

ВИЛЬГЕЛЬМ ГАУФ

THE ORIENTAL STORY
BOOK: A COLLECTION
OF TALES

Вильгельм Гауф
The Oriental Story Book:
A Collection of Tales

*http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36361734
The Oriental Story Book: A Collection of Tales:*

Содержание

INTRODUCTION	6
THE CARAVAN	13
CHAPTER I	18
CHAPTER II	21
CHAPTER III	25
CHAPTER IV	29
CHAPTER V	33
THE HISTORY OF THE SPECTRE SHIP	37
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	48

Wilhelm Hauff
The Oriental Story Book:
A Collection of Tales



INTRODUCTION

IN a beautiful distant kingdom, of which there is a saying, that the sun on its everlasting green gardens never goes down, ruled, from the beginning of time even to the present day, Queen Phantasie. With full hands, she used to distribute for many hundred years, the abundance of her blessings among her subjects, and was beloved and respected by all who knew her. The heart of the Queen, however, was too great to allow her to stop at her own land with her charities; she herself, in the royal attire of her everlasting youth and beauty, descended upon the earth; for she had heard that there men lived, who passed their lives in sorrowful seriousness, in the midst of care and toil. Unto these she had sent the finest gifts out of her kingdom, and ever since the beauteous Queen came through the fields of earth, men were merry at their labor, and happy in their seriousness.

Her children, moreover, not less fair and lovely than their royal mother, she had sent forth to bring happiness to men. One day Märchen¹, the eldest daughter of the Queen, came back in haste from the earth. The mother observed that Märchen was sorrowful; yes, at times it would seem to her as if her eyes would be consumed by weeping.

“What is the matter with thee, beloved Märchen?” said the

¹ Märchen represents the fairy or legendary tales, of which the Germans were at one time so fond.

Queen to her. "Ever since thy journey, thou art so sorrowful and dejected; wilt thou not confide to thy mother what ails thee?"

"Ah! dear mother," answered Märchen, "I would have kept silence, had I not known that my sorrow is thine also."

"Speak, my daughter!" entreated the fair Queen. "Grief is a stone, which presses down him who bears it alone, but two draw it lightly out of the way."

"Thou wishest it," rejoined Märchen, "so listen. Thou knowest how gladly I associate with men, how cheerfully I sit down before the huts of the poor, to while away a little hour for them after their labor; formerly, when I came, they used to ask me kindly for my hand to salute, and looked upon me afterwards, when I went away, smiling and contented; but in these days, it is so no longer!"

"Poor Märchen!" said the Queen as she caressed her cheek, which was wet with a tear. "But, perhaps, thou only fanciest all this."

"Believe me, I feel it but too well," rejoined Märchen; "they love me no more. Wherever I go, cold looks meet me; nowhere am I any more gladly seen; even the children, who ever loved me so well, laugh at me, and slyly turn their backs upon me."

The Queen leaned her forehead on her hand, and was silent in reflection. "And how, then, Märchen," she asked, "should it happen that the people there below have become so changed?"

"See, O Queen Phantasie! men have stationed vigilant watchmen, who inspect and examine all that comes from thy

kingdom, with sharp eyes. If one should arrive who is not according to their mind, they raise a loud cry, and put him to death, or else so slander him to men, who believe their every word, that one finds no longer any love, any little ray of confidence. Ah! how fortunate are my brothers, the Dreams, they leap merrily and lightly down upon the earth, care nothing for those artful men, seek the slumbering, and weave and paint for them, what makes happy the heart, and brightens the eye with joy.”

“Thy brothers are light-footed,” said the Queen, “and thou, my darling, hast no reason for envying them. Besides, I know these border-watchmen well; men are not so wrong in sending them out; there came so many boastful fellows, who acted as if they had come straight from my kingdom, and yet they had, at best, only looked down upon us from some mountain.”

“But why did they make me, thine own daughter, suffer for this?” wept forth Märchen. “Ah, if thou knewest how they have acted towards me! They called me an old maid, and threatened the next time not to admit me!”

“How, my daughter?—not to admit thee more?” asked the Queen, as anger heightened the color on her cheeks. “But already I see whence this comes; that wicked cousin has slandered us!”

“Fashion? Impossible!” exclaimed Märchen; “she always used to act so friendly towards us.”

“Oh, I know her, the false one!” answered the Queen. “But try it again in spite of her, my daughter: whoever wishes to do

good, must not rest.”

“Ah, mother! suppose, then, they send me back again, or slander me so that men let me stay in a corner, disregarded, or alone and slighted!”

“If the old, deluded by Fashion, value thee at nothing, then turn thee to the young; truly they are my little favorites. I send to them my loveliest pictures through thy brothers, the Dreams; yes, already I have often hovered over them in person, caressed and kissed them, and played fine games with them. They, also, know me well, though not by name; for I have often observed how in the night they laugh at my stars, and in the morning, when my shining fleeces play over the heavens, how they clap their hands for joy. Moreover, when they grow larger, they love me still; then I help the charming maids to weave variegated garlands, and the wild boys to become still, while I seat myself near them, on the lofty summit of a cliff, steep lofty cities and brilliant palaces in the mist-world of the blue mountains in the distance, and, on the red-tinged clouds of evening, paint brave troops of horsemen, and strange pilgrim processions.”

“Oh, the dear children!” exclaimed Märchen, deeply affected. “Yes—be it so! with them I will make one more trial.”

“Yes, my good child,” answered the Queen; “go unto them; but I will attire thee in fine style, that thou mayest please the little ones, and that the old may not drive thee away. See! the dress of an Almanach² will I give thee.”

² The German “Almanach” corresponds in a measure with the English “Annual.”

