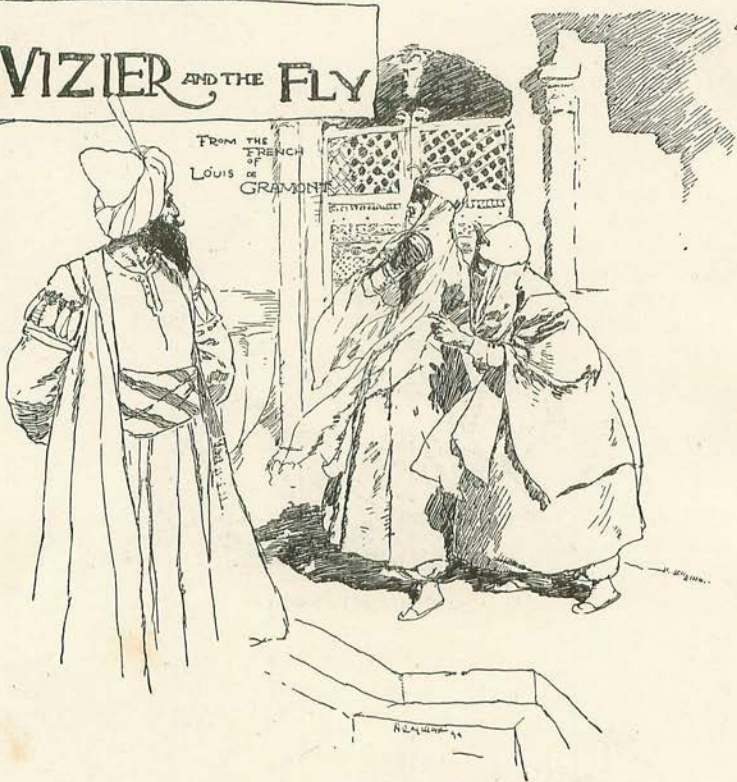


# THE VIZIER AND THE FLY

FROM THE  
FRENCH  
OF  
LOUIS  
GRAMONT



A FAIRY STORY FOR CHILDREN.



HE VIZIER ALI-BEN-HASSAN, Prime Minister of the Calif Amgiad, was one day walking in the country in the environs of Bagdad. Since the morning he had met with nothing but vexations. In the first place, he had slept ill. Then his first-born, his son, Nouredin, had left his home the previous evening, and had returned, after sunrise, shamefully tipsy; clearly indicating that he was leagued with the evil-livers of Bagdad, and had infringed the wise law of the Prophet, forbidding the use of wine and strong liquors.

Then, again, the servant intrusted with the duty of accompanying his daughter to the bath had, on her return, confided to him that, for the fifth time in as many days, a young man, with a self-satisfied air, had, as if by chance, thrown himself in their way; and that, in passing, Amine, under pretence of

arranging her veil, had, on the contrary, deranged it in such a manner as to allow this good-looking stranger to behold her radiant visage; a proceeding which, on the part of a Mahometan young lady, constituted a grave departure from the rules of good conduct.

Already considerably put out of temper by all these worries, Ali had gone to the sitting of the Council. There he had found himself in the presence of the Calif Amgiad, and the Calif Amgiad had received him anything but pleasantly.

A short time before, a sedition had broken out in a neighbouring province. Ali, after having severely repressed it, had not thought it worth while to bring the matter before his glorious master. But the Minister's enemies had not been equally reserved, and the Calif had vehemently reproached his Minister: firstly, with having allowed a sedition to break out in his kingdom; secondly, with having hidden the fact from him; and thirdly, with

having put it down by force, instead of by persuasion—which, indeed, *is* preferable, but, unfortunately, does not always prove successful.

On quitting the Council, Ali bore with him this impression—always painful to a statesman—that his credit was considerably shaken.

