

THE SLIPPERS OF ABOU-KAREM

A TURKISH TALE
FOR CHILDREN

FROM THE FRENCH OF
XAVIER MARMIER.



public square and purchased at a very low price an assortment of crystals. A few days later he learned that a perfumer, whose affairs were embarrassed, had some attar of roses for sale. Profiting by this poor man's need, he bought the precious stuff at half-price. Now, it is the custom of Eastern merchants, when they have conducted an advantageous bargain, to invite their friends to a feast. But Abou-Karem, although much elated by his good luck, did not for an instant dream of squandering a portion of his profits upon a banquet. He decided, how-

ONCE upon a time there dwelt at Bagdad a merchant whose avarice was something frightful. His name was Abou-Karem. Although he was extremely rich, his clothes were nothing but rags, and nobody could possibly tell the original colour of the coarse cloth which formed his turban. But the most remarkable thing about him was his pair of slippers, an extraordinary collection of scraps and shreds, which looked like the remnants of a beggar's cloak, fastened upon soles studded with huge nails. For the last ten years these wretched shoes had given employment to the most patient cobblers of the town, and whenever anyone wished to describe a weighty burden he would say: "It is as heavy as Abou-Karem's slippers!"

One morning the grasping merchant, who was a keen hand at a bargain, went into the

ever, to take a bath, as it was a long time since he had permitted himself such a luxury. In leaving his house for the purpose he chanced to meet an acquaintance, who, observing how painfully he limped in his horrible old slippers, remarked to him that he really ought to buy some new ones.

"Well, I have sometimes thought of doing so," replied Abou-Karem; "but, upon reflection, I have come to the conclusion that these are not so bad after all, and may serve me a long time yet."

When the merchant had finished his ablutions, he donned again his rags, and wound his filthy turban around his head, but in the place of his own much-mended shoes he found a handsome and perfectly new pair of slippers. Thinking that these must be a generous gift from the friend whom he had met that morning, he coolly slipped his feet into them, and returned to his dwelling in

high glee at being so cheaply and excellently shod.

Unfortunately for Abou-Karem, these beautiful slippers belonged to the Cadi of Bagdad, who, almost at the same time as the miser, had visited the same bathing establishment.

The wrath of this potentate may be imagined when his slaves, searching everywhere for his slippers, found only those of Abou-Karem. The miser was promptly arrested, and dragged as a thief before the Cadi. In vain he attempted to defend himself; nobody would listen to him. He was thrown into prison, and released only upon payment of a fine—a considerable sum, with which he might have bought a quantity of fine things.

On his return to his house, Abou-Karem, in a rage with his slippers, as being the cause of his misfortune, flung them into the Tigris, which flowed beneath his windows. Several days afterwards some fishermen drew forth from the river a heavy net. They doubted

they expected to see, they beheld Abou-Karem's slippers, the nails of which had broken the meshes of their net. Disentangling them from their injured property, they hurled them furiously against the miser's windows. Falling violently into his room, the slippers smashed the bottles of attar of roses and the crystals which he had hoped to turn to such profitable account.

"Ah! hateful slippers!" exclaimed their owner, as he entered the chamber, and saw the havoc they had wrought. "At all events, you shall harm me no more!" Then, taking with him a spade, he went into his garden, dug there a deep hole, and buried the obnoxious shoes. A neighbour who was his enemy, seeing him thus employed, hastened to inform the governor that the lucky Abou-Karem was digging in his garden for hidden treasure. The powerful functionary's cupidity was at once excited. In vain the merchant denied his neighbour's story, and protested that his only object in digging had been the



"SOME FISHERMEN DREW FORTH A HEAVY NET."

not but that they had taken an exceptionally good haul, and rejoiced accordingly. How disgusted were they when, instead of the fish

burial of his slippers. Vainly, in order to prove the truth of his statement, he exhibited his fatal property. The governor sternly

refused to believe him, and ordered him to pay a heavy fine.

Abou-Karem left the presence of his implacable judge, bearing in his hands the slippers which had failed to prove his innocence, and crying, in his grief and rage: "I wish never to touch them, never to see them, again!"

