

# King Solomon and Ashmodai

By Henry Iliowizi

It is well known that after Solomon had succeeded his father David as ruler over Israel he had a vision wherein the Lord gave him the choice between riches and wisdom, and that the youthful monarch gave wisdom the preference. In recognition of this he was not alone endowed with an understanding heart, but was given the means of acquiring great wealth, such as enabled him to build the most gorgeous of temples and the most sumptuous of palaces. The secret of Solomon's power was his possession of the Omnipotent Name engraved on his signet-ring, the use of which he was to learn by an accident.

The first great problem Solomon was called upon to solve was how to build God's Temple in compliance with the unaccountable injunction not to employ iron implements in cutting, fitting or smoothing the materials of the sacred edifice. This prohibition implied the existence of a rock-splitting instrument of which neither the King nor his wisest counselors had any knowledge. Eldad the lonely dweller of the sacred caves, the reader of the stars, the wanderer of the desert, the recorder of traditions, Eldad, who at the age of one hundred and nineteen years had no wrinkle on his face, preserving his faculties in all their strength by means of the occult sciences, this wizard who was the engraver of the Ineffable Name on the King's ring, was summoned to appear before His Majesty to answer this question:

"Thou knowest, O, Eldad, that I am to build the House of God with materials unprepared by the use of any iron implement; no doubt Providence has provided the means for the raising of His Sanctuary; my advisers have failed to give me light on the mystery; should it be beyond thy power to enlighten me on this matter, I shall not know whither to turn for the solution of the difficulty," spoke the King. To whom Eldad replied: "Know, O King, that in the beginning of things, as creation was nearing its completion, before the sun of the sixth day had withdrawn his last mellow beam from the earth, fourteen additional wonders were called into being, things which the foreknowledge of the All-knowing destined to play a part in this nether world. They are, the mouth of the earth that swallowed Korah and his rebellious followers; the mouth of the fountain known as Miriam's Well, the unfailing spring whose flow accompanied Israel through the desert, joining in the hymn of praise; the mouth of the brute that spoke to Balaam, after the heathen prophet had beaten it three times, he not having seen the angel that deterred it from advancing; the multicolored rainbow which symbolizes God's mercy to frail man; the manna, Israel's food for forty years; the staff wherewith Moses performed all his miracles; the two sapphires out of which the tablets of the Law were cut; the gems that spelt the Ten Commandments; the letters of the alphabet; the sepulchre of Moses never seen by a mortal eye; the ram destined to be the substitute of Isaac when on the point of being sacrificed; the first pair of tongs, without which no iron could ever be forged; the spirits, both good and evil, the Sabbath having begun before bodies could be formed for some souls, thus left forever disembodied; and the *Shamir*, a worm not larger than a grain of barley, but stronger than rock, which it splits by the mere touch. The *Shamir*, O, King, is the only might in creation to do the work in accordance with the divine behest. Those priceless gems of which the tablets and the letters thereon are cut have been fashioned by the *Shamir*."

"That *Shamir* shall be in my power, O, Eldad, it being there for the building of God's house, as it was there to materialize His immutable Word. But tell me who on earth claims possession of

that wonderful creature? Is it to be had by trade, purchase, strategy, or force?” cried the King, deeply agitated.

“King, beyond what I have told thee my knowledge goes not. The abyss says: It is not in me, and the ocean says: I own it not. Hitherto the *Shamir* has been beyond the reach of human eye. Whether it can be had, the future will tell. Here my wisdom ends,” concluded the hoary wizard, withdrawing from the royal presence. It was late in the evening when the King retired to a restless bed. Light and fitful as were his slumbers, his mind was haunted by weird visions of desolate scenes, cliffs infested with fierce carrion birds, and chasms teeming with venomous reptiles. The first blush of the morning found the monarch on one of his gilded balconies from which he surveyed the floral glories of his exuberant gardens, inhaling the odoriferous breezes of the peaceful morrow. Nature stood in her loveliness, and animate creation seemed to breathe peace. Suddenly there was a scream of pain in one of the towering clusters of green, and the next instant two specimens of the feathered tribes dropped at the feet of the King. In the talons of a carnivorous fowl was closed the tender wing of a trembling dove as white as snow. Moved by the impulse of pity, the King had his strong grip on the neck of the obscene bird of prey, relieving the other, but not before the victim’s wing was broken. Great as was the anger of the King to see the poor dove bleeding and helpless, his astonishment was greater at the instantaneous transformation of the ferocious fowl in his grasp; fowl no more but demon, black and mighty, swelling to enormous proportions, and beseeching the royal captor to set him free.—“Whatever thou biddest me I will do, O, master, the ring on thy finger giving thee power over Ashmodai and his legions, to which I belong doing service as commanded,” stated the dark agent submissively.

