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THE "STANDARD OF THE VEIL"

(p. 437

A NOBLE QUEEN

A ROMANCE OF INDIAN HISTORY.

BY

MEADOWS TAYLOR,

C.S.I., M.R.A.S., M.R.I.A., &c.

AUTHOR OF 'SEETA,' 'TARA,' AND OTHER TALES.

'O, never was there queen
So mightily betray'd!'

Antony and Cleopatra, act i. sc. iii.

NEW EDITION.

LONDON:
C. KEGAN PAUL & CO., 1 PATERNOSTER SQUARE.
1880.

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TO

HIS EXCELLENCY

MOOKHTAR-OOL MOOLK

SIR SALAR JUNG BAHADUR, G.C.S.I.

THE EMINENT AND ACCOMPLISHED STATESMAN

AND

LEADER OF ALL THE ADVANCING CIVILIZATION OF THE DEKHAN,

THIS WORK,

ILLUSTRATIVE OF A PORTION OF ITS HISTORY,

IS DEDICATED

BY HIS FAITHFUL FRIEND,

MEADOWS TAYLOR.

INTRODUCTION.

THE FAVOUR with which my former Indian tales have been received has induced me to write another, in illustration of one of the most important epochs in the history of the Dekhan. The character of the noble Queen Chand Beebee is still popular in the country; and her memory is reverenced, not only as the preserver of Beejapoor, but for the heroic resistance she made to the Moghul armies in their first invasion of the Dekhan and siege of Ahmednugger. The whole circumstances relating to the Queen, upon which this tale has been founded, are detailed in the history of Mahomed Kasim Ferishta, and can be read and verified in the translation of that work by the late Major-General Briggs.

MEADOWS TAYLOR.

OLD COURT, HAROLD'S CROSS, CO. DUBLIN.

August 27, 1875.

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A NOBLE QUEEN.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE CATARACT OF THE KRISHNA.

QUEEN ELIZABETH reigned in England. In the Dekhan, King Boorhan Nizam Shah ruled over Ahmednugger, and King Ibrahim Adil Shah II. over the kingdom of Beejapoor. They were rivals.

It was a fiery day in the end of the month of May 159–, when a small party of horsemen, evidently weary from long travel, were passing over the plains which lie north of the Krishna river. They carefully avoided village and road tracks, and kept a steady course eastward across the cultivated and uncultivated ground which seemed well known to them. There were no hedges, as the fields are unenclosed, except near the villages; and there were no trees, except distant clumps here and there, which marked the site of a village or hamlet, or perchance a lonely Mussulman shrine or Hindoo temple.

Nothing could be more dreary or desolate in appearance than the landscape; every green thing had long ago been burnt up; the soil was for the most part black and cracked; and the fields, which had been or were being ploughed, were broken into large clods, over which the tired horses strained with difficulty.

Beyond the river Krishna, which lay at a few miles' distance to the right hand, was a small cluster of hills, and directly before them a continuation of the range, which seemed to be broken in the middle by a gap; but the hills themselves were continually distorted by the hot wind and mirage, which had effect on everything about them.

Trees suddenly appeared to start up, which dwindled into bushes as the party approached them; villages, with their walls and roofs of white slaty limestone, rose into seeming palaces, glittering in the sun, and disappeared; lakes of water seemed to gather together, and again vanish under the fierce blasts of the burning wind, which carried with it at times clouds of choking dust. Men and bullocks ploughing were seen for a moment, then rose quivering and misshapen into the air, and vanished under an increased blast.

Now and then the droning song of the ploughmen came upon them in snatches, borne by the wind, and again ceased, and there was no sound except the plaintive whistle of the red plover, as flocks ran swiftly over the ground, the shrill chirrup of grasshoppers, or the wail of the lapwing when it was disturbed and flew away. Occasionally large lizards with red throats raised their heads stupidly as the party passed them, or the small blue-throated species looked pertly from its position on a stone or high clod, puffed out its beautiful azure neck, and whistled a defiant note as it beheld the unusual sight, or darted into the hole or crack in which it lived, and was seen no more.

Over ploughed fields flocks of crows or white storks, with their beaks wide open, searched among the newly-turned clods for insects, and rose up with harsh cries and flew away before the mirage, and were soon lost to view; or trembling in the hot air took a short flight and settled again. Here and there a small river bed or a brook suggested a pool of water or thread of stream, at which the horses and men could quench their thirst; but they stayed rarely for this, and pursued their way with all the speed, a quick amble, that their horses were capable of.

In truth, painful to endure as it undoubtedly was, this hot wind and mirage had proved to be their preserver from capture, and probably death. The times were lawless and fierce; party feeling ran high in the Dekhan kingdom, and partizans showed little mercy to each other in the civil war then raging. Early that morning a small force of cavalry in the service of the King of Beejapoor had started on its way to join one of the main bodies of the Royal army on its march to subdue the rebellion of the Prince Ismail, the King's younger brother. But the rebellion was, in fact, that of Eyn-ool-Moolk, the ex-Prime Minister, who in putting forward the young prince had trusted to regain his old influence and power. Nor did this seem at all improbable, as he was certain of the assistance of the King of Ahmednugger and his powerful armies, in order to pay off scores with his cousin of Beejapoor.

It was necessary, therefore, for Beejapoor to send all the troops at its disposal to quell the insurrection which had begun at Belgaum, and the party of cavalry under the young Abbas Khan, which had held a frontier outpost, being ordered to join a larger division, had been pushing on incautiously that morning before daylight, when it was attacked suddenly by an overwhelming force, and, after losing half its number on the field, was forced to fly. Many more were pursued, and captured or slain; many followed their brave young leader, occasionally showing front to their pursuers; but they gradually fell off, and only the four best mounted remained. Even they had had a narrow escape. From the brow of an undulation they had caught the glint of spears on the plain below, while they had also been seen in their elevated position, and were pursued with fresh ardour; but as they plunged into the hot waves of mirage, then beginning to blow, they had been concealed by it, or their figures so distorted that they could not be recognised.

We have no concern in this tale with the progress of the rebellion, or its sudden collapse after the death of Eyn-ool-Moolk, its instigator, and have only mentioned it incidentally to account for the flight of the small party whom we are following.

