



Zadig, or Destiny

VOLTAIRE

Musean Translation

MOUSEIA



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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

Complete machine-assisted Musean translation made directly from Voltaire's French in Beuchot's 1829 edition: Approbation, dedicatory epistle and all twenty-one chapters, including The Dance and Blue Eyes. Voltaire's notes are retained; later editors' notes are omitted. Source-language review is recorded with the source witness.

TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

THE WORK

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SOURCE

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Approbation



I, the undersigned, who have passed myself off as a scholar and even as a man of wit, have read this manuscript and found it, against my will, curious, amusing, moral, philosophical, and fit to please even those who hate novels. I have therefore run it down, and assured the chief military judge that it is a detestable work.

Dedicatory Epistle



OF ZADIG

TO THE SULTANA SHERAA,

BY SADI.

The tenth day of the month of Shawwal, in the year 837 of the Hijra.

Delight of the eyes, torment of hearts, light of the mind, I do not kiss the dust of your feet, because you scarcely walk, or else walk on Persian carpets or on roses. I offer you the translation of a book by an ancient sage who, having the good fortune to have nothing to do, had the further good fortune to amuse himself by writing the history of Zadig, a work that says more than it seems to say. I beg you to read it and pass judgment; for although you are in the spring-time of life, although every pleasure seeks you out, although you are beautiful and your talents add to your beauty; although you are praised from evening to morning, and for all these reasons have every right to lack common sense, you nevertheless have a very wise mind and very delicate taste, and I have heard you reason better than old dervishes with long beards and pointed caps. You are discreet without being suspicious; gentle without being weak; discerning in your generosity. You love your friends and make no enemies. Your wit never borrows its charm from malicious barbs; you neither speak nor do evil, despite the prodigious ease with which you could. In short, your soul has always seemed to

me as pure as your beauty. You even have a little store of philosophy, which has led me to believe that you would take more pleasure than another in this work by a sage.

It was first written in ancient Chaldean, which neither you nor I understand. It was translated into Arabic to amuse the celebrated Sultan Oulougebe. This was when the Arabs and Persians were beginning to write *The Thousand and One Nights*, *The Thousand and One Days*, and so forth. Ouloug preferred reading *Zadig*; but the sultanas preferred the *Thousand and One*. "How can you prefer," the wise Ouloug asked them, "tales that are unreasonable and mean nothing?" "That is precisely why we like them," the sultanas replied.

I flatter myself that you will not resemble them, and that you will be a true Ouloug. I even hope that when you tire of general conversation, which much resembles the *Thousand and One*, except that it is less amusing, I may find a minute in which to have the honor of talking sense with you. Had you been Thalestris in the days of Scander, son of Philip; had you been the Queen of Sheba in the days of Solomon, those kings would have been the ones to make the journey.

I pray the heavenly powers that your pleasures may be unalloyed, your beauty lasting, and your happiness without end.

SADI.

CHAPTER 1

The One-Eyed Man



In the time of King Moabdar there lived at Babylon a young man named Zadig, born with a fine nature strengthened by education. Though rich and young, he knew how to govern his passions; he put on no airs, did not insist on always being right, and knew how to respect human weakness. People were astonished that, with so much wit, he never mocked and insulted those vague, disjointed, tumultuous remarks, those reckless slanders, ignorant pronouncements, coarse jests, and empty clamor of words that Babylon called *conversation*. In the first book of Zoroaster he had learned that self-love is a balloon inflated with wind, which lets out tempests when pricked. Above all, Zadig did not boast of despising women and subduing them. He was generous, and had no fear of serving the ungrateful, following Zoroaster's great precept: *When you eat, feed the dogs, even if they should bite you*. He was as wise as a man can be, for he sought the company of the wise. Trained in the sciences of the ancient Chaldeans, he knew the physical principles of nature as they were then understood, and knew as much metaphysics as anyone has known in any age—that is, very little. Despite the new philosophy of his day, he firmly believed that the year was three hundred and sixty-five days and a quarter long, and that the sun was at the center of the world; and when the leading magi told him with insulting arrogance that

his views were unsound, and that believing the sun turned on its own axis and the year had twelve months made him an enemy of the state, he remained silent, without anger or disdain.

Zadig, possessing great wealth and consequently friends, good health, a pleasing face, a sound and moderate mind, and a sincere and noble heart, believed that he could be happy. He was to marry Sémire, whose beauty, birth, and fortune made her the foremost match in Babylon. His attachment to her was steadfast and virtuous, and Sémire loved him passionately. They were approaching the happy moment of their union when, walking together toward one of Babylon's gates beneath the palms that adorned the bank of the Euphrates, they saw men coming toward them armed with swords and arrows. These were the henchmen of young Orcan, a minister's nephew, whom his uncle's courtiers had persuaded that everything was permitted him. He had none of Zadig's graces or virtues; but believing himself far superior, he was furious not to be preferred. This jealousy, born entirely of vanity, made him imagine that he was madly in love with Sémire. He meant to abduct her. The kidnappers seized her, and in the frenzy of their violence wounded her, shedding the blood of a woman whose very sight would have softened the tigers of Mount Imaus. Her cries pierced the heavens. "My dear husband!" she cried. "They are tearing me from the one I adore." She gave no thought to her danger, only to her dear Zadig. He meanwhile defended her with all the strength courage and love can give. Helped by only two slaves, he put the kidnappers to flight and brought Sémire home unconscious and bleeding. When she opened her eyes, she saw her deliverer. "Oh, Zadig!" she said. "I loved you as my husband; I love you now as the man to whom I owe my honor and my life." Never was a heart more deeply moved than Sémire's; never did a lovelier mouth express more touching feelings in those burning words inspired by gratitude for the greatest of services and the tenderest transports of the most rightful love. Her wound was slight, and soon healed. Zadig was more dangerously hurt: an arrow striking near his eye had left a deep wound. Sémire asked the gods for nothing but her lover's recovery. Her eyes were bathed in tears day and night; she awaited the moment when Zadig's could enjoy her gaze. But an abscess

forming in the injured eye gave cause to fear the worst. They sent as far as Memphis for the great physician Hermes, who arrived with a numerous retinue. He examined the patient and declared that he would lose his eye; he even predicted the day and hour when this disaster would occur. "Had it been the right eye," he said, "I should have cured it; but wounds of the left eye are incurable." All Babylon, pitying Zadig's fate, admired the depth of Hermes' learning. Two days later the abscess burst of itself; Zadig made a perfect recovery. Hermes wrote a book proving that he ought not to have recovered. Zadig did not read it; but as soon as he could go out, he prepared to visit the woman on whom he had set his hopes of lifelong happiness, and for whom alone he wished to have eyes. Sémire had been in the country for three days. On his way he learned that this beautiful lady, having loudly declared an insurmountable aversion to one-eyed men, had married Orcan that very night. At the news he lost consciousness; grief brought him to the edge of the grave. He lay ill for a long time, but at last reason overcame his sorrow, and the very atrocity of what he had suffered helped console him.

"Since I have endured such a cruel whim from a girl brought up at court," he said, "I must marry a woman of the city." He chose Azora, the wisest and best-born woman there, married her, and lived with her for a month in the delights of the tenderest union. He noticed only a little flightiness in her, and a marked inclination to think that the handsomest young men were always the wittiest and most virtuous.

CHAPTER 2

The Nose



One day Azora returned from a walk in a fury, exclaiming loudly. “What is the matter, my dear wife?” he asked. “What can have put you so beside yourself?” “Alas!” she said. “You would be as indignant as I am if you had seen what I have just witnessed. I went to console the young widow Cosrou, who two days ago raised a tomb to her young husband beside the stream that borders that meadow. In her grief she promised the gods to remain beside the tomb as long as the water of that stream flowed past it.” “Well!” said Zadig. “There is an admirable woman, who truly loved her husband!” “Ah!” Azora replied. “If you knew what she was doing when I called on her!” “What, then, fair Azora?” “She was having the stream diverted.” Azora poured out such lengthy abuse and such violent reproaches against the young widow that this parade of virtue displeased Zadig.

He had a friend named Cador, one of those young men whom his wife thought more upright and deserving than the rest. He took him into his confidence and secured his loyalty, as far as he could, with a considerable gift. Azora spent two days with a woman friend in the country, and returned home on the third. Weeping servants told her that her husband had died suddenly that very night; that they had not dared bring her the dreadful news; and that Zadig had just been buried in his ancestors’ tomb at the end of the garden. She wept, tore her hair, and swore she would die. That evening Cador asked leave to speak with her, and they both wept. The next day they wept less, and dined together.

Cador confided that his friend had left him the greater part of his property, and gave her to understand that his happiness would lie in sharing his fortune with her. The lady wept, grew angry, softened; supper lasted longer than dinner, and their talk became more intimate. Azora praised the deceased, but admitted that he had faults from which Cador was free.

In the middle of supper Cador complained of a violent pain in his spleen. The lady, anxious and attentive, had all her scented essences brought, to try whether any might be good for it. She greatly regretted that the great Hermes was not yet in Babylon; she even condescended to touch the side where Cador felt such sharp pain. "Are you subject to this cruel illness?" she asked compassionately. "It sometimes brings me to the edge of the grave," Cador answered, "and only one remedy can relieve me: to lay on my side the nose of a man who died the day before." "What a strange remedy!" said Azora. "No stranger," he replied, "than Master Arnoult's sachets^a against apoplexy." This argument, joined to the young man's exceptional merit, at last decided the lady. "After all," she said, "when my husband passes from yesterday's world into tomorrow's across the bridge of Tchinavar, will the angel Asrael be any less willing to let him through because his nose is a little shorter in his second life than in his first?" So she took a razor, went to her husband's tomb, watered it with her tears, and approached to cut the nose off Zadig, whom she found stretched out in the grave. Zadig rose, holding his nose with one hand and stopping the razor with the other. "Madam," he said, "do not rail so loudly against young Cosrou. The plan to cut off my nose is quite a match for the plan to divert a stream."

^a There was at that time a Babylonian named Arnoult who, in the newspapers, cured and prevented every case of apoplexy with a sachet hung around the neck.

CHAPTER 3

The Dog and the Horse



Zadig discovered that the first month of marriage, as the book of the Zend says, is the moon of honey, and the second the moon of wormwood. Before long he was obliged to divorce Azora, who had become too difficult to live with, and sought his happiness in the study of nature. “No one is happier,” he said, “than a philosopher reading the great book God has set before our eyes. The truths he discovers are his own; he nourishes and elevates his soul, lives in peace, fears nothing from men, and his tender wife does not come to cut off his nose.”

Filled with these ideas, he retired to a country house on the banks of the Euphrates. There he did not busy himself calculating how many inches of water flowed in a second beneath the arches of a bridge, or whether a cubic line more rain fell in the month of the mouse than in the month of the sheep. He did not dream of making silk from cobwebs or porcelain from broken bottles; instead, he studied above all the properties of animals and plants, and soon acquired a discernment that revealed a thousand differences where other men saw only sameness.

One day, walking near a small wood, he saw one of the queen’s eunuchs running toward him, followed by several officers who seemed deeply alarmed, dashing this way and that like distracted men searching for their most precious possession. “Young man,” the chief eunuch said, “have you seen the queen’s dog?” Zadig modestly answered, “It is a bitch, not a dog.” “You are right,” the

chief eunuch replied. "A very small spaniel," Zadig added. "She has recently had puppies; she limps on her left foreleg and has very long ears." "Then you have seen her?" the chief eunuch asked, quite out of breath. "No," Zadig answered. "I have never seen her, and never knew whether the queen had a bitch."

At precisely the same time, by one of fortune's ordinary oddities, the finest horse in the royal stable had escaped a groom on the plains of Babylon. The master of the hunt and all the other officers were chasing it as anxiously as the chief eunuch was chasing the bitch. The master of the hunt approached Zadig and asked whether he had seen the king's horse pass by. "It is," Zadig replied, "a horse with a perfect gallop; it stands five feet high, with very small hooves, and has a tail three and a half feet long. The bosses on its bit are twenty-three-karat gold; its shoes are silver of eleven-twelfths purity." "Which way did it go? Where is it?" the master of the hunt demanded. "I have not seen it," Zadig replied, "and have never heard of it."

The master of the hunt and the chief eunuch had no doubt that Zadig had stolen the king's horse and the queen's bitch. They had him brought before the court of the Great Desterham, which sentenced him to the knout and to spend the rest of his days in Siberia. Scarcely had judgment been delivered when the horse and the bitch were found. The judges were under the painful necessity of reversing their verdict; but they sentenced Zadig to pay four hundred ounces of gold for saying he had not seen what he had seen. First he had to pay the fine; then he was allowed to plead his case before the council of the Great Desterham. He spoke in these terms:

"Stars of justice, abysses of learning, mirrors of truth, who have the weight of lead, the hardness of iron, the brilliance of diamonds, and a great affinity with gold, since I am permitted to address this august assembly, I swear to you by Orosmade that I have never seen the queen's respectable bitch or the sacred horse of the king of kings. This is what happened. I was walking toward the little wood where I later met the venerable eunuch and the most illustrious master of the hunt. I saw an animal's tracks in the sand, and readily judged them to be a small dog's. Long, light furrows imprinted on little ridges of sand between the paw marks told me it was a bitch with hanging teats, and that she had there-

fore had puppies a few days before. Other marks, running in a different direction and always seeming to have brushed the surface of the sand beside the forepaws, taught me that her ears were very long; and as I noticed that one paw always pressed less deeply into the sand than the other three, I understood that our august queen's bitch was a little lame, if I may venture to say so.

"As for the horse of the king of kings, you should know that while walking along the paths of this wood I noticed the marks of a horse's shoes, all at equal distances. 'Here,' I said, 'is a horse with a perfect gallop.' On a narrow path only seven feet wide, the dust on the trees had been brushed away on either side, three and a half feet from the middle of the path. 'This horse,' I said, 'has a tail three and a half feet long, which has swept away the dust by moving from side to side.' Beneath trees forming a canopy five feet high, I saw leaves newly fallen from the branches, and knew that the horse had touched them, and was therefore five feet tall. As for its bit, it must be twenty-three-karat gold, for it had rubbed its bosses against a stone I recognized as a touchstone and on which I made a test. Lastly, from the marks its shoes left on pebbles of another kind, I judged that it was shod with silver of eleven-twelfths purity."