“And what cause underlies thy vicious onslaught against so pure a creature as this dove?” asked Solomon, the revelation breaking on him that his signet-ring invested him with a power akin to omnipotence.

“A symbol of purity, the dove comes under the ban of us who are of Ashmodai’s dark legion,<sup>1</sup> explained the fiend with unreserved candor.

“Thou shalt not go hence before I learn of thee who treasures the *Shamir*,” said Solomon firmly, assuming the demon to know something about it.

“What art thou seeking of me, O, master, who am one of inferior rank bending to the will of our chief Ashmodai, the mighty spirit of this world? Him thou art to question, because he is the one to satisfy thy demand,” replied the demon. “Describe his retreat to me and its approaches, and thou shalt go free,” commanded the son of David.

“He is to be found where no creature of flesh and blood can long endure; it is not heaven; neither is it earth; in the heart of the Orient, on the highest peak of the highest mountain range, a hollow summit crowned with eternal snow, holding under seal before a recess of frozen crystal

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<sup>1</sup> Talmudic angelology assigns to Ashmodai the inferior rank of presiding over the evil demons under the rule of Samaël (éàéùø àáø àëìùà); while Matatron is the recognized chief of the infinite hosts teeming throughout the universe, holding at the same time the office of benign intercession between man and Supreme Grace, and Synadalphon is the next In power, standing on earth with his head reaching to the highest cherubim (úáéçç ìöç àùàæ òøàá àîàò àçà èàì Like Samaël and Lilith, Ashmodai imper- (âîù éíôíí sonates evil in a variety of manifestations. Neither Dumah, the prince of the winds and the custodian of the dead, nor Rohab, the lord of the ocean, are to be degraded to the rank of Ashmodai who dwells in the clouds but depends for his sustenance on what the earth produces. It is to be remarked, however, that the Rabbis take the dark and the bright powers to represent physical forces co-existent with creation (çèùú ééàìí ùù úá àãë ñàòú úáàãëì úë÷ ù÷èùë) This idea is sustained by the additional assertion that the creative energy is incessant, Omnipotence calling forth daily new ministers to carry out His inscrutable designs. çë÷ ñ àòéù àáééíááë, àãðéã ãçðð çãùç ééàìíàãëð) (.èàìíàëëð

the purest spring under the heaven to give him drink, that is Ashmodai's retreat. Hither he descends from his cloud-vested realm, scans the seal to assure himself that no impurity has polluted his delicious beverage, when, having quenched his thirst, he re-seals the fountain, gives audience to his court, who flock hither to receive their orders, and, refreshed by slumber, re-ascends to control the elements and survey the work of his active host," was the information, which insured the demon's release,

