

THE MAN FROM SHÍRÁZ

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A long time ago a Shírází visited Kashmír, and called on an old friend, and stayed with him for three days. This friend, who prided himself on his hospitality, prepared a great feast for his guest. During dinner he naturally looked for some expression of approval from him, and the Shírází, seeing that he was expected to say something complimentary, after a little while remarked that the dinner was good, very good, but not for a moment to be compared with the feasts given in his country. Other conversation followed, and then the company dispersed.

The host, however, was so disappointed at the Shírází friend's modified commendation of the dinner that he could not sleep. All through the long night he was endeavouring to smother his feelings, or planning for a still larger and more extravagant dinner on the morrow; and long before daylight he ran and called the cook, and gave him such an order, and explained everything so minutely to him, that his guest might at least say that the dinner was equal to the meals prepared in his country. If it was a success he promised to give the cook ten rupees *bakhshish*^[1]. But it was not a success. All the expense and all these preparations were again in vain. The feast was declared to be inferior to those in Shíráz^[2]. Not that it was owing to any fault of the cook. On the contrary, no feast could have been cooked or served up better than this one.

The Kashmírí, now suspecting that his *cuisinier* was not so skilful as he thought him to be, engaged another servant in his place, whom he ordered to prepare a still more elaborate meal for the following day, and promised the man twenty rupees if the dinner was thoroughly approved of by the guest. However, there came the same reply—"My dear friend, your feasts cannot match those which are served up in my country."

Some years elapsed, and the Kashmírí, being a traveller as well as his guest, found himself in the city of the Shírází, and seeking out his old

friend's house, called on him. He received a very hearty welcome, and was asked to tarry there for three days, with which he complied. After ablutions and a change of garments he sat down to smoke the pipe of friendship and peace, while dinner was being prepared. He waited with much expectation and curiosity to see what kind of a dinner it would be. "I shall now see," thought he, "in what respect these Shírází feasts are superior to ours." At last dinner was served. Imagine the chagrin and surprise of the Kashmírí when he saw simply a large tray of boiled rice, dotted here and there with bits of vegetable, placed before him. At first he thought it must be a dream, and rubbed his eyes to make quite certain that he was awake. Still the same tray of rice and vegetables was before him. He rubbed his eyes again; he cracked his fingers; he stretched his legs. Still there was the same tray. There was no doubt about it. These rice and vegetables were all that his host had prepared for that evening's meal. Perhaps this meagre display was owing to the lateness of the hour of his call, and that on the morrow a grander dinner would be provided. The morrow came, and the third day, and still the same fare was provided. During the last meal the Kashmírí could not refrain from asking the reason of his friend's remark concerning the inferiority of Kashmírí to Shírází feasts. The host replied, "Well, we here in Shíráz are very plain folk. We welcome you to our country with homely fare. You see us. You have dined with us. Yesterday, to-day, and for ever this is our manner of life. But the feast you provided in honour of my coming (I thank you for it) was special, only for a day. Man could not always live at that rate; for the pocket of the host would soon be emptied and the stomach of the guest impaired—the result to both would be most unpleasant. Hence my remarks, of which I am quite certain you will perceive the truth."

[0] Narrator's name, Mihtar Sher Singh, Officiating Governor, Srínagar. ↑

[1] Generally pronounced *baksháish*, a gift, gratuity. ↑

[2] A city in the south of Persia. ↑

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