenderly do I hold her welfare, that, with all humility to the high mightiness in whose presence I now stand, a humble shepherd, I would yet firmly declare, that I cannot forego the protection of this beloved child, without stronger proof of her parentage than that which has now been offered to me. Far be it from me to put my poor self in array against so great a monarch, and attended by so magnificent a train; but the word of a poor shepherd is his richest store, and I have made an oath in heaven to preserve—"

"Wretch!" said the prince, his eyes flashing fire as he spoke; "is it for one, base born like thee, to presume to doubt the speech of a king who could command thee, and ten thousand of thy fellows, to be hewn in pieces, and their morsels to be scattered to the vultures?"

"My body may be destroyed," rejoined the steady Ben Hafiz, "and my precious treasure may be carried away (mayhap for evil), but my truth and fidelity to her, no prince, were he lord of the whole earth, can even bend, still less break asunder."

The fury of the king now passed beyond all bounds, so that in the violence of his transport the calm old shepherd recognised the cruel face and grey eyes of the pedlar. At this moment he ordered his attendants to follow him into the cottage; and, springing from his horse, he seized the shepherd by the throat; but the old man's virtue was again rewarded; for the jewelled dagger, which had always lain in his bosom, ready, in case he had need of its service, darted forth of its own accord and plunged to the hilt in the breast of the false king, who, with a loud curse and a deep groan, fell stone dead

at the feet of the faithful Ben Hafiz. In horror and amazement he beheld the event, but before he could collect his senses he saw the whole scene, horses and horsemen, vanish in a cloud of smoke, while the only remnant of the vision was a large shaggy beast, that scoured with a frightful noise across the plain. He looked again, and the valley had assumed its former peacefulness, with its silent sheep scattered over it, feeding as before.

The next act of Ben Hafiz was to search for the dagger, which he found safely restored to its former warm asylum, next his heart. He now applied to the ring; and no sooner had it encircled his finger, than his heavenly guardian stood before him in a different guise from any in which she had hitherto appeared. Her dress consisted of a silken robe of heavenly blue, sparkling with an amazing profusion of gems and other precious stones; her neck, bosom, and arms, too, were adorned with jewels of inestimable value; and on her head was a crown of gold that darted forth rays of many-coloured lights, which dazzled the eyes of the beholder.

"I am come before you, dear and faithful Ben Hafiz," said the mild voice of the heavenly one, "in my own character, that I formerly held when a dweller on earth." The gentle spirit now looked towards the little Narina, who had stepped forth from the cottage, and a yearning expression came across her face, which, had she been a mortal mother, might have been followed by tears.

"I was a queen," she continued, "but am now a happy angel. I was a queen, the daughter of a queen, and, through your fidelity, I shall be the mother of a queen. The man whom you have just slain was my lord's brother, and my most bitter foe. By his wicked machinations he turned from

me the heart of the most generous and tender husband that ever blessed the days of mortal woman. This bitter change in the affections of one so loving, and who had been so beloved in return, preyed upon a slender frame, and brought me to the grave. A short time before I left him for ever, I gave birth to yonder child; and, being warned by my godmother, who was a good fairy, of the evil intended her by her wicked uncle, an evil and powerful magician, and who sought to inherit the kingdom after the death of his brother, I caused her to be conveyed away from the palace, and committed in that black cedar chest to the mercy of the waves. My spirit had left its earthly dwelling before my little offspring had been many hours upon the waters. I need not bring to your recollection the vision of the silver dove hovering over the little ark, when you discovered it; and which contained all that bound me most strongly to earth.

"Thus, accompanied only by the silver-feathered shoes, the ring, and the dagger (gifts of my godmother), and the tender blessings of a heart-broken mother, did my infant, my babe, my young firstborn, leave her royal home on her perilous voyage of life. The Good Spirit, whom now I adore in company with blessed angels, guided my precious burden to your sheltering care, my good and faithful Ben Hafiz, and worthy instrument are you of his great goodness.