“An Almanach, mother? Ah!—I will be ashamed to parade, in such a way, before the people.”

The Queen gave the signal, and the attendants brought in the rich dress of an Almanach. It was inwrought with brilliant colors, and beautiful figures. The waiting-maids plaited the long hair of the fair girl, bound golden sandals on her feet, and arrayed her in the robe.

The modest Märchen dared not look up; her mother, however, beheld her with satisfaction, and clasped her in her arms. “Go forth!” said she unto the little one; “my blessing be with thee. If they despise and scorn thee, turn quickly unto me; perhaps later generations, more true to nature, may again incline to thee their hearts.”

Thus spoke Queen Phantasie, while Märchen went down upon the earth. With beating heart she approached the city, in which the cunning watchmen dwelt: she dropped her head towards the earth, wrapped her fine robe closely around her, and with trembling step drew near unto the gate.

“Hold!” exclaimed a deep, rough voice. “Look out, there! Here comes a new Almanach!”

Märchen trembled as she heard this; many old men, with gloomy countenances, rushed forth; they had sharp quills in their fists, and held them towards Märchen. One of the multitude strode up to her, and seized her with rough hand by the chin. “Just lift up your head, Mr. Almanach,” he cried, “that one may see in your eyes whether you be right or not.”

Blushing, Märchen lifted her little head quite up, and raised her dark eye.

“Märchen!” exclaimed the watchmen, laughing boisterously. “Märchen! That we should have had any doubt as to who was here! How come you, now, by this dress?”

“Mother put it on me,” answered Märchen.

“So! she wishes to smuggle you past us! Not this time! Out of the way; see that you be gone!” exclaimed the watchmen among themselves, lifting up their sharp quills.

“But, indeed, I will go only to the children,” entreated Märchen; “this, surely, you will grant to me.”

“Stay there not, already, enough of these menials in the land around?” exclaimed one of the watchmen. “They only prattle nonsense to our children.”

“Let us see what she knows this time,” said another.

“Well then,” cried they, “tell us what you know; but make haste, for we have not much time for you.”

Märchen stretched forth her hand, and described with the forefinger, various figures in the air. Thereupon they saw confused images move slowly across it;—caravans, fine horses, riders gayly attired, numerous tents upon the sand of the desert; birds, and ships upon the stormy seas; silent forests, and populous places, and highways; battles, and peaceful wandering tribes—all hovered, a motley crowd, in animated pictures, over before them.

Märchen, in the eagerness with which she had caused the figures to rise forth, had not observed that the watchmen of

the gate had one by one fallen asleep. Just as she was about to describe new lines, a friendly man came up to her, and seized her hand. "Look here, good Märchen," said he, as he pointed to the sleepers; "for these thy varied creations are as nothing; slip nimbly through the door; they will not suspect that thou art in the land, and thou canst quietly and unobserved pursue thy way. I will lead thee unto my children; in my house will give thee a peaceful, friendly home; there thou mayest remain and live by thyself; whenever my sons and daughters shall have learned their lessons well, they shall be permitted to run to thee with their plays, and attend to thee. Dost thou agree?"

"Oh! how gladly will I follow thee unto thy dear children! how diligently will I endeavor to make, at times, for them, a happy little hour!"

The good man nodded to her cordially, and assisted her to step over the feet of the sleeping men. Märchen, when she had got safely across, looked around smilingly, and then slipped quickly through the gate.

THE CARAVAN

ONCE upon a time, there marched through the wilderness a large Caravan. Upon the vast plain, where one sees nothing but sand and heaven, were heard already, in the far distance, the little bells of the camels, and the silver-toned ones of the horses; a thick cloud of dust, which preceded them, announced their approach, and when a gale of wind separated the clouds, glittering weapons and brilliant dresses dazzled the eye. Such was the appearance of the Caravan to a man who was riding up towards it in an oblique direction. He was mounted on a fine Arabian courser, covered with a tiger-skin; silver bells were suspended from the deep-red stripe work, and on the head of the horse waved a plume of heron feathers. The rider was of majestic mien, and his attire corresponded with the splendor of his horse: a white turban, richly inwrought with gold, adorned his head, his habit and wide pantaloons were of bright red, and a curved sword with a magnificent handle hung by his side. He had arranged the turban far down upon his forehead; this, together with the dark eyes which gleamed forth from under his bushy brows, and the long beard which hung down under his arched nose, gave him a wild, daring expression. When the horseman had advanced fifty paces farther, the foremost line of the Caravan was near, and putting spurs to his steed, in the twinkling of an eye he was at the head of the procession. It was so unusual a thing to see a solitary

rider travelling through the desert, that the guard, apprehending an attack, put their lances in rest.

“What mean you?” exclaimed the horseman, as he saw himself received in so hostile a manner. “Do you imagine that a single man would attack your Caravan?”

Ashamed of their precipitation, the guards lowered their lances, and their leader rode forth to the stranger, and asked to know his pleasure.

“Who is the lord of this Caravan?” inquired the cavalier.

“It belongs to no single lord,” answered the interrogated one; “but to several merchants, who march from Mecca to their native country, and whom we escort through the desert; for oftentimes scoundrels of every kind alarm those who travel here.”

“Then lead me to the merchants,” responded the stranger.

“That cannot be now,” rejoined the other, “for we must proceed without delay, and the merchants are at least a quarter of a mile behind; if, however, you would like to ride along with me until we halt to take our siesta, I will execute your desire.”

