

E951

Volume 4

*The Young Wives' Tale
(Kissat Al-'Arā'is
Al-Sabiya) and Tales
of Fez*

EASTERN LOVE



THE YOUNG WIVES' TALE AND TALES OF FEZ



ENGLISH VERSIONS OF THE
KISSAT AL-'ARĀ'IS AL-SABĪYA OF
AMOR BEN AMAR AND TALES
OF FEZ FROM THE ARABIC BY
E. POWYS MATHERS



*
VOLUME IV

*



JOHN RODKER
FOR SUBSCRIBERS
LONDON ' 1927



MADE IN ENGLAND

THIS EDITION OF THE KISSAT AL-'ARĀ'IS
AL-SABĪYA OF AMOR BEN AMAR, AND
TALES OF FEZ, FROM THE ARABIC,
BEING VOLUME 4 OF "EASTERN LOVE,"
IS HERE TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH FOR
THE FIRST TIME, BY E. POWYS MATHERS.
THE EDITION OF 1,000 COPIES ON ALL
RAG PAPER WAS PRINTED BY RICHARD
CLAY AND SONS, LTD., BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.
THE COPPER PLATE ENGRAVINGS ARE
BY HESTER SAINSBURY AND HAVE BEEN
HAND PRINTED AND HAND COLOURED
BY MESSRS. A. ALEXANDER AND SONS,
LTD. FOR THE NUMBER OF THIS SET
SEE VOLUME I

CONTENTS

Introductory Note ix

The Young Wives' Tale i

Notes 33

Tales of Fez 35

The Slipper-Mender's Son 37

*The Merchant's Daughter and the
Sultān's Son* 43

The Fatal House 53

Atik and Edh-Dhabi 58

Lalla Khallāl the Green 67

Prince Ahmed Ben Amar 76

The Carpenter's Daughter 88

The Language of the Birds 96

*The Kaftān of Love Spotted with
Passion* 109

*Sayings and Adventures of the Sultān's
Dādā* 119

Notes 128

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

MODERN *Arabic fiction*, in so far as it concerns Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, may be conveniently divided into three groups. One consists of the work of the superficially educated author who writes novels in French about his own part of the country, adopting the exterior point of view, taking the least interesting type of French sexual romance as his model, and imitating it badly; with this we need not be concerned. The second comprises the work of those conscientious artists who write either in Arabic or in unaided French or in French with the collaboration of a Frenchman, and who, while altogether discarding the traditional mechanism which would prevent them coming into living contact with their characters, yet remain enthusiastically native in their point of view. When we come to consider, in our Terminal Essay, Eastern Love as a whole, stories of this second class will be found, sheerly because of their method, to have no place in our series. The third group contains all fiction which is not written down; and this may be again divided into tales told privately, in the household, and those told publicly. Examples of the first kind, collected in Fez, form the major part

of this volume. But a single example, chosen not as typical but as unusual among the latter class of professional stories, is given first in

THE YOUNG WIVES' TALE
(*Kūsat al-'arā'is al-sabīya*)
of Amor ben Amar.

In translating from the French version prepared by M. G. de Villeneuve for his most interesting series of note books Une Vie Tunisienne, I have had the advantage of consultation with the collector himself, who took down the tale from its professional teller thirty years ago.

'Most of the stories I have listened to in the squares,' says M. de Villeneuve, speaking of researches made by him in Tunis, Sousse and Kairouan, 'are not worth any attention from those who have the authentic wheat of the Arabian Nights at their disposal; for they are but the surviving husks, and the repast is often of intolerable length. . . .

'But Amor ben Amar struck me as a man of some education, with a pleasant malice in his embroidery of the old themes. I took down three stories from his lips, in each case being given, at my own request, the shortest version. In The Young Wives' Tale, for instance, I was spared two complete recapitulations of the narrative up-to-date, which would have been patiently listened to by the usual audience. . . .

'He took a very intelligent interest in the customs

of other countries, and in this he differed from such others of his profession as I have met. . . . The supernatural was to him a living problem, and he never tired of any exposition, such as of the Black Masses of Guibourg, which I could give him of occult procedure among other peoples. This fact leads me all the more readily to believe that the ritual details which he was fond of introducing were authentic and not invented. . . .

'Amor ben Amar was born near Nabeul in about the middle of the Nineteenth Century, and died in his own house at Kairouan, the Holy City, in 1906.'

Of the ten

TALES OF FEZ

the first nine are selected and translated from Contes Fasis, an admirable volume in which M. E. Dermenghem, a young anthropologist and writer of considerable talent, and M. Mohammed el Fasi have made (taking them from the lips of the latter's grandmother) a collection of simple fairy stories quite peculiar to the city of Fez. Their book is the only one which has been written out of this material. The tradition of these tales is an entirely amateur one, and is said to be dying out; they are told in the household at evening, nearly always by women, and, though ostensibly addressed to the children of the house, make a strong appeal to all adults. It will be necessary in our Terminal Essay to speak of the

ritual surrounding the telling of such stories, to compare the individual tales with those of other countries, and especially to consider the affinities of the ninth with the legend of Cupid and Psyche. For the moment, if their charm has not been too far lost in a second process of translation, the stories may be found worth reading for themselves.

The tenth tale, or collection of anecdotes, the Sayings and Adventures of the Sultān's Dādā, belongs to a more sophisticated and universal tradition. The material from which I have selected was taken down by M. Heinrich Crucy from a prostitute in Fez about five years ago. Tales from such sources may be said, in these days, properly to belong to our first class rather than to our second, for the public woman has ceased in any serious sense to function as a public story teller in North Africa. She still sings and makes impromptu stanzas to attract her clients; but most of her tales are told in intimacy, and most are, besides, quite worthless. The special interest of the Sultān's Dādā lies in its unusual transference of the jester idea to a female, the blending of the philosophy of a Goba or Buhlūl with the epical ugliness and misbehaviour of Old Mother of Calamity. The nearest approach in The Book of The Thousand Nights and One Night, or indeed in Arabic literature, to the character of Dādā, seems to be that of Delilah the Wily, and the latter was rather a noble old lady forced by circumstances to

play practical jokes in her capacity of super-thief than a conscious Rabelaisian teacher such as Dādā is.

In nearly all cases I have kept such place and proper names and special local words as occur in the text in the form in which a native with some French education would transcribe them to-day; but, in order that there should be no inconsistency between these tales and the literary ones which will occupy Volume VII, I have transliterated universal and literary words according to the same simple system of accents adopted in the revised edition of my translation of Dr.

*Madrus' Book of The
Thousand Nights
and One
Night.*

The Young Wives' Tale
(*Kissat Al-'Arā'is*
Al-Sabiya) from the
Arabic of Amor ben
Amar

The Young Wives' Tale

THERE WAS ONCE—BUT ALLĀH WAS ONCE and always, the Merciful, the Compassionate—a wealthy silk-merchant at the Holy City of Sidi Oqba* who, growing old in the accumulation of riches, had stayed unmarried. Therefore when at last he chose a wife, she remained childless, in spite of the old man's exertion, and he despaired.

Year followed after year with no change in the woman's condition, until at length the merchant sought out his wisest friend, who was also the possessor of a large shop, and greeted him, saying: 'Behold, O Mohammed, my white hairs are many and the marrow of my bones has grown thin; also the years have accumulated upon my head, and I remain childless. Therefore I come to make trial of your wisdom, because I fear to leave no son of my own blood to enjoy the good things which shall remain after me.' The merchant Mohammed reflected a certain time, and then answered: 'O friend, despair should have no place in the heart of a True Believer, for there is neither power nor might save in Allāh; He is the Highest. To-night, before you enter the harīm, take care to fulfil all the prescribed

The Young Wives' Tale

rites, and to make your ablution scrupulously, and to pray with fervour; also insert some rosy peppers beneath your tongue. Then if it be God's will that you achieve a son, you shall not die childless.'

The old merchant thanked him, and departed in joy; and that night did all that his friend had suggested. He made his ablution scrupulously, he prayed with fervour, and fulfilled each of the prescribed rites with careful attention; then he placed some rosy peppers beneath his tongue, and, entering his wife's apartment, did that which he had to do with her. And behold! she remained childless as before.

More grieved than ever at the disappointment of his hope, and forgetting that no man may escape the Destiny which is bound about his neck, the merchant now determined to have recourse to a certain Jewish sorcerer, who had become famous throughout all the lands of the Bey for his unnatural powers. And because this magician had been banished to a dwelling beyond the walls of their sacred city by the people of Kairouan, he set out at nightfall to visit him, his face muffled in his mantle, so that he should not be recognised.

He found the Jew's dwelling without misadventure, though it was in a desolate place among tombs, and was about to put his difficulty

A mor ben Amar

before him, when the wizard, who was very old and tall, and most repulsive to the sight, cried out: 'Give me the fifty golden pieces which you have brought, and then keep silence!' Now this was the exact sum with which the merchant had taken care to provide himself, though he had hoped not to have to dispense the half of it, so, hearing it named thus surely, he believed in the Jew's power and, handing over the gold, waited in silence for what might happen.

The Jew counted over the money, and then cast a ball, made of the fat and hair of a goat mixed up with benzoin, into a perfuming pan. When this began to melt and fill the chamber with fumes, he placed a copy of the Holy Koran on the floor at his feet—I seek with Allāh a refuge against the Stoned One, the Accursed—and, opening his garment, made water liberally upon it. After this he wrote a Name upon the palm of his left hand in his own excrement and licked it off with his tongue, crying: 'I invite you! I invite you!' By this time the pupils of his eyes had disappeared within his head, and, as he darted back and forth in the room, calling again and again: 'I invite you, I invite you!' he appeared to the unfortunate merchant, who was half suffocated with fear and smoke, to be thrice his natural

The Young Wives' Tale

size. Finally he ran out through the open door, and could be heard rolling among the tombs.

Forgetting all but his terror, the merchant also made haste to leave that place of ill-omen and, fetching a wide arc to avoid the sorcerer's body as it lay still now among the graves, ran as fast as his age and emotion would allow him back to the City. But as he ran a great white bird flew by his ear, endlessly repeating :

*Set her head towards the West,
Sprinkle rue upon her vest,
She will bear a son and he
Must die or wed the pepper tree.*

Nor did it quit him until he was almost within touch of the sacred walls.

Next morning the merchant had largely recovered from his terror, and began to remember his fifty gold pieces. Therefore, though he supposed the white bird to have been some one of the Invisible in the service of the Jew, or else the Jew himself whose spirit had assumed that body, he yet determined, as a last resort, to follow the advice which the bird had given him. 'For after a son is born,' he said to himself, 'there will be time enough to take counsel about the business of the pepper tree.'

Amor ben Amar

So when night came he went in to his wife, without fulfilling any of the proper usages; he sprinkled rue upon her shift and set her head towards the West and did with her that which he had to do.

And behold! at the end of a month his wife was pregnant, and at the completion of nine, amid the rejoicing of the whole household and of the merchant especially, she bore a son. Also, though the circumstances of his begetting were marvellous in no good sense, the child, through the infinite Mercy of Allāh, was born with *baraka** upon him, and throve from the first hour.

Yet on the night of the seventh day, when a sheep had been killed and the child had been called Asad ('For he lies like a lion upon my heart,' the mother said), and while the merchant sat a little apart from the loud rejoicing, and from the yuyus of the women, and the flute- and the drum-playing, a large white bird came down out of the sky towards him. It lit upon the ground at his left hand and regarded him, saying: 'He shall wed the pepper tree or die.' 'What pepper tree?' asked the old man in consternation, and the bird replied: 'He shall seek and find her.' 'How shall he know her?' asked the merchant, and the bird answered again: 'One sits beneath her preparing

The Young Wives' Tale

kuskus* and feeding the fire with his left hand.' But this time the voice of the bird was as the voice of the abhorrent Jew, so that the old man fainted away ; and when he came to himself the bird had gone. Allāh yen'a lek wa-yakhzik ya Iblīs*.

Afterwards he returned to his house and kept silence about these things ; so that, when he was stricken suddenly a few weeks later, and fulfilled the portion of every man, neither his wife nor any other had heard of the fate which awaited the new-born child. So much for him.

But Asad grew to boyhood and increased in strength and perfect beauty until he was like the moon, the shame of the stars, and was graceful as a young cypress, so that sheep would stop feeding to look at him. When he was four years old his mother chose for him a wise and virtuous teacher, who made him acquainted with all the Koran and the Sunna* and also our grammar in its intricacy. By the time he was eight he could repeat the sūras* of the Holy Book and knew the hadīths* of the Prophet (upon whom be Prayer and Peace !) and could speak and write Arabic like the wisest poet. And other teachers were selected for him, so that he soon excelled in running, wrestling, riding and fencing, in

Amor ben Amar

swimming and firing off guns and hunting with slight hounds, until it became a marvel that such strength could be wed to so much languor and beauty. Nor were these qualities all, for he grew to possess such virtue and happy kindness that even the flowers which were crushed by his foot could love him.

But as for that which concerned the Jewish sorcerer: very many times during Asad's boyhood the old man said to himself: 'God's curse is upon me, seeing that the merchant is dead and has said nothing of the pepper tree. Now if the youth should find the pepper tree by chance, and by chance wed it, then will all my plans have come to nothing!' (And as for these plans, you shall be told about them later.)

So on each occasion that this thought occurred to him he sent one of the Invisible in the form of a large bird, sometimes white and sometimes black, that it might inform the boy of his danger and drive him to seek and wed the pepper tree. But each time that one of these birds flew into the presence of Asad, behold! he so smiled upon it, and virtue and kindness so shone from him, that the creature was moved to an exaltation and spoke the Fātīhah*. Then would Allāh cause it to disappear, so that it neither gave its message nor returned to the sorcerer.

The Young Wives' Tale

In this it will be seen that Allāh, who is the Most High, puts out exceptional good into the world as a balance for exceptional evil, thus confounding the wiles of those who do not believe in the mission of the Prophet (upon whom be Prayer and Benediction!) This good and this evil have to be purchased at the last, for He is the King of the Day of Judgment.

Now it happened one evening, when Asad was full fifteen years old, that he rode at the hour of moghreb* in a part of the plains far to the west of Kairouan, which he had not visited before. The air was filled with a poetic silence and with the scent of wild blossoms; the vault of the sky was growing full of stars.

Asad urged his horse across a stream and, rounding a clump of fig trees which grew upon its bank, beheld at fifty paces distant the figure of an old man seated by a small fire beneath a solitary pepper tree. Surprised at seeing a stranger in a place which he esteemed to be empty save for the presence of Allāh, the young man rode forward and dismounted, asking: 'Jinnī or man?' Then the ancient, whose white beard fell into his lap and who was eating kuskus and feeding the fire with his left hand, made answer: 'I am a man of flesh and blood even as you are, though of all God's creatures I am the most dejected.' So Asad

Amor ben Amar

compassionately sat down by the old man and questioned him concerning the cause of his wretchedness, but first, since he was as wise as he was kindly, he refused with great politeness to partake of the stranger's kuskus.

*The Tale of the Old Man under
the Pepper Tree*

‘**Y**OU MUST KNOW, DELIGHTFUL YOUTH,’ answered the old man, ‘that I was once a farnachi* and practised my calling in a great city beyond the mountains of Djurdjura. At the time of which I speak—it now seems many years ago—I was a widower and, when I collected dung about the streets and stables, I had but two ends in view: to protect my only child, my dearly loved daughter, from all want, and to provide myself on special occasions, since I have a great gust for dulcification, with those very sweet little cakes which are called horns. In both these projects I throve, by Allāh’s aid, so that at least once in every month I was able to afford my cakes, and my daughter was kept from all want and provided with necessities, and grew in remarkable grace and beauty every year.

