

the hand, brought them to their father, exclaiming, "God be praised! our prayers have been accepted"; and delivered them up to their parent. The goldsmith was very much rejoiced, and offered many thanks to the painter, after which he carried his sons home.

Now news of this occurrence became spread about in the city, and it was told how the two sons of the goldsmith, after becoming metamorphosed, were again restored to human shape. Upon this the *cadi* had the painter cited before him, and required him to relate the truth about the matter. The painter informed him that such and such a compact had been made between himself and the goldsmith; that the latter had acted so and so toward him, but that he was unable to prove the charge. "So I got up a ruse," said he, "to make him acknowledge the theft of the gold and silver, and succeeded by my skill in the art of painting." "Barik Allah!" exclaimed all those who heard the recital; "a person's talents should be such as these." They added also many compliments and praises to the painter on the ingenuity of his thought, and his success in laying so wise a plan.

The Craft of the Three Sharpers

From the Arabic

THERE were in time of yore three Sharpers who were wont every day in early morning to prowl forth and to prey, rummaging among the mounds which outlay the city. Therein each would find a silver bit of five *parahs* or its equivalent, after which the trio would foregather and buy whatso sufficed them for supper: they would also expend two half-dirhams upon *Bast*, which is *Bhang* (*Hashish*), and purchase a waxen taper with the other silver bit. They had hired a cell in the flank of a *Wakalah*, a caravansary without the walls, where they could sit at ease to solace

themselves and eat their *Hashish* after lighting the candle, and enjoy their intoxication and consequent merriment till the noon o' night. Then they would sleep, again awaking at day-dawn when they would arise and seek for spoil, according to their custom, and ransack the heaps where at times they would hit upon a silvering of five dirhams and at other times a piece of four; and at eventide they would meet to spend together the dark hours, and they would expend everything they came by every day. For a length of time they pursued this path until, one day of the days, they made for the mounds as was their wont and went round searching the heaps from morning to evening without finding even a half-*parah*; wherefore they were troubled and they went away and nighted in their cell without meat or drink. When the next day broke they arose and repaired for booty, changing the places wherein they were wont to forage; but none of them found aught; and their breasts were straitened for lack of a find of dirhams wherewith to buy them supper. This lasted for three full-told and following days until hunger waxed hard upon them and vexation; so they said one to other, "Go we to the Sultan and let us serve him with a sleight, and each of us three shall claim to be a past master of some craft: haply Allah Almighty may incline his heart usward and he may largesse us with something to expend upon our necessities." Accordingly all three agreed to do on this wise and they sought the Sultan whom they found in the palace-garden. They asked leave to go in to him, but the Chamberlains refused admission: so they stood afar off unable to approach the presence. Then quoth they one to other, "'Twere better we fall to and each smite his comrade and cry aloud and make a clamor, and as soon as he shall hear us he will send to summon us." Accordingly, they jostled one another and each took to frapping his fellow, making the while loud outcries. The Sultan hearing this turmoil said, "Bring me yonder wights"; and the Chamberlains and Eunuchs ran out to them and seized them and set them between the hands of the Sovereign. As soon as they stood in the presence he asked them, "What be the

cause of your wrath one against other?" They answered, "O King of the Age, we are past masters of crafts, each of us weeting an especial art." Quoth the Sultan, "What be your crafts?" and quoth one of the trio, "O our Lord, as for my art I am a jeweler by trade." The King exclaimed, "Passing strange! a sharper and a jeweler: this is a wondrous matter." And he questioned the second Sharper saying, "And thou, the other, what may be thy craft?" He answered, "I am a genealogist of the horse-kind." So the King glanced at him in surprise and said to himself, "A sharper, yet he claimeth an astounding knowledge!" Then he left him and put the same question to the third who said to him, "O King of the Age, verily my art is more wondrous and marvelous than aught thou hast heard from these twain: their craft is easy, but mine is such that none save I can discover the right direction thereto or know the first of it from the last of it." The Sultan inquired of him, "And what be thy craft?" Whereunto he replied, "My craft is the genealogy of the sons of Adam." Hearing these words the Sovereign wondered with extreme wonderment and said in himself, "Verily He informeth with His secrets the humblest of His creatures! Assuredly these men, an they speak truth in all they say and it prove soothfast, are fit for naught except kingship. But I will keep them by me until the occurrence of some nice contingency wherein I may test them; then, if they approve themselves good men and trustworthy of word, I will leave them on life; but if their speech be lying I will do them die." Upon this he set apart for them apartments and rationed them with three cakes of bread and a dish of roast meat and set over them his sentinels dreading lest they fly. This case continued for a while till behold, there came to the Sultan from the land of 'Ajam a present of rarities, among which were two gems whereof one was clear of water and the other was clouded of color. The Sultan hent them in hand for a time and fell to considering them straitly for the space of an hour; after which he called to mind the first of the three Sharpers, the self-styled jeweler, and cried,