The stranger said nothing further; he drew forth a long pipe which he had attached to his saddle, and began to smoke with slow puffs, as he rode along by the leader of the van. The latter knew not what to make of the stranger, and ventured not to ask his name in so many words; but when he artfully endeavored to weave up a conversation, the cavalier, to his remarks, “You smoke there a good tobacco,” or, “Your horse has a brave gait,” constantly replied with only a brief “Yes, yes!” At last

they arrived at the place where they were to halt for the siesta: the chief sent his people forward to keep a look-out, while he remained with the stranger to receive the Caravan. First, thirty camels passed by, heavily laden, guided by armed drivers. After these, on fine horses, came the five merchants to whom the Caravan belonged. They were, for the most part, men of advanced age, of grave and serious aspect; one, however, seemed much younger, as well as more gay and lively than the rest. A large number of camels and pack-horses closed the procession.

Tents were pitched, and the camels and horses fastened around. In the midst was a large pavilion of blue silk, to which the chief of the escort conducted the stranger. When they reached the entrance, they saw the five merchants seated on gold-embroidered cushions; black slaves were carrying around to them food and drink. "Whom bringest thou hither to us?" exclaimed the young merchant unto the leader: before, however, the latter could reply, the stranger spoke.

"I am called Selim Baruch, and am from Bagdad; I was taken captive by a robber-horde on a ride to Mecca, but three days ago managed to free myself from confinement. The mighty Prophet permitted me to hear, in the far distance, the little bells of your Caravan, and so I came to you. Allow me to ride in your company; you will grant your protection to no unworthy person; and when we reach Bagdad, I will reward your kindness richly, for I am the nephew of the Grand Vizier."

The oldest of the merchants took up the discourse: "Selim

Baruch," said he, "welcome to our protection! It affords us joy to be of assistance to thee. But first of all, sit down, and eat and drink with us."

Selim Baruch seated himself among the merchants, and ate and drank with them. After the meal, the slaves removed the table, and brought long pipes and Turkish sherbet. The merchants sat for some time in silence, while they puffed out before them the bluish, smoke-clouds, watching how they formed circle after circle, and at last were dissipated in the ambient air. The young merchant finally broke the silence. "Here sit we for three days," said he, "on horseback, and at table, without doing any thing to while away the time. I feel this tediousness much, for I am accustomed after dinner to see dancers, or to hear singing and music. Know you nothing, my friends, that will pass away the time for us?"

The four elder merchants smoked away, and seemed to be seriously reflecting, but the stranger spoke: "If it be allowed me, I will make a proposition to you. I think one of us, at this resting-place, could relate something for the amusement of the rest: this, certainly, would serve to pass the time."

"Selim Baruch, thou hast well spoken," said Achmet, the oldest of the merchants; "let us accept the proposal."

"I am rejoiced that it pleases you," answered Selim; "and, in order that you may see that I desire nothing unreasonable, I will myself begin." The five merchants, overjoyed, drew nearer together, and placed the stranger in their midst. The slaves

replenished their cups, filled the pipes of their masters afresh, and brought glowing coals for a light. Selim cleared his voice with a hearty draught of sherbet, smoothed back the long beard from his mouth, and said, “Listen then to the History of Caliph Stork.”

CHAPTER I

ONCE upon a time, on a fine afternoon, the Caliph Chasid was seated on his sofa in Bagdad: he had slept a little, (for it was a hot day,) and now, after his nap, looked quite happy. He smoked a long pipe of rosewood, sipped, now and then, a little coffee which a slave poured out for him, and stroked his beard, well-satisfied, for the flavor pleased him. In a word, it was evident that the Caliph was in a good humor. At this season one could easily speak with him, for he was always very mild and affable; on which account did his Grand-Vizier, Mansor, seek him at this hour, every day.

On the afternoon in question he also came, but looked very serious, quite contrary to his usual custom. The Caliph removed the pipe, a moment, from his mouth, and said, "Wherefore, Grand-Vizier, wearest thou so thoughtful a visage?"

The Grand-Vizier folded his arms crosswise over his breast, made reverence to his lord, and answered: "Sir, whether I wear a thoughtful look, I know not, but there, below the palace, stands a trader who has such fine goods, that it vexes me not to have abundant money."

The Caliph, who had often before this gladly indulged his Vizier, sent down his black slave to bring up the merchant, and in a moment they entered together. He was a short, fat man, of swarthy countenance and tattered dress. He carried a chest in

which were all kinds of wares—pearls and rings, richly-wrought pistols, goblets, and combs. The Caliph and his Vizier examined them all, and the former at length purchased fine pistols for himself and Mansor, and a comb for the Vizier's wife. When the pedler was about to close his chest, the Caliph espied a little drawer, and inquired whether there were wares in that also. The trader drew forth the drawer, and pointed out therein a box of black powder, and a paper with strange characters, which neither the Caliph nor Mansor could read.

“I obtained these two articles, some time ago, from a merchant, who found them in the street at Mecca,” said the trader. “I know not what they contain. They are at your service for a moderate price; I can do nothing with them.” The Caliph, who gladly kept old manuscripts in his library, though he could not read them, purchased writing and box, and discharged the merchant. The Caliph, however, thought he would like to know what the writing contained, and asked the Vizier if he knew any one who could decipher it.

“Most worthy lord and master,” answered he, “near the great Mosque lives a man called ‘Selim the Learned,’ who understands all languages: let him come, perhaps he is acquainted with these mysterious characters.”

The learned Selim was soon brought in. “Selim,” said the Caliph to him, “Selim, they say thou art very wise; look a moment at this manuscript, and see if thou canst read it. If thou canst, thou shalt receive from me a new festival-garment; if not, thou

shalt have twelve blows on the cheek, and five and twenty on the soles of the feet, since, in that case, thou art unjustly called Selim the Learned.”

