

*The Cheerful Workman*

*From the Arabic*

IT is mentioned in the celebrated Arabic work entitled the "Mirror of the Age," that one of the caliphs of the house of Abbass, Mutâsid Billah, besides being a very brave and courageous person, was also possessed of keen observation, and the faculty of knowing men by their physiognomy. One day as he was inspecting the erection of a palace on the banks of the Tigris, which he was wont to do once a week, and encourage the builders with presents and other acts of favor, he observed that each of the men employed carrying stones to the edifice bore but one at a time, and that with great gravity and slowness. Among them, however, he perceived one, with black hands and dark complexion, who invariably lifted two at a time, put them on his back, and with evident joy and elasticity carried them from the wharf to the masons. On seeing this, the caliph pointed him out to Hussian, one of his attendants, and asked the cause of this man's unnatural gayety. The attendant answered that the caliph was more competent to form an opinion of the case than himself. The caliph then added that the man was probably possessed of a large sum of money, and was therefore happy from the consciousness of his wealth; or, that he was a thief, who had only sought employment among the workmen for the purpose of concealment. "I do not like his appearance," continued the Prince of the Faithful; "have him brought into my presence."

So, when the man was come, the caliph asked him what his occupation was, and he answered that he was a common laborer. "Have you any money laid by?" demanded the caliph. "None," replied the man. "Tell me the truth," again asked the caliph, repeating the question, and again the man answered in the negative.

Then the caliph ordered an officer to strike the man,

which being done, he immediately cried out for pity and pardon. "Speak the truth," said the officer, "or the caliph will punish you as long as you live." So the man avowed that his trade was that of a tilemaker; and one day, added he, "when I had prepared my kiln, and lit the fire, a man approached me, mounted on an ass, who, dismounting before my kiln, let the ass go, and beginning to undress himself, took from around his waist a girdle, which he placed by his side and began fleaing himself. I, seeing that the man was quite alone, caught him, and throwing him into the furnace of my kiln, closed it down. I then took his girdle, and after killing the ass threw it also into the fire. See, here is the girdle." The caliph took it, and on examining it found it contained some thousands of gold pieces, and, moreover, had its owner's name written upon it. On this discovery the caliph sent criers out, to ask in the streets whether any family had lost a member, or a friend, and if so, to come before him. Soon an aged woman approached, and exclaimed, "My son left me with some thousands of pieces of gold, with which to buy merchandise, and is lost." They showed her the girdle, which she immediately recognized as her son's, and said that it had his name upon it.

The caliph now gave the girdle into the old woman's hands, saying, "See before you the murderer of your son." She demanded the right of retaliation, and the man was forthwith hung upon the door of him whom he had murdered.

All the world admired the caliph's sagacity and commended his justice.

*The Robber and the Woman*

*From the Arabic*

A CERTAIN Robber was a cunning workman and used not to steal aught, till he had wasted all that was with him; moreover, he stole not from his neighbors, neither accompanied with any of the thieves, for fear lest some one should betray him, and his case become public. After this fashion he abode a great while, in flourishing condition, and his secret was concealed, till Almighty Allah decreed that he broke in upon a beggar, a poor man whom he deemed rich. When he gained access to the house, he found naught, whereat he was wroth, and necessity prompted him to wake that man, who lay asleep alongside of his wife. So he aroused him and said to him, "Show me thy treasure." Now he had no treasure to show; but the Robber believed him not and was instant upon him with threats and blows. When he saw that he got no profit of him, he said to him, "Swear by the oath of divorce from thy wife that thou hast nothing." So he swore and his wife said to him, "Fie on thee! Wilt thou divorce me? Is not the hoard buried in yonder chamber?" Then she turned to the Robber and conjured him to be weightier of blows upon her husband, till he should deliver to him the treasure, anent which he had forsworn himself. So he drubbed him with a grievous drubbing, till he carried him to a certain chamber, wherein she signed to him that the hoard was and that he should take it up. So the Robber entered, he and the husband; and when they were both in the chamber, she locked on them the door, which was a stout and strong, and said to the Robber, "Woe to thee, O fool! Thou hast fallen into the trap and now I have but to cry out and the officers of police will come and take thee and thou wilt lose thy life, O Satan!" Quoth he, "Let me go forth"; and quoth she, "Thou art a man and I am a woman; and in thy hand is a knife, and I am afraid of thee." He cried, "Take

the knife from me." So she took it and said to her husband, "Art thou a woman and he a man? Pain his neck-nape with flogging, even as he flogged thee; and if he put out his hand to thee, I will cry out a single cry and the policemen will come and take him and hew him in two." So the husband said to him, "O thousand-horned, O dog, O dodger, I owe thee a deposit wherefore thou hast dunned me." And he fell to bashing him grievously with a stick of holm-oak, while he called out to the woman for help and prayed her to deliver him: but she said, "Keep thy place till the morning, and thou shalt see queer things." And her husband beat him within the chamber, till he overcame him and he swooned away. Then he left beating him and when the Robber came to himself, the woman said to her husband, "O man, this house is on hire and we owe its owners much money, and we have naught; so how wilt thou do?" And she went on to bespeak him thus. The Robber asked, "And what is the amount of the rent?" The husband answered, "'Twill be eighty dirhams"; and the thief said, "I will pay this for thee and do thou let me go my way." Then the wife inquired, "O man, how much do we owe the baker and the greengrocer?" Quoth the Robber, "What is the sum of this?" And the husband said, "Sixty dirhams." Rejoined the other, "That makes two hundred dirhams; let me go my way and I will pay them." But the wife said, "O my dear, and the girl groweth up and needs must we marry her and equip her and do what else is needful." So the Robber said to the husband, "How much dost thou want?" and he rejoined, "An hundred dirhams in a modest way." Quoth the Robber, "That maketh three hundred dirhams." Then the woman said, "O my dear, when the girl is married, thou wilt need money for winter expenses, charcoal and firewood and other necessaries." The Robber asked, "What wouldst thou have?" And she answered, "An hundred dirhams." He rejoined, "Be it four hundred dirhams." And she continued, "O my dear and O coolth of mine eyes, needs must my husband have capital in hand, wherewith he may buy