In earnest consultation with his general Benaiah, Solomon matured the plan for the attack of Ashmodai's retreat, and ere long a well-equipped expedition of a few picked men headed by that undaunted warrior, departed secretly. The haunt of the demoniac chief was not only far to the south-east of the Holy Land, but it was so located that in order to approach it the adventurers had to cross deserts, traverse pestiferous swamps infested with scorpions and dragons, ford wild rivers, and bridge over chasms, only to see themselves in a labyrinth of stupendous rocks, supermounted by a chain of sky-towering peaks lost in dense fogs. Benaiah's eagle eye swept the clouded outlines of the snow-capped heights, trying in vain to locate the spot to be invaded. The impenetrable curtain of shifting fogs precluded accurate observation, and for once the dashing general felt that he was more in need of daring and of patience than of strategy. Retiring with his men to a cave at the base of the mountain, Benaiah took a position which commanded the loftiest point of the summit, hoping that something would occur to betray the object of his quest. Benaiah was struck by the contrast of the frowning mountain-crest on one hand, and the sun's pure effulgence on the other. As he had his eyes riveted on the broken summit, the dense mass of fog darkened perceptibly. A noise as of a boisterous sea repelled by a rocky shore was the precursor of a tempest and an earthquake which convulsed the entire region within and without, thunder and lightning adding to the uproar. The eternal snows on the crest rose pulverized by the fury of a chaotic storm,—a hurricane intermixed with flashes of red fire,—the whole reducing itself within a few seconds to a funnel-shaped whirlwind, revolving with furious speed, its pivot centred in a hollow betwixt mighty cliffs, rendered visible by the convulsive phenomenon. Benaiah knew what it meant, and he was confirmed in his assumption that Ashmodai was descending by observing the same disturbance a few hours later when the demon re-ascended to his airy empire.

Like a good strategist, the general took a little time to study the situation. The ascent of the mountain had to be made with great care, and the proceedings of the chief demon observed from as near a station as was compatible with safety. The climbing was attended with much toil and great danger, but the point was reached, the ground surveyed, and a hiding place secured in a recess barred by a wall of solid ice. Here everything was held in readiness for the next step.

If Ashmodai's descent startled the adventurers from a distance, nearness to the spot of his landing filled them with dismay, the atmospheric and subterranean agitation threatening to sweep them out of their hiding place. Like a thunderbolt striking to the centre of a hurricane, the demon shot down, unsealed his well, plunged his lips in the beryl fluid, drawing up a great quantity, and then sealed it up again. He was hardly ready when the table-land around him was thick with files of demons, who arrived to report what had been accomplished, and to take orders for new tasks. They were all chiefs, of various ranks, each one having legions to carry out his behests. From the reports and the schemes discussed it was clear that they represented three kinds of spirits as to their relation to mankind—of hostility, friendliness, and neutrality. There was a division of labor,—hostile, benevolent, and neutral.

It is impossible to say how the daring band of interlopers would have fared at the hands of the terrible chief and his demonic army had not Benaiah possessed the Omnipotent Name to shield

him from discovery. As matters stood the demons, unconscious of any unwelcome presence, departed, leaving Ashmodai to take his accustomed slumber, after which he darted up like a flash, with the phenomenal accompaniment of elemental disturbance as before. Now came Benaiah's opportunity. Without touching the seal on the cover of the well, the contents were drawn out through a hole skilfully bored beneath the surface of the liquid. This done, the hole was carefully closed, and another one was bored on the opposite side at a higher level, through which wine was poured to fill the emptied well. With every trace removed to avoid suspicion, and every detail ready for the emergency, Benaiah waited patiently for the next day when everything passed off as before, except the astonishment of the dreaded power when he found that his well contained wine instead of water. Doomed by destiny to fall into the trap set for him, and urged by a parching thirst, Ashmodai took but little time to consider the advisability of drinking the intoxicating beverage, balancing Scriptural texts *pro* and *con*, and soon deciding to try its effect on his semi-ethereal nature. This was just what Solomon and his general had counted on. Ashmodai had scarcely dismissed his military Council when the wine began to do its work; he felt as he had never felt before, and he discussed with himself the singular mood into which he found himself plunged, in what way he could not account for, the sensation being wholly new in his superhuman experience. Sleep was on him, and there he lay, stretched out as helpless as a senseless block. Benaiah was at hand with a chain rendered resistless by the Omnipotent Name engraved upon its links. Slipping it around the waist and the neck of the prince of demons, his potency was disposed of. Ashmodai's consternation when awakened words cannot describe. A roar of rage darkened all nature, shook the mountains to their foundation, and horrified all his legions who fled to hide themselves in the deepest chasms, even in the bowels of the earth and under the waters of the sea. For a moment Benaiah lost his speech, while his companions fell prostrate on the ground. The demon assumed every shape of horror to overawe the enemies of his freedom. In a few moments he gave himself the deterring shapes of all that is monstrous and deadly in nature, from the enraged tiger to the hissing serpent whose bite is death; all in vain.—“In the Name of the Most High, I, Benaiah, chief of King Solomon's army, do herewith command thee, Ashmodai, mighty Prince of genii, to follow me to the seat of the wisest King, who needs thy aid to build the Temple of God.”

