

Austin Dobson (1840-1921)

2 *The Mosque of the Caliph*

Unto Seyd the vizier spake the Caliph Abdallah: —
“Now hearken and hear, I am weary, by Allah!
I am faint with the mere over-running of leisure;
I will rouse me and rear up a palace to Pleasure!”

To Abdallah the Caliph spake Seyd the vizier: 5
“All faces grow pale if my Lord draweth near;
And the breath of his mouth not a mortal shall scoff it; —
They must bend and obey, by the beard of the Prophet!”

Then the Caliph that heard, with becoming sedateness,
Drew his hand down *his* beard as he thought of his greatness; 10
Drained out the last bead of the wine in the chalice:
“I have spoken, O Seyd; I will build it, my palace!

“As a drop from the wine where the wine-cup hath spilled it,
As a gem from the mine, O my Seyd, I will build it;
Without price, without flaw, it shall stand for a token 15
That the word is a law which the Caliph hath spoken!”

Yet again to the Caliph bent Seyd the vizier:
“Who shall reason or rail if my Lord speaketh clear?
Who shall strive with his might? Let my Lord live for ever!
He shall choose him a site by the side of the river.” 20

Then the Caliph sent forth unto Kür, unto Yemen, —
To the South, to the North, — for the skilfullest freemen;
And soon, in a close, where the river breeze fanned it,
The basement uprose, as the Caliph had planned it.

Now the courses were laid and the corner-piece fitted; 25
And the butments and set-stones were shapen and knitted,
When lo! on a sudden the Caliph heard frowning,
That the river had swelled, and the workmen were drowning.

Then the Caliph was stirred and he flushed in his ire as
He sent forth his word from Teheran to Shiraz; 30
And the workmen came new, and the palace, built faster,
From the bases up-grew unto arch and pilaster.

And the groinings were traced, and the arch-heads were chasen,
When lo! in hot haste there came flying a mason,
For a cupola fallen had whelmed half the workmen; 35
And Hamet the chief had been slain by the Turc'men.

Then the Caliph's beard curled, and he foamed in his rage as
Once more his scouts whirled from the Tell to the Hedjaz;
"Is my word not my word?" cried the Caliph Abdallah;
"I *will* build it up yet . . . *by the aiding of Allah!*" 40

Though he spoke in his haste like King David before him,
Yet he felt as he spoke that a something stole o'er him;
And his soul grew as glass, and his anger passed from it
As the vapours that pass from the Pool of Mahomet.

And the doom seemed to hang on the palace no longer, 45
Like a fountain it sprang when the sources feed stronger;
Shaft, turret and spire leaped upward, diminished,
Like the flames of a fire, — till the palace was finished!

Without price, without flaw. And it lay on the azure
Like a diadem dropped from an emperor's treasure; 50
And the dome of pearl white and the pinnacles fleckless,
Flashed back to the light, like the gems in a necklace.

So the Caliph looked forth on the turret-tops gilded;
And he said in his pride, "Is my palace not builded?
Who is more great than I that his word can avail if 55
My will is my will," — said Abdallah the Caliph.

But lo! with the light he repented his scorning,
For an earthquake had shattered the whole ere the morning;
Of the pearl-coloured dome there was left but a ruin, —
But an arch as a home for the ring-dove to coo in. 60

Shaft, turret and spire — all were tumbled and crumbled;

And the soul of the Caliph within him was humbled;
And he bowed in the dust: — “There is none great but Allah!
I will build Him a Mosque,” — said the Caliph Abdallah.

And the Caliph has gone to his fathers for ever, 65
But the Mosque that he builded shines still by the river;
And the pilgrims up-stream to this day slacken sail if
They catch the first gleam of the “Mosque of the Caliph.”

1876

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