

Sheddad's Palace of Irem

By Henry Iliowizi

Sheddad and Sheddid, the sons of Ad and the grandsons of Uz, acquired great fame in Hadramaut, where they saw light in Ahkaf, a region of deserts bordered by deserts, desolate as Hejaz, sterile as Tehamah, burning as Dahna "the red," frightful as Gobi, and less explored than Sahara. The ancient Hebrews spoke of Hadramaut as *Hazarmaveth*, the "court of death," and this sepulchral name is fully accounted for by its black rocks, which here and there show head above the sifting sand-ridges, like so many colossal coffins in the midst of the gloomiest of graveyards. Here the tribe of Ad not alone prospered, but accomplished things forever memorable in tale and song.

While traversing the desert of Han-Hai Marco Polo reports to have seen ghostly apparitions; and heard them speak, calling people by their names, and startling the drivers of the caravan by such strange noises as the tramp of horses, the beating of drums, and the blowing of trumpets and other musical instruments. The Oriental counts those spectral manifestations in the deserts as one of the many aspects of the world's spiritual mystery, and the ancient Arab never entered a waste in the dark without this propitiatory expression of confidence uttered with the solemnity of prayer: "I fly for refuge unto the prince of this region, that he may protect me against the foolish of his domain."

It is the Bedouin's conviction that countless ages before the creation of Adam myriads of Jinn or genii were created of fire, and enjoyed the blessings of this world under successive rulers who bore the generic name of Suliman. These airy creatures, however, being of inferior quality, are not alone subject to mortal wants, like eating, drinking and propagating, but are corruptible and perishable; so that when their wickedness provoked Allah's anger, he ordered Eblis to drive them into the most inhospitable deserts, where they are kept in rigid seclusion, but not without a certain latitude of action. For they are permitted to exercise their potential energies, and indulge their various inclinations for good or for evil, some being malignant, others beneficent. The fairy-like Pen, the gigantic Div, and the sinister Tacwins or fates, are referred to in the Koran, which fact renders doubt in their existence out of the question.

Now, the secret of Ad's power, which enabled him to flourish and multiply in the heart of desolation, was a host of Jinn placed at his command by his father Uz, the son of Aram, who was the son of Shem, one of Noah's three offspring. With superhuman agents to carry out his designs, Ad conceived the idea of building the most stupendous palace on earth in the wilderness of Aden, and he intimated the project to his older son Sheddad. Shed-dad's imagination was set aflame, but the vastness of the scheme rendered its realization somewhat doubtful, the nature of the resources notwithstanding.

"Thy plan, father, surpasses in magnitude that of the Tower of Babel, but my ambition would surround the grandest palace under the heavens with a garden like unto Paradise, provided thy means are ample enough to do it," said the firstborn of Ad.

"Palace and garden shall rise by invisible hands!" exclaimed Ad boastfully, and proceeded with the sketching of his design on the sand.

The palace was to be reared on a plateau as high as the highest land of Yemen, should have sufficient accommodation for his progeny multiplied a thousandfold, and its surpassing feature was to be a hall of superb magnificence, with room for the throne of a king to stand in the midst

of his court and his warriors, the grand edifice to be enwreathed by a garden like Eden, and to be accessible and visible only at the royal bidding.

Ad's fabulous dream was again improved upon by his inventive son, who proposed to have a city of princely dwellings cluster around the palace, the garden to surround the whole, and to be enclosed by a wall with stately portals. The additional feature commended itself to Ad, but the execution of the scheme was accompanied by an element of danger of which its projectors were unaware, and which proved fatal to its originator. Believing the hour ripe for the work to begin, Ad repaired one dark night, unaccompanied, to the dismal region to set himself aright with the potent instruments he had depended on for the actualization of his dream. Whether unnerved by the dismal dreariness of the desert, or confused by an instinctive dread of the supernatural machinery to be set in motion, the conjuror uttered the wrong formula, and the sequel was appalling. For instead of the beaming spirits he expected to bow to him, a hideous legion wagged their tails, having descended on him like a tempest, frowning and grinning, their eyes darting fury and hatred. Ad had unwittingly disturbed the dreaded Tacwins, who would have torn him to pieces but for the mystic signet he held in his hand, the talisman which, in a later age, enabled Solomon to capture Ashmodai and rule over myriads of genii. The terror of the moment, however, paralyzed the heart of the unfortunate wizard. Ad was found dead, and was greatly mourned by his family and the tribe that bore his name.

