

THE STORY OF ALI COGIA.

A

Merchant of Bagdad:

from The
Arabian Nights' Entertainments.

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In the reign of the caliph Haroun Alraschid, there lived at Bagdad a merchant whose name was All Cogia, that was neither one of the richest nor the meanest sort. He was a bachelor, and lived in the house which was his father's, master of his own actions, content with the profit he made by his trade. But happening to dream a dream for three nights together, that a venerable old man came to him, and, with a severe look, reprimanded him for not having made a pilgrimage to Mecca, he was very much troubled.

As a good Mussulman, he knew he was obliged to undertake a pilgrimage; but as he had a house, shop, and goods, he had always believed that they might stand for a sufficient reason to excuse him, endeavouring by his charity, and other good works, to atone for that neglect. But after this dream, his conscience was so much pricked, that the fear lest any misfortune should befall him, made him resolve not to defer it any longer; and to be able to go that year, he sold off his household goods, his shop, and with it the greatest part of his merchandises, reserving only some, which he thought might turn to a better account at Mecca: and meeting with a tenant for his house, let that also.

Things being thus disposed, he was ready to go when the Bagdad caravan set out for Mecca: the only thing he had to do was to secure a sum of a thousand pieces of gold, which would have been troublesome to carry along with him, besides the money he had set apart to defray his expenses on the road, and for other purposes. To this end he made choice of a jar of a proportionable size, put the thousand pieces of gold into it, and covered them over with olives. When he had closed the mouth of the jar, he carried it to a merchant, a particular friend of his, and said to him, You know, brother, that in a few days I set out with the caravan, on my pilgrimage to Mecca I beg the favour of you, that you would take charge of a jar of olives, and keep it for me till I return. The merchant promised him he would, and in an obliging manner said Here, take the key of my warehouse, and set your jar where you please. I promise you shall find it there when you come again.

On the day the caravan was to set out, Ali Cogia joined it, with a camel loaded with what merchandises he thought fit to carry along with him, which served him to ride on, and arrived safe at Mecca, where he visited, along with other pilgrims, the temple so much celebrated and frequented

by Mussulmen of all nations every year, who come from all parts of the world, and observe religiously the ceremonies prescribed them; and when he had acquitted himself of the duties of his pilgrimage, he exposed the merchandises he had brought with him, to sell or exchange them.

Two merchants passing by, and seeing All Cogia's goods, thought them so fine and choice, that they stopped some time to look at them, though they had no occasion for them; and when they had satisfied their curiosity, one of them said to the other, as they were going away, If this merchant knew to what profit these goods would turn at Cairo, he would carry them thither, and not sell them here, though this is a good mart.

Ali Cogia heard these words ; and as he had often heard talk of the beauties of Egypt, he was resolved to take the opportunity of seeing them, and taking a journey thither. Therefore, after having packed up his goods again, instead of returning to Bagdad, he set out for Egypt, with the caravan of Cairo; and when he came thither, he found his account in his journey, and in a few days sold all his goods to a greater advantage than he hoped for. With the money he bought others, with an intent to go to Damascus; and while he waited for the opportunity of a caravan, which was to set forward in six weeks, he saw all the rarities at Cairo, as also the pyramids; and sailing up the Nile, viewed the famous towns on each side of that river.

As the Damascus caravans took Jerusalem in their way, our Bagdad merchant had the opportunity of visiting the temple, looked upon by all the Mussulmen to be the most holy, after that of Mecca, whence this city takes its name of *Noble Holiness*.

Ali Cogia found Damascus so delicious a place, abounding with fine meads, pleasantly watered, and delightful gardens, that it exceeded the descriptions given of it in history. Here he made a long abode, but, nevertheless, had not forgot his native Bagdad: for which place he set out, and arrived at Aleppo, where he made some stay; and from thence, after having passed the Euphrates, he bent his course to Moussoul, with an intention, in his return to come by a shorter way down the Tigris.

