

donkey. Stick to silver and gold and what pertaineth thereto of exchange and small change; because indeed the virtue of this ass is a mystery to thee. For every craft its crafty men and for every means of livelihood its peculiar people." When the affair was prolonged upon the three sharpers, they went away and sat down aside; then they came up privily to the money-changer and said to him, "An thou can buy him for us, do so, and we will give thee twenty dirhams." Quoth he, "Go away and sit down at a distance from him." So they did as he bade and the Shroff went up to the owner of the ass and ceased not luring him with lucre and saying, "Leave these wights and sell me the donkey, and I will reckon him a present from thee," till he sold him the animal for five thousand and five hundred dirhams. Accordingly the money-changer weighed out to him that sum of his own moneys, and the owner of the ass took the price and delivered the beast to him, saying, "Whatso shall betide, though he abide a deposit upon thy neck, sell him not to yonder cheats for less than ten thousand dirhams, for that they would fain buy him because of a hidden hoard they know, whereto naught can guide them save this donkey. So close thy hand on him and cross me not, or thou shalt repent." With these words he left him and went away, whereupon up came the three other sharpers, the comrades of him of the ass, and said to the Shroff, "God requite thee for us with good, in that thou hast bought him! How can we reward thee?" Quoth he, "I will not sell him but for ten thousand dirhams." When they heard that they returned to the ass and fell again to examining him like buyers and handling him. Then said they to the money-changer, "Indeed we were deceived in him. This is not the ass we sought and he is not worth to us more than ten nusfs." Then they left him and offered to go away, whereat the Shroff was sore chagrined and cried out at their speech, saying, "O folk, ye asked me to buy him for you and now I have bought him, ye say, we were deceived in him, and he is not worth to us more than ten nusfs." They replied, "We thought that in him was whatso we wanted; but, behold, in

him is the contrary of that which we wish; and indeed he hath a blemish, for that he is short of back." Then they made long noses at him and went away from him and dispersed. The money-changer deemed they did but play him off, that they might get the donkey at their own price; but, when they walked away from him and he had long awaited their return, he cried out, saying, "Well-away!" and "Ruin!" and "Sorry case I am in!" and shrieked aloud and rent his raiment. So the market-people assembled to him and questioned him of his case; whereupon he acquainted them with his condition and told them what the knaves had said and how they had cozened him and how they had cajoled him into buying an ass worth fifty dirhams for five thousand and five hundred. His friends blamed him and a gathering of the folk laughed at him and admired his folly and over-faith in believing the talk of the sharpers without suspicion, and meddling with that which he understood not and thrusting himself into that whereof he had no sure knowledge.

The Withered Hand

From the Turkish

ONE of the caliphs of the Abassides, named Mutaasid Billah Yansur bi nour Ullah, was a sovereign of great good judgment and careful justice. He one day, in company with his attendants, visited a palace situated on the banks of the Tigris, where he observed an expert fisherman throw his net into the river, and, after hauling it out, found only three or four fish in it. The caliph remarking this, commanded the fisherman to throw it into the water again for his sake, "and let us see," said he, "what my luck will be." The man did as he was ordered, and soon after, hauling his net out, felt something weighty among its meshes. In consequence of the increased weight, the attendants of the caliph had to aid him, and when the net

was on shore, they found in it a leather bag, tightly bound round the mouth. In this bag they at first perceived a number of tiles, and finally at its bottom the hand of a tender and young girl, bent and shriveled. The caliph, on seeing the hand, exclaimed, "Poor creature, what work is this, that the servants of God (Mussulmans) should be thus cut to pieces and thrown into the river without our knowledge? We must find the committer of this wicked act." Now with the caliph was one of his cadis (judges), who spoke and said, "Oh! Ameer of the Faithful, give your precious self no trouble about this matter, for, by your favor, we will investigate, and with proper care and circumspection bring it to light."

The caliph at the same time called the governor of the city of Baghdad, and giving the bag into his hands, said, "Go to the bazaar, show it to the sack sewers, and inquire whose work it is; they know each other's work; and if you find the individual who sewed it, bring him to me."

The cadi had the sack shown to the sewers, and an old grave-looking man, on seeing it, exclaimed that it was his own work. "Lately I sold it," added he, "and two others, to one Yahiya Ilha, a native of Damascus, of the family of the Mahides." The cadi on hearing this said, "Come with me to the caliph; fear nothing, he has only a few questions to ask you." So the old man accompanied him into the presence of the caliph, who demanded of him to whom he had sold it. The old man answered as before, adding, "Oh, Prince of the Faithful, he is a man of high rank, but very wicked and tyrannical, and continually does injury and vexation to true believers. Everyone fears him, and none dare complain against him to the caliph. Lately a lady, named Inaan Magennee, purchased a female slave for one thousand dinars who was very fair and beautiful, and, moreover, a poetess. This man supposed her mistress would sell her to him, but receiving the lady's reply that she had already given her her freedom, he sent her word that there was to be a wedding in the house, and requested that the female should be loaned him for the occasion.

The lady, therefore, sent her as a loan for three days, and, after four or five had elapsed, sending to demand her, received for answer that she had already left his house two or three days ago, and notwithstanding the lady's tears and complaints, she could not obtain her slave, nor even hear any news of her.

"The lady, from fear of this man's violence, held her peace, and left the quarter wherein she had resided, for it is said he had already put several of his neighbors to death."

When the old man was done speaking, the caliph seemed greatly rejoiced, and commanded that Yahiya Ilha should forthwith be brought before him. He came, and when he was shown the hand found in the bag his color changed, and he falsely endeavored to exculpate himself. The lady was likewise brought, and so soon as she saw the hand she commenced weeping, and exclaimed, "Yes, indeed, it is the hand of my poor murdered slave." "Speak," said the caliph to the Mahides, "for by my head I swear to know the truth of this affair." So the man acknowledged that he had killed the slave; and the caliph, in consideration of Hasheem,¹ sentenced him to pay to the owner of the slave one thousand pieces of gold for the loss which she had sustained, and one hundred thousand more for the law of retaliation; after which he allowed him three days in which to settle his affairs in the city, and then leave it forever.

On learning this sentence, the public loudly praised the caliph's judgment, and commended his justice and equity.

¹ Beni Hasheem, one of the most ancient Arabian tribes, from which the Prophet descended.—A. T.