He had no sooner returned home than his wife had quarrelled with him, accusing him of niggardliness in the sum he allowed her for her dress, declaring that the wife of the governor of the palace was better dressed than she, and affirming that, in fact, she had nothing to put on. Ali bowed his head before this storm, and ordered his servants to serve him a collation, in the hope of finding in the pleasures of good cheer a compensation for the vexations of his public and private life; but, by an unlucky chance, his cook that day omitted every dish of which he was fond.

Desperate, Ali quitted his house, left the city, and strayed into the country. There, at least, he might fret and fume at his ease.

“Truly,” he muttered, as he went along, “there are days when one would like to make an end of one’s existence. Of what use to one is life?—nothing but to make one angry with everything!”

Meanwhile, a burning sun was scorching the road on which he was walking; and it was not long before he felt an irrepressible desire to find shelter somewhere. But in vain he looked for a shady corner. At length he came in sight of a path which, from its narrowness and turnings, seemed to promise a little coolness. He passed on to it.

The windings of this path conducted him to a ruined wall near which there grew a palm tree. Ali uttered a sigh of relief and stretched himself at the foot of the wall in the shade of the wide leaves.

Doubtless he would soon have fallen asleep had not a buzzing sound come to annoy his sense of hearing. He looked up and saw a pretty, gold-and-green-hued fly gaily wheeling about his head. Wishing to take a nap in peace, Ali drove away the intruder two or three times with his hand; but the obstinate little creature returned again and again to the charge, and ended by impudently perching on the Vizier’s nose.

This was too much for Ali, who jerked himself into a sitting posture, and with his hand made a vigorous but unsuccessful dab

at his enemy. But in the hurry of getting away the quick-winged fly did not notice that it was darting straight into a large spider’s web, spreading between an angle of the wall and the neighbouring palm tree.

Witness of this catastrophe, the Vizier could not, at first, help feeling glad.

“Now,” he thought, “you tiresome insect, you will no longer be able to prevent me from getting the nap I want.”

But, as he continued to watch the fate of the pretty, gold-green fly,

he saw emerge from a crack in the wall a monstrous spider, with a body as big as the finger-tip of a man, and long, black, and hairy limbs. It rushed towards its prey, and set to work spinning a winding-sheet of web about it, as if enjoying its victim’s terror and agony.



“ALI MADE A VIGOROUS BUT UNSUCCESSFUL DAB AT HIS ENEMY.”

The poor fly made such desperate efforts to free itself from its bonds that Ali, at the sight of its hopeless exertion, felt moved by compassion; and though he was very tired, and in spite of the little insect having so recently worried him considerably, he could not bring himself to allow it to perish so miserably.

He rose up, and with a wave of his hand

palm tree, closed his eyes, and was soon soundly asleep.

The sound of a voice pronouncing his name aloud awoke him. He opened his eyes and saw, standing before him, a personage of dazzling beauty and gigantic form. Two light and transparent wings were attached to his shoulders. Ali had no doubt that he was in the presence of a genie.



"A GENIE."

frightened away the spider, after which he released the fly from its perilous captivity.

"Now," he said, "I hope you will leave me in peace."

He opened his finger and thumb, the fly flew away, and Ali speedily lost sight of it. He then lay down again in the shade of the

"Vizier," said the supernatural being, "you have rendered me a great service. I was the fly which lately buzzed about your nose. I took that form for the purpose of relieving myself for awhile from my ordinary greatness, and flitting freely in the sunshine. A malicious sorcerer, my private enemy,

wishing to take advantage of this circumstance, changed himself into the big spider in whose web I became entangled, and in which I should have fared ill but for your assistance.

"You must know that, though we are permitted to assume what appearance we please, we at the same time run the risk of falling into the same snares as the human creatures whose resemblance we borrow; and, if we so fall, we can only be rescued by human aid. It is, therefore, by your generous intervention I have been saved. In return for this great service, ask of me some favour: whatever it may be, I promise to grant it."