The conjuration conquered all resistance, and the demon was led off disarmed and humiliated. Realizing the hopelessness of gaining anything by violence, Ashmodai feigned submissiveness, assumed the form and manner of a most polished and affable courtier, and, ushered into the presence of the King, charmed His Majesty by discourse of things far above the comprehension of ordinary men.

“Thou art to deliver to me the *Shamir* so that God's House be built without the use of iron implements,” said Solomon to Ashmodai.

“The *Shamir* is not in my keeping, great King; the spirit of the ocean has entrusted it to the fowl *Awza* that it be preserved forever in a state of perfection,” replied Ashmodai, adding, “and no man can come near that bird.”

“Tell me where *Awza* breeds her young,” commanded the King.

“South of the great desert there is a mountain with a towering cliff and walls so steep and smooth that a spider has difficulty to climb it. On the top of that rock is the nest of *Awza*, a fowl with claws of steel and eyes of fire, swift as the swallow, larger than the vulture, and fiercer than the eagle,” answered the demon.

Again Benaiah was placed at the head of an expedition, and many were the hardships before the solitary pile rose before the eyes of the indomitable general. There was neither a bird to be

seen nor a nest. The head of the precipitous rock was so high above the clouds that there seemed no possibility of scaling it. But Benaiah was full of resources and had anticipated the difficulty by bringing with him a pair of pigeons. Having left a man with the female bird this side of the mountain, the general made a detour for the opposite side with the male, tied a cord to his foot, and allowed him to rise. Guided by his instinct, the pigeon soon soared above the rock, descending to join his mate. This accomplished, a heavier cord was trailed over, followed by a still heavier rope strong enough to lift a man. This man was Benaiah who, in the dark of night, was hauled up by his attendants. Awza was thus to be circumvented.

Great was the general's joy when he found himself before the nest occupied by its fledglings, Awza being happily away in search for food. A transparent stone is laid securely over the nest. Awza arrives, finds her fledglings imprisoned, hungry, and crying. With motherly tenderness she hurries to split the stone by applying the *Shamir*. Benaiah's great chance is come. From behind a boulder he bursts forth and frightens the bird; she drops the invaluable worm. Benaiah pounces upon it like an eagle. The male bird is soon on the spot. A desperate struggle ensues between the enraged birds and the daring Benaiah. He is armed against iron claws, and is not deterred by fiery eyes. He has the trophy and he holds it, placing it in due time at the feet of his master, to the great surprise of Ashmodai. Thus is the building of God's Temple proceeded with, the *Shamir* splitting and fitting the materials.

Solomon's thirst for wisdom grew with his growing consciousness of the painful limitations as regards its acquisition by man, and Ashmodai availed himself of the King's avidity for knowledge in the hope of throwing him off his guard. He taught him the secrets of the vegetable and mineral kingdoms, and gave him the clue to intercourse with animal creation, including the mind-reading faculty. As a final achievement he suggested the weaving of a prodigious air-float large enough to transport the King on his throne, an army fully equipped, and a host of spirits. On this air-ship, sixty miles square, Solomon, ever accompanied by Ashmodai, traversed great distances, soaring above the clouds, higher than the eagle, and looking down on earth like a god. Woven by genii of the most subtle essences of nature, the texture of that air-island was of azurean translucency, green-blue in color, floating in the sun's radiance like a rippled sea bathed in gold.

But the marvel of the marvelous equipage was its circular pavilion vast in extent and fashioned of rainbow-tints, which photographed, enormously magnified, whatever came within the range of the eye that controlled its course, laying bare the mysteries of land and ocean, and revealing the multifarious activities of the spirit-world under the rule of Ashmodai. Here Solomon's wonder-throne, ascended by seven steps, each one guarded by a pair of magnificent animals chosen from the respective species of the lion, the elephant, the tiger, the bear, the serpent, the antelope, and the eagle, stood on a dais, lofty and brilliant, eclipsed only by the monarch's crown which rivaled the sun in splendor. Solomon began to believe that he was really more than human, and Ashmodai lost no chance to swell the autocrat's overbearing vanity. Solomon was so delighted with his triumph over the chief of demons and the deep secrets he had wrested from him, that he indefinitely deferred setting him free long after the Temple had been dedicated with grand ceremony, and, thanks to rock-bursting *Shamir*, cargoes of gold were pouring into the royal treasury.