When Ali Cogia came to Moussoul, the Persian merchants, with whom he travelled from Aleppo, and with whom he had contracted a great friendship, had got so great an ascendant over him by their civilities and agreeable conversation, that they easily persuaded him not to leave them till they came to Schiraz, from whence he might easily return to Bagdad with a considerable profit. They led him through the towns of Sultania, Pei, Coam, Caschan, Ispahan, and from thence to Schiraz; from whence he had the complaisance to bear them company to India, and so came back again with them to Schiraz; insomuch that, including the stay he made in every town, he was seven years absent from Bagdad, whither he then resolved to return.

All this time his friend, with whom he had left his jar of olives, neither thought of him nor them; but just at the time when he was on the road with a caravan from Schiraz, one evening, when this merchant was supping at home with his family, the discourse happening to fall upon olives, his wife was desirous to eat some, saying, she had not tasted any for a long while. Now you speak of olives, said the merchant, you put me in mind of a jar, which Ali Cogia left with me seven years ago, when he went to Mecca ; and put it himself in my warehouse, for me to keep for him against he returned. What is become of him I know not; though, when the caravan came back, they told me he was gone

for Egypt. Certainly he must be dead, since he has not returned in all this time; and we may eat the olives if they prove good. Give me a plate and a candle, and I will go and fetch some of them, and we will taste them.

For God's sake, husband, sail the wife. do not commit so base an action: you know that nothing is more sacred than what is committed to one's care and trust. You say Ali Cogia has been gone to Mecca, and is not returned; but you have been told that he is gone into Egypt; and how do you know but he may be gone farther? As you have no news of his death, he may return tomorrow, for any thing you can tell; and what a disgrace would it be to you and your family, if he should come, and you not restore him his jar in the same condition he left it! I declare I have no desire of the olives, and will not taste of them: for when I mentioned them, it was only by way of discourse; besides, do you think that they can be good after they have been kept so long? They must be all mouldy, and spoiled; and if Ali Cogia should return, as I have a strong persuasion he will, and should find they have been opened, what will he think of your honour? I beg of you to let them alone.

The wife had not argued so long with her husband, but that she read his obstinacy in his face. In short, he never regarded what she said, but got up, took a candle and a plate, and went into the warehouse. Well, husband, said the wife again, remember I have no hand in this business, and that you cannot lay any thing to my charge, if you should have cause to repent of this action.

The merchant's ears were deaf to these remonstrances of his wife, and he persisted in his design. When he came into the warehouse, he opened the jar, and found the olives all mouldy; but to see if they were all so to the bottom, he turned some of them upon the plate, and by shaking the jar, some of the gold tumbled out. At the sight of the gold, the merchant, who was naturally covetous, looked into the jar, and perceived that he had shaken out almost all the olives, and what remained was fine gold coin. He immediately put the olives into the jar again, covered it up, and returned to his wife. Indeed, wife, said he, you was in the right to say that the olives were all mouldy; for I found it so, and have made up the jar just as Ali Cogia left it; so that he will not perceive that they have been touched, if he should return. You had better have taken, my advice, said the wife, and not meddled with them. God grant no mischief comes of it!

The merchant was not more affected with his wife's last words than he had been by her former, but spent almost the whole night in thinking how he might appropriate Ali Cogia's gold to his own use, and keep possession of it, in case Ali Cogia should return and ask him for the jar. The next morning, he went and bought some olives of that year, took out the old and the gold, and filled the jar with the new, covered it up, and put it in the same place where Ali Cogia left it.

About a month after the merchant had committed so base an action, for which he was to pay dear, Ali Cogia arrived at Bagdad ; and as he had let his house, he alighted at a khan, choosing to stay there till he had signified his arrival to his tenant, and he had provided himself with another house.

The next morning, Ali Cogia went to pay a visit to the merchant his friend, who received him in the most obliging manner imaginable , and expressed a great deal of joy at his return, after so many years absence; telling him that he had begun to lose all hopes of ever seeing him again.

After the usual compliments on both sides on such a meeting, Ali Cogia desired the merchant to return him the jar of olives which he had left with him, and to excuse the liberty he had taken in giving him so much trouble.