"And now, only one thing more have I to communicate. Should you hereafter be questioned by a tall and dark man, of melancholy but handsome aspect, concerning my child, observe him narrowly while you repeat to him my tale. Should he preserve a stern, unmoved countenance, then keep my child for ever, and let her not depart from your protecting

care; but if he betray emotion and sorrow for my fate,—" here the spirit's voice trembled with a mortal tenderness and faltering,—"then surrender my child to his bosom, for he is her father."

With these words the form melted into air, and the shepherd, drawing a deep breath, turned towards his little charge, who was kneeling in the entrance of the porch: her hands were firmly clasped: her countenance was deadly pale, but a serene and happy smile played on her lips, as her eyes, beaming with affectionate devotion, were bent forward towards the spot lately occupied by her angel-mother.

CHAPTER V.

Upon her return one day from the market in the neighbouring town, Dame Sherzaran brought intelligence that some famous king from the other side of the sea was coming in great pomp to the Persian court. "And if he be a young king, and a handsome one," she added, "who knows but he may make our dear Narina his queen; for you know the good spirit told us she was the daughter of a queen, and would be a queen herself." "You women," said the old shepherd, "always have your heads running upon love and matrimony. So, forsooth, because you have found out that our little darling is a princess, and that a stranger king is coming among us to pay his court to our king, nothing less must come to pass but he must make a queen of her." "Many greater wonders than that have happened," said she; "but, queen or no queen, we will all go and see the show when he arrives."

Some days after the above announcement on the part of Sherzaran, as the little Narina was at her favourite play with her pretty four-footed companions, on the summit of a mountain that looked immediately over the sea, she suddenly ceased from her sport, and came tripping down towards the cottage to inform her friends that, a long way off in the sea, a number of beautiful ships were sailing along, and that they appeared to be coming to the part of the coast nearest to their habitation. Ben Hafiz set forth as fast as his old legs would carry him, to a pathway in the cliffs, that led straightway down to the beach; from whence he could catch a sight of the sea, and from which spot he first saw the chest that served the little Narina for her early cradle, and in which she was rocked by the waves.

A gay scene was here presented to his view; for the time he had occupied in arriving at this place had brought the fleet much nearer to the land. It consisted of many vessels, some of them covered with burnished gold, mingled with the brightest colours, that mixed with the sun's rays, and cast beautiful reflections upon the blue and green waves. The masts were silver, and the sails were variously ordered; some of bright purple and gold, some orange, and some rose-coloured and silver. One alone was different from all the rest; it was a dark and melancholy ship; the sails, too, were of the same dismal hue; and the flag was black, bearing upon it a white heart with one half cut away.

The shepherd and his little darling were all the while the only spectators of this strange sight. After a short time, however, when the fleet had all drawn nearly close to the shore, they observed a few people running from the opposite side

of the valley, to the spot where they were standing; these also had seen the fleet out at sea, and were come from the neighbourhood of the city to witness the landing of the crews. In a short time after, a large crowd was flocking to the same spot. Meanwhile the crews of the different vessels were busily engaged in landing and bringing to shore various articles of value, with rare animals of great beauty and stateliness; horses also, richly caparisoned and of elegant figure. When the whole were landed, and drawn up in order of procession, one majestic figure, followed by his horse, came from the black ship and, having mounted, the order was given for the whole company to move towards the city.

The little Narina and her protector were lodged in a narrow recess of the cliff enclosing the passage, and above the road through which the procession was to pass, and were curiously contemplating the variety and splendour of the array. First came a troop of soldiers, clad in scarlet and gold, upon milkwhite horses; the foremost twelve of whom bore silver trumpets which, from time to time, they blew. Then came six horses of the most perfect shapes, and of different colours, each horse being led by a page in green and gold. These were followed by six yeomen dressed in gold tissue, each bearing a steel bow of extraordinary length and exceeding brightness. After these, six others succeeded, clad in blue and silver tissue, holding silver shields, richly embossed with gold. The same number of foot pages followed, in orange robes lined with purple, who bore spears of jet black ebony shafts, inlaid with gold figures. Then walked alone, and at a short distance, a single attendant in a tunic of white and silver, bearing a vase formed out of the largest ruby in the world, and mounted upon a golden pedestal. Four came after the last, dressed in crimson and gold, each holding on his fist a milk-white eagle. Then followed four golden peacocks, each one led in a silver chain, by a little boy dressed in satin of sky blue. All these fair things were intended for presents to the King of Persia. Then came a company of twenty-five Ethiopians, tall men, and of the most swarthy skin; these were clad in white silk dresses, descending no lower than the knee, and fastened above their hips by golden girdles, inlaid with rubies and emeralds. These last were succeeded by a troop of archers in light armour. Then came the king, riding alone at a considerable distance; and the whole procession was completed by a company of spearmen, in red and gold, on grey horses.

