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### From: The Arabian Nights Entertainments, by Andrew Lang.

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### The Caliph Haroun-al-Raschid sat in his palace, wondering if there was anything left in the world that could possibly give him a few hours' amusement, when Giafar the grand-vizir, his old and tried friend, suddenly appeared before him. Bowing low, he waited, as was his duty, till his master spoke, but Haroun-al-Raschid merely turned his head and looked at him, and sank back into his former weary posture. Now Giafar had something of importance to say to the Caliph, and had no intention of being put off by mere silence, so with another low bow in front of the throne, he began to speak. "Commander of the Faithful," said he, "I have taken on myself to remind your Highness that you have undertaken secretly to observe for yourself the manner in which justice is done and order is kept throughout the city. This is the day you have set apart to devote to this object, and perhaps in fulfilling this duty you may find some distraction from the melancholy to which, as I see to my sorrow, you are a prey."

### "You are right," returned the Caliph, "I had forgotten all about it. Go and change your coat, and I will change mine." A few moments later they both re-entered the hall, disguised as foreign merchants, and passed through a secret door, out into the open country. Here they turned towards the Euphrates, and crossing the river in a small boat, walked through that part of the town which lay along the further bank, without seeing anything to call for their interference. Much pleased with the peace and good order of the city, the Caliph and his vizir made their way to a bridge, which led straight back to the palace, and had already crossed it, when they were stopped by an old and blind man, who begged for alms.

### The Caliph gave him a piece of money, and was passing on, but the blind man seized his hand, and held him fast. "Charitable person," he said, "whoever you may be grant me yet another prayer. Strike me, I beg of you, one blow. I have deserved it richly, and even a more severe penalty." The Caliph, much surprised at this request, replied gently: "My good man, that which you ask is impossible. Of what use would my alms be if I treated you so ill?" And as he spoke he tried to loosen the grasp of the blind beggar. "My lord," answered the man, "pardon my boldness and my persistence. Take back your money, or give me the blow which I crave. I have sworn a solemn oath that I will receive nothing without receiving chastisement, and if you knew all, you would feel that the punishment is not a tenth part of what I deserve."

### Moved by these words, and perhaps still more by the fact that he had other business to attend to, the Caliph yielded, and struck him lightly on the shoulder. Then he continued his road, followed by the blessing of the blind man. When they were out of earshot, he said to the vizir, "There must be something very odd to make that man act so--I should like to find out what is the reason. Go back to him; tell him who I am, and order him to come without fail to the palace to-morrow, after the hour of evening prayer." So the grand-vizir went back to the bridge; gave the blind beggar first a piece of money and then a blow, delivered the Caliph's message, and rejoined his master.

### They passed on towards the palace, but walking through a square, they came upon a crowd watching a young and well-dressed man who was urging a horse at full speed round the open space, using at the same time his spurs and whip so unmercifully that the animal was all covered with foam and blood. The Caliph, astonished at this proceeding, inquired of a passer-by what it all meant, but no one could tell him anything, except that every day at the same hour the same thing took place. Still wondering, he passed on, and for the moment had to content himself with telling the vizir to command the horseman also to appear before him at the same time as the blind man. The next day, after evening prayer, the Caliph entered the hall, and was followed by the vizir bringing with him the two men of whom we have spoken, and a third, with whom we have nothing to do. They all bowed themselves low before the throne and then the Caliph bade them rise, and ask the blind man his name.

### "Baba-Abdalla, your Highness," said he. "Baba-Abdalla," returned the Caliph, "your way of asking alms yesterday seemed to me so strange, that I almost commanded you then and there to cease from causing such a public scandal. But I have sent for you to inquire what was your motive in making such a curious vow. When I know the reason I shall be able to judge whether you can be permitted to continue to practise it, for I cannot help thinking that it sets a very bad example to others. Tell me therefore the whole truth, and conceal nothing." These words troubled the heart of Baba-Abdalla, who prostrated himself at the feet of the Caliph. Then rising, he answered: "Commander of the Faithful, I crave your pardon humbly, for my persistence in beseeching your Highness to do an action which appears on the face of it to be without any meaning. No doubt, in the eyes of men, it has none; but I look on it as a slight expiation for a fearful sin of which I have been guilty, and if your Highness will deign to listen to my tale, you will see that no punishment could atone for the crime."