THE BOOK OF SINDIBAD

INTRODUCTION.

In a somewhat extravagant eulogium of the romance known throughout Europe from mediaeval times as the History, or Book, of the Seven Sages, Görres says, that "it sprang originally from the Indian mountains, whence from primeval days it took its course as a little rivulet, and flowed in a westerly direction through Asia's wide field, and, while it proceeded for thousands of years through space and time, always spreading more and more in reaching us. Out of it whole generations and many nations have drank; and, having passed to Europe with the great tide of population, it is now also in our day and generation supplied to such a considerable portion of the public, that in regard to its celebrity and the magnitude of its sphere of influence, it reaches the Holy Book, and surpasses all classical works." This account of the romance is very misleading. The prototype of the Seven Sages was, no doubt, an ancient Indian work (though surely not "thousands of years old") called the Book of Sindibād, from which have sprung two groups of texts, Eastern and Western: the former derived, mediately or immediately, from a common and *written* source; the latter based upon oral traditions of the romance, brought to Europe by minstrels and pilgrims from the East, and preserving little more than the general plan of the original work. The Eastern group of texts must therefore be considered as having a distinct and separate history from the Western group. Like so many other Asiatic collections of fiction, this romance in its several versions consists of a number of tales and apologues, strung together by a general story, running throughout the whole work, of which the following is the outline:

A monarch, powerful, wise, and just, was very unhappy because he had not a son to succeed him on the throne, and he was now far advanced in years. After many earnest prayers to Heaven, he is at length blessed with a son, upon which he assembles the most skilful astrologers to cast his horoscope (as is still customary in the East on the birth of a male child), which is found to portend great danger to his life when he has attained his twentieth year. The king is at first greatly alarmed at this intelligence, but ultimately becomes reconciled to the decree of destiny; and, when the child is old enough, he confides him to a tutor, under whose instruction, however, in spite of all his efforts, the young prince makes no progress in learning during several years. The prince is then taken in hand by a profound sage, called Sindibād, but he, too, fails to instruct him—apparently the youth is hopelessly stupid. The king, on learning this, is enraged at the philosopher, who, nothing daunted by his failure, now boldly undertakes to teach the prince all necessary knowledge in the space of six months, at the peril of his own life. Having succeeded within less than the stipulated period, before the prince is to be presented to his father, in order to exhibit his varied

accomplishments, Sindibād takes an observation of the prince's star, and discovers that he is threatened with loss of life should he utter a word during the seven following days. He communicates this to the prince, and counsels him, notwithstanding, to appear before his father, but on no account to speak until the fatal seven days are passed— for himself, he must hide from the king's wrath. Accordingly, the prince proceeds to the palace, and is warmly embraced by his father, but returns not a word in answer to the questions which are put to him. One of the king's women, secretly in love with the prince, now enters the audience chamber, and learning that he has been apparently deprived of the power of speech, requests his Majesty's permission to try whether she cannot privately induce the prince to speak, which being granted, she takes the youth into the harem, where she tells him of her love for him, and proposes to poison the king, in order that he may at once ascend the throne. Horrified at the thought of such a heinous crime, the prince upbraids her, and flies out of the room. The damsel, fearing the consequences of her conduct, tears her garments and scratches her face, and in this condition presents herself before the king, who inquires the cause of her distress. She replies that his son, who had only feigned himself dumb, had no sooner entered her apartment than he made love to her, and proposed to poison his Majesty. Believing this false tale, the king immediately commands the executioner to put the prince to death. But this precipitate sentence coming to the knowledge of the king's Seven Vazīrs, or counsellors, they determine to save the life of the prince as long as possible, in hopes that his innocence would be established, by each of them in turn relating to the king instances of the craft and malice of women, and warning him against undue haste in affairs of importance. The First Vazīr accordingly appears before the king, and relates two stories to show that no reliance should be placed upon the accusation of a woman; after which his Majesty remands the prince to prison in the meantime. At night, however, the Damsel counteracts the effect produced in the king's mind by the vazīr's tales, by relating a story designed to exemplify the deceitful and wicked disposition of men, with the result of inducing the king to resolve once more to put his son to death. In like manner, the tales of the other vazīrs are controverted by the damsel, until the seven days are passed, when the prince, being free to speak again, informs the king of the damsel's atrocious plot against his life, and relates a number of tales, after which the wicked damsel is punished.

The repeated failures to educate the prince, the father's grief and rage, and the sage finally undertaking to instruct the youth in *six months*, correspond exactly with the frame of the *Pancha Tantra* (Five Chapters), a celebrated collection of Hindū fables, in Sanskrit, as old at least as the 6th century; and the resemblance can hardly be merely fortuitous:

"There is a city in the southern country, named Mihilārōpyam, the king of which, learned and munificent, distinguished among princes and scholars, was named Amara Sacti. He had three sons, youths of no capacity or diligence: Vasu Sacti, Bhadra Sacti, and Ananta Sacti. Observing them averse to study, the king

called his counsellors, and said to them: 'You are aware that my sons are little inclined to application, and incapable of reflection. When I contemplate them, my kingdom is full of thorns, and yields me no pleasure. It is said by the wise: "Better is a son unborn; better is a dead son, than one who is a fool. The first may cause affliction for a little while? but a fool as long as life endures." Again: "Of what use is a cow who has no milk with her calf? Of what use is a son who has neither knowledge nor virtue? Better it is that a wife be barren, that she bear daughters or dead children, and that the family should become extinct, than that a son, endowed with your form, wealth, and family-credit should want understanding." If, therefore, by any means their minds can be roused, do you declare it.'

"On this a counsellor replied: 'Prince, the study of grammar alone is the work of twelve years, how then is a knowledge of *Dharma, Artha, Kama,* and *Mōksla*[1] to be speedily conveyed?' Another counsellor, named Sumati, observed: 'Prince, the powers of man are limited by his transitory existence; but to acquire a knowledge of language alone demands much time. It is better that we think of some means of communicating the substance of each science in a compendious form; as it is said: "The *Sabda Sāstri* (Philology) is a boundless ocean: life is short, and the difficulties are many; the essence, therefore, is to be taken, as the swan extracts the milk from the water."[2] There is a Brāhman, named Vishnū Sarmā, celebrated for his perfect acquisition of the sciences. To him entrust your sons, and he will render them well-informed.' On hearing this, the king sent for Vishnū Sarmā, and addressed him: 'Venerable Brāhman, confer a favour upon me, by instructing these princes in polite literature, and rendering them superior to the youths, their companions; in recompense of which I promise you lands of large extent.' Vishnū Sarmā replied: 'Hear, O king, my words. I am not a retailer of knowledge for lands and wealth; but if I do not instruct your sons in the *Nītī Sāstrā* (Polity), I will forego my own name. There is no need to say more. I do not utter this vaunt through any desire of wealth; for wealth is useless to any one whose passions are mortified and subdued. I wish but to gratify you, and to do the will of Saraswati. Let it be written, therefore, that if, *in six months from this day*, I do not make the princes more proficient than many people in various branches of knowledge, it shall not be allowed to me, a Brāhman, to point out the way of God.' The king, highly gratified by this assurance, delivered his sons to him and retired; and Vishnū Sarmā, taking the princes with him, repaired to his own house, where, for their instruction, he composed these five chapters. Reading these, the princes were, in

---

[1] The four objects or occupations of human life: Duty, Wealth, Desire, and Final Liberation.

