

SAKKO OF LOREE

I

THERE lies the Valley of Loree, where the crags
On either side, with deeply knitted brows,
Stand unruffled face to face,
With steadfast and unblinking gaze.

While at their feet, with frenzied fury writhes
The maddened Debbed as in a rage it flows,
Glancing off its rocks into a demented flight,
Spitting forth spume from its unrestrained mouth;
It lashes and foams its rocky flanks,
Seeking the flowery banks of long ago,
Raving insanely and ceaselessly on,
With its rhythmically roaring watery groan.

From the tenebrous caves, in countless forms,
The spirits with restless voices of buffoonery
Reverberate the moans of demon stream,
Jeeringly simulating its terrifying rumble,
As they repeat the insanely ceaseless refrain
Of its rhythmically roaring watery groan.

No sooner the timid rays of the moon
Enter the darkness of that valley at night
And play atremble with the waves of the stream,
Than, imbued with some hidden gloomy life,
Every single thing in that place revives,
And even darkness and fear breathe and live.

There, upon that platform a monastery prays,
At the head of that rock a fortress keeps guard;
From the darkness of the tower, like some terror,
The screech of an owl spreads out from time to time;
Whilst from the rocky heights, an ancient stone-cross
Silently gazes down into the valley, like some man.

II

Look, there is a cottage yonder in that valley!
Sakko is all alone in it this night:
His companion, a shepherd like himself,
Has gone home to their village tonight,
For here, far away in the mountains,
A thousand and one things can a herdsman lack:
Who knows, was there no dog-food left in his sack?
Was he in need of salt for his sheep, perchance?
Or had he longed for his mother-in-law's omellete?
Perhaps, he had craved to see his spouse again.
He had departed for home that morn,
Having left his flock in the care of another,
Who had driven it to the mountains for him.
Now the sleepless Sakko
Has scraped clean his wet shoes,
Hung up his socks above the fire-place,
And is lying recumbent,
Morose in his loneliness.

III

Even though he is all alone in the fold,
The giant Sakko has naught to fear:

For behold his enormous body,
Lying there like an oak-tree
That has fallen down in the forest;
Were he suddenly to spring to his feet,
His staff, with its studded knob, in his hand
And were to summon loudly his ruthless dogs,
Standing like a mountain, rough and wild,
Then would you know the reason why
Even fearless robbers and beasts alike
Would keep their distance from his fold.
And like himself, so also his companions
Have lived happily from childhood days.
Returning from the pastures every eventide,
They gather wood and light a fire in the room,
Then, blending the sounds of pipes and flutes,
They play tunes and rejoice in unison...

IV

But Sakko is friendless and alone,
In the dark and silent air of this night.
Recumbent beside the fire-place he lies,
Brooding pensively; when all of a sudden,
From nowhere at all, in that valley,
His grandmother's tales of old come to mind!
And thereupon, our Sakko, without intent,
Begins to think about evil spirits:
How they forgather in the middle of the night,
In merry bands, with their twisted feet,
Assuming the guise of Turkish women
And always appearing to lonely men...
Or like the spirits from the dark caves,

Who call in familiar voices to deceive any man
 That may look down from the head of the rock
 Or belatedly pass through the valley below;
 And how they have feasts like human beings,
 When they play upon pipes and tabors...
 Now his grandmother's words from the dim past,
 In ghostly voices are timorously heard anew:
 'They'd call out, "Sakko, come over to us!
 Come and join our wedding-feast!
 See how merrily we dance around;
 How pretty and young is the bride!"
 "Come over, I will make an omelette for you!"
 "Come over, I will make a pancake for you!"
 "I am your aunt... ! I am your mother...!"
 "And I am a very dear friend...!"
 "Sakko... ! Sakko, come over to us!
 See how beautiful this maiden is...
 Oh, see how happily we dance,
 Tara-nina...! Tara-nina...!" '

And visionary images, fantastic and ugly,
 In strange arrays of disorderly multitudes,
 Come to appear, with their tardy movements,
 Before Sakko, sluggishly lingering past,
 Gloomy and slow, like so many shadows
 With malicious smiles, evil and black

V

Was that a fleet-footed deer, or a ravenous wolf,
 That went straight past the fold?
 Did a roe upon a rock near by roll a stone

Suddenly down into the precipice with its foot?
Was that the trembling of leaves in the night wind;
Or the timid little mouse running in the corner
Or was it the feeble moaning of the sheep?
It seemed to Sakko that he heard
Some footsteps in the fold outside:
They stopped, and there was silence...
He listened...

VI

Who threw down earth into the fire-place?
Who was it that looked through the window?
Who was it that softly trod down the roof,
And is now breathing behind the door...?
'Who are you, there? What are you doing?
Why are you silent and will not speak a word...?'

There is no reply: only the stream in the valley
Sleepily groans away in the silence.
'Ah, I know, it must be Kevvo;
Who else would dare to brave my dog?
He is frightened... Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha...!
Kevvo...!'

There is not a sound.
Only the slumbering stream of the valley,
In the terrifying stillness, mutely grumbling on.
For who would be awake at this hour of night?
The world is asleep; and likewise the wind;
It is only the evil spirit that are not:
They have thronged all the valleys merrily

And are having a demon feast in the dark;
They run about like shadows everywhere,
And now they have found a lonely man,
They enter his fold, with giggles and squeals...!

With his eyes staring into the dying fire,
The frightened shepherd breathes heavily,
And the wind spirit of this man of the mountains
Is thrown into turbulence by horrifying doubts.
'No, that was the wind ... that, the shadow of a wolf...
Those were stars and not eyes
That shone through the windows...'
He wants to look up once more,
But his courage fails him.
He listens...

There they come anew, treading softly
And whispering secretly behind the doors:

'He is here!'

'Ha, ha, ha, ha..!'

'look,! look,! look,! look!'

'See over there,

And listen!'

'Ha, ha, ha, ha..!'

Grown prickly all over, Sakko stirs,

Looks towards the threshold and trembles...

Then with a sudden crash the door opens,

The cottage is filled with Turkish women,

And with squeals and giggles and loud laughter...!

VII

It is a terrifying valley. A fragment of the moon
Secretly peeps down, then hides behind the clouds.
In the middle of that dark, horrifying night,
Sakko is running through the Valleys of Loree.
The evil spirits, chasing fast after him,
In ragged multitudes, crying and screaming,
Reach him from behind and seize him by the arms:
They flagellate him with whips made of snakes...!
Whilst others in the caves scream and call out
In familiar voices, as they sound pipes and tabors:
'Sakko, Sakko, come over to us!
Come and join our wedding-feast!
See how merrily we dance around;
How pretty and young is the bride!'

'Come over, I will make an omelette for you!'
'Come over, I will make a pancake for you!'
'I am your aunt... ! I am your mother...!'
'And I am a very dear friend...!'

'Sakko...! Sakko, come over to us!
See how beautiful this maiden is...
Oh, see how happily we dance,
Tara-nina...! Tara-nina...!

Whereas other spirits fly out of the Debbed,
As its waters rise and swell into waves
Sparkling vividly in the darkness, and cry:
'Seize him! Sakko is fleeing in his sanity...!