

**The Wonderful  
Adventures  
of  
Phra the  
Phoenician**

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I unsheathed my Saxon sword

**The Wonderful Adventures  
of  
Phra the Phoenician**

# INTRODUCTION

BY SIR EDWIN ARNOLD, K.C.I.E.

In the garden of my Japanese home in Tokyo I have just perused the last sheets of my son's philosophical and historical romance, "Phra the Phœnician."

Amid other scenes I might be led to analyze, to criticize, perhaps a little to argue about the singular hypothesis upon which he builds his story. Here, with a Buddhist temple at my gate, and with Japanese Buddhists around me, nothing seems more natural than that an author, sufficiently gifted with imagination and study, should follow his hero beyond the narrow limits of one little existence, down the chain of many lives, taken up link by link, after each long interval of rest and reward in the Paradise of Jô-Dô. I have read several chapters to my Asiatic friends, and they say, "Oh, yes! It is *ingwa!* it is *Karma!* That is all quite true. We, also, have lived many times, and shall live many times more on this earth." One of them opens the *shoji* to let a purple and silver butterfly escape into the sunshine. She thinks some day it will thank her—perhaps a million years hence.

Moreover, here is a passage which I lately noted, suggestive enough to serve as preface, even by itself, to the present book. Commenting on a line in my "Song Celestial," the writer thus remarks: "The human soul should, therefore, be regarded as already in the present life connected at the same time with two worlds, of which, so far as it is confined to personal unity to a

body, the material only is clearly felt. It is, therefore, as good as proved, or, to be diffuse, it could easily be proved, or, better still, it will hereafter be proved (I know not where or when), that the human soul, even in this life, stands in indissoluble community with all immaterial natures of the spirit-world; that it mutually acts upon them and receives from them impressions, of which, however, as man it is unconscious, as long as all goes well. It is, therefore, truly one and the same subject, which belongs at the same time to the visible and to the invisible world, but not just the same person, since the representations of the one world, by reason of its different quality, are not associated with ideas of the other, and, therefore, what I think as spirit is not remembered by me as man."

I, myself, have consequently taken the stupendous postulates of Phra's narrative with equanimity, if not acceptance, and derived from it a pleasure and entertainment too great to express, since the critic, in this case, is a well-pleased father.

The author of "Phra" has claimed for Romance the ancient license accorded to Poetry and to Painting—

*Pictoribus atque poetis  
Quidlibet audendi semper fuit æqua potestas.*

He has supposed a young Phœnician merchant, full of the love of adventure, and endowed with a large and observant if very mystic philosophy—such as would serve for no bad standpoint whence to witness the rise and fall of religions and peoples. The Adventurer sets out for the "tin islands," or Cassiterides, at a date before the Roman conquest of England. He dies and lives

anew many times, but preserves his personal identity under the garb of half a dozen transmigrations. And yet, while renewing in each existence the characteristic passions and sentiments which constitute his individuality and preserve the unity of the narrative, the author seems to me to have adapted him to varying times and places with a vraisemblance and absence of effort which are extremely effective.

A Briton in British days, the slave-consort of his Druid wife, he passes, by daring but convenient inventiveness, into the person of a Centurion in the household of a noble Roman lady who illustrates in her surroundings the luxurious vices of the latter empire with some relics still of the older Republican virtues. Hence he glides again into oblivion, yet wakes from the mystical slumber in time to take part in King Harold's gallant but fatal stand against the Normans.

He enjoys the repose, as a Saxon thane, which the policy of the Conqueror granted to the vanquished; but after some startling adventures in the vast oak woods of the South kingdom is rudely ousted from his homestead by the "foreigners," and in a neighboring monastery sinks into secular forgetfulness once more of wife and children, lands and life.

On the return of consciousness he finds himself enshrined as a saint, thanks to the strange physical phenomena of his suspended animation, and learns from the Abbot that he has lain there in the odor of sanctity, according to indisputable church records, during 300 years.

He wanders off again, finding everything new and strange, and becomes an English knight under King Edward III. He is

followed to Crecy by a damsel, who, from act to act of his long life-drama, similarly renews an existence linked with his own, and who constantly seeks his love. She wears the armor of a brother knight, and on the field of battle she sacrifices her life for his.

Yet once more, a long spell of sleep, which is not death, brings this much-wandering Phra to the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and it is there, after many and strange vicissitudes, he writes his experiences, and the curtain finally falls over the last passage of this remarkable record.