All the judges admired Zadig's profound and subtle discernment; the news reached the king and queen. In the antechambers, the royal chamber, and the private study, everyone spoke of Zadig; and although several magi held that he should be burned as a sorcerer, the king ordered that the four-hundred-ounce fine imposed on him be returned. The clerk, the ushers, and the attorneys came to his house in great state to bring back his four hundred ounces; they withheld only three hundred and ninety-eight for legal costs, and their servants asked for fees.

Zadig saw how dangerous too much learning could sometimes be, and firmly resolved that at the next opportunity he would not say what he had seen.

The opportunity soon came. A prisoner of state escaped and passed beneath his windows. Zadig was questioned; he said nothing. But it was proved that he had looked out of the window. For this crime he was sentenced to pay five hundred ounces of gold, and thanked his judges for their leniency, as was the custom in Babylon.

“Great God!” he said to himself. “How pitiable a man is who walks in a wood through which the queen’s bitch and the king’s horse have passed! How dangerous it is to go to the window! And how difficult it is to be happy in this life!”

CHAPTER 4

The Envious Man



Zadig sought consolation in philosophy and friendship for the injuries fortune had done him. In a suburb of Babylon he had a tastefully adorned house, where he assembled all the arts and pleasures worthy of an honorable man. In the morning his library was open to scholars; in the evening his table was open to good company. But he soon learned how dangerous scholars are. A great dispute arose over a law of Zoroaster forbidding the eating of griffins. “How can griffins be forbidden,” said some, “if the animal does not exist?” “It must exist,” said others, “since Zoroaster does not want it eaten.” Zadig tried to reconcile them. “If there are griffins,” he said, “let us not eat them; if there are none, we shall eat still fewer; and in this way we shall all obey Zoroaster.”

A scholar who had composed thirteen volumes on the properties of the griffin, and was also a great practitioner of sacred magic, hastened to denounce Zadig before an arch-magus named Yébor, the stupidest of Chaldeans, and consequently the most fanatical. This man would have had Zadig impaled for the greater glory of the sun, and recited Zoroaster’s breviary in a more contented tone for it. His friend Cador—a friend is worth more than a hundred priests—went to see old Yébor and said:

“Long live the sun and the griffins! Be very careful not to punish Zadig: he is a saint. He keeps griffins in his poultry yard and does not eat them; and his accuser is a heretic who dares maintain that rabbits have cloven feet and are not

unclean.” “Well!” said Yébor, shaking his bald head. “Zadig must be impaled for thinking wrongly about griffins, and the other for speaking wrongly about rabbits.” Cador settled the matter through a maid of honor with whom he had fathered a child, and who had great influence in the college of magi. No one was impaled; several doctors grumbled at this, and foresaw the decline of Babylon. “How precarious happiness is!” Zadig exclaimed. “Everything in this world persecutes me, even beings that do not exist.” He cursed scholars and resolved to live only in good company.

He gathered at his house the most honorable men of Babylon and the most charming women. He gave exquisite suppers, often preceded by concerts and enlivened by delightful conversation from which he had contrived to banish the eagerness to show wit—the surest way of having none and spoiling the most brilliant company. Neither his friends nor his dishes were chosen out of vanity, for in everything he preferred substance to appearance, and thereby attracted the genuine esteem to which he made no claim.

Opposite his house lived Arimaze, a man whose coarse features portrayed his wicked soul. He was eaten up with gall and swollen with pride, and to crown it all, he was a tedious wit. Never having succeeded in society, he took revenge by maligning it. Rich as he was, he had trouble collecting flatterers at his house. The sound of carriages arriving at Zadig’s each evening annoyed him; the sound of his praises irritated him still more. He sometimes went to Zadig’s and sat down to dinner uninvited, poisoning all the company’s pleasure as harpies are said to foul the food they touch. Once he wished to give an entertainment for a lady who, rather than accept it, went to supper at Zadig’s. Another day, chatting with him in the palace, they approached a minister who invited Zadig to supper and did not invite Arimaze. The most implacable hatreds often rest on no more important foundations. This man, whom Babylon called *the Envious*, wished to ruin Zadig because they called him *the Happy*. As Zoroaster says, the chance to do harm comes a hundred times a day, and the chance to do good once a year.

The Envious Man went to Zadig's, where he was walking in the gardens with two friends and a lady to whom he often paid compliments with no intention beyond paying them. The conversation turned on a war the king had just brought to a successful close against his vassal, the prince of Hyrcania. Zadig, who had distinguished himself by his courage in this brief war, warmly praised the king, and the lady still more. He took his writing tablets, composed four lines on the spot, and gave them to the beautiful woman to read. His friends begged him to share them. Modesty, or rather a well-understood self-love, prevented him. He knew that impromptu verses are good only for the woman in whose honor they are written. He broke in two the leaf of his tablets on which he had just written and threw both halves into a rosebush, where they were sought in vain. A little rain began, and everyone went back indoors. The Envious Man stayed in the garden and searched so long that he found a piece of the leaf. It had broken in such a way that each half-line made sense and was itself a shorter line of verse; but by a still stranger accident, these short lines formed a meaning containing the most horrible insults against the king. They read:

By the gravest crimes,
Firm upon his throne,
In the public peace,
He is the sole enemy.

For the first time in his life, the Envious Man was happy. He held the means to destroy a virtuous and charming man. Filled with this cruel joy, he had the satire in Zadig's own hand conveyed to the king. Zadig, his two friends, and the lady were imprisoned. His trial was soon over, without anyone deigning to hear him. When he came to receive his sentence, the Envious Man stood in his path and told him loudly that his verses were worthless. Zadig did not pride himself on being a good poet; but he despaired at being condemned for treason and seeing a beautiful lady and two friends held in prison for a crime he had not committed. He was not allowed to speak, because his tablets spoke. Such was

the law of Babylon. He was therefore led to execution through a crowd of onlookers, none of whom dared pity him, all jostling to examine his face and see whether he would die gracefully. Only his relatives were distressed, for they would not inherit. Three-quarters of his property were confiscated for the king, and the remaining quarter for the Envious Man.

As he was preparing to die, the king's parrot flew from its balcony and settled on a rosebush in Zadig's garden. The wind had carried a peach there from a neighboring tree; it had fallen onto a piece of writing tablet and stuck to it. The bird picked up the peach and tablet and brought them to the monarch's lap. Curious, the prince read words there that made no sense and seemed to be the ends of verses. He loved poetry, and there is always hope with princes who love verse: his parrot's adventure set him thinking. The queen remembered what had been written on one piece of Zadig's tablet and sent for it.

The two pieces were compared and fitted together perfectly. The verses were then read as Zadig had written them:

By the gravest crimes I have seen the earth unsettled.
Firm upon his throne, the king knows how to master all.
In the public peace, love alone makes war:
He is the sole enemy that need be feared.

The king at once ordered Zadig brought before him, and his two friends and the beautiful lady released from prison. Zadig fell face down at the feet of the king and queen, humbly begging their pardon for writing bad verse. He spoke with such grace, wit, and good sense that the king and queen wished to see him again. He returned and pleased them still more. He was given all the property of the Envious Man, who had falsely accused him; but Zadig returned every bit of it, and the Envious Man was moved only by the pleasure of not losing his property. The king's esteem for Zadig grew daily. He included him in all his pleasures and consulted him on all his affairs. From then on the queen

looked on him with a favor that might become dangerous to her, to the king her august husband, to Zadig, and to the kingdom. Zadig was beginning to believe that happiness was not so hard to find.

CHAPTER 5

The Generous



The time came for a great festival held every five years. It was the custom at Babylon, at the end of five years, to proclaim solemnly which citizen had performed the most generous deed. The nobles and magi were the judges. The chief satrap, responsible for the city, presented the finest acts performed under his administration. A vote was taken; the king pronounced judgment. People came from the ends of the earth to this ceremony. The winner received from the monarch's hands a gold cup studded with precious stones, and the king said to him: "Receive this prize for generosity, and may the gods give me many subjects like you!"

When the memorable day arrived, the king appeared on his throne surrounded by nobles, magi, and delegates from every nation, who had come to these games where glory was won not by the speed of horses or the strength of the body, but by virtue. The chief satrap recounted aloud the deeds that might earn their authors this priceless reward. He did not mention the magnanimity with which Zadig had returned the Envious Man's entire fortune: that was not a deed worthy of competing for the prize.

First he presented a judge who had caused a citizen to lose an important lawsuit through a mistake for which he was not even responsible, and had given the man his entire property, equal in value to what the other had lost.

Next he brought forward a young man who, though passionately in love with a girl he was about to marry, had yielded her to a friend dying of love for her, and had even paid her dowry as he gave her up.

Then he produced a soldier who had shown still greater generosity in the Hyrcanian war. Enemy soldiers were carrying off his beloved, and he was defending her against them, when news came that other Hyrcanians were carrying off his mother a few paces away. In tears he left his beloved and ran to rescue his mother; then he returned to the woman he loved and found her dying. He wished to kill himself; his mother reminded him that he was her only support, and he had the courage to endure life.

The judges favored this soldier. The king spoke. "His deed and the others are noble, but they do not astonish me; yesterday Zadig performed one that did. A few days ago I disgraced Coreb, my minister and favorite. I complained bitterly of him, and all my courtiers assured me I was too lenient; each tried to outdo the others in speaking ill of Coreb. I asked Zadig what he thought, and he dared speak well of him. I admit that in our histories I have seen examples of men paying for a mistake with their property, yielding up their beloved, preferring a mother to the object of their love; but I have never read of a courtier speaking favorably of a disgraced minister with whom his sovereign was angry. I give twenty thousand gold pieces to each man whose generous actions have just been recounted; but I give the cup to Zadig."

"Sire," Zadig said, "Your Majesty alone deserves the cup. You have performed the most unheard-of deed, since, though a king, you did not grow angry with your slave when he contradicted your passion." Everyone admired the king and Zadig. The judge who had given his property, the lover who had married his beloved to his friend, and the soldier who had preferred his mother's safety to his beloved's received the monarch's gifts and saw their names inscribed in the book of the generous. Zadig received the cup. The king gained a reputation as a good prince, which he did not keep for long. The day was honored with festivities lasting longer than the law prescribed. Its memory still survives in Asia. Zadig said, "At last, then, I am happy!" But he was mistaken.

CHAPTER 6

The Minister



The king had lost his prime minister. He chose Zadig to fill the post. All the beautiful ladies of Babylon applauded the choice, for since the empire's founding there had never been so young a minister. All the courtiers were angry; the Envious Man coughed blood, and his nose swelled prodigiously. After thanking the king and queen, Zadig went to thank the parrot as well. "Beautiful bird," he said, "you saved my life and made me prime minister. Their Majesties' bitch and horse did me much harm, but you have done me good. So this is what human destinies depend on! But," he added, "such strange happiness may soon vanish." The parrot answered, "Yes." The word struck Zadig. Yet as he was a good natural philosopher and did not believe parrots were prophets, he soon recovered his composure and began to discharge his ministry as well as he could.

He made everyone feel the sacred power of the laws, and no one feel the weight of his rank. He did not restrict the council's freedom to speak, and every vizier could hold an opinion without displeasing him. When he judged a case, it was not he who judged but the law; yet when the law was too harsh, he tempered it, and where laws were lacking, his fairness supplied ones that might have been taken for Zoroaster's.

It is from him that nations derive this great principle: it is better to risk saving a guilty person than to condemn an innocent one. He believed laws were made to help citizens as much as to frighten them. His chief talent was for disentangling the truth, which everyone seeks to obscure. In the first days of his administration he put this great talent to use. A famous merchant of Babylon had died in India. Having married off his daughter, he had made his two sons equal heirs, and left a gift of thirty thousand gold pieces to whichever son was judged to love him more. The elder built him a tomb; the younger added part of his inheritance to his sister's dowry. Everyone said, "The elder loves his father more; the younger loves his sister more. The thirty thousand pieces belong to the elder."

Zadig summoned the two in turn. He told the elder, "Your father is not dead. He has recovered from his last illness and is returning to Babylon." "God be praised," the young man replied, "but that tomb cost me very dearly!" Zadig then told the younger the same thing. "God be praised!" he answered. "I shall give my father back everything I have, but I wish he would let my sister keep what I gave her." "You will give nothing back," Zadig said, "and you will have the thirty thousand pieces. You are the one who loves your father more."

A very rich girl had promised marriage to two magi, and after receiving several months' instruction from both, found herself pregnant. Both wished to marry her. "I shall take as my husband," she said, "whichever of you has enabled me to give the empire a citizen." "I performed that good work," said one. "I had that advantage," said the other. "Well," she replied, "I shall acknowledge as the child's father whichever of you can give it the better education." She gave birth to a son. Each magus wants to raise him. The case is brought before Zadig, who summons both magi. "What will you teach your pupil?" he asks the first. "I shall teach him," the doctor says, "the eight parts of speech, dialectic, astrology, demonology; the nature of substance and accident, the abstract and the concrete, monads and pre-established harmony." "I," says the second, "shall try to make him just and worthy of having friends." Zadig pronounced: "Whether you are his father or not, you shall marry his mother."

Every day complaints reached the court against the governor of Media, named *Irax*. He was a great lord, not bad at heart, but corrupted by vanity and sensuality. He rarely allowed anyone to speak to him, and never to dare contradict him. Peacocks are no vainer, doves no more sensual, tortoises less lazy; he lived for false glory and false pleasures. Zadig undertook to correct him.

In the king's name he sent him a music master with twelve singers and twenty-four violinists, a steward with six cooks, and four chamberlains, who were never to leave him. The king ordered that the following ceremonial be observed without fail; and this is how matters went.

On the first day, as soon as the pleasure-loving *Irax* awoke, the music master entered with the singers and violinists. They sang a cantata lasting two hours, with this refrain every three minutes:

How boundless is his merit!
What grace! What grandeur!
Ah, how pleased with himself
My lord must be!

