

REPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS.

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REPORT

PRESENTED TO THE

**Cambridge Antiquarian Society,**

AT ITS THIRTY-SIXTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

MAY 15, 1876,

WITH AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY  
(INCLUDING THE ANNUAL REPORTS XXXIV, XXXV),  
1873—1876.

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ALSO

**Communications**

MADE TO THE SOCIETY.

No. XVIII.

BEING THE FOURTH AND CONCLUDING NUMBER OF THE  
THIRD VOLUME.

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COMMUNICATIONS,

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XXXII. ON THE LEGEND OF THE CHAPMAN OF SWAFFHAM IN NORFOLK. Communicated by E. B. COWELL, Esq., M.A., Professor of Sanskrit.

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[May 24, 1875.]

I GIVE the English form of this legend in the words of Sir Roger Twysden, as quoted in Blomefield's 'History of Norfolk,' Svo. ed., Vol. VI. pp. 211—213.

"The north aisle of Swaffham Church is generally reported and believed to be built by John Chapman, a tinker of this town: the history of it I shall here transcribe from Sir Roger Twysden's Remembrances, MS. p. 299, published by our great antiquary, Mr Hearne of Oxford, and shall then give my opinion on it.

"The story of the Pedlar of Swaffham Market is in substance this<sup>1</sup>: 'That dreaming one night if he went to London, he should certainly meet with a man upon London Bridge, which would tell him good news; he was so perplexed in his mind that till he set upon his journey he could have no rest; to London therefore he hastes, and walked upon the Bridge for some hours, where being espied by a shopkeeper and asked what he wanted, he answered, 'You may well ask me that question, for truly (quoth he) I am come hither upon a very vain errand,' and so told the story of his dream which occasioned the journey. Whereupon the shopkeeper replied, 'Alas, good friend, should I have heeded dreams I might have proved myself as very a fool as thou hast; for 'tis not long since that I dreamt that at a place called Swaffham Market, in Norfolk, dwells one John Chapman, a pedlar, who hath a tree in his back side, under which is buried a pot of money. Now, therefore, if I should have made a journey thither to dig for such hidden treasure, judge you whether I should not have been counted a fool.' To whom the pedlar cunningly said, 'Yes, verily; I will therefore

<sup>1</sup> Tho. Caii Vindic. Antiq. Acad. Oxon., Vol. I. p. 84, Append.

return home and follow my business, not heeding such dreams henceforward. But when he came home (being satisfied that his dream was fulfilled), he took occasion to dig in that place, and accordingly found a large pot full of money, which he prudently concealed, putting the pot among the rest of his brass. After a time it happened that one who came to his house and beholding the pot, observed an inscription upon it, which being in Latin he interpreted it, that under that there was another twice as good<sup>1</sup>. Of this inscription the pedlar was before ignorant, or at least minded it not; but when he heard the meaning of it he said, 'Tis very true, in the shop where I bought this pot stood another under it which was twice as big;' but considering that it might tend to his further profit to dig deeper in the same place where he found that, he fell again to work, and discovered such a pot as was intimated by the inscription, full of old coin; notwithstanding all which, he so concealed his wealth that the neighbours took no notice of it. But not long after the inhabitants of Swaffham resolving to re-edify their church, and having consulted the workmen about the charge, they made a levy, wherein they taxed the pedlar according to no other rate but what they had formerly done. But he knowing his own ability came to the church and desired the workmen to show him their model, and to tell him what they esteemed the charge of the north aisle would amount to; which when they told him, he presently undertook to pay them for building it, and not only that, but of a very tall and beautiful tower steeple. This is the tradition of the inhabitants, as it was told me there. And in testimony thereof, there was then his picture, with his wife and three children, in every window of the aisle, with an inscription running through the bottom of all those windows, viz. *'Orate pro bono statu Johannis Chapman...Uxorij ejus, et Liberorum suorum, qui quidem Johannes hanc alam cum fenestris tecto et...feri fecit.'*

"It was in Henry the Seventh's time, but the year I now remember not, my notes being left with Mr William Sedgwick, who trickt the pictures, he being then with me. In that aisle is his seat, of an antique form, and, on each side the entrance, the statue of the pedlar of about a foot in length, with pack on his back, very artificially cut. This was sent me from Mr William Dugdale, of Blyth Hall, in Warwickshire, in a letter dated Jan. 29th, 1652-3, which I have since learned from others to have been most true.

