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For the Southern Literary Messenger.

A TALE FROM FLORIAN.

THE following tale was translated from the French of M. Florian, by the present hand, about 7 or 8 years ago, for a Richmond newspaper. That translation its author has not seen since 1827; and lately meeting with the original again, it seemed new enough, as well as sufficiently pretty and interesting, to be worth presenting afresh to the public through the Southern Literary Messenger. It is seldom that so much varied incident has been compressed into so short a compass: yet the rapidity of the narrative has not hindered the writer from indulging a humor both playful and caustic, upon the foibles which he banters, and the vices and crimes which he holds up to detestation. And the moral, disclosed in unravelling the mystery of the allegorical personage from whom the story takes its name, is full at once of beauty and truth.

M.

BATHMENDI.

A PERSIAN STORY.

THE THOUSAND-AND-ONE NIGHTS have always appeared to me charming tales; but I should like them better, if they had oftener a moralscope. Scheherazade, I am aware, is too handsome to be at the trouble of being rational: I know, that with so pretty a face, she has no need of common sense; and that the sultan would have been less enamored, if she had been less silly. These great truths I devoutly believe: and I merely repeat, that for my own part, I would rather read stories which *make me reflect*, while they amuse me. Extravagance is a fine thing, no doubt; but a picture must have shade: and I would fain have reason appear now and then, to make folly go off the better. So an uncle of mine once thought. He had often sailed in the Levant; and had amused himself while there, by composing PERSIAN TALES. They are far below the *Thousand-and-one Nights* in imagination, but exceed them infinitely in number; for my uncle in his life-time made four thousand seven hundred and ninety-eight—all of which are now lost except the following one, preserved by me.

UNDER the reign of a Persian king, whose name my uncle does not tell, a merchant of Balsora was ruined by commercial disasters; and, collecting the shattered remains of his fortune, retired to the province of Kuisistan. He there bought a dwelling, and a farm which he cultivated badly, because he was perpetually regretting his days of opulence and ease. Chagrin shortened his life; he perceived his end to be near; and, calling his four sons around him, he said—"My children, I have nothing to bequeath you but this house, and a secret which I was bound to conceal till now. In the time of my wealth, I had for my friend the genius Alzim; who promised to befriend you when I should be

no more, and to divide a treasure amongst you. He dwells some miles hence, in the great forest of Kom. Go—find him: claim the treasure: but take heed not to believe." * * * * * Death here suppressed the merchant's voice.

His four sons, after interring and mourning him, repaired to the forest of Kom. They inquired for the mansion of the genius Alzim: it was readily shewn them. He was known to the whole country: he received kindly all who visited him; he heard their complaints, consoled them, and lent them money if they needed it. But these benefits were upon the sole condition of *implicitly obeying his directions*. This was his whim. No one could enter his palace without an oath to comply with this condition.

The oath did not deter the merchant's three eldest sons: the fourth, whose name was Tai, thought it a very ridiculous ceremony. Yet, being obliged to enter in order to receive the treasure, he swore, like his brothers: but reflecting on the dangerous consequences of so rash a vow, and remembering that his father, who frequently came to this palace, had passed his life in follies, he resolved, without committing perjury, to place himself out of danger; and, whilst they were leading him to the genius, stopped his ears with perfumed wax. Thus fortified, he prostrated himself before Alzim's throne. The genius made the sons of his ancient friend arise; embraced them, shed tears to his memory, and had a large chest brought, full of dariques. "Here," said he, "is the treasure I design for you. I am going to divide it among you: and I will then tell each the way he must take to be perfectly happy."

Tai heard not what the genius said; but watching him attentively, he saw in his eyes and visage traits of cunning and malignity which gave him much food for thought. Still, he received his portion of the treasure gratefully. Alzim, having thus enriched them, assumed an affectionate tone, and said; "My dear children, your good or bad fortune depends upon your meeting sooner or later a certain being named BATHMENDI, of whom all the world speaks, but whom few, very few, know. Wretched mortals grope after him in vain: But I, for the love I bear you, will whisper to each of you where he may be found." At these words, Alzim takes Bekir, the eldest brother, aside, and says—"My son, you were born with courage, and great military talents. The king of Persia has just sent an army against the Turks. Join that army: in the Persian camp you will find Bathmendi." Bekir thanks the genius, and already burns to march.

