

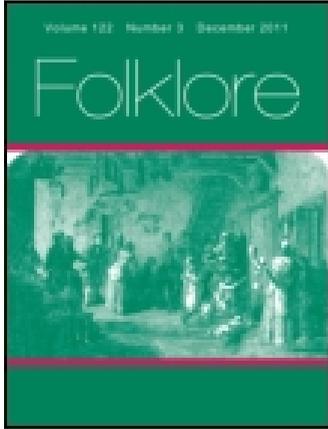
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FAIRY TALES FROM INEDITED HEBREW MSS. OF THE NINTH AND TWELFTH CENTURIES.

By M. GASTER, Ph. D.

IT may sound paradoxical and not at all complimentary to the students of folklore, but it is none the less true, that we know now just as little about the origin of fairy tales, as was known half a century ago. Theories we have plenty and to boot, and faddists not a few; but one cannot say that there is wisdom in the multitude of counsel. I for my own part may be considered as representing one set of faddists, probably consisting of one single individual; but no other theory has as yet been able to solve the difficulties of origin sufficiently; and until a better explanation is forthcoming I stick to my view, the result of many years of research and study.

I hold that tales appear only at a certain stage of intellectual development, and after the time of previous literary achievements. They do not stand at the beginning of literature, but at its acme. The words "tale" and "fairy tale" are elastic terms, which often do duty for many a peculiar string of events, true or imaginary, bound together. Take any collection you like, and you will find in it fairy tales and simple jokes, beast-parables, and cumulative puzzles. The

true tale is the recital of a series of events, grouped in a given way, which if expanded might become a novel, if curtailed, a moral maxim.

I know I am treading dangerous ground in trying to define a thing whose very charm is want of definition, trying to press into the limit of space and time what is boundless and infinite. But one must start somewhere, and better start from a half-truth than from none at all.

The individual element in the origin of a tale has already been pointed out by others. One man must first tell a tale. This is taken up by others, and enlarged or assimilated. The question of the transmission is another moot point; that is, if we admit only one centre for the origin of one or more tales, and not independent origins of one and the same tale. This is for me out of question. The identity between the various tales even in distant countries is not the result of mere chance. It would be a miracle of the highest order to find such a similarity or identity between the intellectual products of various nations, limited wholly and solely to so complex a thing as a tale with a number of incidents. In everything else there is profound disparity; only in the tale there should be identity, and this not due to extraneous circumstances! There are things which men with theories will swallow without looking too closely at them; I decline to make the experiment or to follow the example.

I am asking myself, How have I come to know a great number of tales in my youth? Born and bred in the East, I had greater facilities of coming in contact with the most varied elements of the populace than those given by the artificial and highly secluded form of education in the civilized world of the West. I had thus the opportunity of growing up under the same influences, to which the nations of the West had been exposed during the period of personal intercourse of a primitive, slow, and more enduring character. The nurse from Hungary, and the housemaid from Wallachia, the Albanian with his sweetmeats, and the

peasant with his fowls and eggs, the pilgrim from the Holy Land, and the hawker, the Gipsy, all and each came and conversed and told tales. When a circle was formed, sometimes in the garden, often before the gate in the twilight of the setting sun, they would gather and listen attentively. At times one of those present would interrupt the speaker to remind him of an incident he had forgotten; and not seldom would the audience follow the recital with vivid and strong expressions of approval or dismay. When one had finished, others would follow, thus exchanging and communicating, spreading and developing the tale; and assisting it in its travels through many lands.

One bond united them, and this has hitherto not been sufficiently recognized, viz.: the belief in the reality of the tale. There was not one who for one moment would doubt the reality of such a courageous prince and a supernatural beauty; the speaking of animals, and their power of assistance; the qualities of living and dead water; the drakos and his mighty club, the vampire, the sun and moon as persons,—why it would have been rank heresy to doubt their existence. It would with one blow have destroyed that world of hope and delight, that ideal conception of things that may at any time fall to the share of mortals, portrayed in the tale. The tale would lose its attraction, and would speedily die. This is the reason why the school with its dogmatism and with nicely-balanced programmes, with mathematics and natural science, has proved the deadly enemy of the fairy world. It has destroyed the belief in the supernatural, the fantastic, and irrational, if you like, and it has left the children poorer than they were of yore, at any rate as far as the poetry of life is concerned. They are stranded high and dry upon the rock of exact sciences.

The element of religious belief, and I take this expression in the widest sense, is one of the most important features in the history of the origin and spread of fairy tales. And

this has been systematically neglected by the students of fairy tales. The reason is not far to seek. European folktales, and especially those in modern collections, have lost most, if not all, of the religious element. The more we go to the East, the more the religious character of the tale will become pronounced. In the West few of the supernatural beings have been allowed to subsist; they are on sufferance and wait to obtain leave to go. Their surroundings have departed, and we meet only with such beings in our tales as have not yet died out from the cruder forms of belief. The popular mythology of the Slavonians, or Albanians, or modern Greeks, or Rumanians is incomparably richer than that of any of the western nations. Their fairy tales are therefore fuller, richer, more vivid, and to my mind much more true to the original form, than any of the pale counterparts in western folklore. I know the Celtic faddists will turn fiercely upon me and point out to me modern tales in ancient MSS. of the 15th century, which may be copies of the 12th, and these in their turn copies of the 5th or more ancient texts. It is not here the place to discuss questions of literary criticism; but one point is certain, at least for those who have had occasion to compare ancient texts with later copies. They are never absolutely identical. A century will make a difference, often a very pronounced difference, between the original and the copy. The copyist is always also author *in partibus infidelium*. He handles the subject very freely. He will add and subtract, just as his fancy dictates to him. There is no such scrupulous observance of the author's rights as we would fain imagine. The substance may in some cases remain the same, but the accessories will often undergo a process of transformation so radical as not to be found any longer in the later copy.

This happens to literary monuments. How much more is this the case with the oral tale, subject to the changes and freaks of each new speaker. Small wonder therefore that the religious element should drop out in the West, thus

obscuring one of the main points of origin, and one of the main sources of attraction and dissemination.

But, if we go to India or to Egypt, more so to the former, the Jātaka has retained fully the religious character. The legends of saints and the miracles of the Apostles in the Apocryphal Acts, the story of Psyche and the legend of Adonis-Tammuz, the parables of Barlaam stand in the service of religion, and are carried on the crest of the religious wave, which spreads and covers one continent after the other.

The abiding factor in human life has been, for centuries, religious teaching; and whatever appeared under that form, was doubly welcomed. The tales and legends are so many means to teach a moral lesson, to inculcate a peculiar dogma, or to bring home to the minds of the people some abstract ethical truth. The standard of these maxims and the trend of the religious teachings conveyed through the parable are in absolute harmony with the religious environment. A Buddhist tale may teach transmigration-of-the-soul; an Egyptian, metamorphosis, or change of man into animal. Another will describe that form of Hell which is recognised by the dogma of his Church. But all point to one source, the religious and didactical, as the originating factor in the first place, and in the second, as one of the causes of the transmission. In this transmission the first change that will set in will be to transform, and then to drop slowly that religious element. It gets out of harmony. It is no more understood. Popular fancy will not fasten on it; but will cling to the poetical excuse in the form of an entertaining tale. Local deities and current beliefs will take the place of the old deities of the original form, when and where there is such a local mythology to supplant it. But where the fairies and goblins have departed from the hearth of the farmer, and have deserted the crossings of the roads, the tale will lack the poetical machinery, and get impoverished and attenuated to the extreme. It has lost,

already long before, its original meaning and has now become a mere skeleton, a shadow of what once was a picture saturated with rich colouring.

If my view is correct, and historical investigation seems to favour it, we shall easily understand why some of the fairy and other popular tales appear either meaningless or downright cruel and barbarous. The prince has been transformed by the wizard of the West, into the uncanny shapeless dog. A charm has been thrown upon him, which no one, if not this Society, will be able to break. The spell will, however, not be broken, if we start upon the wrong track. The comparison which has hitherto been made at random must give way to a certain system. The similarity between certain general points and the eclecticism in the comparison of incidents, which lies at the root of many far-fetched conclusions of modern researches based upon them, is to my mind fallacious. We dare not follow in our study the same flight of fancy, which delights us in the fairytale, or we shall never leave dreamland or Cockayne.

I always pre-suppose that we start from the assumption of migration, that tales wandered from land to land. In our research, I would try in the first place to follow geographically in the wake of that journey. Now, it is a remarkable fact that the tales of adjoining countries show much closer similarity to one another, than with those collected in a distant land. Even in cases of totally different races, and some of quite recent origin, but all now living in that neighbourhood, such as Turks and Greeks and Albanians, this similarity is startling. How this could be explained on the anthropological tack, or on any other, except on that of mutual borrowing, passes the wit of man. I am prepared to hear ingenious attempts to explain it away, but facts have a peculiar obstinacy; they will not be altered by any doctoring or hectoring. If, as I believe, the ancient Byzantine Empire formed the bridge between

the products of East and West, and the Frankish Empire to have been one of the means of bringing Byzantine lore near to the Atlantic, the route which the tales have taken will be perfectly clear.