‘The bows of the archer could not suggest the moving curves of her brows, and all the coral of the deep sea was in her lips; her hair was night and her forehead day, and the lights of day and night were gathered in her eyes; her breasts were two citrons, and their little points could pierce through any fabric. Would to Allāh she had been less fair!

Amor ben Amar

‘ Now it happened that one day as I was taking my load of dung to the hammām, that a tall Jew of venerable appearance stopped me in the street and, after cordial salutation, wished to be informed of the situation of any little shop which I knew might be to let. As it chanced that such a one stood vacant in the street just opposite my own poor dwelling, I directed the stranger to it, and by the time that I returned to my daughter in the evening I found that the stranger had installed himself at the shop and, in spite of the pooriness of the neighbourhood, had stocked it with stuffs and metal work of every colour and great beauty.

‘ But, as day followed day, it was noticed that the Jew would be absent from his place of business for hours together, though none had, on any occasion, seen him leave. I also found, though this was not known to the rest of the quarter, that each of the old man’s absences coincided with periods of great wretchedness on the part of my dear Amīna, who would complain of headache and of an unclean feeling as if eyes devoured her in secret.

‘ So I, who had heard a great deal from the public story-tellers concerning the unpleasant powers of sorcerers, especially if they be Jews, took counsel with a very holy man of my

The Young Wives' Tale

acquaintance and told him that I suspected our neighbour, to what end I could only too well imagine, of visiting and spying upon my daughter by means of his art. The saint considered for a long while and then advised me to return home and, on the next occasion of the Jew's absence from his shop, to throw handfuls of cut onions about my daughter's apartment.

'I thanked my holy friend in the name of the Most High, and, returning home, expended the money which I had set aside for my monthly treat of sweet cakes all upon onions.

'And, on the next occasion when I saw that the Jew had disappeared from his shop and yet none had seen him leave it, I chopped up the onions very fine and, entering my daughter's chamber, sprinkled the fragments all about the floor. I withdrew, closing the door after me, but stationed myself behind a hole in it to see what should befall.

'At once my daughter began to weep at the eyes, and, even as she did so, I perceived the dim figure of a man standing within a pace of her; this appearance swiftly grew clearer, and in a moment I beheld the accursed sorcerer, who still turned his eyes upon her, though they were blind with weeping from the onions, as if he would swallow her up.

Amor ben Amar

‘ For you must know that, according to custom, this impious person had endued his eyes with a magic ointment to make himself invisible, and that his tears had gradually washed it away, until he became plain to the outraged sight of my daughter and myself.

‘ Amīna cried in terror, and I, leaping into the room, began to belabour the intruder about the head with the brush of my trade. Immediately he jumped from the window on to a low, adjoining roof; but I followed him, and, as I pursued him, uttered loud cries which brought many other members of my guild to my assistance. We chased the Jew from roof to roof with sticks and brushes, and had just surrounded him upon a certain one, when it opened beneath him and he evaded us. Hastening down to the street we saw that all the precious goods of his shop had also disappeared. Therefore I returned home and consoled my daughter, imagining that our troubles had come to a final end.

‘ Indeed for a whole month we saw and heard nothing of the sorcerer, and it was with joy in my heart that I one day discovered I had collected enough copper coin for my mensual supply of cakes. I hastily made my purchase, but even as I brought the first exquisite trifle of almond paste towards my mouth and it

The Young Wives' Tale

touched my lips, the world grew black before me and I knew nothing more.

‘When I came to myself it was near evening, and I sat, even as you see me now, in this unknown place, with a little fire beside me on which kuskus, the food from which I have the greatest abhorrence, lay in a pot preparing ; and at my back this pepper tree stood and sighed, and its leaves seemed to whisper *Amīna*.

‘As I was taking in my surroundings and beating my head to know how I had come here, I saw the Jew (may the compassion of God visit him not !) rolling towards me, riding upon a cloud of dust. When he reached me, he dismounted and his steed lay down upon the desert. He stood and regarded me with malignant triumph, and then said (and alas ! each word is written in blood upon my memory :) “O beast, O low gatherer of infamous matters, know that when Fakfash son of Kakrash son of Makmash deigned to pasture his eyes upon your beautiful but ill-born daughter, you beat him about the head with a dirty broom ; know also that the wrath of Fakfash is terrible.” After this he stood silent for a space gloating upon me and upon this pepper tree, and then continued : “It is *Amīna*, and she shall stand still to all the winds, while you sit down in her shadow and eat kuskus and feed the fire

Amor ben Amar

with your left hand. But this shall not be so for ever ; for in a week, in a month, in a year shall come a youth, thinking to save his life by wedding the pepper tree, and on his coming you shall die, and the souls of the youth and of Amīna shall be shut in boxes, to serve me with degradation for ever and ever.” Thus far had the Jew spoken in a tone of triumph, and I felt my heart turn over in my breast at the fate which awaited my daughter and at the thought of an everlasting kuskus with death at the end ; but now a cloud crossed the wizard’s face, and he continued : “ Had the matter rested with Fakfash this should have been my vengeance, rounded and complete ; but He whom I serve not is the Highest, nor will He permit the last thread of hope to be snatched altogether from the vilest of His creatures. Therefore should any man come and wed the pepper tree for loving kindness, not seeking to save his life thereby—this thing is most unlikely—then not only shall no harm come to him, but also Amīna and you, O dungy one, shall be made free. But in much learning is much power, and, even should such a man be found willing, he must first seek out from the face of the earth two married girls, two only, who have remained with pearl unpierced and flower unplucked—this

The Young Wives' Tale

thing is less likely still—and must wed them both before he weds the pepper tree. Therefore I think, O unhappy dealer in excrement, that you may prepare for death after a surfeit of kuskus. Therefore I think that the souls of the pepper tree and of her groom shall serve me in boxes throughout eternity.”

‘With this, O amiable young man, the Jew called up his steed of dust from where it lay upon the desert, and departed from me, I cannot tell how long ago. Since then I have not moved from this place, and the Invisible have kept me supplied with kuskus, the food of all others which I most detest. Also, when I have tried to feed the fire with my right hand, behold! my left has undertaken the service against my will. Often and often have noble youths ridden this way, and I have told them my sad story; but those who would have married a pepper tree, yet objected to wed into the house of a farnachi, and those who could stomach my trade have shrunk from the search for unmounted brides, or have feared to undertake the piercing of those unlucky pearls, the plucking of those ominous flowers. Therefore I sit in despair and await the coming of the youth who, thinking to save his life, shall seek us, bearing my death, and my daughter’s and his own damnation. And

Amor ben Amar

in my dreams I sit down to exquisite sweet horns.'

When he had made an end of this tale, the old man wept until the tears fell like a cascade down his white beard into the lap of his garment. And to Asad it seemed as if the pepper tree shivered in loveliness at the chill breath of night and sighed throughout all her leaves: *Ab, save me, save me!* So he made up the resolution of his mind in silence for a full hour, and then said: 'Old man, there is no inconvenience. As for your story, the grief of it touches me. As for your daughter, I love her already, for your description has inflamed me, and also I have seen her dancing and heard her sighing. As for your trade, my father was a silk merchant. Do not the women cry *ya gemel el-bēt** when they have lost their master? Is not the horse a lofty animal? Surely it is as noble a calling to collect that which proceeds from these as to gather what comes from a worm, a thing in the likeness of Evil? And as for the brides with pearl unpierced and flower unplucked, there is in every man an emulous will to succeed where another man has failed. Therefore I swear to free the delicate Amīna or perish in the attempt.' And, as he ceased speaking, tears of happy dew fell from the pepper tree, and the old man

The Young Wives' Tale

caught him to his breast with murmurs of content.

But as for that which concerned Fakfash bin Kakrash bin Makmash: his servants among the Invisible hurried in a flock to tell him what had passed between Asad and the old man and the pepper tree; but nothing is to be gained by repeating it in this place. And when he had heard them, his fury knew no bounds, and he at once set about the master conjuration of his life, in order that he might utterly destroy all three, seeing that his plan had come to nothing. He took off all his garments and put them on again inside out; then he made his ablution in urine, and started to pray impiously towards the West. But the matter of his ablution had excited the flies so that one of them came and settled upon his nose. He threw up his hand to drive it away and behold! his ring of power flew from a finger into the mouth which was opened in prayer, and descended and choked him; he fell over with his feet in the air, and his soul escaped by way of his back parts, and was gathered by that Hell which had so long hungered for it. So much for him.

From this it will be seen that Allāh, who is the All-Potent and the Most-High, though He permits a certain power upon the earth to men who glory

Amor ben Amar

in evil and to those rebellious spirits who bowed not to the orders of Sulaimān-bin-Dāūd (upon whom be Prayer and Peace !), yet will pluck up that evil like grass in His hour, and not suffer the True Believer to be devoted before his birth to ultimate destruction. For now if Asad, with God's aid, can find endurance for that search and strength to pierce those pearls, then he shall be saved and Amīna and the old man with him. But God knows all.

Young Asad remained all night by the pepper tree, and in the morning, as he rose to depart, the old man blessed him, for he now hoped that an end to his own and his daughter's sufferings might be expected, and had steeled himself to bear his vigil and his diet of kuskus until, if it were Allāh's wish, the bridegroom should return. Also, as Asad mounted his horse, the tree let fall a cluster of rose-coral-coloured peppers upon him, and he put them in his breast as he rode away.

Soon Asad reached home, and told his mother all that had befallen ; but, though the old woman wept, she put no other obstacle than tears in her son's way. Therefore, without losing an hour, he loaded a pack-horse with silks and jewels, with henna and amber and gold pieces, and arming himself with sword and gun, rode out upon his search for wedded virgins.

The Young Wives' Tale

There followed for Asad a random journey of indescribable peril and weariness: he scoured the world, in search of unmounted brides, to North and South and West, riding in torment through great deserts and venturing more than once in a wābūr* upon the sea. Thrice he was set upon by bands of robbers, who cared nothing for his exceptional beauty, and on each occasion he beat them off with slaughter, saving the load of his pack-horse from their hands; on each occasion also, because of the spirit with which he defended himself, he was cast into prison by the būlīs* of the Franks, and only escaped with difficulty. And all the while, though he enquired diligently, he found himself no nearer to the object of his quest.

But one day, after he had been thus travelling for three months, he entered a certain city, and put up his horses at a certain khān. Then, as the day invited him, he went out beyond the walls and walked he knew not whither, thinking with sorrow of his long search and its unsuccess. Presently the heat of the sun in the hour of zuhr* wearied him, and he therefore lay down under some trees which grew by a lonely pool in the oued* watering that city, and slept, covering his face.

He was wakened by the sound of approaching

Amor ben Amar

footsteps, though they were as light as moths, and, looking round, perceived a young woman dressed as a widow approaching the pool. She came down to it quite unaware of Asad's presence, and to his unbounded surprise began to collect handfuls of mud, till she had made a pile of it before her, and to pick up little sharp stones and knead them with fragile hands into the pile. Then she unveiled, and it was as if the sky held instantly two glories of the sun; for her cheeks were of jasmine brightened by the blood of roses, and her lips were stained with scarlet sugar; also her eyes, under brows curved like the wings of a dark bird, shone with the lustre of precious candles, and her hair was night. Asad, who had never before been granted so paradisaical a vision, caught his breath as he beheld it. But, all unwitting, the woman bent and took two handfuls of the mud with the sharp pebbles and began to rub it violently over the beauties of her face. Then she uncovered her bewildering breasts, which were as two proud pomegranates, and treated them in the same sorry fashion. She was about to undress further and to commit God knows what more intimate maceration, when Asad gave vent to a long and dolorous sigh. The woman started at this sound and, swiftly adjusting her veils,

The Young Wives' Tale

sank without power of movement upon the bank of the oued, so great was her surprise and perturbation. Asad immediately approached and sat beside her, comforting her trouble with kind words ; and when her spirit was a little appeased, he asked, but with all humility, how it came about that she heaped so much indignity and harm on beauties which could have filled the world with light. So, in a little, the woman looked upon her beautiful interrogator with kind eyes, and sighing said :

The First Young Wife's Tale

YOU MUST KNOW, O AMIABLE BUT IMPRUDENT youth, that I am the daughter of the wali of yonder city, by his adored and favourite wife; and it was supposed that I was born in an auspicious hour. I grew up to miraculous beauty and took glory in the form which the Giver gave. (How great is He who modelled and created it!) Also, I can say these things without shame; for you shall hear how my vanity was punished. By day I would look long at my face in the mirror, and sometimes at the splendour of my breasts, or my thighs' excellence. I would look haughtily upon my beauty in the glass even at night*; and by this it may be I invited the Jinn and wooed misfortune.

'Soon the fame of my beauty was noised abroad, and one poet said such and such of it, and a second such and such; but yet another thrice took up his pen to write of it, and thrice fainted away.

'Now this last was a young man called 'Ali el-Mishmish* because of the sweetness of his verses; and after he had thus thrice failed to celebrate me, he purchased a house near that of my father, and, when none could hear but I, would walk upon its roof and sing to my shadow.

The Young Wives' Tale

‘When I saw that, in spite of his faintings, he was as strong as Antar, as graceful as a reed, and as handsome as a night filled with moon and stars, I loved him, and we exchanged sweet letters in secret. Then, when our feelings could be denied no longer, he asked me in marriage of my father the wali, and because he was also rich and highly-born, as well as a poet, my father consented.

‘We were wedded with great splendour, and when the night came and the women had withdrawn, I lay naked upon the bed (this was my pride), and a faint lamp glowed near me, since I could not forego my glory. Then my husband entered the apartment and drew near, and his eyes fell upon me, and he cried: ‘Now glory and praise to God!’ At the same instant he fell forward upon the bed, imprisoning my legs; and when my women ran to me, in answer to my calling, we found that his spirit had departed. Since then I have been held in abhorrence by the young men who before praised me, therefore I sigh and strive to lessen the beauty of my nakedness, for I wish to be wed and pierced like other women.’

When she had made an end of this tale the girl wept, and the two young people looked at and loved each other. Asad at length broke the silence of constraint between them, saying:

Amor ben Amar

‘There is no inconvenience.’ And he told her all the circumstances of his search, which I shall not here repeat, and begged her to journey with him, suitably attended, to his mother’s house in Kairouan, there to abide until he should succeed in the rest of his mission and return to wed her.

‘With pleasure and good heart,’ she answered ; so he gave rich gifts from his store to the wali her father, thereby winning his consent ; and on the morrow the two started for the Holy City, the girl in a litter, suitably attended, and Asad riding beside her. God prospered their journey, and they soon came to the house of the dead silk-merchant, where his mother wept tears of joy over her son and received the bride with a warm heart.

But Asad, as soon as he had replenished the riches upon his pack-horse and without delaying at all to rest himself, set out upon a journey which proved, before its end, more filled with danger and hardship even than that former one. Again he scoured the world, in hunger and thirst, to South and West and North, riding upon his horse or *sikket el-hadīd**, or venturing in a *wābūr* on the sea. Not only was he again attacked by thieves, and defended himself and was cast into prison ; but also certain Franks doated upon his beauty, and he escaped

The Young Wives' Tale

from their hands only with great difficulty, and by rudeness. But all the while, though he enquired with diligence, he came no nearer to the object of his quest.