Undeterred by the tragic end of his father, Sheddad, now the acknowledged head of his tribe, and the owner of the potent seal, took his brother Sheddid into the secret, asserting it to be their filial duty to complete at all hazard what their sire had begun. Sheddid was not of the adventurous type; he preferred the ease of the tent to enterprises fraught with danger, and besought his brother to desist from an attempt which had already proved fatal, declaring himself content to be simply one of the tribe. Sole master of the situation, however, Sheddad burned with impatience to see his dazzling vision assume the form of reality; and wholly reckless as to danger, proceeded to act in the manner planned by his father and himself. He proved more successful than Ad in putting himself in communication with the friendly Jinn subject to his will, and astonished them with the sketch he drew of what he meant them to accomplish for him; for by this time the previous outline was even more expanded, and his commands were set forth with irrevocable authority.

“You are required to build for me a city never to be equalled, still less to be excelled, by anything art or skill may attempt to produce; it is to be the home of a people a thousand times more numerous than the tribe of Ad, and its crowning marvel is to be my palace,— of a splendor befitting a king of kings, and of an amplitude to afford room for a great court and an army.¹ Grounded on a rocky foundation on a level with Yemen's highlands, the city's walls and dwellings shall be white as alabaster, but the palace shall be of onyx, trimmed with gold and set with gems. Twelve gorgeous halls shall be named after the signs of the zodiac, all opening upon one grander than them all, beneath a dome lucent as the firmament, illumined by a sun, a moon, and scintillating stars, moving at the king's will around his throne that shall blaze with what is most precious and brilliant in those jewels which rival the lustre of the constellations. Vaults for

¹ The Koran has this reference to the Palace of Irem, showing that it was already a tradition before the time of Mohammed:

“Hast thou not considered how the Lord dealt with Ad, the people of Irem, adorned by lofty buildings, the like whereof hath not been erected in the land?” (Surah 89; “The Daybreak.”)

That Sheddad, having planted a garden in imitation of the heavenly paradise had been smitten by lightning on his way hither, is another variation of the widely known legend.

treasures, apartments for feasting, pavillions for ease, recesses for love, grottoes for coolness, cisterns for bathing, colonnades for pleasure, balconies for survey, and seats for delight, shall make my palace inimitable for all time. And city and palace shall be embedded in an Eden of foliage, blossom and fruit, animated by birds of lustrous plume and sweetest song. Tax your skill to build more perfect than I know to ask for, but never less; and let your magic make the retreats inaccessible without the pleasure of the king," closed Sheddad, inwardly sorry that his inventive faculty lagged behind his vaulting ambition to be unexcelled in grandeur and glory.

"Master of the potent seal," replied the chief of the shining files, "thy behest is our concern. In eleven nights Sheddad shall stamp our work with his approval." Elevated in his own estimation to the rank of a king of kings, and conscious of a power equal to that of a god, it required but a slight incentive for Sheddad's vanity to overleap itself, and infernal Eblis was at hand to furnish it. In the guise of an angel, the devil bewildered the architect of Irem by saluting him as a god.—"Born of a woman, thine is the homage due to a prince of the skies, before whom spirits bow, exalted Sheddad!" spoke the Satanic deceiver with a profound salaam, and rose on his mighty wings to vanish in the void of the desert.

After this Sheddad would not have been astonished to hear the stars proclaim his majesty, but he was surprised when, having listened to his marvellous tale of the city the Jinn would build for him, Almena, his favorite wife, beheld an evil omen in the fact that, in his plan of sumptuous building, Sheddad had neglected to provide for the worship of the only true God.

"How could Sheddad forget him who created the heavens and the earth, the stars and the spirits, and whose just wrath wiped out the people in the time of our ancestor Noah? God's temple ought to rise high above thy palace, or it will not stand, even according to the prophecy of Hud, thy uncle, whose words were confirmed by signs from On High," expostulated Almena. "Woman, thy Sheddad is a god, and shall be worshipped because of his potency, and the favors he may bestow on those who shall please him. A heavenly power paid me homage before I entered this tent, and in eleven nights the tribe of Ad will see the wonder of the world. My palace shall be their temple, my throne their altar, thyself their goddess, and Sheddad their god!" cried the infatuated chief.

