

The Adventures of the Caliph Haroun Alraschid

I.

Of the Boyhood and Youth of the Caliph Haroun. And of his Friendship for Giafar the Barmecide.

The Caliph Haroun, to whom be perpetual fame, was the second of the sons of the Caliph Mohadi. As an infant, he was beautiful as the day; as an infant of seven days, you might have supposed him a year old. His face was like the full moon, his eyes like the stars Aisch and Kesil, his lips like twin pomegranates. As soon as he was born, the nurse pronounced in his ear the Tecbir and the Adan, and wrapped him up and gave him to his mother, who nourished him till he was satiated and slept. When the Caliph Mohadi entered and congratulated his wife on her safety, he said, "Where is GOD'S deposit?" Whereon she withdrew a veil of white gauze, and recompensed his eyes with the sight of the infant, surpassing all others in its loveliness. The Caliph blessed heaven, and said unto his wife, "What hast thou named him?" She said, "Had it been a girl, I had named her; but since it is a boy, none shall name him but thyself." Then he named him by the name that was to be known all over the world.

The Child Haroun was left to the care of the women unto the age of seven years, growing each day more of an angel in beauty and discretion. Then he had male officers appointed him, and Yahia the Barmecide for his tutor, to teach him all things appertaining to religion and wisdom; and he conducted himself as sagely as though he were twelve years old, and learned the Koran by heart, and became skilful in reading and writing, and computation, and the knowledge of animals, minerals, and herbs, and the course of the stars, their names and influences, and the position of the kingdoms of the Earth and their cities and rivers, and the history of the Kings and Sultans by whom they had been governed from the earliest times.

But the Caliph Mohadi observed that as his mind expanded with knowledge, his health and strength became lessened; wherefore he said, "It is not fit that the boy should continually consort with aged Sheikhs, without having a companion of his own age; nor is it suitable that he should be too much with his elder Brother Hadi, who lately smote him in the eye. There are some persons who remain the better friends the less they are together. Where shall we find a suitable playmate

for the young Haroun, one who will neither teach him evil words, nor inspire malicious thoughts, nor impart habits detrimental to him, nor smite him on the head, nor yet fawn or cringe or flatter?" Then one of the attendants said, O Caliph! such a boy as thou seekest is Gaifar, son of Yahia the Barmecide. He is neither haughty nor cringing, neither rough nor dissimulating, but in all things truthful, faithful, brave, kind, docile, and accomplished. He can read, write, and compute; he is a devourer of books, and of the sayings of wise men; he can also ride, and throw the dart, and hurl the spear, and draw the bow; and he is beautiful in person and of good parentage. Are not the Barmecides among the noblest houses in Bagdad? Wherefore, O Caliph! there is none other companion so meet for the young Haroun as Gaifar"

Then the Caliph was pleased, and his heart expanded, and he commanded the young Gaifar to be brought into his presence. The boy came blushing, for he knew not wherefore he was brought, and he feared it might be for some inadvertent fault, or to be posed with some hard question. Nevertheless, he kneeled and kissed the hem of the Caliph's garment spontaneously, without any bashfulness or awkwardness, and then arose and stood before him like a statue, not trembling, but with his arms folded across his breast, his head bent, and his eyes burning with soft and furtive Light under their downcast lashes.

Then the Caliph saw he was a boy to be esteemed, and a companion to be commended; and he said unto him, "How old art thou?" And Gaifar answered and said, "Thy servant is eleven." then said the Caliph, "Canst thou read the Koran?" Gaifar replied, "Thy servant has it written in his heart." The Caliph said, "Canst thou rule thy temper by its laws, and thy life by its spirit?" The boy answered, "O Prince of the Faithful! such is my continual endeavour; but where is the son of Adam that is perfect? How much less the youngest and least of thy servants?"

Then the Caliph said to the young Haroun who stood at his knee, and who was in the ninth year of his Age, "Go kiss him and embrace him, and be friends with him and play with him, and be true to one another all the days of the years of your lives, and commit no evil, remembering that GOD sees the heart; and let Gaifar be the eyelid to thine eye." Then the boys promptly embraced, and having eyed one another, they clave unto one another from that time forth for evermore; and they went forth from the Caliph's presence with their arms about one another's necks.