My clear friend, Ali Cogia, replied the merchant, you are to blame to make all these apologies; your vessel has been no inconvenience to me: on such an occasion I should have made as free with you: there, take the key of my warehouse; go and take it; you will find it in the some place where you left it.

Ali Cogia went into the merchant's warehouse, took his jar, and after having returned him the key, and thanks for the favour he had done him, returned with it to the khan where he lodged; and opening the jar, and putting his hand down as low as the pieces of gold lay, was very much surprised to find none. At first, he thought he might perhaps be mistaken; and, to discover the truth, poured out all the olives into all his travelling kitchen-utensils, without so much as finding one single piece of money. His astonishment was so great, that he stood for some time motionless; then lifting up his hands and eyes to heaven, he cried out, Is it possible that a man, whom I took to be my good friend, should be guilty of so base an action?

Ali Cogia, cruelly alarmed at the fear of so considerable a loss, returned immediately to the merchant. My good friend, said he, be not surprised to see me come back so soon. I own the jar of olives to be the same put into your magazine; but with the olives I put a thousand pieces of gold into it, which I do not find. Perhaps you might have occasion for them, to employ them in trade; if so, they are at your service; only put me out of my pain, and give me an acknowledgment, after which you may pay me again at your own convenience.

The merchant, who expected that Ali Cogia would come with such a complaint, had meditated an answer. Friend Ali Cogia, said he, when you brought your jar of olives to me, did I touch it? did not I give you the key of my warehouse? did not you carry it there yourself, and did not you find it in the, same place, covered in the same manner as when you left it? And if you put gold in it, you should have found it again. You told me that they were olives, and I believed it. This is all I know of the matter: you may believe me, if you please; but I never touched them.

Ali Cogia made use of all the mild ways he could think of to oblige the merchant to do him right. I love peace and quietness, said he to him, and shall be very sorry to come to those extremities which will bring the greatest disgrace upon you: consider that merchants, as we are, ought to abandon all interest to preserve a good reputation. Once again I tell you, I should be very much concerned if your obstinacy shall oblige me to force you to do me justice; for I would rather almost lose what is my right than have recourse to law.

Ali Cogia, replied the merchant, you agree that you left a jar of olives with me; and now you have taken it away, you come and ask me for a thousand pieces of gold. Did you ever tell me that such a sum was in the jar? I did not even know that they were olives, for you never showed them to me. I wonder you do not as well ask me for diamonds and pearls instead of gold; begone about your business, and do not raise a mob about my shop: for some persons had already stopped. These last words were pronounced in so great heat and passion, as not only made those who stood about the

shop already stay longer, and created a great mob, but the neighbouring merchants came out of their shops to see what was the dispute between Ali Cogia and the merchant, and endeavour to reconcile them; and when Ali Cogia had informed them of his grievance, they asked the merchant what he had to say.

The merchant owned that he had kept the jar for Ali Cogia in his warehouse, but denied that ever he meddled with it; and swore that he knew it was full of olives only because All Cogia told him so, and bid them all bear witness of the insult and affront offered him. You bring it upon yourself; said Ali Cogia, taking him by the arm; but since you use me so basely, I cite you to the law of God; let us see whether you will have the assurance to say the same thing before the cady.

The merchant could not refuse this summons, which every good Mussuhnan is bound to observe or be declared a rebel against religion; but said, With all my heart; we shall soon see who is in the wrong.

All Cogia carried the merchant before the cady, before whom he accused him of cheating him of a thousand pieces of gold, which he had left with him. The cady asked him if he had any witnesses; to which he replied, that he had not taken that precaution, because he believed the person he trusted his money with to be his friend, and always took him for an honest man.

The merchant made the same defence he had done before the merchants his neighbours, offering to make oath that he never had the money he was accused of; and that he did not so much as know there was such a sum; upon which the cady took his oath, and dismissed him acquitted.