In order to determine whether any given tale has retained its primitive form, or has been modified in its transmission, I would then examine the tale as to its religious character. As I have already indicated, I use these words in the broadest possible meaning. I would look for the amount of belief and things believed in contained in the tale; and the greater the prominence which is given to it, the more ancient would I consider that tale. It must contain a certain moral or ethical point, if it is not merely a joke, or the tale of simple clever feats, such as the clever thief (Rhampsinit). Beast tales pure and simple are another class of similar tales which have lost their original meaning, and have turned either to satires of existing circumstances (Reynard), or pure and simple tales of animals, although endowed with human faculties.

It would lead me too far astray to follow this question up here, although it stands in close connection with my views as to the easterly home and the route which the migration of tales took. Byzantium can be shown in this case also as the connecting link.

If these views of the religious (ethical) character of the tale be true, and also the criterion for the classification of tales in a chronological and geographical order, guided by the retention of that feature or by its disappearance, these views must be borne out by literary investigation. The older a tale is, the more prominent must be this character, and the more recent the tale is, the more bare and bald. If we then compare the versions that have come down to us in a written form with their oral counterpart, the same difference would have to be found, viz.: that the older MS. or printed version will contain more mythological or ethical (or didactical) elements, than the parallels in modern collec-

tions, which have undergone that change of shedding the skin.

Here our real difficulties commence. Old collections of fairy or other tales are extremely scarce. Egypt, with but one or two exceptions, leaves us thus far in the lurch; and Indian old fairy tales are distinctly different from European.

The literary tradition stops short at the twelfth century. I am speaking of Europe at large, and that part of it which stands under Latin influence. Classical antiquity lay buried under the ruins of Rome. From India and Egypt it is a far cry to those countries and to that epoch where and when the first "Exempla" appear and Syntipas, Bidpai and Barlaam have not yet obtained European citizenship. The bridge over that gap from East to West, and from antique to modern life, is formed undoubtedly by the Rome of the East—by the Greek Empire, which held sway for centuries over Asia Minor as well as over North Africa and the South of Europe, up to Venice; in fact, over all the countries of the eastern shores of the Mediterranean waters. This political unity helped the free intercourse between East and West. Life in Byzantium is half oriental under Phokas, Chalkondylas, and the Comnenes; and there is the place where a poem such as that of Digenis Akritas could have been written, and as early as the tenth century. It reminds one both of the Shahnameh of Firdusi and of the epical cycles of Charlemagne and Arthur in France and England. The intercourse between various nations was possible only there; and for that very reason I hold that the folklore of the Balkan peninsula has retained more of its ancient colour than any other folklore of Europe.

What we want is to find ancient literary parallels, at any rate some centuries old, and to compare them with their modern parallels. If my conjectures are right, then the old texts will resemble more closely the versions collected in the ancient Byzantine Empire and will be more remote from the

other variations. I do not hide from myself the difficulty which may beset our paths also in this direction. Very much, if not everything, depends upon the skill of the modern collector; and again, if a parallel is not to be found in these collections, we are far from justified in assuming that it does not exist among those nations. If not found in one spot, it often turns up in another spot, and the *argumentum ex silentio* is no argument at all.

I have thus far been roaming about in the wide and limitless field of airy speculations, befitting one lost in the wondrous world of tales and legends. I have tried to sketch a new line of study, so to mount up to the fountain of the imaginary stream of tradition. But hitherto we have been walking through a dried-up bed of the river: will it lead us to the water of life, by which the chopped up heroes are called back to life; or will it all vanish when the charm is broken? It is time, therefore, that I return to the world of stern realities and explain to you how I came to lead you so long, and, I fear, so weary a way. It was because I wished to introduce you to the old parchments and the treasures they have kept faithfully for so many a century.

I have now the honour to introduce you first to a remarkable volume of miscellaneous nature in the Bodleian Library, containing among other things, close upon 100 moral tales. Of these 30 or 40 constitute, thus far, the oldest "Preceptorium" on the Decalogue, being "exempla" arranged according to the Ten Commandments. The other 60 and more, are independent legends and tales. This MS. is famous for the fact that it contains a Hebrew—Old-French glossary and is older than the year 1,200. It belongs at latest to the second half of the twelfth century and was written either in France or here in England. It is thus older than Jacques de Vitry. But the date of the copy is not that of the original composition. Most of these tales and legends are copied from much more ancient sources,

and with but few exceptions occur again in another MS. (this in my possession, *Cod. Or. Gaster*, 82) belonging at latest to the tenth century, written probably in Palestine. It is here not the place to dilate on the date of this collection. Suffice it to say, that from internal evidence I place the date of the original compilation to be not later than the fifth century. No name of a person living after the fifth century is mentioned in the collection, of which the older MS. is thus but a recent copy and that of the twelfth century a still more recent one.

If we compare the parallel stories in both collections we shall find here again my views corroborated. Although the edifying element is still strongly represented, some incidents in the tales have been modified in the younger MS., and this modification continues in later versions. In these MS. we have thus far the oldest examples of genuine tales. One of these is a true fairy tale in the strictest sense of the word. I have selected only four to bring before you to-night. You will easily recognise in them old acquaintances, but somewhat changed. The motive is the same, but the setting is peculiar. They belong to well-known cycles and are curious specimens of ancient tales of fairies and genii. They are by centuries older than the Arabian Nights, and, except the Jātakas and the Egyptian tales, are probably the oldest extant specimens.

I commence with the story of the religious disputation between a heathen and a Jew. The comparative literature has been studied by Cosquin in connection with No. 7 of his collection (I., pp. 84-94). The oldest parallel belongs to the *Libro de los Gatos* of the fourteenth century. Our text is thus the oldest representative, and close upon 1,000 or 900 years older than the oldest European version. In our text the religious element is the reason for the tale, and the peg to hang it on. Instead of a disputation between the followers of two religious systems, in Christian

Europe an abstract ethical principle was substituted, viz: right or wrong, which of the two prevails? So in Russia, Greece, Servia, &c. This has been still more attenuated in western parallels, and only a good and bad fellow have taken their place in Lorraine, Tyrol, Italy. Worse still is the Norwegian parallel, where one cuts out the eyes of his companion because he had deceived him. In the old oriental text, Satan, the demon, plays the *rôle*, and is proud of his deception when speaking to the other two demons of this exploit. The others reveal their evil doings, and how to counteract them. The man loses only money and obtains more in return. The blinding of the good in some European versions is only an increase of horror, to accentuate the reward. Thus in western tales, such as in Lorraine, Brittany, Basque country, Germany, Flanders, &c., animals have taken the place of the demons in Greek, Russian, Gipsy, Servian, and other parallels. The Albanian parallel (Hahn, 30) is still more identical with our tale, as far as the king's daughter is concerned and the wonderful delivery of her troubles. Without going into more details, we find the tales of the Mediterranean basin more akin to the old text than their northern variants.

The second tale, a real fairy tale, is remarkable from many a point of view. It reminds one remotely of Amor and Psyche, and still more of the golden lock of the ancient Egyptian tale, by which the princess is found. The second half belongs to the cycle of "La belle aux cheveux d'or" (Cosquin, No. 73), but also to "Le roi d'Angleterre et son filleul" (Cosq. No. 3). The grateful animals and the water of life and death are the prominent incidents in the second half, whilst the first belongs to a totally different cycle of deathbed promises. The father requests his son to do a certain thing and the strict fulfilment of this command brings the reward with it.

A late version of this tale was known through the Jewish-

German *Maassebuch* of the sixteenth century; the German translation of Helvicus (1612) and Tendlau's *Fellmaier's Abende*. None of the versions quoted by Cosquin, Köhler, Shaineanu, and others, goes back beyond the sixteenth century. Taking it at its lowest estimate, this version of mine belongs at latest to the twelfth century. The existence of this text has been unknown hitherto. It has therefore been assumed by all those who knew it only from the *Maassebuch* that it was a German tale, which the compiler of that book of legends had introduced into it. Out of twenty-five longer and shorter "exempla" this would have been probably the only example not taken from ancient Hebrew writings. But my discovery of the Hebrew text sets this hypothesis thus far at rest, but not the question of its origin. Considering that in the Bodleian MS., out of one hundred tales, the Hebrew sources of almost all can be shown, it is not likely that this and perhaps one or two similar should be the only exceptions. German origin is quite out of the question, as this MS. has been written in a French-speaking country. Not a single trace points to Europe as the original home of this tale, embedded in the middle of a large collection. It does not stand at the end as an addition made by the scribe, but is in the very midst of a copy of a much older MS. I have already pointed out the connection between this MS., written in the west of Europe, and the older collection written some centuries previously in Palestine. To a similar collection must this tale also have belonged, as will be shown later on.