They seldom spoke one to another, for their heads were muffled in folds of cotton cloth, and the cotton sheets they usually carried on their saddles were now thrown over their persons to keep off the fierce heat of the sun. It was evident that two of them were wounded; and exhausted by the heat and loss of blood, could barely sit their horses. One of these was the young leader of the party, Abbas Khan, who occasionally reeled in his saddle as if about to faint from weakness, but again revived by a drink of water from a companion's leathern bottle, rallied bravely, and the march was resumed as before.

Abbas Khan, the nephew of Humeed Khan, and his adopted son, was, perhaps, twenty-five years old, or it might be less. His dress of Genoa velvet, braided with gold, was rich and handsome, but frayed with perpetual use, as were also the crimson velvet saddle-cloth and housings. On his head he wore a steel morion with a spike at the top, covered partly with padded velvet flaps, which fell over his ears and part of his neck behind, and were protected by small scales of steel; and a steel bar, as part of the morion itself, projected over his forehead, and was covered with velvet as the side pieces. Long Persian boots of soft leather, embroidered in coloured silk, greaves of padded velvet, strengthened

by steel scales, covered his thighs, and steel gauntlets, richly inlaid with gold, defended his wrists and his arms up to his elbow; a waistband of a rich green muslin scarf, the brocaded ends of which were tied at his right side, partly supported his sword, which hung from a baldrick embroidered with gold, crossing his breast.

It was the handsome dress of a Dekhan cavalier of the period, and there was not a braver, nor as yet one more distinguished, than the young Abbas Khan. For the times were rough. Insurrections and rebellions were the normal condition of the country, and especially of the capital; while from Ahmednugger on the north, and Beeder and Golconda on the east, the frontier was rarely or ever secure. Often, indeed, great leagues were made among the rival Sovereigns, and large armies sent into the field, when heavy actions were fought with terrible slaughter. Abbas Khan's service had always been in frontier posts, and his daring character and athletic frame urged him to undertake perilous enterprises, with little heed as to the possible results; indeed, he seemed to have no perception of danger, nor thought but to strike a blow against an enemy whenever he might appear. Rash to a degree, his uncle had refused him a command in his own army lest by his indiscreet valour he might compromise the effect of military skill; but he had no wish to curb the young man too much, and as the best experience was to be gained in frontier service, he had from time to time committed important posts to his nephew's charge.

Those who had escaped with him from the skirmish at Kórla were his own retainers; but they had, as we know, fallen behind from exhaustion, wandered into other paths, or taken refuge in villages. There were only three left—one, by name Jumal, as badly wounded as the young leader himself, who with difficulty kept his seat. He was the Khan's standard-bearer, and still carried the small green pennon he had defended so bravely in the fight. The second was Yasin, an attendant of his own; the third Runga, a chief of the Beydurs of the country to the eastward, a tall grim-looking Hindoo, who acted as guide. All were well mounted, but the hardy, active horse of the Beydur was perhaps the freshest.

The day was now declining, and the furious wind had somewhat fallen, but still blew in occasional gusts, accompanied by clouds of dust; but the wounded men could barely hold out, and there were drops of blood oozing from the bandages with which the Khan's chest and left arm had been hastily bound up, while

the pressure of the velvet coat, soaked in blood, which had dried hard and adhered to a part of the wound, was exquisitely painful.

The Beydur saw that it was so, and tried to cheer his young master, saying in his rough Canarese tongue, which the Khan understood perfectly, "Fear not, Abbas Khan, fear not, an hour hence thou wilt be safe in the fort. See, the trees of Nalutwar are already behind us, and my own hills are growing more and more distinct amidst the haze and dust. Cheer up, and set thy teeth like a true soldier as thou art; I say another coss and thou art safe among my people, and the wound shall be dressed again. And thou, too, Jumal, we will care for thee also. Faint not, man, but keep a good heart."

"I do not like the ceasing of the wind so suddenly," said Yasin Khan; "if the rebels were to see us now, we should have a poor chance for life."

"We could at least die like soldiers," was the Khan's reply. "It was my rashness which caused this disaster and the loss of so many of our poor fellows! May God forgive me, for I fear my uncle will not; and to your fidelity I owe my life, O friends; may Alla reward ye. Yes, I will hold out, if the bleeding will let me, but even now the ground swims before my eyes. Give me some more water, for I thirst." And after a long draught from the leathern bottle, the young man settled himself afresh in his saddle, spoke cheerily to his horse, and pressed on again.

They had not proceeded more than a mile when several men sprang out of a thicket and rushed towards the Beydur chief, whose feet they kissed with passionate tears and cries of joy. "Oh, thou art safe, thou art safe," was all they could find words to say. "We heard thou wert dead, lying on the field by Kórla, and some have gone to seek thee there."

"Peace," cried the chief, laughing. "See, children, I am unharmed and safe."

"But there is danger," cried several. "A party of the rebel horsemen have tracked ye, and are near us now. Can ye not ride faster? once within the pass and ye are safe. Ride on, we will follow."

"On your lives," returned the chief, "stop them there. Keep yourselves close within the brushwood, and fire at them as ye can. Their horses are as weary as our own, and can do little. Ye can defend the mouth of the Cháya Bhugwuti; or, if they are many, ye may entice them into the hills on the main road."

"And what would ye do by the Cháya Bhugwuti? Do ye not

know, master, that Mother Krishna is running full, and ye cannot get refuge in the fort?"

"Ha!" cried the chief, "is it so indeed; and when did this happen? We did not hear the mother."

"About noon," was the reply of several. "She comes down before her time. Listen!"

As the man spoke, a deep hollow sound fell upon their ears. The wind blowing from the west, along the course of the great river, had prevented this sound reaching them before; but there could be no mistake now, and on passing a small eminence they saw the river in flood, from bank to bank, rushing rapidly along; while in the gap of the hill before them rose a column of mist, which increased as the wind lulled, and again was blown away as a gust came down the river.

"If there were time," said the leader of the new party with his men, who were running beside the horses, "ye should turn by the upper road, and make straight for Korikul, but it is too late now for that; and how are ye to cross the river?"