"Bring me the jeweler-man." Accordingly they went and brought him and set him before the Sovereign who asked him, "O man, art thou a lapidary?" And when the Sharper answered "Yes" he gave him the clear-watered stone, saying, "What may be the price of this gem?" Then the Sharper took the jewel in hand and turned it rightward and leftward and considered the outside and pried into the inside; after which he said to the Sultan, "O my lord, verily this gem containeth a worm bred within the heart thereof." Now when the King heard these words he waxed wroth with exceeding wrath and commanded the man's head to be stricken off, saying, "This jewel is clear of color and free of flaw or other default; yet thou chargest it falsely with containing a worm!" Then he summoned the Linkman who laid hands on the Sharper and pinioned his elbows and trussed up his legs like a camel's and was about to smite his neck when behold, the Wazir entered the presence and, seeing the Sovereign in high dudgeon and the Sharper under the scimitar, asked what was to do. The Sultan related to him what had happened, when he drew near to him and said, "O my lord, act not after this fashion! An thou determine upon the killing of yonder man, first break the gem and, if thou find therein a worm, thou wilt know the wight's word to have been veridical; but an thou find it sound then strike off his head." "Right is thy rede," quoth the King: then he took in hand the gem and smote it with his mace and when it brake behold, he found therein the worm amiddlemost thereof. So he marveled at the sight and asked the man, "What proved to thee that it harbored a worm?" "The sharpness of my sight," answered the Sharper. Then the Sultan pardoned him and, admiring his power of vision, addressed his attendants saying, "Bear him back to his comrades and ration him with a dish of roast meat and two cakes of bread." And they did as he bade them. After some time, on a day of the days, there came to the King the tribute of 'Ajam-land accompanied with presents, among which was a colt whose robe black as night showed one shade in the sun and another in the shadow. When the ani-

mal was displayed to the Sultan he fell in love with it and set apart for it a stall and solaced himself at all times by gazing at it, and was wholly occupied with it and sang its praises till they filled the whole country side. Presently he remembered the Sharper who claimed to be a genealogist of the horse-kind and bade him be summoned. So they fared forth and brought him and set him between the hands of the Sovereign who said to him, "Art thou he who knoweth the breed and descent of horses?" "Yea verily," said the man. Then cried the King, "By the truth of Him who set me upon the necks of His servants and who sayeth to a thing 'Be' and it becometh, an I find aught of error or confusion in thy words, I will strike off thy head." "Hearkening and obedience," quoth the Sharper. Then they led him to the colt that he might consider its genealogy. He called aloud to the groom, and when they brought him he bade the man back the colt for his inspection. So he mounted the animal and made it pace to the right and to the left, causing it now to prance and curvet and then to step leisurely, while the connoisseur looked on and after a time quoth he to the groom, "'Tis enough!" Then he went in to the presence and stood between the hands of the King who inquired, "What hast thou seen in the colt, O Kashmir?" Replied the Sharper, "By Allah, O King of the Age, this colt is of pure and noble blood on the side of the sire: its action is excellent and all its qualities are praiseworthy save one; and but for this one it had been perfect in blood and breed nor had there been on earth's face its fellow in horseflesh. But its blemish remaineth a secret." The Sultan asked, "And what is the quality which thou blamest?" and the Sharper answered, "Its sire was noble, but its dam was of other strain: she it was that brought the blemish and if thou, O my lord, allow me I will notify it to thee." "'Tis well, and needs must thou declare it," quoth the Sultan. Then said the Sharper, "Its dam is a buffalo-cow." When the King heard these words he was wroth with wrath exceeding and he bade the Linkman take the Sharper and behead him, crying, "O dog! O accursed!