The third tale, taken from the more ancient collection (*Cod.*, 82) enables us to prove the fact of changes occurring in more recent copies. The same tale is found in both collections, and one of the most important elements which gives to the old recension quite a pathetic form is entirely omitted in the second, viz:—the love of woman daring death, whilst father and mother shrink in dread from the

contest, and leave their only son to the mercy of the angel of death. One is surprised to find this fine romantic touch in an old oriental tale. This tale belongs to the cycle of the mediæval Byzantine epos of Digenis Akritas. At the close of his life he fights death, but unsuccessfully. The fight of man (hero) with Charon is now one the best known themes of modern Greek folk-songs. Many years ago I got a Macedo-Rumanian version from a seller of Turkish Delight in the market of Breslau. In this song, the hero asks in turn his father, mother, brother and sister to take out the snake from his bosom. All refuse except the maid of his love, who pulls out from his bosom, not a snake as he pretended, but a girdle of gold, studded with diamonds. It would be somewhat hazardous to connect with our tale the numerous tales of Death acting as godfather, etc., in fairy tales, or the cheating of Death by the power conferred upon the hero through three wishes granted to him by God (Christ or St. Peter). The connecting links must be found first, although there can be no doubt as to their belonging to one cycle.

Last, not least, we have in No. 4 another peculiar tale from the Bodleian MS., to which I know scarcely any parallels in European literature. Portions of it resemble the cycle of the lost child ultimately found in great honour. The disputation of the crows has a particularly oriental ring about it. German legend tells of the snake asking Charlemagne to deliver judgment (Grimm, *Deutsche Sagen* II., p. 130); but that is all we find of parallelism in the two tales. In a Rumanian translation of a Turkish (Arabic?) tale called *The History of Skinder* (a MS. in my possession), we find thus far an absolutely identical parallel with the first half of the Hebrew version. The further development of the tale is different in both versions.

Fortune has now played into my hands another MS., no less remarkable than those two I have been dealing with hitherto. This also is a collection of tales, but written

mostly in the sixteenth century, and what is more interesting, somewhere in the North of Persia. It forms as it were the connecting link. For we find in it a variation of tale No. 1 taken from the very old collection, and also a parallel to No. 4, taken here from the Bodleian MS. This fact proves now that also those tales for which oriental Hebrew sources were not known, had none the less come from such eastern collections; and are not borrowed from some western source. The differences between these two versions are no less characteristic. They prove my theory, that oriental tales have kept in their home more of the mythical and religious original element, and that the tale in its migration becomes less complete, and is impoverished to a certain extent. The European copy is a modification and materialisation, and there are besides profound changes in the accessorial elements. Though the canvas is the same, the design on the whole the same, the colouring, however, is different. From No. 2 it is also evident that the Bodleian text is not original: instead of *three* things, Jochanan does only *two* for the queen. Similarly half of the prophecy of the birds has dropped out of the European text, and the reason for the washing of hands: these are an illustration of the changes in No. 4. I append, therefore, the Hebrew-Persian version of this tale.

We have here, moreover, almost all the elements out of which mediæval romances were spun. Crescentia and Veronica are only the counterpart of such similar simple tales, not to go as far back as the *Clementine Recognitions* with their legend of Faustus and Faustinius, or the legend of Eustathius Placidus.

But I must not go on rambling over countries and centuries, as I might be lured away from the object of my paper, viz., to bring before you the find I was fortunate enough to make, and to point out that the literary unbroken tradition for at least 3-4 tales can be traced, in one literature, as far as 1,000 years back, if not more, and the great

importance of which this fact may prove to be for the history of fairy tales in the lands of the West. Not that these have been borrowed directly from our MSS.; but the way one came, others could and probably have come too. Whence those tales may have come originally, and where they may have been told for the first time, is a question that I consider still premature to answer. The versions which I have read here to-night do not look like the very first attempts in telling tales. They show unmistakable signs of the reason of their existence and the cause of their dissemination. The ethical-religious principle is prevalent in all, and finds its counterpart in those parallels which by their geographical position lie nearer to the country where, close upon 1,000 years ago, we find them delighting the listeners and carrying them away from the stern reality of the temporary victory of cunning and wrong, to the poetical justice of the fairy tale in the reward of the hero.

I. *The Heathen and the Jew.*

Once a heathen and a Jew were walking along together, when the heathen remarked to the Jew : " My religion is better than thine." " Not so," replied the Jew ; " on the contrary, mine is better than thine, as it is said, ' what nation is there so great that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law.' " The heathen then said : " Supposing it is decided my religion is better than thine, then I will take thy money ; but if it be decided that thy religion is better than mine, then shalt thou take my money." The Jew replied : " I agree to accept this condition." As they were walking along, Satan appeared to them in the form of an old man. They thereupon asked him the question as to whose religion was the better ; and he replied : " That of the heathen is the better." After they had proceeded a little farther, Satan appeared to them again, in the form of a young man. They put the same question, and they received the same reply. When they had walked a little farther, he appeared to them again in the form of another old man. On asking the same question again, the identical reply was once more given. The heathen therefore took the Israelite's money. The Israelite then journeyed on in fear of his life, and lodged in the open. When a third of the night had gone by, he heard some spirits speaking to each other. Two of them asked a third : " Where hast thou been to-day ? " to which he replied : " I met a Jew and an Aramean, I laughed at them and gave evidence in favour of the heathen." They then asked another : " Where hast thou been to-day ? " To which he

replied: "I prevented the daughter of an emperor from giving birth, after she had suffered the pains of travail for seven days. But if they had taken some green leaves of the tree overhanging their throne, and had squeezed them upon her nose, she would have given birth immediately." They again addressed a third spirit: "Where hast thou been?" He replied: "I stopped up the well of a certain province. But if they had taken a black ox and had slaughtered it over the water, it (the well) would have been open again." The Jew gave great heed to their conversation; and, rising up early in the morning, he went to the country of the emperor (spoken of), and found his daughter in travail. He then told one to take some green leaves of the tree overhanging their throne, and to squeeze them upon her nose. This was done, and she immediately gave birth. The king thereupon presented the Jew with a large sum of money, because this was the only child he had. The Jew then journeyed to the country in which the stopped wells were to be found, and told the people to take a black ox and slaughter it over the well, after which the water would flow as usual. They did so, and the water flowed. The inhabitants thereupon presented him with a large sum of money. On the morrow he met the heathen who had taken his money; and the heathen expressed his surprise by saying: "Have I not already taken all thy money from thee; how is it that thou art such a rich man?" He then related to him what had happened. "Then I will also go," he said, "and inquire of the people of that place." He therefore journeyed on and lodged in that field; but the three spirits came and killed him, for it is said, "The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead." (*Proverbs* xl., 8.)

II. *The Princess with Golden Hair.*

There was once a pious old man, who was exceedingly rich. He had but one son, whose name was Jochanan. This Jochanan had a beautiful and pious wife. When his father was about to die he called his son and exhorted him to occupy himself with God's precepts and to continually perform acts of charity. He bequeathed to him all his wealth, saying: "When the days of thy mourning are over, go into the street and remain there until thou seest a man come to sell his wares in the market. The first man who comes, buy from him his wares and take them home, and take good care of them." The old man soon died and was duly buried. After his son had observed thirty days of mourning he remembered his father's wish, and accordingly went forthwith into the street, where he sat until he saw a man carrying a magnificent cup (or bowl). Jochanan asked him whether he was willing to sell the cup he was carrying. He answered: "Yes." "How much do you want for it?" "One hundred pieces of gold," said the man. "Let me have it for sixty pieces," said Jochanan. The man refused and passed on. Jochanan remembering his pious father's wish, called after the man and said: "Give me the cup, and here are the hundred pieces of gold which thou hast asked." The man replied: "If thou wilt give me 200 pieces of gold I will give thee the cup; but if not I

must go on my way." Jochanan then said: "I will not give thee more than the 100 pieces which thou askedst." He went away. Jochanan then thought that he must purchase the article in order to carry out his father's wish. He thereupon called after him again, and said: "Here, take the 200 pieces which you asked." The man replied: "If you are satisfied to give me 1,000 pieces in current money, I will give you the cup; but if not I must go." Jochanan, then seeing that every time the man, when recalled, charged more, bought it perforce in compliance with his father's last wish. He took it home, paid the 1,000 pieces, and put it aside. He sometimes tried to open it, but was not able. When one Passover Evening they (he and his wife) were about to celebrate the first evening he asked his wife to bring the cup he bought and place it upon the table in honour of the festival. The pious woman did as requested. Jochanan was this time able to open it, and found a smaller cup (box) within the larger.

