

SOUTHERN CITIZEN.

WHAT DO WE LIVE FOR, BUT TO IMPROVE OURSELVES AND BE USEFUL TO ONE ANOTHER?

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AHMED THE COBBLER.

In the great city of Isfahan lived Ahmed the Cobbler, an honest and industrious man, whose wish was to pass through life quietly, and he might have done so, had he not married a handsome wife, who although she had condescended to accept of him as a husband, was far from being contented with his humble sphere of life.

Sittara, such was the name of Ahmed's wife, was forever forming foolish schemes of riches and grandeur, and though Ahmed never encouraged them, he was too fond a husband to quarrel with what gave her pleasure; an incredible spite or spite of the head, was his only answer to her of ten wild day dreams; and she continued to persuade herself that she was certainly destined to great fortune.

It happened one evening, while in the temple of Allah, that she went to the Hemmam, where she saw a lady richly dressed in a magnificent robe, covered with jewels, and surrounded by slaves. This was the very condition Sittara had always longed for, and she eagerly inquired the name of the happy person who had so many attendants and fine jewels. She learned it was the wife of the chief astrologer to the King. With this information she returned home. Her husband had met her at the door, but was received with a frown; nor could all his caresses obtain a smile or a word; for several hours she continued silent, and in apparent misery, at length she said:

Cease your caresses; unless you are ready to give me a proof that you do really and sincerely love me!

'What proof of love,' exclaimed poor Ahmed, 'can you desire, which I will not give.'

'Give over cobbling; it is a vile low trade, and never yields more than ten or twelve dollars a day. Turn astrologer; your fortune will be made, and I shall have all I wish, and be happy.'

'Astrologer!' cried Ahmed, 'astrologer! have you forgotten who I am—a cobbler, without any learning—that you want me to engage in a profession which requires so much skill and knowledge? I neither think nor care about your qualifications, and the enraged wife will know for that if you do not turn astrologer immediately, I will be divorced from you to-morrow.'

The cobbler remonstrated, but in vain. The figure of the astrologer's wife, with her jewels and her slaves had taken complete possession of Sittara's imagination. All night she dreamed her; she dreamt nothing else, and on awaking declared she would leave the house, if her husband did not comply with her wishes. What could poor Ahmed do? he was no astrologer; but he was doubtfully fond of his wife, and he could not bear the thought of being divorced. He promised to obey, and she said his title stock-bought him a knowledge of astronomical phenomena, and a table of the twelve signs of the zodiac. The

table of the zodiac was to be the key to the secret of the ruby. Ahmed, the cobbler, was in great distress, having lost his chief ruby belonging to the crown. Every search had been made to recover the precious jewel, but to no purpose; and as the jeweler knew he could no longer conceal its loss from the king, he looked toward to do all in his power to recover it.

It so happened that the king's jeweler was passing by. He was in great distress, having lost his chief ruby belonging to the crown. Every search had been made to recover the precious jewel, but to no purpose; and as the jeweler knew he could no longer conceal its loss from the king, he looked toward to do all in his power to recover it.

A passing man will catch at a broken reed; the jeweler had so long heard the sound of the word astrologer, that he went up to Ahmed, and told him what had happened, and said, 'If you understand your art, you must be able to discover the king's ruby. Do so, and I will give you two hundred pieces of gold. But if you do not succeed, within six hours, I will use all my influence at court to have you put to death as an impostor.'

Poor Ahmed was thunderstruck. He stood long without being able to move or speak, reflecting on his misfortunes, and grieving above all, that his wife, whom he loved, had, by her envy and selfishness, brought him to such a fearful alternative. 'Full of these sad thoughts,' he exclaimed aloud, 'Oh woman, woman! thou art more baneful to the happiness of man than the poisonous dragon of the desert!'

The lost ruby had been entrusted by the jeweler's wife, who discerned by the look that his eyes were fixed on it, to a woman who had been a slave to his husband. This lady, on seeing her master speak to the astrologer, drew down and when she heard Ahmed, at those moments of apparent abstraction, compare a woman to a poisonous dragon, she was satisfied he must know every thing. She ran to her mistress, and breathless with surprise, 'You are discovered, my dear mistress; you are discovered by a vile astrologer. Before six hours are past, the whole town will know that you will become infamous, if you cannot find some way of prevailing on him to be merciful.—She then related what she had seen and heard, and Ahmed's exclamation carried as complete objection to the mind of the terrified mistress as it had done to that of her slave.

The jeweler's wife, hastily throwing off her veil, went in search of the dreaded astrologer. When she found him, she threw herself at his feet, crying—'Spare my honor and my life, and I will confess every thing!'

'What can you have to confess to me?' exclaimed Ahmed in amazement. 'Nothing! nothing! with which you are not already acquainted. You know too well that I stole the ruby from the king's crown. I did so, to punish my husband, who uses me most cruelly; and I thought by this means to obtain riches and have him put to death. But you, most wonderful man, from whom nothing is hidden, have discovered and defeated my wicked plan. I beg only for mercy, and will do whatever you command me.'