The king was habited in a suit of coal-black armour, and his horse was of the same doleful complexion. As he rode at a sober pace, with the beaver of his helmet up, he displayed to view a pale and handsome countenance, sadly thoughtful, yet mild, and adorned with a short and curly black beard. He appeared to take little notice of the admiring multitude, but as he passed the spot in the cliff where the little Narina and her friend were standing, level with his own figure as he sat upon his lofty steed, his eyes suddenly rested upon the face of the child, and he involuntarily drew up the horse's rein, while a blush started to his cheek. He paused a moment, attentively considering the object of his notice, then passed on, at the same time beckoning to him an officer from the front rank behind him, whom he charged to inform himself of "the name and residence of the old man and child standing in yonder niche of the rock."

Shortly after the whole cavalcade had passed, and when

the foremost of the company had reached a road in the mountains on the opposite side of the valley, a distant sound of trumpets was heard, and over the summit of the hill was seen a troop of soldiers approaching, accompanied by a multitude of spectators. Others again succeeded, throng after throng, when the peaceful little valley again became filled with armed men, neighing steeds, and splendid colours. The King of Persia came, attended by the whole of his court and army, with long trains of camels, some white and others jet black. The king himself rode upon a beautiful white Arab horse, gorgeously caparisoned in red morocco harness, with gold studs and precious jewels. His own robe and turban blazed with diamonds, emeralds, and rubies. Above his head was supported, by four horsemen, a spacious silk canopy, rose-coloured.

As the two companies came together, the Persian monarch left his cavalcade, and, drawing near, saluted his royal visiter, who, with much dignity and grace, received his princely welcome. The Persian guards then followed in the rear of the procession, and their king rode by the side of his mourning guest, both under the same canopy. In the space of two or three hours the great multitude had passed over the mountains and reached the city, and the little valley was once more left in silence to Ben Hafiz, his wife, and their thoughtful and wondering child.

The remainder of the day was spent in conjectures respecting the cause of the black king's visit; also, that of his sending to inquire the names and dwelling of Ben Hafiz and Narina. Sherzaran, of course, thought of nothing less than that her "rose-bud," as she called her, was to become a great queen, and she and her husband to be grandees.

"Heaven help your poor head!" said the worthy old Ben; "what pretty grandees an old shepherd and a fleece-dresser would make! What I want to know is, who this king can be, and why he should send to ask about us. I am not sure that he is any better than the wicked magician who has heretofore so troubled us." And then, recollecting the ring, he applied it to his finger for the purpose of gaining the desired information; but their angel protectress did not answer the summons, which greatly perplexed the old couple. They then concluded that it would, perhaps, prove serviceable to them only in cases where immediate danger threatened their little charge. In silence and anxiety, therefore, they implored a blessing on their endeavours for her welfare, and, hoping all for the best, lay down for the night in sleep and innocence.

CHAPTER VI.

On the following morning, shortly after sunrise, a man, richly dressed, and on horseback, rode up to the cottage, and inquired for Ben Hafiz. The good housewife informed him that her husband had left home to attend his flock; at the same time, she requested him to inform her what was the business of so fine a gentleman with a poor shepherd. "Good dame," said the messenger, "your husband will know my business when he hears my errand; suffice to say, I am come from the king who arrived yesterday, and must see Ben Hafiz: to whom, and no one else, am I ordered to deliver my master's commands."