Almena was a frail daughter of Eve, and Sheddad's picture of their prospective divinity, sustained as it was by an angel's confirmation, converted her to share her husband's madness. The thoughts that occupied them during the day came in weird visions during the night,— throngs kneeling in adoration before them, burning incense and wafting expiatory invocations, and kings hurrying from the ends of the earth to receive their crowns and sceptres from Sheddad's grace. On the tribe, it was deemed best that their chief's godship should burst as a revelation.

While the tribe of Ad were soundly asleep in their tents, a man and a woman slipped cautiously out of the encampment. They were mounted on two fast dromedaries; and glided like spectres into the heart of the desert, buried in night and silence. Once more Eblis played his infernal trick on the deluded Sheddad, now in company of his bewitched Almena, by a renewed mock-adoration offered as by a winged cherub. For it is hardly necessary to state that the infatuated couple were on their way to the abode of their future felicities. They had not been riding many hours before the level, blank face of the waste softened into undulations scantily covered with that vegetation which the camel alone is capable of digesting,—its gastric capacities being almost equal to that of the ostrich,—and the outlook indicated rising ground. A stretch had to be crossed punctuated by black rocks in ever-increasing number, until the wilderness looked a stony maze of dismal projections worn smooth by the grinding sands, ever moving with the gusts of

hot air; and the East indicated daybreak when Sheddad and Almena ascended a height from which they could survey a vast horizon, bordered on the south-east by sea, but presenting otherwise the sterility of Arabia Deserta. A curious and perplexing paralysis of speech deprived them of the interchange of sentiments, and an up-hill advance of a mile or so brought them before an arched portal of imposing stateliness, opening on a great city, half-hidden from view by the sylvan and floral wealth of an Eden.

Husband and wife exchanged a look of amazement, strangely debarred from an audible articulation of feeling just when there was so much to be wondered at. There being nobody to hinder, no one to welcome them, Sheddad and Almena tied their brutes to the glittering handles of the brazen gates, and proceeded to take sovereign possession of what they considered their indisputable domain. The ascending avenue before them might have been called "The Vista of Enchantment." Sinuous in its course, its moss-bedded windings were bordered by crystal rivulets which came down, broken by impediments, in bounding cascades, the water teeming with fish of tints recalling the changeful blushes of Aurora. Towering trees shaded, with their intertwining crowns of delicious leafage, a tropical exuberance of lesser growths weighed down with luscious fruit or glowing and sparkling with soft colors forming part of a delightful disorder of shrubs and vines, climbing, winding, crawling, hanging and blooming, but receding here and there to uncover the placid mirror of a lake limpid as beryl, or a spring of the coolest and purest liquid, all approachable by a hundred inter-crossing pathways, lined and so softly carpeted that the unsandaled foot paced as on a silken rug of the finest texture. Here the bulbul's note was drowned in a concert of rival warblers, whose melodies were as sweet as their feathers were coruscant.

With ravenous greed Sheddad and Almena surrendered to the garden's temptations, swallowing great quantities of precious fruit, but feeding a hunger that seemed to grow with its glutting; nor did the cooling drink they greedily imbibed allay their parching thirst. But the whetted appetite rendered the sensuous enjoyment resistlessly fascinating; and, the choice of the food being seemingly unlimited, husband and wife would have abandoned themselves altogether to physical indulgence, had not an overpowering sight burst on them, like a vision from a suddenly opened heaven.

They were on the point of ascending a terrace laid out with all the arts of magic, and enwreathed with all the bounties of nature, when they reached the entrance to an enormous square, superbly enclosed by what appeared a score of palaces blended in one mass of variegated splendors, the one at the opposite end overtopping the others by a dome which blazed in the sun's radiance, as though set with carbuncles. Symmetrically proportionate to the size of the grand space ran a depression defined by a line of artistic shafts of alabaster, capped with globes of burnished gold studded with gems, and rising majestically above a grove of enameled green, thick with odoriferous bloom. In the heart of the depression was a basin filled with a rushing water as transparent as the sky, and enlivened by star-doffed swarms of the finny tribes. It was an azure stream in an Elysian garden, in the heart of a succession of edifices far beyond the limits of human resources and ingenuity. Except for the feathered musicians, and the zephyr which stirred the air and foliage, not a sound was heard, nor a creature to be seen. The overawing majesty of an architecture that dwarfed pantheons into monuments of man's vain endeavor to imitate the inimitable, and the gorgeousness which could not be thought of without remembering the limitations of earthly art and treasures however great, justified to himself Sheddad's conceit that he was more than human, a consciousness now at last fully shared by Almena. Still unable to express their wonderment in words, they resorted to gestures and grimaces, as though the tale of

