

A Lesson in Humility, Haroun-al-Raschid

786 - 809

from Fifty Famous People

by James Baldwin

One day the caliph, Haroun-al-Raschid, made a great feast. The feast was held in the grandest room of the palace. The walls and ceiling glittered with gold and precious gems. The table was decorated with rare and beautiful plants and flowers.

All the noblest men of Persia and Arabia were there. Many wise men and poets and musicians had also been invited.

In the midst of the feast, the caliph called upon the poet, Abul Atayah, and said, "O Prince of Verse Makers, show us thy skill. Describe in verse this glad and glorious feast."

The poet rose and began: "Live, O caliph and enjoy thyself in the shelter of thy lofty palace."

"That is a good beginning," said Raschid. "Let us hear the rest." The poet went on: "May each morning bring thee some new joy. May each evening see that all thy wishes have been performed."

"Good! Good!" said the caliph, "Go on."

The poet bowed his head and obeyed: "But when the hour of death comes, O my caliph, then alas! Thou wilt learn that all thy delights were but a shadow."

The caliph's eyes were filled with tears. Emotion choked him. He covered his face and wept.

Then one of the officers, who was sitting near the poet, cried out: "Stop! The caliph wished you to amuse him with pleasant thoughts, and you have filled his mind with melancholy."

"Let the poet alone," said Raschid. "He has seen me in my blindness, and is trying to open my eyes."

Haroun-al-Raschid (Aaron the Just) was the greatest of all the caliphs of Bagdad. In a wonderful book, called "The Arabian Nights," there are many interesting stories about him.

Model Practice 1

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Three Men of Gotham

from Fifty Famous Stories Retold

by James Baldwin

There is a town in England called Gotham, and many merry stories are told of the queer people who used to live there.

One day two men of Gotham met on a bridge. Hodge was coming from the market, and Peter was going to the market.

"Where are you going?" said Hodge.

"I am going to the market to buy sheep," said Peter.

"Buy sheep?" said Hodge. "And which way will you bring them home?"

"I shall bring them over this bridge," said Peter.

"No, you shall not," said Hodge.

"Yes, but I will," said Peter.

"You shall not," said Hodge.

"I will," said Peter.

Then they beat with their sticks on the ground as though there had been a hundred sheep between them.

"Take care!" cried Peter. "Look out that my sheep don't jump on the bridge."

"I care not where they jump," said Hodge; "but they shall not go over it."

"But they shall," said Peter.

"Have a care," said Hodge; "for if you say too much, I will put my fingers in your mouth."

"Will you?" said Peter.

Just then another man of Gotham came from the market with a sack of meal on his horse. He heard his neighbors quarreling about sheep; but he could see no sheep between them, and so he stopped and spoke to them.

"Ah, you foolish fellows!" he cried. "It is strange that you will never learn wisdom. Come here, Peter, and help me lay my sack on my shoulder."

Peter did so, and the man carried his meal to the side of the bridge.

"Now look at me," he said, "and learn a lesson." And he opened the mouth of the sack and poured all the meal into the river.

"Now, neighbors," he said, "Can you tell how much meal is in my sack?"

"There is none at all!" cried Hodge and Peter together.

"You are right," said the man; "and you that stand here and quarrel about nothing, having no more sense in your heads than I have meal in my sack!"

Model Practice 1

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