"Let us reach Narrainpoor first, and we will see to that," said Runga, quietly. "Away, some of ye, to Narrainpoor, and tell the fishermen to go on to the lower ferry with their gear. Their lives shall answer for the young Khan's if there be any delay, and I, Runga, declare it. Tell Krishna, the barber, to have his needles ready; there may be time to dress the Khan's wound. Ye remember him, children, how he slew the panther with his sword, and how ye all worshipped him. Away! we have to save his life; no matter what the flood is, we shall be cowards if we do not place him in the fort ere the sun sets."

The men he spoke to were Beydurs like himself. Indeed, Runga was not only a chief but a relative of the Rajâh of the Clan, then a very powerful one, which could bring twenty thousand men into the field. Runga Naik held the lower part of the western frontier with horse and footmen, and had been summoned to join the young Khan according to the tenor of his service to the State. He was a true adherent, not only because of his service, but because of his love for and admiration of the Khan, and this was shared by the people. It would be disgrace indeed if aught happened to Abbas Khan or his followers; and at their chief's appeal several of them dashed forward in the direction of the hollow booming sound and cloud of mist.

They were fleet of foot, and admirably equipped for tough frontier service. On their heads they wore conical caps of leather,

which drew in by a string round the forehead and temples. Each wore loose leather drawers reaching as far as the knee, with a red waistband of strong stuff, and pliant sandals completed their costume. Some had sword and shield, with a knife in the girdle; others carried long matchlocks, with the powder-horns and bullet-bags hanging at their waists. Among rocks and brushwood they were invisible, and as the aspect of the country had suddenly changed, there were now granite rocks and brushwood enough to conceal a host of such men as they.

"Some of us had better stop here," cried the leader of the footmen, as they approached a small pass in the hill, "and wait for the rebel dogs if they come up."

"Do so, my sons," replied the leader, "but do not fire unless they make an attempt to pass you. And now, Khan," he said to the young man, as he pointed out a small village with some green rice fields around it, "that is Narrainpoor, and I vow an offering to Cháya Bhugwuti herself, if she allow us to pass her in safety. Cheer up now, and keep thy heart thankful, for all danger is past."

It was well, indeed, that the refuge was near, for Abbas Khan was past speech. He was faint and sick, reeling in his saddle at every stumble of his noble horse in the rough ground. Often he had patted its neck and encouraged it by his voice; and met with a response in a low whinny and a toss of the head; but now horse and rider were alike exhausted. The young Khan was conscious of nothing but a dull booming sound in his ears, which increased every moment, yet he clung instinctively to the saddle, and his standard-bearer's powerful arm alone had prevented him from falling to the ground for the last few miles. He had heard the Beydur's last speech with only a dim consciousness of what it meant, but he smiled faintly, and pointed to his wound, and to his mouth, which was parched, and was becoming swollen. Then Runga Naik dashed forward and returned with a number of men and a low bedstead; the young Khan was placed upon it, and borne gently into the village, while his charger was cared for by kindly men, who allowed him to nibble mouthfuls of the fresh green rice as he passed on.

"See whom I have brought you, Bheemajee," said the Naik. "'Tis Abbas Khan, our young master, and a brave one too; therefore assist him, for he is badly wounded, and, notwithstanding, hath ridden through this fearful day without a murmur, true soldier as he is: but now he has fainted at last. Where is Krishna, the barber? He must see to the wound directly."

"I am here, Maharaj," said that functionary, stepping forward. "Show me the wound, and I will do what is needful."

They stripped him as he lay unconscious on the bed, and the stiff velvet coat being carefully removed, as well as the heavy steel morion, and his head bathed with cool water, the young man sat up, and at first looked wildly about him.

"Ul-humd-ul-Illa," said the standard-bearer piously. "He wakes from his trance, and will live; but I thought he would have died."

"Not this time, friend," said the Khan, faintly enough, but with a cheery smile. "How much farther have we to go? Let me mount again and get on; we have yet far to ride, and I feel strong and well already."

"You are among my people now," cried Runga Naik cheerily; "no more riding, and the fort is nigh at hand, where you will be safe for a long rest. Fear not, therefore; old Krishnajee will dress your wound, and they are cooking some kicheri. Praise to the gods! you are safe, my noble master!"

Then the barber performed his duty skilfully and tenderly. The wound was long, extending from the left breast across the left arm, and had bled much, but was not very deep. A few stitches were put into it to keep the lips together, a poultice of green herbs, carefully mashed, was placed over it, and a few bandages completed the simple dressing, which was borne, though it had been exquisitely painful, without a murmur.

The other wounded man was treated in the same manner, but he was weaker, and his wound was deeper, and a Mussulman fakeer who was present took charge of him carefully.

It was surprising to see how the young Khan had rallied; but his great strength of frame and vigorous constitution enabled him to conquer at last the weakness that had overtaken him, and after a slight but grateful meal, he professed himself ready to go on.

But now the old Patell interfered. "The mother river is raging," he cried; "do not ye hear her? and, indeed, the thunder of the cataract has increased as the wind fell. No one could attempt to cross the rapids below and live. My sons, be not mad! and let the lives the gods have spared rest here with us in safety. Go not to certain death!"

"Peace, Bheemajee!" returned Runga Naik, somewhat scornfully. "I have crossed the rapid myself when it was worse than it is now, and the mother has done me no harm. I tell thee there is no time to delay. Hark! dost thou hear that—and that?

The enemy are at the pass, and there are only twelve men to hold it. Burma will not let them through if he can help it; but if they are many he must fail, and we perish. Ho! my sons," he cried to the people around, "who will swim with me across the ford? do ye fear?"

With a shout and yell, such as Beydurs only can give, a number of stout young fellows answered the appeal and ran for their bundles of gourds, which were always ready. "We are your children," they said, touching their master's feet and the Khan's; "we will take you over, and fear not. Let us go now. There is an hour's good light, and we can remain in Juldroog and cross by the lower ferry in the boat. Come!"

It was indeed time, for the first few shots in the pass seemed to be followed up by others, and the shouts and shrieks of the Beydurs sounded closer. "Away with ye," cried the Beydur Naik to the men who had accompanied him; "tell Burma to hold the pass with his life for half-an-hour, then to retreat to the Cháya Bhugwuti, and hold that till death, if needs be." And as the men departed, the Khan's bed was taken up, the horses sent on before, and the little procession, leaving the village, proceeded at as rapid a pace as the rugged ground would permit.