Babel was to have a sort of counterpart in the story of Sheddad's palace of Irem. And their wonder rose in intensity as, entering the left wing of the palace by a sublime portico, the lofty vaulted spaces, communicating by exquisitely carved arches, imparted the illusion that the ceilings were as high as heaven and sparkled with real stars.

An implied welcome was extended to them in the first apartment by a banquet set in a begemmed service of golden vessels,—dainties and beverages fit for gods. Hours busily spent at the sumptuous board did neither appease their hunger nor quench their thirst. Every morsel and every quaff sharpened the craving for more. When they succeeded in tearing themselves from the table's inexhaustible dishes, their progress through the palatial spaces consumed more time than they were aware of, the fascinations being as varied as they were marvellous. For incomputable as was the wealth, and lavish the ornamental art bestowed on each and every room traversed, their main charm lay in the optic illusions, causing Sheddad and his companion to laugh with amusement and wonder, to scream with astonishment, or to shudder with horror.

Yielding to a woman's inquisitiveness, Almena was always a little in advance of her husband, always eager to be yet more surprised, and her eagerness was fully gratified. Once when a scream of laughter brought Sheddad to his wife's side, he found that what she had mistaken for clear water, rippled by a breeze, was indeed the solid floor of a long green archway, imparting the illusion of a stream flowing under cover of beautiful trees; Almena had prepared to cross it, with her sandals off, and her skirts raised, imagining the water to wave gently in a bed of golden sand. Here, again, she recoiled with terror from the glaring eyes of a crouching lion, ready to fly at her in a rage; there she stood paralyzed at the sight of the deadly *rukta*, rolled up in a coil on an imperial divan, with her fangs pointed, and her eyes glaring. In this manner the most formidable species of the animal kingdom faced them in threatening postures throughout the entire palace, often environed by their natural conditions, always in a pose of aggressive ferocity. Yet all this notwithstanding, Sheddad affected the lofty bearing of a god in his realm; strode haughtily along the mysteriously echoing halls, the echoes of which ere long mixed with strains of music sweet beyond expression. Drawn by the swelling harmonies, they descended a stately flight of stairs landing on a platform whence, descending another flight, they beheld themselves at the extreme end of an enormous cavern bathed in a translucent haze of an unearthly luminousness. The muffled rumble of a distant waterfall blended enchantingly with waves of melody that floated incomprehensibly through the weird mazes of the honey-combed hollow extending endlessly in cavernous, inaccessible spaces, passes and galleries. Availing themselves of conveniently protruding stepping-stones, the explorers ventured into the nethermost ranges, fairly brightened by the reflex of a stalactitic display, grotesque in shape, bulky in size, and indefinable in color, every known hue blending into a magic play of ever-changing spectra, and suggesting the idea that the palace above was the blossom of which the underground masses were the roots. Here they stood bewitched by the symphonies they could not account for, and by a scenery human genius may dream of, but never imitate.

While divided between the delights of the ear and the charm of the eye, Sheddad and Almena lost no sight of a crystal barrier behind which flowed a clear water alive with luminous fish, and through which they had a glimpse of things above, recognizing it to be the bed of the rushing stream that flowed in the court of the palace, fed by unexplorable cisterns, and discharging its volume into an unsounded abyss. As they advanced the wonders multiplied. Fluted pillars of snowy alabaster, draped and marvellously traced by invisible hands; towering shafts of white, red, amber and blue; hanging balconies of gossamer lightness, trimmed with scarfs finer than the Indian shawl; canopies bristling with numberless crystals of every tint and shape; cataracts

petrified in the act of precipitation; grottoes, fountains, streamlets and cascades, with a myriad other exhibitions of magic art, filled subterraneous spaces of unmeasured magnitude.