"ROGER TWYSDEN."

<sup>1</sup> The common tradition is, it was in English rhyme viz.:

"Where this stood  
Is another as good;"

Or as some will have it:

"Under me doth lie  
Another much richer than I."

Blomefield remarks that the story is to be found in Johannes Fungerus' "Etymologicon Latino-Græcum," pp. 1110, 1111, where it is told of a man of Dort in Holland. Blomefield also adds that the north aisle of the church was certainly built by John Chapman, who was churchwarden in 1462; but he thinks that the figures of the pedlar, &c., were only put "to set forth the name of the founder; such rebuses are frequently met with on old works."

The story is also told in Abraham de la Pryme's diary (Nov. 10, 1699) as a "constant tradition" concerning a pedlar in Soffham, alias Sopham, in Norfolk.

As Fungerus' book is not a common one, I subjoin the passage to which Blomefield alludes; it occurs in the article *Somnus*. The copy of the "Etymologicon Latino-Græcum" in the University Library bears the date 'Lugduni, 1607.'

"Rem quæ contigit patrum memoriâ ut veram ita dignam relatu, et sæpenumero mihi assertam ab hominibus fide dignis apponam: Juvenis quidam in Hollandia, Dordraci<sup>1</sup> videlicet, rem et patrimonium omne prodegerat, conflatoque ære alieno non erat solvendo. Apparuit illi quidam per somnium, monens ut se conferret Campos<sup>2</sup>: ibi in ponte indicium aliquem facturum, quid sibi, ut explicare se posset illis difficultatibus, institutum foret. Abiit eo, cumque totum fere diem tristis et meditabundus deambulationem supra prædictum pontem insumsisset, misertus ejus publicus mendicus, qui forte stipem rogans illic sedebat, *quid tu*, inquit, *adeo tristis?* Aperuit illi somniator tristem et afflictam fortunam suam, et quæ de causa eo se contulisset. Quippe somnii impulsu huc se profectum; et exspectare Deum velut a machina, qui nodum hunc plus quam Gordium evolvat. At mendicus, *Adeone tu demens et excors, ut fretus somno, quo nihil inanius, huc arripères iter? Si hujuscemodi nugis esset habenda fides, possem et ego me conferre Dordracum ad eriuendum thesaurum sub cynosbato defossum horti cujusdam* (fuerat autem hic hortus patris somniatoris hujus), *mihi itidem patefactum in somno*. Subticuit alter, et rem omnem sibi declaratam existimans rediit magno cum gaudio Dordracum, et sub arbore prædicta magnam pecuniæ vim invenit, quæ ipsum liberavit (ut ita dicam) nexu, inque lautiore fortuna, dissoluto omni ære alieno, collocavit."

<sup>1</sup> Dort.

<sup>2</sup> Kempen.

We see by this extract that the story is one by no means confined to Norfolk, but equally current in Holland and probably elsewhere on the Continent. It is evidently an old legend, located by popular fancy in several widely distant spots (just like that of Whittington and his cat), and it has only become connected with Swaffham as an attempt to explain the forgotten mystery of the figure of the chapman and his pack in the parish church.

Modern research has shown that a very large proportion of the popular legends of Europe can be traced in their oldest forms to the East, and especially to the early Buddhist writings, as fables and stories were continually used by the Buddhist teachers to illustrate and popularize their doctrines. I have not succeeded in tracing this at present to India or to a Buddhist source; but I have found it in the great Persian metaphysical and religious poem called the *Masnavi*, written by *Jalaluddin*, who died about A. D. 1260, and therefore it may very probably have come to him from a still more Eastern home.

I subjoin a translation of the legend as it appears in the *Masnavi*, only slightly compressing it, and omitting the long metaphysical and mystical digressions with which the author, *more suo*, continually interrupts the course of the story.

In his prose title prefixed to the chapter, he tells his readers that the man is sent to Cairo to learn that "a man's treasure is only to be sought in his own house, though he may have to go to Egypt to find it."

A certain heir in Baghdad possessed boundless wealth;  
 He wasted it all and was left destitute and forlorn.  
 (Hereditary wealth is never faithful,  
 For unwillingly it parted from him who is gone.)  
 When he became empty, he remembered God,  
 And began to say 'O God, look upon me;  
 He said 'O God, thou gavest me wealth and it is gone;  
 O give me wealth again or send me death.'