On opening it he found a small scorpion. They were both amazed at the sight. Jochanan took it out and gave it some food. It crawled round his neck, embracing and kissing him. When it was satisfied it entered the smaller cup, which Jochanan closed and placed in the larger one as it was before. Jochanan then said to his wife: "My father did not request me to do this for nothing. We shall feed this scorpion and bring it up, to know what the end of it will be." They fed it every day, so that it grew and was not able to enter the smaller cup. It was therefore placed in the larger one; but it grew in such immense proportions that a separate place had to be made for it. Jochanan's wealth decreased very much through this; because the scorpion ate whatever they possessed, until it grew to such an immense size as not to be able to enter any house or court yard, and continued to grow until it was like a huge mountain. When Jochanan had nothing more in his possession to give it to eat, he wept and said to his wife: "What shall we do in order to provide it with food; we have nothing left; it has devoured everything we had." His wife suggested that he should sell his robe, and she would do the same to-morrow, to give it food.

They did so. When they had nothing else left Jochanan prostrated himself before it to God and said: "Thou knowest, O Lord, that I have given my all in order to perform the wish of my father, and am left with absolutely nothing. Reveal to me what is the use of this scorpion (dragon) which I have reared, and what will the end be?" The scorpion thereupon opened its mouth and said: "God has heard thy prayer, and has given me permission to speak to thee. I know that thou hast done whatever thou couldst for me, and hast not refrained from giving me everything in thy possession to enjoy. Now therefore, make any request thou pleasest and I will comply with it." Jochanan answered and said: "Teach me then all the languages of the world." He did so; and Jochanan was able to understand the language of animals, birds and beasts, and all the languages of the world. The scorpion further said: "Let thy pious wife, who took so much trouble for me, and who was so zealous to serve me, let her ask anything she wishes and I will grant it." She said:

"O my Lord, provide me with sufficient to maintain myself, my husband, and my household." "Follow me," he said, "and bring wagons, horses, and asses, and what animals you can with you, and I will load you with silver and gold, with precious stones and pearls." They followed him until he brought them to a forest, the name of which was Ilai. Into the depth of this forest they penetrated. The scorpion began to whistle, and there forthwith presented themselves before him all the wild beasts of the world, serpents, scorpions, &c. Every one of which brought a present of silver and gold, precious stones and pearls, and cast them before him, just as people bring presents to a king.

And the scorpion said to Jochanan and his wife: "Go and fill your sacks and wagons, fill whatever you possess, so that you may have abundance of everything." They did so. Jochanan then said to the scorpion: "Be not angry with me if I ask thee to tell me who thou art and from whence thou hast come." It replied: "I am the son of Adam. I am getting smaller during a period of 1000 years, and during the next 1000 years I gradually grow. I was not included in the command: 'On the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'" Jochanan then said: "Since thou art the son of Adam, do thou bless me." He said: "May God deliver thee from the evils which will come upon thee." Jochanan in amazement asked: "What are these evils which are to come upon me?" But he gave no reply, and departed peacefully; and Jochanan returned to his house a very rich and wise man, and there was not a man whose wisdom was as great as his.

The king, having heard of his profound wisdom, sent for him to ask him to solve difficulties on very many subjects, and found him to be exceedingly clever and well versed in everything. The king therefore loved him more than all the other wise men. Now this king had not married. One day his counsellors came to him and said: "It cannot be pleasant to thee to live in this state, without any heir to succeed to the throne after thee. For when thou art dead the kingdom will remain without an heir and will fall to a stranger, because thou wilt not have a son to succeed thee. Therefore let a beautiful girl be sought for the king in all the provinces of the kingdom, or thee to take to wife." But the king refused to listen to them. They, however, came a second and a third and a fourth time, until he said: "Well, since you really wish me to marry, give me three days' time, and I will then reply whether it is right to marry or not." They did so. On the second day, while he was sitting in his courtyard in deep meditation, a raven perched upon him and brought between its legs a very beautiful golden hair, which fell upon the king. On the third day he brought this hair to his counsellors, and said: "You wish me to marry. Well, if you can bring that woman to whom this hair belongs I shall be pleased to marry her; but if not, I will execute you." "Give us," they said, "three days' time to know what to do." He gave it to them. They thereupon counselled together and found that there was not any man in existence able to do this, except Jochanan; for he was skilled in all languages, and his equal was not to be found in all the land. On the third day they came to the king, and said: "There is a certain wise man

in thy kingdom named Jochanan, who knows all the languages of the world. He is the only man who is able to do what you ask." The king thereupon sent for him. In the meantime it happened that a certain bird flew over Jochanan's house of learning and, crying, said: "May God deliver thee, Jochanan, from the evils about to come upon thee." When Jochanan heard this, he was much alarmed, for the scorpion had blessed him with the very same words. The servants of the king then came to Jochanan, and said: "Arise, come unto the king; for he has sent for thee." Jochanan trembled very greatly. He rose, went to the king, and prostrated himself before him. The king then said to him: "I have heard that thou art very wise, and of great understanding, knowing all the languages of the world. Now, I wish to take a woman to wife, for the law of the kingdom forbids a king to remain unmarried and without children. Therefore go and bring this very woman to whom this hair, which a raven brought to me, belongs; for I know that this hair belongs to a woman. Her I desire." Jochanan replied: "There is not a king, prince, governor, or ruler, who has ever made such a request as thou hast made, to seek a woman to whom the hair which thou hast in thy hand belongs." The king said: "If thou wilt not bring her to me, I will cut off thy head and those of thy people." "If so," replied Jochanan, "then grant me three years' time to seek her and bring her to thee." He granted it to him. Jochanan immediately went to his house, called his wife and family, and told them the whole matter. Then he, his wife, sons, and daughters wept on account of his sorrow. He, however, with the consent of his wife and family, went in the direction of the forest of Ilai for he said: "I may peradventure meet the scorpion whom I reared and brought up." He took with him three loaves of bread and ten pieces of gold. He penetrated the depth of the forest and met a huge dog, the like of which he had never before seen. The animals of that forest were unlike any others, and of immense stature. This dog, who was crying and howling, said: "God has created me so large and so different from any other dog that I am not able to find sufficient food for my want, for 'a handful will not satisfy the lion.' If I were as small as other dogs I could maintain myself with very little. Hast thou created me to die of hunger?" Jochanan said: "God has not created thee to die through hunger, for his mercies extend to all his creatures. Take one of these loaves which I have, and eat." It did so, and said: "May God deliver thee from all manner of troubles which are about to befall thee. May he grant me, that I be able to reward thee as a return for the food which I eat, as a return for this kindness which thou hast done to me." Jochanan went further, and came upon an immense raven, the like of which he had never seen. It cried and said the same thing as the dog. Jochanan gave it another of his loaves. The raven blessed him for it in exactly the same manner as the dog. Jochanan went on his way, and on coming out of the forest saw a river before him. He thereupon went and sat down by the river side and there ate the remaining loaf which he had, and drank some water. Just opposite him he saw a fisherman, who said to him: "Wouldst thou like to

buy the fish I have caught?" He replied: "Yes." "Wilt thou give me for them the ten pieces of gold which thou hast in thy bag?" Jochanan was amazed, and said: "Who told thee that there are ten pieces of gold in my bag?" "Nobody," replied the fisherman, "except God." Jochanan took them and gave them to him. When he opened the net he found in it but one very beautiful large fish, which was worth 100 gold pieces. When the fisherman saw that the fish was so immense he was angered to death at the bargain which Jochanan had made, and cast the fish before him (Jochanan). It spread itself before Jochanan, and said to him: "My lord, thou knowest that I am too large for thee to carry, and even if thou wishest to eat me thou wilt have ample with but a little piece of me. Do therefore what is upright and good, and cast me into the river from which I have come, and with the help of God I will pay thee back the sum which thou hast given for me. May God be with thee and deliver thee from the evils which are about to come upon thee, and may he grant me to reward thee for the kindness which thou hast shown to me." At these words Jochanan cast the fish into the river. The fisherman, seeing it, was very angry and said: "Why didst thou cast the fish back into the river? Thou hast acted foolishly, for it was worth 100 pieces of gold." Jochanan replied: "I did this on account of what is written: 'And his mercies are upon all his creatures.'" He rose, and while walking by the river side saw on the other side of the river a large handsome town situated upon the river. Outside the town there stood two women. One was the queen of that place, the prettiest woman in the whole country. The other woman was her handmaid. The queen said to her handmaid: "See this poor man on the other side of the river; he is coming after me and wishes to take me with him to wed me to a king whose wickedness is unparalleled. He has never seen me, nor has he heard from me; but a raven took one of the hairs of my head and brought it to him. He thereupon sent this good man after me. I shall have to go with him if he is able to do three things which I shall ask him. Do thou go and tell the boatman to bring him to me." The boatman did so, and brought him before the queen. Jochanan stood before her, and made obeisance to her. She replied by saying: "Blessed art thou who comest. Whence comest thou, and whither dost thou go?" He replied: "I have come from a distant land to seek a woman the hair of whose head is like this hair which I carry with me." "Stay with us one month," she said, "and we shall give thee what thou seekest." He stayed with her. At the expiration of the month Jochanan came to the queen and said to her: "Tell me whether I shall be able to find what I seek in thy kingdom." "Yes," she said, "I who stand before thee am the very woman whom thou seekest, and here is the proof: my hair is the same as the hair which thou carriest. Know, now, that I will go with thee; but first thou must perform three things for me if thou wishest me to go with thee." Jochanan then said: "Do not impede me. If I do not bring thee to the king within four months, know that the remainder of my people must perish." She thereupon said: "I possess two pitchers; and I wish thee to

