

from

The Rose Garden

Written by
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Translated by
Francis Gladwin

"It was the season of spring; the air was temperate, and the rose in full bloom. The vestment of the trees resembled the festive garments of the fortunate. It was mid-spring, when the nightingales were chanting from the pulpits of the branches; the rose decked with pearly dew, like blushes on the cheek of a chiding mistress. It happened once, that I was benighted in a garden, in company with one of my friends. The spot was delightful, the trees intertwined; you would have said that the earth was bedecked with glass spangles, and that the knot of the Pleiades was suspended from the branch of the vine. A garden with a running stream, and trees from whence birds were warbling melodious strains: that filled with tulips of various hues; these loaded with fruits of several kinds. Under the shade of its trees the zephyr had spread the variegated carpet. In the morning, when the desire to return home overcame our inclination for remaining, I saw in his lap a collection of roses, odoriferous herbs, and hyacinths, which he had intended to carry to town. I said, "You are not ignorant that the flower of the garden soon fadeth, and that the enjoyment of the rose-bush is but of short continuance; and the sages have declared, that the heart ought not to be set upon anything that is transitory." He asked, "What course is then to be pursued?" I replied, "I am able to form a book of roses, which will delight the beholders, and gratify those who are present; whose leaves the tyrannic arm of the autumnal blasts can never affect, nor injure the blossom of its spring. What benefit will you derive from a basket of flowers? Carry a leaf from my garden: a rose may continue in bloom for five or six days; but this rose-garden will flourish forever." As soon as I had uttered these words, he flung the flowers from his lap, and, laying hold on the skirt of



my garment, exclaimed, "When the beneficent promise, they faithfully discharge their engagement." In the course of a few days, two chapters (one on the comforts of society, and the other containing rules for conversation) were written out in my notebook, in a style that may be useful to orators, and improve the skill of letter-writers. In short, whilst the rose was yet in bloom, the book entitled the Rose Garden was finished: but it will be truly perfected on gaining a favorable reception at court, and when it obtains an indulgent perusal from that prince who is the asylum of the world, the shadow of the Most High, the ray of providential beneficence, the treasury of the age, the refuge of religion, the favorite of Heaven, the mighty arm of the victorious empire, the lamp of the resplendent religion, the most splendid of mankind, the aggrandizer of the faith, Sa'd, son of Atabuk the great; that potent monarch to whom nations bend the neck; lord paramount of the kings of Arabia and Persia; sovereign of land and sea; inheritor of the throne of Solomon, Muzaffar al-Din, may God perpetuate the good fortune of both, and prosper all their righteous undertakings!"

Out of the Pan into the Fire

I had grown weary of the society of my Damascus friends, and therefore, made my way into Jerusalem desert, where I enjoyed the companionship of the beasts; until the time came when the Franks made me their prisoner, and kept me with Jews in a trench in Tripoli digging clay. One of the leading citizens of Aleppo, with who I had been formerly acquainted, chancing to pass by, recognized me and said, "Sirrah, what manner of life is this?" I said, "What can I say?"

I fled from men to mountain and to plain,
For I had nothing from mankind to gain;
How is my case? Regard me in this den,
Where I must sweat with men that are not men.
Better to hand in chains, when friends are there,
Than dwell with strangers in a garden fair."

He had compassion on my condition, and with ten dinars procured my release from bondage. He took me along with him to Aleppo, and there made me marry his daughter, adding a dowry of a hundred dinars. Some time passed. She was a woman always scowling, disobedient and growling; she began to give me plenty of her shrewish tongue, and made life wholly miserable for me.

A bad wife comes with a good man to dwell:
She soon converts his pleasant world to hell.
Beware of evil partnership, beware:
From hellish torment, Lord, thy servant spare!