And one night he saw a dream, and an angel's voice said to him,  
 'In Cairo shall thy wealth be found;  
 'In a certain place is a great treasure;  
 'Thou must go to Cairo in search for it.'  
 When from Baghdad he came to Cairo,  
 His back became hot as he saw the face of the country,  
 In his hope that the heavenly voice would prove true,  
 That so he might find a treasure there to banish his sorrow.  
 The voice had said that in a certain street in a certain place  
 A treasure of marvellous value lay buried.  
 But of provisions, little or much, he had none left;  
 And he began to beg of the common people.  
 But shame and spirit seized the hem of his garment,  
 And he began to gather himself up for endurance;  
 And then again his appetite fretted with hunger,  
 And he saw no escape from showing his want and begging.  
 At last he said 'I will go out softly at night,  
 'That in the darkness I may not feel shame at begging.  
 'Like a night-mendicant I will pray and beg,  
 'That they may throw me half a *dánk* from the roofs.'  
 In this thought he went out into the street,  
 With this intent he wandered hither and thither.  
 At one moment shame and honour stopped him,  
 At another hunger said to him 'beg.'  
 One foot forwards, one foot backwards, for a third of the night,  
 Saying, 'Shall I beg or shall I lie down with parched lips?'  
 Suddenly a watchman seized him,  
 And angrily beat him with fist and stick.  
 By chance it had happened that in those dark nights  
 The inhabitants had been greatly vexed with robbers,  
 And the Caliph had said, 'Cut off that man's hand,  
 Whoever wanders abroad at night, though he were my own kinsman.'  
 And the minister had sternly threatened the watchmen,  
 'Why are ye so pitiful towards the robbers?'  
 It was at such a time that the watchman saw him and smote him,  
 With blows of stick and fist without number.  
 The poor man shrieked and cried aloud for help;  
 'Strike me not,' he said, 'that I may tell thee my true story.'  
 He answered, 'I have given thee a respite, speak on;  
 'Tell me how thou hast come out by night.  
 'Thou art not of this place, thou art a stranger and one unknown;  
 'Tell me truly in what treachery art thou engaged.  
 'The officers of the court have blamed the watchmen,

'Saying, "Why are the thieves now so many?"  
 'Their number is made up of thee and thy friends,  
 'Disclose at once thy evil companions.  
 'If not, I will take on thee the vengeance for all,  
 'That the men in power may be no longer blamed.'  
 The other replied, after many oaths,  
 'I am no house-burner or purse-stealer;  
 'I am no robber or lawless liver:  
 'I am a stranger to Cairo—a man of Baghdad.'  
 Then he told the story of the dream and the hidden treasure of gold,  
 And the heart of the watchman opened at its truthfulness.  
 The heart is at rest in upright speech,  
 As a thirsty man finds rest in water.  
 He answered, 'Thou art no thief or villain,  
 'Thou art an honest man—only an owl and a fool.  
 'For such a fancy and dream to take such a journey,  
 'There is not a barley-corn's worth of reason in thy head.  
 'Times upon times have I seen a dream,  
 'That in Baghdad there is a treasure hidden,  
 'Buried in such a street, in such a quarter,'  
 (And lo! that was the very street of this distressed one,)  
 'It is in such a house, go thou and find it,'  
 (And lo! the enemy mentioned his own name as that of the house,)  
 'Times upon times have I seen this dream,  
 'That there is a treasure in a place in Baghdad;  
 'But in spite of the vision I never stirred from my place,  
 'And thou from a dream wilt only find weariness of foot.'  
 He said to himself, 'The treasure is in my own house;  
 'Why then should I have poverty and sorrow here?  
 'I have been dying of beggary on the top of a treasure,  
 'Because I was in ignorance and behind a veil.'  
 At the good news he became drunk with joy and his pain was gone,  
 Silently he uttered a hundred times 'Praise to God.'  
 Back to Baghdad he returned from Cairo,  
 Making prostrations and bowings, and uttering thanks and praise;  
 All the way amazed and drunk with joy at the wonder,  
 At this reverse of fortune and strange journey of search.

NOTE. This Communication was printed, shortly after it was read to the Society, in the *Cambridge Journal of Philology*, Vol. VI., pp. 189—195.

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