bring me one full of the water of Hell, and the other full of the water of the Garden of Eden." Jochanan thereupon wept and said: "Who is able to do this?" She said: "If thou art not able to do this, I will not go with thee." "If this is so, then bring me the two pitchers and I will do what I can." When they were brought to him, he went immediately across the river and travelled until he came to the forest of Ilai. There he sat down, and weeping in bitterness of his soul prayed, and said: "May it please thee, O God, to send the raven to which I gave of my bread, and which promised to repay me in some way or another." The raven came and perched upon him, and said: "I am here to do thy bidding." He then took the pitchers and hung them upon the raven's neck, and said: "Bring me one of these (pitchers) full of the water of the Garden of Eden, and the other full of the water of Hell. "I will do what thou biddest," said the raven. It departed on its journey. It came and, immersing a pitcher in the river of Hell, filled it with the water of that river; but the water was boiling hot, so that one could not put his finger into it without scalding himself, and had it not been that the mercy of God was upon it the raven would have been burnt. From thence it went to the river which flows in the midst of the Garden of Eden and filled the other pitcher with its water. The raven then dipped itself in the water (of that river) and washed its body, after which its flesh was healed of the wounds and bruises which it had received from the waters of Hell. It then took up the pitchers, went to Jochanan, and said to him: "Behold, my lord, I have done as thou hast commanded me." Jochanan then took the pitchers and went to the queen. He said: "Behold, my lady, the pitchers full of the water of the Garden of Eden and Hell, as thou hast bidden." When the queen took them she looked at the waters and recognised that the water of Hell was very hot and had a very bad odour, while the water of the Garden of Eden was very cold and its smell was that of sweet spices. The queen was thereupon exceedingly rejoiced, and said: "There is yet another request which thou must perform for me. Twenty-five years ago my father died and gave me the ring from his finger. It contained a very precious stone, the like of which is not to be found in the whole world. One day I went out for a walk by the river-side, and the ring fell from my hand into the river. My servants sought for it, placed a dredge in the water, and carried the water to another place, and yet could not find it. If thou canst bring it to me, I will go with thee without delay." Jochanan said: "How can one possibly find a thing which has been lost in this river now twenty-five years ago?" She replied: "If thou wilt not bring it to me, I will not go with thee." Jochanan then went by the river side until he came to the spot where he cast the fish which he once bought. There he sat down and wept. While he was still speaking and praying, the fish appeared, and said: "O my lord, I am ready to fulfil thy wish. I know what thou seekest, and God knows that it is not in my possession; but I know, and am able to recognise that fish which took it and in whose possession it is still, but I must first arraign it (the fish) in judgment before Leviathan, to whom I must relate the whole case." That fish went to Leviathan, and said: "There is a

certain good man by the river-side," and he related to him the whole story. Leviathan then said: "Go after that fish and ask it whether it knows where that ring is, and I will intercede on thy behalf to return it to the owner." It went after that fish and brought it to Leviathan, who said to him: "Thou possessest a certain ring, which thou hast taken and found at such and such a time. Restore it to this fish, and it will carry it to the pious man who is standing at the brink of the river. All his people are bowed down with sorrow on account of this ring." This fish then handed it to the other one, and so it was brought to Jochanan. But when the fish spat it out from its mouth on the ground, a huge swine snatched it, swallowed it, and departed. Jochanan wept in the bitterness of his soul and, crying, exclaimed: "Woe unto me, woe unto me." The fish was also exceedingly angered at it, and said to Jochanan: "I have not the power to do anything more in this matter; but may God grant thee the request of thy heart and bring thee forth from thy trouble to freedom." The fish then departed and went on its way. Jochanan then said: "O Lord, may it please thee to bring the dog to me, so that I and it may go out together to seek that swine, if it is possible to find it." While he was thus speaking the very dog came up barking, and it said: "Beloved, I have already performed thy request and thy desire; for I met the swine that took the ring from thee. I killed it, tore its inwards, and took its entrails out of its body. They are now lying on the ground. Come, and I will lead thee to the place, and thou shalt open the entrails and find it within." Jochanan went there and found the swine dead. He opened the entrails and found the ring within. He took it out and went on his way greatly rejoicing. The dog also departed. Jochanan came to the queen and gave her the ring. When she saw it she took it and kissed it, and was exceedingly glad. Jochanan then said: "Since God has prospered the way whither he has sent me; let us now go away together to my native place and country; for I have performed whatever thou hast asked of me. Do therefore what is right, and let us not tarry." She replied: "Since this thing cometh from God I cannot refuse thee, but will go with thee to whatever place thou wishest to take me." They then arose, went together, and came to the palace of the king, who had sent in quest of her. When the king heard of their coming he went out to meet them, he and his horsemen with him, and brought them to his palace. When they arrived at his palace, Jochanan heard that his wife had died, that his sons were taken captive, that they had lost whatever remained to them; for the counsellors who envied him had plundered all his property and taken them captive. When Jochanan heard this, he was exceedingly grieved for his wife and his sons, and wept and cried on account of them.

When they (his sons) heard that their father had returned they were exceedingly rejoiced. They came to him and related to him all the trouble which happened to them. He then freed them, and they remained with him. He was beloved and favoured by the king because he had brought him a most

beautiful woman ; one so beautiful was not to be found in the whole kingdom. The king thereupon desired to wed her at once, and to lead her to the wedding canopy ; but she answered and said : " It is not customary in my country as soon as one speaks to a woman to marry her immediately. Grant me twelve months' time." The king replied : " I will fulfil all thy requests and entreaties ; do what seemeth good in thine eyes." Now Jochanan was much beloved and favoured by the king and queen, so that the king took the ring from his finger and, presenting it to him, appointed him controller of all his household and the ruler of everything which he possessed. On account of this the counsellors envied him, and said to each other : " Unless we take counsel together to slay this man, he will now requite us for all the evil which we have done to him and his sons." So one day they lay in wait for him, smote him, and tore him to pieces limb from limb. When the news reached the king's palace that Jochanan was slain, and that his murderers had torn him to pieces, the king and queen were exceedingly grieved. And the queen said : " Take me to the place where his (scattered) limbs are lying." They took her to the place. She then took each limb and joined them together just as they were in the beginning. She then took her ring, and on touching the wounds with the stone the bones and sinews became joined together, by virtue of the power of the stone which the ring contained. After this she took some of the water from the Garden of Eden and washed his flesh, so that it became healed, and had the appearance of the flesh of a young boy. She then lay upon him, and placed her mouth against his mouth, and kissed him. She then prayed to God, and He restored his soul, so that he came to life again, rose up, and walked upon his feet.

When they saw that she was able to restore the dead to life they marvelled exceedingly. The king said : " If this is so, let us go and wage war against the neighbouring nations, and if I am killed in battle she will be able to restore me to life." The king accordingly set out with his princes and servants against another king's country. They were arrayed in a long line of battle. But the king, his princes, and his servants were killed. The counsellors then came to the queen and said to her : " Come and restore to life the king, his princes, and servants, for they have fallen by the sword." She went to the place (of the slain) together with Jochanan and did to them first the same that she had done to Jochanan ; but she took instead water from Hell and sprinkled it upon them, when they were all immediately burnt to ashes. She then said : " Behold the wonders of God ; for mine is not the wisdom nor the knowledge to kill and restore to life ; but it is God who slays and revives the dead, who wounds and heals, who humbleth and who exalteth. It was not pleasing to him to restore to life these wicked men as he restored to life this good man. I am not able to do anything more." They therefore returned to their homes, and the kingdom remained without a king. They then cast their eyes upon Jochanan and accordingly made him king over them ; for all those who sought his life were now dead. Moreover they gave him the beautiful woman to wife. They lived together in peace, tranquility, and comfort for many years, and begat both sons and daughters. On account of

this it is said: "Cast thy bread upon the water, for in time to come thou wilt find it again." (*Eccles. xi., i.*)

III. *The Bridegroom and the Angel of Death.*

It is told of a certain Reuben the Libellarius, that he had but once only during his life committed a sin, which was the following:—