Then one day, after he had thus been travelling fruitlessly for three months, he entered a certain city and saw a great concourse of people jostling excitedly before a large and well-built house in a pleasant street. 'What is the meaning of this crowd?' he asked of a bystander, and the man replied: 'O sidi, this is the house of the Sheikh of the Goldsmiths, and the commotion is that he offers the hand of his daughter to any who will make her tell the way it happened.' 'The way what happened?' questioned Asad, and the man answered: 'You are indeed a stranger! Did you not know that her husband cast himself from the window on her marriage night, and fractured his neck?'

So Asad, thinking that this as well might be his affair as it might be far to the contrary, crossed the spacious courtyard of the house and entered a richly adorned and brightly carpeted hall, in which, upon a seat of honour, sat an old man in deep perplexity.

As soon as this venerable host saw so handsome and suitable a stranger approaching, he greeted him with every benevolence and asked him his

Amor ben Amar

name and country. To this Asad made fitting reply, and then ventured to ask in his turn: 'Is it true, O Sheikh of the Goldsmiths, that your daughter's husband threw himself from the window on his marriage night, and thereafter broke his neck?' 'Alas, it is but too true,' answered the old man, 'and now she will not even tell how this came to pass, so that evil murmurs begin to be made against her, and against my house. Therefore I offer her in marriage, together with a gift of two thousand pieces of gold, to any who shall make her reveal that secret, and who, when he has heard it, shall yet have a heart to wed her. Many, brooding upon the fate of that unhappy man, have found no courage for this enterprise, and the very many who have been tempted both by the gold and by the notorious beauty of my daughter, have been displeasing to her and have therefore not succeeded.'

'May I be permitted to make the attempt?' asked Asad. For though he could not tell what had happened in that chamber of death and bridal, and therefore was unaware whether he had to do with a pearl unpierced as yet or far to the contrary, he reasoned that the old man's condition would, should he wish to withdraw, sufficiently absolve him.

At once the old man led him into an inner

The Young Wives' Tale

apartment and, taking his own seat upon a mattress, bade him be seated upon another. Upon a third an unveiled woman sat and shone in all the brightness of her childhood. Her hair was a river, dark and deep, the stars reflected among it were her eyes, the floating foam and roses of its surface were her cheeks, her lips were the scarlet fruit adrift upon it. And as Asad looked he felt the love mount upwards to his heart.

Servants served tea with mint flowers, and as the two young people drank of it, Allāh alone knows what shy signalling, what up-lifting and down-dropping of brows and eyes and hearts, took place between them. Scarcely had the servants withdrawn, when Asad cried: 'O delight of my eyes, blood of my heart, and angle of my liver, tell me, I pray you, the way your bridegroom came by his death, or I myself will perish yet more quickly!'

Then the girl, to the great delight of her father the Sheikh of the Goldsmiths, said: 'I love and honour,' and turning her long

eyes slantwise upon

Asad, thus

began:

The Second Young Wife's Tale

YOU MUST KNOW, O DELIGHTFUL YOUTH, that I was wedded with great splendour, as befitted my father's position. And on the night of my marriage, after the women had retired and I lay upon the couch in darkness awaiting my husband, one of the cats which had conceived a liking for me entered before him and settled by me, though I did not know it, upon the silks. Then my husband came to me and leaned over to caress me, but he set his hand upon the cat and it moved and squeaked beneath him, and he mistook it. Therefore, calling aloud that he sought refuge in Allāh, he ran to the window and cast himself forth from it. Since then, because I could not bring myself to relate this thing, I have been held in abhorrence by all the youths who before praised me; and so I weep and sigh, for I wish to be wed and pierced like other women.'

When she had finished speaking, the girl hid her face in her hands, but Asad cried: 'As Allāh lives, there is no inconvenience.' Then he explained to the Sheikh of the Goldsmiths the circumstances of his search, and gave him many handsome gifts, and received the promised pieces of gold and an auspicious blessing. On the morrow the two young people set out for

The Young Wives' Tale

the Holy City, the girl in a rich litter, suitably attended, and Asad riding beside her. Allāh prospered their journey, and they soon arrived at the house of the dead silk-merchant in Kairouan, where his mother wept tears of joy over her son and received the bride with a warm heart.

After this, and with as little delay as possible, Asad and his mother and the two brides set forth, with great provision of tents and carpets and silks, of food and drink and perfume, and journeyed towards the place of the pepper tree. And they took the whole household with them and many guests, and the kādī and witnesses, and a troop of those women whose business is in weddings.

As soon as they arrived at the grove of fig trees, and while a great encampment was being arranged, Asad went forward and greeted the old man under the pepper tree, who immediately praised Allāh and overset his pot of kuskus into his little fire. But as for Amīna the pepper tree, she seemed to glory and laugh throughout all her leaves.

When all had been suitably prepared, Asad wedded the walī's daughter amid feasting and loud rejoicing. And that night, as he entered the bridal tent where the girl lay naked upon the bed, with a faint lamp glowing near her because she could not forego her glory, he

Amor ben Amar

muffled his eyes in a silk scarf and, thus approaching, blew out the lamp. Also he did many times with her that which he had to do. But as for the old man, he was immersed in a provision of those sweet cakes which are called horns; and as for the pepper tree, she shook her branches in anger, and sighed with a woeful sound.

Then, when the prescribed interval was over, Asad, amid the loud rejoicings of all the guests, wedded the daughter of the Sheikh of the Goldsmiths. And that night, as he entered the bridal tent where the girl lay waiting him in the dark, the cat came in with him; but, as the creature loved him for his virtue and kindness, it rubbed against his legs as he approached the couch. Therefore when, in leaning over to caress his bride, he set his hand upon it and it moved and squeaked beneath him, he mistook it not, but did that which he had to do, and so continued until the morning. But as for the pepper tree, she sighed with a woeful sound and shook her branches in anger. After this, when the prescribed interval was over, Asad wedded the pepper tree herself, amid such a feasting and rejoicing as far outdid those which had gone before. And as soon as they were man and wife in the sight of Allāh, behold! the pepper tree vanished away, and

The Young Wives' Tale

in its place stood a woman of such exceeding loveliness that neither tongue nor pen could tell it in a thousand years. The beauty of the first bride, set in the scale against it, would have been as feathers, and of the second would have been as thistle-down.

As soon as Amīna looked upon her husband, her jealous resentment passed for ever, and love alone remained. But she showed to Asad her right hand from which the little finger was wanting, and asked: 'My lord, in what place did you cast down the pepper cluster?' For wonder, and because of her beauty, he made no answer, but, taking the peppers from his bosom, laid them within her hand. And immediately they vanished out of sight, and lo! the finger of the hand was altogether restored in loveliness.

That night Asad again entered the bridal tent. Allāh gave him strength, and he behaved mightily until the morrow. Then the whole encampment returned to the Sacred City, and Asad and his three wives abode there together in all felicity until they were visited in their turn by the Builder of Tombs, the Pillager of Palaces, the Destroyer of Delights, the Provider to the Grave.

But God knows all.

The End.

NOTES

PAGE

- | | | |
|---|------------------------|--|
| 1 | <i>Sidi Oqba</i> | referring to Kairouan in Tunisia, which he founded, and not to Sidi Oqba (Okba), near Biskra in Algeria, where he is buried. |
| 5 | <i>Baraka</i> | good luck, in such a context. |
| 6 | <i>Kuskus</i> | the rejects from flour, prepared as rice, usually served with stewed meat and vegetables, and a hot red sauce; but here obviously plain. |
| 6 | <i>Allāh yen'a lek</i> | May God damn you and cause your ruin, O Iblis. |
| 6 | <i>Sunna</i> | the orthodox tradition, made up of the Koran and the <i>hadiths</i> of the Prophet. |
| 6 | <i>Sūras</i> | chapters. |
| 6 | <i>Hadīths</i> | sayings or teachings of Mohammed, not found in the Koran. |
| 7 | <i>Fātihah</i> | ‘The opening’ <i>sūra</i> of the Koran, beginning : ‘In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise to God, Lord of the worlds. . . ’ |

PAGE

8	<i>Mogbreb</i>	the sunset prayer.
10	<i>Farnachi</i>	one who collects dung for heating the ham- mām.
17	<i>Ya gemel el-bēt</i>	O camel of the house.
20	<i>Wābūr</i>	steamer. (<i>vapour</i>)
20	<i>Būlis</i>	police.
20	<i>Zubr</i>	the prayer one hour after noon.
20	<i>Oued</i>	stream.
23	<i>Even at night</i>	to look in a mirror at night is one of the many negligences which attract the Jinn. Others are not to fold up the clothes at night, to omit to say <i>Bismillab</i> before sitting down to eat, to yawn, to whistle, to sleep on one's slippers.
23	<i>El-Mishmish</i>	the apricot.
25	<i>Sikket el-hadīd</i>	the railway.

*Tales of Fex
from the Arabic*

The Slipper-Mender's Son

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a princess as beautiful as the moon, who was dearly loved by her father, the Sultān. Since one day she conceived a desire to visit the markets, and as it would not have been fitting for her to be seen on foot in the streets by day, an order was sent out to all the merchants to light their shops that evening, to display their most desirable merchandise, and to go away. And all obeyed, except a single simple slipper-mender, who was, in spite of his mean profession, a great sorcerer, and who also had a son as handsome as the day. This man counselled the youth rather to shut himself up inside the shop.

Afterwards the princess and her followers walked in the markets, which were all lighted and quite empty, admiring the objects displayed on the counters, the chiselled brasses, the finely-gilded leathers, the multi-coloured stuffs, the potteries with sumptuous designs, the perfumes, the hennas, the dyes, the daggers and damascened guns, the Toledo blades, the girdles,

Tales of Fez

the varied fruits, the great steel spurs, the silver and copper ornaments, and those fashioned out of rare woods. Nothing but their laughter sounded in the deserted streets.

But when the princess arrived before the shop of the slipper-mender and found its door fast closed, she became enraged against the mannerless fellow who had disobeyed and seemed to defy the Sultān's daughter. Therefore she ordered the eunuchs who followed her to force the door ; but her rage quickly abated when she saw the young man seated, shining with beauty, among his father's leathers. They looked at each other for a moment without speaking, and were both dazzled.

And the princess returned to her father's palace without further delay, and quite in silence.

Also the son of the slipper-mender lost no time in falling ill.

'He is ill of love,' said the doctor.

But the father was, as we have said, a great magician, therefore he knew a magic formula of invisibility. He wrote this on his son's brow, and the latter was able to enter the palace, and even into the apartments of his well-beloved.

When she ate, he sat facing her and also helped himself from the dish, so that the plates which left the princess's chamber bore two holes, one

From the Arabic

on each side of such food as was left, as if she had been eating from both sides at once. We can imagine the rage and shame of the Sultān when he heard of this. But no one could find any man with the princess ; the mystery was incapable of solution. So a Jewish sorcerer was summoned, who ordered a great fire to be lighted in the room. This was done, and at the end of a few moments the temperature was raised considerably ; therefore the young man, who, though invisible, was present in real flesh and bone, began to sweat, and passed his hand over his brow to wipe away the great drops which fell from it. But in doing so he gradually effaced the magic formula and suddenly appeared to the sight of all.

The Sultān was too much astonished and went in too great fear of magicians in general to dare to punish him. Instead he contented himself with ordering the young man's father to come to him to explain the matter. The slipper-mender answered that he would certainly come if he were sent a horse and sumptuous clothing, so that he might present himself at the Court in a costume worthy of his science.

Furious at such pretension, the Sultān sent two eunuchs with orders to fetch the old man in chains if he refused to come of his own free will. The eunuchs obeyed ; they chained the old

Tales of Fez

man and led him to the palace. But, O marvel, it was a chained and dying ass that appeared before the King. Being more and more furious he sent four eunuchs. But this time it was a dead mule which arrived before his throne. He sent eight others, and it was a horse which fell at his feet in the last stage of decomposition ! Therefore the Sultān decided to send the horse and the clothes, and the old magician came. After saluting him respectfully, the latter said :
' Why do you oppose the marriage of our children, seeing that they love each other ? '
' Does my daughter really love your son ? '
' Ask her ! '

And as the princess, when she was called into the Presence, did not conceal her love in any way, the marriage was celebrated forthwith. Then he who had been the slipper-mender wished to return the Sultān's hospitality, so he invited first the chamberlain, then the wazīr, then the Sultān himself.

The chamberlain came, and after dinner the magician led him to a certain barrel, telling him to look within. Then the chamberlain saw himself falling into the barrel, falling long and long, and coming at last to a garden, where he was violated by fifteen provincial gardeners. He became a pregnant woman, and with infinite pain gave birth to a dead child.

From the Arabic

Then suddenly the chamberlain found himself as before, leaning over the barrel.

‘Have you seen pretty things?’ asked his host.

‘Are you satisfied?’

‘Oh yes, perfectly satisfied, thank you!’ the terrified official made haste to answer.

‘It is useless to hide anything from me,’ said the other. ‘Now you know my power. Say nothing to anyone.’

The wazīr came in his turn, was sumptuously entertained, and was also conducted to the rim of the magic barrel. He fell into it likewise, or had the impression that he fell into it, and found himself transformed into an ass, loaded with lime. A brutal donkey-boy maltreated him, raining blows on him with a stick, or thrusting a sharp needle into a sore kept open at the base of his neck, and leading him for fifteen days up all the mountainous lanes of the city.

‘I could procure you all those ills in reality,’ said the magician to the wazīr, when that great man found himself clinging giddily at last to the rim of the barrel.

Nor was the Sultān spared. He saw himself first in a boat which was shipwrecked, and then clinging for twenty-one days, dying of thirst and hunger, to a plank which was tossed about by the wild waves.

Tales of Fez

‘Are you satisfied?’ asked his host at length.

‘Have you seen interesting things in my barrel?’

‘Very interesting things indeed,’ answered the Sultān, who had been much moved. And the impression of what he had seen was so great that he made the slipper-mender
his grand-wazīr and
most intimate
friend.

*The Merchant's Daughter and
the Sultān's Son*

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a rich merchant who had a daughter called Āishah, as beautiful as the moon. Glory to God who created and modelled a creature so very fair !

As she was taking the air one evening on the terrace, her dādā* climbed up to her with a bowl of thin soup, and while she was drinking it the girl let one of the little balls of paste fall on her breast, and afterwards picked it up and put it in her mouth.

The Sultān's son, who was walking on the neighbouring terrace, saw this and said :

‘ O Lalla, you who grow basil, you who water a pot of basil on the terrace, tell me, I pray you, how many leaves there are in your basil-plant ! ’

‘ O son of the Sultān,’ she answered, ‘ O you who hold all lands, O learned Lord, O sage who reads in the book of Allāh, tell me how many fish there are in the water, stars in the sky, and stops in the Koran ! ’

‘ Be quiet, greedy ! ’ he mocked. ‘ You took

Tales of Fez

up the ball of the thin soup from your breast and ate it.'

The young girl came down from the terrace in a very bad humour, and asked her dādā to take her to Moulay Idrīs for a little distraction.

As they went on their way, she saw the Sultān's son again, sitting at the stall of a fruit-merchant and eating a pomegranate. A seed from this pomegranate fell to the earth between his slippers, and he picked it up and ate it.