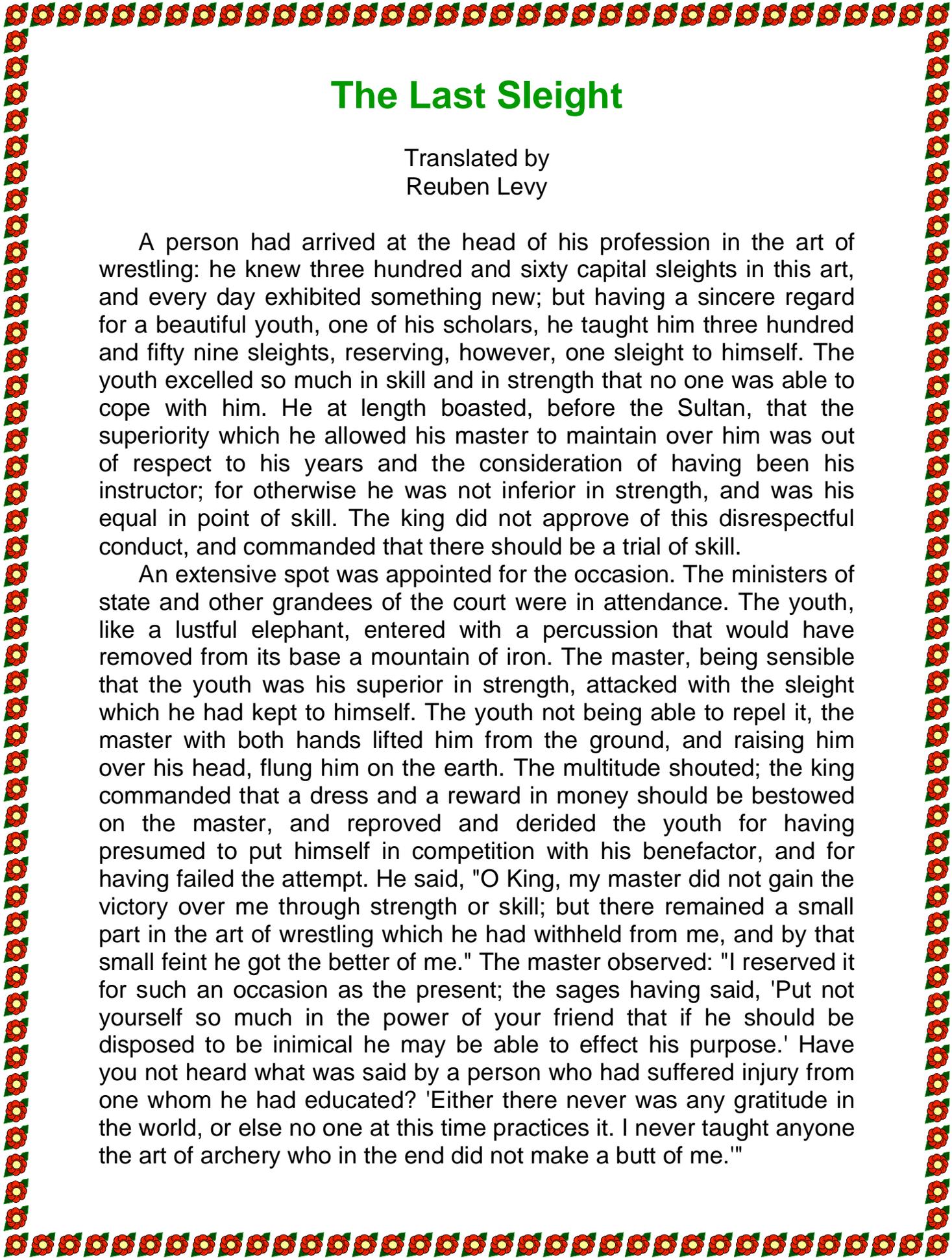
Once in a torrent of abuse she said, "Are you not that man whom my father bought back from the Franks?" I said, "Yes, I am that man whom your father bought back from the Frankish chains for ten dinars, and delivered into your bondage for a hundred dinars.

