

THE LAST OF THE SOPHIS: A POEM

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The Last of the Sophis: A Poem by C. F. Henningsen

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C. F. HENNINGSEN

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SOPHIS: A POEM**

THE
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E. J. H. 1832.

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—
A POEM.
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BY

C. F. HENNINGSEN,

A Minor.

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ARGUMENT OF THE POEM.

MANDANO, last of the royal line of Sophi, or Sephi, being driven from Persia by the usurper Nadir, takes refuge among the Daghistan Tartars, attains a high rank in their tribe, and becomes enamoured of Zuleyda the daughter of the chief. Nadir, or Kouli-Khan, having conquered the rest of Asia, turns his arms against the hordes of Daghistan; and the council think it more prudent to defer Mandano's marriage with Zuleyda, until he shall have proved his fidelity to them against his invading countrymen. A Dervise of the sect of Ali, old and infirm, seeks refuge with them, from the persecution of the Persian tyrant; which is readily granted.

At sunset in the garden of a Kiosque, Zuleyda is to meet her lover, and the Dervise availing himself of the opportunity, comes to offer her the magic flowers his art has drawn from other regions; but on perceiving the Persian prince hastening to the rendezvous, throwing aside his disguise, he bears her to a steed, which is concealed in the brushwood, and flies—Pursuit and death of Zerda—Advance of the Persian army unopposed through the desert, until a guide offering to conduct them to the retreat of the Tartars, they take their way through

the passes of Assan—Treachery of the guide—Ambuscade of the Tartars, and destruction of the army—The Sophi pursues a band retreating to the shore, and hears the shrieks of his betrothed bride, above the din of carnage—The line of the fugitives is broken, and Mandano beholds her in the arms of her ravisher—But the Dervise, unable to retain his prize longer, leaves her a corpse in the arms of the conqueror. At that moment the guards close around him, proclaiming him aloud the Khan of Persia—The Sophi pursues the murderer across the desert, but in vain—A fever keeps him several days confined in a solitary cavern—Taking a solemn vow of vengeance, he enters his native country—His feelings on retracing the scenes of his infancy—On his road over a mountain he perceives a train encircling its base, and his eye distinguishes at a distance the usurper of Persia—He seeks him when awaiting alone the beasts of the forest—They meet—The skill of Mandano prevails, his adversary is slain, and he flies—His steed dies from fatigue on the way, but he gains the scene of his misfortune—The tribe have removed further northward—He finds the solitary cell of a hermit—His tale—His sorrows, and the conclusion.

As a Russian traveller was wandering on the borders of the Caspian sea, he was somewhat astonished at hearing the sounds of music, an unusual thing in the wild and desert parts his footsteps were now treading. As it seemed to proceed from the edge of the rock, he advanced lightly on tiptoe, and perceived an aged man in the garb of a gylong—a kind of monk, or solitary hermit of the country, beguiling his weary hours, in improvising to a rude instrument something resembling a lyre, the wars of the Daghistan Tartars. He would have listened in silence, but a little wolf-dog, till now unobserved, pricked up its ears, and by his shrill bark informed his master of the intrusion of a stranger. He turned and gazed on the Russian without any demonstration of surprise or curiosity. He was of the middle size; a long white beard descended to his girdle, his countenance beamed with animation, although the traces of many summers sat on his wrinkled brows. "I had gazed on him a few seconds (proceeds the Russian), when he broke our mutual silence, by courteously asking me if the humble dwelling of a gylong could offer hospitality to a stranger? After expressing my thanks, I assured him, that I was in want of nothing, but begged of him to proceed with his song. After some hesitation, and many entreaties, although the Asiatics have rarely much *mauvaise honte*, he tuned his many-stringed instrument. 'My son! it is but rarely (said he) that a living creature interrupts my lonely meditations. I recollect the time when these hills and valleys were covered by the

innumerable tents of a tribe of which there are none perhaps but myself existing, and for years have I amused myself in the melancholy pleasure of retracing the sorrows of others on my lyre: if it can be any to you, young as you are, you are welcome to share it, and listen to the rude song, that has hitherto been unheard, except by the lonely rocks: what I sing is not the phantasy of the brain; would that it were! Hearken then to a tale that happened when the great sultan was driven from our rocks. I was nursed by the cradle, and strewed flowers on the grave, of her of whom I will tell thee.' There was a something earnest in his dark eyes, and yet, I know not why, at first I thought it a mere prelude to his oriental minstrelsy. Having whistled back his dog, who had strayed across the road on the scent of some animal, he bent on his instrument, and began with sounds, wild and immeasurable, yet harmonious as the tone of the Æolian harp.