Selim bowed himself and said, “Sire, thy will be done!” For a long time he pored over the manuscript, but suddenly exclaimed, “This is Latin, sire, or I will suffer myself to be hung.”

“If it is Latin, tell us what is therein,” commanded the Caliph. Selim began to translate:—

“Man, whosoever thou mayest be that findest this, praise Allah for his goodness! Whoever snuffs of the dust of this powder, and at the same time says, Mutabor, can change himself into any animal, and shall also understand its language. If he wishes to return to the form of a man, then let him bow three times to the East, and repeat the same word. But take thou care, if thou be transformed, that thou laugh not; otherwise shall the magic word fade altogether from thy remembrance, and thou shalt remain a beast!”

When Selim the Learned had thus read, the Caliph was overjoyed. He made the translator swear to tell no one of their secret, presented him a beautiful garment, and discharged him. To his Grand-Vizier, however, he said: “That I call a good purchase, Mansor! How can I contain myself until I become an animal! Early in the morning, do thou come to me. Then will we go together into the country, take a little snuff out of my box, and hear what is said in the air and in the water, in the forest and in the field.”

CHAPTER II

SCARCELY, on the next morning, had the Caliph Chasid breakfasted and dressed himself, when the Grand-Vizier appeared, to accompany him, as he had commanded, on his walk. The Caliph placed the box with the magic powder in his girdle, and having commanded his train to remain behind, set out, all alone with Mansor, upon their expedition. They went at first through the extensive gardens of the Caliph, but looked around in vain for some living thing, in order to make their strange experiment. The Vizier finally proposed to go farther on, to a pond, where he had often before seen many storks, which, by their grave behavior and clattering, had always excited his attention. The Caliph approved of the proposition of his Vizier, and went with him to the pond. When they reached it they saw a stork walking gravely to and fro, seeking for frogs, and now and then clattering at something before her. Presently they saw, too, another stork hovering far up in the air.

“I will wager my beard, most worthy sire,” exclaimed the Grand-Vizier, “that these two long-feet are even now carrying on a fine conversation with one another. How would it be, if we should become storks?”

“Well spoken!” answered the Caliph. “But first, we will consider how we may become men again.—Right! Three times bow to the East, and exclaim ‘Mutabor!’ then will I be Caliph

once more, and thou Vizier. Only, for the sake of Heaven, laugh not, or we are lost!”

While the Caliph was thus speaking, he saw the other stork hovering over their heads, and sinking slowly to the ground. He drew the box quickly out of his girdle, and took a good pinch, then he presented it to the Grand-Vizier, who also snuffed some of the powder, and both exclaimed “Mutabor!” Immediately their legs shrivelled away and became slender and red; the handsome yellow slippers of the Caliph and his companion became misshapen stork’s feet; their arms turned to wings; the neck extended up from the shoulders, and was an ell long; their beards had vanished, and their whole bodies were covered with soft feathers.

“You have a beautiful beak, my lord Grand-Vizier,” exclaimed the Caliph after long astonishment. “By the beard of the Prophet, in my whole life I have not seen any thing like it!”

“Most humble thanks!” responded the Vizier, as he bowed. “But if I dared venture it, I might assert that your Highness looks almost as handsome when a stork, as when a Caliph. But suppose, if it be pleasing to you, that we observe and listen to our comrades, to see, if we actually understand Storkish.”

Meanwhile the other stork reached the earth. He cleaned his feet with his bill, smoothed his feathers, and moved towards the first. Both the new birds, thereupon, made haste to draw near, and to their astonishment, heard the following conversation.

“Good-morning, Madam Long-legs; already, so early, upon

the pond?”

“Fine thanks, beloved Clatter-beak. I have brought me a little breakfast. Would you like, perhaps, the quarter of an eider-duck, or a little frog’s thigh?”

“My best thanks, but this morning I have little appetite. I come to the pond for a very different reason. I have to dance to-day before the guests of my father, and I wish to practise a little in private.”

Immediately, thereupon, the young lady-stork stepped, in great excitement, over the plain. The Caliph and Mansor looked on her in amazement. When, however, she stood in a picturesque attitude upon one foot, and, at the same time, gracefully moved her wings like a fan, the two could contain themselves no longer; a loud laugh broke forth from their bills. The Caliph was the first to recover himself. “That were once a joke,” said he, “which gold could not have purchased. Pity! that the stupid birds should have been driven away by our laughter; otherwise they would certainly even yet have been singing.”

But already it occurred to the Grand-Vizier that, during their metamorphosis, laughter was prohibited; he shared his anxiety on this head with the Caliph. “By Mecca and Medina! that were a sorry jest, if I am to remain a stork. Bethink thyself, then, of the foolish word, for I can recall it not.”

“Three times must we bow ourselves to the East, and at the same time say, Mu—mu—mu—”

They turned to the East, and bowed so low that their beaks

almost touched the earth. But, O misery! that magic word had escaped them; and though the Caliph prostrated himself again and again, though at the same time the Vizier earnestly cried “Mu—mu—,” all recollection thereof had vanished, and poor Chasid and his Vizier were to remain storks.

CHAPTER III

THE enchanted ones wandered sorrowfully through the fields, not knowing, in their calamity, what they should first set about. To the city they could not return, for the purpose of discovering themselves, for who would have believed a stork that he was the Caliph? or, if he should find credit, would the inhabitants of Bagdad have been willing to have such a bird for their master? Thus, for several days, did they wander around, supporting themselves on the produce of the fields, which, however, on account of their long bills, they could not readily pick up. For eider-ducks and frogs they had no appetite, for they feared with such dainty morsels to ruin their stomachs. In this pitiable situation their only consolation was that they could fly, and accordingly they often winged their way to the roofs of Bagdad, to see what was going on therein.