One early morning the sovereign of the richest kingdom upon earth bade the winds raise and waft his imponderable encampment toward the rising day, he being enthroned in his pavilion with Ashmodai at his feet. Up soared the magic float, lighter than air, transparent as ether, and stronger than adamant, hurrying eastward as an undulating firmament, suffused with purple and

gold. The soundless vast above, coupled with the radiant flood that broke from the East, and the amazing kaleidoscope of animal and spirit life startlingly reflected by the walls of the glowing pavilion, overawed the mind of the most daring of kings, who exclaimed: "How great the all-powerful God, in whose infinity we are not more than an atom in the universe of matter!"

"Great King, thy head is the microcosm of the immensity whose contemplation overpowers thee. The heavens hide nothing which man cannot own if he but knew how," said Ashmodai with a pull at his chain.

"Thou art speaking riddles, potent spirit. Give me certainty that my grave is not the end, and thy chains shall be broken," cried Solomon.

"King, disembodied thou art my like, spirit of the everlasting Source, unchanged by change, but for the time dimmed, because engrossed with what is unethereal here. Yet even in thy mortal coil I can give thee, if restored to liberty, by virtue of thy signet-ring, a glimpse of things above thy highest dreams, provided thou wilt give me leave to stimulate thy spiritual essence for the transmutation by harmony such as, at thy bidding, I can cause my spirits to produce," promised Ashmodai.

"Then let the air vibrate with melody such as will fit my grosser substance for thy suggested change," commanded Solomon, thoughtlessly.

At this the atmosphere trembles with the voices of a myriad chorus, throwing the King into an ecstasy of delight, ravishing his soul and causing his tears to flow. In his ecstatic transport the monarch bids Ashmodai to come within the reach of his hand; a touch breaks the chains of the wily demon, another movement of the hand delivers to him the signet-ring—and then—the symphony sounds like the hissing of twenty thousand serpents, night swallows the rays of the sun, a burst as of a hundred batteries shakes the firmament, a tremendous pillar of lurid flame shoots up into the height of azure, from its core darts forth a bundle and vanishes beyond the sea;—it is Solomon whom, by the might of his regained breath, Ashmodai has hurled to the end of earth,<sup>2</sup> allowing him to fall unhurt; the ring the demon drops into the deep. All this is the work of a moment, after which the atmosphere is clear and bright, the hissing ceases, and Solomon is on his throne,—that is it is Ashmodai in the guise of Solomon robed in royalty to mock the power of the castaway autocrat.

Who could be wise enough to unmask the fraudulent usurper? Who would blame a spirit for avenging an outrageous humiliation? The court was informed that the chief of demons had escaped, and everything went on as before, including the tender attention due to the inmates of the royal harem.

Poor Solomon picked himself up in a far distant land, astonished and confused. His memory failed him; he stood transformed in face and form, and only darkly remembered that he had been a king somewhere. From his situation he could well infer that he had had some foolish dream of pomp and lordship. In reality he was a homeless beggar, shattered in health and unsound in mind. Starvation forced him to beg for bread, and vagabonds were his bed-fellows in the wretched retreats open to the outcasts of humanity. His hours were divided between waking and dreaming; sane moments were followed by invasions of melancholy. Sometimes he doubted that his name was Solomon, that the world around him was real. A hard time was in store for the befooled wise man. Slowly the faculty of memory returned, and the singular circumstances which placed him where he found himself rose clearly before his recollection.

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<sup>2</sup> The old version of the Talmud has it thus: "Solomon sent Benaiah to bring him the Shamir from Ashmodai, and he threw him out of his kingdom."