After the cantata a chamberlain delivered a speech lasting three-quarters of an hour, expressly praising him for every good quality he lacked. When it was over, he was led to the table to the sound of instruments. Dinner lasted three hours; the moment he opened his mouth to speak, the first chamberlain said, "He will be right." Scarcely had he uttered four words when the second chamberlain cried, "He is right!" The other two chamberlains roared with laughter at the witty things *Irax* had said or ought to have said. After dinner they repeated the cantata.

He found this first day delightful, believing the king of kings was honoring him as he deserved. The second seemed less pleasant; the third was awkward; the fourth unbearable; the fifth a torment. At last, exasperated by always hearing them sing,

Ah, how pleased with himself
My lord must be!

by always hearing that he was right, and by being addressed in a speech every day at the same hour, he wrote to court, begging the king to recall his chamberlains, his musicians, and his steward. He promised to be less vain and more diligent in future. He had less incense burned before him, gave fewer entertainments, and was happier; for, as the Sadder says, perpetual pleasure is no pleasure.

CHAPTER 7

Disputes and Audiences



In this way Zadig showed the subtlety of his genius and the goodness of his soul every day. He was admired, and yet he was loved. He was thought the most fortunate of men; the whole empire rang with his name. Every woman cast looks at him; every citizen celebrated his justice; scholars regarded him as their oracle; even priests admitted he knew more than old Yébor the arch-magus. There was no question now of prosecuting him over griffins: people believed only what he found believable.

A great quarrel had lasted in Babylon for fifteen hundred years, dividing the empire into two obstinate sects. One held that the temple of Mithra must always be entered left foot first; the other abhorred the custom and always entered with the right. People awaited the solemn festival of the sacred fire to learn which sect Zadig would favor. The universe had its eyes on his two feet; the whole city was in a fever of suspense. Zadig entered the temple by jumping with both feet together, and then proved in an eloquent speech that the God of heaven and earth, who shows no partiality to persons, values the left leg no more than the right. The Envious Man and his wife maintained that his speech had too few figures, that he had not made the mountains and hills dance enough. “He is dry and has no genius,” they said. “In his speeches you see no sea fleeing, no stars falling, no sun melting like wax. He has none of the proper

Oriental style.” Zadig was content with the style of reason. Everyone supported him, not because he was on the right path, not because he was reasonable, not because he was charming, but because he was first vizier.

He settled the great lawsuit between the white magi and the black magi just as successfully. The whites maintained it was impious to turn toward the winter sunrise when praying to God; the blacks asserted that God abhorred the prayers of men who turned toward the summer sunset. Zadig ordered everyone to face whichever way they pleased.

Thus he discovered the secret of dispatching both private and public affairs in the morning. The rest of the day he devoted to embellishing Babylon. He had tragedies performed at which people wept, and comedies at which they laughed—things long out of fashion, which he revived because he had taste. He did not pretend to know more than artists; he rewarded them with gifts and honors, and felt no secret envy of their talents. In the evening he greatly entertained the king, and the queen above all. The king said, “What a great minister!” The queen said, “What a charming minister!” And both added, “It would have been a great pity if he had been hanged.”

No man in office was ever obliged to grant so many audiences to ladies. Most came to discuss affairs they did not have, in order to have one with him. The Envious Man’s wife was among the first to present herself. She swore by Mithra, by the Zend-Avesta, and by the sacred fire that she had detested her husband’s conduct. She then confided that this husband was a jealous brute; she hinted that the gods were punishing him by denying him the precious effects of that sacred fire through which alone man resembles the immortals. She ended by letting her garter fall. Zadig picked it up with his usual courtesy, but did not fasten it around the lady’s knee; and this little fault, if a fault it was, caused the most dreadful misfortunes. Zadig gave it no thought, and the Envious Man’s wife thought of it a great deal.

Other ladies presented themselves every day. The secret annals of Babylon maintain that once he yielded, but was astonished to enjoy without pleasure and to embrace his mistress absentmindedly. The woman to whom, almost without noticing it, he gave tokens of his protection was a chambermaid of

Queen Astarté. This tender Babylonian consoled herself by thinking, "The man must have a prodigious number of affairs on his mind, since he goes on thinking of them even while making love." At one of those moments when many people say nothing and others utter only sacred words, Zadig suddenly let slip a cry: "The queen!" The Babylonian thought he had at last come to himself at a happy moment, and was saying, "My queen." But Zadig, still deeply distracted, pronounced the name of Astarté. The lady, who in these happy circumstances interpreted everything in her own favor, imagined this meant, "You are more beautiful than Queen Astarté." She left Zadig's apartments with very handsome presents, and went to tell her adventure to the Envious Man's wife, her intimate friend. The latter was cruelly stung by this preference. "He did not even deign," she said, "to fasten this garter for me—the very one here, which I no longer wish to wear." "Oh, oh!" the fortunate lady said to the envious one. "You wear the same garters as the queen! You must buy them from the same maker?" The Envious Man's wife pondered deeply, said nothing, and went to consult her husband.

Meanwhile Zadig noticed that his mind was always wandering when he gave audiences or judged cases. He did not know what to attribute it to; this was his only trouble.

He had a dream. He seemed first to be lying on dry grass, some of it prickly enough to trouble him; then he lay softly on a bed of roses, from which a serpent emerged and wounded his heart with its sharp, poisoned tongue. "Alas!" he said. "I lay a long time on that dry, prickly grass; now I am on the bed of roses. But what will the serpent be?"

CHAPTER 8

Jealousy



Zadig's misfortune sprang from his happiness itself, and above all from his merit. Every day he conversed with the king and with Astarté, his august wife. His conversation gained still more charm from that desire to please which is to wit what adornment is to beauty; his youth and grace gradually made an impression on Astarté of which she was at first unaware. Her passion grew in the shelter of innocence. Without scruple or fear, Astarté gave herself over to the pleasure of seeing and hearing a man dear to her husband and to the state; she never ceased praising him to the king; she spoke of him to her attendants, who outdid her in their praise. Everything drove deeper into her heart the arrow she did not feel. She gave Zadig presents more tenderly suggestive than she supposed; she believed she was speaking to him only as a queen pleased with his services, and sometimes her words were those of a woman in love.

Astarté was far more beautiful than that Sémire who so hated one-eyed men, or that other wife who had wanted to cut off her husband's nose. Astarté's familiarity, her tender words, at which she was beginning to blush, her glances, which she meant to turn away but which settled on his, kindled a fire in Zadig's heart that astonished him. He struggled; he called to his aid the philosophy that had always aided him; it gave him insight, but no relief. Duty, gratitude, the sovereign majesty he was violating rose before his eyes like avenging gods; he struggled, he triumphed; but this victory, which had to be won again

at every moment, cost him groans and tears. He no longer dared speak to the queen with that gentle freedom which had so charmed them both: a cloud came over his eyes; his conversation grew strained and disjointed; he lowered his gaze; and when, despite himself, his eyes turned toward Astarté, they met the queen's, wet with tears and shooting darts of flame. They seemed to say to one another, "We adore each other, and we are afraid to love; we both burn with a fire we condemn."

Zadig left her presence distracted, bewildered, his heart weighed down by a burden he could no longer bear. In the violence of his turmoil he let his friend Cador discover his secret, like a man who, after long enduring the assaults of a fierce pain, finally reveals his suffering through a cry wrung from him by a sharper spasm, and through the cold sweat streaming down his brow.

Cador told him, "I have already discerned the feelings you wanted to hide from yourself; the passions have unmistakable signs. Consider, my dear Zadig: since I have read your heart, will the king not discover there a feeling that offends him? His only fault is that he is the most jealous of men. You resist your passion more firmly than the queen fights hers, because you are a philosopher, and because you are Zadig. Astarté is a woman; she lets her eyes speak all the more recklessly because she does not yet believe herself guilty. Fatally reassured by her innocence, she neglects the appearances she needs to preserve. I shall tremble for her as long as she has nothing to reproach herself with. If the two of you had come to an understanding, you would know how to deceive every eye: a passion just born and struggled against betrays itself; a love that has been satisfied knows how to hide." Zadig shuddered at the suggestion of betraying the king, his benefactor; never was he more faithful to his prince than when he was guilty of an involuntary crime against him. Yet the queen spoke Zadig's name so often, her brow flushed so deeply as she said it, she was now so animated, now so confused when she spoke to him before the king, and she sank into such deep reverie when he had gone, that the king grew troubled. He believed everything he saw and imagined everything he did not see. Above all, he noticed

that his wife's slippers were blue and Zadig's slippers were blue, that his wife's ribbons were yellow and Zadig's cap was yellow: terrible evidence for a prince sensitive on such matters. Suspicion became certainty in his embittered mind.

Every slave of a king or queen is a spy upon the royal heart. It was soon discovered that Astarté was in love and Moabdar was jealous. The Envious Man persuaded the Envious Woman to send the king her garter, which resembled the queen's. To make matters worse, the garter was blue. The monarch could think of nothing now but how to take revenge. One night he resolved to poison the queen and have Zadig strangled with a cord at daybreak. The order was given to a pitiless eunuch, the instrument of his vengeance. There was then in the king's room a little dwarf who could not speak but could hear. He was always allowed to remain; like a household pet, he witnessed the most secret proceedings. This little mute was deeply attached to the queen and to Zadig. With equal astonishment and horror, he heard the order for their deaths. But how could he forestall that dreadful command, which would be carried out in a few hours? He could not write; but he had learned to paint, and above all could capture a likeness. He spent part of the night sketching what he wanted the queen to understand. In one corner of his picture he showed the king, convulsed with fury, giving orders to his eunuch; a blue cord and a cup lay on a table, with blue garters and yellow ribbons; in the center of the picture the queen was dying in her attendants' arms, with Zadig strangled at her feet. A rising sun on the horizon indicated that this horrible execution was to take place at the first light of dawn. As soon as he had finished, he ran to one of Astarté's attendants, woke her, and made her understand that the picture must be taken to the queen that very instant.

Meanwhile, in the middle of the night, there is a knock at Zadig's door; he is woken; he is given a note from the queen; he wonders whether he is dreaming; with a trembling hand he opens the letter. What was his astonishment—and who could express the consternation and despair that overwhelmed him—as he read these words: “Flee this very instant, or they will take your life! Flee, Zadig; I command you in the name of our love and my yellow ribbons. I was not guilty; but I feel I am about to die guilty.”

Zadig scarcely had the strength to speak. He ordered Cador to be brought to him and, without a word, handed him the note. Cador made him obey and set out at once for Memphis. "If you dare go to the queen," he told him, "you will hasten her death; if you speak to the king, you will destroy her just as surely. I will take charge of her fate; follow your own. I will spread the rumor that you have taken the road to India. I will come to you soon and tell you what has happened in Babylon."

At that very moment Cador had two of the swiftest dromedaries brought to a secret gate of the palace. He had Zadig placed on one; he had to be carried and was close to breathing his last. A single servant accompanied him, and soon Cador, plunged in astonishment and grief, lost his friend from sight.

On reaching the edge of a hill overlooking Babylon, the illustrious fugitive turned his eyes toward the queen's palace and fainted; he recovered his senses only to weep and wish for death. At last, after dwelling on the deplorable fate of the most lovable of women and the foremost queen in the world, he turned his thoughts for a moment to himself and cried, "What, then, is human life? Virtue! What good have you done me? Two women have shamefully deceived me; the third, who is innocent and more beautiful than the others, is going to die! All the good I have done has always been a source of curses for me, and I have been raised to the summit of greatness only to plunge into misfortune's most dreadful abyss. Had I been wicked like so many others, I would be happy like them." Crushed by these deadly reflections, his eyes shrouded in grief, the pallor of death on his face, his soul sunk in the depths of dark despair, he continued his journey toward Egypt.

CHAPTER 9

The Beaten Woman



Zadig steered by the stars. The constellation Orion and the brilliant star Sirius guided him toward the port of Canopus. He marveled at those vast globes of light that appear to our eyes as mere faint sparks, while the earth, which is really only an imperceptible speck in nature, seems to our greed so great and noble a thing. He pictured human beings as they truly are: insects devouring one another on a tiny atom of mud. This faithful image seemed to blot out his misfortunes by showing him the nothingness of his own existence and of Babylon. His soul soared into infinity and, released from his senses, contemplated the unchanging order of the universe. But afterward, when he returned to himself and looked into his heart, and thought that Astarté might have died for him, the universe vanished from his eyes, and in all nature he saw only Astarté dying and Zadig unhappy. Yielding to this ebb and flow of sublime philosophy and crushing grief, he traveled toward the borders of Egypt; his faithful servant had already reached the first village and was looking for lodgings for him there. Meanwhile Zadig walked toward the gardens bordering the village. Not far from the highway he saw a weeping woman calling on heaven and earth to help her, and a furious man pursuing her. He had already caught her; she clasped his knees. The man rained blows and reproaches on her. From the Egyptian's violence and the woman's repeated pleas for forgiveness, Zadig judged that one was jealous and the other unfaithful; but when he looked closely at this

woman, whose beauty was touching and who even bore some resemblance to the unfortunate Astarté, he felt himself filled with compassion for her and horror at the Egyptian. "Help me!" she cried to Zadig through her sobs. "Save me from the most brutal of men! Save my life!" At these cries Zadig ran to throw himself between her and the brute. He knew something of the Egyptian language. In that language he said, "If you have any humanity, I beg you to respect beauty and weakness. Can you abuse a masterpiece of nature like this, when she lies at your feet with nothing but tears to defend her?" "Aha!" said the raging man. "So you love her too! Then it is on you that I must take revenge." With these words he lets go of the woman, whom he was holding by the hair with one hand, takes up his spear, and tries to run the stranger through. Zadig, who had kept his composure, easily avoided a madman's thrust. He seized the spear near its iron point. One tries to pull it back, the other to wrench it away. It breaks in their hands. The Egyptian draws his sword; Zadig arms himself with his own. They attack each other. The first rains down a hundred hasty strokes; the second parries them skillfully. Sitting on the grass, the woman adjusts her hair and watches them. The Egyptian was stronger than his opponent; Zadig was more skillful. Zadig fought like a man whose head directed his arm, the other like a hothead whose blind anger drove his movements at random. Zadig lunges and disarms him; and as the Egyptian, more furious than ever, tries to hurl himself upon him, Zadig seizes him, bears down on him, throws him to the ground, and holds his sword against his chest. He offers to spare his life. Beside himself, the Egyptian draws his dagger and wounds Zadig at the very moment his conqueror was granting him mercy. Outraged, Zadig plunges his sword into the man's breast. The Egyptian gives a horrible cry and dies struggling. Zadig then went up to the woman and said humbly, "He forced me to kill him. I have avenged you; you are free of the most violent man I have ever seen. What would you have me do now, madam?" "Die, you villain!" she answered. "Die! You have killed my lover. I wish I could tear out your heart." "Really, madam," Zadig replied, "you had a strange man for a lover. He was beating you with all his strength, and he wanted to take my life because you begged me to help you." "I wish he were still beating me!" the woman cried

out. "I thoroughly deserved it; I had made him jealous. If only heaven would let him beat me and put you in his place!" More astonished and angrier than he had ever been in his life, Zadig said, "Madam, beautiful as you are, you deserve a beating from me in turn, you are so absurd; but I will not take the trouble." With that he climbed back onto his camel and headed toward the village. He had scarcely gone a few paces when he turns at the noise of four couriers from Babylon. They were riding at full gallop. On seeing the woman, one of them cried, "That is her! She matches the description we were given." They paid no attention to the dead man and immediately seized the woman. She kept crying out to Zadig, "Help me once more, generous stranger! Forgive me for complaining of you. Help me, and I am yours until the grave!" Zadig no longer had any desire to fight for her. "Try someone else," he replies. "You will not catch me again." Besides, he was wounded, his blood was flowing, he needed help; and the sight of the four Babylonians, probably sent by King Moabdar, filled him with alarm. He hurries toward the village, unable to imagine why four couriers from Babylon had come to seize this Egyptian woman, but still more astonished at the woman's character.

