

KALILA AND DIMNA,

OR

THE FABLES OF BIDPAI.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ARABIC.

BY THE

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hereafter, if we are worthy to enter into that eternal dwelling, whither the prophets and ministers of knowledge and good are gone before. The information which we had already received was sufficient to stamp on your behaviour a complexion, which betrayed the motives by which you were instigated ; it was nevertheless the will and pleasure of the king that we should submit it to a judicial examination, however small the doubt which remained on our own minds. I see, O judge, answered Dimna, that you are not bound by the rules of equity in your proceedings ; and it is unjust in a king to persecute the unfortunate, who have been guilty of no crime, by preferring an accusation against them, without allowing them to make their defence ; and I cannot be expected to submit to unmerited punishment without resistance ; besides, the precipitation with which you have hurried on the proceedings against me (for my trial has scarcely lasted three days) proves, that the attainment of the ends of justice is the least of the motives by which you have been influenced. The duty of a judge, replied the other, as has been in old times laid down, is to make himself acquainted with the conduct both of the

good and bad, that, by dealing with every one according to his deserts, he may strengthen and improve the disposition of the former, and create, where they are wanting, good intentions in the latter; therefore the best counsel which we can give you, Dimna, is to reflect on your present situation, and in acknowledging your crime, to shew signs of repentance and contrition. Upright judges, continued Dimna, never decide from suspicion alone, for suspicion ought never to supply the place of justice; and though in your opinion I may be guilty of the crime laid to my charge, still I cannot consent to sacrifice the inward persuasion which I have of my own innocence, founded on a knowledge of the motives by which I have been guided, to your presumption of my guilt, which from its very nature must be inconclusive, and liable to error. If the accusation of others has already had the effect of injuring me in your opinion, what advantage can I promise myself in becoming my own accuser; I should then belie the consciousness of my innocence, and challenge the punishment which I feel I do not deserve; and I should incur a charge of inconsistency in deposing falsely to my own criminality, in the very moment that I

am on my trial for a supposed offence of the same nature against another. Cease therefore, O judge, to address me in this manner. Your language, if meant as advice, is ill-timed, and ill-directed; if intended as a snare to entrap the innocent, it is base, and unbecoming the situation which you fill, and, what is worse than this, your words will be treasured up by foolish and ignorant men as lessons of instruction; for the decisions and opinions of those who are entrusted with the administration of justice, are capable, according to the different construction which is put upon them, and the latitude with which they are interpreted, of becoming a support to the cause of virtue, or of affording a cloak to vice. I warn you, therefore, against the train of evil consequences, which the course you are pursuing may draw after it. I do not allude to any worldly misfortune which may result to you from it, for the high opinion which the king and his attendants entertain of your wisdom and judgment, places you above the reach of temporal calamity, but will not protect you from the pangs of remorse, for having violated in my person the rules of equity and justice: and have you never heard it reported,

that he who pretends to have a knowledge of that with which he is not acquainted, and speaks authoritatively and unblushingly in a dubious affair, is likely to meet with no better fate than the falconer, who accused his master's wife of adultery? The judge having desired to hear the story, Dimna continued as follows :

There was in a certain city a nobleman married to a woman of great beauty, and remarkable for the propriety of her conduct ; and he had in his service a falconer thoroughly skilled in the bringing up and training of hawks, and who was in such estimation with his master, that he often enjoyed the honour of sitting at table with him in the company of the ladies ; and the consequence was, that he fell in love with his wife, who so far from listening to his declarations, or giving him the least encouragement, changed colour and became red with shame, as often as he renewed his indecent proposals. The passion of the falconer being only increased by the refusal which he met with, he had recourse to various expedients for the attainment of his purpose, but which were all equally unsuccessful. So he went out hawking one day as usual, and caught two young parrots, which he carried

home and brought up, and when they were grown to their full size, he placed them in two separate cages, and taught one of them to say, I saw the porter lying with my mistress in my master's bed; and the other he instructed to cry out, I will not tell tales. At the end of six months, the parrots being quite perfect in their lesson, the falconer carried them to his master, who was all admiration and wonder at hearing them talk, though he did not understand a syllable of what they said, for the falconer had taught them in the language of Balk; however his astonishment was not diminished by this circumstance, and he desired his wife to take care of them. A short time after some friends from Balk came on a visit to the nobleman, who entertained them very hospitably; and after they had dined, and talked over the news of the day, their host ordered the falconer to bring the two parrots, and as soon as they were in the room, they cried out as they had been taught; and the men of Balk, understanding what they said, looked with surprise one at the other, and then turned away their heads, in order to conceal the astonishment which their looks might betray. This conduct of his guests did not

escape the notice of the nobleman, who therefore asked his friends what the parrots had said, but they refused for a long time to tell him ; till at length, being tired by a repetition of the same question, they explained it to him, and added, that they could not remain in a house of such ill fame. Upon this the nobleman begged them to speak to the parrots in the language of Balk, which they did, and found that they were not able to say any thing but what they had learned from the falconer ; and in this way the innocence of the nobleman's wife was completely proved, and the villany of the falconer brought to light. The nobleman therefore sent for him, and he came into the room with a white hawk upon his hand ; and the wife, as soon as she saw him, asked him triumphantly, if he had himself seen what the parrots had published ; and upon his answering in the affirmative, the hawk sprung at his face, and plucked out his eyes with its claws ; and the wife exclaimed, that it was a punishment from heaven, for his having asserted what he did not know. Dimna added, that he had related this fable, to shew that falsehood is severely punished as well in this world as in the next.