I heard that a sheep had by a great man been rescued from the jaws and the power of a wolf; in the evening he stroked her throat with a knife, whereon the soul of the sheep complained thus: "Thou hast snatched me away from the claws of a wolf, but at last I see thou art thyself the real wolf."



On Contentment

I never lamented about the vicissitude of time or complained of the turns of fortune, except on the occasion when I was barefooted and unable to procure slippers. But when I entered the great mosque of Kufah with a sore heart, and beheld a man without feet, I offered thanks to the bounty of God, consoled myself for my want of shoes, and recited: "A roast fowl is to the sight of a satiated man less valuable than a blade of grass on the table; and to him who has no means nor power a burnt turnip is [as good as] a roasted fowl."

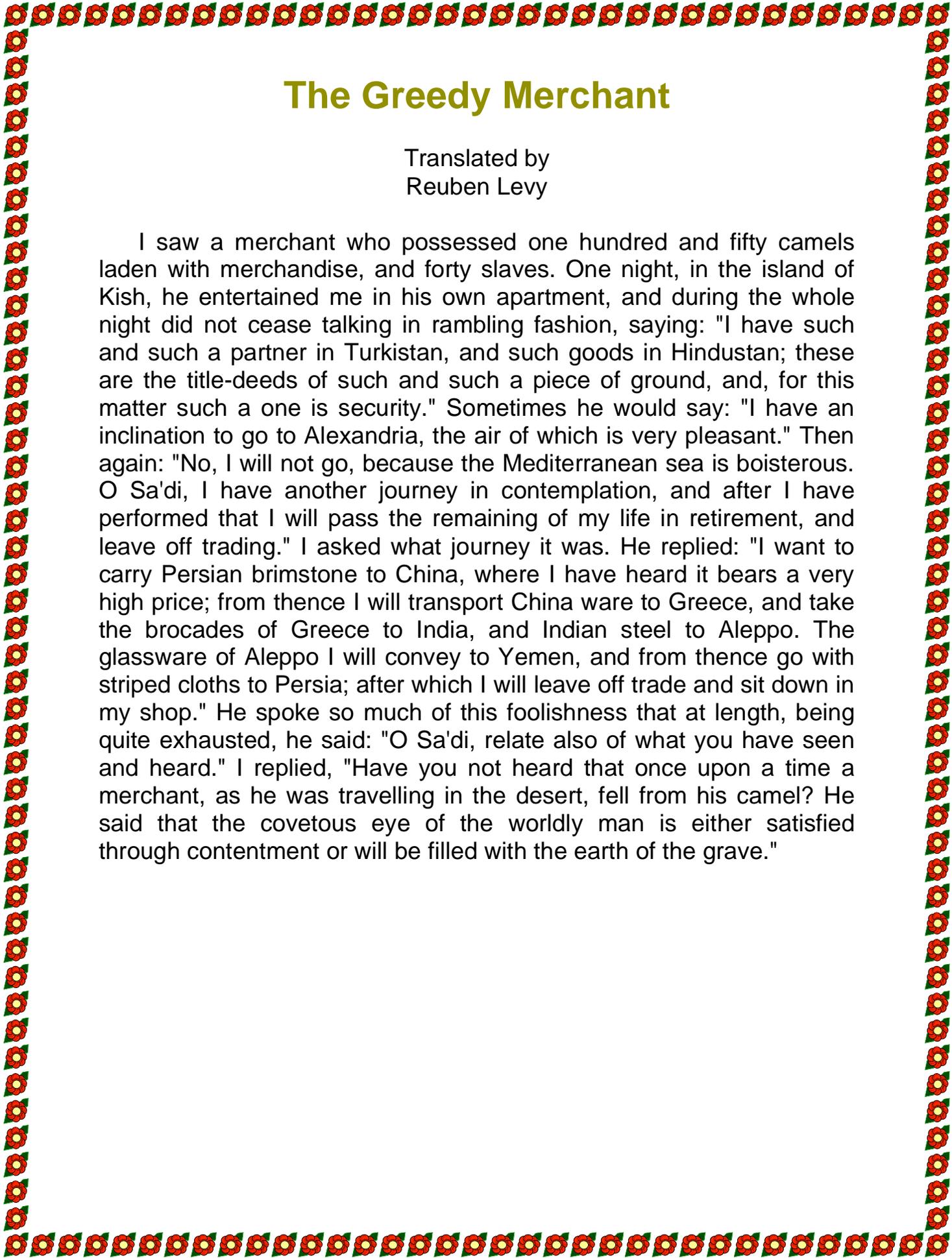


The Last Sleight

Translated by
Reuben Levy

A person had arrived at the head of his profession in the art of wrestling: he knew three hundred and sixty capital sleights in this art, and every day exhibited something new; but having a sincere regard for a beautiful youth, one of his scholars, he taught him three hundred and fifty nine sleights, reserving, however, one sleight to himself. The youth excelled so much in skill and in strength that no one was able to cope with him. He at length boasted, before the Sultan, that the superiority which he allowed his master to maintain over him was out of respect to his years and the consideration of having been his instructor; for otherwise he was not inferior in strength, and was his equal in point of skill. The king did not approve of this disrespectful conduct, and commanded that there should be a trial of skill.

An extensive spot was appointed for the occasion. The ministers of state and other grandees of the court were in attendance. The youth, like a lustful elephant, entered with a percussion that would have removed from its base a mountain of iron. The master, being sensible that the youth was his superior in strength, attacked with the sleight which he had kept to himself. The youth not being able to repel it, the master with both hands lifted him from the ground, and raising him over his head, flung him on the earth. The multitude shouted; the king commanded that a dress and a reward in money should be bestowed on the master, and reproved and derided the youth for having presumed to put