"If the pass is forced," said Runga to the Patell, "keep the wounded man safely concealed, and bring what men ye have to the entrance of Cháya Bhugwuti, and all of ye defend that. If Burma and his people are safe, fire two shots down the ravine over the ford, and we shall know what they mean."

"May the Mother guide you, my lord," said the old man piously. "I vow a sacrifice to Cháya Mata if she let you pass safely."

The path was narrow and intricate, among huge masses of granite rock, which sometimes almost blocked the way. It would have been impossible to have ridden through it. Suddenly Runga Naik stopped.

"You would like, perhaps, to see the nymph in her fury," he said, "and you can do that without walking. Come on to the edge," he said to the bearers of the Khan's litter, "and set it down on the terrace." The men did so, and Abbas Khan beheld a scene which, from its combined grandeur and beauty, struck him with utter amazement.

The terrace of rock was level, and his bed had been set down on the very edge. At first he closed his eyes, for he hardly dared to look on the turmoil of waters below him; but the tall figure of

Runga Naik was even nearer the fearful precipice, and he seemed to stand unmoved. "Wait a little, Khan Sahib," he said in his strong, manly voice; "wait till a gust of wind drives away this blinding mist, and thou wilt see it all." And almost as he spoke the spray, driven by the wind, passed to the other side of the chasm, slowly unveiling by degrees the noble cataract, which he could now see nearly from the top, whence the water of the mighty river precipitated itself—to the bottom, where it was still partially veiled with spray. The river was full from bank to bank, and about a quarter of a mile, perhaps indeed more, in breadth, and fell from point or step to step of the incline of four hundred feet with a fearful crash and clamour. In no part of its course, except one, was the rock perpendicular, but it was broken by huge masses of rock which showed their tops only in a few places. The steps of the whole incline were in irregular portions, which caused breaks in the fall and added to its sublimity. Here and there the action of the water had hollowed out large deep holes, which now and again spouted forth columns of water and spray to a surprising height, and fell back with a roar and splash with marvellous effect. The whole was a seething, roaring mass, which dazzled his eyes and, weak as he was, overpowered his senses, and he sank back almost fainting; but he rallied directly, and again the Beydur chief spoke.

"The pool is clear, Meeah," he said. "See, it is like all the horses in the world tossing their manes and fighting."

It was, indeed, a frightful place to look upon. At his feet, as it seemed, in a wide pool at the foot of the fall, the tremendous masses of water falling into it met other currents and eddies of equal power, and dashing together raised enormous waves which met in innumerable shocks, and cast their spray high into the air, whirling, foaming, breaking, with inconceivable violence and grandeur almost impossible to look on with a steady eye for a moment together. Yet the Beydur, to whom the scene was familiar, beheld it with a serene gravity.

"This is the nymph in her fury," he said, "and we worship her, and cast flowers and our simple offerings into her bosom to appease her. When it is past we can wander over the rocks and make offerings at the holy pools, which now vomit forth the columns of water you see rising, and the pool now so fearful to look upon is as still as a lake. Come, you have seen enough."

But the Khan was fascinated. "A little while more, and I shall be ready," he said. "The first shock of the sight was almost

too much for me, but now I am calmer, and I would watch awhile."

The sun had become low in the heavens, and the slanting beams of his light played over the boiling water with exquisite effect. The terror of the cataract had passed away, and only its beauty remained. Although the water was yellow and muddy, yet the rosy light played among every giant stream, or tiny portion of the vast fall, causing rainbows to appear, to vanish, and to re-appear in every part of the spray on which the sun shone. No one could count them; some remained steady for an instant, then broke to pieces; some were seen only to disappear; while beneath them the stupendous rushes of water from the great holes, rising in perpetual changes, seemed hung with these lovely garlands ever varying. The banks of the chasm were huge piles of granite rock, covered with trees and brushwood, which seemed to bend in homage to the genius of the place, and they were all now lighted up with roseate tints, while the deep shadows of the ravine increased the beauty and solemnity of the scene.

"Enough!" cried the young Khan, after a silence of some minutes. "My soul is full of it. And such are the powers and works of the Lord of Might! Yet no one had told me of this most wonderful sight. Lead on, friend. I shall not forget what I have seen. This is, indeed, a land of wonders. And is yon roaring torrent to be crossed?"

"Even so," said his guide. "The Holy Mother will protect us if we are brave and trust to her. The water is smooth at the ferry though it is rapid, and we need to be careful. A hundred times have I crossed it alone, with only a few gourds tied to my back; but my lord is precious, and we have made every preparation."

Then the bed was taken up and carried on along the almost level top of the bank of the ravine, but the way became more difficult and intricate as they proceeded. Presently, as they emerged from behind a great cluster of rocks piled one upon another, as it were by mortal hands, the noble fort of Juldroog appeared. At first it seemed to belong to the rocky range on which the party were proceeding, but after a little time the Khan saw that it was detached and stood alone. It was a lofty hill, consisting of the same granite rocks as the range, and in its natural state must have been almost inaccessible; but it had been strengthened by bastions and curtains wherever they could be placed, and had been made a perfectly impregnable citadel. The house of the commander surmounted all, and from its roof flew the Royal standard of Bejapoor. The sun shone

brightly upon the rocks, the brushwood, and the massive fortifications, and seemed to soften and harmonise their rugged details, and the young Khan looked eagerly to his place of refuge and his cousin's pleasant society with a degree of feverish anxiety, which was the consequence of his wound as well of the exhausting day he had gone through.

Now the bearers began to descend a narrow pass in the bank, which was traversed with difficulty, even by men; but the people who carried him were sure footed, and performed their task steadily and successfully. At the foot was a small portion of green sward, on which some persons were resting, with a bed smaller than that the Khan had been carried upon, with, as it seemed, piles of dry gourds tied to its legs and sides.

