

Edward Lane's *The Arabian Nights*

The Sultan and His Vow

It is written in the chronicles of the Sassanian monarchs that there once lived an illustrious prince, beloved by his own subjects for his wisdom and his prudence, and feared by his enemies for his courage and for the hardy and well-disciplined army of which he was the leader. This prince had two sons, the elder called Schah-riar, and the younger Schah-zenan, both equally good and deserving of praise.

When the old king died at the end of a long and glorious reign, Schah-riar, his eldest son, ascended the throne and reigned in his stead. Schah-zenan, however, was not in the least envious, and a friendly contest soon arose between the two brothers as to which could best promote the happiness of the other. Schah-zenan did all he could to show his loyalty and affection, while the new sultan loaded his brother with all possible honors, and in order that he might in some degree share the sultan's power and wealth, bestowed on him the kingdom of Great Tartary. Schah-zenan immediately went to take possession of the empire allotted him, and fixed his residence at Samarcand, the chief city.

After a separation of ten years Schah-riar so ardently desired to see his brother, that he sent his first vizier, with a splendid embassy, to invite him to revisit his court. As soon as Schah-zenan was informed of the approach of the vizier, he went out to meet him, with all his ministers, in most magnificent dress, and inquired after the health of the sultan, his brother. Having replied to these affectionate inquiries, the vizier told the purpose of his coming. Schah-zenan, who was much affected at the kindness and recollection of his brother, then addressed the vizier in these words: "Sage vizier, the sultan, my brother, does me too much honor. It is impossible that his wish to see me can exceed my desire of again beholding him. You have come at a happy moment. My kingdom is tranquil, and in ten days' time I will be ready to depart with you. Meanwhile pitch your tents on this spot, and I will order every refreshment and accommodation for you and your whole train."

At the end of ten days everything was ready, and Schah-zenan took a tender leave of the queen, his consort. Accompanied by such officers as he had appointed to attend him, he left Samarcand in the evening and camped near the tents of his brother's ambassador, that they might proceed on their journey early the following morning. Wishing, however, once more to see his queen, whom he tenderly loved, he returned privately to the palace, and went directly to her apartment. There, to his extreme grief, he found her in the company of a slave whom she plainly loved better than himself. Yielding to the first outburst of his indignation, the unfortunate monarch drew his scimitar, and with one rapid stroke slew them both.

He then went from the city as privately as he had entered it, and returned to his pavilion. Not a word did he say to any one of what had happened. At dawn he ordered the tents to be struck, and the party set forth on their journey to the sound of drums and other musical instruments. The whole train was filled with joy, except the king, who could think of nothing but his queen, and he was a prey to the deepest grief and melancholy during the whole journey.

The Book of The THOUSAND NIGHTS AND A NIGHT (ALF LAYLAH WA LAYLAH)

By Sir Richard F. Burton (1885)

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionating, the Compassionate!
PRAISE BE TO ALLAH * THE BENEFICENT KING * THE CREATOR OF THE
UNIVERSE * LORD OF THE THREE WORLDS * WHO SET UP THE FIRMAMENT
WITHOUT PILLARS IN ITS STEAD * AND WHO STRETCHED OUT THE EARTH
EVEN AS A BED * AND GRACE, AND PRAYER-BLESSING BE UPON OUR LORD
MOHAMMED * LORD OF APOSTOLIC MEN * AND UPON HIS FAMILY AND
COMPANION TRAIN * PRAYER AND BLESSINGS ENDURING AND GRACE WHICH
UNTO THE DAY OF DOOM SHALL REMAIN * AMEN! * O THOU OF THE THREE
WORLDS SOVEREIGN!

And afterwards. Verily the works and words of those gone before us have become instances and examples to men of our modern day, that folk may view what admonishing chances befel other folk and may therefrom take warning; and that they may peruse the annals of antique peoples and all that hath betided them, and be thereby ruled and restrained:--Praise, therefore, be to Him who hath made the histories of the Past an admonition unto the Present! Now of such instances are the tales called "A Thousand Nights and a Night," together with their far famed legends and wonders.

Therein it is related (but Allah is All knowing of His hidden things and All ruling and All honoured and All giving and All gracious and All merciful that, in tide of yore and in time long gone before, there was a King of the Kings of the Banu Sasan in the Islands of India and China, a Lord of armies and guards and servants and dependents. He left only two sons, one in the prime of manhood and the other yet a youth, while both were Knights and Braves, albeit the elder was a doughtier horseman than the younger. So he succeeded to the empire his name was King Shahryar, and he made his younger brother, Shah Zaman hight, King of Samarcand in Barbarian land.. When the Wazir entered the city he proceeded straightway to the palace, where he presented himself in the royal presence; and, after kissing ground and praying for the King's health and happiness and for victory over all his enemies, he informed him that his brother was yearning to see him, and prayed for the pleasure of a visit.

... "I hear and I obey the commands of the beloved brother!" adding to the Wazir, "But we will not march till after the third day's hospitality."

... On the fourth day he made ready for wayfare and got together sumptuous presents befitting his elder brother's majesty, and stablished his chief Wazir viceroy of the land during his absence. Then he caused his tents and camels and mules to be brought forth and encamped, with their bales and loads, attend ants and guards, within sight of the city, in readiness to set out next morning for his brother's capital. But when the night was half spent he bethought him that he had forgotten in his palace somewhat which he should have brought with him, so he re turned privily and entered his apartments, where he found the Queen, his wife, asleep on his own carpet bed, embracing with both arms a black cook of loathsome aspect and foul with kitchen grease and grime. When he saw this the world waxed black before his sight and he said, "If such case happen while I am yet within sight of the city what will be the doings of this damned whore during my long absence at my brother's court?" So he drew his scymitar and, cutting the two in four pieces with a single blow, left them on the carpet and returned presently to his camp without letting anyone know of what had happened.

Then he gave orders for immediate departure and set out at once and began his travel; but he could not help thinking over his wife's treason and he kept ever saying to himself, "How could she do this deed by me? How could she work her own death?," till excessive grief seized him, his colour changed to yellow, his body waxed weak and he was threatened with a dangerous malady, such an one as bringeth men to die.