Progressing through irregular archways and winding passages, Sheddad and Almena were lost in the labyrinth. Remembering, however, that the crystal basin ran along the grand couit above, Sheddad followed its length and discovered a way to an ascent which took them to a broad stairway. This was the entrance from below to a colonnade of astonishing height and dimensions, covering the entire width of the court, and having at both extremes grand flights of steps, leading up to the wing of the palace crowned by the blazing dome.

If the son of Ad and his consort marveled at what they had seen hitherto, they felt stupefied as ascending they stood before a golden arch wrought in imitation of the rainbow, revealing the all-outshining throne-hall, rising high above the lofty throne. Four tigers erect on their haunches held up with their forepaws the seat of majesty, a gorgeous divan bedecked with priceless jewels, under a lofty canopy shaded by tapestries of matchless fabric and embroidery. To the right, suspended from the roof of the canopy, hung the sceptre, a mace incrusting with brilliants; to the left the crown, of dazzling splendor; above the throne sun, moon, and stars were scattered within the concave of the dome, while the twelve adjoining halls similarly represented the signs of the zodiac, thus completing a startling illusion of the heavens.

As though driven by an irresistible force, Sheddad, with the firm step of a king, advanced to take possession of his throne, Almena watching him with a throbbing heart. Nine steps had to be ascended before the seat could be reached. The aspirant to godship thought he felt the deadly breath of the tigers, whose distended claws and furious eyes threatened destruction, but he nerved himself and ascended the royal seat. Simultaneously with his touch upon the throne the crown descended on his head, the sceptre flew into his hand, while a mantle of radiance clothed his frame. Sheddad felt that he was a god, for his coronation was confirmed by the immediate action of sun, moon and stars, which began to move in their respective orbits, shedding mellow light, and filling the spaces with sweet strains.

From his exalted seat Sheddad had for the first time an extended view of his dominion, and he realized that what he had seen thus far was but the heart of the whole, which seemed unbounded in extent and unapproachable in magnificence. It was manifest that palace and court formed the focus of a great city, spreading in many directions in avenues shaded by trees and cooled by delicious springs, placid lakes, playing fountains, and bubbling streamlets. Why should he lose a moment to reveal himself to his tribe as their god and lead them hither triumphant in confirmation of his godship? Who on earth was mightier than he?

He rose. The sceptre slipped from his hand, the crown from his head, the mantle from his shoulders. Everything stood still. The song died. A dimness spread around him. The eyes of the tigers glared viciously. He stood by the side of his wife. They joined hands, hurried down and out into the open air to find that it was twilight and sultry. Surely the garden was less green, the flowers less fresh, the air less balmy, and the water less transparent than before. The song of the birds had changed into a melancholy chirrup, and their eyes glowed with threatening fierceness. From the water of the basin the fish pierced the royal pair with their fiery eyes, and the breeze moved lamenting through the corridors and trees. With a woman's instinct of impending danger, Almena led the way out of the court; but the garden was plunged in a mist, which made impossible a quick exit from the sylvan entanglements. While trying to strike the main avenue, they fell in with their dromedaries browsing contentedly in the thick of the most exquisite shrubbery, with neither saddle nor rope available for use. The brutes looked unaccountably shaggy; they turned to run at the approach of their master, and did not stop until they had passed

the gateway of which Sheddad was in quest. Here the saddles were found, shabby and mouldy, were placed where they belonged, the camels having submitted to the goad, and the homeward journey began.

A deep sigh escaped Almena's breast as the distance widened between them and the enchanted city, and when she found words she began solemnly: "Sheddad, what is it we have seen and passed through? Cold runs my blood when I think of the place; and dost thou mean to re-enter it as our permanent home?"

"Thou art a woman, or thou wouldst know that what Sheddad conjured out of naught, Sheddad will as master rule and own. Are not those spirits subject to my will?" was the imperious answer.

"Thou wilt bear patiently with thy Almena, my lord; but are not the looming cities and splendid gardens often seen in the haze of the desert the dread of the lured Arab, who, mistaking them for fertile oases, rushes to destruction? Verily, the wiles of Eblis are numberless, and thy great palace is destitute of the sacred place to prove it a work of the friendly Jinn. Thy father's end be thy warning, O, light of mine eyes!" cried the woman appealingly.