However, the knowledge of things immaterial which Solomon had acquired by his intimate intercourse with Ashmodai afforded him some help and comfort during his long wanderings from place to place,—unhonored, often the target of ridicule to such as heard him descant on his Solomonic pretensions. Great was his pain on hearing one day a strange traveller speak of the real Solomon's wisdom, his glorious rule, and the uncounted wealth that reached him by land and sea. "Can it be that I am mad? If Solomon reigns in Jerusalem, who am I?" asked of himself the confounded beggar king, and prayed humbly that he might be enlightened as to the nature of his condition. His pride was broken.

One late afternoon the royal wayfarer arrived, tired and hungry, before the gate of an inhospitable city. At first the unfriendly inhabitants denied him admission, but on hearing him claim the title of Solomon the Wise, they allowed his majesty to enter, convinced that they had a madman before them. Beyond this their hospitality did not extend. With a crust of bread as his supper, the unpitied monarch found no softer couch than the turf of a roofless enclosure, with many animals as his companions. The night was cold, and the situation tormenting for a starved man who had nothing wherewith to cover himself. After a few hours of restless slumber, Solomon felt his limbs so badly cramped that he was obliged to rise and walk to keep his blood in circulation. In the dimness of a clouded moon Solomon came near an old mare full of bruises, and so emaciated that one had no difficulty in counting her ribs. Solomon's experience rendered him accessible to sympathy with life in misery, and he derived sad consolation from the sight of other creatures who were even more wretched than he. He reflected that man is the source of great torments and wretchedness here below in inflicting pain on creatures entrusted him by a kind Providence.

It was about midnight when the royal beggar rose again to renew his walk, finding it impossible to drown his worry in oblivious sleep. The moon shone brightly, and the deep silence held the weird landscape in magic repose, forming a strong contrast with the agitation suppressed in the king's bosom. Presently familiar notes fell on Solomon's ear; it was the speech of the ill-fated mare, who spoke words of sorrow to her inexperienced family, giving them her maternal advice, now that her end was near. With bated breath the man listened to the story of a life-long agony, recited by a creature of the noblest species under human control.

"Yes, I have often been whipped and kicked by my cruel master. Ah, hunger, too, and thirst,—the heat by day and the cold by night, I endured; toiling, toiling under the rod, and now that I am old he has turned me out that I perish unsheltered, unfed. Too weak am I to drive off the flies which torture me, and death will not come. Once I was led to believe that we horses had an advantage over the animals that are slaughtered for food. The sight of a victim's blood shed by the carnivorous lust of man made me shudder. I have seen the head of the fowl twisted off, have seen lambs swim in their blood, have seen the calf taken for slaughter from the side of her dam who rent the air with lamentation, have seen cattle felled by the deadly club in the hand of glut-tonous man. And have I not, in my younger days, been used in the chase? Mounted on me, my master, in company of his like, thought it great sport to unleash a pack of bloody hounds in pursuit of a frightened hare, fox, or deer. Hunted down, the agonized creatures fell, to be torn to pieces. Man is our devil, helpless, dumb animals that we are. Enough is there in nature to glut his hunger. The hen supplies him with her eggs, the cow with her milk and with butter and cheese, and the lamb with its wool; while we carry him and his burdens, multiply his strength in battle, and gratify his love of pomp and pleasure. Honey, fruits, mushrooms, and a variety of grains and vegetables should protect animate creation from his deathful greed."

“There will be a dead fellow to-morrow,” said a lusty colt made hot by his dam’s tale of woe. “That master of thine will not long be master of mine; one kick of my hind legs will do for him; let him try it with me; he won’t whip me a second time.”

“Child, never try it, if thou lovest me,” cried the intelligent, but much-abused mare. “A vicious horse, as they brand one who resents abuse, is sure to get his double share of torture; I have tried it and had the worst of it. Kick once your master and his vengeance will take years to bleed you to death.”

“But I won’t stand it. I will kick right and left, break windows, bones, vehicles, break whatever comes in my way, and break myself if it must be. They will be kept busy watching my legs; I won’t stand it,” answered the colt determinedly.