From this spot the view of the fort was even more impressive than from above. It appeared to rise like a cone to the height of five hundred feet or more; a pile of masses of granite, built up by Titans, but softened by foliage and brushwood. The bastions, which from above seemed to be part of the fort itself, now projected from the rocks in bold relief against the reddened sky, and the sun, shining down the river, lighted the waters with a soft red glare, which rested upon the fort and the mountains beyond with a rich, but lovely, effect. Before them the channel they had to pass was hardly more than a bowshot across, but the current, though smooth, was very rapid, and the water passed in undulations, either caused by masses of rock beneath or by its own inherent force. These undulations were regular, and nowhere formed breakers. Already they saw the walls beyond and the beach, filling with people to watch their progress; but even the powerful voice of the Beydur chief could not be heard, and, taking a brass horn from one of the men, he blew a loud blast, with a peculiar quivering note at the end of it, which was answered at once from the fort.

"Ah! they know my signal, you see, Khan, and now we shall have thy cousin to welcome thee. Come, the raft is ready, Bismilla!"

Runga Naik had divested himself of his dress and arms, and placed only his sword upon the frail raft, where the Khan's dress and arms were also bestowed. The horses and the Khan's followers had been sent by the upper path to the village of Jernalpoor, and would rest there till the flood subsided. And all was now ready.

"Stay," cried the Beydur, "I would fain hear that my people are safe, and I have arranged the signal. Hark!"

Almost as he spoke two shots were discharged from the upper pass, and he knew that the enemy's attack had been repulsed. "Bismilla!" he exclaimed, as he sat astride between two piles of gourds, united by a broad and strong horse-girth, "one cannot be drowned with such as these. Now, my sons, take the Khan up gently, and place the bed in the water—wait my signal, and let the next wave pass by. Now!" he shouted, as one of the waves of the current, passing by, broke on the pebbly beach. "Now, for your lives, Jey Mata!" "Jey Mata!" was repeated by the ferrymen, and the little raft shot out with the vigorous strokes of the swimmers into the stream.

The passage was not without extreme danger, for the power of the current was immense, and carried them down a long distance, and the young Khan, as the banks seemed to shoot past him, and the raft was whirled round and round with great velocity, almost gave up hope that the stream would be passed; but the Beydur cried to him not to fear, for all danger was over; and, in any case, resigning himself, like a good Moslim, to his fate, he saw, after a time that appeared to him interminable, that the raft was urged into a backwater, and men on the bank flung ropes to them, by which the shore was soon gained.

"Well done! well done!" cried a manly voice from a crowd of soldiers. "I say, well done, Runga Naik, 'tis like thee to do a feat of daring like that; but whom hast thou there? By the Prophet, but I should know his face. Abbas Khan! brother! how comest thou here in such a woful plight; and wounded, too?"

"It is no time to ask questions of him now, my lord," said the Beydur; "but for that ugly wound he would be as strong and fresh as I am; but you see he has been bleeding all day in the hot wind, and has been often insensible, and seems to have fainted again. Yet run to some shelter, I pray thee, and let thy surgeon look after him."

"He is gone to Moodgul, alas!" said Osman Beg, the killadar or governor of the fort, who was usually termed Nawab, "and all I can do is to recall him when any one can get across the large channel, which I fear may not be for some days. There is, however, the old Dervish, who hath a rare skill, and he can be taken there at once."

"Good, my lord; let him be taken up as he is by my people, and if thou wilt send one of thy servants with him, the holy Syud will no doubt help him, though he is blind."

"I will go myself," said the Nawab, "and see to his comfort."

Then the bed was taken up and carried on gently, and set down within the enclosure of a small mosque and dwelling place. At first the old Dervish could not understand why he had been so suddenly disturbed, but on hearing that a wounded man needed his care, bade him to be brought in, and, after examining him, declared he must remain for the present where he was, and that the attendant whom the governor had nominated to wait upon his cousin should remain also to minister to him.

The young Khan was at once bathed, dressed in dry garments, and laid in a comfortable bed. The barber's stitches of his wound had at least held well, and bleeding had ceased. He was already refreshed, but he could not give a clear account of what had happened to the old Sheykh and his cousin, who sat by him. His pain had increased, and a low delirium had commenced.

"Oh that I could see you," he said, "but I am blind! Zóra, my child, make up the soothing potion for him and a poultice of herbs, and tell his people how it is to be applied. We will both watch him to-night, for the fever is strong; but, Inshalla, ere many days he will be strong again. Be assured, Nawab Sahib, that your poor servant will do his best."

"Then I leave my cousin in thy care, Hazrar, and will return early to see him," said the Nawab, as he saluted the Dervish reverentially and took his departure.

CHAPTER II.

"A NIGHT'S VIGIL."

THE night was hot, and the incessant roar of the cataract came fitfully on the ear as it now swelled into a deep thunderous sound, and again was softened by the night air. Under the effects of the opiate the young man seemed to sleep for a while, but the fever prevailed again, and with bright glassy eyes the sufferer now stared vacantly about him, recognising no one, and relapsing into insensibility; but he muttered low words to himself, and all they who watched could distinguish were an occasional fierce battle cry, and the broken interjections of a combat. From time to time

the old Dervish felt his pulse and his head, but there were no signs of relief, and he sate down again anxiously. "The sun hath stricken him," he said to the child, "as well as the sword, and it may go hard with him, strong as he is. Alas! alas! if he should die? Yet he shall not die unless Alla wills it. If I could but see him. Ya Kureem! if I could but see him! Watch him carefully, Zóra, and tell me from time to time how he looks; give him the cooling drink when he is uneasy, and see that the cloths on his brow do not get dry. Ere morning he may sleep quietly. Meanwhile I will pray for him, child, and if it be his fate he will live;" and the Dervish turned aside, and Zóra saw his beads passing through his fingers and his lips moving in prayer as he bowed his face to the ground.

So the child watched, and wondered as she gazed on the face and figure lying before her. Sometimes the features would be distorted by pain, and again this would be changed to fierce excitement, and the battle cries would be uttered with a fierce vigour as he partly rose and waved his right arm as if it held a sword; but the girl put it back gently, and patted him as she would a child. Sometimes his lips would seem to be dry, and his tongue stiff and clammy, and he would cry for water faintly and querulously; and the cool drink administered to him from time to time soothed him for the moment, and he lay quietly. Zóra was an experienced nurse, for often she had attended the sick and wounded who were brought to her grandfather's humble dwelling for help. She had no timidity of men, she had never been secluded like other girls of her age, and her office was to lead her grandfather when he moved abroad, and to tend the sick who came for his advice. The light was purposely dimmed, but her form could be clearly seen, and we may endeavour to describe it.