Alzim beckoned Mesrou, the second son, to approach. "You," said he, "have shrewdness, address, and a great propensity to falsehood. Take the road to Isbahan; 'tis at court that you must seek Bathmendi."

To the third brother, whose name was Sadder, he said, "You are gifted with a lively and fruitful imagination: You see objects not as they are, but as you would have them be; you often possess genius, and not always common sense: be a poet. Take the route to Agra: among the wits and fair ladies of that city, you may find Bathmendi."

Tai, in his turn, advanced; and, thanks to the pallets of wax, heard not one word that Alzim said. It has since been ascertained, that he counselled Tai to become a Dervise.

After thanking the beneficent genius, the four brothers returned home. The three eldest dreamed of nothing but Bathmendi. Tai unstopped his ears, and heard them arrange their departure, and determine to sell their little dwelling to the first bidder, in order to divide the price. Tai offered to become the purchaser: he caused the house and farm to be valued, paid his brothers their respective portions, and embracing them tenderly, with a thousand good wishes, remained alone in the paternal mansion.

He then employed himself in executing a scheme, which he had long meditated. He was enamored of young Amine, the daughter of a neighboring farmer. She was handsome and discreet: she managed her father's household, comforted his declining years, and prayed Heaven for two things—that her father might long live, and that she might be the wife of Tai. Her prayers were heard. Tai asked, and obtained her. Her father went to live with his son-in-law, and taught him the art of enriching the ground, so as to be enriched by it in return. Tai had some gold still remaining of Alzim's gift: he employed it in extending his farm, and in buying a flock. The farm doubled its value; the fleeces of the sheep were sold; plenty reigned in Tai's house; and, as he was industrious and his wife frugal, each year augmented their income. Children, that ruin wealthy idlers, in the cities, enrich laborers. At the end of seven years, Tai, the father of six lovely children, the husband of a sweet and virtuous wife, son-in-law to an aged, yet a hale and amiable man, master of several slaves, and of two flocks,—was the happiest and the most independent farmer of Kusistan.

Meantime his three brothers were in chase of Bathmendi. Bekir arrived at the Persian camp; presented himself to the grand vizier, and begged to be employed in the most hazardous services. His mien, and his gallant bearing, pleased the vizier, who admitted him into a squadron of cavalry. In a few days, a bloody battle took place. Bekir achieved prodigies; saved his general's life, and captured the general of the enemy. The camp rung with the praises of Bekir: all the soldiers called him the champion of Persia; and the grateful vizier promoted his deliverer to the rank of general. "Alzim was right," said Bekir to himself; "'tis here that fortune awaits me; I am evidently about to find Bathmendi."

Bekir's glory, and especially his promotion, aroused the envy and the murmurs of all the satraps. Some of them came to ask him about his father; complaining that they had suffered by his bankruptcy: others pretended to have held *madam his mother* as a slave: all refused to serve under him, because they were his seniors in office. Bekir, made miserable by his very successes, lived alone, ever on the watch, ever in danger of some outrage, which he might amply revenge but could not prevent. He regretted the time when he was a mere private soldier, and awaited impatiently the close of the war; when the Turks, reinforced by fresh troops, and led by a new general, made an attack upon his division. It was the juncture, for which the satraps of the army had long wished. They exerted a hundred times more ability in procuring the defeat of their leader, than they had ever shewn to avoid defeat themselves. Bekir defended himself like a lion: but he was neither obeyed nor seconded. In vain did the Persian soldiers

wish to fight: their officers restrained them, and led them only to flight. The valiant Bekir, abandoned, covered with wounds, and overwhelmed by numbers, was taken by the Janissaries. The Turkish commander unworthily loaded him with irons, and sent him to Constantinople, where he was thrown into a frightful dungeon. "Alas!" cried Bekir, "I begin to think that Alzim has deceived me: for I cannot hope to meet Bathmendi here."

The war lasted fifteen years; and the satraps always obstructed the exchange of Bekir. His dungeon was not opened until peace came: he hurried to Ispahan, to seek his patron the vizier, whose life he had saved. It was three weeks before he could obtain an audience. Fifteen years, in prison, make some change in the appearance of a handsome young man. Bekir was not easily to be recognized: and the vizier did not know him again. However, on calling to mind the various events of his own illustrious life, he did remember that Bekir had done him some trifling service. "Aye—yes, friend," said he; "I will requite you. A brave man—but the empire is deeply in debt: a long war, and grand feastings have exhausted our finances. However—come and see me again—I will try—I will see"—"Alas, my lord!" said Bekir, "I have not a morsel of bread; and in the fifteen days that I have been waiting for a moment's interview with your highness, I should have died of hunger, but for a soldier of the guard, my old comrade, who shared his pay with me." "That was very good of the soldier," said the vizier; "really, it is quite touching. I will report it to the king. Come and see me again; you know I love you." And with these words, he turned his back upon him. Bekir returned the next day, and found the gate closed. In despair, he left the palace and the city, resolving never to enter them again.