And it came to pass that the commerce between the souls of these twain led to all manner of good and no manner of evil; and the boy Gaifar incited the young Haroun to ride and shoot and wrestle, and also to read and to observe and to reflect. And whenever he saw in him any tendency to wrong, he said, "O do not that thing which my soul hateth!" And Haroun would abstain, because he loved Gaifar.

Sometimes when they were seated together, pouring out all their young thoughts, Gaifar would say, "Ah, such and such a thing in the city is wrong, and

unjust, and unequal. If I were a man and of great power, I would remedy it." Then Haroun would say, "My brother Hadi is older than I, and will doubtless marry and have sons, and will rule after my father in Bagdad, and his sons will rule after him. How-beit, when I attain unto man's estate, it may be that my Father will bestow on me the government of such and such a province; and then thou shalt be my vizier."

Then the two boys would imagine themselves, the one a reigning sovereign, the other his vizier; and would invent such and such laws and judgments, and frame such and such Adventures. Haroun would say, "What judgment wouldest thou give in such a case?" Gaifar would reply, "I would give such and such a judgment." "That would be a bad judgment," says Haroun. "Why?" says Gaifar. "The guilty would not fear you, nor desist from their guiltiness," says Haroun. "It were better," says Gaifar, "to err on the side of mercy than of severity." Then saith Haroun, "Clemency is sometimes cruelty, and cruelty is sometimes clemency." And Gaifar made answer and said, "A just man may be severe, but never cruel."

In process of time it came to pass that Haroun being accomplished in all science and all arts of peace, the Caliph Mohadi decreed that he should begin to study the science of war, and go forth with an army. Therefore, he put him in command of his forces that were prepared to make war on Irene, empress of the Greeks, giving him wise and able captains that might aid him with their judgment without diminishing his renown. Therefore while Gaifar remained in Bagdad, applying himself to wisdom and judgment, Haroun carried victorious war to the gates of Constantinople, and laid waste many of the Empress's provinces.

Now it befell that Haroun, being destitute of the presence and advice of his friend Gaifar, and thrown into the companionship of many young nobles and officers neither so good nor so wise, he was sometimes betrayed into conduct that Gaifar would have disapproved. Nevertheless, though he escaped not some blemishes, he conducted himself, on the whole, wisely, and the reproaches that now and then fell upon him were not from men's tongues but from his own heart. And he returned to Bagdad, after a prolonged absence, covered with glory.

Now, when Haroun and Gaifar again met, they were so much altered that they scarcely knew one another, and could not refrain from smiling. For they were now bearded men, and Gaifar had espoused a wife, who had blessed him with a little daughter. The Caliph Mohadi was sick, and had summoned his sons to his bedside. He was attended by a Christian physician of the family of Baktishua, whose name signifieth "the Servants of JESUS." There were none others like unto them for healing, throughout all the land. Then said Haroun privately to Gaifar, "I am displeased that my Father should be attended by a Chrstian dog." "What sayest thou, O Prince?" said Gaifar, "and why callest thou the good Physician a dog?" "He is of the Infidels, an accursed Giaour," said Haroun, "and may think he doeth a laudable action by secretly poisoning my father." "Nay, O Prince, thou wrongest a man of a noble spirit," said Gaifar; "I would that all Moslemen were

even as this Christian, as far as purity of life and Integrity of heart extend.” “You are deceived,” says Haroun, “by his eloquent tongue and sweet countenance; I believe he is no better than other men.” “Let time answer for him,” says Gaifar, “and if it prove him better, remember my word. Besides, if he were to harm the Caliph, would not Prince Hadi and thou instantly put him to death, and all his house?” “Unquestionably,” said Haroun.

Now it befell that the Christian physician was so happy as to heal the Caliph; wherefore the Caliph tormented his soul to devise how to make him a suitable recompense. Having cogitated much in his mind, he inquired of one of his servants whether Baktishua were married. “Verily, he is married,” replied the Servant, “but he hath but one wife, and she is ugly and old.” Then the Caliph bade his slave Mesrour carry to the good Physician a purse containing three thousand pieces of gold, and also three beautiful Greek girls to replace his old wife.

