

**THE SHAVING OF  
SHAGPAT: AN ARABIAN  
ENTERTAINMENT**

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The shaving of Shagpat: an Arabian entertainment by George Meredith

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**GEORGE MEREDITH**

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SHAVING OF SHAGPAT

An Arabian Entertainment

BY  
GEORGE MEREDITH

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# THE SHAVING OF SHAGPAT

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## THE THWACKINGS

It was ordained that Shibli Bagarag, nephew to the renowned Baba Mustapha, chief barber to the Court of Persia, should shave Shagpat, the son of Shimpoor, the son of Shoolpi, the son of Shullum; and they had been clothiers for generations, even to the time of Shagpat, the illustrious.

Now, the story of Shibli Bagarag, and of the ball he followed, and of the subterranean kingdom he came to, and of the enchanted palace he entered, and of the sleeping king he shaved, and of the two princesses he released, and of the Afrite held in subjection by the arts of one and bottled by her, is it not known as 't were written on the finger-nails of men and traced in their corner-robcs? As the poet says:

Ripe with oft telling and old is the tale,  
But 't is of the sort that can never grow stale.

Now, things were in that condition with Shibli Bagarag, that on a certain day he was hungry and abject, and the city of Shagpat the clothier was before him; so he made toward it, deliberating as to how he should procure a meal, for he had not a dirhem in his girdle, and the remembrance of great dishes and savoury ingredients were to him as the illusion of rivers sheening on the sands to travellers gasping with thirst.

And he considered his case, crying, "Surely this comes of wandering, and 't is the curse of the inquiring spirit! for in Shiraz, where my craft is in favour, I should be sitting now with my uncle, Baba Mustapha, the loquacious

one, cross-legged, partaking of seasoned sweet dishes, dipping my fingers in them, rejoicing my soul with scandal of the Court!"

Now, he came to a knoll of sand under a palm, from which the yellow domes and mosques of the city of Shagpat, and its black cypresses, and marble palace fronts, and shining pillars, and lofty carven arches that spanned half-circles of the hot grey sky, were plainly visible. Then gazed he awhile despondingly on the city of Shagpat, and groaned in contemplation of his evil plight, as is said by the poet:

The curse of sorrow is comparison!  
As the sun casteth shade, night showeth star,  
We, measuring what we were by what we are,  
Behold the depth to which we are undone.

Wherefore he counselleth:

Look neither too much up, nor down at all,  
But, forward stepping, strive no more to fall.

And the advice is excellent; but, as is again said:

The preacher preacheth, and the hearer heareth,  
But comfort first each function requireth.

And "wisdom to a hungry stomach is thin pottage," saith the shrewd reader of men. Little comfort was there with Shibli Bagarag, as he looked on the city of Shagpat the clothier! He cried aloud that his evil chance had got the better of him, and rolled his body in the sand, beating his breast, and conjuring up images of the profusion of dainties and the abundance of provision in Shiraz, exclaiming, "Well-a-way and woe's me! this it is to be selected for the diversion of him that plotteth against man." Truly is it written:

On different heads misfortunes come:  
One bears them firm, another faints,  
While this one hangs them like a drum  
Whereon to baster loud complaints.

And of the three kinds, they who bang the drum outnumber the silent ones as do the billows of the sea the ships