[2] This is a popular notion among the Hindūs: because the bird seems, as they imagine, to extract his food by suction, from solution in water, wherefore a bird of this genus is considered to be an emblem of discrimination, as being capable of separating milk from water. *Note by H. T. Colebrooke.*

six months, highly accomplished, and the Five Tantras became famous throughout the world. Whosoever reads this work acquires the whole *Nītī Sāstrā*, and will never be overthrown by Indra himself."

The resemblance between the leading idea of the tale of Sindibād and the biblical story of Joseph and the wife of Potiphar is very obvious. But the incident is found in an Egyptian romance— the oldest extant fairy tale which dates from the 14th century B.C., "when Pharaoh Ramses Miamun, the founder of Pithom and Ramses, ruled at Thebes, and literature celebrated its highest triumphs at his brilliant court: nine pre-eminent *savans* were attached to the person of the king, the contemporary of Moses."[3] The following is an abstract of the first part of this ancient tale (it is among the papyri in the British Museum):

The story relates to two brothers, of the same mother and father; the name of the elder was Anapou (Anubis), that of the younger was Satou. Anapou, being the head of the house, married, and he treated his younger brother as his son. (Some obliterations here occur, but it appears that Satou was a skilful feeder of cattle, and that he led his brother's herds every day to the pasture, and brought them back at night to their stalls.) "When the season of tillage arrived, the elder brother said to him: 'Let us take the teams and go to plough, for the land appears [*i.e.*, the water of the inundation had subsided], and is fit for culture. When we have ploughed it, you shall fetch the seed.' So the young man proceeded to execute what his elder brother told him." The story goes on to the following effect: The ploughing being finished, the elder brother sends the younger home to fetch seed. On arriving at the house, the young man finds his brother's wife engaged in combing her hair. He asks her for corn, and she bids him go to the granary and help himself, while she completes her toilette. Satou fetches one of the largest baskets, in order to carry back as much corn as possible. On his return from the granary, laden with barley and wheat, the lady compliments him upon his strength, and addresses him in precisely the same fashion as the wife of Potiphar addressed the Hebrew Joseph. Satou indignantly rejects her advances, and departs with his load, promising, however, to observe the strictest silence as to what had occurred. The wife of Anapou determines to be revenged; and when the husband returns in the evening, he is astonished to find his wife stretched on the bed, apparently lifeless, stripped of her clothes, and with all the outward semblance of having been the victim of violent outrage. "Who has been speaking with thee?" he inquires. "No man hath spoken to me," is the reply, "but thy brother, when he came to fetch corn." And she then proceeds to tell the story, *mutatis mutandis*, and concludes with conjuring her husband to take summary vengeance upon the offender. "The elder brother became as furious as a panther; he sharpened his sword, and took it in his hand. Then he went and stood behind the door of the stall, ready to kill his younger brother on his arrival in the evening

---

[3] Deutsch's *Literary Remains*: Egypt, Ancient and Modern.

with his cattle. When the sun set, Satou came back, according to his daily wont. As he approached, the cow which walked first said to her keeper: ‘Methinks thy elder brother is yonder, with his sword ready to kill thee when thou comest near him.’ He heard the words of the first cow, and then came another and said the same. Then he looked under the door of the stall, and he saw the feet of his brother, who stood behind the door, sword in hand. He threw his load on the ground, and began to run as fast as he could, and his brother pursued him, sword in hand.” Satou invokes the aid of the sun-god Ra, who causes a wide river full of crocodiles to flow between the two brothers. The younger calls to the elder to wait until next day, when he will give a full explanation. Accordingly, when the sun rises, he relates the true state of the affair, reproaches his brother with his credulity, and, calling the sun to witness his innocence, he inflicts a grievous mutilation upon himself, and falls fainting on the bank of the river. The elder brother is much afflicted, but is unable to go to his assistance on account of the crocodiles. Satou at length recovers, and announces his intention of quitting his brother’s company and of retiring to the valley of the acacia, a remote place, apparently beyond the limits of Egypt.[4]

Such is the earliest example of the aphorism, “The woman whose love is scorned is worse than poison.” Classical legend affords another instance in the tale of Phædra and Hippolytus, and it is probable that the same incident has often actually occurred in different countries and times. M. Paulin Paris cites the following anecdote, as being historically true, and as having exercised a certain influence on the oldest French form of the romance (*Dolopathos*), in which the name of the prince, like that of one of the victims in this tragedy, is Lucinian:

Fausta, the daughter of the tyrant Maximian, was the second wife of the great Constantine. For a long time she had the most decisive influence over that prince, and she had stopped at nothing to ensure the success and glory of his reign. She had actually sacrificed to the interests of the emperor the honour and the life of her father. Crispus, son of the first wife, having long appeared to inspire her with an almost maternal love, afterwards Fausta manifested entirely contrary feelings. Whether for the purpose of opening for her own children the path to the throne,

---

[4] *Cambridge Essays, 1858*: “Hieratic Papyri,” by C. W. Goodman, M. A., pp. 233-235.— Deutsch remarks: “This hieroglyphic document is the only one hitherto known which belongs to the world of fiction. . . Apart from the general literary interest attaching to this relic of more than 3000 years ago which gains a peculiar significance from the fact that it was first written and read at the very court of Ramses II, at which Moses was educated it incidentally reveals so much of the manners and customs, the notions and views of that peculiar era of ancient Egypt, that we cannot be too grateful for its almost miraculous preservation.” The style, he says, is “lucid and clear, and, though full of poetic fancy, yet simple and unaffected.”