The girl was delighted to have surprised this gesture in him, and returned home in the best of humours. Early next morning she went up on to her terrace to water her pot of basil, as was her custom, and to work at her embroidery.

Thus it happened that the same dialogue took place as on the previous day.

'O Lalla, you who grow basil, how many leaves are there in your plant?'

'O son of the Sultān, O you who hold all lands, O learned Lord, O sage who reads in the book of Allāh, tell me how many fish there are in the water, stars in the sky, and stops in the Koran!'

'Be gone, greedy! You took up the ball of the thin soup from your breast and ate it.'

But this time she replied in triumph:

'Be gone, greedy! You took up the pomegranate seed which had fallen in the mud between your slippers and ate it.'

From the Arabic

It was the prince's turn to grow angry and to depart. He made his way to the Jews' quarter, to a certain one whose clothes he purchased. Disguised as a little wandering Jewish pedlar, covered with a black bonnet, wearing black slippers, and bearing a tray full of merchandise for women, he walked through the streets crying his goods until he came to the dwelling of Lalla Āishah. Imitating the voice of a little Jewish pedlar, he cried : ' Scents and mirrors ! Kerchiefs and combs and rings ! ' and this he did so well that the girl took him for a true son of Israel, and sent her dādā out to him to buy some perfume.

Seeing that his ruse had succeeded, the disguised prince said to the negress :

' Choose out and take all that you wish.'

And, when she asked the price :

' I only require one kiss of your mistress's cheek,' he said.

The girl consented and allowed herself to be kissed on the cheek by this filthy pedlar, who straightway departed, glorying in his success.

Next morning, at the first hour, he climbed up on to the terrace, and saw the daughter of the merchant watering her basil.

' O Lalla, you who grow basil,' he said, ' tell me how many leaves it has ! '

' O Sultān's son,' she replied, ' O learned Lord,

Tales of Fez

and the like, tell me how many fish there are in the water, stars in the sky, and stops in the Koran !’

‘ Be gone, greedy ! You took up the ball of the thin soup from your breast and ate it.’

‘ Be gone, greedy ! You took up the pomegranate seed which had fallen in the mud between your slippers and ate it.’

It was now the prince’s turn to triumph, and he said :

‘ I was the Jew, I walked along the streets, and I had my will of the cheek of the merchant’s daughter.’

When she heard these words, Lalla Āishah was covered with confusion and quickly descended from the terrace.

‘ Dādā,’ she said, ‘ I wish to go at once to see my aunt. Will you come with me ? ’

‘ Willingly,’ said the dādā.

Lalla Āishah told her aunt all that had happened and begged her to colour her black, that she might seem in everything a slave. As soon as she had been turned into a negress, she had her aunt lead her to the House of the Converted Jew and sell her.

The merchant found the young girl so beautiful that he offered her to the Sultān’s son, and the latter had her sent to his dwelling.

But before she departed, Lalla Āishah got ready

From the Arabic

a razor, a cucumber, some red ochre, a mirror and a violent narcotic.

She caused the prince to drink of this drug and, when he was asleep, shaved off his beard and moustache, painted him like a woman, hung the mirror round his neck, thrust the cucumber up his bottom, and then escaped.

Returning to her aunt's house, she carefully washed and had already become quite white again, when the Sultān's son awoke to find himself in a very humiliating position.

After the usual dialogue had taken place between the two upon the following morning from terrace to terrace, that is, between the merchant's daughter and the prince who was shaved as close as a woman, the girl was able to finish it in triumph, crying :

' I was a slave, I went to the House of the Converted Jew ; then I played several splendid tricks on the Sultān's son.'

Furious, humiliated, and vexed to the bottom of his heart, the Sultān's son swore to marry this young obstinate, and to compel her to confess that man is more subtle than woman.

He asked for her hand in marriage, and her father consented. As soon as he had her in his possession he placed her in an underground granary, giving her very coarse clothes and,

Tales of Fez

for sole nourishment, a daily barley loaf and a jar of water from the oued.

But the cunning girl dug a subterranean tunnel between the granary and her parents' house ; thus she was able to go home every day to eat, and had only to take care to be back in her prison at the time when her husband came with her daily ration.

Stretching out the black bread and the jar, he would say :

‘O Lalla Aishah, O sad dweller in this granary, which is the more subtle, man or woman ? ’

‘ Woman, my Lord,’ she would always answer, and he never could make her alter her reply.

The days passed thus, and the Sultān died, and his son succeeded him. At the beginning of Spring he decided to spend certain days in the country, as was his custom, and therefore came to visit his wife in the granary.

‘In eight days,’ he said, ‘I shall go to Sūr at five o’clock in the morning and spend a fortnight there.’

‘For your health, Lord ! ’ answered the young woman, ‘and may it bring you happiness.’

She hastened along the tunnel to her father’s house, and begged him to make preparations even more magnificent than those of the Sultān at Sūr, and told him that she wished to be

From the Arabic

installed in that place an hour before her husband could himself arrive.

On the night before his departure the Sultān came to say farewell to his wife, and at dawn the next day he set out upon his journey. When he came to Sūr, he found velvet tents, far handsomer than his own, set up there, and at the door of one of these tents he saw a young slave dressed with marvellous richness. He asked about in his astonishment, and learned that a very beautiful young woman had come earlier that same morning to settle down in that place for a few days. Being filled with curiosity, he begged the slave to ask her mistress if she would receive him. She sent back answer that she would not see him until he had spent three days in the city as a scavenger of dung.

The Sultān consented, and returned in three days, all dirty and covered with dung. Water was heated for him, and he was washed, and afterwards dressed in sumptuous clothing. Finally and at length he went below the tent of the mysterious unknown.

‘I will not speak to you,’ said Lalla Āishah, ‘until you have a marriage contract made for us, and give me your sabre and its belt for dowry.’

Moved by the sweetness of the voice in which this demand was made, the Sultān consented,

Tales of Fez

and then, losing all sense of time, passed twenty whole days with his loved one without recognising her.

On the twentieth day they sent to tell him that if he did not return a revolution would break out in the City ; therefore he left his wife, who had by this time become pregnant.

When the Sultān reached home, Lalla Āishah was already back in her granary. The first thing he did was to go and visit her, being sure that she would now acknowledge the superiority of masculine cunning. He said :

‘ I have just passed twenty days of delight in the country with a woman who has eyes like yours, hands like yours, a face like yours, and a voice like yours.’

‘ For your health, Lord ! ’ she answered simply.

‘ Your good fortune is a great good fortune, and happiness ceases not to fall upon you. May joy and pleasure abide in your dwelling ! ’

After this all went on as before.

In the fifth month of her pregnancy, Lalla Āishah began to make preparations for the birth of her child. At the end of the ninth month she brought forth a son, and called him Sūr.

Next Spring the Sultān went again to the country, choosing this time to pitch his tents at a place called Dūr. Lalla Āishah had preceded him, and all went between them as before.

From the Arabic

She insisted that the Sultān should spend three days as a wandering sweet-seller, and demanded his silver prayer-case with its silken cord as dowry. In course of time she bore a second son, whom she called Dūr.

In the third year matters fell out precisely in the same way, but this time at el-Kusūr. The Sultān had to spend three days cleaning the tent where his loved one's horse was tethered, and to give his ring as dowry. This time the child was a daughter, and her mother called her Lalla Hamamet el-Kusūr, the Dove of the Palaces.

Each time her husband returned to the granary, Lalla Āishah refused to admit the superiority of men over women in matters of ingenuity. Therefore the Sultān ended by feeling that he had had enough of so headstrong and proud a wife, and told her that he intended to take another favourite.

'I love and honour her!' she answered imperturbably. 'May Allāh consolidate your reign, and cause your triumph! When will they get the chamber ready for your new bride?'

'On such a day,' he answered.

'I wish you luck,' she said.

When the time came, she put her three children into their most beautiful clothes. Then she gave Sūr a pair of scissors, Dūr a small knife, and young Hamamet el-Kusūr a little watering-can.

Tales of Fez

Finally, she had the children introduced into the palace and bade them cut and wet all that the negresses were preparing.

The children carried out their task to a marvel, and thoroughly spoilt all the preparations. When the servants would have driven them forth, they cried :

‘ This house is the house of our father, and yet these sons of dogs would drive us from it ! ’

And when the servants tried to catch them and put them to the door by force, they called out as loudly as they possibly could :

‘ Come, my brother Sūr ! Come, my brother Dūr ! Come, my sister Lalla Hamamet el-Kusūr ! Look, look, we can see Uncle Packet flying up to heaven ! ’

And while the people of the house lifted their eyes to see Uncle Packet, the three little ones escaped.

Thus it was that the Sultān learnt that these were his own children. The whole tale was made clear to him, and he had to acknowledge that woman is much more cunning than man. He sent back the girl he was about to marry, and it was in honour of Lalla Āishah the Merchant’s daughter that the festival

preparation went
forward.

The Fatal House

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a man who had two wives, each of whom had given him seven daughters.

Fourteen daughters ! Not one son ! That is an exceptional misfortune ! The father had a marked preference for one of his wives, but she was very evil and had no thought but to rid herself of the daughters of her rival.

Now there was a fatal house in that city, haunted by the Jinn. We died if we passed the night there. So, having heard of this house, the bad woman persuaded her husband to hire it, and to send the seven daughters of the spurned wife to sleep there one evening. This was done.

But these girls were very cunning, as well as being exceedingly virtuous, courageous and well-brought-up. They were not disturbed by what they thought was going to happen, but only requested their miserable father to buy them brooms and fishes, milk and perfumes.

The house was very dirty, and full of the dry carcasses of men who had perished there ; but

Tales of Fez

the seven sisters courageously swept the whole place, and cast milk upon the floor to appease the Jinn, who are very partial to this drink, and burned the perfumes for the same purpose.

And during this time one of them lit a fire and began to grill the fish for supper ; but suddenly a hand without either arms or body appeared, stretching out to her, while a voice said in gentle, supplicating accents :

‘ My sister, give me a fish to eat.’

‘ With pleasure and good heart, dear friend,’ answered the cooking girl, without showing any sign of disturbance. ‘ This one is still too hot. It would hurt you. I will cool it.’

As soon as the fish had become cool enough, she stretched it out to the hand, and did the same for seven other hands which came, one after the other, to beg for grilled fish.

Then, as night had fallen, the seven sisters lit candles, and set themselves to table, and ate.

Then a Jinnī with two noses presented himself, having a candle in his hand ; but, instead of being frightened, they welcomed him in friendly fashion, and made him sit beside them, and offered him very sweet tea with mint.

‘ Do you require a being with three noses ? ’ cried another Jinnī, suddenly appearing.

‘ Certainly ! ’ they answered. ‘ With heart most friendly and in duty bound ! ’

From the Arabic

And thereafter successively appeared a Jinnī with four, a Jinnī with five, a Jinnī with six, and a Jinnī with seven noses, who were all received most kindly by the sisters.

Then the voice of a little child was heard weeping, moaning and saying :

‘ O my sister ! O my sister ! Fetch me down ! Fetch me down ! ’

The bravest of all took a candle and mounted the staircase leading to the terrace. On the top step lay a great slab of meat, and it was this which was making all the noise. So she took it tenderly in her robe and carried it downstairs.

The Jinn were affected by their welcome from the seven sisters, and therefore, instead of doing them harm, thanked them for having fed and scented them, for having washed the house, and for having kept them company.

Next day, at dawn, the father came to the fatal house with fourteen bearers, provided with seven planks, to carry away the corpses of his daughters ; but, instead of finding them dead, he saw them joyous and in excellent health, and covered with jewels which the grateful Jinn had given them. Therefore he was compelled to dismiss the bearers and to take the young girls home with him.

Who was disappointed ? It was the wicked, jealous wife. Seeing the gifts with which her

Tales of Fez

step-daughters had been loaded, she wished the same for her daughters, and accused her husband of being very clumsy. At length, at her insistence, he led his seven other daughters to the haunted house and left them there alone.

They had asked for fishes and victual as the others had, but, as they were negligent and dirty, they had not thought for either brooms or perfumes. Without tidying at all, they began to prepare their meal ; and at once a hand showed itself before the one who was grilling and begged for a fish.

‘What horror !’ cried the girl, and began to recite the formula of exorcism : ‘In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate ! I seek near God a refuge against Satan, the Stoned One !’

And she cried to her sisters :

‘Give me an axe.’

But the menaced hand disappeared with no word spoken.

When the Jinn with two, three, four, five, six and seven noses came to ask to share their repast, instead of receiving them cordially as the other sisters had done, these sisters refused them company, and not without heaping curses and mockeries upon them.

When the voice of the child cried from the terrace : ‘Fetch me down !’ not one of them

From the Arabic

went to the help of the enchanted meat, but each one cried : ‘ God damn you ! ’

When the father arrived next morning at dawn, this time without either bearers or planks, he found seven corpses in the fatal house.

He repented bitterly of his fault, and ceased to love the wicked woman who had caused this calamity through her evil intention with regard to her step-daughters.

For an evil intention is
everything.

Atīk and Edb-Dbabi

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a rich merchant who had a very beautiful and learned son. The charm, the manners, the intelligence, the courage of this lad won the admiration of all who came near him, and his father, fearing for him the danger which his beauty might excite, took care to hide him from the world, and saw to it that all his time should be passed, either in study or in fencing and riding, far from the thronged streets and bustling markets.

But the father underwent that which is undergone by all men, and died on a certain day, leaving his son a great fortune, a fair house, and many slaves. Now that he had become master of his own acts, the young man got into the habit of going every day to walk in the city, and of rejoicing in a sight of the rich shops and the coloured crowd. And all the world was astonished to see such beauty.

‘Yā Allāh !’ said each. ‘Who is this delicious adolescent ? We have never remarked such an exquisite appearance in our streets before.



FIG. 102. — Native American, holding bow and arrow.

From the Arabic

He is like the moon upon her fourteenth night.'

And each time he entered one of the markets, the people would turn round to him, troubled to the extreme limit of trouble by his radiant face and by the damnation for all souls which shone from it. Then, without caring for his confusion, they would cluster round him, and exclaim :

'Yā Allāh ! The crescent of Ramadān twinkles upon us, and the full moon is rising in our market ! Doubtless this is an angel from the seventh Paradise or a King from the lands of Dream !'

Has not a poet said :

'O Lord, You have created Beauty to steal away our brains, and have said to us : My servants, be virtuous. You are the Source of all Beauty and You love that which is Fair ; how then can You forbid Your creatures not to love the Beauty which You have created, and not to be troubled in their wits by that which you have made Fair ?'

Soon all the city spoke of the boy, and he dared not go abroad. The Sultān learnt that there was a lad of marvel in Fez, the rich heir of a merchant who had just died ; therefore he resolved to make the acquaintance of the youth, and sent to fetch him.

But scarcely had the messengers come to him, when an old woman also sought him out, and said to him :

Tales of

‘Be it upon my head and before my eyes,’ cried the young man, and at once set forth.

But scarcely had he passed the ramparts and entered the gardens of the Sultān, when a troop of forty armed men, springing out from behind rocks and trees, threw themselves upon him. These men had been sent there by the Sultān himself. But Atik overcame them all, and cut off their heads ; then, with the same sword which ran red from their blood, he cut forty lemons in the orchard, plucked the requisite mint stalks, and returned to the palace, where all the guests were astonished to see him still alive. When he perceived the forty lemons, the Sultān understood that his men had been killed, and began to fear that Atik might in very fact fulfil his promise of reaching Edh-Dhahi. The tea which was forthwith prepared with the fresh mint was then drunk, and all the guests returned to their own houses.