On the first day they observed great commotion and mourning in the streets; but on the fourth after their transformation, they lighted by chance upon the royal palace, from which they saw, in the street beneath, a splendid procession. Drums and fifes sounded; on a richly-caparisoned steed was seated a man, in a scarlet mantle embroidered with gold, surrounded by gorgeously-attired attendants. Half Bagdad was running after him, crying, "Hail, Mizra! Lord of Bagdad!" All this the two storks beheld from the roof of the palace, and the Caliph Chasid exclaimed,—

“Perceivest thou now why I am enchanted, Grand-Vizier? This Mizra is the son of my deadly enemy, the mighty sorcerer Kaschnur, who, in an evil hour, vowed revenge against me. Still I do not abandon all hope. Come with me, thou faithful companion of my misery; we will go to the grave of the Prophet; perhaps in that holy spot the charm may be dissolved.” They raised themselves from the roof of the palace, and flew in the direction of Medina.

In the use of their wings, however, they experienced some difficulty, for the two storks had, as yet, but little practice. “O Sire!” groaned out the Vizier, after a couple of hours; “with your permission, I can hold out no longer; you fly so rapidly! Besides, it is already evening, and we would do well to seek a shelter for the night.”

Chasid gave ear to the request of his attendant, and thereupon saw, in the vale beneath, a ruin which appeared to promise safe lodgings; and thither, accordingly, they flew. The place where they had alighted for the night, seemed formerly to have been a castle. Gorgeous columns projected from under the rubbish, and several chambers, which were still in a state of tolerable preservation, testified to the former magnificence of the mansion. Chasid and his companion went around through the corridor, to seek for themselves a dry resting-place; suddenly the stork Mansor paused. “Lord and master,” he whispered softly, “were it not foolish for a Grand-Vizier, still more for a stork, to be alarmed at spectres, my mind is very uncomfortable; for here,

close at hand, sighs and groans are very plainly perceptible.” The Caliph now in turn stood still, and quite distinctly heard a low moaning, which seemed to belong rather to a human being than a beast. Full of expectation, he essayed to proceed to the place whence the plaintive sounds issued: but the Vizier, seizing him by the wing with his beak, entreated him fervently not to plunge them in new and unknown dangers. In vain! the Caliph, to whom a valiant heart beat beneath his stork-wing, burst away with the loss of a feather, and hastened into a gloomy gallery. In a moment he reached a door, which seemed only on the latch, and out of which he heard distinct sighs, accompanied by a low moaning. He pushed the door open with his bill, but stood, chained by amazement, upon the threshold. In the ruinous apartment, which was now but dimly lighted through a grated window, he saw a huge screech-owl sitting on the floor. Big tears rolled down from her large round eyes, and with ardent voice she sent her cries forth from her crooked bill. As soon, however, as she espied the Caliph and his Vizier, who meanwhile had crept softly up behind, she raised a loud cry of joy. She neatly wiped away the tears with her brown-striped wing, and to the great astonishment of both, exclaimed, in good human Arabic,—

“Welcome to you, storks! you are to me a good omen of deliverance, for it was once prophesied to me that, through storks, a great piece of good fortune is to fall to my lot.”

When the Caliph recovered from his amazement, he bowed his long neck, brought his slender feet into an elegant position,

and said: “Screech-owl, after your words, I venture to believe that I see in you a companion in misfortune. But, alas! this hope that through us thy deliverance will take place, is groundless. Thou wilt, thyself, realize our helplessness, when thou hearest our history.”

The Screech-owl entreated him to impart it to her, and the Caliph, raising himself up, related what we already know.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN the Caliph had told his history to the owl, she thanked him, and said: "Listen to my story, also, and hear how I am no less unfortunate than thyself. My father is the king of India; I, his only, unfortunate daughter, am called Lusa. That same sorcerer Kaschnur, who transformed you, has plunged me also in this affliction. He came, one day, to my father, and asked me in marriage for his son Mizra. My father, however, who is a passionate man, cast him down the steps. The wretch managed to creep up to me again under another form, and as I was on one occasion taking the fresh air in my garden, clad as a slave, he presented me a potion which changed me into this detestable figure. He brought me hither, swooning through fear, and exclaimed in my ear with awful voice, 'There shalt thou remain, frightful one, despised even by beasts, until thy death, or till one, of his own free will, even under this execrable form, take thee to wife. Thus revenge I myself upon thee, and thy haughty father!'

"Since then, many months have elapsed; alone and mournfully I live, like a hermit, in these walls, abhorred by the world, an abomination even to brutes. Beautiful nature is shut out from me; for I am blind by day, and only when the moon sheds her wan light upon this ruin, falls the shrouding veil from mine eye."

The owl ended, and again wiped her eyes with her wing, for

the narration of her wo had called forth tears. The Caliph was plunged in deep meditation by the story of the Princess. "If I am not altogether deceived," said he, "you will find that between our misfortunes a secret connection exists; but where can I find the key to this enigma?"

The owl answered him, "My lord! this also is plain to me; for once, in early youth, it was foretold to me by a wise woman, that a stork would bring me great happiness, and perhaps I might know how we may save ourselves."

The Caliph was much astonished, and inquired in what way she meant.

"The enchanter who has made us both miserable," said she, "comes once every month to these ruins. Not far from this chamber is a hall; there, with many confederates, he is wont to banquet. Already I have often watched them: they relate to one another their shameful deeds—perhaps he might then mention the magic word which you have forgotten."

"Oh, dearest Princess!" exclaimed the Caliph: "tell us—when will he come, and where is the hall?"