Such, briefly, is the framework of the creation which, while it has certainly proved to me extremely seductive as a story, is full, I think, of philosophical suggestiveness. As long as men count mournfully the years of that human life which M. Renan has declared to be so ridiculously short, so long their fancies will hover about the possibility of an *elixir vitæ*, of splendidly extended spans like those ascribed to the old patriarchs, and meditate with fascination the mystical doctrines of Buddhism and the Vedantes. In such a spirit the Egyptians wrapped their dead in careful fashion, after filling the body with preservatives; and if ancient tomes have the "Seven Sleepers" of the Koran, the Danish King who dozes under the Castle of Elsinore, and our own undying King Arthur, do we not go to see "Rip Van Winkle" at the play, and is not hibernation one among the problems of modern science which whispers that we might, if we liked, indefinitely adjourn the waste of corporeal tissue, and spread our seventy or eighty years over ever so many centuries?

But to be charming, an author is not obliged to be credible, or what would become of the "Arabian Nights," of "Gulliver," and of the best books in the library? Personally, I admire and I like "Phra" enormously, and, being asked to pen these few lines by way of introduction, I counsel everybody to read it, forgetting who it is that respectfully offers this advice until the end of the book, when I shall be no longer afraid if they remember.

Tokyo, Japan: April 14, 1890.

# **The Wonderful Adventures of Phra the Phoenician**

## PROLOGUE

Well and truly an inspired mind has written, "One man in his time plays many parts," but surely no other man ever played so many parts in the course of a single existence as I have.

My own narrative seems incredible to me, yet I am myself a witness of its truth. When I say that I have lived in this England more than one thousand years, and have seen her bud from the callowest barbarity to the height of a prosperity and honor with which the world is full, I shall at once be branded as a liar. Let it pass! The accusation is familiar to my ears. I tired of resenting it before your fathers' fathers were born, and the scorn of your offended sense of veracity is less to me than the lisping of a child.

I was, in the very distance of the beginning, a citizen of that ancient city whose dominion once stretched from the blue waters of the Ægean round to and beyond the broad stream of the Nile herself. Your antiquities were then my household gods, your myths were my beliefs; those facts and fancies on the very fringe of records about which you marvel were the commonplace things of my commencement. Yes! and those dusty relics of humanity that you take with unholy zeal from the silent chambers of sarcophagi and pyramids were my boon companions, the jolly revelers I knew long ago—the good fellows who drank and sang with me through warm, long-forgotten nights—they were the great princes to whom I bent an always duteous knee, and the fair damsels who tripped our

sunny streets when Sidon existed, and Tyre was not a matter of speculation, or laughed at their own dainty reflections, in the golden leisure of that forgotten age, where the black-legged ibis stood sentinel among the blue lotus-flowers of the temple ponds.

Since then, what have I not done! I have traveled to the corners of the world, and forgotten my own land in the love of another. I have sat here in Britain at the tables of Roman Centurions, and the last of her Saxon Kings died in my arms. I have sworn hatred of foreign tyrants in the wassail bowls of serfs, and bestrode Norman chargers in tiltyards and battlefields. The kingdoms of the misty western islands which it was my wonderful fortune to see submerged by alternate tides of conquest, I have seen emerge triumphant, with all their conquerors welded into one. I have seen more battles than I can easily recall, and war in every shape; I have enjoyed all sorts of peace, from the rudest to the most cultivated.

I have lived, in fact, more than one thousand years in this seagirt island of yours; and so strange and grim and varied have been my experiences that I am tempted to set them down with a melancholy faith in my own uniqueness. Though it is more than probable few will believe me, yet for this I care nothing, nor do I especially seek your approval of my labors. I, who have tasted a thousand pleasures, and am hoary with disappointments, can afford to hold your censure as lightly as I should your commendation.

Here, then, are my adventures, and this is how they commenced.

## CHAPTER I

Regarding the exact particulars of my earliest wanderings I do confess I am somewhat uncertain. This may tempt you to reply that one whose memory is so far-reaching and capacious as mine will presently prove might well have stored up everything that befell him from his very beginning. All I can say is, things are as I set them down; and those facts which you cannot believe you must continue to doubt. The first thirty years of my life, it will be guessed in extenuation, were full of the frailties and shortcomings of an ordinary mortal; while those years which followed have impressed themselves indelibly upon my mind by right of being curious past experience and credibility.

Looking back, then, into the very remote past is like looking upon a country which a low sun at once illuminates and blurs. I dimly perceive in the golden haze of the ancient time a fair city rising, tier upon tier, out of the blue waters of the midland sea. A splendid harbor frames itself out of the mellow uncertainty—a harbor whereof the long white arms are stretched out to welcome the commerce of all the known world; and under the white fronts, and at the temple steps of that ancient city, Commerce poured into the lap of Luxury every commodity that could gratify cupidity or minister to human pleasure.