"Art thou the wife of Sheddad, or of Sheddid? Let woman be timid, but no man be craven. The signet on my finger scorns infernal traps. Thou hast seen me on the awful throne destined to be the worship of nations, and thou art to share in the divine sovereignty of thy Sheddad.—But, O, Almena, why is thy voice so unlike the one I have ever heard since the days of our youthful love? It sounds as though thou art speaking to me from the hollow of a cave," spoke the son of Ad uneasily.

"Thou hast taken this question from my lips, my lord; for thy speech is so unfamiliar to my ear that, were I not near thee, I should mistake it for an echo heard in the mountains of Yemen," confessed the daughter of the desert.

There was no time for another remark. The air swarmed with thousands of lurid Cupids, each one holding a tiny harp under his left arm. Flocking together, they interlocked in such a fashion as to form a stupendous arch, perfect in shape and burning like a crescent cut from the effulgent sun. On the top of the curve alighted one larger than his compeers, his outstretched arms pointing a glittering tiara in the direction of Sheddad, whose advance was greeted with voluptuous strains

"Hail, our chief, thy sceptre sway!
Rule Irem, Sheddad, we obey!
Thy seal bade spirits be thy thralls,
Hail, god of Irem's magic halls!"

With the dying of the choral apostrophe, the treacherous vision conjured by Eblis to dispel Almena's intuitive fear of something dreadful to come faded away. The sure-footed dromedaries picked their way among the bleak rocks and the sand ridges, with not a glimmer to break the darkness nor a syllable to spur them on. Sheddad and Almena continued silent under the overpowering spell of the sight, which soared before their mental vision long after it had vanished to the eye.

Daybreak found them near a solitary cliff known for the brackish water, oozing from one of its cracks, and the scanty browsing nearby fit for camels. Turning to his fresh water supply to appease his thirst, Sheddad found the water-skin not only empty, but as dry as an old hide, while the figs he held in reserve were mouldy and hard as stone. Almena had the same experience. Unaccountable as appeared this discovery, it was less of a surprise than the cadaverous aspect of husband and wife, as they looked into each other's faces in full daylight. "Thou dost not look

like thyself, my lord; there is neither blood in thy veins nor a beam of life in thine eye," cried the startled mate of the aspiring god.

"And thou hast described thy own looks, O, Almena.—It is but the withering of our mortal substance before our beings are impregnated with immortal virtue," assumed Sheddad with an air of supreme indifference, in which, however, his heart failed to share. Almena's ghastly countenance, once the seat of radiant beauty, struck a chord of unexpressed pain in the heart of her besotted consort.

The consternation of the tribe of Ad, on learning that a dead pair mounted on two bulky *delools*² was on the point of entering their encampment, may be imagined. The news was brought by some Arabs, who, perceiving the approach of the strangers, made a sally, but hurried back with the horrifying alarm, "The dead are coming!" Whoever could run took to his heels, leaving the infirm old and the helpless young to face the ghosts, who entered the settlement and took possession of the largest tent, the one just vacated by Sheddad, who was among the first to deny himself the enjoyment of the uninvited visitors.

"If we have undergone a change, so has this place and all things hereabout in but a few days; our young camels have grown large and fat,—and who is this sleeping child?" asked Sheddad, pointing to a half-naked maiden stretched on a mat upon the ground.—"Can this be our Chaviva?"

"Our daughter!" exclaimed the mother hysterically, recognizing in the girl of seven the child of two years. "Either we see wrong or things are wrong," added the woman, greatly troubled.

"Neither this nor that; we are not the same, our sight is not the same, but the world around us is the same, only that we see it magnified, as higher beings must see; else how could the powers above take cognizance of what is going on below?" argued Sheddad with self-approving plausibility.

While Almena waited for her child to waken, Sheddad proceeded to investigate the neighborhood with the view of gathering an audience to whom to reveal himself. In vain did the hapless old men and women hide themselves from the searching eye of the cadaverous chief; he ferreted them out and warned them to beware of his wrath. "Inform the tribe, and let Sheddad know, that Sheddad and Almena have dwelt in the land of the spirits as god and goddess, and that I am come to take you into an Eden of endless felicities, if you only say, 'Lead on, Sheddad.'"

"Hast thou not dwelt with the dead all that time?" asked a trembling crone.

"No, daughter of the noble tribe; during the five days we have been away."