When Atik reached his home, he found the mysterious old woman waiting for him.

‘Now that you have triumphed in all things, and have proved the truth of your declaration as to what you were, it remains only to reach Edh-Dhahi. You must open your father’s treasure to me, and in two days I will tell you what more you have to do.’

He gave her the key of the chamber where all

From the Arabic

the riches of the dead merchant were stored in minted pieces and unwrought ingots. The old woman took what she needed and then went to the Jewish quarter, to the shop of two jewellers of that faith, whom she begged to come with her to her home to undertake a certain labour.

The Jews accepted, and the dame bade them fashion, out of the gold which she had, a gazelle large enough for a youth to hide within it. Two days later the golden gazelle was finished, and had been provided with an invisible door, opening on the inside. The old woman then gave the Jews a fistful of gold pieces each, telling them to carry this to their families and then to return for the rest of their wage. They obeyed her joyfully, and in the meanwhile told no one of the matter, because they had not yet touched all their money.

But the woman dug a great hole in the courtyard of her house, and covered the bottom of it with dry faggots; then she thatched all with reeds, and set a mat above. When the jewellers returned, she offered them tea and made them be seated on the mat. They fell into the hole, and she threw down cans of flaming petroleum upon them and upon the dry wood until the two unfortunates were completely burned. At last she replaced the tiles which she had had to move, and all was hidden.

Tales of Fez

She then fetched Atik to her and, after making him enter the gold gazelle, went to the Sultān's palace. By crying and insisting to the guards, she was at length admitted into the Presence, and said to the Commander of the Faithful :

‘ Lord, I have come to ask you, of your great goodness, to take care of a gold gazelle for me, since I am about to depart to the East, to make my pilgrimage to Mecca. I am very old, and perhaps it is written that I shall die there. If I return to Fez, you can give me back my gazelle ; if not, she shall be yours.’

The Sultān accepted this trust and gave the old woman two eunuchs to fetch the gold gazelle for her. And when he saw it, he was thrown into stupefaction, since he had never before set eyes upon the like.

‘ This object will give a great deal of pleasure to my daughter, Edh-Dhahi, since she lives all alone in her subterranean palace.’

He had the gazelle lowered by the flagstone in the middle of the fountain basin, and the girl received the gift with rapture. She began to caress the pretty gilded animal, and shower all sorts of tender and gentle words upon it ; but Atik did not make a move till nightfall.

When Edh-Dhahi was asleep, however, he opened the door, came out from the gazelle, and sat down to eat the remnants of the girl's supper.

From the Arabic

Afterwards he returned noiselessly to his hiding-place.

After a few days, the slaves of the princess began to be astonished at finding all the plates quite empty every morning. They asked each other how their mistress had eaten so much, and began to feel themselves aggrieved, since it was their habit to finish the rest of the meal themselves.

One night Edh-Dhahi woke while Atik was still eating. Without the least trace of fear she asked: 'Man or Jinnī?' 'Man,' he answered. 'I am of the race of Adam, and I bear witness that there is no godhead save that of God, and that Muhammad is the Prophet of God!'

The princess immediately fell in love with the handsome Atik. Therefore, instead of dismissing him, she begged him to continue his meal, and herself kept him company. Thus the two lived together for several days, in mutual delight, and whenever a slave entered the apartment, the young man would run to conceal himself in the gold gazelle. At length Atik proposed that they should marry, and himself drew up the following contract upon a sheet of paper: 'Before Atik notary, Allāh kādī, and His Angels witnesses, Edh-Dhahi consents to marry the consenting Atik, according to the will of Allāh and the words and traditions of the Prophet.'

Tales of Fez

Then he signed the contract in his quality of notary, and that night was the night of penetration.

When they had lived together for a whole year, without once leaving the sweetness of each other's arms, a little child was born, and the mother laid him, with the marriage contract inserted in his swaddling bands, on the border of the basin a few moments before that hour when she knew that her father, the Sultān, made a habit of coming for his prayer and ablution by the fountain.

The Sultān was exceedingly astonished and a little annoyed at the trick which Atīk had played upon him. But, as it was now too late to do anything and as he was in his heart of hearts delighted to be a grandfather, he smiled upon the little morsel and embraced him tenderly ; then, calling up his daughter and son-in-law, he gave order that their marriage should be celebrated with every kind of pompous and public festivity. Glory
be to Allāh.

Lalla Khallāl the Green

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a certain very rich family whose only child was a daughter. The mother died and the girl was placed as an apprentice in the house of a neighbour, that she might be taught embroidery. This neighbour was a wicked and cruel woman and used to load little Lalla Khallāl the Green with blows. Also, as she herself desired through avarice to marry the widower, she employed the child to urge on her father to this wedding, promising as a reward that she would no longer beat her.

But when she had gained her end she was far from remembering what she had undertaken. This vile stepmother had a daughter of her own by her first marriage, who was a gross and ill-educated child, and made dirtinesses in her bed ; while Lalla Khallāl was both charming and intelligent, and as clean as she was pretty. Glory be to Him who created and modelled so fair a creature ! Now, in order to alienate the father from his daughter, this unpleasant woman used to saddle her with all the incongruities of her own child.

Tales of Fex

One day, under pretence of being very amiable with her, she took that little stepdaughter out into the country. When they had found a patch of shade, they sat down together and the old woman began to comb the child's long hair and take the lice from it. As the day was very warm the patient went to sleep ; then her step-mother rolled her long hair about a thorn bush and departed.

During the child's sleep a certain gazelle, a creature of God, passed by that way, had pity on her, and unwound the hair with his feet. The little girl woke and saw the gazelle licking her brow. At first she was very frightened, but soon she became accustomed to the animal and lived for many years with him.

Thus she became a young woman, quite as beautiful as the moon, a marvel of creation. One day, as she was going for a walk, she came near a village and, seeing a house which took her fancy, climbed up to the terrace of it. She leaned over the well of the house and could see no one ; yet the place appeared to be inhabited, for there were various objects of use about the courtyard and carpets at the entrance of the rooms. But there were not even any women there, such as we would expect if the men were abroad.

Climbing down and entering the kitchen, she



From the Arabic

saw that it was full of great quarters of venison, and game of fur and feather; therefore she understood that the house belonged to hunters. Men when they live alone can never take care of their surroundings. If the truth must be told, this house was not in very good order. So the sweet young woman, who loved cleanliness, set herself to wash the whole place, to set the rooms in order, to do the cooking and to make all ready for a meal.

Then she hid herself.

Soon she saw seven hunters returning with all sorts of game; and these good fellows were astonished to find their table served and the house in order. Yet, as they were mistrustful, they first made an old dying greyhound eat of the kuskus which they found prepared. As the animal did not die, they gaily began to eat, but not without having first said: In the name of God!

Next morning all the hunters set out once more, except the eldest, who wished to probe the mystery and therefore feigned to be asleep. But from feigning he passed into real sleeping, and Lalla Khallāl the Green, after she had set the house in order and cooked the dinner, went up to him, stained his right hand and his left foot with henna, and returned to her hiding-place.

Tales of Fez

Next day the second brother, who trusted to be more successful, stayed behind in his turn ; but he also fell into a true sleep and the young girl played the same jest on him. And afterwards the same thing happened with four more of them.

But when the youngest stayed behind under the same conditions, he succeeded in keeping awake, while pretending to sleep, until the moment when Lalla Khallāl, after tidying the house and preparing the meal, came up to him. She put henna on his left foot as she had done to the others, but, when she would have painted his right hand, he seized her suddenly by the arm, crying :

‘ Mortal or of the Jinn ? ’

‘ I am a woman of the race of Adam. I say over the confession of Faith.’

As she was very beautiful, the youngest hunter fell in love with her and asked her if she would accept him as a husband. When she said that she would, he advised her to say to his six brothers : ‘ He who caught me shall marry me.’

When the rest returned in the evening, the young man showed them his unpainted right hand, and then introduced them to the girl. All were stricken with amazement at her beauty, and each desired her for himself. But she declared :

‘ He who caught me shall marry me.’

From the Arabic

So the two were married, and the whole eight lived together in great happiness ; for the other hunters greatly appreciated the sweetness of Lalla Khallāl's disposition and the excellent management which she introduced into the affairs of their house.

One day, while her husband and her six brothers-in-law were hunting, Lalla Khallāl heard a Jew crying his wares for women in the street. She recognised him as one Dāūd, a wandering pedlar from the city where she had been born.

She signed him to come to her, bought different trifles from him, and asked him the news of her family. When he had told her that her father and stepmother were still alive, she dismissed him with a little purse full of gold pieces. And the old man hurried to the stepmother and told her where he had found Lalla Khallāl. The old woman at once promised him two little purses of gold (for she had laid hold of all the dead mother's fortune) if he would procure a finger-ring rich in sleep-producing qualities.

Dāūd soon returned to the village where he had seen Lalla Khallāl, knocked at her door, gave her good-day, and handed her the ring as a present from her stepmother ; also he exclaimed that the latter had not been at all to blame, that she had not lost the child on purpose by the

Tales of Fez

thorn bush, and that she was desolated at no more beholding her.

While she was preparing the kuskus for that night's meal, the young woman placed the ring between her teeth in order that she might mix the semolina with both hands, and immediately fell down unconscious.

As soon as the seven hunters returned they supposed her dead and gave way to great grief. 'The joy of our life is passed,' they said. 'We shall never hear her voice again, we shall no more take pleasure in her tender presence. Our dwelling will lack her valuable cares for evermore. There is no power or might save in God! Such is the Destiny which He had written for us.'

'What are we to do with the body?' asked the youngest, the husband, who was well-nigh dead from his despair. 'I can never resign myself to letting so sweet a thing go rotten in the earth.'

Now these seven brothers had a she-camel whose name was Nala. They dressed the young woman's body in all magnificence, covering it with jewels and precious veils, and then placed it upon the she-camel, saying to her:

'Go forward, Nala, go forward ceaselessly; and do not halt unless someone calls you by your name.'

From the Arabic

Nala obeyed, and all the land was soon talking about this prodigy: a she-camel who went forward for ever, bearing the body of a very beautiful woman, dressed like a queen.

Many tried to catch Nala, but none succeeded; for no horse could run as fast as she. The Sultān himself could not succeed. Therefore he promised a great reward to any who should bring the she-camel and her burden of mystery into his presence.

‘I shall make him rich,’ he said. ‘I shall make him in every way as rich as God meant him to be.’

Now a poor harvester was going along a certain road on his ass, and just at the moment when the she-camel passed him, he dropped his sandal.

‘Give me, I pray you,’ he said to a little ragamuffin, ‘give me my nala.’

Hearing her name, the she-camel halted instantly, and gently allowed herself to be led by the peasant into the presence of the Sultān, who generously rewarded the man.

Lalla Khallāl was still sleeping. Her heart did not beat, and no breath raised her breasts.

‘She must be buried,’ said the Sultān, and sent for women to undertake this task according to the rites.

These first drew the ring from the place where it

Tales of Fez

still remained between the teeth of the young woman, and at once the body sat up, fresh and smiling. In his delight the Sultān asked first for her story and then for her hand. And she accepted him in the end, for she did not know how she could find her actual husband.

Nala was put in the palace stable.

One day Lalla Khallāl the Green, who could not forget her first love, and did not at all care to share the favours of a single master with a whole harīm, resolved to be gone from that place at any cost. Therefore she organised a pleasure party in the Sultān's gardens with six maids of her honour, bidding them conceal about them anything they valued. All seven hid themselves in a large chest which was put on Nala's back, as if it were provision for the excursion. But as soon as they came to the entrance of the garden, Lalla Khallāl said to Nala :

‘Go forward, Nala, and do not halt until you reach the door of your masters.’

Thus it was that she discovered the village again, and the house of the seven hunters.

‘We have forfeited,’ they were saying, ‘all our good luck along with her. And to put a crown upon our grief, Nala is lost to us.’

On hearing her name and the voice of her masters the she-camel began to utter loud glou-glous of great joy.

From the Arabic

The brothers were indeed happy to find their dear Lalla Khallāl the Green again, when she fell weeping into the arms of her husband. Then she brought the six maids of her honour out of the chest.

‘ See,’ she said to her brothers-in-law, ‘ these are the wives I have brought you.’

And she vaunted to the young girls the
charm of every woman
having a husband
apiece.

Prince Ahmed Ben Amar

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a King who had long vainly desired to be a father, and who came to the height of happiness when at length his wife, having been so far barren, gave him a little daughter.

As he feared to lose this child for whom he had waited so long, and that he might preserve her from the evil-eye, he had her shut up in a richly-furnished underground palace, with an old negress to look after her. Her feeding was very specially cared for, and she was only given the crumb of bread and such parts of meat as had no bones.

The walls on one side of this palace were made entirely of glass and looked upon a garden where an oued ran.

When the young girl was fifteen years of age, her old nurse died and was replaced by another slave. But this woman, who had not been warned in the matter, gave her mistress bread whole with its crusts and unfiletted meat.

‘ This bread has a crust such as I have never seen before, and this meat has bones such as I

From the Arabic

have never seen before,' said the young princess. And she hammered a bone against the wall to let the marrow out of it.

The glass wall broke at once, and, leaning out by the hole thus made, the girl found that her palace looked upon a fair garden divided by an oued.

A young man as handsome as the full moon was walking in the garden.

'Oh! what a handsome young man upon the shore of the sea!' cried the princess, who had never seen such a sight.

'Oh! what a fine palace on the shore of the sea!' said the unknown in his turn. 'O Girl, I wish it had a series of dream verandahs which would take a month to cross.'

At their first mutual glance these two had fallen in love with each other.

Caught by this passion and by the desire to have the dream verandahs, the princess fell ill. The Sultān called doctors to him in his despair, and said to his daughter:

'The treasures of the East and those of the West shall come to your bedside if you desire them. Every head you wish shall be cut off and brought to your feet.'

'The only thing I wish,' she said, 'is a series of dream verandahs which it would take a month to cross.' And the Sultān immediately

Tales of Fex

ordered the construction of these things. Would he not have done better to ask at once who had inspired such an idea ?

After the masons of that land had laboured to satisfy the princess's caprice, she went forth once more, perceived the same young man, and cried :

‘ Oh ! what a handsome young man by the shore of the sea ! ’

‘ Oh ! what a fine palace by the sea with a series of dream verandahs which would take a month to cross ! ’ he answered. ‘ I would it were provided with two benches, the one of male amber and the other of yellow amber.’

The princess fell ill again. Her father said to her :

‘ The treasures of the East and those of the West shall come to your bedside if you desire them, and the heads you wish shall be cut off and placed at your feet.’

‘ I only want two benches,’ she answered, ‘ the one of male amber, the other of yellow amber.’ These were made. She was cured. She leaned forth. She perceived the young man, and cried :

‘ Oh ! the handsome young man by the shore of the sea ! ’

And he :

‘ Oh ! the fine palace by the sea, with its series of dream verandahs which it would take a

From the Arabic

month to cross, and its two benches, the one of male amber and the other of yellow amber. O Girl, I wish it had a column of musk and a column of right amber also.'

'The treasures of the East and the treasures of the West shall come to your bedside if you desire them,' said the Sultān to his daughter, when she became ill of love and caprice for the third time. 'And such heads as you wish shall be cut off and placed at your feet.'