Zóra was apparently about fourteen years old, perhaps somewhat more; but she was tall for her age, and her figure was lithe and supple. She was fair in comparison with ordinary Mussulman women of her country, but not fairer than a light, clear, ruddy brown, betokening health and strength. Her head was small and perfectly shaped, sitting on a graceful neck; and her hair, a glossy black, escaped from under the scarf she wore in a profusion of soft curls, which seemed to wind lovingly about her neck and shoulders. Her forehead was wide and somewhat low, but smooth and glistening, the eyebrows gently arched and regular; but it was the eyes that involuntarily attracted every beholder, and with her mobile lips expressed every emotion of her mind. Now they

would be fully and tenderly opened, and you would see the large soft dilated pupil of a velvety black, floating, as it were, on a ground of the tenderest violet and azure. A merry arch glance shot from them as they closed almost to a twinkling dot of light They seemed incapable of anger or petulance, and, indeed, the child's life had as yet been one of little sorrow or excitement of any kind, and her natural disposition was gentle and submissive.

It was certain that her figure would be strikingly elegant as her age progressed, but as yet there was no indication of form, except a litheness and grace which marked every movement; and as she stretched forth her hand to minister to the wounded sufferer, her rounded arms, small hands, and taper fingers, gave promise of actual beauty in days to come; while as she threw back her luxuriant hair, the movement of her neck conveyed an exquisite undulating motion to her whole figure. No one could call the girl beautiful, or her features regular; they would not have been nearly so charming had they been so; but her mouth and pearly teeth accorded with all else, and combined to produce a countenance as attractive as it was in reality arch, good humoured, and interesting. She was very plainly, not to say coarsely, clad; but the simple muslin scarf, which passing round her body and head fell over her right arm, was worn with a peculiar air and grace, and the petticoat of cotton stuff was, perhaps, fuller and more womanly than her age required.

She was mistress of her grandfather's house; and the gossips about, though somewhat shocked at her being seen abroad at all, told her she was too old to wear a child's trousers, and they had been discarded. Round her neck she wore a single silver ring, and bracelets and anklets of the same, but hid away in a chest were some gold ornaments and rich clothes. And in regard to these, and to his former life, her grandfather was silent. Some day, he had said, he would tell her all, but she was too young yet, and it was a sad story. All that she knew of him from the neighbours was that, although a Dervish, he was a State prisoner, and the time of his first coming to the fort had been forgotten long ago.

Her mother had died in her infancy, yet Zóra's young life had been a happy one as she grew up. The old man had taught her the rudiments of Persian, and the meaning of words at first parrotwise, but gradually, and with the aid of a vocabulary, she had progressed easily and satisfactorily. Her grandfather usually spoke to her in that language, and she could now write a fair hand, and record what he dictated to her. She had had few companions,

except when she was a mere child, for as she grew older her grandfather admonished her against the idle gossip of the little village which lay beneath the fortress, and when she went out with him to lead him where he desired to go, no one, out of respect to the old man, ever addressed her. She had only one attendant, an old woman named Mamoola, who swept the house and cooked their simple meals, and was assisted by Zóra in all other household matters with unceasing skill and interest in her occupation. Who could make the tender hot cakes and the various kinds of vermicelli in which the old man delighted more deftly than Zóra? Who could sew the old-fashioned flowing garments he wore so well as she? And she had learned also to make quilted caps, and embroider them with gold and silver ornaments and spangles, which the soldiers of the fort commissioned, and were sold also in the little weekly bazaar, bringing a welcome addition to their limited means. Zóra's soft, pretty drawer strings, also, were knitted in elegant patterns, and finished with gay tassels, and there was an active demand for them. So, in all respects, the little maiden was ever busy, and any loneliness of life or care had, as yet, never reached her.

Zóra sighed as she looked on the young Khan, so restless in his feverish sleep. Why should he have come to such a pass? Why should the pitiful Alla have thus struck him down in his strength and power of life, and cast him upon the care of strangers? What misery would be his mother's, or his sister's, perhaps his wife's, if they could only see him now, moaning and murmuring in his sleep, and now and again shouting his fierce battle-cry, "Deen! Deen!" and raising his arm to strike. What was war, that men should risk their lives for its dread honours, sudden death or a maimed life? War was, indeed, a common theme even among children of her own age, and there were names of heroes in their mouths. But war had now come to the lonely, secluded fortress of Juldroog. Soldiers came and went, and wounded men were brought in, and her grandfather was often called to them. Ah! it must be pitiful to see thousands of them lying on the bare earth, blistering in the sun, with horrible wounds undressed and uncared for; and the very thoughts made her shiver and draw her soft curtain closer around her.

Before her lay a youth whose form was cast in a noble fashion. His muscular arms were bare, and his broad chest, except where it was bound up. When the features were at rest, they seemed to her grand and beautiful; and when he sometimes smiled during his

snatches of sleep, a winning frank expression passed over them, and the gentlest smile she had ever seen. Again, in a paroxysm of pain or delirium, the whole was distorted and blurred, and the girl turned away her face with tears and low sobs, which she could only with difficulty stifle. And still she watched, and the old man kept his prayerful vigil, and the cataract continued its monotonous, thundering roar, which seemed at times to fall into a sobbing moan.

"Lie down and sleep, Zóra," said the Dervish, in a low tone. "Thou must be weary of watching, my child, and the night is far spent."

"Not so, Abba!" which was her usual term of endearment for her grandfather; "not so. I am not weary. I cannot sleep; and he needs watching every moment. He will not bear the sheet over his chest, and is ever throwing it off; his lips are dry and parched; and he looks at me sometimes, and points to his throat and head, as if to ask for cool drink and wet cloths, and I have to give them. O Abba! will he die? Surely the good God will spare him. Come and feel his pulse, for he seems hotter and more restless."

"It is as you say, my darling," replied the old man, who had risen and felt his patient all over. "It may be the crisis of the sun fever, and he may be better, or may pass away in death at dawn. Go quietly; bring me of the cooling powders we made a few days ago; they are from a formula of Aboo Sena, of blessed memory, and are potent to check fever like this. Go and bring one."

