

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, May 30, 1891 to February 6, 1892)

Extract from the Book called the Book of the Shaking of Heads

Alexandria 1892

Once a Persian came to Kairo and went to the Vizier and told him he was a learned man of the Persians and no one could equal him in knowledge. And he made a great impression upon the Vizier by his words and stood high in his favor. The Vizier said to him "could you debate with the learned men of our mosque?" He answered yes I shall ask them a question in your presence. If they answer I shall be obedient to them but if not my renown will be more than "theirs." Then the Vizier sent for the learned men and when they came, the room was filled and the Vizier told them the circumstances. Then the learned man said "Let the Persian ask what he will" the Persian then rose up and ask them a question by means of a sign, without speaking a word. The learned man said _____ "O Vizier, sign language is for the deaf and dumb, we don't know what he means. Then answered the Vizier, you must answer his question. He forced them to engage in this debate on account of his partiality and love for the Persian. Then they said give us three days time that we may see the rest of the sheichs. The Vizier granted their request. They then said to each other "what is your opinion about dispersion and his returning home a conqueror over us? One said, my opinion is to look for some stupid man from the country, a numbskull, who cannot distinguish between the sky and the earth nor length from breadth. Let us make him our Sheich and dress him in the garb of a learned man. He shall walk in front and we behind and we shall say to the Vizier, this is our Sheich. He will answer the Persian.

Then the crowd of these scholars went to look for such a one and they saw a stupid fellow from the country, long and lank, with a woolen coat on, that reached to his knees. He was eating boiled eggs, and as they came up to him he had just eaten three and had one left over. When he saw the learned men, he thought they wanted to take the egg from him. He thereupon put it inside of his cap and turned to flee. They however went up to him and he said, "I am under your protection ye poets." They said, "O peasant don't be afraid we will not harm you" He replied "I was afraid you wanted to take me to my master. He would cut off my head, this is the first time I ever came to Kairo. I was hungry. I bought four eggs that I cooked. Three I have eaten one I have put into my cap. Then they said, "we wish to do you a good if you will hearken to us. Besides we will give you two hiasters and dine you well." The peasant said I will do whatever you want, dig a well, tear down that wall, take away dirt, or if you want I'll help you in a fight. No, no, that is not it, we want to make you our Sheich and answer the Persians's questions and

conquer him. Don't speak a word. Use only signs." The peasant said take me to this panderer of a Persian. Then they dress him up as a scholar and put a turban round his cap. The peasant took the egg out of his cap and put it into his sleeve. They begged him to leave it behind but he said no. It is my hen's first egg I shall take it with me and eat it, when I am hungry. They then went to the Vizier and said, this is our Sheich. He will answer the Persian. The Persian sat down in the proper manner or student-sit-but the peasant stretched out his leg showing no respect to those present as if he were in a stable. The Persian was astonished and said to himself "if he was not a most celebrated scholar, he would not so despise the assembly." Thereupon the discussion began. The Persian asked a question by pointing towards the peasant with one finger. The peasant replied by stretching out to fingers. Then the Persian raised his hand toward heaven. The peasant laid his hand upon the ground. Then the Persian took a little box out of his sleeve, opened it and brought forth a little chicken, and threw it toward the present. The peasant in reply, took the egg out of his sleeve and threw it toward the Persian. The Persian shook his hand with astonishment and said to the Vizier and the other scholars. He has answered my questions, I shall become one of his scholars and followers. Then the Vizier honor to the peasant and his champions. When they came to their lodgings, his companions said to the peasant: "explain to us the questions and the answers." The peasant said "shame on you ye learned men, not to understand this." As the Persian sat opposite me I noticed his eyes were red and his wrath increasing and he pointed at me his finger as if to say watch out or I will [hew] out your eye. Then I pointed him two fingers, as if to say I will bore out your two eyes. Then the Persian raised his hand toward heaven, as if to say, "if you don't obey me, I will hang you to the roof." And I laid my hand on the ground as if to say "I'll throw you down on the ground hard enough to drive the devil out of you. When he saw I was getting the better of him he brought forth the little chicken, to indicate that he eat chicken every day and was delicate about his eating and drinking. Then I brought forth my boiled egg, to show him I ate eggs every day and was delicate about my eating and drinking and so I conquered. The learned men then went to the Persian and asked him to interpret the signs. He replied "my lifelong I have questioned wise men but no one except your Sheich has been able to answer my questions." Explain the questions and answers they said. "I said the Persian raised my finger to declare there is only one God. Your Scheich pointed at me with two fingers to indicate that there is no other God. I raised my hand to declare God made the heavens. Your Sheich laid his hand on the ground to show that God had also spread out the earth. Then I took the little chicken out of the box, thus declaring that God brings the living out of the dead. Your chic brought forth the egg as if to say he also brings the dead out of the living. So he answered my questions and I have never seen a wiser man" (then they understood that the Persian had one meaning and the peasants another. According to the proverb, "she has gone toward the east and I have gone toward the West. Oh what a difference there is between the one going eastward and the one going westward." Thus their signs suited each other although the meanings were different)

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Oct 31st, 1891