One day when he went to synagogue in the morning he found a man sitting in his place. He rebuked him, and said: "In the place of great men thou must not sit." The man immediately went away, and sat by the door weeping bitterly. His tears reached the throne of glory, and God therefore sent the angel of death to take his (Reuben's) son; and he had begotten his son after his eightieth year. When the angel of death came to him, Reuben recognised him, and said: "Why hast thou come here? has the time arrived for me to quit the world?" "No," replied the angel, "God has sent me to take away thy son's life." "Why?" said he. "Because," replied the angel, "thou didst rebuke this poor man." "If," said he, "I am thus found guilty grant me thirty days during which time I may marry my son to his bride, so that he may rejoice; and then take his life." The angel of death granted him thirty days. God was angered fourfold with the angel of death. Reuben then divided his property into three portions; one portion he dealt out to the poor and needy, the second portion to rejoice his son, saying: "Perhaps the reverse will be realised, viz.: 'Wealth does not profit in the day of wrath, but charity delivereth from death.'" The third portion he put away to see what would happen. After twenty-nine days had passed, during which time he had rejoiced his son's heart, the prophet Elijah came and sat by the door of the lad, who immediately trembled, and said: "Why hast thou come here, old man?" He replied: "My son, I am Elijah who have come to tell thee good tidings." The lad, making obeisance to him, asked him: "What good tidings have you?" To which he replied: "To-morrow the angel of death will take thy soul, my son." The lad then said: "Is it not true, old man, that from the beginning of the world it has been so, that as soon as one's day comes he must die?" "Yes," replied the prophet, "but thou wilt not die as other people." "How is that?" said the lad. The prophet replied: "The angel of death will come against thee with the fourfold anger with which he was rebuked by God." "What can I do to save myself," said the lad? He replied: "When thy father goes up before the ark and thou standest at his left side, watch and thou wilt see a poor man attired in dirty torn clothes. Pay him honour, for he is the angel of death, who will perhaps have mercy upon thee." Accordingly, on the morrow, when the time arrived, he again saw that man, and greeting him, said: "O my master, get up and sit in the place of the great." To which he replied: "O my son, but yesterday thy father said to me, 'in the place of great men do not sit,' and now thou biddest me [sit there]." The lad replied: "I wish to do thee honour." At which the angel replied: "May he to whom honour belongs have compassion upon thee." He then forthwith

went out and sat by the door of the canopy, and the lad sat in front of him. He said: "My son, I will ask thee a question." The lad replied: "Ask." He then said: "A man borrowed from his neighbour a barnful of straw. He then took the straw and placed it in clay, and with it built a large house. After some time the owner of the straw came and said: 'Return to me the straw I lent you.' What should he do?" The lad said: "He should give him other straw instead." "But if," said the angel, "he will not take any except his own, what should he do?" The lad replied: "He should then break down his house, place the bricks in water, dissolve them, and extracting the straw return it to him." The angel then said: "Thou, my son, art the straw, and the breath (body) of life is the building. God, who is the owner of the straw, has sent me to take back his straw." He had not finished speaking when the father of the lad came out of the synagogue, sobbing and crying for his child, and prostrating himself before the angel of death, said to him: "I entreat thee to take away my life instead of my son's." The angel of death immediately clothed himself with the garments of cruelty, anger, wrath and severity, and appeared to him equipped as a warrior going out to battle. He unsheathed his sword and placed his foot upon his neck, in order to slay him. At this his 243 limbs trembled violently. He then stood up and fled from before the angel, and said: "Go and take the life of him for whom thou hast been sent, for I am not able to bear thee." When his old mother saw that, she fell down, and her hair was dragged in the dust, and she said: "I entreat thee to take my life instead of that of my offspring." And she was sobbing heavily and weeping. The angel of death immediately clothed himself with the four garments of cruelty, and appeared armed like a warrior going forth to battle. He unsheathed his sword and placed his foot upon her neck, to slay her; but she fled from under him and running away shut the door after her, and said: "Go and take the life of him to whom thou hast been sent; take it, for I am not able to bear thee. Go." At that moment the bride of the lad saw this commotion. She descended from her bridal canopy and, falling down, prostrated herself before the angel of death, said: "I entreat thee to take my life instead of this young man's, and leave him to complete the term of his life. 'Life for life' will then be literally fulfilled." At this the angel of death immediately clothed himself with the four garments of cruelty, he then drew his sword from its sheath and placed his foot upon her neck. She then said to him: "Finish the word (bidding) of the King of Kings who hath sent thee." He nearly crushed her two or three times. She did not stir, but said: "Fulfil the word of the King of Kings." The angel of death forthwith had mercy upon her; and a tear of mercy fell upon her from the eye of the angel of death. Then spake God, and said: "If this cruel one who slayeth people has mercy upon them, shall I, who am called the God of mercy and kindness, not have compassion upon these people?" He thereupon granted seventy more years to each one of them.

IV. *The Story of the Young Man and the Ravens.*

It happened once that a man had an only son, who was eighteen years old. He was very rich. One day his son came to his father and said: "Hear me, O my Lord! Thou hast reared me and given me a good position, so that I am very rich both in wealth and in property; but I learn absolutely nothing from thee, neither the law, nor wisdom, nor polite manners, nor knowledge, nor understanding. If now it is pleasing to thee I shall go and study in a certain country beyond the sea; for I have been informed that there exists a particular city full of exceedingly wise people—in fact, wiser than any other people in the whole world. I should like to go there to study for three years, after which time I will return to thee." His father replied: "What is the use of it, my son? Seeing that thou hast abundant riches, and considering the fact that I am old and do not know how soon the day of my death may come, besides which thy mother is also very aged. If we die, to whom shall we leave all these riches?" At this his son said: "I do not care for thy wealth, because in the hour of death neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones, nor pearls are of any use, but study and the fact of having performed good deeds." When his father heard this, he said: "Remain with us, O my son, and I will engage a very learned man for thee who will remain with us. Further, every day I will sustain six poor men, all in order that thou remain with us." "Do not be angry, my father," said his son, "when I tell you that nothing in the world will prevent me from going there, for I shall learn more there in three years than I should here in ten." When his father saw he could not prevent him, he said: "If this is your firm intention, then take with thee 1,000 pieces of gold and some beautiful and suitable garments, and then go in peace; but do not be delayed from returning at the end of three years." The lad thereupon went on his journey to the city across the sea, and arrived at the city, all the inhabitants of which were exceedingly learned. He went to the chief among them and studied there under him. In the course of three years he learned very much. When the end of the time had nearly arrived, his father sent for him and, obtaining the permission for his departure from his teacher, he returned home. When his father and mother saw him, they were exceedingly rejoiced, and asked him what he had learnt. To which he replied: "I have been learning the law, and I would yet wish to go and stay there another three years." "But," said his father, "thou hast already remained there a long time." To which the son replied: "I have promised to return to my teacher to study yet another three years, and then I will allow nothing to detain me." "If that is so," said his father, "then take with thee another 1,000 pieces of gold, and new and beautiful clothes, and go in peace. But when I send for thee, thou shalt come back immediately and not linger." He took what was given him and went on his journey, until he arrived before his teacher, with whom he studied another three years. During his stay there of six years he had studied the Law, the Prophets, Hagiographa, Talmud, and the general rules of Hermeneutics. When the end of the time arrived, his

father sent for him and obtained permission of leave from his teacher. When he came to his father and mother they rejoiced exceedingly on seeing him ; and on his father asking him again what he had learnt, he replied : " I have learned very much." Then said his father : " Tell us something of what thou hast learned." " But," he replied, " I have not yet been able to acquire wisdom, and therefore I cannot tell thee anything until I remain there another three years." " Thou hast been there a very long time and thou shalt not return ; for we are both of us very aged and wish thee to stay here with us to take care of us." But he replied : " I shall surely lose whatever I have gained if I do not remain there another three years." " If this is so," said his father, " since it is not good for thee to lose whatever thou hast gained, go in peace." He accordingly went on his journey, taking with him another 1,000 pieces of gold, and remained there another three years. During those three years he learned how to speak the language of the trees and demons, the tales of foxes and the language of every animal, wild beast and bird ; in fact, there did not remain any single science in the world which he had not learned. When the three years came to an end his father came for him himself, and presented his teacher with very costly gifts. The teacher then said to him : " Take thy son, thine only son, and go with him in peace to thy house. He is profoundly wise in all the sciences of the world ; there is no equal to him." Having taken leave of the teacher they went on their way. When they came to the sea they engaged a ship and entered it. On being in mid-ocean a raven came and, sitting on the mast, cried ; and while he was crying, said : " The father of this youth is now very rich ; but before he dies he will be reduced to absolute poverty, and ultimately he will again become so rich that there will not be anyone like him in all the land."

When his son heard this he laughed very much. " Why dost thou laugh so much?" said his father. He replied: " Because I was thinking of things I used to do in my boyhood." But his father said: " Thou dost not laugh at that, but at something else." The son did not wish to tell his father the truth, lest he should frighten him and make him angry. But his father was nevertheless exceedingly angry with him, and said: " Is it for this I have thrown away my money, that he laughs and does not know why? He must indeed be a fool, as Solomon in his wisdom says: ' Laughter in the mouth of a fool is weeping.' " He thereupon seized hold of his son and cast him into the sea. Now God prepared a great fish, which swallowed him and carried him to a place far off; and there it vomited him in another kingdom. While he was sitting by the seashore the shepherd of the king saw him there naked, and going up to him said: " My son, what is thy business? Whence comest thou, and from what place?" He replied: " I was travelling in a ship and the Lord brought a very strong wind upon us which destroyed the ship in which I was travelling. But the Lord prepared a raft and brought me hither." " Dost thou know any kind of work?" said he. " Yes," he replied. " What kind of work dost thou know?" " I have been a shepherd from my youth," said he. " If so, then stay with me and mind my flock, and I will give thee

thy wages." He stayed with him, and the shepherd clothed him, maintained him, and loved him very much; and the Lord blessed the shepherd for his sake. He entrusted to him all he had.