How can a buffalo-cow bear a horse?" The Sharper replied, "O my lord, the Linkman is in the presence; but send and fetch him who brought thee the colt and of him make inquiry. If my words prove true and rightly placed, my skill shall be stablished; but an they be lies let my head pay forfeit for my tongue. Here standeth the Linkman and I am between thy hands: thou hast but to bid him strike off my head!" Thereupon the King sent for the owner and breeder of the colt and they brought him to the presence. And the Sultan asked him saying, "Tell me the truth anent the blood of this colt. Didst thou buy it or breed it so that it was a rearing of thy homestead?" Said he, "By Allah, O King of the Age, I will speak naught which is not sooth, for indeed there hangeth by this colt the strangest story: were it graven with graver-needles upon the eye-corners it had been a warning to whoso would be warned. And this it is. I had a stallion of purest strain whose sire was of the steeds of the sea; and he was stabled in a stall apart for fear of the evil eye, his service being intrusted to trusty servants. But one day in springtide the Syce took the horse into the open and allowed him to mate with a buffalo-cow. She conceived by him and when her days were completed and her throwing-time came she suffered sore pains and bare yonder colt. And all who have seen it or have heard of it were astounded," said he, presently adding, "By Allah, O King of the Age, had its dam been of the mare-kind the colt would have had no equal on earth's surface or aught approaching it." Hereat the Sultan took thought and marvelled; then, summoning the Sharper he said to him when present, "O man, thy speech is true and thou art indeed a genealogist in horseflesh and thou wottest it well. But I would know what proved to thee that the dam of this colt was a buffalo-cow?" Said he, "O King, my proof thereof was palpable nor can it be concealed from any wight of right wits and intelligence and special knowledge; for the horse's hoof is round while the hooves of buffaloes are elongated and duck-shaped, and hereby I kenned that this colt was a jumart, the issue of a cow-buffalo." The Sultan was

pleased with his words and said, "Ration him with a plate of roast meat and two cakes of bread"; and they did as they were bidden. Now for a length of time the third Sharper was forgotten till one day the Sultan bethought him of the man who could explain the genealogy of Adam's sons. So he bade fetch him and when they brought him into the presence he said, "Thou art he that knowest the caste and descent of men and women?" and the other said, "Yes." Then he commanded the Eunuchs take him to his wife and place him before her and cause him declare her genealogy. So they led him in and set him standing in her presence, and the Sharper considered her for a while, looking from right to left; then he fared forth to the Sultan who asked him, "What hast thou seen in the Queen?" Answered he, "O my lord, I saw a somewhat adorned with loveliness and beauty and perfect grace, with fair stature of symmetrical trace and with modesty and fine manners and skillful case; and she is one in whom all good qualities appear on every side, nor is aught of accomplishments or knowledge concealed from her, and haply in her center all desirable attributes. Natheless, O King of the Age, there is a curious point that dishonoreth her, from the which were she free none would outshine her of all the women of her generation." Now when the Sultan heard the words of the Sharper, he sprang hastily to his feet and clapping hand upon hilt bared his brand and fell upon the man, purposing to slay him; but the Chamberlains and the Eunuchs prevented him saying, "O our lord, kill him not until his falsehood or his fact shall have been made manifest to thee." The Sultan said to him, "What then appeared to thee in my Queen?" "She is ferly fair," said the man, "but her mother is a dancing-girl, a gypsy." The fury of the King increased hereat and he sent to summon the inmates of his Harem and cried to his father-in-law, "Unless thou speak me sooth concerning thy daughter and her descent and her mother I"— He replied, "By Allah, O King of the Age, naught saveth a man save soothfastness! Her mother indeed was a Ghaziyah: in past time a party of the tribe was

