# VII.The Bird-man

When the Son of the Chan had done as formerly, spoken the threatening words, and carried off Ssidi, Ssidi asked him as before to tell a tale; but the Son of the Chan shook his head without speaking a word, and Ssidi began as follows:—“In times gone by there lived in a fair country the father of a family, whose three daughters had daily by turns to watch over the calves. Now it once happened, during the time that the eldest sister should have been watching the calves, that she fell asleep, and one of them was lost. When the maiden awoke and missed the calf, she arose and went forth to seek it, and wandered about until she reached a large house with a red door.“She went in, and then came to a golden door, next to that to a silver one, and last of all to a brazen door. After she had likewise opened this door she found, close to the entrance of it, a cage decorated with gold and all manner of costly jewels, and within it, on a perch, there stood a white bird.“‘I have lost a calf,’ said the maiden, ‘and am come hither to seek it.’ At these words the bird said, ‘If thou wilt become my wife I will find the calf for you, but not without.’ But the maiden said, ‘That may not be; among men birds are looked upon but as wild creatures. Therefore I will not become your wife, even though, through refusing, I lose the calf for ever.’ And when she had thus spoken she returned home again.“On the following day the second sister went forth to tend the calves, and she likewise lost one of them. And it happened unto her as it had done unto the eldest sister, and she too refused to become the wife of the bird.“At last the youngest sister went forth with the calves, and when she missed one she too wandered on until she reached the house wherein the bird resided. The bird said unto her likewise, ‘If thou wilt become my wife, I will procure for thee the calf which thou hast lost.’ ‘Be it according to thy will.’ Thus spake she, and became the wife of the bird.“After some time it happened that a mighty thirteen days’ feast was held at a large pagoda in the neighbourhood, and upon this occasion a number of persons assembled together, amongst the rest the wife of the bird. And she was the foremost among the women; but among the men the most noticed was an armed man, who rode upon a white horse three times round the assemblage. And all who saw him exclaimed, ‘He is the first.’“And when the woman returned home again the white bird demanded of her, ‘Who were the foremost among the men and the women who were there assembled together?’ Then said the woman, ‘The foremost among the men was seated upon a white horse, but I knew him not. The foremost of the women was myself.’“And for eleven days did these things so fall out. But on the twelfth day, when the wife of the bird went to the assemblage, she sat herself down near an old woman. ‘Who,’ said the old woman, ‘is the first in the assemblage this day?’ To this question the wife of the bird replied, ‘Among the men, the rider upon the white horse is beyond all comparison the foremost. Among the women, I myself am so. Would that I were bound unto this man, for my husband is numbered among wild creatures since he is nothing but a bird.’“Thus spake she, weeping, and the old woman replied as follows:—‘Speak ye no more words like unto these. Amongst the assembled women thou art in all things the foremost. But the rider upon the white horse is thine own husband. To-morrow is the thirteenth day of the feast. Come not to-morrow unto the feast, but remain at home behind the door until thine husband opens his birdhouse, takes his steed from the stable, and rides to the feast. Take ye, then, the open birdhouse and burn it. And when thou hast done this thy husband will remain henceforth and for ever in his true form.’“The wife of the bird, thereupon, did as she had been told; and when the birdhouse was opened, and her husband had departed, she took the birdhouse and burnt it upon the hearth. When the sun bowed down towards the west the bird returned home, and said to his wife, ‘What, art thou already returned?’ and she said, ‘I am already returned.’ Then said her husband, ‘Where is my birdhouse?’ And the wife replied, ‘I have burnt it.’ And he said, ‘Barama, that is a pretty business—that birdhouse was my soul.’“And his wife was troubled, and said, ‘What is now to be done?’ To these words the bird replied, ‘There is nothing can be done now, except you seat yourself behind the door, and there by day and night keep clattering a sword. But if the clattering sword ceases, the Tschadkurrs will carry me away. Seven days and seven nights must ye thus defend me from the Tschadkurrs and from the Tângâri.’“At these words the wife took the sword, propped open her eyelids with little sticks, and watched for the space of six nights. On the seventh night her eyelids closed for an instant, but in that instant the Tschadkurrs and Tângâri suddenly snatched her husband away.“Weeping bitterly, and despising all nourishment, the distracted wife ran about everywhere, crying unceasingly, ‘Alas, my bird-husband! Alas, my bird-husband!’“When she had sought for him day and night without finding him, she heard from the top of a mountain the voice of her husband. Following the sound, she discovered that the voice proceeded from the river. She ran to the river, and then discovered her husband with a load of tattered boots upon his back. ‘Oh! my heart is greatly rejoiced,’ said the husband, ‘at seeing thee once more. I am forced to draw water for the Tschadkurrs and the Tângâri, and have worn out all these boots in doing so. If thou wishest to have me once again, build me a new birdhouse, and dedicate it to my soul; then I shall come back again.’“With these words he vanished into the air. But the woman betook herself home to the house again, made a new birdhouse, and dedicated it to the soul of her husband. At length the bird-man appeared and perched himself on the roof of the house.”“Truly, his wife was an excellent wife!” exclaimed the Son of the Chan.“Ruler of Destiny, thou hast spoken words! Ssarwala missdood jakzang!” Thus spake Ssidi, and burst from the sack through the air.Thus Ssidi’s seventh relation treats of the Bird-man.Next - VIII.The Painter and the Wood-carver

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