The owl was silent a moment, and then said: "Take it not unkindly, but only on one condition can I grant your wish."

"Speak out! speak out!" cried Chasid. "Command; whatever it may be, I am ready to obey."

"It is this: I would fain at the same time be free; this, however, can only take place, if one of you offer me his hand." At this proposition the storks seemed somewhat surprised, and

the Caliph beckoned to his attendant to step aside with him a moment. "Grand-Vizier," said the Caliph before the door, "this is a stupid affair, but you can set it all right."

"Thus?" rejoined he; "that my wife, when I go home, may scratch my eyes out? Besides, I am an old man, while you are still young and unmarried, and can better give your hand to a young and beautiful princess."

"Ah! that is the point," sighed the Caliph, as he mournfully drooped his wings: "who told you she is young and fair? That is equivalent to buying a cat in a sack!" They continued to converse together for a long time, but finally, when the Caliph saw that Mansor would rather remain a stork than marry the owl, he determined sooner, himself, to accept the condition. The owl was overjoyed; she avowed to them that they could have come at no better time, since, probably, that very night, the sorcerers would assemble together.

She left the apartment with the storks, in order to lead them to the saloon; they went a long way through a gloomy passage, until at last a very bright light streamed upon them through a half-decayed wall. When they reached this place, the owl advised them to halt very quietly. From the breach, near which they were standing, they could look down upon a large saloon, adorned all around with pillars, and splendidly decorated, in which many colored lamps restored the light of day. In the midst of the saloon stood a round table, laden with various choice meats. Around the table extended a sofa, on which eight men were seated. In one of

these men the storks recognised the very merchant, who had sold them the magic powder. His neighbor desired him to tell them his latest exploits; whereupon he related, among others, the story of the Caliph and his Vizier.

“What did you give them for a word?” inquired of him one of the other magicians.

“A right ponderous Latin one—Mutabor.”

CHAPTER V

WHEN the storks heard this through their chasm in the wall, they became almost beside themselves with joy. They ran so quickly with their long feet to the door of the ruin, that the owl could scarcely keep up with them. Thereupon spoke the Caliph to her: "Preserver of my life and that of my friend, in token of our eternal thanks for what thou hast done for us, take me as thy husband." Then he turned to the East: three times they bowed their long necks towards the sun, which was even now rising above the mountains, and at the same moment exclaimed "Mutabor!" In a twinkling they were restored, and in the excessive joy of their newly-bestowed life, alternately laughing and weeping, were folded in each other's arms. But who can describe their astonishment when they looked around? A beautiful woman, attired as a queen, stood before them. Smiling, she gave the Caliph her hand, and said, "Know you your screech-owl no longer?" It was she; the Caliph was in such transports at her beauty and pleasantness, as to cry out, that it was the most fortunate moment in his life, when he became a stork.

The three now proceeded together to Bagdad. The Caliph found in his dress, not only the box of magic powder, but also his money-bag. By means thereof, he purchased at the nearest village what was necessary for their journey, and accordingly they soon appeared before the gates of the city. Here, however,

the arrival of the Caliph excited great astonishment. They had given out that he was dead, and the people were therefore highly rejoiced to have again their beloved lord.

So much the more, however, burned their hatred against the impostor Mizra. They proceeded to the palace, and caught the old magician and his son. The old man the Caliph sent to the same chamber in the ruin, which the princess, as a screech-owl, had inhabited, and there had him hung; unto the son, however, who understood nothing of his father's arts, he gave his choice,—to die, or snuff some of the powder. Having chosen the latter, the Grand-Vizier presented him the box. A hearty pinch, and the magic word of the Caliph converted him into a stork. Chasid had him locked up in an iron cage, and hung in his garden.

Long and happily lived Caliph Chasid with his spouse, the Princess; his pleasantest hours were always those, when in the afternoon the Vizier sought him; and whenever the Caliph was in a very good humor, he would let himself down so far, as to show Mansor how he looked, when a stork. He would gravely march along, with rigid feet, up and down the chamber, make a clattering noise, wave his arms like wings, and show how, in vain, he had prostrated himself to the East, and cried out, Mu—mu. To the Princess and her children, this imitation always afforded great amusement: when, however, the Caliph clattered, and bowed, and cried out, too long, then the Vizier would threaten him that he would disclose to his spouse what had been proposed outside the door of the Princess Screech-owl!



When Selim Baruch had finished his story, the merchants declared themselves delighted therewith. “Verily, the afternoon has passed away from us without our having observed it!” exclaimed one of them, throwing back the covering of the tent: “the evening wind blows cool, we can still make a good distance on our journey.” To this his companions agreed; the tents were struck, and the Caravan proceeded on its way in the same order in which it had come up.

They rode almost all the night long, for it was refreshing and starry, whereas the day was sultry. At last they arrived at a convenient stopping-place; here they pitched their tents, and composed themselves to rest. To the stranger the merchants attended, as a most valued guest. One gave him cushions, a

second covering, a third slaves; in a word, he was as well provided for as if he had been at home. The hottest hours of the day had already arrived, when they awoke again, and they unanimously determined to wait for evening in this place. After they had eaten together, they moved more closely to each other, and the young merchant, turning to the oldest, addressed him: "Selim Baruch yesterday made a pleasant afternoon for us; suppose Achmet, that you also tell us something, be it either from your long life, which has known so many adventures, or even a pretty Märchen."

Upon these words Achmet was silent some time, as if he were in doubt whether to tell this or that; at last he began to speak: "Dear friends, on this our journey you have proved yourselves faithful companions, and Selim also deserves my confidence; I will therefore impart to you something of my life, of which, under other circumstances, I would speak reluctantly, and, indeed, not to any one: The History of the Spectre Ship."