or to take revenge of the slight shown to her by her step-son, she accused Crispus of meditating to kill his father, and of wishing to soil the nuptial couch. To give more colour to her imposture, she included in the same accusation the young Lucinian, the son of the hateful Lucinius, and then hardly fourteen years of age. Constantine, too easily persuaded of the crimes of which the two princes were accused, condemned both to the last punishment which they would have merited had they been guilty. But the unhappy father was not long before he repented himself of his credulity: he learned at the same time of the misconduct and infidelity of Fausta, and the execution of that princess was the just expiation of the death of Crispus and Lucinian.[5]

And Keller has remarked that two pictures by Dierick Stuerbout (*circa* 1462) exhibit a similar history; the Baron Von Keverberg describes them thus: These pictures represent a tragic history, told in an ancient chronicle of the town of Louvain, entitled *Legende Dorée* (Golden Legend), as having happened in the year 985. It informs us that the Emperor Otho had caused an illustrious count to be beheaded. The empress had conceived a violent love for him, and had falsely accused him of the same crime, because he would not respond to her adulterous passion. The tragic end of the count is the subject of the first picture. In the second his weeping widow is kneeling before the emperor. Holding in one hand the bleeding head of her husband, and in the other a red-hot iron, she proves the innocence of the dead count. Otho, enraged, condemned the empress to the flames, wherein she paid the penalty of her crime.[6]

In the Turkish romance of the *Forty Vazlrs*, it is related (by the 17th Vazīr) that a certain young man, at Mecca, during the season of pilgrimage, and when famine prevailed, went to purchase some wheat of a woman, who at first refused to sell him any, but afterwards promised him a load of wheat on condition that he would make merry with her. But the good youth repelled her advances, upon which she threatened to call her neighbours and complain against him. He then stole into an inner room, intending to mutilate himself (like the Egyptian Satou), when, lo! the wall miraculously opened, and he found outside ten camels laden with wheat— the gift of Allah, as a reward of his piety and virtue.

But the frame of the Book of Sindibād rests (as Professor Benfey has pointed out) on a story out of the life of Asoka, the great defender of Buddhism. After the death of his first wife, Asandhimitra, he made one of his female servants his queen. This second wife had fallen in love with, but had been rejected by, a son of the king by another wife, Padmavati, the name of the son being

---

[5] Paulin Paris: *Étude sur les diffirents Textes, imprimés et manuscrits, du Roman des Sept Sages.*

[6] *Dyocletianus Leben*, etc. Von Adelbert Keller. Quedlinburg und Leipzig, 1841. Einleitung, p. 43.

Dharmavivardhana, or (from his beautiful eyes) Kunala. The son was sent by his father against Takshasila, which was in revolt. During the prince's absence, the king was seized with a dangerous malady, and determined to set Kunala on the throne. The queen, foreseeing that this would be her ruin, promised to heal the king's disorder. This she did; and being offered by the king any gift she might ask, she desired the favour of exercising the regal power for *seven days*, and employed this time in sending to Takshasila and having the prince's eyes put out. The blind son comes before his father as a lute-player, and is recognised, and the Queen is burnt.[7]

The story has deeply penetrated Indian literature. In a Telegu palm-leaf manuscript entitled *Sārangdhara Charita*, described by Dr. H. H. Wilson, the hero, Sārangdhara, is the son of Rājamahendra, king of Rājamahendri, whose step-mother Chitrāngī falls in love with him. He rejects her advances, on which she accuses him to the king of attempting to violate her, and the king orders him to have his feet cut off, and to be exposed in the forest to wild beasts. There a voice from heaven proclaims that the prince in his former life was Jayanta, minister of Dhaval Chandra, who, being envious of Sumanta, one of his colleagues, contrived to hide the slippers of Sumanta under the bed of the queen. The king, finding them and ascertaining whose they were, commanded Sumanta to be exposed to wild beasts after having his legs and hands cut off; in retribution of which Jayanta, now Sārangdhara, suffers the like mutilation. He acknowledges the justice of the sentence, and his wounds are healed by a Yogi. A voice from heaven apprises the king of the innocence of his son, and he takes Sārangdhara back and puts Chitrāngī to death. Sārangdhara adopts a religious life.— In the Tamil version, when the prince has been mutilated and cast into the jungle, his dead mother's lamentations are heard by the Siddhas, who restore the prince's limbs, and a voice from heaven apprises the king of Chitrāngī's guilt. Again: In the *Kumara Rāma Charita*, Ratnangī, one of the wives of Rāja Kāmpila, became enamoured of Kumara Rāma, his youngest son, and importuned him to gratify her desires. Finding him inexorable, her love was changed to hatred, and she complained to Kāmpila that Rāma had attempted her chastity. Kāmpila in a rage ordered Rāma to be put to death instantly, with his four chief leaders. The minister Bachapa, however, secreted Rāma and his friends in his palace, and decapitating five ordinary criminals, produced their heads to the rāja as those of his intended victims. Kāmpila soon repented of his haste, and the prince's death was the subject of universal sorrow. After some time Rāma reappeared, and the Princess Ratnangī, on hearing of this, hanged herself, by which Kāmpila was satisfied of the innocence of his son.[8]

---

[7] *Orient und Occident*, iii, p. 177.

[8] *Descriptive Catalogue of the Mackenzie Collection of Oriental MSS.*, etc. By H. H. Wilson. Calcutta, 1828.

To the sporadic part of the family of the Sindibād belong the Turkish romance of the *Forty Vazīrs*, the Persian *Ten Vazīrs* (generally called the *Bakhtyār Nāma*) and the Hindu *Alakeswara Kathā*. The frame of the Forty Vazīrs corresponds pretty closely with that of the Book of Sindibād, but the eighty subordinate tales, related by the vazīrs and the lady alternately, are, with but one or two exceptions, quite different from those found in the several texts of the Seven Vazīrs, or Wise Men. This romance is said to have been composed, from an old Arabian work, entitled, *The Forty Mornings and Forty Evenings* early in the 15th century. The plan of the *Bakhtyār Nāma* (or the Ten Vazīrs) is essentially different from the frame of the Sindibād books, in which, as we have seen, the prince must keep strict silence for seven days, he is tempted by one of his father's women, who falsely accuses him, and the vazīrs, or wise men, save his life from day to day, by relating tales to the king, until the period of danger to the prince is past. All this is precisely reversed in the *Bakhtyār Nāma*, the outline of which is as follows:

A king, flying with his wife from his kingdom, which is in revolt, is obliged to abandon his newly-born son near a well. The infant is found by a robber-chief, who adopts and educates him as his own son. Meanwhile the king recovers his kingdom. It happens that the robber-chief, at the head of his band, attacks a large caravan, and is defeated, many of his followers being killed or taken prisoners, and among the latter is the robber-chiefs adopted son. When the prisoners are brought before the king, he is struck with the grace and beauty of the youth his own son, but, of course, unknown to him pardons him and takes him into his service. One evening the young man, dazed with wine, wanders into the private apartments of the palace, seeking his way out, and, not knowing what he is doing, lays himself down on the royal couch, and falls asleep. In this condition he is discovered by the king, who, concluding that the queen must be privy to the youth's presence there, is naturally furious, sends for the queen, and accuses her of infidelity, which she denies; and the king causes her and the young man to be confined separately, until he has considered what had best be done. In the morning the prime vazīr, who is envious of the youth's favour with the king, having learned the particulars of the affair of the preceding night, obtains leave to visit the queen, and assures her that his Majesty would not be convinced that she was innocent, and counsels her, if she would save her own life, to accuse the youth (who is only the son of a robber, he reminds her) of having stolen unawares into the harem, and professed love to her. After much persuasion, she at length consents to the vazīr's proposal, and having accused the young man, the king gives orders for him to be brought before him and put to death. But the youth speaks eloquently in his own behalf, and incites the king's curiosity to hear a certain tale in illustration of the evils of precipitation, which, leave being granted, he relates, and is then sent back to prison. Next morning the second vazīr presents himself before the king, and urges him to put the youth to death. The young man is again brought forth to be executed, when he obtains leave to relate another story, showing the deplorable consequences of rashness, after which he

is once more remanded to prison. In this manner, each of the Ten Vazīrs in turn seeks the youth's destruction, and he pleads his own cause by means of eloquent speeches and impressive tales, until the eleventh day, when he is led out to execution, and his foster-father the robber-chief, recognises him, hastens to the king, and implores the life of the youth whom he had found in the wilderness so many years ago; and showing the jewels which were upon the infant, the king sees with horror that he was about to murder his own son, and puts the envious vazīrs to an ignominious death.

It will thus be seen that the frame of the *Bakhtyār Nāma* is very remotely related to the Sindibād books: in place of a dumb prince and his seven defenders, we have an eloquent youth defending himself against his ten false accusers. I have been at the trouble of sketching the frame of this romance, because it is commonly included in the Sindibād cycle, by writers, too, who ought to know better.[9]

The third romance of the sporadic group, the *Alakeswara Kathā*, closely resembles the tale of Bakhytār and the Ten Vazīrs: this is a story, written in the Tamil language, of the raja of Alakapur, and his four ministers, who, "being falsely accused of violating the sanctity of the inner apartments, vindicate their innocence and disarm the king's wrath by relating a number of stories," one of which is the familiar tale of the Lost Camel, found also in the Talmud.[10]

Much obscurity surrounds the early history of the Book of Sindibād, notwithstanding the important discoveries of European scholars during the last thirty years. The work of Des Longchamps is often misleading, and his theories regarding the introduction of the romance into Europe and the pedigree of the Eastern texts are now, for the most part, set aside— being superseded by the laborious investigations of such learned and acute men as Baethgen, Benfey, Brockhaus, Comparetti, Gödeke, Keller, Montaiglon, Mussafia, Noldeke, Paulin Paris, etc.; but when and where the original work was composed, and how it was first spread abroad, are questions which have not yet been satisfactorily answered. True, Ma'sūdī, who has been styled the Herodotus of the Arabs, in his great historical work, *Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*, written about A.D. 943-4,

---

[9] Thus Gödeke says (*Orient und Occident*, iii , p. 388): "This form which gives the power of speech only to the Masters, besides being found in Nakhshabī [of which I shall have somewhat to say presently], has been adopted only by the *Ten Vazīrs*, and by Herbers" a most preposterous statement, since the Ten Vazīrs are the accusers, not the defenders, of the young man, and do not relate any tales.

[10] *Descriptive Catalogue of the Mackenzie Collection of MSS.* , etc. By H. H. Wilson. Vol. i, p. 220.

speaking of the Indian kings, says: “In the reign of Kūrūsh lived As-Sindibād, who is the author of the Story of the Seven Vazīrs, the Preceptor, the Boy, and the Wife of the King. This is the work,” he adds, “which is called the Book of Sindibād.” And nearly to the same purpose is the evidence lately found, some sixty years earlier than Ma’sudi, viz., Al-Ya’qūbī, who wrote about A.D. 880, and who says, also referring to the ancient Indian kings: “To them belongs Kush,[11] who was in the time of Sindibād the Wise; and this Kush composed the Book of the Craft of Women.” But from these writers we only learn that, according to tradition, the romance was originally written in India. That either the sage Sindibād or the mythical king Kūrūsh, or Kūsh, was the author is, of course, absurd: there is no more reason to suppose that Sindibād was the author of the work which bears his name than that Vishnū Sarmā composed the *Pancha Tantra*, or Bidpai the *Kalila wa Dimna*. Farther, we see that the romance was well— known and almost certainly in an Arabic form— about A.D. 880. But, according to the *Fihrist*, Abān Lāhiqī, who died A.D. 815-16, composed the tale in rhymed couplets, which throws its date back to the early years of the 9th century, and the prose version from which it was derived may have been fifty years older dating about the middle of the 8th century.

The oldest extant text derived directly from an Eastern source was until lately assumed to be the Greek version, entitled *Syntipas*[12] (evidently a corruption of Sindibād), composed, by one Andreopulos, from the Syriac, as we are informed in his prologue:

“This book which thou seest, (my) friend, is (the work) of the fabulist Syntipas, according to the Syrians, nay, rather (according to) the wise prose-writers of the Persians: which being drawn up in the Syrian language, I, Andreopulos, worshipper of Christ, the last [or humblest] of authors, have indited this book, and translated it into the Greek phraseology of the present time. Having been appointed, this work (is) at the command of Gabriel, the renown of grandees, the august Duke of the city of Melitene (he) who is truly a devout dweller in the house of Christ who also decided these (fables) should be set forth, because they do not exist in the books of the modern Greeks. For this collection especially denounces evil-doers, and at the close eulogises deeds admirably achieved.”

To Professor Comparetti belongs the honour of having identified the august Duke Gabriel, at whose command the work was translated, with the prince of the same name who ruled in Melitene between 1086 and 1100; the date of the Greek

---

[11] In an astronomical work much used by Ya’qūbī the name is written Karūsh.