"Oh that these sightless eyes could see but for a moment, that his face might be revealed to me," thought the Dervish; "names that I have not heard for years have escaped his lips, and Humeed Khan is his uncle! What Humeed Khan? what Ankoos Khan? Eyn-ool-Moolk—is that traitor still living? Even as I sit here, blind and helpless, the old scenes—the noble buildings of Beejapoor, the pomp of royalty and war, are before me—all confused and blurred in my memory with the miserable King Ibrahim and his riotous debauchery. Strange mockery of fate! that when honour and wealth were seemingly in my grasp they should have passed into blindness and this prison. Yet it was thy will, O pitiful Alla! and the old Dervish accepts it reverently. I must be careful," he continued to himself, as the light step of Zóra entered the chamber. "She hath never known, and must not see my weakness. Zóra, hast thou brought the medicine?"

"It is here, Abba," she said. "How am I to give it?"

"When he is athirst again, put half the powder into the drink, and

watch the result. If his skin becomes moist, give no more ; but if in an hour he is still burning, give him the rest. I can do no more, child, but commit him into the Lord's hands. I shall not leave thee, Zóra ; but I am weary, and would sleep. If thou art afraid at any time, I shall awake with a touch, and will sit by thee ; but where are the Nawab's people ? they can take their turn, surely."

"All gone," said Zóra. "With one excuse or other they went away, and I have been alone ; but one man lies without who has sat there since the youth was brought in, looking wistful, like a dog which seeks his master. I asked him who he was, and he says he is Runga Naik Beydur, but that he may not come in as he is of low caste. May he come, Abba ? "

"Surely, child, surely. True Islam knows no distinction of caste in mercy's service, and thou mayest admit him to watch with thee if thou wilt ; and 'tis thus, my brave one," he added, tenderly passing his hands over her face ; "'tis thus thou learnest the ways of mercy and pity. See, he stirs and writhes. I hear his movement."

"'Tis but what has happened before," she replied, as she poured some of the sherbet into a small silver cup, and mixed the powder with it. Zóra saw that he drank it eagerly, and again shrank back upon his pillow.

"Now I will call the Beydur," said Zóra, as she went to the door, and found the man watching as before. "Rise, and follow me," she said.

"But I am unclean, lady," was the reply. "Who admits the Beydur within the threshold of a devout Moslim ? Yet if I might help thee to tend him—my brave boy—my heart would thank thee."

"My grandfather bids thee come, in the name of Alla," said the girl. "Rise and enter ; you are welcome."

The man rose, and bending down to the earth clasped her feet and kissed them passionately. Zóra could feel the hot tears dropping from his eyes, as he put his lips to them. "So much love," she thought, "and for a Moslim ! " "Abba lies in here," she said, as she crossed the chamber, and the stalwart form of the Beydur followed.

"He is welcome, in the name of the Most Merciful," said the old man ; "let him watch."

"Not before I have kissed your reverend feet. I know thee, Huzrut, but I can be silent as death," said the man, partly removing his turban, and prostrating himself. "And I may watch ? "

"Hast thou eaten, my son? dost thou desire food?"

"None," replied Runga. "To see him yonder and watch by him is food and drink to me, for I love him, Huzrut, love him as though he were my own child. If he lives, I will eat when I have bathed. If he die, I will stay till the earth covers him, and then depart, for I shall have a long and weary journey before me. Will he live?"

"As God pleases," was the reply. "I have done what I could, and he is in His hands. Watch and see."

Then Runga Naik sat down by the bed and watched with the girl. His touch seemed as tender as a woman's as he smoothed the pillow of the sufferer, changed the wet cloths on his head, and placed the wounded arm in easier positions; but still the moaning and delirium continued, and the muttering, of which Zóra could catch only a word here and there.

"His spirit is in the fight," said Runga, softly. "Do not be afraid; and he killed his enemy as he received that blow. But he did not strike first, and Meeah's was the strongest blow, and Elias Khan was dead ere he fell from his horse. Then we too struck in, and brought Meeah away safely, I and two others; but it was hard to bring him through the waves of heat, and now it is harder still, for they struck him down. Hast thou no more medicine? he must not rave thus."

"I have," she said; "but whether he will live or die under it Abba cannot tell, and I fear."

"Give it, in the name of the Lord!" said the Beydur, earnestly. "The remedy of a holy man cannot fail. And now lie down and sleep, lady," he continued, after the remedy had been administered; "I will watch."

"I cannot sleep," she replied, "let me watch with thee."

So they remained silent; but the two faces before her had a fascination for Zóra that she could not overcome. The one, noble, dignified, and in its full beauty of tender manhood, with its, as yet, downy moustache and beard; and the other hard and stern, with eyes and mouth that could perhaps be cruel, a thick moustache and grizzled whiskers, and a forehead seamed with furrows—yet all combining in an expression of tender pity and grief that could hardly be suppressed. What could be the connection between the two men, separated as they were by race and faith?

They watched till the day was breaking and the birds in the trees began to chirp and twitter, and a cock crew loudly; then Abbas Khan, who had been lying, as it were, in a trance, suddenly

opened his eyes quietly, and saw the Beydur sitting by his bed. "Runga!" he said, faintly. "Runga!"

"Dost thou know me, Meeah?" was the reply. "It is, indeed, Runga. What wouldst thou?"

"I have been dreaming," he said, wearily, "and the last scowling glance of my foe as I struck him down has been ever before me; but there came at times a Peri of Paradise who gave to me of the heavenly sherbet, and the angel drove him away, and he could not take me to hell;" and he sank back exhausted.

"It is the crisis Abba spoke of," whispered Zóra, "and if he sleep it is well. Speak not, but watch."

The intensity of anxiety with which both watched the young man cannot be described, but the struggle between death and life did not continue long. Presently tears seemed to steal from his eyelids and fall upon his cheek, the quick gasping breath became more regular, there was a dew upon the lips, and the skin was becoming cooler and moister every moment; and yet, it might be deceptive!

"Dost thou know me, Meeah?" asked the Beydur. There was no reply, but a gratified smile overspread the face, and, taking the Beydur's rough hand in his own, Abbas Khan clasped it to his heart and fell gently into slumber.