"Ah, ah!" said the kind old soul; "I know your business as well as if you had told it to me; and you need not have huffed me off so, for I can keep a secret." Then, rubbing her hands, and laughing, "We shall be grand folks in our old days—I know we shall, for I have dreamt so three times." So saying, she trotted round to the end of the cottage, and pointed out to the horseman her husband in the distance; who, with Narina and his dog at his side, was seated upon the bank of a little brook under a palm tree. Away rode the messenger, and Sherzaran returned to her household work, and the nursing of her thoughts of their future greatness.

"Ben Hafiz," said the courier, after leaping the brook, and coming close to him, "you are commanded by the great king who arrived here yesterday, my master, to go to the court of the King of Persia, and to take with you the child that was standing at your side when his majesty passed under the cliffs upon leaving the sea-shore." "Who is this great king?" replied Ben Hafiz; "and what can he want with a poor shepherd and his child?" "All this you will hear when you come into my lord's presence." "But how are my poor legs to carry me to such a distance, when it would take some hours to ride there?" "That labour will be spared you; for, in about an hour from this time, a chariot from the king, your master, will come to your cottage to convey you both before my lord. You must, therefore, return home and prepare for your journey." So saying, the messenger turned his horse's head, and rode back the way he came.

Ben Hafiz and his little companion now bent their steps towards the cottage, hand in hand, for the purpose of being properly equipped, and in attendance when the royal chariot should come to carry them before the stranger-king. The old shepherd had never been without the ring and the dagger; and, as he had more than once found the benefit of attending to the instructions he had received from the heavenly visiter, he still determined that they should accompany him. He also resolved that Narina, in case of danger, should go in her silver-feathered shoes. "I will go in them, dear Ben Hafiz," said she, "to please you, but I shall not want them." The confident tone of this speech, so different from any he had ever before heard from his darling, surprised the old man, and set him thinking.

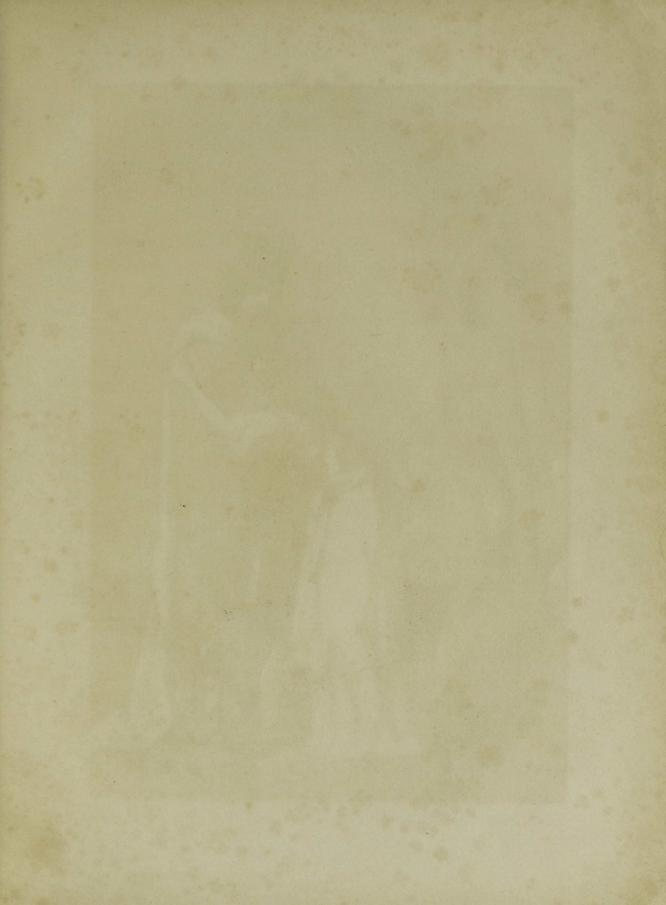
The grand carriage now came for them, and the kind old Sherzaran bustled about the doorway, now and then humming a low tune; and then trotting in-doors to hasten the travellers; at one time clapping her hands, when she thought of what she hoped would come to pass; and at another, twitching some part of her dress to make it sit with propriety, as she appeared before the king's coachman and the royal attendants; and, lastly, as they drove from the door, following them with her blessings.