An angel from heaven could not have brought more consolation to Ahmed than did the jeweler's wife. He assumed all the dignified solemnity that became his new character, and said—'My name, I know all that thou hast done, and it is fortunate for thee that thou hast confessed to me thy sin, and beg for mercy before it was too late. Return to thy home, put the ruby under the

pillow of the couch on which thy husband sleeps, let it be left under the farthest of the door, and he shall be guilty of no sin, even be suspected.'

The jeweler's wife returned home and did as she was desired. An hour Ahmed followed her and told the jeweler he had made his calculations and found by the aspect of the sun and moon, and by the configuration of the stars that the ruby was at that moment lying under the pillow of his couch, on the side farthest from the door. The jeweler thought Ahmed must be crazy, but as a ray of hope is like a ray from heaven to the wretched he ran to his couch and there to his joy and wonder, found the ruby in the very place described.—He came back to Ahmed, embraced him, called him his dearest friend and preserver of his life, gave him the two hundred pieces of gold, declaring he was the first astrologer of the age.

These pieces of gold, he gave to the poor cobbler, who returned home more thankful to God for his preservation than by his good fortune. The moment he entered the door, his wife ran up to him and exclaimed, 'Well my dear astrologer! what success?'

'I have said Ahmed, very gravely, there are two hundred pieces of gold: I hope you will be satisfied now and not ask me again to hazard my life, as I have done this morning.' He then related all that had passed. But the recital made a very different impression on the lady from what those occurrences had made on Ahmed. She saw nothing but the gold, which would enable her to live with the chief astrologer's wife at the Hemmam. 'Coward!' said she, 'courage thy dearest husband! this is only your first labor in your new and noble profession. Go on and prosper; and two shall become rich and happy.' In vain Ahmed remonstrated and represented the danger; she burst into tears, and begged him not to leave her, ending with her usual threat insisting upon a divorce.

Ahmed's heart melted, and he agreed to make another trial. Accordingly, next morning he sallied forth with his astrolabe, his twelve signs of the zodiac, and his almanac, exclaiming as before, 'I am an astrologer!—I know the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the twelve signs of the zodiac. I can calculate nativities—I can foretell every thing that is to happen!' A crowd again gathered around him, but it was now with wonder and not ridicule—for the story of the ruby had gone abroad, and the voice of fame had converted the poor cobbler Ahmed into the ablest and most learned astrologer that was ever seen at Isfahan.

While every body was gazing at him, and admiring his success, she was the wife of one of the richest merchants in the city, and had just been at the Hemmam, where she had lost a valuable necklace and ear-rings, she was now returning home in great alarm, lest her husband should suspect her of having given her jewels to a lover. Seeing the crowd around Ahmed, she asked the reason of their assembling, and was informed of the whole story of the famous astrologer; how he had been a cobbler, was inspired with supernatural knowledge, and could with the help of his astrolabe, his twelve signs of the zodiac, and his almanac, discover all that ever had, or ever would happen in the world. The story of the jeweler and the king's ruby was then told her, accompanied by a thousand wonderful circumstances which had never occurred. The lady, quite satisfied of his skill, went up to Ahmed and questioned her loss, saying, 'a man of your knowledge and penetration will easily discover my jewels; find them and I will give you fifty pieces of gold.'

The poor cobbler was quite confounded, and looked down, thinking only how to escape without a public exposure of his ignorance. The lady, in passing through the crowd, had torn the part of her veil. Ahmed's downcast noticed part of this, and wishing to inform her of it in a delicate manner, before it was observed by others, he whispered to her, 'Lady look down at the rent.' The lady's head was full of her loss, and she was at that moment endeavoring to recollect how it could have occurred. Ahmed's speech brot it at once to her mind, and she exclaim-

ed in delighted surprise, 'stay here a few moments, thou great astrologer.—I will return immediately with the reward thou so well deserve.' Saying this, she left him and soon returned, carrying in one hand the necklace and ear-ring, and in the other a purse with fifty pieces of gold. 'There is gold for thee thou wonderful man! to whom all the secrets of nature are revealed.'

'I had quite forgotten where I laid the jewels, and without thee should never have found them. But when thou desiredst me to look at the rent below, I instantly recollected the rent near the bottom of the wall in the bath room, where before dressing, I had hid them. I can now go home in peace and comfort, and it is all owing to thee thou wisest of men!'

After these words, she walked away, and Ahmed returned to his home, thankful to Providence for his preservation, and fully resolved never again to attempt it. His handsome wife, however, could not yet rival the chief astrologer's lady in her appearance at the Hemmam, so she renewed her entreaties and threats to make her lord husband continue his career as an astrologer.

About this time it happened that the king's treasury was robbed of forty chests of gold and jewels, forming the greater part of the wealth of the kingdom. The high treasurer and other officers of State used all diligence to find the thieves, but in vain. The king sent for his astrologer, and declared, that if the robbers were not detected by a stated time, he, as well as the principal ministers should be put to death. Only one day of the short period given them remained. All their search had proved fruitless, and the chief astrologer, who had made his calculations, exhausted his art to no purpose, had resigned himself to his fate, when one of his friends advised him to send for the wonderful cobbler, who had become so famous for his extraordinary discoveries. Two slaves were immediately despatched for Ahmed, whom they commanded to go with them to their masters. You see the effects of your ambition! said the poor cobbler to his wife; 'I am going to my death. The king's astrologer has heard of my presumption, and is determined to have me executed as an impostor.'