THE HISTORY OF THE SPECTRE SHIP



MY father had a little shop in Balsora; he was neither rich, nor poor, but one of those who do not like to risk any thing, through fear of losing the little that they have. He brought me up plainly, but virtuously, and soon I advanced so far, that I was able to make valuable suggestions to him in his business. When I reached my eighteenth year, in the midst of his first speculation of any importance, he died; probably through anxiety at having intrusted a thousand gold pieces to the sea. I was obliged, soon after, to deem him happy in his fortunate death, for in a few weeks the intelligence reached us, that the vessel, to which my father had committed his goods, had been wrecked.

This misfortune, however, could not depress my youthful spirits. I converted all that my father had left into money, and set out to try my fortune in foreign lands, accompanied only by an old servant of the family, who, on account of ancient attachment, would not part from me and my destiny.

In the harbor of Balsora we embarked, with a favorable wind. The ship, in which I had taken passage, was bound to India. We had now for fifteen days sailed in the usual track, when the Captain predicted to us a storm. He wore a thoughtful look, for it seemed he knew that, in this place, there was not sufficient depth of water to encounter a storm with safety. He ordered them to take in all sail, and we moved along quite slowly. The night set in clear and cold, and the Captain began to think that he had been mistaken in his forebodings. All at once there floated close by ours, a ship which none of us had observed before. A wild shout and cry ascended from the deck, at which, occurring at this anxious season, before a storm, I wondered not a little. But the Captain by my side was deadly pale: "My ship is lost," cried he; "there sails Death!" Before I could demand an explanation of these singular words, the sailors rushed in, weeping and wailing. "Have you seen it?" they exclaimed: "all is now over with us!"

But the Captain had words of consolation read to them out of the Koran, and seated himself at the helm. But in vain! The tempest began visibly to rise with a roaring noise, and, before an hour passed by, the ship struck and remained aground. The boats were lowered, and scarcely had the last sailors saved

themselves, when the vessel went down before our eyes, and I was launched, a beggar, upon the sea. But our misfortune had still no end. Frightfully roared the tempest, the boat could no longer be governed. I fastened myself firmly to my old servant, and we mutually promised not to be separated from each other. At last the day broke, but, with the first glance of the morning-red, the wind struck and upset the boat in which we were seated. After that I saw my shipmates no more. The shock deprived me of consciousness, and when I returned to my senses, I found myself in the arms of my old faithful attendant, who had saved himself on the boat which had been upturned, and had come in search of me. The storm had abated; of our vessel there was nothing any more to be seen, but we plainly descried, at no great distance from us, another ship, towards which the waves were driving us. As we approached, I recognised the vessel as the same which had passed by us in the night, and which had thrown the Captain into such consternation. I felt a strange horror of this ship; the intimation of the Captain, which had been so fearfully corroborated, the desolate appearance of the ship, on which, although as we drew near we uttered loud cries, no one was visible, alarmed me. Nevertheless this was our only expedient; accordingly, we praised the Prophet, who had so miraculously preserved us.

From the fore-part of the ship hung down a long cable; for the purpose of laying hold of this, we paddled with our hands and feet. At last we were successful. Loudly I raised my voice,

but all remained quiet as ever, on board the vessel. Then we climbed up by the rope, I, as the youngest, taking the lead. But horror! what a spectacle was there presented to my eye, as I stepped upon the deck! The floor was red with blood; upon it lay twenty or thirty corpses in Turkish costume; by the middle-mast stood a man richly attired, with sabre in hand—but his face was wan and distorted; through his forehead passed a large spike which fastened him to the mast—he was dead! Terror chained my feet; I dared hardly to breathe. At last my companion stood by my side; he, too, was overpowered at sight of the deck which exhibited no living thing, but only so many frightful corpses. After having, in the anguish of our souls, supplicated the Prophet, we ventured to move forward. At every step we looked around to see if something new, something still more horrible, would not present itself. But all remained as it was—far and wide, no living thing but ourselves, and the ocean-world. Not once did we dare to speak aloud, through fear that the dead Captain there nailed to the mast would bend his rigid eyes upon us, or lest one of the corpses should turn his head. At last we arrived at a staircase, which led into the hold. There involuntarily we came to a halt, and looked at each other, for neither of us exactly ventured to express his thoughts.

“Master,” said my faithful servant, “something awful has happened here. Nevertheless, even if the ship down there below is full of murderers, still would I rather submit myself to their mercy or cruelty, than spend a longer time among these dead

bodies." I agreed with him, and so we took heart, and descended, full of apprehension. But the stillness of death prevailed here also, and there was no sound save that of our steps upon the stairs. We stood before the door of the cabin; I applied my ear, and listened—there was nothing to be heard. I opened it. The room presented a confused appearance; clothes, weapons, and other articles, lay disordered together. The crew, or at least the Captain, must shortly before have been carousing, for the remains of a banquet lay scattered around. We went on from room to room, from chamber to chamber finding, in all, royal stores of silk, pearls, and other costly articles. I was beside myself with joy at the sight, for as there was no one on the ship, I thought I could appropriate all to myself; but Ibrahim thereupon called to my notice that we were still far from land, at which we could not arrive, alone and without human help.