Ali Cogia, extremely mortified to find that he must sit down with so considerable a loss, protested against the sentence, declaring to the cady that he would appeal to the caliph Haroun Alraschid, who would do him justice; which protestation the cady only looked upon as the effect of the common resentment of all those who lose their cause, and thought he had done his duty in acquitting a person who had been accused without witnesses. While the merchant returned home, triumphing over Ali Cogia, and overjoyed at his good fortune, Ali Cogia went and drew up a petition; and the next day, observing the time when the caliph came from noon prayers, he placed himself in the street he was to pass through, and holding out his hand with the petition, an officer appointed for that purpose, who always goes before the caliph, came and took it to present it.

As Ali Cogia knew that it was the caliph's custom to read the petitions at his return to the palace, he went into the court, and waited till the officer who had taken the petition read it, and came out of the caliph's apartment, who told him that the caliph had appointed an hour to hear him next day; and then asking him where the merchant lived, he sent to notify him to attend at the same time.

That same evening, the caliph, the grand vizier Giafar, and Mesrour, the chief of the eunuchs, went all disguised through the town, as I have already told your majesty it was his custom occasionally to do: and, passing through a street, the caliph heard a noise, and mending his pace, he came to a gate, which led into a little court; through a hole he perceived ten or twelve children playing by moonlight.

The caliph, who was curious to know at what play the children played, sat down upon a stone bench just by; and, still looking through the hole, he heard one of the briskest and liveliest of the children say, Let us play at the cady. I will be the cady; bring All Cogia and the merchant who cheated him of the thousand pieces of gold before me.

These words of the child it the caliph in mind of the petition Ali Cogia had given him that day, and made him redouble his attention to see the issue of the trial.

As the affair of Ali Cogia and the merchant made a great noise in Bagdad, it had not escaped the children, who all accepted the proposition with joy, and agreed on the part each was to act: not one of them refused him that made the proposal to be cady; and when he had taken his seat, which he did with all the seeming gravity of a cady, another, as an officer of the court, presented two before him, one as Ali Cogia, and the other as the merchant against whom he complained.

Then the pretended cady directing his discourse to the feigned Ali Cogia, asked him what he had to lay to that merchant's charge.

Ali Cogia, after a low bow, informed the young cady of the fact, and related every particular, and afterwards begged that he would use his authority, that he might not lose so considerable a sum of money.

Then the feigned cady, turning about to the merchant, asked him why he did not return the money which All Cogia demanded of him.

The feigned merchant alleged the same reasons as the real merchant had done before the cady himself, and offered to confirm by oath that what he had said was truth. Not so fast, replied the pretended cady; before you come to your oath, I should be glad to see the jar of olives. Ali Cogia, said he, addressing himself to the lad who acted that part, have you brought the jar? No, replied he. Then go and fetch it immediately, said the other.

The pretended Ali Cogia went immediately, and returning as soon, feigned to set a jar before the cady, telling him that it was the same he left with the accused person, and took away again. But, to omit no part of the formality, the supposed cady asked the merchant if it was the same; and as by his silence he seemed not to deny it, he ordered it to be opened. He that represented Ali Cogia seemed to take off the cover. and the pretended cady made as if he looked into it. They are fine olives, said he; let me taste of them; and then pretending to eat of them, added, They are excellent; but, continued he, I cannot think that olives will keep seven years, and be so good: send for some olive-merchants, and let me hear what is their opinion. Then two boys, as olive-merchants, presented themselves. Are you olive-merchants? said the sham cady. Tell me how long olives will keep to be fit to eat?

Sir, replied the two merchants, let us take what care we can, they will hardly be worth any thing the third year; for then they have neither taste nor colour. If it be so, answered the cady, look into that jar, and tell me how long it is since those olives were put into it.

The two merchants pretended to examine and to taste the olives, and told the cady they were new and good. You are mistaken, said the young cady ; Ali Cogia says he put them into the jar seven years ago.