On entering the palace of the chief astrologer, he was surprised to see that dignified person come forward to receive him, and lead him to the seat of honor, and not less so to hear himself thus addressed. 'The ways of heaven most learned and excellent Ahmed, are unsearchable. The high are often cast down and the low are lifted up. The whole world depends upon fate and fortune. It is my turn to be depressed by fate; it is thine to be exalted by fortune.'

His speech was here interrupted by a messenger from the king, who having heard of the cobbler's fame, desired his attendance. Poor Ahmed now concluded that it was all over with him, and followed the king's messenger, praying to God that he would deliver him from his peril. When he came into the king's presence, he bent his body to the ground, and wished his majesty long life and prosperity. 'Tell me, Ahmed,' said the King, 'who has stolen my treasure?'

'It was not one man,' answered Ahmed, 'after some consideration; there were forty thieves concerned in the robbery.'

'Very well,' said the king; 'but who were they? and what have they done with my gold and jewels?'

'These questions,' said Ahmed, 'I cannot now answer, but I hope to satisfy your majesty, if you will grant me forty days to make my calculations.'

'I grant you forty days,' said the king; 'but when they are past, if my treasury is not found, your life shall pay the forfeit.'

Ahmed returned to his house well pleased; for he resolved to take advantage of the time allowed him to fly from a city where his fame was likely to be his ruin. 'Well, Ahmed,' said his wife as he entered the house, 'what news at court?'

'No news at all,' said he 'except that I am to be put to death at the end of forty days, unless I find forty chests of gold and jewels, which have been stolen from the royal treasury.'

'But you will discover the thieves.'

'How! by what means am I to find them?'

'By the same art which discovered the ruby and the lady's necklace.'

'The same art?' replied Ahmed. 'Foolish woman! thou knowest that I have no art, and that I have only pretended to it for the sake of pleasing thee. But I have had sufficient skill to gain forty days, during which time you may easily escape to some other city, and with the money I now possess, and the aid of my former occupation, we may still obtain an honest livelihood.'

'An honest livelihood,' repeated his lady, with scorn. 'Will thy cobbling, thou mean spiritless wretch! ever enable me to go to the Hemmam like the wife of the chief astrologer? Hear me, Ahmed! I think only of discovering the king's treasure. Hast thou not just as good a chance of doing so as thou hadst of finding the ruby, and the necklace and ear-rings. At all events, I am determined thou shalt not escape; and shouldst thou attempt to runaway, I will inform the king's officers, and have thee taken and put to death, even before the forty day expires. Thou knowest me too well, Ahmed, to doubt my keeping my word. So take courage, and endeavor to make thy fortune, and place me in that rank of life to which my beauty entitles me!'

The poor cobbler was dismayed at this speech; but knowing that there was no hope of changing his wife's resolution, he resigned himself to his fate. 'Well,' said he, 'you will shall be obeyed. All I desire is to pass the few remaining days of my life as comfortably as I can. You know I am no scholar, and have little skill in reckoning; so there are forty dates—give me one every night after I have said my prayers, that I may put them in a jar, and by counting them, may always see how many of the few days I have to live are gone.'

The lady pleased at carrying her point, took the dates, and promised to be punctual in doing what her husband desired.

Meanwhile the thieves who had stolen the king's treasure, having been kept from leaving the city by fear of detection and pursuit, had received accurate information of every measure taken to discover them. One of them was among the crowd before the palace on the day the king sent for Ahmed, and hearing that the cobbler had immediately declared their exact number, he ran in a fright to his comrades, and exclaimed: 'We are all found out! Ahmed, the new astrologer, has told the king that there are forty of us.'

'There needed no astrologer to tell that,' said the captain of the gang. 'This Ahmed with all his simple good nature, is a shrewd fellow. Forty chests having been stolen, he naturally guessed there must be forty thieves, and he has made a good hit that is all; still it is prudent to watch him, for he certainly has made some strange discoveries. One of us must go to night, after dark to the terrace of this cobbler's house, and listen to his conversation with his handsome wife for he is said to be very fond of her, and will, no doubt tell her what success he has had in his endeavors to detect us.'

Every body approved of this scheme; and soon after night fall, one of the thieves repaired to the terrace. He arrived there just as the cobbler had finished his evening prayers, and his wife was giving him the first date. 'Ah!' said Ahmed as he took it, 'there is one of the forty.'

The thief, hearing these words, hastened, in consternation to the gang, and told them that the moment he took his post he had been perceived by the supernatural knowledge of Ahmed, who immediately told his wife that one of them was there. The spy's tale was not believed by his hardened companions; something might have been imputed to his fears; he might have been mistaken, in short, it was determined to send two men the next night at the same hour. They reached the house just as Ahmed, having finished his evening prayers, he had received the second date, and heard him exclaim, 'My dear wife to night there are two of them.'

The astonished thieves fled, and told their still incredulous comrades what they had heard. Three men were con-