“Thou mayest as well kick against a rock and have thy hind legs broken, or throw thyself into a millpond and be drowned, as seek revenge by hurting thy master. We are not unavenged, however. Nature, our common mother, does not allow her offenders to go unpunished. If man would simply be content to live on what the animal and vegetable kingdoms freely give him, he would be a much happier, tamer, healthier and nobler being. Chase and slaughter create that ferocious temper which revels in bloodshed, so that his own kindred bleed, victims of his atrocity. Child, I, too, have revolted in my time. Exasperated by the cuts of a whip in the hand of a miscreant, I once made a wild break for deliverance, fled madly through the street, dashed against everything in my way,—dashed against a throng of men, women and children, who tried vainly to escape,—did all the harm I could, and landed bruised and breathless among the terrified children in an open schoolyard, killing one and hurting others. Thereafter I was treated as the savage beast, was kicked in and out of time, my legs being fettered and my head held fast by a chain tied to the wall. When employed, the bit in my mouth was cruelly tight; and that was all I gained. A higher will must have decreed this to be our lot,” concluded the starving mare, lowering her head mournfully.

Solomon, whom the equine group had not noticed, approached and astonished them by addressing them in the language they so well understood. The luckless mare raised her head, and her glazed eyes flashed as the soft voice of the king uttered this:

“Thou art right, Oh, noble creature, in charging thy master with unkindness and ingratitude toward thy high-spirited race that has rendered him invaluable service. Yea, man is as yet a child and a slave of habit, but will in due time rise to an understanding of his duties toward the myriad lives around him, not created for wanton abuse or ruthless destruction. Indeed, he pays dearly for the gratification of his lower instincts, the benign Creator having meant him to be prompted by the gentler, deeper, sweeter qualities of his being. The day will come when he will shudder at the idea of sustaining his life by the immolation of others, when the flesh-eater will be seen in the same light as the cannibal.—My name is Solomon, and in my kingdom they called me The Wise, but my wisdom fails to enlighten me why things are as they are when they could be so much better. Believe me, man has tortures of body and soul, and has, like you, his devil to plague and circumvent him. Holy Writ contains beautiful words in praise of the horse, he, armed with thunder, nobler than the lion, fearless as the eagle, graceful as the zebra, strong as the wave, quick as the wind, the pride of the warrior, the pleasure of the prince, the seat of the king. Once restored to power, I will remember the burden of thy grievance, faithful mare, and thy race will be benefited as far as my will shall prevail.”

The horses were pleased with the sympathetic words of their distinguished friend, and the ambitious colt offered to carry him as far as he wished. Solomon had plenty of leisure to explain

the difficulty into which he had been plunged by the wiles of Ashmodai, and that he was sure of restoration the moment he could enter the gates of his beloved Jerusalem.

“May thy wisdom, thy kindness, and thy kingdom spread far and wide, Oh, King! so that my helpless offsprings be spared the torments that I have endured during the length of my days!” prayed the man, with a tremor which betrayed extreme weakness. The next instant saw the poor brute tremble, stagger, fall and expire.

If Solomon had counted on an easy triumph over his formidable adversary, his arrival at Jerusalem, after years of untold hardships and trials, undeceived him. The city showed every indication of great prosperity; the kingdom stood firmly established, and the brilliance of the royal Court had no rival in the gorgeous Orient. Embassies came to pay the homage of principedoms and empires near and far, bringing presents of rare animals, gold, costly products, and precious stones, and they departed overawed by the superhuman wisdom of Israel’s mighty ruler, who amazed the ambassadors not alone by addressing each one in his native language, but by showing a minute acquaintance with their secret matters of state, and by reading their hidden thoughts. The envoys reported to their sovereigns that a demi-god had come to reign over an earthly kingdom.

For a shabby mendicant to overthrow a power of Ashmodai’s devices and resources was indeed a business to make even a Solomon despair of success.