himself in competition with his benefactor, and for having failed the attempt. He said, "O King, my master did not gain the victory over me through strength or skill; but there remained a small part in the art of wrestling which he had withheld from me, and by that small feint he got the better of me." The master observed: "I reserved it for such an occasion as the present; the sages having said, 'Put not yourself so much in the power of your friend that if he should be disposed to be inimical he may be able to effect his purpose.' Have you not heard what was said by a person who had suffered injury from one whom he had educated? 'Either there never was any gratitude in the world, or else no one at this time practices it. I never taught anyone the art of archery who in the end did not make a butt of me.'"



The Greedy Merchant

Translated by
Reuben Levy

I saw a merchant who possessed one hundred and fifty camels laden with merchandise, and forty slaves. One night, in the island of Kish, he entertained me in his own apartment, and during the whole night did not cease talking in rambling fashion, saying: "I have such and such a partner in Turkistan, and such goods in Hindustan; these are the title-deeds of such and such a piece of ground, and, for this matter such a one is security." Sometimes he would say: "I have an inclination to go to Alexandria, the air of which is very pleasant." Then again: "No, I will not go, because the Mediterranean sea is boisterous. O Sa'di, I have another journey in contemplation, and after I have performed that I will pass the remaining of my life in retirement, and leave off trading." I asked what journey it was. He replied: "I want to carry Persian brimstone to China, where I have heard it bears a very high price; from thence I will transport China ware to Greece, and take the brocades of Greece to India, and Indian steel to Aleppo. The glassware of Aleppo I will convey to Yemen, and from thence go with striped cloths to Persia; after which I will leave off trade and sit down in my shop." He spoke so much of this foolishness that at length, being quite exhausted, he said: "O Sa'di, relate also of what you have seen and heard." I replied, "Have you not heard that once upon a time a merchant, as he was travelling in the desert, fell from his camel? He said that the covetous eye of the worldly man is either satisfied through contentment or will be filled with the earth of the grave."