

## The Story of Sulaimán and the Heron: Adduced to Show the Worthlessness of Life without Suitable Companions

The king said, 'I have heard that Sulaimán (the blessing and peace of God be upon our Prophet and upon him!) was a king whose reversed command was adorned with the honor of rapid execution. Jins,' [1] men, animals, and birds, bound the girdle of submission and obedience to him on the waist of their souls. The writer of destiny had ornamented the diploma of his kingly office with the signature, 'Give me a kingdom which may not be obtained by any after me,' [2] and the groom of omnipotence had placed the saddle of his authority on the east wind as his steed; so the verse, 'It blew in the morning for a month, and in the evening for a month,' [3] affords a description of his riding.

VERSE.

Heaven was his servant, and the sun his slave,

Fortune obeyed him, earth his bidding did.

Genii and men devoted service gave,

And ranks of beasts and birds his portals hid.

One day one of the cherubs of the oratories of the angelic world came to see him, and presented to him a cup full of the water of life, and said, 'The Creator of all! May His greatness be glorified and His power magnified!' has given thee free choice, and has said, 'Quaff, if thou wilt, this cup; and, till the end of time, be free from tasting the beverage, 'Every soul shall taste of death.' [4] And if thou wishest, quickly lift up thy foot, and from the corner of the prison of humanity, betake thyself to the pure garden and expansive air of divinity.' Sulaimán (On him be peace!) reflected within himself, that the coin of life is a stock with which it is possible to secure in the bázár of the resurrection abundant profit; and that the space of existence is a field, in which can be sown the seed of happiness in both worlds and the plant of eternal felicity.

COUPLET.

Too short the hand of this life is,

To reach to such enduring bliss.

Wherefore, in every point of view, one ought to choose the continuance' [5] of existence rather than the allurements of extinction and annihilation; and, for the two or three days that the reins of delay are in the hand of option, exertion ought to be used to secure the favor of the Almighty.

HEMISTICH.

'T is life that's past in serving those we love.

Again he reflected, saying, 'The chiefs of the Genii and of men are present, and the leaders of the beasts and birds. I must consult with them, and whatever their unanimous opinion may be, that I must propose to myself as my rule in this matter.' He then took counsel with all the fairies, and men, and birds, and all the animals, as to drinking the beverage of life. All bade him drink it, and were comforted and glad at his life being perpetuated, in which, too, the welfare of the inhabitants of the world would be included.

COUPLET.

'Enjoy the fruit of life eternal and of never-ending days,

For 'tis the prayer which night and morning, old and young, too, for thee raise.'

Sulaimán said, 'Is there any one of all my subjects that is absent from this assembly?' They replied, 'Yes! the Heron has not come to this meeting, and is not informed of this consultation.' Sulaimán (On him be peace!) sent the horse to summon him, but the Heron declined to come. Again he commanded the dog, saying, 'Go! and bring the Heron.' The dog came to the Heron, who acquiescing in his words, presented himself before Sulaimán. Sulaimán said, 'I wish to consult thee, but before I tell thee the subject, solve a difficulty I have.' The Heron expressed his inability, and said,

## HEMISTICH.

'Who then am I, that of me that illustrious mind should think?

Thy slave has not power to solve any difficulty, nor does he deserve that such a king, as thou, should honor him by consulting him. It is not, however, strange that the great of lofty station should inquire into the circumstances of their humble subjects.

## COUPLET.

Thou art the sun and I a mote most insignificant,

It is not strange the sun to motes its fostering rays should grant.

If my lord, pre-eminent for the dignity of the prophetic office, will favor me with a declaration of that difficulty, that which passes through my feeble mind shall be represented.' Sulaimán (On him be peace!) rejoined, 'After man, the most noble animal is the horse, and the basest of animals is the dog. What is the meaning of this, that thou wouldest not come at the summons of the most noble animal, and didst accept the invitation of the meanest?' The Heron replied, 'Although the beauty of nobility is out-wardly apparent in the horse, and the most perfect gifts are luminously and evidently displayed in him, yet he has not fed in the mead of faithful-ness, nor drunk one drop from the fountain of gratitude.

## COUPLET.

Not from thy steed expect to find a sense of favors ever,

A horse – a wife – a scymitar – these three were faithful never.

And notwithstanding that the dog is notorious for his baseness, and well-known for his impurity, still he has eaten the morsel of constancy, and habituated himself to the custom of gratitude.

## COUPLET.

The dog wears in his ear the ring of love,

Nor for one morsel will unthankful prove.

And I, in accepting the invitation of my lord, who is the fountain of fidelity and the confluence of all truth and sincerity, did not listen to the words of an unfaithful animal, but gave heed to the address of a faithful one.' Sulaimán (On him be peace!) approved of this reply, and disclosed to him the question as to drinking the water of life. The Heron said, 'Wilt thou drink that water alone, or wilt thou give a part thereof to thy friends and kinsmen also?' Sulaimán (On him be peace!) said, 'They have sent it specially for me, nor have they granted a portion of it to others.' The Heron replied, 'O Prophet of God! how may this be, that thou shouldest continue alive and every one of thy friends and companions and children, and of those who are attached to thee, perish before thee? I cannot imagine that there could be enjoyment in such a life, nor can I suppose that there could be happiness in an existence which would be an incessant scene of separation.

## STANZA.

Prize high the converse of thy friends, for know! the coin of life-time here

Was given but to scatter at the feet of those that we hold dear.

Oh! life is precious but to view the flowers that in the world appear,

This spectacle is joyous but when friends and those we love are near.'

Sulaimán (On him be peace!) applauded what he said, and declining the envenomed draught of separation, sent back the water of life untasted to the place whence they had brought it.

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