I was young then, no doubt, nor need I say a fool; and very likely the sight of a thousand strange sails at my father's door

excited my daily wonder, while the avarice which recognizes no good fortune in a present having was excited by the silks and gems, the rich stuffs and the gums, the quaint curiosities of human ingenuity and the frolic things of nature, which were piled up there. More than all, my imagination must have been fired by the sea captains' tales of wonder or romance, and, be the cause what it may, I made up my mind to adventure like them, and carried out my wilful fancy.

It is a fitting preface to all I have learned since that my first real remembrance should be one of vanity. Yet so it was. More than a thousand years ago—I will not lower my record by a single luster to propitiate your utmost unbelief—I set out on a first voyage. It might be yesterday, so well it comes before me—with my youthful pride as the spirit of a man was born within, and I felt the strong beat of the fresh salt waves of the open sea upon my trading vessel's prow, and knew, as I stood there by her steering-oar, that she was stuffed with a hundred bales of purple cloth from my father's vats along the shore, and bound whither I listed. Who could have been prouder than I?—who could have heard finer songs of freedom in the merry hum of the warm southern air in the brown cordage overhead, or the frothy prattle of the busy water alongside, as we danced that day out of the white arms of Tyre, the queenly city of the ancient seas, and saw the young world unfurl before us, full of magnificent possibilities?

It is not my wish or intention to write of my early travels, were it possible. On this voyage (or it may be on some others that followed, now merged into the associations of the first) we traded east and west, with adventure and success. The

adventure was sure enough, for the great midland sea was then the center of the world, and what between white-winged argosies of commerce, the freebooters of a dozen nations who patrolled its bays and corners, and rows of royal galleys sailing to the conquest of empires, it was a lively and perilous place enough. As for the profit, it came quickly to those who opened a hundred virgin markets in the olden days.

We sailed into the great Egyptian river up to Heliopolis, bartering stuffs for gold-dust and ivory; at another time we took Trinacrian wine and oranges into Ostia—a truly magnificent port, with incredible capacities for all the fair and pleasant things of life. Then we sailed among the beautiful Achaian islands with corn and olives; and so, profiting everywhere, we lived, for long, a jolly, uncertain life, full of hardship and pleasure.

For the most part, we hugged the coasts and avoided the open sea. It was from the little bays, whose mouths we thus crossed, that the pirates we greatly dreaded dropped down upon merchantmen, like falcons from their perches. When they took a vessel that resisted, the crew, at those rough hands, got scant mercy. I have come across a galley drifting idly before the wind, with all her crew, a grim row of skeletons, hanging in a row along her yard, and swinging this way and that, and rattling drearily against the sail and each other in melancholy unison with the listless wallow of their vessel. At another time, a Roman trireme fell upon a big pirate of Melita and stormed and captured her. The three hundred men on board were too ugly and wicked to sell, so the Romans drove them overboard like sheep, and burned the boat. When we sailed over the spot at

sundown the next day she was still spluttering and hissing, with the water lapping over the edge of her charred side, and round among the curls of yellow smoke overhead a thousand gulls were screeching, while a thousand more sat, gorged and stupid, upon the dead pirates. Not for many nights did we forget the evil picture of retribution, and how the setting sun flooded the sea with blood, and how the dead villains, in all their horror, swirled about in twos and threes in that crimson light, and fell into our wake, drawn by the current, and came jostling and grinning, and nodding after us, though we made all sail to outpace them, in a gloomy procession for a mile or so.

It often seemed to me in those days there were more freebooters afloat than honest men. At times we ran from these, at times we fought them, and again we would give a big marauder a share of cargo to save the ship from his kindred who threatened us. It was a dangerous game, and one never knew, on rising, where his couch would be at night, nor whether the prosperous merchant of the morning might not be the naked slave of the evening, storing his own wealth in a robber cave under the lash of some savage sea tyrant.

Yet even these cruel rovers did me a good turn. We were short of water, and had run down along a lonely coast to a green spring we knew of to fill water-butts and skins. When we let go in the little inlet where the well was to be found, another vessel, and, moreover, a pirate, lay anchored before us. However, we were consciously virtuous, and, what was of more consideration, a larger vessel and crew than the other, so we went ashore and made acquaintance round the fresh water with as villainous a gang of sea-robbers as ever caused the

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