

The Treasure of Rampsinitus

An article in the December number of *Blackwood* contains the following version of the old but excellent story of Herodotus, about the treasure of the Egyptian King, Rampsinitus:

“Rampsinitus had more money than he knew what to do with, so he ordered a stone building to be made, one of the walls of which was joined to the outer wall of his own dwelling. Wishing to make all safe, he ordered the building to be made without an entrance, so that the treasure being built in could never be got out again without pulling down the wall. The architect, however, thinking it a pity that the treasures should be of no use to anyone, and that the king would scarcely perceive a certain amount of subtraction, devised a stone in the wall, which was in appearance as fast as the rest, but really moved by a secret spring, and thus supplied his necessities from time to time from the king’s hoard. This went on for all his life. On his death bed the old scoundrel instead of repenting, let his two sons into the secret of the movable stone, consoling his conscience with the flattering unctiousness that he was thereby securing a livelihood for his children without greatly hurting anyone.—The sons felt themselves in duty bound to help themselves, in accordance with their father’s wishes. But they were not so fortunate as he was, for one day the new king took it into his head to pull down the wall and have a look at his treasure. What was his astonishment when he saw that a good part of it had been spirited away. All the seals were safe, and there was no window, door, or chimney. He thought his father must have made a mistake as to the original amount so he plastered the hole up again, and opened it sometime after, a second time. The treasure had suffered a further diminution. However, he set man traps among the coffers, built the place up again, and found, not a man, but a man’s body, with the leg fast in a gin and the head gone; still there was no sign of entrance or exit.

Rampsinitus now thought he had hit on a device to catch the thief. He hung up the body in a public place, and set guards by it, ordering them to apprehend anyone they might see making demonstrations of grief before it.

The mother of the dead man was horrified at this exposure of the corpse, and so after making some difficulties, her reviving son determined to rescue it. He provided himself with several asses, and loading them with a skin of wine each, drove them on till he came to his brother’s corpse, and those who were watching it. Then he managed to unfasten two or three of the skins so that the wine ran out, but in such a manner that it seemed accidental. This part of the story shows of how old origin is the image-breaking dodge, said to be still sometimes practiced in the streets of London. Then he began beating his head and cursing his stars, as not knowing which ass was losing most wine, and being, consequently, in a difficulty which was to run to the rescue. The guards, in high glee, and thinking it a good joke, all ran to fetch vessels to catch the wasting wine, while he pretended to be in a passion with them, and began abusing them, which, under the circumstances, amused them still more. Having thus got them into high good humor, he ended by appearing to make it up and giving them one of the skins to drink.—When they were royally drunk, and all asleep, he stole away his brother’s carcass; and not content with the completeness of this job, left the guards with their whiskers shaven off. The king when he heard of the stealing away of the corpse, was in a greater rage than ever, but he kept it to himself, and was determined to find out the thief at any price.

Rampsinitus employed his daughter as the detective, and she, watching her opportunity, extracted a confession from the culprit, and immediately after she had heard it, seized him by the arm. He was prepared for this, and ran away, leaving a false arm in her hand. The confession was in answer to the question, what was the wickedest and wisest thing he had ever done. The wickedest thing he allowed to have been beheading his brother, when he was caught in the trap, to prevent recognition, and the wisest thing making the king's guards drunk and carrying off the body. This new escape brought [the] king's rage to a climax, and it evaporated in admiration of the exceeding cleverness of this prince of artful dodgers. So he made a proclamation, promising a free pardon, and all kinds of favors beside, if the party would disclose himself.—The thief trusted the king, and the king rewarded him by giving him his detective daughter in marriage, considering him worthy of that honor, as being the most knowing of all men; for that the Egyptians were the shrewdest of mankind, and he was the shrewdest of Egyptians.

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