passing by my abode when a young maid strayed from her fellows and was lost. They asked no questions concerning her; so I lodged her and bred her in my homestead till she grew up to be a great girl and the fairest of her time. My heart would not brook her wiving with any other; so I wedded her and she bare me this daughter whom thou, O King, hast espoused." When the Sultan heard these words the flame in his heart was quenched and he wondered at the subtlety of the Sharper man; so he summoned him and asked him saying, "O wily one, tell me what certified to thee that my Queen had a dancing-girl, a gypsy, to mother?" He answered, "O King of the Age, verily the Ghaziyah race hath eye-balls intensely black and bushy brows, whereas other women than the Ghaziyah have the reverse of this." On such wise the King was convinced of the man's skill and he cried, "Ration him with a dish of roast meat and two scones." They did as he bade and the three Sharpers tarried with the Sultan a long time till one day when the King said to himself, "Verily these three men have by their skill solved every question of genealogy which I proposed to them: first the jeweler proved his perfect knowledge of gems; secondly the genealogist of the horse-kind showed himself as skillful, and the same was the case with the genealogist of mankind, for he discovered the origin of my Queen and the truth of his words appeared from all quarters. Now 'tis my desire that he do the same with me that I also may know my provenance." Accordingly they set the man between his hands and he said to him, "O fellow, hast thou the power to tell me mine origin?" Said the Sharper, "Yes, O my lord, I can trace thy descent, but I will so do only upon a condition; to wit, that thou promise me safety after what I shall have told thee; for the saw saith, 'Whilst Sultan sitteth on throne 'ware his despite, inasmuch as none may be contumacious when he saith 'Smite.'" Thereupon the Sultan told him, "Thou hast a promise of immunity, a promise which shall never be falsed." And the man said, "O King of the Age, when as I acquaint thee with thy root and branch, let it be between

us twain lest these present hear us." "Wherefore O man?" asked the Sultan, and the Sharper answered, "O my lord, Allah of Allmight hath among His names 'The Veiler'; wherefore the King bade his Chamberlains and Eunuchs retire so that none remained in the place save those two. Then the Sharper came forward and said, "O my lord, thou art not the son of a king." As soon as the King heard these words his case changed and his color waxed wan and his limbs fell loose: he foamed at the mouth; he lost hearing and sight; he became as one drunken without wine and he fell fainting to the ground. After a while he recovered and said to the Sharper, "Now by the truth of Him who hath set me upon the necks of His servants, and thy words be veridical and I ascertain their sooth by proof positive, I will assuredly abdicate my Kingdom and resign my realm to thee, because none deserveth it save thou and it becometh us least of all and every. But an I find thy speech lying I will slay thee. He replied, "Hearing and obeying"; and the Sovereign, rising up without stay or delay, went inside to his mother with grip on glaive, and said to her, "By the truth of Him who uplifted the sky above the earth, an thou answer me not with the whole truth in whatso I ask thee, I will cut thee to little bits with this blade." She inquired, "What dost thou want with me?" and he replied, "Whose son am I, and what may be my descent?" She rejoined, "Although falsehood be an excuse, fact and truth are superior and more saving. Thou art indeed the very son of a cook. The Sultan that was before thee took me to wife but we had no issue; and he would mourn and groan from the core of his heart for that he had no seed, nor girl nor boy; neither could he enjoy aught of sweet food or sleep. Now it chanced that the wife of the Kitchener bare him a boy, and I prevailed upon her to keep the birth secret; and my women brought the child to me, and spread abroad that at last an heir was come. Now at that time the Sultan was hunting and birding and enjoying himself about the gardens; and when the bearer of good news went to him and announced the birth of a man-child he hurried back to me

and forthright bade them decorate the capital and he found the report true; so the city adorned itself for forty days in honor of its King. Such is my case and my tale." Thereupon the King went forth from her to the Sharper and bade him doff his dress, and when this had been done he doffed his own raiment and habited the man in royal gear and hooded him with the Taylasan and asked him saying, "What proof hast thou of my being base born?" The Sharper answered, "O my lord, my proof was thy bidding our being rationed, after showing the perfection of our skill, with a dish of roast meat and two scones of bread; whereby I knew thee to be of cook's breed, for the Kings be wont in such case to make presents of money and valuables, not of meat and bread as thou didst, and this evidenced thee to be no king's son, but a cook's son." He replied, "Sooth thou sayest," and then robed him with the rest of his robes including the Kalansuwah or royal head-dress under the hood, and seating him upon the throne of his estate, went forth from him after abandoning all his women to him and assumed the garb of a Darwaysh who wandereth about the world and formally abdicated his dominion to his successor. But when the Sharper-king saw himself in this condition, he reflected and said to himself, "Summon thy whilom comrades and see whether they recognize thee or not." So he caused them be set before him and conversed with them; then, perceiving that none knew him he gifted them and sent them to gang their gait. And he ruled his realm and bade and forbade and gave and took away and was gracious and generous to each and every of his lieges; so that the people of that region who were his subjects blessed him and prayed for him.