CHAPTER 10

Slavery



As he entered the Egyptian village, he found himself surrounded by the people. Everyone shouted, “There is the man who carried off the beautiful Missouf and has just murdered Clétofis!” “Gentlemen,” he said, “God preserve me from ever carrying off your beautiful Missouf! She is far too capricious. As for Clétofis, I did not murder him; I merely defended myself against him. He wanted to kill me because I had very humbly begged him to spare the beautiful Missouf, whom he was beating mercilessly. I am a stranger seeking refuge in Egypt; it is hardly likely that, on coming to ask your protection, I would begin by abducting a woman and murdering a man.”

The Egyptians were just and humane in those days. The people led Zadig to the town hall. First they had his wound dressed; then they questioned him and his servant separately to discover the truth. They found that Zadig was not a murderer; but he was guilty of shedding a man’s blood: the law condemned him to slavery. His two camels were sold for the village’s benefit; all the gold he had brought was distributed among the inhabitants; he himself was put up for sale in the public square, along with his traveling companion. An Arab merchant named Sétoc bid for them; but the servant, better fitted for hard labor, sold for far more than his master. There was no comparison between the two men. Zadig thus became a slave subordinate to his own servant; they were fastened together with a chain around their ankles, and in this condition followed

the Arab merchant to his house. On the way Zadig comforted his servant and urged him to be patient; but, as usual, he reflected on human life. "I see," he told him, "that the misfortunes of my destiny are spilling over into yours. Everything has turned out very strangely for me so far. I was fined for seeing a female dog pass by; I nearly got impaled over a griffin; I was sent to my execution for writing verses in praise of the king; I came close to being strangled because the queen had yellow ribbons; and here I am, a slave with you, because a brute beat his mistress. Come, let us not lose heart; perhaps all this will end. Arab merchants have to have slaves; why should I not be one like anyone else, since I am a man like anyone else? This merchant will not be pitiless; he will have to treat his slaves well if he wants them to be of service." He spoke in this way, while deep in his heart he was occupied with the fate of the queen of Babylon.

Two days later Sétoc the merchant set out for Arabia Deserta with his slaves and camels. His tribe lived near the desert of Horeb. The journey was long and arduous. On the road Sétoc valued the servant far above the master, because the former was much better at loading camels; every little favor went to him. A camel died two days' journey from Horeb; its load was divided among the servants, and Zadig received his share. Sétoc began to laugh at the sight of all his slaves walking bent double. Zadig took the liberty of explaining why, and taught him the laws of equilibrium. Astonished, the merchant began to see him in a different light. Seeing that he had aroused his curiosity, Zadig heightened it by teaching him many things relevant to his trade: the specific gravities of metals and commodities of equal volume; the characteristics of various useful animals; the means of making useful those that were not. In short, Sétoc came to regard him as a sage. He preferred Zadig to the companion he had valued so highly. He treated him well and had no reason to regret it.

On reaching his tribe, Sétoc's first business was to reclaim five hundred ounces of silver from a Hebrew to whom he had lent them in the presence of two witnesses; but both witnesses had died, and the Hebrew, against whom nothing could be proved, was appropriating the merchant's silver, thanking God for giving him the means to cheat an Arab. Sétoc confided his trouble to

Zadig, who had become his adviser. "Where," Zadig asked, "did you lend your five hundred ounces to this faithless man?" "On a broad stone near Mount Horeb," the merchant answered. "What is your debtor's character?" said Zadig. "A scoundrel's," Sétoc replied. "But I am asking whether he is quick or phlegmatic, shrewd or imprudent." "Of all the bad debtors I know," said Sétoc, "he is the quickest." "Well then," Zadig persisted, "allow me to plead your case before the judge." He duly summoned the Hebrew to court and addressed the judge as follows: "Cushion of the throne of equity, I come in my master's name to reclaim five hundred ounces of silver from this man, who refuses to return them." "Have you any witnesses?" said the judge. "No, they are dead; but a broad stone remains, on which the silver was counted out. If Your Highness will order the stone to be fetched, I hope it will bear witness. The Hebrew and I will remain here until the stone arrives; I will send for it at the expense of Sétoc, my master." "Most willingly," answered the judge, and he began disposing of other cases.

At the end of the hearing he said to Zadig, "Well, has your stone not arrived yet?" The Hebrew laughed and answered, "Your Highness could stay here until tomorrow and the stone would still not have arrived. It is more than six miles away, and it would take fifteen men to move it." "There!" Zadig cried. "I told you the stone would bear witness. Since this man knows where it is, he admits that the silver was counted out upon it." Disconcerted, the Hebrew was soon forced to confess everything. The judge ordered him tied to the stone without food or drink until he had returned the five hundred ounces, which were soon paid.

The slave Zadig and the stone were held in great esteem throughout Arabia.

CHAPTER 11

The Pyre



Delighted, Sétoc made his slave his closest friend. He could no more do without him than the king of Babylon had been able to; and Zadig was fortunate that Sétoc had no wife. In his master he discovered a disposition toward goodness, great integrity, and sound sense. He was sorry to see that, following the ancient custom of Arabia, Sétoc worshiped the host of heaven—that is, the sun, moon, and stars. He sometimes spoke to him about it with great tact. At last he told him that these were bodies like any others and deserved his homage no more than a tree or a rock. “But,” Sétoc said, “they are eternal beings from which all our blessings come. They give life to nature; they govern the seasons; besides, they are so far from us that we cannot help revering them.” “You receive greater benefits,” Zadig answered, “from the waters of the Red Sea, which carries your merchandise to India. Why should it not be as ancient as the stars? And if you worship what is far away, you ought to worship the land of the Gangarides, at the ends of the earth.” “No,” Sétoc said, “the stars are too brilliant for me not to worship them.” When evening came, Zadig lit a great many candles in the tent where he was to dine with Sétoc; and as soon as his master appeared, he fell to his knees before the burning tapers and said, “Eternal, brilliant lights, always look kindly upon me!” Having spoken these words, he sat down to dinner without looking at Sétoc. “What are you doing?” Sétoc asked in astonishment. “What you do,” Zadig replied. “I worship these candles

and neglect their master and mine.” Sétoc understood the profound meaning of this fable. His slave’s wisdom entered his soul; he no longer lavished incense upon created things, but worshiped the eternal Being who had made them.

There was then a dreadful custom in Arabia, originally brought from Scythia, which, having established itself in India through the influence of the Brahmins, threatened to spread throughout the East. When a married man died and his beloved wife wished to become a saint, she burned herself in public upon her husband’s body. This was a solemn festival called the *widowhood pyre*. The tribe in which the most women had burned was held in the highest esteem. An Arab of Sétoc’s tribe died, and his widow, named *Almona*, who was very devout, announced the day and hour when she would throw herself into the flames to the sound of drums and trumpets. Zadig pointed out to Sétoc how contrary this horrible custom was to the welfare of the human race: every day young widows were allowed to burn who could have given children to the state, or at least raised their own. He made Sétoc agree that, if possible, so barbarous a practice should be abolished. Sétoc answered, “For more than a thousand years women have enjoyed the right to burn themselves. Which of us will dare change a law that time has consecrated? Is anything more respectable than an ancient abuse?” “Reason is older still,” Zadig replied. “Speak to the chiefs of the tribes, and I will go to the young widow.”

He had himself introduced to her; after winning her favor with praise of her beauty and telling her what a pity it was to consign so many charms to the flames, he also praised her constancy and courage. “You must have loved your husband enormously?” he said. “I? Not at all,” the Arab woman answered. “He was a brute, a jealous, unbearable man; but I am firmly resolved to throw myself onto his pyre.” “There must, apparently,” Zadig said, “be some exquisite pleasure in being burned alive.” “Oh, nature shudders at it,” said the woman, “but it has to be done. I am devout; my reputation would be ruined, and everyone would laugh at me if I did not burn myself.” Having made her admit that she was burning herself for other people and out of vanity, Zadig spoke to her at length in a way that made her a little fonder of life; he even succeeded in inspiring some affection for the man who was speaking to her. “What would

you do, after all," he asked, "if the vanity of burning yourself did not have such a hold on you?" "Alas," said the woman, "I think I would ask you to marry me."

Zadig was too full of thoughts of Astarté not to evade this declaration; but he went at once to the chiefs of the tribes, told them what had happened, and advised them to pass a law forbidding any widow to burn herself until she had conversed alone with a young man for a full hour. From that time on, no woman in Arabia burned herself. To Zadig alone they owed the destruction, in a single day, of so cruel a custom, which had endured for so many centuries. He was therefore Arabia's benefactor.

CHAPTER 12

The Supper



Sétoc, unable to part from this man in whom wisdom dwelt, took him to the great fair at Basra, where the foremost merchants of the inhabited world were to gather. It was a deep consolation to Zadig to see so many men from different countries assembled in one place. It seemed to him that the universe was one great family coming together at Basra. On the very second day he found himself dining with an Egyptian, an Indian of the Gangarides, a man from Cathay, a Greek, a Celt, and several other foreigners who, in their frequent journeys to the Arabian Gulf, had learned enough Arabic to make themselves understood. The Egyptian seemed very angry. "What an abominable country Basra is!" he said. "They refuse to lend me a thousand ounces of gold on the best security in the world." "How so?" said Sétoc. "On what security have they refused you this sum?" "On my aunt's body," the Egyptian answered. "She was the finest woman in Egypt. She always accompanied me; she died on the journey. I have made her into one of the most beautiful mummies we possess, and in my own country I could get anything I wanted by pawning her. It is very strange that here they will not even give me a thousand ounces of gold on such solid security." Still fuming, he was about to eat some excellent boiled chicken when the Indian took him by the hand and cried in distress, "Oh! What are you going to do?" "Eat this chicken," said the man with the mummy. "Take care not to," said the Gangaride. "The soul of the departed woman may have passed into this

chicken's body, and you would not want to risk eating your aunt. Cooking chickens is an obvious outrage against nature." "What do you mean by your nature and your chickens?" the angry Egyptian retorted. "We worship an ox, yet we eat oxen readily enough." "You worship an ox! Is that possible?" said the man from the Ganges. "Nothing could be more possible," the other replied. "We have done so for a hundred and thirty-five thousand years, and none of us sees any fault in it." "Oh! A hundred and thirty-five thousand years!" said the Indian. "That reckoning is a little exaggerated. India has been inhabited for only eighty thousand years, and we are certainly older than you; Brahma had forbidden us to eat oxen before you ever thought of putting them on altars and spits." "A fine creature your Brahma must be, to compare him with Apis!" said the Egyptian. "What has your Brahma done that is so fine?" The Brahmin answered, "He taught human beings to read and write, and the whole earth owes him the game of chess." "You are mistaken," said a Chaldean sitting beside him. "It is to the fish Oannès that we owe such great blessings, and it is only just to pay homage to him alone. Everyone will tell you that he was a divine being, with a golden tail and a handsome human head, and that he came out of the water to preach on land for three hours a day. He had several children, who all became kings, as everyone knows. I have his portrait at home, and revere it as I should. One may eat as much beef as one pleases, but cooking fish is certainly a very great impiety. Besides, both of you are of origins too ignoble and too recent to dispute anything with me. The Egyptian nation counts only a hundred and thirty-five thousand years, and the Indians boast of only eighty thousand, whereas we have almanacs going back four thousand centuries. Believe me, give up your follies, and I will give each of you a fine portrait of Oannès."

The man from Cambalu spoke up. "I have great respect for the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Greeks, the Celts, Brahma, the ox Apis, and the handsome fish Oannès; but perhaps Li or Tien^a, whichever you choose to call it, is quite as good as oxen and fish. I will say nothing of my country; it is as large as the lands of Egypt, Chaldea, and India put together. I do not dispute antiquity, because

it is enough to be happy, and being ancient amounts to very little. But if we must speak of almanacs, I would say that all Asia uses ours, and that we had very good ones before arithmetic was known in Chaldea.”

^a Chinese words whose proper meanings are: *li*, natural light, reason; and *tien*, heaven; both also mean God.