In due time the couple arrived at the gates of the palace, where a page was prepared to receive them, who led them through a number of galleries and apartments till they arrived at a particular one, when he took his leave, requesting them to remain till his lord should come. He had scarcely closed the door, when another on the opposite side of the room was opened, and the same tall, handsome, and sorrowful figure appeared before them whom they had observed, and who had so particularly noticed them, the day before. Immediately upon his entrance he fixed his eyes upon the child, and sud-

denly walked towards the window, where he remained for a considerable time in silence. At length, taking a deep breath, he turned round, and walking towards the two, he said,—"Ben Hafiz, I have already inquired respecting you, and have learned that this child is not your own, but that you rescued her from peril, and with your good wife have protected and fostered her. Is it not so? Did you not also receive with her certain rare and precious articles that have been especially serviceable to you in cases where danger threatened the babe? Confess to me freely."

"Great king! and my lord," said the unflinching old shepherd, as he looked steadily in his face, "I also have heard much of you, and (pardon the boldness of an old man who has bound himself to perform a sacred duty), before I make known the whole history of this dear babe, I must be assured that your thoughts concerning one whom I shall not name, are altered, and that you are prepared both to receive and cherish her memory. When I feel that to be the case, I shall be able to set your heart at rest, and render you in all respects the father of your child. I am now her father; I have been her father; and, again I say, great king, pardon the boldness of one so humble in life compared with him to whom he is thus talking, her father I shall remain, till I discover one more worthy than myself to claim that title. I speak it not in boast, my lord, but I am so armed in honesty, resolution, and powerful weapons entrusted to me for her defence, that I fear no human attempts to force her from my protection."

"Excellent old man!" said the king; "would that I had had such a friend at my side when my mind was poisoned against her of whom I was unworthy, and whom I now believe





to be in the company of the good and the blessed, and scarcely more free from unholy taint than when in the flesh she deigned to become my companion."

He had scarcely uttered these words than Narina, with a countenance glowing with delight, leaped into his arms, and with both hers encircling his neck, buried her face in his bosom. They sank down together upon a seat, and the old shepherd, quickly putting the ring upon the finger of the king, hurried from the room, which had instantly become conscious of a heavenly presence.

After such time had been passed as allowed of Narina to describe to her father the events of her life, with the uniform tenderness and watchful care of the good old shepherd and his wife, at his desire she left the room, and returned to it again accompanied by her faithful friend; when the king took him by the hand, and told him that it was his own wish, and particularly that of his daughter, that he and the affectionate Sherzaran should return with them to his own country, where they should pass the remainder of their days in peace, and in such occupation as they might choose for their own delight. "You shall still be my Narina's father," added he, "and I hope you will be my friend. As for the precious articles that were discovered in the chest on the sea, the shoes shall remain with her; the ring will be mine, for by means of its virtue I shall recover the society of one from whom I ought never to have been estranged; and you, as the long-tried champion and protector of our Narina, shall still keep the dagger in charge for her defence in time of need."

"It is hard to take with safety an old tree from its soil," said Ben Hafiz; "and still harder to change the course of

its growth and habit: if, therefore, my lord will permit me still to continue my peaceful employment of tending my old friends and fleecy companions, and once a day to come and look upon the face of her whose affectionate gratitude and cheerful obedience have been the delight of my heart for eleven happy years, I will follow him and her throughout the world."

The king instantly accorded with the worthy shepherd's request. Ben Hafiz and his wife were lodged that night in the palace. Who now was so happy as Sherzaran? -- her dreams of greatness had been fulfilled! But how much more happy was her husband; for he closed his eyes for the night with the pleasing reflection of having performed his duty; added to which, he received the approbation of the celestial spirit, who informed him that, as he had been the protector of the helpless, true to his word, and faithful and zealous in his undertaking, he had already received his reward in this life, by the possession of a good and therefore happy conscience: "What your lot may be in the life to come, Ben Hafiz," said the angel-mother, "I may not disclose; rest satisfied, however, with the assurance that the Great Being, in whose sight I draw an eternity of bliss, can in nowise cast forth those who strive to imitate him in acts of long-suffering and loving-kindness."

