

were to exchange conundrums and riddles, and a money fine was to be exacted from the one of them who failed to find the proper answer to a question propounded by the other. Naturally it was Hiram who was always the loser. The Tyrians maintain that finally Solomon found more than his match in one of Hiram's subjects, one Abdamon, who put many a riddle to Solomon that baffled his wit.²⁸

Of Solomon's subtlety in riddle guessing only a few instances have come down to us, all of them connected with riddles put to him by the Queen of Sheba.²⁹ The story of this queen, of her relation to Solomon, and what induced her to leave her distant home and journey to the court at Jerusalem forms an interesting chapter in the eventful life of the wise king.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

Solomon, it must be remembered, bore rule not only over men, but also over the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, demons, spirits, and the spectres of the night. He knew the language of all of them and they understood his language.³⁰

When Solomon was of good cheer by reason of wine, he summoned the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the creeping reptiles, the shades, the spectres, and the ghosts, to perform their dances before the kings, his neighbors, whom he invited to witness his power and greatness. The king's scribes called the animals and the spirits by name, one by one, and they all assembled of their own accord, without fetters or bonds, with no human hand to guide them.

On one occasion the hoopoe³¹ was missed from among the

birds. He could not be found anywhere. The king, full of wrath, ordered him to be produced and chastised for his tardiness. The hoopoe appeared and said: "O lord, king of the world, incline thine ear and hearken to my words. Three months have gone by since I began to take counsel with myself and resolve upon a course of action. I have eaten no food and drunk no water, in order to fly about in the whole world and see whether there is a domain anywhere which is not subject to my lord the king."³² And I found a city, the city of Kitor, in the East. Dust is more valuable than gold there, and silver is like the mud of the streets. Its trees are from the beginning of all time, and they suck up water that flows from the Garden of Eden. The city is crowded with men. On their heads they wear garlands wreathed in Paradise. They know not how to fight, nor how to shoot with bow and arrow. Their ruler is a woman, she is called the Queen of Sheba. If, now, it please thee, O lord and king, I shall gird my loins like a hero, and journey to the city of Kitor in the land of Sheba. Its kings I shall fetter with chains and its rulers with iron bands, and bring them all before my lord the king."

The hoopoe's speech pleased the king. The clerks of his land were summoned, and they wrote a letter and bound it to the hoopoe's wing. The bird rose skyward, uttered his cry, and flew away, followed by all the other birds.

And they came to Kitor in the land of Sheba. It was morning, and the queen had gone forth to pay worship to the sun. Suddenly the birds darkened his light. The queen raised her hand, and rent her garment, and was sore astonished. Then the hoopoe alighted near her. Seeing that a

letter was tied to his wing, she loosed it and read it. And what was written in the letter? "From me, King Solomon! Peace be with thee, peace with the nobles of thy realm! Know that God has appointed me king over the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the demons, the spirits, and the spectres. All the kings of the East and the West come to bring me greetings. If thou wilt come and salute me, I shall show thee great honor, more than to any of the kings that attend me. But if thou wilt not pay homage to me, I shall send out kings, legions, and riders against thee. Thou askest, who are these kings, legions, and riders of King Solomon? The beasts of the field are my kings, the birds my riders, the demons, spirits, and shades of the night my legions. The demons will throttle you in your beds at night, while the beasts will slay you in the field, and the birds will consume your flesh."

When the Queen of Sheba had read the contents of the letter, she again rent her garment, and sent word to her elders and her princes: "Know you not what Solomon has written to me?" They answered: "We know nothing of King Solomon, and his dominion we regard as naught." But their words did not reassure the queen. She assembled all the ships of the sea, and loaded them with the finest kinds of wood, and with pearls and precious stones. Together with these she sent Solomon six thousand youths and maidens, born in the same year, in the same month, on the same day, in the same hour—all of equal stature and size, all clothed in purple garments. They bore a letter to King Solomon as follows: "From the city of Kitor to the land of Israel is a journey of seven years. As it is thy wish and behest that I

visit thee, I shall hasten and be in Jerusalem at the end of three years."

When the time of her arrival drew nigh, Solomon sent Benaiiah the son of Jehoiada to meet her. Benaiiah was like unto the flush in the eastern sky at break of day, like unto the evening star that outshines all other stars, like unto the lily growing by brooks of water. When the queen caught sight of him, she descended from her chariot to do him honor. Benaiiah asked her why she left her chariot. "Art thou not King Solomon?" she questioned in turn. Benaiiah replied: "Not King Solomon am I, only one of his servants that stand in his presence." Thereupon the queen turned to her nobles and said: "If you have not beheld the lion, at least you have seen his lair, and if you have not beheld King Solomon, at least you have seen the beauty of him that stands in his presence."

Benaiiah conducted the queen to Solomon, who had gone to sit in a house of glass to receive her. The queen was deceived by an illusion. She thought the king was sitting in water, and as she stepped across to him she raised her garment to keep it dry. On her bared feet the king noticed hair, and he said to her: "Thy beauty is the beauty of a woman, but thy hair is masculine; hair is an ornament to a man, but it disfigures a woman."⁴

Then the queen began and said: "I have heard of thee and thy wisdom; if now I inquire of thee concerning a matter, wilt thou answer me?" He replied: "The Lord giveth wisdom, out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." She then said to him:

1. "Seven there are that issue and nine that enter; two

yield the draught and one drinks." Said he to her: "Seven are the days of a woman's defilement, and nine the months of pregnancy; two are the breasts that yield the draught, and one the child that drinks it." Whereupon she said to him: "Thou art wise."