Throwing himself at the foot of a tree, on the bank of the river Zenderou, he reflected upon the ingratitude of viziers, his own past misfortunes, and those which menaced him; and, unable to endure thoughts so dismal, he arose, to plunge into the stream—when he felt himself clasped by a beggar, who bathed his face with tears, and sobbed out, "it is my brother; it is my dear Bekir!" Looking up, Bekir recognised Mesrou. No one can find a long-lost brother without pleasure; but an unfortunate, needy, friendless, and hopeless, who is about to end his life in despair, thinks, that in a brother whom he loves, he sees an angel from Heaven. Mesrou and Bekir at once felt this sentiment: they press each other to their bosoms—they mingle their tears—and, after the first moments of tenderness, they gaze at each other with affliction and surprise. "You too, then, are unhappy!" cried Bekir. "This is the first moment of happiness," said Mesrou, "that I have enjoyed since our separation." At these words, embracing again, they leaned upon each other; and Mesrou, seated beside Bekir, began his narrative as follows:

"You remember the fatal day, when we went to Alzim's abode. That perfidious genius told me, that I should find Bathmendi, the object of our desires, at court. I followed his advice, and soon arrived at Ispahan. There I became acquainted with a young female slave to the mistress of the grand vizier's first secretary. This slave took a liking for me, and made me known to her mistress; who finding me younger and handsomer

than her lover, lodged me in her own house, as her half-brother. The half-brother was soon presented to the vizier: and some days afterwards, obtained an office in the palace. I had only to let my fortune lead me on, and to remember the path which had brought me thus far. I never quitted that path: and, the sultana mother being old, ugly, and all-powerful, I failed not to pay my court assiduously to her. She distinguished me, by a friendship as intimate as that of the slave and her mistress had been. Thenceforward, honors and riches began to rain upon me. The sultana caused me to be presented with all the money in the treasury, and all the dignities of the state. The monarch himself testified affection for me: he loved to converse with me, because I flattered him adroitly, and always advised him to what I knew he wished to do. This was the way to induce him to do what I wished; and it soon succeeded. At the end of three years, I was at once prime minister, favorite of the king, lover of his mother, with power to appoint and displace viziers; deciding every thing by my influence, and giving audience every morning to the grandees of the empire, who came to wait for my awaking to obtain a smile of protection. Amidst all my wealth and glory, I was surprised at not finding Bathmendi. "I want for nothing," said I; "why does not Bathmendi present himself?" This thought, and the frightful solicitude of my life, poisoned all my pleasures. As the sultana grew older, she became more difficult to please, and my gratitude grew more irksome. Her tenderness for me was a torment. On the other hand, my station procured me a thousand tiresome flatterers, and a hundred thousand powerful enemies. For every favor I conferred, hardly a single mouth thanked, and a thousand reviled me. The generals whom I appointed were defeated, and all was attributed to me. Whatever good the king did, belonged only to himself; all the evil was laid at my door. The people detested me—the whole court hated, a hundred libels excoriated me: my master often frowned, the sultana-mother sickened me by her fondness; and Bathmendi seemed more distant than ever.

"At length, the king's passion for a young Mingrelian gave the finishing stroke to my fortunes. The whole court united with her, in hopes that the mistress would expel the minister. I parried the blow, by joining the Mingrelian, and flattering the king's passion. But his love became so violent, that, being resolved to espouse her, he demanded my advice. I evaded an answer for some days. The sultana mother, who was afraid of losing her power by her son's marriage, declared to me, that unless I broke off the match, she would have me assassinated on the very day of its consummation. An hour afterwards, the fair Mingrelian vowed, that *unless I procured her marriage with the king the next day*, I should be strangled on the day following. My position was embarrassing. I must choose the dagger, the bow-string, or flight. I chose the last. Disguised as you see, I escaped from the palace with some diamonds, which will sustain us in some nook of Hindostan, far from courts, Mingrelians, and sultana mothers."