"Five years!" interrupted a chorus of voices. "For five years have Sheddad and Almena been missed and mourned as lost," supplemented the aged female to the unspeakable consternation of his godship. He had spent years, instead of hours, in the magic palace, and everything contributed to confirm the astounding fact. Yet, however amazed, Sheddad's faith in his superhumanity was so deeply rooted that the new revelation occurred to him as but another evidence of his supernatural destiny. To continue for five years without regular food and sleep was to him a most striking proof of his transmutation, while the many years that passed like so many hours attested the blessedness of the seat he had created.

The one man of the tribe, who was most concerned and least delighted with Sheddad's return from what he believed to be the real beyond, was his own brother Sheddad, who wished himself a thousand miles away from the spot; not that he was jealous of the rights attaching to his brother's primogeniture, but because he shuddered at the thought of meeting him, to say nothing of his

² A *delool* is a dromedary trained and used as a saddle animal, and not as a burden carrier.

aversion to the conjurer's chimerical projects. However, having nerved himself to the emergency, Sheddid faced his brother with the question whether he was determined to lead his people into a realm whence they would return like him looking more dead than alive.—“An evil influence sways thy heart, O, my brother. The children of Ad are happy, why tempt them into a snare spread by Eblis?”

Sheddad replied with a glowing outline of the Eden in store for them who would follow him. “That ye may all be convinced of the truth my words contain, this coming eve a mist shall rise from the bosom of Hadramaut, and with it shall ascend the image of the palace and city embedded in gardens like unto Paradise. Remain in the waste ye who love it; but ye who prefer the marble habitation, the cool walk, the cooler spring, the crystal bath, the delicious fruit, the mellow sunshine, the sights of wonder, and the rule of the world, to the dark tent, the scanty meal and the arid region,—are welcome to share them with Sheddad,” cried he with godlike benignity.

This offer was received with a wild shout by the fiery children of the desert, and the promised mirage was expected with intense interest. Retiring to his tent, the mighty wizard summoned the chief of the Jinn and charged him with the task of conjuring up the picture of the Palace of Irem. Sunset was the signal for every eye to turn toward the desert. With nightfall came a pellucid silveriness, which transformed the wilderness into an atmospheric canvas whereon rose, looming in perfect outline and majestic proportions, the city, palace and gardens of Irem. Wild joy yielded to a sober sense of awe before him who thus proved his claim to worshipful reverence.—“Lead us, divine Sheddad,” was the cry, followed by the taking down of tents and the loading of camels, the whole tribe being seized by the one passion, to possess and inhabit the grandest and happiest of cities. Sheddid was obliged to choose between remaining behind or going with the tribe, and he threw in his lot with the multitude, his evil forebodings notwithstanding.

The march was opened with dance and song, Sheddad and Almehna leading the motley caravan; but soon voices other than human began to disturb the pregnant silence of the dismal waste. Sheddad's name was heard articulated to the accompaniment of heart-chilling laughter. As if goaded by demons to madness, the camels grew vicious, throwing women and children from their backs and trampling them to death, so that everybody hoped for day to deliver them from terror. But there was no break in the night, although it seemed as long as three nights in one; and when light finally broke on the caravan it came so suddenly that it almost blinded the confused Arabs. And with it came a noise from On High, a noise like that of a myriad roaring lions, growing, swelling and reverberating till heaven appeared in uproar, — earth trembling, the desert glowing like a furnace, the sands rising and whirling like a cyclone of ignited gases, and exploding in vitriolic sheets of fire. Man and brute tried to bury their heads in the burning sands. The catastrophe was too terrible for flesh to survive. In his agony Sheddad felt the signet slip from his finger. Struck deaf and dumb, the son of Ad perished with his entire following, the cyclonic fire consuming them flesh and bone. Only those whom weakness or the love of little ones detained behind remained to build up again the almost annihilated tribe of Ad.

Such was the punishment of Sheddad for his aspiration to godship. His name lives in Arabia's legendary lore. Down to this day Allah preserves the city and palace as a monument of divine retribution, and numerous are the tales of straying pilgrims or lost Bedouins, who have been favored with a glimpse of it. Among these is Kalabah who, having lost himself in the desert while in search of a camel, suddenly found himself before the gate of a dazzling city. He entered it, but was so overawed by the dead stillness therein that he fled its precincts in horror, taking with him an invaluable stone as a memento. This he showed to the Caliph Madwigah in confirmation of his adventure,—as is duly recorded.