“You are all profoundly ignorant!” the Greek cried. “Do you not know that chaos is the father of everything, and that form and matter have brought the world to its present state?” This Greek spoke at length, but at last the Celt interrupted him. Having drunk heavily while the others argued, he now thought himself more learned than all of them. Swearing, he said that only Teutath and oak mistletoe were worth talking about; that he, for his part, always carried mistletoe in his pocket; that his ancestors the Scythians were the only good people who had ever existed in the world; that, admittedly, they had sometimes eaten human beings, but that was no reason not to show great respect for his nation; and that, finally, if anyone spoke ill of Teutath, he would teach him some manners. The quarrel then grew heated, and Sétoc saw the moment coming when the table would run with blood. Zadig, who had remained silent throughout the dispute, rose at last. He first addressed the Celt, as the most furious, told him he was right, and asked him for some mistletoe; he praised the Greek’s eloquence and soothed all the heated spirits. He said very little to the man from Cathay, because he had been the most reasonable of them all. Then he told them, “My friends, you were about to quarrel over nothing, for you are all of the same opinion.” At this they all cried out. “Is it not true,” he said to the Celt, “that you worship not this mistletoe but the one who made the mistletoe and the oak?” “Certainly,” answered the Celt. “And you, my Egyptian friend, surely you revere in a particular ox the one who gave you oxen?” “Yes,” said the Egyptian. “The fish Oannès,” he continued, “must give way to the one who made the sea and the fish.” “Agreed,” said the Chaldean. “The Indian,” he added, “and the man from Cathay acknowledge, as you do, a first principle. I did not altogether understand the admirable things the Greek said, but I am sure he too admits a higher Being, on whom form and matter depend.” The Greek, finding himself admired, said that Zadig had understood

his thought very well. “Then you are all of the same opinion,” Zadig replied, “and there is nothing here to quarrel about.” Everyone embraced him. Having sold his wares at a very high price, Sétoc took his friend Zadig back to his tribe. On arriving, Zadig learned that he had been tried in his absence and was about to be burned over a slow fire.

CHAPTER 13

The Appointments



The Appointment.

While he was traveling to Basra, the priests of the stars had resolved to punish him. The jewels and ornaments of the young widows they sent to the pyre belonged to them by right; having Zadig burned was the very least they could do for the trick he had played them. They therefore accused Zadig of holding erroneous opinions about the host of heaven; they testified against him and swore they had heard him say that the stars did not set in the sea. This dreadful blasphemy made the judges shudder; they were on the point of tearing their garments when they heard these impious words, and would doubtless have done so if Zadig had possessed the means to pay for them; but in the extremity of their grief they contented themselves with condemning him to be burned over a slow fire. In despair, Sétoc used his influence in vain to save his friend; he was soon obliged to hold his tongue. The young widow Almona, who had developed a great taste for life and owed it to Zadig, resolved to rescue him from the pyre whose abuses he had shown her. She turned her plan over in her mind without speaking of it to anyone. Zadig was to be executed the next day; she had only the night to save him. Here is how she went about it, like a charitable and prudent woman.

She perfumed herself, heightened her beauty with the richest and most alluring attire, and went to request a secret audience with the chief priest of the stars. Once before this venerable old man, she addressed him in these words: "Eldest son of the Great Bear, brother of the Bull, cousin of the Great Dog"—these were the pontiff's titles—"I come to confide my scruples to you. I am very much afraid that I committed an enormous sin by not burning myself on my dear husband's pyre. Indeed, what had I to preserve? Perishable flesh, already quite withered." With these words she drew from her long silk sleeves her bare arms, exquisitely shaped and dazzlingly white. "You see," she said, "how little all this is worth." In his heart the pontiff found it worth a great deal. His eyes said so, and his mouth confirmed it; he swore that he had never in his life seen such beautiful arms. "Alas!" the widow said. "My arms may be a little less bad than the rest; but you will admit that my bosom was not worth my concern." Then she revealed the most enchanting breast that nature had ever formed. Beside it, a rosebud on an ivory apple would have looked like madder on boxwood, and lambs fresh from the washing would have seemed a brownish yellow. This bosom, her great black eyes languishing and softly shining with a tender fire, her cheeks glowing with the loveliest crimson mingled with the purest milky white, her nose, which was not like the tower of Mount Lebanon, her lips, like two borders of coral enclosing the finest pearls of the Arabian Sea—all this together made the old man believe he was twenty. Stammering, he made a tender declaration. Seeing him aflame, Almona asked him to pardon Zadig. "Alas!" he said. "My beautiful lady, even if I granted you his pardon, my indulgence would serve no purpose; three other colleagues of mine must sign it." "Sign it all the same," said Almona. "Gladly," said the priest, "provided that your favors are the price of my compliance." "You do me too much honor," said Almona. "Only be so kind as to come to my room after the sun has set; as soon as the brilliant star *Sheat* is above the horizon, you will find me on a rose-colored sofa, and you may do what you can with your servant." She then left, taking his signature with her and leaving the old man full of love and doubts about his pow-

ers. He spent the rest of the day bathing; he drank a cordial made with cinnamon from Ceylon and the precious spices of Tidore and Ternate, and impatiently waited for the star *Sheat* to appear.

Meanwhile the beautiful Almona went to the second pontiff. He assured her that the sun, the moon, and all the fires of the firmament were mere will-o'-the-wisps beside her charms. She asked him for the same pardon, and he proposed that she pay the price. She allowed herself to be persuaded and made an appointment with the second pontiff for the rising of the star *Algénib*. From there she went to the third and fourth priests, always collecting a signature and giving an appointment from one star to the next. Then she sent word to the judges to come to her house on important business. They came; she showed them the four names and told them the price at which the priests had sold Zadig's pardon. Each priest arrived at the appointed hour; each was greatly astonished to find his colleagues there, and still more to find the judges, before whom their shame was exposed. Zadig was saved. Sétoc was so delighted with Almona's ingenuity that he made her his wife.

CHAPTER 14

The Dance



Sétoc needed to go to the island of Serendib on business; but the first month of his marriage, which is, as everyone knows, the honeymoon, allowed him neither to leave his wife nor to believe he could ever leave her. He asked his friend Zadig to make the journey for him. “Alas!” Zadig said. “Must I put an even greater distance between the beautiful Astarté and myself? But I must serve my benefactors.” He spoke, he wept, and he left.

He had not been long on the island of Serendib before he was regarded as an extraordinary man. He became the arbiter of every dispute among the merchants, the friend of the wise, the adviser of the small number of people who take advice. The king wished to see and hear him. He soon recognized Zadig’s full worth, trusted in his wisdom, and made him his friend. The king’s familiarity and esteem made Zadig tremble. Night and day he was haunted by the misfortune Moabdar’s kindness had brought upon him. “I please the king,” he said. “Will that not be my ruin?” Yet he could not escape His Majesty’s attentions; for it must be admitted that Nabussan, king of Serendib, son of Nussanab, son of Nabassun, son of Sanbusna, was one of the best princes in Asia, and when one spoke with him it was difficult not to love him.

This good prince was continually praised, deceived, and robbed: everyone competed to plunder his treasures. The receiver-general of the island of Serendib always set the example, which the others faithfully followed. The king

knew it; he had changed his treasurer several times, but had been unable to change the established fashion of dividing the royal revenues into two unequal halves, of which the smaller always went to His Majesty and the larger to the administrators.

King Nabussan confided his trouble to the wise Zadig. "You who know so many fine things," he said, "do you know a way of finding me a treasurer who will not rob me?" "Certainly," Zadig answered. "I know an infallible way to give you a man with clean hands." Delighted, the king embraced him and asked how it was to be done. "You need only," Zadig said, "make everyone who presents himself for the dignity of treasurer dance; whoever dances most lightly will unfailingly be the most honest man." "You are joking," said the king. "What a curious way to choose a receiver of my revenues! What! You claim that the man who performs the best *entrechat* will be the most upright and capable financier?" "I do not promise he will be the most capable," Zadig replied, "but I assure you he will undoubtedly be the most honest." Zadig spoke with such confidence that the king believed he had some supernatural secret for judging financiers. "I do not like the supernatural," Zadig said. "People and books full of marvels have always displeased me. If Your Majesty will let me make the trial I propose, you will be quite convinced that my secret is the simplest, easiest thing in the world." Nabussan, king of Serendib, was far more astonished to hear that this secret was simple than he would have been if it had been presented as a miracle. "Very well," he said. "Do as you see fit." "Leave it to me," said Zadig. "You will gain more from this trial than you think." That very day he had a proclamation issued in the king's name: all who aspired to the office of high receiver of the funds of His Gracious Majesty Nabussan, son of Nussanab, were to present themselves in light silk clothing in the king's antechamber on the first day of the Moon of the Crocodile. Sixty-four of them came. Violinists had been brought into a neighboring hall; everything was ready for the ball, but the hall's door was closed, and to enter it one had to pass through a small, rather dark gallery. An usher came to fetch and escort each candidate, one after another, through this passage, where he was left alone for a few minutes. The king, who was in on the secret, had laid out all his treasures in the gallery. When

all the applicants had reached the hall, His Majesty ordered them to dance. Never had anyone danced more heavily or with less grace; all kept their heads down, their backs bent, their hands pressed to their sides. "What scoundrels!" Zadig murmured. Only one of them danced nimbly, head high, gaze assured, arms outstretched, body upright, legs firm. "Ah, the honest man! The worthy man!" said Zadig. The king embraced this good dancer and declared him treasurer; all the others were punished and assessed financial penalties with the greatest justice in the world, for each had filled his pockets during his time in the gallery and could scarcely walk. For human nature's sake, the king was sorry that of these sixty-four dancers, sixty-three were thieves. The dark gallery was called *the Corridor of Temptation*. In Persia these sixty-three gentlemen would have been impaled; in other countries a court of justice would have been convened that would have consumed three times the stolen money in expenses and restored nothing to the sovereign's coffers; in another kingdom they would have fully vindicated themselves and had this light-footed dancer disgraced. In Serendib they were sentenced only to enlarge the public treasury, for Nabussan was very indulgent.

He was also very grateful: he gave Zadig a sum of money greater than any treasurer had ever stolen from the king his master. Zadig used it to send messengers to Babylon to learn Astarté's fate. His voice trembled as he gave this order, his blood rushed back toward his heart, his eyes were covered with darkness, his soul was on the point of leaving him. The courier set out; Zadig watched him embark, then went back to the king, seeing no one, believing himself in his own room, and uttering the word "love." "Ah, love!" said the king. "That is precisely the matter. You have guessed what troubles me. What a great man you are! I hope you will teach me how to recognize a woman who can withstand every test, just as you have found me a disinterested treasurer." Having recovered his senses, Zadig promised to serve him in love as in finance, though the task seemed more difficult still.

CHAPTER 15

Blue Eyes



“The body and the heart,” the king said to Zadig... At these words the Babylonian could not help interrupting His Majesty. “How grateful I am,” he said, “that you did not say ‘the mind and the heart’! Those are the only words you hear in Babylonian conversation; you see nothing but books about the heart and the mind, written by people who have neither. But please, sire, go on.” Nabussan continued: “My body and my heart were both made for love; the first of these two powers has every reason to be content. I have a hundred women here at my service, all beautiful, obliging, attentive, even passionate—or pretending to be so with me. My heart is far less happy. I have learned all too well that people lavish caresses on the king of Serendib and care very little about Nabussan. It is not that I think my women unfaithful; but I would like to find a soul that was mine. For such a treasure I would give all hundred beauties whose charms I possess. See whether, among these hundred sultanas, you can find me one whose love I can be sure of.”

Zadig answered as he had on the matter of the financiers: “Sire, leave it to me. But first allow me to dispose of what you displayed in the Gallery of Temptation. I will give you a proper accounting, and you will lose nothing.” The king gave him absolute authority. In Serendib he chose thirty-three of the ugliest little hunchbacks he could find, thirty-three of the handsomest pages, and thirty-three of the most eloquent and vigorous bonzes. He allowed them

all free entry to the sultan's chambers. Each little hunchback had four thousand gold pieces to give away, and on the very first day every hunchback was successful. The pages, with nothing to offer but themselves, triumphed only after two or three days. The bonzes had a little more difficulty; but at last thirty-three devout women surrendered to them. Through latticed screens overlooking all the chambers, the king watched these trials and marveled. Of his hundred women, ninety-nine fell before his eyes. One remained, very young, entirely new to the place, whom His Majesty had never approached. One, two, three hunchbacks were sent to her, offering as much as twenty thousand gold pieces. She was incorruptible, and could not help laughing at their notion that money would give them better figures. The two handsomest pages were presented to her; she said she found the king handsomer still. The most eloquent bonze was unleashed on her, then the most intrepid. She found the first a chatterbox and did not even deign to suspect the second's gifts. "The heart is everything," she said. "I will never yield to a hunchback's gold, a young man's charms, or a bonze's seductions. I will love Nabussan alone, the son of Nussanab, and wait until he is pleased to love me." The king was beside himself with joy, astonishment, and tenderness. He took back all the money that had secured the hunchbacks' success and gave it to the beautiful Falide: that was the young woman's name. He gave her his heart; she richly deserved it. Never had the flower of youth shone so brightly; never had the charms of beauty been so enchanting. Historical truth will not allow us to conceal that she curtsied badly, but she danced like the fairies, sang like the sirens, and spoke like the Graces. She was full of talents and virtues.

Loved by Falide, Nabussan adored her; but she had blue eyes, and this became the source of the greatest misfortunes. An ancient law forbade kings to love any of those women whom the Greeks later called "ox-eyed." The chief of the bonzes had established this law more than five thousand years earlier. To take the mistress of the first king of the island of Serendib for himself, that first bonze had made the anathema against blue eyes a fundamental law of the state. All the orders of the empire came to remonstrate with Nabussan. People declared in public that the kingdom's last days had arrived, that abomination

had reached its height, that all nature was threatened with some sinister event—in short, that Nabussan, son of Nussanab, loved two great blue eyes. The hunchbacks, the financiers, the bonzes, and the brunettes filled the kingdom with their complaints.

The savage peoples who live in northern Serendib took advantage of this general discontent. They invaded the good Nabussan's dominions. He asked his subjects for funds; the bonzes, who possessed half the state's revenues, contented themselves with raising their hands to heaven, and refused to put them into their coffers to help the king. They offered beautiful prayers set to music and left the state at the mercy of the barbarians.