It happened once when the king was sitting in his house, together with his princes and servants, that there gathered upon his house a huge army of ravens, so that the whole house was covered with them. They divided themselves into two bands on the two sides of the palace, and between the two bands there were three ravens, two males and a female between them. These three sat there and would not stir from their place, while two other ravens were going from one band to the other as if they were messengers. Moreover, nobody was able to drive them away, neither by (the shooting of) arrows, nor by throwing stones, nor by any other means. The king and princes and all the onlookers were amazed; for they had neither heard of, nor seen, anything like this before. The king then sent messengers to all the provinces of his kingdom, in order to gather together every wise man, every man of understanding, every counsellor, every enchanter and wizard to come at an appointed time. All of them accordingly assembled and came before the king. The king said: "Whoever will be able to interpret this thing to the king, to him will be given the king's daughter for wife and half of his kingdom, during the king's lifetime, and the whole after his death." Some of them came to the king, and said: "My lord, the king, this thing points to famine and want." Others again interpreted it to mean, that he would beget sons and bury them. Each one of them interpreted it to be, in any case, a sign of woe. But their words did not enter the heart of the king, so that he said: "Not one of them is able to speak such things as will enter my ears, for they all speak lies." The king then sat on the floor in bitterness and sorrow, and he was grieved to the heart, so that he desired neither to eat nor drink. They all came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. When the lad saw the intense grief of the king, and that he had vowed to confer such great honour upon the man who would be able to interpret the mystery, he rose up as a wise and courageous man and went up to the garden of the king's palace, to the door of his bed-chamber, and wished to enter therein to speak to the king. When the gate-keepers saw him, that his clothes were torn, and his hair dishevelled, just as he was in the field with his flock, although he was beautiful in stature and appearance, they said to him: "What is thy business with the king?" "I desire to speak to the king, and to tell him what he wishes." The gate-keepers ran and told the king, and said: "Our lord, the king, there is a certain lad standing at the door of the chamber, who wishes to speak to thee; he says, he will tell thee whatever thou hast hidden in thine heart." The king said: "Let him come in." The lad, then entering before the king, made obeisance to him, and said: "Long live the king! behold I am a young man in years, while all thy wise men are old; but God has given me knowledge and understanding to tell the king what he has buried in his heart; but it is not from me, but from God, who has revealed his secret to his servant. Now, my lord, O king, thou hast promised to give thy daughter and one half of thy kingdom to him who shall be able to tell thee,

and all thy kingdom after thou hast departed this life." "This have I promised," said the king, "and this do I swear to fulfil." "I will tell thee then," said the lad, "for what reason all these ravens have gathered themselves at that place, and the truth I will tell before all so that my words may be proved true." So they all came to listen to the words of the lad. Then the lad said: "It happened once that there was a grievous famine in all the land so that the birds were not able to find sufficient food in the fields. Now my lord, O king, do thou pay great attention to my words and know that of the three ravens which thou seest, two are males and the one in the middle is a female, which is the wife of the raven sitting on her right. In the year of the famine he drove his wife out and said to her: 'Go away to whatever place thou wishest, for I have quite sufficient to do to find enough food for myself, so that I cannot help thee.' His wife therefore went on her way and found this raven that is sitting on her left side. He said to her: 'Who art thou, my daughter, and whither goest thou alone?' To which she replied: 'Know, my lord, that my husband has driven me away on account of the famine, saying that it was difficult for him to find his own maintenance.' He then said: 'Behold my own wife is dead and I possess no companion. If thou desirest to remain with me, I will support and maintain thee to the best of my power, but on condition that thou become my wife and that thou wilt never leave me for any other.' She replied: 'We two are better together than I myself left alone; therefore I will do as thou sayest.' The raven then came and took her to himself as a wife. They lived together, and he maintained her during all the years of the famine. Now when the years of plenty had arrived, her first husband wished to receive her as at first. But the other raven said: 'I have maintained her during the years of famine, and have taken to me to wife that female whom thou hast divorced; and now dost thou come to rob me of her, seeing that the time of plenty has arrived?' They argued for some time, and at length determined to go to judgment. On account of this all these ravens have assembled here, because, not knowing the law, they have all come here to hear from thee what the judgment should be. And this shall be a sign to thee (of the truth of my tale). After thou hast declared what appears to thee to be the just decision, all the ravens, acting immediately upon that decision, will go against the guilty, will slay it, and cast it at thy feet. Now, therefore, pronounce judgment as it seems just to thee, as to which of these claimants the female belongs as his wife." The king and all his princes and servants thereupon were greatly astonished and perplexed at what they had heard. The king then took counsel with his princes and servants, all of whom were of opinion that the one who had divorced her had no right whatever to make her return to him as his wife, for he had driven her away during the years of famine; and further, since this other one supported her during that time, he was worthy to keep her as his wife. This decision being ratified by the king the ravens forthwith rose up against the condemned, smote him with their wings, wounded him, and killed him, and then, casting him before the feet of the king, they all went on their way. When the king saw this, he

said: "Since God has made known to thee all this, there is nobody so great in understanding and in wisdom as thou; therefore thou shalt be the second in the kingdom, and I will give thee my daughter."

In the meantime the father of the young man was impoverished; in fact his poverty was such that there never was any so poor as he, for there did not remain to him and his wife sufficient to clothe themselves, they were naked and put to shame. The young man then said to the king: "My lord the king, if I have found grace in thy sight, grant me this request, which I shall ask of thee, by which I may know that thou art pleased with me." "Ask what thou desirest," said the king, "and I will fulfil it." He then said: "Let the king issue a command, and make it known in all the kingdom, that there shall not remain either old man or old woman, poor or rich, who shall not have come to the wedding of thy daughter; I shall be willing to supply water for them to wash their hands when they come in to partake of the banquet." Letters were accordingly sent to all the provinces in the kingdom, by means of messengers, commanding every person to come to the wedding of the king's daughter. They accordingly came from all sides and from every corner. The young man's father and mother were also among those who came, according to the command of the king. When his parents came, they remained behind the door, for they were naked and were ashamed. The young man then went and sought them on every side and in every corner, until he discovered them behind the door. He then said to them: "Come forward, ye blessed of the Lord; why do you stand there? Come inside the house with the others, and do not remain here." They replied: "If it please thee, let us remain here; for we are naked and dirty, and are therefore ashamed to enter with the others." The young man thereupon commanded the overseer of his house to bring this man and woman into the palace (house), to wash them, and anoint them, and to give them of the very best food and drink, and clothe them with garments of fine linen and lace. "Moreover do whatever seems proper to them, but say nothing to anybody. Thou shalt do for them whatever is in thy power for three days." He did so. On the fourth day the young man came to see his father and mother, and found them rejoicing and of good cheer. He then said to them: "Who are you, and in what place do you dwell? Have you any children, and if so what are their occupations?" They replied: "We dwell in such and such a place, and have only had one son. I used to be a very rich merchant, and was so until very recently. But now old age has crept over me, and I am in poverty as thou hast seen. Now, however, God has granted us the blessing of finding favour and kindness before thee. Blessed be He who exalts thee, who hast bestowed all these favours upon us, so that thou hast given us the wherewith to live and to maintain ourselves." "Where is this son of whom thou speakest? Tell me now whether he is dead or alive, and in which place he dwells?" They were no longer able to restrain themselves and began to cry. "Why do you weep?" said he, "do you lack anything or do you perhaps desire anything to eat or drink?" They replied: "No my lord. Nothing has been withheld from us." "What then is the

story of this son of yours?" Then they related to him everything about their son, and everything that had happened to them; they denied him nothing. They then raised their voices and wept bitterly, for they were longing to ease their hearts by crying. He also wept with them until it was late. He then commanded every man to go from his presence, so that nobody was with him when he made himself known to his parents, saying: "I am thy son whom thou didst cast into the sea, and this is my mother. Because I did not wish to tell thee why I laughed thou didst cast me into the sea. But God prepared a huge fish which swallowed me." And telling them everything that happened (the whole story) he said: "Now do not grieve nor be angry, for God has sent me before you to maintain you. I shall now be the son-in-law to the king. I shall do good to you, and you will be to me as a head." They were unable to reply for they were perplexed before him. It became soon known that his father and mother had come, and the thing was pleasing to the king and the princes. The king said to him: "Let thy parents come up to thee, and let them dwell on the best of the land." The young man then rose up and prostrated himself to the ground, saying: "Long live the king!" They then made a banquet, and performed the wedding ceremony; and ultimately he became king, thus fulfilling the word of scripture which says: "The stone which the builders have rejected has become a corner-stone." (*Psalm cxviii., 22.*)

Variant of No. IV.