With these words, he threw the slippers into a reservoir which adjoined the governor's palace. Unhappily, they were sucked into an already obstructed pipe, and completely stopped the flow of the water. Then there was a huge outcry. The engineers, summoned in hot haste to ascertain the cause of this accident, discovered, of course, the clumsy slippers, and, equally of course, were careful to suppress the fact that owing to their own negligence the pipe had been already partially stopped up when the slippers had been thrown in. It was Abou-Karem who had done all the mischief, doubtless out of spite against the governor.

Again he was arrested and sentenced to pay another heavy fine. His slippers, however, were scrupulously returned to him.

"What is to be done with them?"

said the worried man to himself. "I have consigned them to the earth and to the water, and the result in each case has been most disastrous. It only remains for me to commit them to the flames. But as they are so soaked with

water and mud, it will be necessary first to dry them."

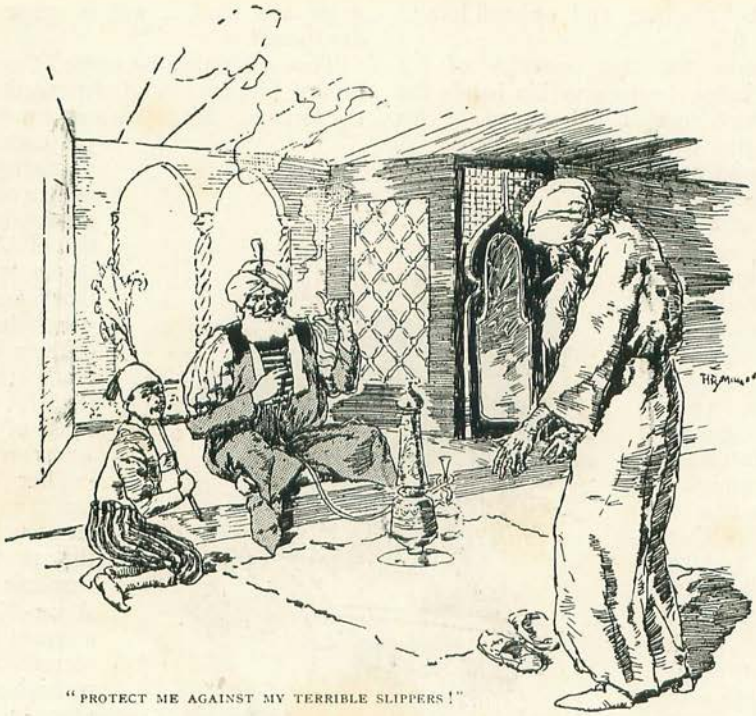
Thus cogitating, he carried them up to the roof of his house and deposited them upon the terrace. Alas! his misfortunes were not yet ended. A dog, amusing himself upon a neighbouring terrace, leaped upon that of Abou-Karem, began to play with those luckless slippers, dragged one of them to the edge of the roof, and let it fall upon the head of a woman who, carrying a child in her arms, was walking in the street below. Upon the summons of the woman's husband, Abou-Karem was arrested for the fourth time, and punished more severely than ever for having nearly killed, by his carelessness, a mother and her child.

After the sentence had been pronounced, the merchant, turning a rueful face towards the Cadi, addressed him thus: "Most puissant judge! I submit myself humbly to your decree. I will pay the fine, and undergo my chastisement. But I implore of you this one favour—protect me against my terrible slippers! They have caused me to be imprisoned, humiliated, ruined, and have

put me in peril of capital punishment. Who knows to what danger they might not yet expose me? Be just and merciful! Let me hope that the evils which they have brought about may be no longer attributed to me, but



"HE THREW THE SLIPPERS INTO A RESERVOIR."



"PROTECT ME AGAINST MY TERRIBLE SLIPPERS!"

rather to these instruments of wicked spirits!"

The Cadi acceded to this request, promising that he would himself take charge of the fatal shoes. At the same time, he warned

the avaricious Abou-Karem that true economy does not consist in the continual amassing of wealth, but rather in the wise management and regulation of needful expenditure.