"Oh, my dear Zadig, will you rescue me from this dreadful predicament too?" Nabussan cried in anguish. "Very gladly," Zadig answered. "You shall have as much money from the bonzes as you want. Abandon the lands where their castles stand, and defend only your own." Nabussan did exactly that. The bonzes came to throw themselves at the king's feet and implore his help. The king answered them with beautiful music, its words a prayer to heaven for the preservation of their lands. At last the bonzes gave money, and the king brought the war to a successful end. Thus, through his wise and fortunate counsel and his very great services, Zadig had earned the irreconcilable hatred of the most powerful people in the state. The bonzes and the brunettes swore to destroy him; the financiers and the hunchbacks did not spare him; they made the good Nabussan suspicious of him. Services rendered often wait in the antechamber while suspicions enter the private study, as Zoroaster's maxim says. Every day brought fresh accusations: the first is repelled, the second grazes, the third wounds, the fourth kills.

Alarmed, Zadig, who had successfully settled his friend Sétoc's business and sent him his money, thought only of leaving the island. He resolved to go in person to seek news of Astarté. "For if I stay in Serendib," he said, "the bonzes will have me impaled. But where can I go? In Egypt I will be a slave; in Arabia, most likely burned; in Babylon, strangled. Still, I must learn what has become of Astarté. Let us leave, and see what my sad destiny has in store for me."

CHAPTER 16

The Robber



When he reached the border between Arabia Petraea and Syria, armed Arabs came out of a well-fortified castle he was passing. He found himself surrounded. “Everything you have belongs to us,” they shouted, “and you yourself belong to our master.” Zadig answered by drawing his sword; his servant, a courageous man, did the same. They struck dead the first Arabs who laid hands on them. Their attackers doubled in number; undaunted, they resolved to die fighting. There were two men defending themselves against a multitude; such a struggle could not last long. The master of the castle, named Arbogad, saw Zadig’s astonishing feats of valor from a window and conceived an esteem for him. He hurried down, came himself to drive his men back, and freed the two travelers. “Everything that passes through my lands is mine,” he said, “as is anything I find on other people’s lands. But you seem such a brave man that I exempt you from the general rule.” He brought him into his castle, ordering his men to treat him well; and that evening Arbogad chose to dine with Zadig.

The lord of the castle was one of those Arabs known as *robbers*; but among a multitude of bad deeds he sometimes did good ones. He robbed with furious greed and gave generously; fearless in action, rather gentle in his dealings, dissolute at table, merry in his excesses, and above all frank. He took a great liking to Zadig; their conversation grew lively and prolonged the meal. At last Arbogad said, “I advise you to enlist under me; you could do no better. It is not a bad

trade. One day you may become what I am.” “May I ask,” said Zadig, “how long you have practiced this noble profession?” “Since my earliest youth,” the lord replied. “I was the servant of a fairly able Arab; my situation was unbearable. I despaired to see that, of all the earth, which belongs equally to everyone, destiny had reserved no share for me. I confided my troubles to an old Arab, who told me, ‘My son, do not despair. Once there was a grain of sand that lamented being an unknown speck in the desert. After a few years it became a diamond, and now it is the finest ornament in the crown of the king of India.’ His words struck home. I was the grain of sand; I resolved to become a diamond. I began by stealing two horses. I gathered some comrades around me and put myself in a position to rob small caravans. In this way I gradually ended the disparity that had originally existed between other men and me. I had my share of this world’s goods; indeed, I was compensated with interest. I was held in great esteem. I became a robber lord; I acquired this castle by force. The satrap of Syria tried to dispossess me, but I was already too rich to have anything to fear. I gave the satrap money, in return for which I kept the castle and enlarged my estates. He even appointed me treasurer of the tribute Arabia Petraea paid to the King of Kings. I performed my duties as a receiver, and not at all as a payer.

“The Great Desterham of Babylon sent a minor satrap here, in King Moabdar’s name, to have me strangled. The man arrived with his orders; I knew all about them. Before his eyes I had the four men he had brought to tighten the cord strangled themselves. Then I asked what his commission to strangle me might earn him. He answered that his fee could run to three hundred gold pieces. I made it plain that he would earn more with me. I made him my deputy robber; today he is one of my best officers, and one of the richest. Take my advice, and you will succeed as he did. There has never been a better season for robbery, now that Moabdar has been killed and everything in Babylon is in confusion.”

“Moabdar has been killed!” said Zadig. “And what has become of Queen Astarté?” “I know nothing about that,” Arbogad replied. “All I know is that Moabdar went mad, that he was killed, that Babylon is one great cutthroats’

den, that the whole empire is laid waste, that there are still some fine hauls to be made, and that for my part I have made some splendid ones.” “But the queen,” said Zadig. “Please, do you know nothing of the queen’s fate?” “I have heard something about a prince of Hyrcania,” he replied. “She is probably among his concubines, unless she was killed in the uproar. But I am more interested in plunder than in news. I have captured a number of women on my raids; I keep none of them. I sell them for a good price when they are beautiful, without asking who they are. People do not buy rank. An ugly queen would find no buyer. Perhaps I have sold Queen Astarté; perhaps she is dead. But it matters little to me, and I think you should care no more than I do.” As he spoke he drank so valiantly, and muddled every idea so thoroughly, that Zadig could get no clear account from him.

He sat speechless, crushed, motionless. Arbogad kept drinking, telling stories, repeating endlessly that he was the happiest of men, and urging Zadig to make himself just as happy. At last, gently lulled by the fumes of wine, he went off to sleep in peace. Zadig spent the night in the most violent turmoil. “What!” he said. “The king went mad! He has been killed! I cannot help pitying him. The empire is torn apart, and this robber is happy. Oh, fortune! Oh, destiny! A thief is happy, and the most lovable being nature ever made has perhaps died a dreadful death, or lives in a state worse than death. Oh, Astarté! What has become of you?”

At daybreak he questioned everyone he met in the castle; but everyone was busy, and no one answered. Fresh conquests had been made during the night; they were dividing the spoils. All he could obtain amid this tumultuous confusion was permission to leave. He took advantage of it without delay, more deeply sunk than ever in his painful reflections.

Zadig walked on, anxious and troubled, his mind filled with the unfortunate Astarté, the king of Babylon, his faithful Cador, the happy robber Arbogad, that woman of such changeable moods whom Babylonians had carried off on the borders of Egypt—in short, with all the reversals and misfortunes he had suffered.

CHAPTER 17

The Fisherman



A few leagues from Arbogad's castle, he found himself beside a little river, still lamenting his destiny and seeing himself as the very model of misfortune. He saw a fisherman lying on the bank, barely holding in one limp hand a net he seemed about to abandon, his eyes raised to heaven.

"I am certainly the most unfortunate of men," the fisherman was saying. "By everyone's admission, I was the most celebrated seller of cream cheeses in Babylon, and I was ruined. I had the prettiest wife a man could possess, and she betrayed me. I had one wretched house left, and I saw it plundered and destroyed. Taking refuge in a hut, I have nothing to live on but my fishing, and I cannot catch a single fish. Oh, my net! I will throw you into the water no more; it is my turn to throw myself in." With these words he rose and moved forward like a man about to plunge into the river and end his life.

"What!" Zadig said to himself. "Are there men as unfortunate as I am?" His impulse to save the fisherman's life was as swift as the thought. He ran to him, stopped him, and questioned him with tenderness and comfort in his manner. They say we feel less wretched when we are not alone in our misery; but according to Zoroaster, this comes not from malice but from need. We feel drawn to a fellow sufferer as to one of our own kind. A happy man's joy would be an insult; but two unfortunate men are like two frail shrubs that lean on one another and gain strength against the storm.

“Why do you give way to your misfortunes?” Zadig asked the fisherman. “Because,” he answered, “I see no way out of them. I was the most respected man in the village of Derlback, near Babylon, and with my wife’s help I made the finest cream cheeses in the empire. Queen Astarté and the famous minister Zadig were passionately fond of them. I had supplied their households with six hundred cheeses. One day I went to the city to be paid. On arriving in Babylon, I learned that the queen and Zadig had disappeared. I ran to Lord Zadig’s house—I had never seen him—and found the Great Desterham’s archers, armed with a royal warrant, loyally plundering his house in good order. I flew to the queen’s kitchens. Some of the lords of the royal table told me she was dead; others said she was in prison; others maintained that she had fled. But all assured me that I would not be paid for my cheeses. My wife and I went to Lord Orcan’s, who was one of my customers. We asked for his protection in our misfortune. He granted it to my wife and refused it to me. She was whiter than those cream cheeses with which my troubles began, and the splendor of Tyrian purple was no more brilliant than the rosy color that brought that whiteness to life. That was why Orcan kept her and drove me out of his house. I wrote my dear wife a desperate man’s letter. She said to the messenger, ‘Ha, ha! Yes! I know who the man writing to me is; I have heard of him. They say he makes excellent cream cheeses. Have some brought to me, and see that he is paid.’

“In my misery I decided to seek justice. I had six ounces of gold left. I had to give two ounces to the legal adviser I consulted, two to the attorney who took my case, and two to the chief judge’s secretary. When all that was done, my lawsuit had not yet begun, and I had already spent more money than my cheeses and my wife were worth. I returned to my village intending to sell my house to recover my wife.

“My house was easily worth sixty ounces of gold; but people could see that I was poor and in a hurry to sell. The first man I approached offered me thirty ounces; the second, twenty; and the third, ten. I was so blinded that I was finally ready to agree, when a prince of Hyrcania came to Babylon, ravaging everything in his path. My house was first ransacked and then burned.

“Having thus lost my money, my wife, and my house, I withdrew to this country where you see me now. I tried to live by fishing. The fish mock me just as people do. I catch nothing; I am starving; and without you, noble comforter, I was about to die in the river.”

The fisherman did not tell this story without interruption, for at every turn Zadig, moved and beside himself, said, “What! Do you know nothing of the queen’s fate?” “No, my lord,” the fisherman answered. “But I know that the queen and Zadig never paid me for my cream cheeses, that my wife has been taken from me, and that I am in despair.” “I trust,” said Zadig, “that you will not lose all your money. I have heard of this Zadig. He is an honorable man, and if he returns to Babylon, as he hopes to do, he will give you more than he owes you. But as for your wife, who is not so honorable, I advise you not to try to get her back. Believe me, go to Babylon. I will be there before you, because I am on horseback and you are on foot. Call on the illustrious Cador; tell him you met his friend, and wait for me at his house. Go; perhaps you will not always be unhappy.”

“Oh, mighty Orosmade!” he continued. “You use me to comfort this man; whom will you use to comfort me?” As he spoke he gave the fisherman half of all the money he had brought from Arabia. Overwhelmed and delighted, the fisherman kissed the feet of Cador’s friend, saying, “You are a saving angel.”

Still Zadig kept asking for news, and shedding tears. “What, my lord!” the fisherman cried. “Can you be unhappy too, you who do good?” “A hundred times unhappier than you,” Zadig answered. “But how can it be,” the good man said, “that the giver deserves more pity than the receiver?” “Because your greatest misfortune,” Zadig replied, “was poverty, while mine is of the heart.” “Has Orcan taken your wife?” the fisherman asked. These words brought all Zadig’s adventures back to his mind. He recounted the list of his misfortunes, beginning with the queen’s female dog and ending with his arrival at the robber Arbogad’s. “Ah!” he told the fisherman. “Orcan deserves to be punished. But as a rule it is people like him who are destiny’s favorites. Whatever happens, go to Lord Cador’s and wait for me.” They parted: the fisherman walked on thanking his destiny, and Zadig hurried away, still accusing his own.

CHAPTER 18

The Basilisk



Coming into a beautiful meadow, he saw several women searching intently for something. He took the liberty of approaching one of them and asking whether he might have the honor of helping with their search. “Be sure you do nothing of the kind,” the Syrian woman replied. “What we are looking for may be touched only by women.” “That is very strange,” said Zadig. “May I venture to ask what this thing is that only women are allowed to touch?” “A basilisk,” she said. “A basilisk, madam! And why, if you please, are you looking for a basilisk?” “It is for our lord and master Ogul, whose castle you can see beside the river at the end of the meadow. We are his most humble slaves. Lord Ogul is ill; his physician has prescribed a basilisk cooked in rosewater. And since it is a very rare animal, and never lets anyone but women catch it, Lord Ogul has promised to choose as his beloved wife whichever of us brings him a basilisk. Please let me search, for you can see what it would cost me if my companions got there first.”

Zadig left the Syrian woman and the others to look for their basilisk, and walked on through the meadow. When he reached the bank of a little stream, he found another woman lying on the grass, looking for nothing. Her figure seemed majestic, but a veil covered her face. She was leaning toward the stream; deep sighs escaped her lips. In her hand she held a little stick, with which she was tracing letters in the fine sand between the grass and the stream. Curious to

see what she was writing, Zadig came closer. He saw the letter Z, then an A; he was astonished. Then a D appeared; he trembled. No surprise ever equaled his when he saw the last two letters of his name. For a while he stood motionless. At last he broke the silence in a faltering voice: "Oh, generous lady! Forgive a stranger, an unfortunate man, for daring to ask by what astonishing chance I find the name ZADIG written here by your divine hand." At that voice, at those words, the lady lifted her veil with a trembling hand, looked at Zadig, gave a cry of tenderness, surprise, and joy, and, overcome by all the different feelings assailing her soul at once, fainted into his arms. It was Astarté herself, the queen of Babylon, the woman Zadig adored and reproached himself for adoring; the woman whose fate he had so mourned and so feared. For a moment he lost the use of his senses. Then, fixing his gaze on Astarté's eyes, which were reopening with a languor mingled with embarrassment and tenderness, he cried, "Oh, immortal powers, who govern the destinies of frail humanity, are you restoring Astarté to me? At what a time, in what a place, in what a state do I see her again!" He fell to his knees before Astarté and pressed his forehead to the dust at her feet. The queen of Babylon raised him and made him sit beside her on the bank of the stream. Again and again she wiped her eyes, from which the tears kept flowing afresh. Twenty times she returned to words her sobs had interrupted. She asked what chance had brought them together, and suddenly forestalled his answers with more questions. She began the story of her misfortunes, then wanted to know Zadig's. At last, when both had somewhat quieted the tumult in their souls, Zadig told her briefly what adventure had brought him to this meadow. "But, unhappy and revered queen, how do I find you again in this remote place, dressed as a slave, with other slave women searching for a basilisk to cook in rosewater on a physician's orders?"