[12] This Greek text was published, from two manuscripts in the King’s Library, at Paris, by Boissonade, in 1825; and a critical edition, by Eberhard, was printed at Leipzig, in 1872.

version may thus be referred to the last decade of the 11th century.[13] In the preface the book is stated to be translated into Syriac from the work of "Mousos the Persian." A unique but, unfortunately, imperfect MS. of the Syriac text was discovered by Rödiger, and printed, with a German translation, by Baethgen, in 1879.[14] "There can be no doubt," says Nöldeke, in a most interesting and important review in the Journal of the German Oriental Society, vol. xxxiii, "that this is the Syriac book translated into Greek by Andreopulos. Both agree in the general course of the narrative, and also in the brevity of the introduction. Even in details, the *Syntipas* shows itself to be, not indeed a literal translation, but yet a translation tolerably correct as to the sense. Hence we must conclude that the parts wanting in the Syriac text stood as they are found in *Syntipas*, But the style of the two is very different. The Syriac narrates plainly and naturally; *Syntipas* is prolix, ornate, and turgid. . . The greater prolixity arises simply from the manner of the translator: even his additions are as strong a contrast to the mode of the original as the rest."— The work of Musa the Persian (presumably written in the Arabic, from the Pahlavī) is now apparently lost, but it must have been extant in the middle of the 13th century, since a Castilian rendering, from the Arabic, made in 1253,[15] corresponds in most respects with the Syriac and its Greek derivative. About the same time a Hebrew version[16] was composed, probably also from the Arabic, in which many liberties are taken with the original stories omitted, others inserted, names given to the seven counsellors, etc.

To recapitulate: the Book of Sindibād was brought from India, its native country, to Persia, where it was translated into Pahlavī (as were the Fables of Bidpai in the 6th century); from Pahlavī, Musa rendered it into Arabic, about the

---

[13] *Researches respecting the Book of Sindibād*, by Domenico Comparetti, pp. 55-58. This valuable work was translated by Mr. Henry Charles Coote, and published for the Folk-Lore Society, 1882.

[14] *Sindban, oder die Sieben Weisen Meister, Syrisch und Deutsch*, von Fried. Baethgen. Leipzig, 1879.

[15] *Libro de los Engannos et los Asayamientos de las Mugeres*: Book of the Deceits and Tricks of Women. This text, with a translation into English by Mr. H. C. Coote, is appended to Professor Comparetti's *Researches*.

[16] *Mishté Sandabar*: Parables of Sandabar. A French translation of this version, by Carmoly, was published at Paris, 1849. In the preface to the edition of Rolland's *Sevin Seages* printed for the Bannatyne Club it is stated that the Hebrew text was "first printed, at Constantinople, in 1516, and afterwards, at Vienna, in 1544, 1568, and 1605." According to Dempster (*Hist. Eccles.*, p. 364), James Bonaventure Hepburn translated the work from Hebrew into Latin.

middle of the 8th century; from Arabic it was translated into Syriac, into old Spanish, and into Hebrew; from Syriac into Greek. Thus far, satisfactory; but not so, when we inquire into the source of Persian texts.

According to Daulat Shāh, the tale of Sindibād was composed in Persian verse by Azraqī, who died at Herāt, A.D. 1132 (A.H. 537). This work seems no longer extant; but it is cited in the Jehangīrī Dictionary (A.D. 1576): "Whoever sees, O king, the counsels of Sindibād well knows that therein the poet's art is difficult." And Sa'dī probably quotes from it in his *Bustān*: "How charmingly has this subtle remark been expressed in (the book of) Sindibād, saying: 'Love is a fire, O my son; advice, a wind.' With wind does fierce fire become more aspiring, (as) by beating does a leopard become more enraged."

Another Persian poetical version, entitled *Sindibād Nama*, was written, by an unknown author, in A.D. 1375, an epitome of which is contained in the present volume. The author informs us that his royal patron one day taxed him with being lazy: "Perform," said the king, "such an achievement with the sword of the pen as shall live as long as swords are wielded. Turn into verse, during my reign, some prose work, that my memory may be perpetuated: let it be the Tale of Sindibād." To this the poet replied: "If God grant me his aid, and if my life be spared, I will turn into verse that celebrated book." Having stated the year when his poem was composed (A.H. 776), proceeding to the tale, he begins: "An Arabian by descent, but speaking the Persian tongue, has thus informed me, in eloquent language, that there lived in India a sage and mighty monarch," and so on (see pp. 5-7). It thus appears that the Tale of Sindibād was known to our poet and his royal patron only in a prose form, the author of which was an Arab by descent, which Falconer thought might afford ground for conjecture that the Arab had found the tale in the language of his family and translated it from Arabic into Persian: the usual process by which works in Pahlavī were returned in later ages to the Persians was through the Arabic.

But there was a modern Persian prose version in this country some forty years since, purporting to be derived from the Pahlavī through the Darī, which has long escaped notice in the investigation of the genealogy of the Book of Sindibād. It is thus referred to by Mr. W. H. Morley, in a letter to Mr. E. W. Lane, dated August, 1841, which is printed in Lane's translation of the *Thousand and One Nights*, vol. iii, p. 681:

"Some time since the Oriental Translation Committee were kind enough to lend me a manuscript from their library, comprising four volumes and containing a collection of tales in the Persian language. Many of these I translated with a view to publication, but one story (occurring in the 4th volume) which is similar in construction to the *Bakhtyār Nāma*,[17] and is preceded by a very curious preface, I reserved for more particular consideration at a future period. On reading the

---

[17] This is not correct— see outline of that romance, pp. xxxii-xxxiv, above.