'I only want two columns, the one of musk and the other of right amber.'

When this desire had been satisfied, the princess leaned forth afresh.

'Oh! the fine palace by the sea,' said the youthful unknown in the garden. 'Oh! the fine palace with its series of dream verandahs that it would take a month to cross, with its benches of male amber and yellow amber, with its columns of right amber and musk! I wish it had two fountain basins in the midst of a court yard paved with bright mosaics, one having a jet of rose-water and the other a jet of orange-water.'

The Sultān fulfilled this new wish. Then it was emerald tiles with ruby incrustation which the stranger wished for and the princess demanded. Finally, when she had leaned forth yet again, the girl heard these words :

Tales of Fez

‘ Oh ! the fine palace by the sea with its series of dream verandahs which it would take a month to cross, with its two benches, the one of male amber and the other of yellow amber, its two columns of right amber and musk, its two basins, one having a jet of rose-water and the other a jet of orange-water, its emerald tiles with ruby incrustation ! Now nothing lacks save the Sultān’s daughter seated on one of the benches and Prince Ahmed ben Amar on the other.’

This time the princess fell even more seriously ill. She became yellow, and admitted to herself that she was taken in the toils of this young man. None of the doctors in the Fortunate Empire could succeed in curing her. All the old women came to tell her tales in order to distract her. She was not distracted. None could find the cause of this sickness, and the girl kept her secret.

At last a really old and very intelligent woman came to her. As the princess dearly loved a certain little bird which lived ever in a cage at her side, the old woman took the bird and cut its throat upon the breast of the sleeping invalid. The princess cried in anger and desolation as she woke :

‘ O Lord, my Master ! May he who has deprived me of this bird be deprived in his turn,

From the Arabic

as I am deprived of Prince Ahmed ben Amar ! ' The old woman's subtlety had succeeded, and she hastened to tell the Sultān of it. When he learned that his daughter was in love with a man, he fell into a fury and ordered a certain eunuch to carry the princess into the country, to kill her there, and to bring back her blood-stained shift in proof.

But the eunuch, feeling pity rise within him, warned the princess, advised her to provide herself with all the precious and easily-portable treasures on which she could lay hands, and then went out with her beyond the city.

When they had come to a far-off farm, she requisitioned a sheep, undressed herself, and stretched out her chemise. The eunuch cut the animal's throat above this garment. Then the princess put on the clothes of a servant and, after having hidden her treasures under the coarse veil which covered her abundant hair, went forward alone into the desolate country, where there is neither bird to fly nor beast to walk.

She journeyed from city to city, passing herself off as a beggar, and seeking Prince Ahmed ben Amar in every place. At length she found work in a house where a certain woman dwelt, and this woman kept her on as servant, because she was hard-working and courageous in spite of her noble education. This woman was none

Tales of Fez

other than the Prince's sister. He had also two other sisters living in different houses. He used to come and visit them in turn for one night every three years. He came to that house at length, and the disguised princess recognised him, without daring to reveal herself. He passed the evening with his sister, slept in the house, and departed at dawn, with no intention of returning save in three years. Not wishing to wait so long, the Sultān's daughter betook herself to the house of the second sister and, at the end of a single year, saw the object of her love again, but without summoning up the courage to show herself or to speak to him. Leaving her second mistress, she went to the house of the third sister, whose affection she was not long in winning.

'My brother seems to be the victim of I know not what enchantment,' said this third woman to the princess. 'He can only come to visit us once every three years, and then but for a single night. No one knows what he does with the rest of his time.'

'All powerful Allāh will help us,' said the disguised princess. 'There is no power or wisdom save in Him !'

So, when Prince Ahmed ben Amar came, both women questioned him anxiously, begging him tell what they might do to aid him.

From the Arabic

‘I indeed suffer from a sorcery,’ he said, ‘but no one can deliver me.’

‘You must not speak so,’ said the princess, who had by this time made herself known to him. ‘God will not refuse us His support, and perhaps we shall be able to do something for you.’

‘Very well ! This is what must be done : the first mouthful of kuskus must be subleised from my mouth without my noticing it, seven hairs must be dragged from my beard without my feeling it, I must be followed when I leave without my knowing it, I must be tracked whither I go without my seeing it, and in that place the mouthful must be cast down, the seven hairs must be burnt, and my follower must stay for a whole month without sleeping. At the end of the month a fish will come to that place, and spew me out of his mouth ; for I dwell within him, and can only leave his belly once every year. You see that all this is impossible ; therefore leave me in my wretched predicament.’

‘I will nevertheless try,’ answered the princess, who had a bold heart and came of a fine race. Indeed the Prince’s third sister succeeded in subleising the first mouthful of kuskus, and in tearing out seven hairs from her brother’s beard while he slept. She gave the mouthful and the

Tales of Fez

hair to the princess, who wrapped all in a handkerchief, and then followed Ahmed ben Amar to the seashore. There she beheld him go down and become ingulfed in a certain cave. Therefore, after casting down the mouthful and burning the hairs, she sat down near the entrance of this cave, and for a month her tears helped her to forego her sleep.

When the last day came, the poor girl was exceedingly fatigued, and sat there in continuous tears, thinking on the sad Destiny of him she loved. Only the hope of saving him sustained her in her task. As time went on, a peasant woman passed by and said to her :

‘ Oh, supernatural beauty, what do you here ?
O young girl unmeriting all misfortune, why do you weep so ? ’

Happy to see a human face once more, the princess told the new-comer her story (but she did not speak of the jewels which were hidden in her hair and which she had ever carefully preserved). Then, at the end of her strength, she slept.

The peasant woman set a stone beneath her head, so that her sleep might be the deeper ; but when Ahmed ben Amar, delivered by the month’s watching, came up out of the monstrous fish, which swam in to spew him upon the shore, she passed herself off as the princess by repeating

From the Arabic

the story which she had heard. The two returned to the city and were married.

The poor princess woke all alone beside the cave, and understood that she had been betrayed, for the stone which had shut the entrance had been moved aside. Following the foot-prints of the prince, she came to the city and learned that he was living with his wife in a beautiful house.

Instead of letting her grief overwhelm her, she went to a slave-merchant and, after causing him to stain her black all over, had herself sold to the Prince as a negress. Though her master did not recognise her, he learned to esteem her greatly because she worked very well, and, when at length he had children, he confided their education to the black slave. The children loved her very dearly.

One day she suggested to them that they should say to their father: 'We want Dādā to tell us a story.'

So when evening came the little children said to their father: 'We want Dādā to tell us a story.'

'It is not worth while,' said the Prince's wife, who had already recognised the princess-slave and had become very yellow in her anxiety. 'It is not seemly that slaves should tell night-tales.'

Tales of Fez

But the father gave way to his children and called the dādā, who at once began to tell a story. She began by describing the beautiful palace of her youth, with its series of dream verandahs which it would take a month to cross, its benches of male amber and yellow amber, its columns of right amber and musk, its jets of rose-water and orange-water, its emerald tiles with ruby incrustation, and telling of the handsome young man who walked beside the water.

‘Sit down near me, Dādā,’ said the Prince.

Then she described her illness, the Sultān’s anger, the eunuch’s pity, and how she herself had undertaken to destroy the fatal enchantment. ‘Come nearer to me, Dādā,’ said the Prince.

Then she told how she had stayed a month without sleeping, and had finally slept beside the cave, how the peasant woman had betrayed her, and how she had blackened herself and become a slave in order to live near her love. Finally she drew forth the royal jewels hidden in her hair.

‘Come nearer to me still,’ said the Prince.

‘Come nearer to me still, my darling. What shall be the punishment?’

He had the wicked peasant woman torn in sunder by two camels, and great feasts cele-

From the Arabic

brated his marriage to his dear one. Those two lived happily until the day on which the King of Death came seeking them.

Glory to the Living, who does not
die, to Whom alone
are due our
praises !

The Carpenter's Daughter

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a poor carpenter whose wife died in childbed, leaving a daughter on his hands ; in truth a beautiful baby, but one whose upkeep was like to be a grave burden upon her father, and who therefore seemed to have been born under very sad auspices. How could the unfortunate man take care of his child when he had no money, no relations, no slave, and was worn out by his work ?

But Allāh constitutes himself a Father to the fatherless.

As soon as he returned home after the burial of his wife and had anxiously opened his door, he found all the house as clean and well-arranged as when the dead woman had looked after these things. Better still, the cooking had been done and a meal set out. He had nothing to do but to wash his right hand, and dip it into the dish, saying : ‘ In the name of God ! ’ to drive away the devil.

To crown all, the little girl had been carefully swaddled and was sleeping peacefully.

From the Arabic

Yet there was no one there. And the miracle was repeated every day. A mysterious hand looked after the child and directed the house. The reason for these things was that the People of the Invisible had adopted the girl, and now looked after her and gave her suck. And she, being under the protection of the Jinn, developed with miraculous rapidity, growing greater, wick and lamp, by night and day.

When she was three, she seemed to be twelve, and her intelligence was remarkable. Her father had given her the name of Āishah, in memory of the favourite wife of the Prophet.

Now at that time there was a Sultān upon the throne who delighted in all fantastic things, and whose habit it was to ask strange questions, which his people had to answer on forfeit of their heads.

‘Who will tell me,’ he asked, ‘what the water-wheel says?’

Many persons had already been put to death for their silence, and at length the Sultān sent for Āishah’s father and asked him the same question, offering him a thousand dirhams or death.

But all that the carpenter could do was to obtain a delay of three days.

‘Do not torment yourself so, my father,’ said Āishah, when she saw the good man return in terror to his house. ‘Follow my advice. Do

Tales of Fex

not wait for the three days. What is the good of that ? Go to the Sultān to-morrow, sit down by the water-wheel which turns in the garden, stay there listening for a quarter of an hour, and then recite the verses which I am about to teach you.'

The carpenter did these things. After pretending to listen with great attention to the water-wheel as it turned, as it turned slowly groaning among the citrons and the jasmines, he advanced towards the throne of the Sultān, and said :

' O Commander of the Faithful, this is what the water-wheel says :

*I was a quince tree spreading perfume and
Giving all sorry lovers back their sighs.
The Sultān cursed me suddenly. I stand
A silly plank and weep from all my eyes.'*

Now you must know that the Sultān was afflicted with ringworm and hid the fact most carefully. One day the branch of a certain quince tree had knocked off his fez and surrounding turban, setting his head bare before all his following. Being furious that his malady was discovered, he had caused the tree to be cut down and a water-wheel made of its wood.

How had the carpenter known of this detail ? This seemed extraordinary to the Sultān, and he hurried to put a second question, giving a

From the Arabic

three days' respite as before. This time he required to know what the water sang as it boiled upon the fire.

And this time also young Āishah consoled her father, as he sat in his house groaning and brooding upon death.

'Go to the palace,' she said, 'sit down before the stove, lay your ear near to the kettle, and say to the Sultān :

*I was quick water, and the wood I fed
When I was living, burns me now I'm dead.'*

The Sultān had to be contented with this answer.

'But now I wish,' he said to the carpenter, 'that you bring me a vegetable garden on the back of a camel.'

This time the poor man gave up hope entirely.

'Beautiful verses will not help me now,' he said, 'for the matter is too material. My last hour is written for to-morrow.'

'How can you so lack courage?' asked the ingenious Lalla Āishah. 'You have only to ask for eight days' grace, and Allāh thereafter will provide!'

As soon as her father had obtained this delay, she set earth and dung in a saddle-tray and sowed various seeds within it.

At the end of a week all the vegetables had begun to sprout, and there was nothing left to

Tales of Fez

do but to fasten the saddle-tray to the back of a camel.

But the Sultān propounded a further test.

‘You must come to me,’ he said, ‘at the same time mounted and on foot, and weeping and laughing at the same time.’

But it was weeping and by no means laughing that the carpenter returned to his own house.

‘Good-bye, my dearest daughter,’ he said.

‘Soon you will have no father at all.’

And he explained the Sultān’s strange and contradictory conditions to Āishah.

‘If it is only that,’ she said, ‘you may be quite tranquil. Go and find a quite little, little donkey, such a one as can walk between your legs without your sitting on him; also you must take some onions with you, for they can draw tears from your eyes without preventing your laughing at the same time.’

‘My daughter is a true Ifritah,’ said the carpenter to himself next day as he made his entry into the palace in that bewildering fashion.

But though the Sultān could not help laughing, he was a little vexed also, and therefore he set a fifth problem, though promising that it should be the last.

‘Make me a robe out of a block of marble,’ he said.

‘Do not weep, my father,’ cried Āishah, when she heard of this. ‘Simply go back to the Sultān

From the Arabic

and require him to send you some threads of sand with which to sew the robe.'

The Sultān was quite disarmed by this request and gave the carpenter a rich reward ; at the same time he insisted upon knowing who had so wonderfully counselled him.

'It was my daughter, who has been raised, I think, by the Masters of Earth.'

'I wish her for my wife !' cried the King.

'For in truth no other could have shown such fine and handy intelligence.'

He took Lalla Āishah, the Carpenter's Daughter, for his legitimate Queen. And the two lived together for many happy days.

Now the Sultān frequently gave justice to his people at the palace entrance, and one day he had to judge between two men who were disputing over a new-born foal. One owned a gelding, the other a mare ; and both animals had dwelt in the same stable, with each of the men looking after them on alternate days.

'My mare was full,' said the plaintiff, 'and on the day when she was due to bring forth, it was my comrade's turn to look after the stable. When I entered in the evening, I saw the new-born foal under the gelding and not under my mare. O Commander of the Faithful, does it not nevertheless belong to me, in spite of this perfidious substitution ?'

Tales of

‘ May Allāh make the days of our master the Sultān innumerable,’ said the other. ‘ My animal is paſt peradventure the mother of the foal.’

Then said the Sultān : ‘ The foal belongs to the man under whose beaſt it was found. You may retire.’

Ulcerous with indignation, the maſter of the mare went aſide to hide his angry tears. Now the Queen’s window looked out upon the tribunal and Lalla Aīſhah had heard the ſentence pronounced. Therefore ſhe had pity on the unfortunate man and, without ſhowing herſelf, called to him through the lattice, aſking the cauſe of his grief.

‘ This is what you muſt do,’ ſhe ſaid. ‘ You muſt return to the Sultān and ſay to him : “ I ſowed my field near the river with grains of corn, but alas ! the fiſhes have eaten all the young ſhoots.” ’

‘ But do fiſh eat graſs and the like ? ’ cried the Sultān, with a great laugh.

So the owner of the mare, ſtill following the Queen’s advice, cried out : ‘ But do geldings bring forth ? ’

‘ Who told you to ſay that ? ’ ſaid the Sultān, and then low to himſelf : ‘ I only know one perſon in my kingdom capable.’

‘ I heard a voice through a window,’ answered the man, ‘ but I ſaw no one.’

From the Arabic

Being furious that his wife had spoken to a man, the Sultān ran to Lalla Āishah saying :

‘ I send you back to your father. You are no longer my Queen. But you have my permission to carry away with you a single chest filled with anything you most care to take.’

When that night came, Lalla Āishah mixed with the Sultān’s food a soporific dose sufficiently strong to keep him in a deep sleep for several hours ; then she placed him in the chest which it was her right to take away. Slaves followed her with it, and she took the road to the carpenter’s house.

The Jinn, who kept Lalla in the charge of their protection, had prepared all in the house for a reception of great splendour. As soon as the Sultān began to wake, a fortifying soup was given to him and, as he sat up, he began to admire the beauty of his surroundings.