Sir, replied the merchants, we can assure you they are of this year's growth; and we will maintain there is not a merchant in Bagdad but will say the same. The feigned merchant that was accused would have objected against the evidence of the olive-merchants; but the feigned cady would not suffer him. Hold your tongue, said he; you are a rogue; let him be hanged. Then the children put an end to their play, clapping their hands with great joy, and seizing the feigned criminal to carry him to execution.

Words cannot express how much the caliph Haroun Alraschid admired the sagacity and sense of the boy who had passed so just a sentence in an affair which was to be pleaded before him the next day. He withdrew, and rising off the bench he sat on, he asked the grand vizier, who heard all that passed, what he thought of it. Indeed, commander of the true believers, answered the grand vizier Giagar, I am surprised to find so much sagacity in one so young.

But, answered the caliph, do you know one thing? I am to pronounce sentence in this very cause tomorrow; the true Ali Cogia presented his petition to me today; and do you think, continued he, that I can give a better sentence? I think not, answered the vizier, if the case is as the children represented it. Take notice then of this house, said the caliph, and bring the boy to me tomorrow, that he may try this cause in my presence; and also order the cady, who acquitted the roguish merchant, to attend, to learn his duty from a child. Take care likewise to bid Ali Cogia bring his jar of olives with him. and let two olive merchants be present. After this charge, he pursued his rounds, without meeting with any thing else worth his attention.

The next day the vizier went to the house where the caliph had been witness of the children's play, and asked for the master of it; but he being abroad, his wife came to him. He asked her, if she had any children. To which she answered, she had three; and called them. My brave boys, said the vizier, which of you was the cady when you played together last night? The eldest made answer he was; but not knowing why he asked the question, coloured. Come along with me, my lad, said the grand vizier, the commander of the faithful wants to see you.

The mother was in a great fright when she saw the grand vizier would take her son with him, and asked him upon what account the caliph wanted him. The grand vizier encouraged her, and promised her that he should return again in less than an hour's time, when she should know it from himself. If it be so, sir, said the mother; give me leave to dress him first, that he may be fit to appear before the commander of the faithful; which the vizier readily complied with.

As soon as the child was dressed, the vizier carried him away and presented him to the caliph at the time he had appointed to hear Ali Cogia and the merchant.

The caliph, who saw that the boy was dashed, to encourage him, said, Come to me, child, and tell me if it was you that determined the affair between Ali Cogia and the merchant that cheated him of his money? I saw and heard you, and am very well pleased with you. The boy answered modestly

that it was he. Well, my son, replied the caliph, come and sit down by me, and you shall see the true Ali Cogia, and the true merchant.

Then the caliph took him by the hand, and set him on the throne by him, and asked for the two parties. When they were called, they came and prostrated themselves before the throne, bowing their heads quite down to the carpet that covered it. Afterwards the caliph said to them, Plead each of you your causes before this child, who will hear and do you justice; and if he should be at a loss, I will rectify it.

Ali Cogia and the merchant pleaded one after the other; but when the merchant proposed his oath as before, the child said, It is too soon; it is proper that we should see the jar of olives.

At these words, Ali Cogia presented the jar, placed it at the Caliph's feet, and opened it. The caliph looked upon the olives, and took one and tasted it. Afterwards the merchants were called, who examined the olives, and reported that they were good, and of that year. The boy told them that Ali Cogia affirmed that it was seven years since he put them up; and they returned the same answer as the children, who represented them the night before.

Though the merchant who was accused saw plainly that these merchants' opinions would condemn him, yet he would say something in his own justification. But the child instead of ordering him to be hanged, looked at the caliph, and said, Commander of the faithful, this is no jesting matter; it is your majesty that must condemn him to death, and not me, though I did it in yesterday in play.

The caliph, fully satisfied of the merchants' villany, delivered him into the hands of the ministers of justice to be hanged. This sentence was executed upon him, after he had confessed where he hid the thousand pieces of gold, which were restored to Ali Cogia. Then the monarch, most just and equitable, turning to the cady, bid him learn of that child to acquit himself more exactly of his duty; and embracing the boy, sent him home with a purse of a hundred pieces of gold, as a token of his liberality.