2. Then she questioned him further: "A woman said to her son, thy father is my father, and thy grandfather my husband; thou art my son, and I am thy sister." "Assuredly," said he, "it was the daughter of Lot who spake thus to her son."

3. She placed a number of males and females of the same stature and garb before him and said: "Distinguish between them." Forthwith he made a sign to the eunuchs, who brought him a quantity of nuts and roasted ears of corn. The males, who were not bashful, seized them with bare hands; the females took them, putting forth their gloved hands from beneath their garments. Whereupon he exclaimed: "Those are the males, these the females."

4. She brought a number of men to him, some circumcised and others uncircumcised, and asked him to distinguish between them. He immediately made a sign to the high priest, who opened the Ark of the covenant, whereupon those that were circumcised bowed their bodies to half their height, while their countenances were filled with the radiance of the Shekinah; the uncircumcised fell prone upon their faces. "Those," said he, "are circumcised, these uncircumcised." "Thou art wise, indeed," she exclaimed.

5. She put other questions to him, to all of which he gave replies. "Who is he who neither was born nor has died?" "It is the Lord of the world, blessed be He."

6. "What land is that which has but once seen the sun?" "The land upon which, after the creation, the waters were gathered, and the bed of the Red Sea on the day when it was divided."

7. "There is an enclosure with ten doors, when one is open, nine are shut; when nine are open, one is shut?"

"That enclosure is the womb; the ten doors are the ten orifices of man—his eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, the apertures for the discharge of the excreta and the urine, and the navel; when the child is in the embryonic state, the navel is open and the other orifices are closed, but when it issues from the womb, the navel is closed and the others are opened."

8. "There is something which when living moves not, yet when its head is cut off it moves?" "It is the ship in the sea."

9. "Which are the three that neither ate, nor did they drink, nor did they have bread put into them, yet they saved lives from death?" "The signet, the cord, and the staff are those three."

10. "Three entered a cave and five came forth therefrom?" "Lot and his two daughters and their two children."

11. "The dead lived, the grave moved, and the dead prayed: what is that?" "The dead that lived and prayed, Jonah; and the fish, the moving grave."

12. "Who were the three that ate and drank on the earth, and yet were not born of male and female?" "The three angels who visited Abraham."

13. "Four entered a place of death and came forth alive, and two entered a place of life and came forth dead?"

"The four were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and the two were Nadab and Abihu."

14. "Who was he that was born and died not?" "Elijah and the Messiah."

15. "What was that which was not born, yet life was given to it?" "The golden calf."

16. "What is that which is produced from the ground, yet man produces it, while its food is the fruit of the ground?" "A wick."

17. "A woman was wedded to two, and bore two sons, yet these four had one father?" "Tamar."

18. "A house full of dead; no dead one came among them, nor did a living come forth from them?" "It is the story of Samson and the Philistines."

19. The queen next ordered the sawn trunk of a cedar tree to be brought, and she asked Solomon to point out at which end the root had been and at which the branches. He bade her cast it into the water, when one end sank and the other floated upon the surface of the water. That part which sank was the root, and that which remained uppermost was the branch end. Then she said to him: "Thou exceedest in wisdom and goodness the fame which I heard, blessed be thy God!"⁸⁸

The last three riddles which the Queen of Sheba put to Solomon were the following:

20. "What is this? A wooden well with iron buckets, which draw stones and pour out water." The king replied: "A ronge-tube."

21. "What is this? It comes as dust from the earth, its food is dust, it is poured out like water, and lights the house."—"Naphtha."

22. "What is this? It walks ahead of all; it cries out loud and bitterly; its head is like the reed; it is the glory of the noble, the disgrace of the poor; the glory of the dead, the disgrace of the living; the delight of birds, the distress of fishes."—He answered: "Flax."⁸⁹

SOLOMON MASTER OF THE DEMONS

Never has there lived a man privileged, like Solomon, to make the demons amenable to his will. God endowed him with the ability to turn the vicious power of demons into a power working to the advantage of men. He invented formulas of incantation by which diseases were alleviated, and others by which demons were exorcised so that they were banished forever.⁹⁰ As his personal attendants he had spirits and demons whom he could send hither and thither on the instant. He could grow tropical plants in Palestine, because his ministering spirits secured water for him from India.⁹¹

As the spirits were subservient to him, so also the animals. He had an eagle upon whose back he was transported to the desert and back again in one day, to build there the city called Tadmor in the Bible.⁹² This city must not be confounded with the later Syrian city of Palmyra, also called Tadmor. It was situated near the "mountains of darkness,"⁹³ the trysing-place of the spirits and demons. Thither the eagle would carry Solomon in the twinkling of an eye, and Solomon would drop a paper inscribed with a verse among the spirits, to ward off evil from himself. Then the eagle would reconnoitre the mountains of darkness, until he had spied out the spot in which the