Bekir then recited his adventures to Mesrou. They agreed, that it would have been as well for them not to run over the world; and that their wisest course was, to return to Kusistan, to the neighborhood of their brother Tai, where Mesrou's diamonds would procure

them a peaceful and easy life. Thus resolved, they took the road, and travelled for some days without an adventure. As they passed through the province of Farsistan, they arrived one evening at a village, where they proposed to spend the night. It was a holiday. Upon entering the village, they saw many children of the peasants' returning from a procession, led by a sort of master, ill clad, marching with downcast look and pensive air. The two brothers approach, and observe him attentively. What was their surprise! It was Sadder—their brother Sadder, whom they embraced! "Ah!" said Bekir, "is genius thus rewarded?"—"You perceive," answered Sadder, "that genius is treated much like valor. But philosophy finds in misfortune an ample subject for meditation; and that is somewhat consoling." He then sent his pupils to their home, conducted Bekir and Mesrou to his little cabin, served them up a little rice for supper, and, after having heard their histories, told his own:

"Alzim, who, I strongly suspect, delights in the woes of mankind, counselled me to seek this undiscoverable Bathmendi in the great city of Agra, among men of genius and fair ladies. I arrived in Agra; and determined, before I appeared in public, to herald myself by some brilliant production. At the end of a month, my work appeared: it was a complete course of all human sciences, in a small octodecimo volume of sixty pages, divided into chapters. Each chapter comprised a tale; and each tale taught a science perfectly. My book had prodigious success. Some reviews cavilled at it, as too prolix: but all people of fashion bought it; and I was consoled for the criticisms. My book and I became all the rage. I was sought for—invited into every circle that had any pretension to wit or genius: all that I did was charming: I was the theme of every tongue, and every wish; and the favorite sultana with her own hand wrote me a badly spelled note, praying me to visit the court. 'Bravo!' thought I; 'Alzim has not deceived me. My glory is at its height: I shall sustain myself by surer means than intrigue: I shall please—I shall captivate—I shall find Bathmendi!' I was favorably received at the great Mogul's palace. The sultana loudly proclaimed herself my patroness; called upon me for verses; gave me pensions; admitted me to her select suppers; and, a hundred times a day, swore to me an unalterable friendship. For my part, I gave myself up to the liveliest gratitude. I promised to devote my days to singing the renown of my benefactress; and made a poem, in which the sun was but a mock-diamond beside her eyes, and ivory, coral, and the pearls of the Persian gulf, were dim and homely compared with her face, neck, and teeth. These refined and delicate compliments completed my assurance of her perpetual favor."

"I thought myself on the point of meeting Bathmendi, when my protectress quarrelled with the grand vizier, about the government of a province, which he refused to the son of her confectioner. The sultana, exasperated at such audacity, demanded of the sultan the banishment of the insolent minister; but the sultan loved the vizier, and refused the favorite. The next thing was to organize an intrigue, to destroy the cherished vizier. Being in the plot, I received orders to compose a bloody satire against the minister, and circulate it. The satire was soon made—that is not difficult: it was even good—

which is still easy: it was read with avidity—and that is sure to tell. The vizier soon learned that I was the author. Going to the favorite, he carries her the commission which he had before denied, and a draft upon the royal treasury for one hundred darics; only asking in return, permission to put me to death in a dungeon. 'He is a vile wretch,' answered the favorite; 'and I am happy in having the power to do what may please you. I will instantly have the insolent sought for, who has dared insult you against my positive orders; and he shall be put into your hands.' Happily, a slave who was present, ran to tell me of this conversation; and I had barely time to escape. Ever since, I have been traversing Hindostan, gaining a meager subsistence by writing tales, making verses, and toiling for booksellers who cheated me, and who, less indulgent to my talents than to their own consciences, continually asserted that my style was not pure enough. Whilst I was wealthy, my works had been master-pieces: now that I was poor and friendless, my effusions were trash. Tired at length of enlightening the universe, I preferred teaching the peasants to read: and I am now schoolmaster in this village, where I eat black bread, and have no hope of seeing Bathmendi."