"While they look for their basilisk," the beautiful Astarté said, "I will tell you all I have suffered, and all I forgive heaven now that I see you again. You know that the king my husband resented your being the most lovable of men; for that reason, one night he resolved to have you strangled and me poisoned. You know how heaven allowed my little mute to warn me of His Sublime Majesty's order. No sooner had the faithful Cador compelled you to obey me

and leave than he dared to enter my rooms in the middle of the night through a secret passage. He carried me away and took me to the temple of Orosmade, where his brother, the magus, hid me inside a colossal statue whose base reaches the temple's foundations and whose head touches the vault. I was as if buried there, but the magus attended me, and I lacked none of life's necessities. Meanwhile, at daybreak, His Majesty's apothecary entered my bedroom with a potion compounded of henbane, opium, hemlock, black hellebore, and aconite; another officer went to your house with a cord of blue silk. They found no one. To deceive the king more thoroughly, Cador pretended to come and accuse us both. He said you had taken the road to India and I the road to Memphis. Agents were sent after you and after me.

"The couriers searching for me did not know me. Almost no one but you had ever seen my face, and then in my husband's presence and at his command. They set off in pursuit, guided by the description they had been given. On the borders of Egypt they caught sight of a woman of my height, perhaps even more charming than I was. She was wandering about in tears; they had no doubt she was the queen of Babylon, and brought her to Moabdar. At first their mistake threw the king into a violent rage; but soon, examining the woman more closely, he found her very beautiful and was consoled. Her name was Missouf. I have since been told that in Egyptian the name means *the beautiful, capricious woman*. She was indeed; but she had as much cunning as caprice. Moabdar liked her. She brought him so completely under her sway that she had herself declared his wife. Then her character unfolded in full: without fear, she indulged every folly her imagination could devise. She tried to compel the chief of the magi, who was old and gouty, to dance before her; when he refused, she persecuted him fiercely. She ordered her master of the horse to make her a jam tart. In vain he protested that he was no pastry cook: he had to make the tart, and was dismissed because it was too badly burned. She gave the office of master of the horse to her dwarf, and the post of chancellor to a page. That was how she governed Babylon. Everyone missed me. The king, who had been a fairly honorable man until the moment he decided to poison me and have you strangled, seemed to have drowned his virtues in his prodigious love for the

beautiful, capricious woman. He came to the temple on the great festival of the sacred fire. I saw him imploring the gods for Missouf at the feet of the statue in which I was hidden. I raised my voice and cried, 'The gods reject the prayers of a king turned tyrant, who sought the death of a reasonable woman so that he could marry a madwoman.' These words so confounded Moabdar that his mind grew troubled. The oracle I had delivered and Missouf's tyranny were enough to rob him of his reason. Within a few days he went mad.

"His madness, which seemed a punishment from heaven, was the signal for revolt. People rose up and rushed to arms. Babylon, so long sunk in idle luxury, became the scene of a dreadful civil war. They brought me out of my hollow statue and placed me at the head of a faction. Cador hurried to Memphis to bring you back to Babylon. The prince of Hyrcania, hearing this disastrous news, returned with his army to form a third faction in Chaldea. He attacked the king, who rushed to meet him with his mad Egyptian woman. Moabdar died covered in wounds. Missouf fell into the victor's hands. As misfortune would have it, I myself was captured by a Hyrcanian detachment and brought before the prince at precisely the moment when Missouf was being brought to him. You will no doubt be flattered to learn that the prince found me more beautiful than the Egyptian; but you will be distressed to hear that he destined me for his harem. He told me very firmly that as soon as he had finished a military expedition he was about to undertake, he would come to me. Imagine my anguish. My bonds with Moabdar were broken; I could belong to Zadig; and I was falling into this barbarian's chains! I answered him with all the pride my rank and feelings gave me. I had always heard that heaven bestowed on people of my station a stamp of grandeur that, with a word or a glance, brought anyone rash enough to stray from the deepest respect back into its humble submission. I spoke as a queen, but I was treated as a lady's attendant. Without even deigning to address me, the Hyrcanian told his Black eunuch that I was an impertinent woman, but he thought me pretty. He ordered him to take care of me and put me on the favorites' regimen, to freshen my complexion and make me more worthy of his favors on the day he found it convenient to honor me with them. I told him I would kill myself. He answered with a laugh that peo-

ple did not kill themselves, that he was used to such behavior, and left me like a man who has just put a parrot in his menagerie. What a condition for the foremost queen in the world—and, more than that, for a heart that belonged to Zadig!”

At these words he threw himself at her knees and bathed them in tears. Astarté tenderly raised him and continued: “I found myself in a barbarian’s power, the rival of a madwoman with whom I was confined. She told me her Egyptian adventure. From the features with which she described you, from the time, from the dromedary you were riding, from every circumstance, I concluded that it was Zadig who had fought for her. I had no doubt you were in Memphis, and resolved to escape there. ‘Beautiful Missouf,’ I told her, ‘you are much more amusing than I am; you will entertain the prince of Hyrcania far better than I could. Help me find a way to escape. You will reign alone; you will make me happy by ridding yourself of a rival.’ Missouf planned my escape with me. So I left in secret with an Egyptian slave woman.

“I was already near Arabia when a famous robber named Arbogad seized me and sold me to merchants, who brought me to this castle where Lord Ogul lives. He bought me without knowing who I was. He is a sensual man, interested only in feasting, who believes God put him into the world to keep a lavish table. He is so excessively fat that he is always on the verge of suffocating. His physician, who has little influence over him when he is digesting well, rules him like a despot when he has eaten too much. He has persuaded him that he will cure him with a basilisk cooked in rosewater. Lord Ogul has promised his hand to whichever of his slaves brings him a basilisk. You see that I leave them to their eager efforts to deserve this honor; and I have never had less desire to find that basilisk than since heaven allowed me to see you again.”

Then Astarté and Zadig said to each other all that feelings long restrained, all that their misfortunes and their love could inspire in the noblest and most passionate hearts; and the spirits who preside over love carried their words to the sphere of Venus.

The women returned to Ogul's house without having found anything. Zadig had himself presented to him and spoke in these terms: "May immortal health descend from heaven to watch over all your days! I am a physician. On hearing of your illness I hurried to you, and I have brought you a basilisk cooked in rosewater. Not that I aspire to marry you: I ask only for the freedom of a young Babylonian slave woman you have had for a few days. I agree to remain a slave in her place if I am not fortunate enough to cure the magnificent Lord Ogul."

The proposal was accepted. Astarté left for Babylon with Zadig's servant, promising Zadig she would send him a courier without delay to tell him everything that had happened. Their farewell was as tender as their reunion had been. The moment of reunion and the moment of parting are the two greatest turning points of life, as the great book of the Zend says. Zadig loved the queen as much as he swore he did, and the queen loved Zadig more than she told him.

Meanwhile Zadig spoke to Ogul as follows: "My lord, my basilisk is not to be eaten; all its virtue must enter you through the pores. I have put it in a small, well-inflated skin bag covered with a thin hide. You must strike this bag with all your strength, and I must send it back to you repeatedly. After a few days of this regimen you will see what my art can do." On the first day Ogul was quite out of breath and thought he would die of exhaustion. On the second he was less tired and slept better. In eight days he recovered all the strength, health, lightness, and good spirits of his finest years. "You have played ball and practiced moderation," Zadig told him. "Learn that no basilisk exists in nature, that moderation and exercise always keep us well, and that the art of making excess and health live together is as fanciful as the philosopher's stone, judicial astrology, and the theology of the magi."

Ogul's chief physician, sensing how dangerous this man was to medicine, joined forces with the personal apothecary to send Zadig looking for basilisks in the next world. Thus, after always being punished for doing good, he was about to perish for having cured a gluttonous lord. He was invited to an excellent dinner. He was to be poisoned at the second course; but at the first he

received a courier from the beautiful Astarté. He left the table and departed. When you are loved by a beautiful woman, says the great Zoroaster, you always find a way out of trouble in this world.

CHAPTER 19

The Combats



The queen had been welcomed in Babylon with the raptures always bestowed on a beautiful princess who has suffered misfortune. Babylon now seemed more peaceful. The prince of Hyrcania had been killed in battle. The victorious Babylonians declared that Astarté should marry whoever was chosen sovereign. They would not let the highest position in the world—that of Astarté's husband and king of Babylon—depend on intrigues and factions. They swore to recognize the bravest and wisest man as king. A great tournament ground, bordered by magnificently decorated amphitheaters, was laid out a few leagues from the city. The contestants were to appear fully armed. Each had a separate lodging behind the amphitheaters, where no one was to see or recognize him. Each had to ride four jousts. Those fortunate enough to defeat four knights were then to fight one another, so that the last man left master of the field would be proclaimed victor of the games. Four days later he was to return in the same armor and solve the riddles proposed by the magi. If he failed to solve them, he would not be king, and the jousting would begin again until a man was found who could win both contests; for they were determined to have the bravest and wisest man as king. Throughout this time the queen was to be closely guarded. She was permitted only to attend the games, veiled; she was not allowed to speak to any claimant, so that there could be neither favoritism nor injustice.

This was what Astarté made known to her lover, hoping he would show more courage and intelligence for her sake than anyone else. He set out, praying to Venus to strengthen his courage and enlighten his mind. He reached the bank of the Euphrates on the eve of the great day. Concealing his face and name as the law required, he had his device entered among those of the contestants and went to rest in the lodging assigned him by lot. His friend Cador, who had returned to Babylon after searching for him in Egypt without success, had a complete suit of armor sent to his lodging from the queen. On her behalf he also had the finest horse in Persia brought to him. Zadig recognized Astarté in these gifts: his courage and his love drew fresh strength and hope from them.

The next day, when the queen had taken her place beneath a canopy of precious stones and the amphitheaters were filled with all the ladies and all the orders of Babylon, the contestants appeared in the arena. Each laid his device at the feet of the chief magus. Lots were drawn for the devices; Zadig's came last. The first man to advance was a very rich lord named Itobad, exceedingly vain, not very brave, most unskillful, and without intelligence. His servants had persuaded him that a man like him ought to be king; he had answered, "A man like me ought to reign," and so they had armed him from head to foot. He wore golden armor enameled in green, a green plume, and a lance adorned with green ribbons. The way Itobad handled his horse showed at once that heaven had not reserved Babylon's scepter for a man like him. The first knight to ride against him unseated him; the second knocked him backward onto his horse's rump, his legs in the air and his arms outstretched. Itobad recovered his seat, but so gracelessly that the whole amphitheater burst out laughing. A third did not deign to use his lance, but as he rode past caught Itobad by the right leg, spun him halfway around, and sent him sprawling onto the sand. The tournament squires ran up laughing and put him back in the saddle. The fourth contestant seized his left leg and threw him off the other side. He was escorted amid jeers to his lodging, where the law required him to spend the night, and as he limped along he said, "What an adventure for a man like me!"

The other knights acquitted themselves better. Some defeated two contestants in succession; a few reached three. Only Prince Otame defeated four. At last Zadig fought in his turn, unseating four riders in succession with all possible grace. It remained to discover whether Otame or Zadig would prevail. The former wore blue and gold armor with a matching plume; Zadig's armor was white. Every wish was divided between the blue knight and the white. The queen, her heart pounding, prayed to heaven for the color white. The two champions made their passes and turns with such agility, struck such splendid blows with their lances, and sat so firmly in their saddles that everyone except the queen wished Babylon might have two kings. At last, their horses exhausted and their lances broken, Zadig used this stratagem: he rides behind the blue prince, leaps onto his horse's rump, catches him around the waist, throws him to the ground, takes his place in the saddle, and prances around Otame as he lies there. The whole amphitheater cries, "Victory to the white knight!" Otame rises in fury and draws his sword; Zadig springs from the horse, saber in hand. There they stand in the arena, fighting a new battle in which strength and agility triumph by turns. The plumes of their helmets, the studs of their armguards, and the links of their armor fly far under a thousand rapid blows. They thrust and slash, right and left, at head and chest; they retreat, advance, size each other up, close, grapple, coil back like serpents, and attack like lions; sparks leap continually from the blows they exchange. At last Zadig, collecting himself for a moment, stops, feints, bears down on Otame, throws him, and disarms him. Otame cries, "White knight! You are the man who must reign over Babylon." The queen's joy knew no bounds. The blue knight and the white were led back to their separate lodgings, like all the others, as the law prescribed. Mute servants came to wait on them and bring them food. One can judge whether the queen's little mute was the one who waited on Zadig. Then they were left to sleep alone until the next morning, when the victor was to bring his device to the chief magus to have it matched and his identity established.

Lover though he was, Zadig slept, so great was his exhaustion. Itobad, lodged beside him, did not sleep. He rose in the night, entered Zadig's lodging, took his white armor and device, and left his own green armor in their place. At

daybreak he went proudly to the chief magus to announce that a man like him was the victor. No one had expected it; but he was proclaimed while Zadig still slept. Astarté, astonished and with despair in her heart, returned to Babylon. Almost the whole amphitheater had emptied by the time Zadig awoke. He searched for his armor and found only the green suit. He was obliged to put it on, having nothing else at hand. Astonished and indignant, he donned it in fury and came out dressed in it.

Everyone still in the amphitheater and the arena greeted him with jeers. They crowded around and insulted him to his face. No man had ever suffered such humiliating mortification. His patience gave way; he scattered the rabble who dared abuse him with blows of his saber, but he did not know what course to take. He could not see the queen; he could not claim the white armor she had sent him, for that would compromise her. Thus, while she was plunged in grief, he was filled with fury and anxiety. He walked along the banks of the Euphrates, convinced that his star had doomed him to misery without remedy, reviewing all his misfortunes from the affair of the woman who hated one-eyed men to the affair of his armor. "This is what comes," he said, "of waking too late. Had I slept less, I would be king of Babylon; I would have Astarté. Learning, good conduct, courage—have they served only to make me wretched?" At last he let himself murmur against Providence, and was tempted to believe that everything was ruled by a cruel destiny that oppressed the good and made green knights prosper. One of his sorrows was wearing the green armor that had brought him so many jeers. A merchant passed; he sold it to him for a pittance and took a robe and a tall cap in exchange. Dressed in these, he followed the bank of the Euphrates in despair, secretly accusing the Providence that never ceased to persecute him.