So spoke the genie. The Vizier remained for a while without answering. At length, after having reflected, he said:—

"I was saying to myself, only a short time back, that long life was no advantage, since so many of our days are spoiled by divers vexations; and that it would be better to have a shorter existence, composed exclusively of happy and cloudless days; if, then, it be in your power to do it, good genie, suppress from my life in future all days of affliction, or even of annoyance, and let me live only during those which are exempt from trouble. Do that, and you will have largely repaid me the service I have done you."

On hearing those words an enigmatical smile overspread the face of the genie.

"Have you well weighed your request?"

"Yes," replied Ali.

"Let it be according to your desire!"

Instantly, as it seemed to the Vizier, his fantastic interlocutor seized him by the middle of the body and rose in the air with him to a height so giddy as presently caused him to lose his senses. When he returned to consciousness, he found himself in his house in Bagdad, in bed. His body was straightened out and so rigid that he found himself unable to make the least movement.

His eyes were closed. Nevertheless he saw all that was passing about him, and heard all that was being said. The room was full of people. His wife, his children, his servants were there; all lamented him, and deplored the loss of so good a husband, so good a father, so good a master, a friend so faithful and devoted.

"What is the meaning of all this?" thought Ali. "Am I dead, then?"

"Yes," said a voice.

The genie stood at the foot of the Vizier's bed, visible only to him, reading his thoughts.

"Perfidious spirit!" thought Ali; "is this the way you redeem your promise?"

"Do not accuse me," replied the genie, "but lay the blame to your own stupidity alone. Why did you ask of me what was impossible? Two fairies have been intrusted with the task of spinning the destinies of men. Before one, at the beginning of things, was placed a heap of white wool, from which she spun fortunate days; before the other was placed a heap of black wool, from which she spun the days that were to be unfortunate.

"Now, one night, while they were sleeping, Satan came by and amused himself by mixing together the two heaps of wool, and so thoroughly entangled the whole that the fairies, on awaking, found it impossible to separate the black from the white wool; and, from that time, the days spun by them are of mixed colour—made up of contentments and affliction. Recall the days you have passed: is there one of them on which you have not experienced some satisfaction, small as it may have been?"

"In asking me to take from your days to come all those on which some discomfort may reach you, you have, in fact, asked me to suppress the whole, and you have immediately arrived at the day of deliverance—and death. I am sorry to have had to teach you this lesson, but you have drawn it down upon yourself."

"Unfortunately, it can now be of no use to me, since I am dead," said Ali.

The genie smiled.

"I am good-natured," he replied. "If you like, I will imagine that you have said nothing, carry you back to the spot whence I brought you, and nothing in your life shall be changed. What do you say?"

"I could not wish for anything better," replied the Vizier.

The genie stretched his hands towards him: everything melted from his sight, and, for the second time, he became unconscious. When he recovered the use of his senses, he found himself at the foot of the wall under the shade of the palm tree where he had fallen asleep.

Rising to his feet he asked himself whether this adventure had really happened to him or whether he had simply dreamed it; then, thoughtfully, he made his way back home. While he slept the sun had declined, so that his walk was no longer rendered unpleasant.

On reaching his house, Ali learned that his son, Nourredin, had been made so ill by his overnight's excesses that he had vowed never, thenceforth, to drink anything but water. He also learned that the young man

whom his daughter had so frequently met on her way to and from the bath was the son of one of the richest and most important personages in Bagdad, and asked for the hand of Amine in marriage.

Furthermore, he received a message from the Calif Amgiad, the Sovereign, admitting that, on reflection, the conduct of Ali in the matter of the sedition had appeared

The wife of the Vizier having paid a visit to the wife of the governor of the palace and seen, with her own eyes, that the last new dress of that lady was an utter failure, was now in a delightfully amiable temper. Finally, the cook had determined to make up in a striking manner for his short-comings of the morning, and served up an exquisite repast.

So ended, in the happiest way in the world,



"A VISIT TO THE WIFE OF THE GOVERNOR."

to him to have been both prudent and firm ; and conveying the assurance that he might consider himself to be more in favour than ever.

a day begun so adversely ; and the Vizier, on retiring to bed, confessed within himself that the genie, real or imaginary, had given him some sage advice.