There once lived an exceedingly meek and pious man whose wife was equally pious. They had no children, since his wife was barren. They therefore spent much money in trying to obtain a cure but without any avail. They grieved on this account even until old age. After a time this pious woman said to her husband: "Let us obtain a divorce and I shall get married to another man." When her husband heard this he wept, and after fasting for two days and three nights, clothed in his prayer-garments he went to the cemetery, and standing by the grave of a very pious and wise man he prayed and wept bitterly; when of a sudden the earth opened and there came forth a band of men clothed with their prayer-garments. "Why," said they, "dost thou weep and cry?" "Because I have no children," he replied. "Then do not weep," said they; "make a covenant with us that if thou beget a son thou wilt bring him here to be circumcised by us; and we shall grant thee a son." "I accept this arrangement, and as soon as my wife bears a son I shall bring him here to be circumcised by you." "Next year, then," said they, "shall thy wife bear a son, but do not tell anybody of this." Accordingly his wife did bear a son in the following year. His congregation asked: "When shall we circumcise the child?" And on the eighth day they said: "Why dost thou not circumcise thy son?" But he replied: "I shall not do so." And wrapping himself in his prayer-garments he took his son and whatever appertained to the circumcision, and went to the burial-ground, where he stood praying until the earth opened, and there came forth this band of men, who hastily took the child and they went away together with the father.

They played and sang until they arrived at their synagogue. Their rabbi then took the child and, circumcising it according to the law, they returned it to the father saying: "Go now in peace." After the father had gone a little way rejoicing he came to a place in which he could neither go forward nor return. He turned round and seeing nobody he was greatly troubled and cried aloud, until the same band appeared to him and said: "If thou wishest us to show thee the way safe to thy native place, give us thy son, and we shall teach him the Law until seven years have elapsed; after that time come and take thy son and go away in peace." "I am willing to do as you have said," he replied; and giving them his son; they showed him the way to his native town, and he returned home to his house. On his wife asking what had become of her son, he narrated all that had happened from the very time of the conception of the child until that time. After the pious man had waited seven years he enveloped himself with his prayer-garments, and, going to the same place, he prayed until the same band came forth and brought the child to the father. He looked like an angel of God, educated in Torah, Mishnah, Gemara, and in every science, so that the father was exceedingly glad and took the child to go away, when they said: "Give him to us for yet another year and we shall teach him the seventy languages of the birds and beasts; and after that time take him and go in peace." The pious man agreed, and entrusting his son to them he went to his house and told his wife all that had happened. When the year had elapsed he went to the same place and received his son full of wisdom and the Law, and knowing seventy languages.

On their way home they came to a brook of water where they wished to quench their thirst and to wash their hands and feet. At that moment two birds came before them crying very loud. The son, noticing this, laughed and cried. "Why dost thou laugh and cry?" said the father. The son replied: "I laughed because one bird told me that in the future I should become king, and I cried because it further told me that my father would afterwards wash my hands and feet, just as a slave." Then said his father: "I was in trouble until God granted thee to me, and even then I was in great trouble for eight years; and now am I to be a slave (to thee)? I will have neither son nor servitude; in accordance with Ben Sira's saying, viz., 'When a son does not behave like a son, leave him upon the water to swim.'" He then took him and threw him into the water, and returned home in distress. The lad swam until he came to a certain fuller, who took him out and brought him to his house, where he grew up as his own son.

Soon after these things, while the king of the Gentiles was sitting in his palace and various dainties were brought him, two birds used to come every day and after wallowing in the dust they shook themselves in the food of the king, after which they flew away. The king sent forth a herald in the town saying: "That the man who would explain the meaning of the action of these birds would be clothed in regal garments." The king sat on his throne awaiting a reply, but no one was able to explain this riddle. The princes of the king at length said: "No one is able to explain this thing except the Jews."

The king accordingly issued a decree that Jews of all countries should come to him. The king then said to the Jews: "If you are able to interpret the meaning of these things, well; but if not I shall slaughter all the Jews who are under my sway." At this they were much alarmed and obtained seven days' time in which to unravel the mystery. They immediately searched and investigated all the sciences, but could not find a cure for their wound, so that they instituted a fast for all the Jews, for days and nights, just as in the time of Mordecai and Esther, with sackcloth and ashes.

The fuller came home to his house very sad and grieved. On the lad asking the reason of his sadness and grief he told him all that had happened, and said: "To-morrow we shall all be killed." But the lad said in reply: "Eat and drink, and do not be troubled, for to-morrow I shall go to the king and explain the action of these birds." On the same night the fuller went to the rabbi of the place, and narrated what he had heard, and the rabbi rejoiced exceedingly. On the morrow they took the lad and, having clothed him in costly garments, brought him to the king, and said: "O our lord the king, this lad will tell thee the meaning of this mystery." The king accordingly ordered the dainties to be brought before him. The birds as usual came and sprinkled some dust upon the food and flying away sat on the top of a tree. The lad then asked the birds in their own language why they persisted in spoiling the food of the king and they replied: "Because this king possesses neither justice nor righteousness." "Why?" asked the lad. "Because," said they, "we are the souls of two Jews. We were once travelling in the wilderness with much money, and about to return to our house when two of the king's servants came against us, and, killing us, robbed us of all our money, and went on their way. Nobody inquired after this, and our wives remained mourning over us uncertain of our fate. On account of this we sprinkle dust into the food of the king in order to obtain justice, and to free our wives." The lad then related to the king all that he had heard, but the king said: "I do not know who these men are." The lad then asked the birds who they were, and they replied: "Let the king order all his servants to come before him, and those two upon whose heads we perch will be the murderers." The king accordingly issued a command that all his servants should come before him, and the birds perched upon the heads of two of them. The king then threatened them with such anger until the two murderers told the murder with their own lips. Their houses were spoiled and they themselves killed, before the birds, and hanged. The king then asked the birds what their respective names were, and whose sons they were. And they replied: "One is Samuel ben Jehonathan and the other Aaron ben Jehonathan of the city of so-and-so." The king wrote down the whole story and sent to them, to their city, all the money of the servants who were killed, which was paid in full to their heirs. The birds then returned to their place, and the king dismissed the Jews in peace.

He then appointed the lad vice-regent, just as Joseph was appointed to Pharaoh. He ruled with great justice, and explained and investigated all the laws, so that the report was soon spread that a new king was on the throne

who judged according to truth, that he investigated the law and explained it. The people therefore brought before him difficult cases for decision, and he decided them according to the truth of the cases. After a time the pious man's wife quarrelled with her husband, saying: "Where is my son which I gave thee to circumcise? What hast thou done with him?" "He is dead," he replied. "Where did he die?" said his wife. "Show me the place of his grave that I may go there and see it, and my heart will be at ease?" "I do not know," replied the husband, "where he was buried." . . .

He then went with his wife to the king to bring the case for judgment before they died. The king (recognising his parents) ordered all the people out so that he might be able to make himself known to them. His mother then approached him and said: "My lord the king, such and such is the case that has happened. Do thou ask this man, who stands before thee, where my son is." But the king replied: "I have been engaged from the early morning until now deciding cases, and they are just now bringing me some food." They also brought a vessel of gold for washing the hands before eating. He then hinted to his servants to go away so that there remained no one to wash his hands except this man (his father) and his wife. The king waited a little time so that the man might understand to bring the water to him for washing. The man rose and did so. And the king said: "Do thou also sit down and partake of the meal." He did so. While they were eating, the king asked: "Where is the son of this woman?" In reply, he told him all that had happened, and then said that he is now dead. "Why dost thou tell falsehoods?" said the king. "For I was standing at the door of the gate and saw thee throw him into a brook of water. Thou must pay the penalty with thy life." When his servants came to smite him, he said: "I entreat thee, O king, to spare me, thou sayest the truth; but I was afraid of telling it, for fear of the king." "Since thou hast confessed this, come to me." They came to him and he said: "I am thy son who was sitting by the brook of water when two birds came before us crying; I cried and laughed. Then, asking me what these two birds said, I told thee 'I laughed because they told me I should at some future time be king, and I cried because they said that thou wouldst bring me water just as a servant to wash my hands.' Then thou didst reply: 'After all the trouble I have had with thee, shall I be a slave to thee?' And thou didst forthwith cast me into the water." He told his father everything that had happened until he became king. "On account of this," said he, "I had these dainties and the water jug brought to fulfil what was prophesied." His parents then embraced him, saying: "Thou art certainly our son." They wept for joy until it reached the royal palace. The king also rejoiced, and the father was appointed chief governor of the city; so that his parents rejoiced exceedingly and begat sons and daughters. The Preacher says: "Whatever God does stands for ever; it can neither be added to nor diminished."