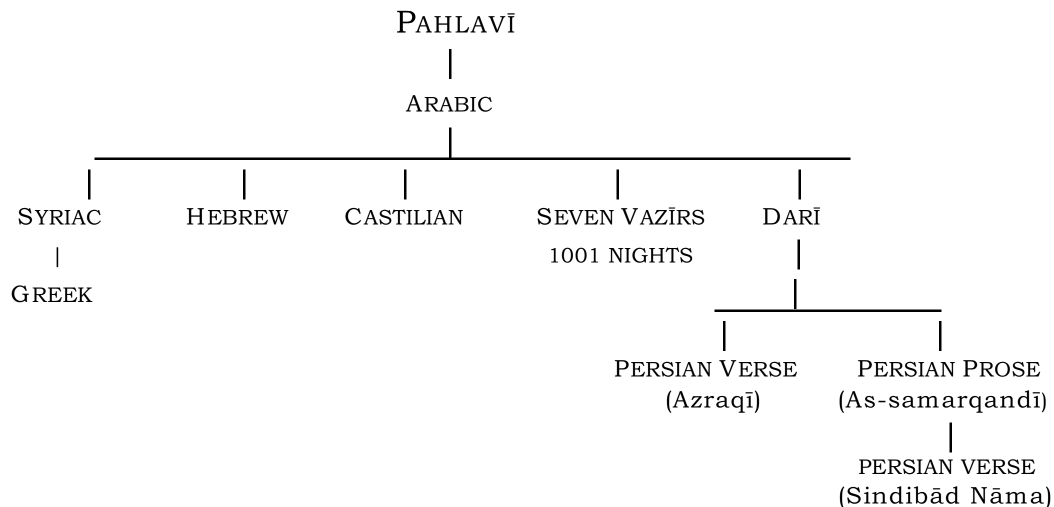
twenty-third number of your excellent translation of the *Alf Laila wa Laila* I was struck by finding in the Abstract of the Story of the King, and his Son, the Damsel, and the Seven Vazīrs the name of the sage As-Sindibād, and the circumstances related in the introduction coincided with those in the Persian story above alluded to. I suspected that they must be identical, and was fully satisfied that they were so, when on referring to the MS. I found that the same tales occurred in both. The great importance of the Persian version consists in its preface, which is omitted both in your edition and the MS. of the British Museum, and which is exceedingly valuable as an evidence of the Persian origin of the story. The preface states that the book is named the *Kitāb-i Sindibād*, and that it was collected from the sages of ‘Ajam. It then says: ‘This book was originally in the Pahlavī tongue, and till the time of the Amīr Nāsiru-‘d-Dawla Abū Muhammad Nūh bin Mansūr Sāmāni, it had not been translated by any person, the Amīr commanded that the Kh’āja Amīd Abū-‘l-Fawaris Fatādzarī should translate it and set right the discrepancies and errors he might find therein. In the year 338 [A.D. 949] the aforesaid Kh’āja undertook the task, and converted it into the Darī language.’ The author of the preface, Muhammad bin ‘Alī bin Muhammad bin Husayn Az-Zahir Al-Kātib As-Samarqandī, then mentions that he has rendered the Darī translation into modern Persian, and dedicates his work to Abū-‘l Muzaffar Qilij Tamghāh Khāqān.”[18]

The Arabic version referred to by Morley as agreeing with his text is that of the *Seven Vazīrs* in the *Thousand and One Nights* based, of course, upon the old Arabic text derived from the Pahlavī, but composed at a much more recent period than any of the other Eastern versions. The introduction is abridged and garbled; a number of the original tales have been suppressed and others substituted. Morley’s statement that the same stories occur in both his text and that of Lane must be understood in a restricted sense, otherwise his text was considerably later than the 12th century. He probably meant that certain stories in Lane’s version also occurred in his text.— The approximate date of the modern Persian version of As-Samarqandī is, according to Morley, A.H. 590 (A.D. 1193), when a prince of a somewhat similar name to that of the author’s patron, Tamghāh Khāqān, flourished. Azraqī’s poem was composed about 70 years before that date, and if the foregoing account be accurate, it was doubtless derived from the Darī

---

[18] This manuscript seems to have disappeared from the Library of the Royal Asiatic Society, London, many years ago. It is thus described by Morley: “The story in the Persian MS. comprises 117 *folia*, and is written in three different hands: the first part is in very illegible Shikastah, and has been apparently added since the exaration of the other two, which are in the Nastalīk character: the latter portion has been taken from a smaller volume, and inlaid to make it conform in size with the rest, and the other volumes of the collection.”

text. But even had we not good reason to believe that the work existed in Arabic long before the date of the Darī translation, it were almost incredible that it should remain in the Pahlavī till A.D. 949. Possibly, something has been omitted in the preface quoted by Morley— mention of the intermediate Arabic text may have been deliberately suppressed by some copyist, if not indeed by As-Samarqandī himself. Let us rather conclude that from the Arabic the work was translated into the Darī in the 10th century, and suppose that As-Samarqandī was the very "Arabian by descent, but speaking the Persian tongue," whose version furnished the groundwork of the *Sindibād Nāma*. According to this view, the genealogy of the romance would be as follows:



The tale of the Seven Vazīrs occurs in three printed texts of the *Thousand and One Nights*: the text edited by Macnaughtan, at Calcutta; that edited by Habicht and Fleischer, at Breslau; and the edition printed at Būlāq (sometimes called the Cairo text), which corresponds pretty nearly with the Calcutta text, and which was the basis of Lane's translation. It is also found in the Rich MSS. Nos. 7404, 7405, 7406, an imperfect copy of the *Nights* brought from Bagdād, of which an analysis was published in the *Asiatic Journal*, 1839— the *Seven Vazīrs* is in the third volume of this MS; and in the fragment of a MS. of the *Nights* procured in Bengal, now, I believe, in the Bodleian Library at Oxford.[19] Although these versions are much corrupted from the original, such as we now possess it in the oldest Eastern texts, yet, says Professor Nöldeke, "a few of the stories are fairly preserved in almost the sequence of words; and it may be asked whether a careful examination of all the texts of this part of the *Thousand and One Nights* might not give a considerably better text. At all events, I am disposed to lay upon this form of the

[19] Jonathan Scott's translation of the *Seven Vazīrs* as found in this MS. is reprinted in the present volume.

book which is still *Arabic*— a somewhat greater value than has hitherto been done."

Yet another version of the *Seven Vazīrs* is found in the Persian collection of Nakhshabī, entitled *Tūtī Nāma*, Parrot-Book, composed early in the 14th century, from an older Persian book of similar character, based upon a Sanskrit work, of which the *Suka Saptati*, Seventy Tales of a Parrot, is a modern redaction. In this version,[20] the damsel does not relate any stories, six of the vazīrs have one story each, the seventh has none, but directs, on the 7th day, that the prince be questioned, after which the damsel is condemned to death, and the king abdicates the throne in favour of his son.— Professor Nöldeke thinks that the prose Persian text used by the author of the *Sindibād Nāina* was the same as that from which Nakhshabī derived the tales of his 8th Night, and that it was probably the Sindibād of Muhammad bin 'Alī Daqā'iqī of Hājī Khalīfa, No. 7259. This author is perhaps the same with As-Samarqandi, also a Muhammad bin 'Alī. At all events, Nöldeke's theory of one text having been used for both versions is certainly strengthened by the circumstance, hitherto unnoticed, that the Story of the Father-in-Law is found in both, and in no other known texts of the Sindibād; and, farther, by the fact that the Story of the Libertine Husband, which in the Greek and other texts is fused with the Story of the Go-Between and the She-Dog, appears in both as a separate tale, which it assuredly was originally, and so occurs in the *Suka Saptatī*.