Mesrour repaired to the house of the good physician, but found him not at home. In his place, the door was opened by his pupil Isa. When Isa learnt Mesrour’s errand, his eyes gloated on the gold, and he took it, and likewise received the three damsels, and promised to deliver them to his master. But, in the space of about an hour, Baktishua presented himself to Mesrour, and re-delivered to him the three slaves; saying that he thanked the Caliph for his liberality, but that Christians were restricted to one wife.

Then Gaifar laughed, and said unto Haroun, “Said I not unto thee, O Prince, that this man had a padlock on his heart?” “Thou hadst reason,” said Haroun, “but why have they this senseless custom?” “I wish no customs were more senseless,” returned Gaifar. “Henceforth esteem not a man to be evil, solely because he is a Christian.”

Meantime the Caliph Mohadi having been made acquainted with Baktishua’s conduct, esteemed him the more for it, and loaded him with presents such as it was not unlawful for him to receive. And the following year, when the good Physician’s health failed, and he was unable to heal himself, save by change of air, the Caliph permitted him to absent himself from Bagdad, and sent him away loaded with wealth and honours.

Now, while the good Physician was absent, it befell that the Caliph Mohadi was in very deed stricken for death, with no one at hand for his leech, but Baktishua’s disciple Isa. Feeling himself, therefore, to be approaching his end, he sent for his son Hadi, and delivered unto him his last Instructions, and bade him renown himself and increase the glory of the Caliphate; after which he blessed him, and became chilly, and gathered up his feet and died. And there was made for him great wailing. And Hadi his son reigned in his stead.

Now, the Prince Haroun was absent with an army; and it was thought that the Caliph Mohadi would have made greater provision for him than he did, had he not been suddenly stricken with the mortal coldness of death. Howbeit, Hadi his brother was pleased to keep him at a distance from him with his army, lest he

should draw aside from him the hearts of the people; wherefore Haroun remained distant from Bagdad, emulating the achievements of Saadi Batthal or the worthy, otherwise called Giafar Sadak, whose adventures are written in a book.

Meantime Hadi the son of Mohadi reigned at Bagdad; and whatsoever he listed to do, and whatsoever his fancy inclined him to, and whatsoever his temper incited him to, that he did. He restrained himself not, either in the desire of his eyes, or the pleasing of his palate, or the gratification of his pride. His harem was crowded with slaves, his table was loaded with dishes, his flatterers accumulated wealth. Nevertheless all these things hindered not that he should be cut off in the flower of his Age. Wherefore he died and was buried, leaving no son; and Haroun his brother became caliph in his stead.

Then Haroun the Caliph, attended by Al Fadl the Barmecide and all his inferior officers, and a long array of victorious warriors, returned to Bagdad, and all the people went forth to meet him. And the poor laid their heads in the dust, and he showered handfuls of gold upon them, and they cried, "blessed be Haroun the son of Mohadi, the descendant of Abbas the kinsman of the Prophet!" And the ladies of Bagdad crowded to their lattices and house-tops, and eyed him through their veils, and said one to another, "Is not this Haroun the conqueror of Irene, the champion of the East?" And Yahia the Barmecide came forth to meet him, and said, "Welcome, my son, my pupil, my pride, and the pride of Bagdad!" Then Haroun hastily alighted, and kissed the old man and embraced him; and all the people cried, "Wonderful is GOD, and blessed are those who glorify Him, and are just and clement, and who respect grey hairs!"

Then Gaifar the son of Yahia the Barmecide drew near, and Haroun embraced him, and whispered in his ear, "Be thou henceforth ever at my right hand: thou art my vizier!"

Then when he entered the palace, he saw Mesrour at the head of all the slaves that guard the private apartments, and he said unto him, "Be thou my state executioner." And he said to Al Fadl, the eldest son of Yahia the Barmecide, "Henceforth thou commandest mine armies, second only to myself."

Then he resorted to the women's apartments, to salute his mother; and he gave her a palace and money, and vessels of gold and silver, and many slaves. Also he saluted his sister Abbassa, and gave her slaves and treasure and jewels, and rich stuffs of sold and of silver, and appointed her apartments adjoining his own palace. Now Abbassa was very young, and beautiful as the day; even as the rose and the pomegranate.



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