‘ You are at my home, dear master,’ said Lalla Āishah. ‘ You gave me permission to bring away what was dearest to me.’

The Sultān threw himself at her feet, asking forgiveness for having suspected her, and
thenceforward their happiness was
as perfect as it can be
among mortals.

Glory be to
Allāh !

The Language of the Birds

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a rich merchant in Fez who was in despair because he had no child. Also his advanced age seemed to forbid him any hope in this respect. But his desire was so great that he asked one of his friends, who lived at a great distance, to come to visit him and to give him advice. This friend was a magician. When he had consulted his art, he said :

‘ You will have a son.’

For he knew of the existence, in a far country, of a tree whose fruit infallibly rendered the eater fecund.

So he turned the ring of wisdom upon his finger and thus caused two colossal black men to appear before him, powerful Afārīt, whose feet were founded upon the earth and whose heads touched the tall sky.

‘ Why have you called us ? ’ they cried in a menacing tone. ‘ What work have you got for us ? ’ Command and we shall obey.’

Then, on the magician’s order, they departed and plucked the fruit of the supernatural tree,



From the Arabic

which they brought back to the merchant and his wife, who both ate heartily of it.

Nine months afterwards a handsome boy was born, and his father took care to provide him with an excellent education at the best school in the city.

When the boy was ten years old, the merchant took him with him upon pilgrimage to Mecca. But before they arrived and while they were visiting a certain city of Egypt, they passed in front of a very strange school: through the delicately-carved lattice-work the pupils might be heard speaking in an unknown tongue. Father and son could distinguish nothing but *tiu tiu tiu kiwit kiwit kiwit tiu tiu tiu tiu*. . . .

'That is the language of the birds. I teach it to my pupils,' answered the master proudly, when the two strangers questioned him.

Allured by this original form of instruction and desirous of having his son grounded in every branch of learning, the merchant trusted the child to the old professor, giving him six little bags of gold to pay his fees until the day when he himself, having accomplished his pilgrimage, should return to take him back to Fez.

But two years passed and the father did not return. He had forgotten the way and had arrived at his own home without his son.

'He fell into the sea,' he explained to his wife,

Tales of Fex

who thereupon became almost blind through weeping.

The merchant was a careless and self-centred man, and so, being absorbed in his business, he forgot his son for the whole of ten years, always putting off until the morrow that day on which he would set out to search for him. Yet a time came when he did at last go forth again on pilgrimage. He was more fortunate this time ; he found the city and the street and the school ; he heard *tiu tiu tiu kiwit kiwit* once more ; but he did not recognise the professor. Instead of the old man whom he had left, a very handsome youth of twenty was teaching the class. The merchant made inquiries and found that the master had stayed at home that day from illness, and that the best pupil was taking his place. When the old man had been fetched, he said, pointing to the young teacher :

‘Do you not recognise your son ? This is he whom you confided to my care ten years ago. He has become so learned that he can in all things take my place.’

The joyful merchant clasped his son in his arms and then, after thanking the old master, said farewell to him, with a present of new bags of gold to console him for the departure of his helper. The two now took boat for the Far West, and

From the Arabic

when they had been for some time in the open sea, three birds came to perch on the nettings and began to sing.

‘What are they saying?’ asked the father, but his son did not care to answer.

‘Chi chi chi tiu tiu tiu,’ cried the birds.

‘Why will you not tell me what they are singing?’ insisted the father, and many other rich men of Fez who were journeying with him began to mock him, saying :

‘It seems most profitable to pay money for the instruction of a son ! Why spend ten years in studying the language of the birds and then fail to interpret the very first birds that come to hand ?’

So, much against his heart, the young man gave way, and cried :

‘You insist on knowing what they say ? Very well, dear father. They say that I shall become a Sultān some day and you a porter.’

This prophecy was by no means to the old man’s taste, but he said nothing at the time. Yet he ruminated silently on his anger, and with such deep brooding that, when night fell, he went down into the hold, emptied one of his chests of its merchandise, and fastened his sleeping son within it. Then, when he had carefully closed down the lid, he threw the whole thing overboard.

Tales of Fez

‘At least,’ he grumbled, ‘I shall not be lying to my wife this time when I say he fell into the sea. That will be God’s truth.’

And the ship continued on her way towards the Fortunate Empire.

When he came to the city of Moulay Idrīs, the old merchant found that his house had been completely burnt to the ground; and it took him several days to discover his wife, who had had to become a washerwoman to gain her bread. After these two ancient people had dragged out a miserable existence for some time, they decided to leave their native city; broken by age and worn with grief they crossed Bou Jloud, passed under Bab Segma, and went forth to find their fortune in some other place. So much for them.

There was, during that time, a certain poor fisherman who lived in a town by the sea and scarcely contrived to earn his livelihood. On a particular day he was in a very bad temper, because his wife had just been brought to bed of a daughter. A daughter—that is to say, a mouth to feed and no honourable incentive to do so. To put a crown upon his misfortune, he fished from sunrise and his net brought him in nothing. Therefore, in his discouragement, he climbed up again to the beach and sat

From the Arabic

there on the sand, with his head between his palms.

Lifting his eyes of a sudden, the fisherman saw a large chest floating upon the waves and being carried towards the shore. He therefore got back into his boat and, setting out towards this stray, brought it immediately back to his house. When his wife and himself at last succeeded in opening their booty, they saw that it contained a handsome young man dressed in rich garments.

‘Are you man or Jinnī?’ they cried in their astonishment.

‘I am a man of flesh and bone even as you are; therefore do not fear me,’ said the young man, and while they comforted him with a very hot soup and showed him all sorts of attention springing from pure pity, he continued:

‘You are henceforward my only parents. See, here is money which I had stowed away in my wallet. Take it, and also sell these expensive garments, since I have no use for them.’

Now this young man, who had been born, as must be remembered, under marvellous conditions, and educated in an exceptional manner, was a Luck-Bringer. He carried good fortune with him.

From the day on which the youth began to live at the fisherman’s house, that good man

Tales of Fez

always had excellent catches, and joy dwelt in the home. And the young man, for his part, being very learned, frequented the schools and the mosques and the University of that place, and became the intimate friend of the kādī's son. Now the Sultān of that place was considerably annoyed. Every day while he was sitting among the people of his court, three birds would come about him and vivaciously chatter for several moments, as if they were asking each other something. Then they would fly away, but only after having, O abomination !, done their needs on the head of Sidna* himself.

The Sultān had offered the half of his kingdom to anyone who would deliver him from this calamity ; but death was to be the penalty of one who should make the attempt and fail. Many persons had thus had their heads cut off, and none had been able to explain the mystery. Therefore, as the kādī bore the reputation of being very learned, the Sultān sent for him and gave him eight days in which to arrange the matter.

We can imagine that it was in a state of much depression that the unfortunate kādī left the palace. At the University where he taught, he cut short the time of his class, and all his pupils remarked his anxiety. When he had returned home, he put his affairs in order as if he

From the Arabic

were presently to die, and told his son of the Sultān's bidding.

That evening the fisherman's adopted son, the young man who had been saved from the waters, met his young friend, and noticed his sadness. He asked him concerning it, and learnt of the doom which hung over the kādī's head.

'If it be only that,' he said, 'do not torment yourself. I will get you clear of the business. It is useless to wait for eight days. Let your father present himself before the Sultān to-morrow, and I will go with him.'

The next day, when he stood with the kādī in the palace, he saluted the Sultān three times and then asked him if he would give the half of his kingdom in case of success. The three birds had already come and were beginning to chatter. 'Yes,' said Sidna.

'Let the notaries come, then, to register the deed of gift,' said the prudent young man, and, when this had been done, he began to speak with the birds. It sounded an incomprehensible exchange of: tiu tiu tiu—kiwit kiwit—chi chi chi—tiu tiu tiu.

'They ask justice,' he said at length, turning towards the King. 'They are two males and one female. This on the left is from the East, this other is from the West. The female

Tales of Fez

belonged to the latter, but he was absent for a very long time on a journey. Thinking him dead, she married the other and lived with him for a year. They demand that the Sultān should decide upon their case.'

But the Sultān felt himself very embarrassed.

'If you wish, O Prince of Believers, I will give judgment in your place, and all shall be made plain.'

When the Sultān acceded to this suggestion, the young man said to the bird who came from the East :

'Go towards the East !'

To him who came from the West :

'Go towards the West !'

And to the female :

'Follow him you love !'

When the two male birds had obeyed, the female followed her first husband into the West without a moment's hesitation.

All who were present became filled with marvel, but the Sultān regretted that he had to give half his kingdom away for a few *tiu tiu*'s, and was not ready to sign the act which the notaries had drawn. Then the young man threatened to call all the birds of the world to that place, that they might behave upon Sidna as the first three had done.

Indeed he called out certain orders in the

From the Arabic

language of the birds, and immediately the Sultān saw the sky growing dark above his head. All the birds of every kind from every land of all the earth were assembled above that court ; and there was a fine concert of tiu tiu's. Then said the young man :

‘I will order them all together to do their businesses upon you if you do not fulfil your promise.’

The Sultān had to yield, and the birds departed. Nor did the royal ill-humour continue, for the young man was so amiable and seductive that none might help loving him. He caused the fisherman and his wife to be brought to the palace and dressed in the dresses of kings and of kings' sons, and they gave thanks to Heaven that they had been granted this most fortunate youth. Seven days afterwards the old Sultān died, leaving the kingdom to the young man who understood the language of the birds.

In the meantime his real parents, who had left Fez in their ruin, had come at last to that very city.

‘Try to get work as a porter,’ the old woman advised her husband. ‘I will myself again become a washerwoman. We can meet this evening.’ And with that the old man went to the small square near the ramparts, where those

Tales of Fez

who wished to be hired as porters used to wait for work.

On that same day the Sultān bade his master of the palace to have wood laid in for the Winter. Therefore the master of the palace told his eunuchs to go out and engage porters for this work. Thus it was that the father became, according to the prediction of the birds, a porter in that city where his son was Sultān.

The old man was not at all accustomed to manual work, for, in his whole life, he had hardly ever done anything except sell goods and count over money. Therefore the eunuch, who was overseeing his labour, saw that he did his task ill and gave him a few blows with a rope to encourage him, while the two went on towards the palace.

The Sultān, who was reclining upon the terrace, recognised his father. He would doubtless have liked to know the old man's reason for throwing him into the sea, but his heart was too generous to nurture thoughts of revenge. Seeing his frail old father staggering under the blows of the eunuch, he sent down a message bidding them exchange their parts. Thus the porter took the rope and the eunuch the burden. Now, as the father was a much less generous man than his son, he gave back many

From the Arabic

more blows than he had received and was lashing his persecutor furiously when the two entered the palace. But, when a further order was brought from the Sultān that he should be led into the great hall, he began to feel afraid and asked himself if he were not going to be punished for having ill-treated a royal servant. While he was busy with such thoughts, the Sultān entered and began to question him concerning his existence.

‘Have you a family, a son, a wife?’ This he asked because he wished to have news of his mother.

‘I have never had a son,’ said the old man, whose conscience was not very clear upon this point. ‘But I have a wife who is very old and feeble and does washing.’

‘Go and fetch her,’ ordered the Sultān to two of his eunuchs.

These were not very pleased at this command, since its execution would not bring them anything; but the order was a formal one. After a long search in every place, they managed to find a house where a strange washerwoman had just been employed, and returned to the palace with the old woman.

All who are concerned in this story were thus brought together.

‘Poor woman,’ said the Sultān in deep emotion.

Tales of Fez

‘What misfortune has brought you down to this?’

‘Alas, O Sultān, my husband has caused all our grief by losing our son.’

‘Would you recognise your son?’

‘Yes, yes, Lord! He has a beauty-spot on his right shoulder.’

Immediately the Sultān undressed, showing his bare right arm, and embraced his mother, who wept exceedingly in her joy. He pardoned his father, and ordered slaves to wash the two old people at the hammām and to dress them in the garments of kings and the sons of kings.

Henceforward he lived with his real and his adopted parents; his reign was a long one and in every way fortunate for his subjects.

*The Kaftān of Love Spotted
with Passion*

THERE WAS AND THERE WAS—AND ALLĀH was in every place—no land, no region, is empty of Him—and there was basil and lilies in the lap of the Prophet (upon whom be the benediction and the peace of God !), and there was once a man who had three daughters and, wishing to depart on pilgrimage, asked each of them what he should bring back for her. ‘Gold and silver bracelets crusted with gems,’ said the eldest. ‘Gilded slippers,’ said the second. But the youngest asked time to reflect before she answered. As soon as she found herself alone in her own chamber, a Jinnīah appeared before her, saying :

‘Ask your father to bring you The Kaftān* of Love Spotted with Passion.’ Then she disappeared. When the moment came for her father’s departure, the little one asked him for The Kaftān of Love Spotted with Passion, and the good man, promising to find it for her, set forth upon the road of Allāh. He accomplished his pilgrimage to the sacred city and bought fine bracelets there for the eldest daughter, and gilded slippers for the second. But he forgot the kaftān.

Yet when he was half-way home he remem-

Tales of Fez

bered his promise and asked this garment of all he met. Everyone thought that he was mad. Some laughed in his face, others answered him gently that they did not know, yet others sighed in silence and made off as quickly as possible. But no one helped him at all in the matter.

At length, one day, he met, in a certain solitary place, a venerable old man sitting at the foot of a tree in deep meditation, and having white hair and a white beard which fell below his knees. When the man asked his usual question, the sheikh made answer :

‘ My poor child, what are you seeking ? Do you not know that it is impossible for a human to see the Kaftān of Love ? Yet, if you absolutely hold to the attempt, you must follow my instructions point by point. After a half-day’s journey from this place you will reach a very great tree. Sit down below it and wait. You will be given seven dishes on a wooden tray, one after the other. Taste of each of them and then go down to the edge of the sea ; drink a few mouthfuls of her water and then wait. Have courage, and God accord you peace ! ’

The traveller followed this advice, and all came to pass as the sheikh had said. Soon after he had drunk of the water of the sea, a being with the appearance of a man came up out of the waves, and said to him :

From the Arabic

‘He who has eaten of our food and drunken of our water is worthy to be given the desire of his heart. Why have you come here, and what do you wish?’

‘I wish,’ answered the father, ‘The Kaftān of Love Spotted with Passion.’

‘That is well,’ said the mysterious being. ‘Cast yourself into the sea, and you shall see what you shall see.’

So the man dived, and soon found a door below the waves. He passed through this, and came into the courtyard of a vast palace, where slaves were walking. ‘What do you wish?’ asked one of them. ‘The Kaftān of Love,’ he answered. ‘Come into this room,’ said the slave.

The man obeyed, and saw a male figure of imposing aspect, seated upon a splendid throne in the middle of that room. He saluted the seated figure three times, as we salute Sultāns, and asked him for the Kaftān of Love.’

The being welcomed him kindly and gave him a morsel of sandal-wood.

‘Hand it to the girl who wishes the thing,’ he advised, ‘and tell her to put henna upon herself, to wash her room very carefully, to go to the hammām, and then, after shutting herself in alone, to burn a small piece of this wood, and may God give you peace!’

Tales of Fez

Being delighted that he would be able to pleasure all his three daughters, the traveller returned home, gave his presents, and carefully repeated to his youngest the advice of the King of the Jinn.