Professor Comparetti has attempted, with great ingenuity, to explain the fusion of the stories of the She-Dog and the Libertine Husband. An Arabian writer of the loth century, Muhammad bin Al-Warraq, mentions two texts of the Book of Sindibād, a Greater and a Lesser. According to Comparetti, originally the vazīrs had but one story each, and a *second* set was added at a later period, thus constituting the Greater Sindibād, which he considers is for us represented by the *Syntipas*, where the *second* tales thus appear:

First Vazīr,	The Parrot
Second Vazīr,	Double Infidelity
Third Vazīr,	Rice Dealer
Fourth Vazīr,	She-Dog
Fifth Vazīr,	Burnt Cloth
Sixth Vazīr,	Bread Elephant
Seventh Vazīr,	Woman's Wiles

Six of this new series were taken from the *Suka Saptatī* (the tale of the Parrot being adapted from the frame), the fourth forming, as in that collection, two tales, originally thus:

[20] The Eighth Night: Story of the Prince and the Seven Vazīrs, and the misfortune which happened to the Prince on account of a Girl.

Fourth Vazīr,	She-Dog
Fifth Vazīr,	Libertine Husband

"There was some one, however, who wished to introduce the tale of the Burnt Cloth, and in order to do this he united the story of the fifth vazīr with that of the fourth, and put the new tale in the vacant place." But in the Persian *Sindibād Nāma* we find not only the Story of the Burnt Cloth (though in a very different form), but also the two others still separate; from which it would appear that this text represents a more ancient version than that from which the others were derived. But Comparetti would perhaps be disposed to consider this deduction as being more specious than sound. His theory, however, is not favoured by Professor Nöldeke, who has pointed out that in two MSS. of the *Fihrist* is a passage stating that the Larger Sindibād was translated by Asbagh bin 'Abdu-'l-'Azīz bin Sālim Sijjistānī, and bore the name of *Aslam and Sindbād*, and "since in all our existing texts there is not a word about Aslam or a similarly written name, we may pretty confidently conclude that they represent the *lesser* book. "—The name of Aslam might have been that of the prince; and the larger work probably disappeared soon after the smaller form of it became popular— just as Kāderī's abridgment of the *Tūti Nāma* seems to have almost wholly superseded the original work of Nakhshabī. The facility with which manuscript copies of the smaller work could be multiplied would alone account for the disappearance of the other.

All the six vazīrs' tales in Nakhshabī occur also in the *Suka Saptatī*, and five are *second* tales in the Greek, Syriac, and old Castilian texts that of the second vazīr, the Libertine Husband, is in these the concluding portion of the story of the She-Dog.— Professor Brockhaus regarded Nakhshabī's version of the *Seven Vazīrs* as the most ancient, from its greater simplicity, only the vazīrs relating tales on the subject of the deceit of women. "In this," he remarks, "the oldest of the French versions, *Dolopathos*, strangely enough, agrees with this Persian redaction, no doubt by chance." In the case of *Dolopatkos*, the simple form clearly indicates the manner in which the tale came into France, viz., by oral tradition. The monkish author of the original Latin text would probably exercise his own judgment both in amplifying and embellishing the frame, and in his choice of the subordinate stories. Of the eight tales (seven told by the wise men and one by the tutor), three only, the first two and the last, are, so far as I am aware, found in later texts, in which, however, the woman is given stories, and, in place of the tutor, the prince relates the final tale.[21]

By reference to the Comparative Table of Eastern Texts, it will be seen that the Persian *Sindibād Nāma* has, exclusively, four tales in the introduction. Of these, Gödeke has pointed out that the second, third, and fourth occur, almost exactly in the same forms, in the *Avadānas*, or Indian apologues, translated by Stan. Julien from the Chinese, and that "they thus reach back to a time when the

---

[21] See Appendix, Nos. 32 and 33.

Buddhist teaching had extended to China, which, according to Chinese state annals, happened as far back as the first century of the Christian era."[22] In a note on this, Comparetti, in p. 30 of his *Researches*, remarks that the fact of these tales being of Buddhist origin proves nothing— they may well have been introduced at a recent period. But surely not in forms so near the originals? In the conclusion of this text it has two additional tales, one of which, the Four Liberators, is unquestionably very ancient. It is admitted on all hands that in the Syriac and Greek texts the introduction is considerably abridged. In the Persian, both introduction and conclusion are much more detailed— in short, there is nothing in the plan of the poem to indicate suppression or curtailment, considering the deficiencies in the MS., which are, unfortunately, both numerous and serious.[23] But it will perhaps be contended that in this the poet has used the freedom of enlarging upon his original, and also of suppressing portions and substituting others, or that the author of his original had done so. Let us see what reasons there are to assume the Greek text to be the best representative of the Book of Sindibād as it was translated into Arabic from the Pahlavī— when, we do not know; but say, the middle of the 8th century.[24] The only certain date we possess is that of the Greek text, namely, the latter years of the nth century. The Syriac version may have been composed from the Arabic one hundred years before the Greek, or about A.D. 990. Now, regarding the Persian *Sindibād Nāma*: this was written so late as 1375, from a prose version, "translated from the Arabic," as is

---

[22] *Orient und Occident*, iii, 393.

[23] Folio 41 is wanting; after fol. 44, a *lacuna*; fol. 57 is wanting; fol. 62, a *lacuna*; fol. 86, a *lacuna*, and the next 40 leaves are displaced: 87-126 should be placed after 155, where another deficiency occurs; fol. 126, a *lacuna*: 127-154 should follow 86, where there is also a deficiency. Göodeke (in *Orient und Occident*, iii, 394) conjectured that the five tales of the Greek text which are not found in the Persian had been torn out of the MS., "probably owing to something in their contents that was offensive." The tales were certainly not torn out for any such reason, since three of them the Drop of Honey, the Fox, and Destiny have nothing whatever offensive in them; of the others, one is nauseous (the Loaves), and one is silly enough (the Bread Elephant). Besides, as we now see, there was no room for three of these, each of the vazīrs having his two tales; the stories of The Fox and Destiny were probably in the MS. originally. No doubt, many of the *lacuna* are to be explained by the nature of some of the pictures that remain in the MS., of which there are about ninety.