"You must go hence," said Mesrou, "and return with us to Kusistan, where some diamonds of mine will ensure us an easy and quiet life." It was not difficult to persuade Sadder; and the three brothers, setting out early next morning, took the way to Kusistan. They were on the last day of their journey; and not far from Tai's dwelling. This thought consoled them: but their hope was mingled with fear. "Shall we find our brother? We left him poor—he cannot have found Bathmendi, since he has been unable to go in quest of him." "My dear friends," said Sadder, "I have reflected much on this Bathmendi, that Alzim told us of; and really, I believe he deluded us. Bathmendi does not, and never did exist: for, since Bekir did not meet him when he commanded half the Persian army—since Mesrou did not hear of him when he was the favorite of the great king—and I could not even divine who or what he was, whilst the favors of glory and fortune were heaped upon me—it is evident, Bathmendi is a creature of fancy; a chimera; an illusion, which men chase merely from the love of chasing illusions." Sadder was proceeding to prove that Bathmendi dwelt no where on earth, when a band of robbers issued from some rocks on the road-side, and ordered the brothers to strip. Bekir offered resistance; but he was disarmed; and four of these gentry, holding a dagger at his breast, unrigged him, while their comrades did the like to Mesrou and Sadder. After this ceremony, which was the work of a moment, the captain of the robbers wished them a pleasant journey, and left them half naked in the highway.

"This confirms my position:" said Sadder, looking at his brothers. "Ah, the cowards!" cried Bekir; "they took away my sword!" "Oh, my poor diamonds!" said Mesrou, sorrowfully.

It was now night: the three unfortunates hastened on towards the mansion of their brother: and on arriving there, the sight of it made their tears flow fast. They stopped at the door, but durst not knock. All their fears, all their doubts, returned. While they hesitated, Bekir rolled up a large stone below the window, and

mounting upon it, looked in. He saw, in a neat and simply furnished apartment, his brother Tai at table, amid ten children, who were eating, laughing, and prattling all together. On his right was Amine, mincing some meat for her youngest son; and on his left was a little old man of a mild and lively countenance, who was filling Tai's cup. At this spectacle, Bekir threw himself into the arms of his brothers, and knocked at the door with all his might. A servant opened it, but uttered cries of alarm on seeing three half-naked men. Tai runs out: they fall upon his neck, call him "brother!" and bathe him in tears. Though confounded at first, he soon recognises them, and locks them in his arms. The children run to the spectacle; and so does Amine, but retires with her daughters, on seeing the three strange men. The old man alone did not leave the table.

Tai clothed his brothers; presented them to his wife, and made them kiss his children. "Alas!" said Bekir, much affected, "your happy lot consoles us for all that we have suffered. Since the moment of our separation, our lives have been but a series of calamities; and we have not so much as had a glimpse of that Bathmendi, after whom we have been running." "I believe you"—said the little old man who continued still at the table; "I have never stirred from this place." "What!" exclaimed Mesrou, "are you . . ." "I am BATHMENDI," said the old man. "It is quite natural that you should not know me, since you never saw me before: but ask Tai—ask Amine—and all these children, every one of whom knows my name. I have lived with them fifteen years; and am perfectly at home here. I have been away but for one day; it was when Amine's father died: but I returned, and now hope never to go hence a single step. It rests only with yourselves, gentlemen adventurers, to become acquainted with me. If it so please you, I am willing: if not, why I shall be content. I trouble no one: I stay in my corner, never dispute, and detest noise." The three brothers, whose eyes had been eagerly fixed upon the little old man, wished to embrace him. "O, softly!" said he: "I do not like all these violent emotions: I am rather delicate; and too close an embrace stifles me. Besides—we must become friends before we caress. If you wish us to become friends, do not busy yourselves too much about me. I value freedom more than politeness; and have an antipathy to all excess." At these words he arose, kissed the foreheads of all the children, slightly saluted the three brothers, smiled upon Amine and Tai; and went to await them in their chamber.

Tai sat down again with his brothers, and had beds prepared for them. The next morning, he shewed them his fields, his flocks, his working beasts; and unfolded to them all the pleasures he enjoyed. Bekir wished to begin work that very day; and he was the first to become the friend of Bathmendi. Mesrou, who had been prime minister, was the chief shepherd; and the poet assumed the task of selling the corn, wool, and milk, which were sent to market in the city. His eloquence attracted customers; and he was as useful as the others. At the end of six months, Bathmendi became attached to them; and their days, many and tranquil, flowed softly on to the bosom of felicity.

[It is needless to say, that *Bathmendi*, in the Persian tongue, signifies *Happiness*.]