The young girl, with no delay, did all that she had to do, and, when she had burned a little of the sandal-wood, a troop of beings, carrying lanterns, came and knocked at the door of the house, crying to the merchant to give his youngest daughter to them. If he should ever wish to see her again, he had but, they said, to go to a certain place and call her with his mind, and they themselves would then appear to conduct him to his child.

The girl departed fearlessly with them, and came to the palace of the Kaftān of Love. There she was placed in a room with a little negro to serve her, who gave her dinner and then made tea for her; but, in the last glass of tea which she drank, he placed a pinch of powder which plunged her into a profound sleep.

Now the Kaftān of Love was a Jinnī of the race of the Jinn, who had fallen in love with the young girl as he flew through the air one day and saw her sitting beautifully and gently at her window. He was the son of the King of that submarine palace, and the palace itself

From the Arabic

communicated by a glass pipe with the room where the child had been established. The Kaftān of Love now came by way of the glass pipe and joyfully contemplated the object of his love. He did not wake the little person, but lay down beside her until morning and departed before she was awake.

He did the same thing every day, and the girl's life went forward thus ; for the small negro put her to sleep every evening with banj before the coming of her mysterious husband. At the end of some months she began to grow rather weary, since she did nothing but eat and sleep, and saw no human face save that of the little slave. During this time also, her sisters began to regret her absence and ardently desired to see her. At their request, the merchant went to the place which he had been told to visit and sat down with closed eyes, thinking of his daughter. When he opened them again at the end of a moment, he found himself on the shore of the sea, and saw a little negro coming towards him, who asked him what he wished.

‘I have come to take my daughter home,’ he answered, ‘for her sisters wish to see her.’

‘No good will come of such a departure.’

‘I am resolved upon it, and her sisters have a great need to see her once again.’

‘I will go and tell my master.’

Tales of Fez

With that the slave departed, and presently returned with the announcement that the Kaftān of Love consented to his wife's leaving at the important hour of evening prayer, on condition that the little negro himself came to fetch her back on the morrow at the same time.

The father promised, shut his eyes once more, and found himself at home. And that very evening his daughter knocked at the door, accompanied by the little negro.

After they had tenderly embraced her, her mother and her two sisters questioned her about her husband and her life :

‘ Are you happy ? Where do you live ? ’

‘ Down there,’ she answered.

‘ And your husband ? What sort of man is he ? Does he love you ? Is he kind to you ? Where does he live ? ’

‘ Down there,’ she answered simply, and would add nothing more.

But when night had come and she went in to lie down with her sisters, these pressed her with new questions and sought for detailed information about this mysterious husband and his life.

‘ I have never seen my husband ! ’ she confessed at length. ‘ I only see the little negro who looks after me and gives me all I want. Every evening he makes tea, and I always go to sleep

From the Arabic

after the last glass. In the morning I always wake alone upon my bed.'

'Oh, how can you endure to live under such conditions?' cried her sisters. 'It is all too monotonous and too mysterious. You do not even know who your husband is. This cannot go on. You must follow our advice. Here are a napkin, a candle and some matches. To-morrow, when the little negro gives you the glass of tea, you must not drink it; you must pour it into this napkin, and then pretend to go to sleep. Thus you shall see all.'

Delighted with the idea of making plain her own dark problem, the young girl departed on the morrow with the little negro, who had come punctually to fetch her, and did all that her sisters had told her.

Thinking her asleep, the little negro took her in his arms and laid her on the bed. Then the Kaftān of Love came by way of the glass pipe, ate the rest of the supper, drank tea, and lay down to sleep by the side of his human wife, after having tenderly regarded and caressed her. When she was sure that he slept, she took the candle out of her pocket, lighted it and brought it near the face of the Jinnī.

She saw a very handsome young man lying by her, whose lids were closed and whose breast rose and fell regularly beneath a kaftān

Tales of Fez

of silk. Looking more closely at this garment, she noticed that the button-holes which closed it were each provided with a little padlock and a tiny key. Pricked on by curiosity, she worked the locks and opened the kaftān . . . and lo ! she found herself descending a great stairway into a vast house. Following the steps, she came first to a room filled with gold bars, then to one filled with powdered gold, and lastly to one cumbered with all kinds of precious stones. When she had visited these three, she ascended the staircase and shut all the padlocks. But, through her clumsiness, a drop of boiling wax fell from the candle on to the face of her husband, who woke in a very bad temper, divining all that had passed.

‘I was right to say that your journey to your father’s house had not good fortune in it.’

‘It was written,’ she answered humbly. ‘It was my Destiny. But my intention was by no means evil.’

‘I am willing to pardon you this time. But you must never return to your father’s house again.’ After that day, the Kaftān of Love came openly into his wife’s presence, without having her first sent to sleep with powdered banj. They lived thus together for six months, and at the end of that time the girl’s father came as before to ask leave to lead her back to his house. The

From the Arabic

little negro made known his master's intention in this matter, but the father so insisted that he was at length received by the Kaftān of Love in person, who told him that he had pardoned his wife her first indiscretion, but that he would certainly not stomach a second one. With this warning he allowed her to be absent again, between the important hours of the evening prayer of two days.

As soon as she arrived, her sisters questioned her anew, and she told them how she had succeeded, thanks to their stratagem, in seeing her husband, who now no longer hid himself from her.

‘What is his name?’ they asked.

‘I do not know. I have never questioned him about it.’

‘You must do so. And if he refuses to answer, you must sulk, you must become sad, you must refuse to eat and drink and speak, until he gives way and tells you his name. That is how it pays to behave with men.’

The little one answered by hearing and obeisance and, as soon as she arrived back at her own place, assumed a most dejected air, bitterly complaining to her husband that he had never told her his name.

The Kaftān of Love was indeed angry at this, and he answered that he would never tell his

Tales of Fez

name, since it was infinitely better that she should not know.

‘ My husband does not love me any more,’ she cried with a burst of tears. ‘ How can a woman live if she does not know her husband’s name ? ’ And she repulsed all the dishes which the little slave brought to her. Then, after she had sulked for a long time, she returned to the assault.

‘ I cannot tell you. Be quiet ! ’ said her husband.

But it is not easy to come to the end of a woman’s obstinacy. In final exasperation, the Jinnī went out into the courtyard and, by breathing air strongly into his lungs, began to swell and grow greater and greater, until his head was as high as the roof of the house. Then he cried several times in a horrible great voice :

‘ My name is The Kaftān of Love Spotted with Passion ! The Kaftān of Love ! The Kaftān of Love Spotted with Passion ! ’

Then, seizing his wife in his giant hands, he took her up and cast her far off into
a terrible deserted
place. . .

*Sayings and Adventures of the
Sultān's Dādā*

THERE WAS ONCE A SULTĀN IN FEZ—BUT Allāh is the only Sultān and reigns for ever—who was wiser and more just and glorious than any who have come after. But the sole Wise and the sole Just and the sole Glorious is Allāh. And this Sultān's mother had died as he was born, so that the milk and influence of his boyhood had depended upon a nurse picked from among the negro women in Fez by the unanimous voice of all the doctors and wise men of his father's court. When this Sultān came to the throne, he continued to pay great respect to his dādā, and allowed her a place of special licence in the women's and the men's parts of the palace.

For she was a woman of note ; she was hideous and wise and very fat ; her face made the birds flying in heaven drop their eggs out of due time ; her swift answers put every procuress to shame ; she was as lustful as a sparrow, as shameless as a bride, and had a kind heart.

I will tell you some of the things she said and did.

It happened once that the Sultān looked at and desired a very beautiful slave girl, belonging to an unimportant man about the court. But her

Tales of Fez

owner loved her, and, with many expressions of respect, refused to sell her. At length the Sultān grew angry, and offered the man the choice of selling or death. Then he had the girl weighed against her weight in gold pieces, and gave these to the man, who went forth from the Presence with a broken heart.

Later that day the Sultān boasted to Dādā of his generosity ; but she refused to extol him for it.

Yet, when the time came for the noon meal on the following day, after the Sultān had blunted the first edge of his desire with the girl, Dādā intercepted the slave who was bringing the chief dish into the Presence, and took it from him. Now this dish was the Sultān's favourite, of skewered mutton-chops with a peculiar sauce. Throwing these out of the dish, Dādā made a great motion in their place, and then covered all again with the original blue silk. Afterwards she carried the dish into the Presence, saying to the Sultān that she would that day serve him herself because of his generosity. But, when she uncovered the terrible contents of the dish and the Sultān, stopping his eyes and nose with his hand, ordered all the palace cooks to be put to death, she said : ' What does it matter ? They are of the same weight, my son. They are even a trifle more, for this dish has no bones.'

From the Arabic

One morning the Sultān, who had eaten and drunken too heavily the night before and was distempered, allowed his spleen to overcome his usual subtlety in statecraft, and, between two envoys, the one over-honest and the one over-suave, made the less advantageous alliance.

As night fell on that day he sent for Dādā and asked her to mix him sherbert in a fashion which she only knew. 'Hearing is obedience!' she answered and, shuffling off her ponderous slippers, smacked the Sultān's cheeks hard with them, once on the right and once on the left. 'O filthy Dādā!' cried the Sultān, 'how long shall I bear you? You have earned death by doing this.'

'It is my misfortune,' answered Dādā, getting again into her slippers. 'You lost your wits this morning, my son, I have just found them.' Dādā lay once on the marble of the harīm privy, taking great pleasure with a big green vegetable marrow. As matters were in ecstatic train, her favourite little girl of all the Sultān's women entered the privy, picking her nose with her finger, thinking herself quite alone. 'O child,' gasped out Dādā to the intruder, 'what is the use of trying to teach you manners?'

A madman was arrested by the guards in a certain street in Fez, while he was disturbing the citizens and crying: 'Even Maghrib is a

Tales of Fez

shadow, and we shadows on that shadow, and the Sultān a shadow upon us shadows.' As he was an object for mockery, he was dragged into the Presence, and the Sultān mocked him, and all the court mocked him, and the grand-wazīr mocked him, saying: 'He is so dull of perception that if he were beaten he would say it rains.'

After this the Sultān, wishing a special mock that should transcend all which went before, sent for Dādā and, when she entered the dīwān, said to her: 'Come, Dādā, this madman has said to the people: "Even Maghrib is a shadow, and we shadows on that shadow, and the Sultān a shadow upon us shadows." We have all mocked him as cleverly as we could, and our grand-wazīr has said: "He is so dull of perception that if he were beaten he would say it rains." Come now, excel yourself, Dādā, and say what you say.'

So Dādā, who hated the grand-wazīr, considered and then said: 'This matter of shadows and of shadows upon shadows is too high for me. But as for your most gracious grand-wazīr, it seems to me that his mind is so shining bright that only if his body were burned would he be at peace with himself.'

But the madman was beaten, and Dādā behaved in an outrageous fashion for many days.

From the Arabic

One day when the Sultān, who was devoted to his horses, wandered without an attendant among the stables, he saw a large groom, in stooping to make water, display a very great inheritance. At the same moment Dādā, who had been rather drunk all day and had also perceived the magnificence of the groom, came out and put a handful of gold pieces into the man's palm. As the Sultān watched without either of the two noticing him, Dādā lay down and made ready to receive the wonderful merchandise for which she had paid. But, just before the thing could take place, the Sultān ran forward, brandishing his sword. The groom fled, and Dādā reluctantly covered herself.

‘O disgraceful Dādā, O blot upon our reign!’ cried the Sultān. But Dādā, rolling over in the muck, answered: ‘Better disgrace than death.’ Then, unwrapping one of her great nipples, she sorrowfully continued: ‘Not once did I deny you this, my child. And yet your need was never greater than mine.’

Dādā chanced to break wind in the very Presence, and the Sultān, growing angry at this, called her the daughter of a wanton bitch. ‘You must be wrong, my son,’ answered the old woman with a sigh. ‘Qualities descend from mother to daughter, and a bitch can reach many parts of herself that I cannot.’

Tales of Fez

There was a time when the Sultān doted on a girl who was sent to him, and let his spirit be occupied with her to the exclusion of all other things. She was beautiful and very frail and most evil. Her breasts and flanks were slighter than is thought fitting, and her body was everywhere as cool as those of little children. Her mind was a knot of serpents, both poisonous and quick in doing ; and her life had the tenure of the flame of a match in a garden. After some months in which she had wound and interwound the affairs of Maghrib into subtle confusion, while the Sultān hung upon her soft red lip, the breath of Allāh blew upon that light flame and the girl died. She was prepared and set out, and the Sultān, throwing aside his turban and tearing his face, lay down over her knees.

As he was murmuring : ‘ O slight one of my reign, O wild dove, I die with you, I die with you, even I, the King ! ’, Dādā, who had ventured near, cried : ‘ Well done, my child ! Those are the first wise words I have heard in Fez for seven months. A girl like that is better to die with than to live with.’ Then the Sultān, who had not heard Dādā’s terrible voice for a long time, rolled away from the body and sat up and wept. At last he smiled, and then laughed so that he fell over on his backside.

From the Arabic

It was the Sultān's custom to take Dādā with him, when she was not overcome with drinking and could walk very softly, on his secret visits of inspection among his women.

One night, instead of remaining with his immediate favourite as all the girls had thought he would, he called his nurse to him, and the two made progress among the other rooms of the harīm.

As ill-fortune would have it, when they came to the chamber of a certain girl called Narcissus Petal, who was Dādā's preferred of all the women, and looked through a contrived lattice, they saw her clasping, with a great exchange of sighs and poetry, and among the remains of feasting, a rich young merchant, as fair as the full moon, who had been introduced in women's clothes into the secret places of the palace. The Sultān rushed in upon these two, crying for the bearer of his sword to kill them, but Dādā ran past him, and behaved as if she was demented. Before the astonished eyes of all three, she seized a banana which lay upon the floor near a bowl of flavoured rice cream, and thrust the fruit, with sighs and groans of delight, several times into the sweet dish. Then, changing her expression from amatory to a fine imitation of great wrath, she mashed the banana beneath her naked feet and dashed the bowl in

Tales of Fez

pieces against the wall, crying: 'Thus! thus! They have deserved to die!'

'O bestial Dādā,' cried the Sultān, while the guilty couple cowered before him, 'why do you do this?' Panting excessively, 'I have taken vengeance on the two vile things,' Dādā replied, and then, throwing her dirty kerchief to the culprits, she said: 'You are under my protection. The Sultān may not imitate the slave.'

When Dādā felt death coming to her, and took to the place where she lay, the Sultān would not leave her by day or night. At last she said: 'A thing troubles me, my son.' 'What is that?' asked the Sultān between his tears, and Dādā replied: 'God does not allow a black person into His Compassion.' Then she fell silent. Afterwards she smiled, and said: 'But you, my son, are a King, and yet you have put up with this black old bitch because she was amusing. Have you not put up with me? Have you not needed me?' 'O Dādā,' answered the weeping Sultān, 'I have indeed put up with you, I have indeed needed you.' 'Then,' she said in delight, 'Allāh, who is also a King, may perhaps put up with me; He may need an amusing black old bitch in His Paradise.'

After Dādā had been buried, the Sultān pro-

From the Arabic

claimed mourning for a year in the whole of Maghrib, and himself tasted no joy for that period. A poet said of her at the time :

*Dādā was very large and black,
Greater and darker is our lack.*

The End.

NOTES

PAGE

43	<i>Dādā</i>	black nurse.
102	<i>Sidna</i>	our Lord.
109	<i>Kaftān</i>	under-tunic.