[24] We are informed of a poetical version having been made by a man who died A.D. 815, but since we do not know its contents the fact goes for nothing in dealing with texts which are before us. It presupposes, however, an earlier prose text.

generally assumed, from the author's statement that "an Arabian *by descent*, but speaking the Persian tongue," had furnished him with the material of his poem. But unless we are to consider the preface of As-Samarqandī to his text in the MS. described by Morley (see above, p. xli) as a tissue of fabrications, from first to last, it will at least be conceded that he translated it out of the Darī into modern Persian, and, if so, the Arabic was certainly the source of that Darī version; and between A.D. 949, the date of the Darī, and A.D. 990, the possible date of the Syriac (and it might have been even later), the Arabic text may have undergone alterations such as we find in the Syriac, Greek, and old Castilian versions. The *Sindibād Nāma*— poem though it is may therefore more faithfully reflect the Book of Sindibād than the older texts. All this, of course, is little better than conjecture; a comparison of the Persian prose text described by Morley with the poem which may have been based upon it (the *Sindibād Nāma*) would probably satisfactorily settle the whole question, and it is to be hoped that the missing MS. will yet be discovered.

The name of Sindbād[25] is familiar to every schoolboy in Europe through the fascinating Arabian tale of the Voyages of the venturous merchant, Sindbād the Sailor, as he is commonly but erroneously styled. "It is singular," says Hole, in his Remarks on that tale, "that the names of both the narrator and auditor, Sindbād and Hindbād, are derived, not from the Arabic, but the old Persian language. *Bād* [*ābād*] signifies a city; *Sind* and *Hind* are the territories on either side of the Indus. *Sind* indeed is the original name, as *Hind* is of those countries which lie between it and the Ganges." But this etymology of the name is rejected by Benfey, who derives it from *Siddhapatī*, lord of sages, or sorcerers: Siddhi being a Sanskrit word, signifying "perfection of power," and those beings called Siddhas, who are supernaturally endowed, figure frequently in Indian fictions. Applied to a mere mortal, Siddhapatī would indicate that such a man was wise beyond all others. The termination *bād* could in no case be identified with *ābād*, a place or an abode.

To what cause, it may be asked, does the Book of Sindibād, as represented more or less closely in Asiatic and European versions, owe its unfailing popularity during so many ages of the world's history? The leading incident, of a youth being in imminent danger of death in consequence of the malice of his stepmother, has, no doubt, ever had a peculiar fascination for readers of all ranks and ages; but it is chiefly, as I think, due to the circumstance that most of the subordinate tales turn upon the wickedness, profligacy, and craft of women. This is not only a

---

[25] Both Lane and Falconer write the name Sindibād, a form which is retained in the present work, but which is a comparatively recent corruption. In the *Sheref Nāma*, the oldest dictionary of Persian extant (though older vocabularies and glossaries are known), the name is written *Sindbād*.

characteristic of Muslim tales, inspired probably by the low estimate which the Prophet of Mecca is credited by tradition with having entertained of the female sex, but it also pervades much more ancient Indian fictions. These attributes, as Dr. H. H. Wilson has observed, probably "originate in the feelings which have always pervaded the East unfavourable to the dignity of women. But we are not to mistake the language of satire, or the licentiousness of wit, for truth, or to suppose that the pictures which are thus given of the depravity of women owe not much of their colouring to the malignity of men. The avidity with which this style of portraiture was adopted and improved upon in Europe shows that either the women of Christian Europe were still more vicious than those of India, or the men were still less disposed to treat them with deference and esteem. It is in this respect that stories of domestic manners contrast so remarkably with the inventions of chivalric romance; and the homage paid in the latter to the virtues and graces of the female sex is a feature derived, in all probability from that portion of their parentage which comes from the North, woman being ever held in higher honour amongst the Teutonic nations than amongst those of the South of Europe or of the East, and contributing, by the elevating influence she was permitted to enjoy, to their moral exaltation and martial superiority."

Our old English jest-books abound in tales of the levity and perverseness of women, which are paralleled in the popular literature of all other European countries. The well-worn story of the man whose perverse wife was drowned, and he sought her against the stream, alleging to his neighbours that she would be sure to float up the river instead of being carried with the current, is also domiciled in Germany, Scandinavia, and Russia.— An Eastern anecdote to the same purpose seems a commentary on a saying ascribed to Muhammad that a man should always do the opposite of what his wife advises: A young man once went on the roof of his house to repair it, and having finished the task, called to his wife, and asked her how he should come down. She answered: "You are a young and active man; what hinders you from jumping down?" He jumped accordingly, and dislocated his ankle, which confined him to the house for many months; and even when able to go about a little, his ankle was still out of its place. He again had occasion to repair his roof, and when he had done, he asked his wife how he should come down this time. "O, by the stairs, to be sure," quoth she. But when he reflected how he had come to grief by following his wife's advice formerly, he resolved to jump down, which he did, and, behold, his ankle returned to its proper place.

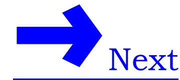
It would appear that collections of "proverbs" against women were common in England in the days of Chaucer, if we may credit the Wife of Bath, whose fifth husband, Jankins, clerk of Oxenforde, we are told, had a book comprising tales of the wickedness of wives, which he frequently pored over with pleasure. One evening he was reading aloud portions of his book, which so incensed his spouse that she tore three leaves out of it, and then knocked him backwards into the fire. Her husband, who was but half her age, bounded up and felled her to the floor.

Lying moaning, as if at the point of death, she begged him to stoop down, that she might kiss him in token of her forgiveness. The husband bent down, when, instead of kissing, she bit him on the cheek. The end of the brawl was that he became very penitent and burnt his book.

The sages of ancient Greece were no whit behind the fablers of India in their bitter sayings about women. Thus Antiphanes: “In a woman one thing only I believe, that when she is dead she will not come to life again; in all else I distrust her until she is dead;” and Menander: “Of all wild beasts on earth or in sea, the greatest is woman;” again: “Where are women there are all kinds of mischief;” and Diogenes, seeing some women who had been hanged from the boughs of an olive-tree, said: “I wish all trees bore that kind of fruit.”

Whether Somadeva is to be credited with all the spiteful remarks upon women in the *Kathā Sarit Sāgara*, or he has merely versified what he found ready to hand in the *Vrihat Kathā*, some are conceived in the most malignant spirit; for example: “Women, like prosperous circumstances, are never faithful to any one in this world;” again: “A fickle dame is like a sunset, momentarily aglow for every one;” and again: “Do not put yourself in the power of a woman: the heart of a female is a tangled maze.” But he is not always unjust: “Here and there you will find a virtuous woman, who adorns a glorious family as the streaks of the moon adorn a broad sky.”

Prev

 Next

Home

Prepared for www.wollamshram.ca/1001/Clouston/Sindibad_Main.htm
© 2010 (100213)