CHAPTER 20

The Hermit



As he walked, he met a hermit whose venerable white beard reached down to his waist. In his hand he held a book, which he was reading attentively. Zadig stopped and bowed deeply. The hermit greeted him with such noble gentleness that Zadig was curious to speak with him. He asked what book he was reading. "It is the book of destinies," said the hermit. "Would you like to read a little?" He put the book into Zadig's hands; but for all his knowledge of many languages, Zadig could not decipher a single character. This only redoubled his curiosity. "You seem very sorrowful," the good father said. "Alas, I have reason enough!" said Zadig. "If you allow me to accompany you," the old man replied, "perhaps I may be of use. I have sometimes brought consolation to the souls of the unfortunate." Zadig felt respect for the hermit's bearing, his beard, and his book. In conversation he found him possessed of superior insight. The hermit spoke of destiny, justice, morality, the highest good, human weakness, virtues, and vices with such vivid and moving eloquence that Zadig felt drawn to him by an irresistible charm. He earnestly begged him not to leave him until they had returned to Babylon. "That is the very favor I ask of you," said the old man. "Swear to me by Orosmade that you will not part from me for the next few days, whatever I may do." Zadig swore, and they set out together.

That evening the two travelers reached a splendid castle. The hermit asked for hospitality for himself and the young man accompanying him. The porter, whom one might have taken for a great lord, admitted them with a sort of disdainful kindness. They were presented to a senior servant, who showed them his master's magnificent rooms. They were admitted to the lower end of his table, without the lord of the castle honoring them with a glance; but they were served as lavishly and exquisitely as the others. Afterward they were given water to wash in a golden basin set with emeralds and rubies. They were taken to sleep in a handsome apartment, and the next morning a servant brought each of them a gold piece, after which they were dismissed.

"The master of the house," Zadig said along the way, "seems a generous man, though a little proud. He practices hospitality nobly." As he spoke, he noticed that a very large pouch the hermit carried seemed stretched and swollen. Inside he saw the golden basin set with precious stones, which the hermit had stolen. At first he did not dare show any sign of it, but he was astonished beyond measure.

Toward noon the hermit appeared at the door of a very small house inhabited by a rich miser and asked for a few hours' hospitality. An ill-dressed old servant received him roughly and ushered him and Zadig into the stable, where they were given some rotten olives, bad bread, and spoiled beer. The hermit ate and drank as contentedly as the evening before. Then, addressing the old servant, who was watching them both to see that they stole nothing and urging them to leave, he gave him the two gold pieces he had received that morning and thanked him for all his attentions. "Please," he added, "let me speak with your master." The astonished servant introduced the two travelers. "Magnificent lord," said the hermit, "I can only thank you most humbly for the noble manner in which you have received us. Please accept this golden basin as a small token of my gratitude." The miser almost fell backward. Giving him no time to recover from his amazement, the hermit hurried away with his young companion. "Father," said Zadig, "what am I witnessing? You seem unlike any other man: you steal a golden basin set with precious stones from a lord who receives you magnificently, and give it to a miser who treats you shamefully." "My son,"

the old man answered, "that magnificent man, who receives strangers only out of vanity and to make them admire his wealth, will grow wiser; the miser will learn to offer hospitality. Be astonished at nothing, and follow me." Zadig still did not know whether he was dealing with the maddest or the wisest of men; but the hermit spoke with such authority that Zadig, bound by his oath as well, could not help following him.

That evening they reached a pleasantly built but simple house, with nothing suggestive of either extravagance or avarice. Its master was a philosopher who had withdrawn from the world and peacefully cultivated wisdom and virtue, yet did not grow bored. He had taken pleasure in building this retreat, where he received strangers with a nobility entirely free of ostentation. He himself came to meet the two travelers and first let them rest in a comfortable room. A little later he came himself to invite them to a neatly served and well-planned meal, during which he spoke discreetly of the recent upheavals in Babylon. He seemed sincerely devoted to the queen and wished Zadig had appeared in the tournament to contest the crown. "But men," he added, "do not deserve a king like Zadig." Zadig blushed, and felt his sorrows redouble. In conversation they agreed that the affairs of this world did not always go as the wisest would wish. The hermit maintained throughout that the ways of Providence were unknown, and that men were wrong to judge a whole of which they perceived only the smallest part.

They spoke of the passions. "Ah, how destructive they are!" said Zadig. "They are the winds that fill a ship's sails," the hermit replied. "Sometimes they sink it; but without them it could not sail. Bile makes us angry and ill; yet without bile a man could not live. Everything here below is dangerous, and everything is necessary."

They spoke of pleasure, and the hermit proved that it was a gift of the Divinity. "For," he said, "a man can give himself neither sensations nor ideas: he receives everything. Pain and pleasure come to him from elsewhere, as does his very being."

Zadig marveled that a man who had done such extravagant things could reason so well. At last, after a conversation as instructive as it was pleasant, their host escorted his two travelers back to their room, blessing heaven for sending him two men so wise and virtuous. He offered them money with an ease and nobility that could give no offense. The hermit refused and took his leave, saying he intended to set out for Babylon before daybreak. Their parting was affectionate; Zadig in particular felt full of esteem and affection for so lovable a man.

Once in their room, he and the hermit spent a long time praising their host. At daybreak the old man woke his companion. "We must leave," he said, "but while everyone is still asleep, I want to leave this man a token of my esteem and affection." With these words he took a torch and set the house on fire. Horrified, Zadig cried out and tried to prevent so dreadful a deed. The hermit dragged him away with superior strength; the house was ablaze. Already some distance off with his companion, the hermit watched it burn calmly. "Thank God!" he said. "There is my dear host's house destroyed from top to bottom! The fortunate man!" At these words Zadig was tempted all at once to burst out laughing, abuse the reverend father, beat him, and run away. He did none of these things, but still subdued by the hermit's authority, followed him against his will to their last night's lodging.

It was the home of a charitable and virtuous widow, whose fourteen-year-old nephew, a charming boy, was her only hope. She did the honors of her house as well as she could. The next day she told her nephew to accompany the travelers as far as a bridge which, having recently been damaged, had become a dangerous crossing. The eager boy walks ahead of them. Once they are on the bridge, the hermit says to him, "Come here. I must show my gratitude to your aunt." He seizes him by the hair and throws him into the river. The child falls, appears for a moment on the water, and is swallowed by the torrent. "Monster! Most wicked of all men!" Zadig cried. "You promised me more patience," the hermit interrupted. "Know that beneath the ruins of the house Providence set on fire, its master has found an immense treasure. Know that the boy whose neck Providence has wrung would have murdered his aunt in a year and you in

two.” “Who told you that, barbarian?” Zadig cried. “And even if you had read this event in your book of destinies, does that give you the right to drown a child who has done you no harm?”

As the Babylonian spoke, he saw that the old man no longer had a beard, and that his face was taking on the features of youth. His hermit’s robe vanished; four beautiful wings covered a majestic body radiant with light. “Messenger of heaven! Divine angel!” Zadig cried, falling to the ground. “Have you descended from the highest heaven to teach a feeble mortal to submit to eternal decrees?” “Men,” said the angel Jesrad, “judge everything without knowing anything. Of all men, you most deserved enlightenment.” Zadig asked leave to speak. “I distrust myself,” he said, “but may I dare ask you to resolve a doubt? Would it not have been better to correct this child and make him virtuous than to drown him?” Jesrad answered, “Had he been virtuous and lived, his destiny was to be murdered himself, along with the woman he would marry and the son born of their union.” “What!” said Zadig. “Must there necessarily be crimes and misfortunes, and must misfortunes fall on good people?” “The wicked,” Jesrad replied, “are always unhappy. They serve to test the small number of the just scattered over the earth; and there is no evil from which some good does not arise.” “But,” said Zadig, “what if there were only good and no evil?” “Then,” Jesrad answered, “this earth would be another earth, the chain of events would be another order of wisdom; and such an order, which would be perfect, can exist only in the eternal dwelling of the Supreme Being, whom evil cannot approach. He has created millions of worlds, none of which can resemble another. This immense variety is an attribute of his immense power. There are no two leaves on earth, no two globes in the infinite fields of heaven, that are alike; and everything you see on the little atom where you were born had to occupy its place at its appointed time, according to the immutable decrees of the one who embraces all. Men think the child who has just died fell into the water by chance, and that the same chance burned down that house. But there is no chance: everything is a trial, a punishment, a reward, or a precaution. Remember the fisherman who thought himself the most unfortunate of men. Orosmade sent you to change his destiny. Feeble mortal! Stop disput-

ing what you must adore.” “But,” said Zadig... As he was saying *but*, the angel was already taking flight toward the tenth sphere. Kneeling, Zadig adored Providence and submitted. From high in the air the angel called to him, “Take the road to Babylon.”

CHAPTER 21

The Riddles



Beside himself, like a man near whom a thunderbolt has fallen, Zadig walked at random. He entered Babylon on the day when the men who had fought in the tournament were already assembled in the palace's great vestibule to solve the riddles and answer the chief magus's questions. All the knights had arrived except the green armor. As soon as Zadig appeared in the city, the people gathered around him: their eyes could not look at him enough, their mouths could not bless him enough, their hearts could not wish him the empire enough. The Envious Man saw him pass, shuddered, and turned away; the people carried him to the place of assembly. The queen, told of his arrival, was tossed between fear and hope and devoured by anxiety. She could understand neither why Zadig was without armor nor how Itobad came to wear the white suit. A confused murmur rose at the sight of Zadig. Everyone was astonished and delighted to see him again, but only knights who had fought were allowed to appear in the assembly.

"I fought like any other," he said, "but another man here is wearing my armor. Until I have the honor of proving it, I ask permission to present myself to solve the riddles." The matter was put to a vote. His reputation for integrity was still so deeply impressed on their minds that they did not hesitate to admit him.

The chief magus first proposed this question: "Of all things in the world, what is the longest and the shortest, the swiftest and the slowest, the most divisible and the most extensive, the most neglected and the most regretted; without which nothing can be done, which devours all that is small and gives life to all that is great?"

It was Itobad's turn to speak. He answered that a man like him understood nothing of riddles, and that it was enough to have won with mighty strokes of his lance. Some said the answer was fortune, others the earth, others light. Zadig said it was time. "Nothing is longer," he added, "since it measures eternity; nothing shorter, since there is never enough for all our plans; nothing slower for those who wait, nothing swifter for those who enjoy themselves. It extends infinitely in greatness and divides infinitely in smallness. Everyone neglects it; everyone regrets its loss. Nothing is done without it. It consigns to oblivion whatever is unworthy of posterity and makes great things immortal." The assembly agreed that Zadig was right.

The next question was: "What do we receive without thanks, enjoy without knowing how, give to others when we do not know what we are doing, and lose without noticing?"

Everyone offered an answer; Zadig alone guessed that it was life. He solved all the other riddles just as easily. Itobad kept saying that nothing could be simpler, and that he would have managed just as well had he cared to take the trouble. Questions were proposed about justice, the highest good, and the art of ruling. Zadig's answers were judged the soundest. "What a pity," people said, "that so fine a mind should belong to so poor a horseman."

"Illustrious lords," Zadig said, "I had the honor of winning the tournament. The white armor belongs to me. Lord Itobad took it while I slept; he apparently judged that it would suit him better than the green. I am ready to prove to him before you, here and now, with my robe and sword against all that fine white armor he stole from me, that I am the man who had the honor of defeating the brave Otame."

Itobad accepted the challenge with the greatest confidence. He had no doubt that, equipped with helmet, breastplate, and armguards, he would easily overcome a champion in a nightcap and dressing gown. Zadig drew his sword, saluting the queen, who watched him filled with joy and fear. Itobad drew his own without saluting anyone. He advanced on Zadig like a man with nothing to fear. He was about to split his head open when Zadig parried, setting what is called the strong of his blade against the weak of his opponent's, so that Itobad's sword broke. Then Zadig seized his enemy around the body, threw him to the ground, and, placing his sword point in a gap in the breastplate, said, "Let yourself be disarmed, or I will kill you." Itobad, still astonished at the misfortunes befalling a man like him, let Zadig have his way. Zadig calmly removed his magnificent helmet, his splendid breastplate, his handsome armguards, and his gleaming thigh armor; put them on himself; and in this attire ran to throw himself at Astarte's knees. Cador easily proved that the armor belonged to Zadig. He was recognized as king by unanimous consent, above all Astarte's: after so many adversities, she tasted the sweetness of seeing her lover worthy in the eyes of the whole world to be her husband. Itobad went home to have himself called "my lord." Zadig became king and was happy. He kept the words of the angel Jesrad present in his mind. He even remembered the grain of sand that had become a diamond. He and the queen adored Providence. Zadig let the beautiful, capricious Missouf roam the world. He sent for the robber Arbogad and gave him an honorable rank in his army, promising to advance him to the highest dignities if he behaved like a true warrior, and to have him hanged if he practiced the robber's trade.

Sétoc was summoned from the depths of Arabia with the beautiful Almona to take charge of Babylon's commerce. Cador was given a position and cherished in proportion to his services. He became the king's friend, and the king was then the only monarch on earth who had a friend. The little mute was not forgotten. The fisherman was given a handsome house. Orcan was ordered to pay him a large sum and return his wife; but the fisherman, grown wise, took only the money.

The beautiful Sémire could not console herself for having believed that Zadig would be one-eyed, nor could Azora stop weeping for having wanted to cut off his nose. He softened their grief with gifts. The Envious Man died of rage and shame. The empire enjoyed peace, glory, and abundance: it was the finest age the earth had known, and the earth was ruled by justice and love. People blessed Zadig, and Zadig blessed heaven^a.

^a Here ends the manuscript of the history of Zadig that has been recovered. It is known that he met with many other adventures, which have been faithfully recorded. The gentlemen who interpret Oriental languages are asked to communicate them if they should come into their hands.