Having entered the city, the beggar-king sought the haunts of the paupers without breathing a syllable as to his identity, lest Ashmodai be alarmed by his presence, which was a circumstance to be feared. Solomon the beggar knew that he looked so unlike Solomon the Wise that he long hesitated to approach his whilom faithful Benaiah, who, innocent of the demon’s fraud, continued as dashing and as loyal as ever before. The attempt at an interview resulted in the general’s throwing a silver coin to get rid of the importunate beggar, who dared accost him as though he was his equal. In his despondency Solomon turned his back on his endeared capital, roamed about for many days distracted with grief, until, having caught sight of the sea, he fell prostrate on the shore, prayed in great humility, wept and fell asleep. He had a dream in which Eldad, who had died during his wanderings, appeared to him in the guise of an angler, unloosening a large fish from his hook which he presented to the dreamer. A scream in the air startled Solomon from his sleep, and a slap on his cheek by some cold thing brought him to his feet. Before him lay a fish in contortions, above him two birds were soaring, one higher than the other, who, in their fight for the prey, evidently had allowed it to drop on the sleeper’s face. Parched with thirst and stung by hunger, Solomon tore the fish open, when, lo! the ring, Eldad’s gift, the all-controlling charm, was there. No sooner was it on the King’s finger than an appalling earthquake shook the shore, while from the heart of God’s city burst a prodigious pillar of smoke and flame, losing itself in the deep azure. Useless to add that this was the trail of Ashmodai’s precipitous flight, who, immediately apprised of his adversary’s triumph, fled as fast as he could, spreading consternation as he went.

Solomon by this time had enough experience with the chief of demons to last him for the rest of his life; yet nothing else but Ashmodai’s subsequent vengeance was the cause of his falling from grace in after years, so that the wisest of ancient kings not alone forfeited the power vested in the Omnipotent Name, but closed a glorious career so ingloriously that he died an object of pity to some of his subjects and of hatred to the rest. Having secured the means of building the Temple without the aid of ordinary implements, he would have acted wisely in dismissing the chief of invisible hosts instead of detaining him unjustly, and preying into mysteries not intended for man. Solomon’s aspiration to be more than human, while it gratified his vanity, brought on

eventually his ruin, while his mind was never at ease, even under the constant guardianship of the “Heroic Sixty,” his close body-guard.

NOTE.—“We also tried Solomon, and placed on his throne a counterfeit body; afterward he turned unto God and said, O Lord, forgive me, and give me a kingdom which may not be obtained by any after me; for thou art the bestower of kingdoms. And we made the wind subject to him; it ran gently at his command whithersoever he directed, and we also put the demons in subjection under him, and among them such as were every way skilled in building, and in diving for pearls.” (Koran, Surah 38.)

The Talmudic version of Solomon’s temporary dethronement runs thus:—Conscious of the fact that the stability of his kingdom depended on the signet on his finger, Solomon had but one trusty concubine named Amina whom he entrusted with the invaluable jewel during moments when the body’s natural functions rendered its removal obligatory, it bearing the ineffable Name. One day Sakhar, a malicious demon, appeared to Amina in the shape of Solomon, possessed himself of the ring, usurped the throne, transformed or deformed the real monarch, and ruled the land to suit himself, altering the laws, and doing all the mischief a devil is capable of doing. In the meantime Solomon, distracted by the incident, and wholly unknown to his court, wandered about, depending on alms for subsistence. This misadventure of the wise king was brought about by an image of himself made for worship at his order by another devil to comfort his favorite wife, Jerada, the beautiful princess of Sidon, whose father had fallen during the siege of that city by Solomon’s army. As soon as the worship of the image ceased, the devil fled the palace and threw the signet into the sea. A fish swallowed the thaumaturgic ring, was caught, and providentially fell into Solomon’s hand, thus possessing him of the omnipotent charm which enabled him to recover his kingdom. As to Sakhar, he was caught, a stone was tied around his neck, and he was ruthlessly thrown into the lake of Tiberias. Sakhar standing for the Hebrew noun *sheker*—falsehood, and Amina for *emunah*,—faith or firmness, the deeper sense of the allegory needs no further elucidation. Among the most familiar legends which cluster around Solomon’s rule is that of his green carpet woven of silk and of a magnitude sufficiently ample not alone to hold his throne, but an army of men to his right hand and a host of spirits to his left. At the king’s command the winds transported the entire equipment, slow or fast, according to his majesty’s pleasure, while the royal head was shaded by an enormous flock of birds on the wing. Countenance is given to this fable in the Koran,—“And his armies were gathered together unto Solomon, consisting of genii, and men, and birds.” (Surah, 27.)