We refreshed ourselves with the meats and drink, which we found in rich profusion, and at last ascended upon deck. But here again we shivered at the awful sight of the bodies. We determined to free ourselves therefrom, by throwing them overboard; but how were we startled to find, that no one could move them from their places! So firmly were they fastened to the floor, that to remove them one would have had to take up the planks of the deck, for which tools were wanting to us. The Captain, moreover, could not be loosened from the mast, nor could we even wrest the sabre from his rigid hand. We passed the day in sorrowful reflection on our condition; and, when night began to

draw near, I gave permission to the old Ibrahim to lie down to sleep, while I would watch upon the deck, to look out for means of deliverance. When, however, the moon shone forth, and by the stars I calculated that it was about the eleventh hour, sleep so irresistibly overpowered me that I fell back, involuntarily, behind a cask which stood upon the deck. It was rather lethargy than sleep, for I plainly heard the sea beat against the side of the vessel, and the sails creak and whistle in the wind. All at once I thought I heard voices, and the steps of men upon the deck. I wished to arise and see what it was, but a strange power fettered my limbs, and I could not once open my eyes. But still more distinct became the voices; it appeared to me as if a merry crew were moving around upon the deck. In the midst of this I thought I distinguished the powerful voice of a commander, followed by the noise of ropes and sails. Gradually my senses left me; I fell into a deep slumber, in which I still seemed to hear the din of weapons, and awoke only when the sun was high in the heavens, and sent down his burning rays upon my face. Full of wonder, I gazed about me; storm, ship, the bodies, and all that I had heard in the night, recurred to me as a dream; but when I looked around, I found all as it had been the day before. Immoveable lay the bodies, immoveably was the Captain fastened to the mast; I laughed at my dream, and proceeded in search of my old companion.

The latter was seated in sorrowful meditation in the cabin. "O master," he exclaimed as I entered, "rather would I lie in

the deepest bottom of the sea, than pass another night in this enchanted ship." I asked him the reason of his grief, and thus he answered me:—

"When I had slept an hour, I awoke, and heard the noise of walking to and fro over my head. I thought at first that it was you, but there were at least twenty running around; I also heard conversation and cries. At length came heavy steps upon the stairs. After this I was no longer conscious; but at times my recollection returned for a moment, and then I saw the same man who is nailed to the mast, sit down at that table, singing and drinking; and he who lies not far from him on the floor, in a scarlet cloak, sat near him, and helped him to drink." Thus spoke my old servant to me.

You may believe me, my friends, that all was not right to my mind; for there was no delusion—I too had plainly heard the dead. To sail in such company was to me horrible; my Ibrahim, however, was again absorbed in deep reflection. "I have it now!" he exclaimed at length; there occurred to him, namely, a little verse, which his grandfather, a man of experience and travel, had taught him, and which could give assistance against every ghost and spectre. He also maintained that we could, the next night, prevent the unnatural sleep which had come upon us, by repeating right fervently sentences out of the Koran.

The proposition of the old man pleased me well. In anxious expectation we saw the night set in. Near the cabin was a little room, to which we determined to retire. We bored several holes

in the door, large enough to give us a view of the whole cabin; then we shut it as firmly as we could from within, and Ibrahim wrote the name of the Prophet in all four corners of the room. Thus we awaited the terrors of the night.

It might again have been about the eleventh hour, when a strong inclination for sleep began to overpower me. My companion, thereupon, advised me to repeat some sentences from the Koran, which assisted me to retain my consciousness. All at once it seemed to become lively overhead; the ropes creaked, there were steps upon the deck, and several voices were plainly distinguishable. We remained, a few moments, in intense anxiety; then we heard something descending the cabin stairs. When the old man became aware of this, he began to repeat the words which his grandfather had taught him to use against spirits and witchcraft:

“Come you, from the air descending,
Rise you from the deep sea-cave,
Spring you forth where flames are blending,
Glide you in the dismal grave:
Allah reigns, let all adore him!
Own him, spirits—bow before him!”

I must confess I did not put much faith in this verse, and my hair stood on end when the door flew open. The same large, stately man entered, whom I had seen nailed to the mast. The spike still passed through the middle of his brain, but he had

sheathed his sword. Behind him entered another, attired with less magnificence, whom also I had seen lying on the deck. The Captain, for he was unquestionably of this rank, had a pale countenance, a large black beard, and wildly-rolling eyes, with which he surveyed the whole apartment. I could see him distinctly, for he moved over opposite to us; but he appeared not to observe the door which concealed us. The two seated themselves at the table, which stood in the centre of the cabin, and spoke loud and fast, shouting together in an unknown tongue. They continually became more noisy and earnest, until at length, with doubled fist, the Captain brought the table a blow which shook the whole apartment. With wild laughter the other sprang up, and beckoned to the Captain to follow him. The latter rose, drew his sabre, and then both left the apartment. We breathed more freely when they were away; but our anxiety had still for a long time no end. Louder and louder became the noise upon deck; we heard hasty running to and fro, shouting, laughing, and howling. At length there came an actually hellish sound, so that we thought the deck and all the sails would fall down upon us, the clash of arms, and shrieks—of a sudden all was deep silence. When, after many hours, we ventured to go forth, we found every thing as before; not one lay differently—all were as stiff as wooden figures.



Thus passed we several days on the vessel; it moved continually towards the East, in which direction, according to my calculation, lay the land; but if by day it made many miles, by night it appeared to go back again, for we always found ourselves in the same spot when the sun went down. We could explain this in no other way, than that the dead men every night sailed back again with a full breeze. In order to prevent this, we took in all the sail before it became night, and employed the same means as at the door in the cabin; we wrote on parchment the name of the Prophet, and also, in addition, the little stanza of the grandfather, and bound them upon the furled sail. Anxiously

we awaited the result in our chamber. The ghosts appeared this time not to rage so wickedly; and, mark, the next morning the sails were still rolled up as we had left them. During the day we extended only as much as was necessary to bear the ship gently along, and so in five days we made considerable headway.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.