"Oh! I vowed sheep to thee, Mother, for his life, and thou hast accepted the vow, and he is safe. Safe, lady, safe!" he said eagerly to Zóra, in a low voice full of emotion. "Safe, and he shall ride again with me against his country's enemies. Now more covering if thou hast it, for cold must not strike him. And do thou take rest, for the night has been a weary one to thee. See, the old man sleeps softly; Meeah said truly, thou art of heaven."

The excitement had been great, and the girl had not once closed her eyes. Now the kind words of the stranger affected her deeply, and as she lay down on her carpet, which had been spread in a corner of the room, tears burst from her eyes and low sobs rose which she could not control; but they soothed her, and she fell into a deep sleep.

The world abroad was astir in the early morn, the birds twittered and chirped in the great tamarind trees, pigeons fluttered in the little mosque, cooed and greeted each other, ringdoves seemed to answer them, and noisy paroquets flew screaming abroad to get their early food. As the sun rose, his ruddy beams rested on the grim rocks and feathery foliage of the deep glen with glowing lustre, and at the end of the Fort Island the noble river spread out

into a large, quiet, lake-like pool. The cataract above still roared with a sullen moan, but the water was not so high, for, like all sudden and early floods, the river had subsided continuously during the night. The only one stirring in the house was the old woman servant. She had milked the cow and the goats, and turned them loose to graze, and had sat down to pick rice for the morning meal.

"It must be kicheri and dall, I suppose; they had phoolkas and dall yesterday. No, I will make the kicheri; too much dall is not good for the Huzrut, and it will be good for the stranger too, if he wakes and the fever is gone. Ya Kureem! what a night it was, and yet that child never flinched once nor feared the wild raving she heard. Punah! I could not have borne it—not I; and when I looked in last, who should be sitting by the bed but that bloody reiver Runga Naik, who shook his finger at me and then put his hand on his lips and motioned me away; and Zóra lay in the corner sleeping, never thinking that that man of blood was nigh her. Ugh! I should have trembled too much to have attempted to sleep; but God only knows what that child is. Mayhap an angel from before the Lord, for she is born for good works and loving deeds. 'Nurse,' she says sometimes, 'are there none sick in the village whom I could attend? are there none poor whom we can feed? Go, look round, and bring me news.' She would be doing good now, I warrant me, if she were not asleep. But let her sleep and wake of herself, my fairy! my darling!"

"Mother! Mother Mamoola!" cried a rough strong voice at the entrance of the little enclosure before the Dervish's dwelling. "Mother! where art thou? I have been looking everywhere about, but no one is stirring. Art thou dead? Is the Dervish dead?"

"Get away with thee, oh, bawling wretch!" cried the dame angrily, as she put down her rice sifter, not relishing this interruption to her soliloquy. "Get thee gone, I say, and keep silence. They are all asleep, after a fearful night with the wounded man," she continued, as she reached the entrance. "Ah! it is thee, Ghuffoor. Why art thou bawling so?"

"Do not be angry so early in the day, mother," said the man; "it will spoil thy temper. My lord the Nawab is even now coming down the hill with all his retinue, and must be admitted to see his cousin. I am sent on to warn ye all. Where is the fairy face? and the Huzrut ought to be at prayers in the mosque; let me go to him, wherever he be."

"I tell thee, again, begone!" retorted the dame. "Tell the Nawab Sahib that they are all asleep, and neither I, Mamoola, nor anyone else shall rouse them for the Nawab, or fifty Nawabs. Tell him this from me, Mamoola, and bid him go back as he came. The youth's spirit hovers between life and death, but, praise to the saints, he sleeps; and they all sleep, too, except Runga Naik, who watches the youth as though he were his own son. Begone, I say, and run at thy best speed, or we may have the crier shouting my lord's titles, and horns blowing, and a din enough to wake the dead."

"Well, if it be so," said the man, laughing, "I will deliver thy message, but the Nawab will not relish it. Hath he not prepared chambers, and have not the cooks been at work since daylight?"

"Ah me!" said the dame, wiping her eyes with the corner of her scarf; "you will have to eat the good food yourselves, for the youth may not eat except what the Huzrut allows him, even if he eat at all for many a day, except a mouthful. He is as weak and helpless as a child, after that wound and sun burning; and I am going to cook a mild kicheri myself. God grant him strength to eat, if ever so little. But I am prating to thee while thou shouldst be half way up the mountain. Away with thee, and return soon; if the youth recovers we will send word that the Nawab may come in the evening."

"Now I did what was right," crooned the old dame to herself, as she resumed her rice picking on the steps of the dwelling. "Perhaps my lord, the Nawab, may be angry; but who cares? What would the old man have said if I had let them all in, I wonder?"

"Mother!" said a gentle voice behind her; "Mother! he sleeps still. Runga hath not even withdrawn his hand that the youth took and held fast; but he motioned me to feel his head, and said it was painful. And I looked, and behold! there is a wound in it. Yet he has never flinched or complained. Mother, come with me; we can wash it gently, and we can put on the cool herbs and tie it up. And Abba still sleeps peacefully, and the youth like a tired child, and never stirs. Oh, mother! he will live! he will live! May the good saints preserve him for his mother."

And the girl and her attendant went and did their kindly office. The Naik's wound was not deep, but he had narrowly escaped death, as he knew; and as the cool dressing was applied, tears of relief and gratitude coursed down his rugged cheeks.

"He sleeps; he is cool as an infant," he said in a whisper.

"He has not moved nor let go my hand. Yes, he will live, lady; live to be grateful to thee, as I am."

Zóra marvelled at the man's endurance and heroism, so truly proved. All the previous day, though badly wounded in the defence of his young master, he had borne heat, and dust, and fatigue without a murmur or a thought except for him whom he had rescued from death, and he had watched through the night without food or relief from pain. "What am I to him?" she thought, sadly; "but I am only a child, only a child."

And the hot day passed, and they fanned the sleeper gently. The old Dervish, when he awoke, examined his patient carefully, and was satisfied. Nothing could induce Runga to leave his post, but having bathed hurriedly in the holy river, he ate a little of the dame's good mess, drank some of the cooling sherbet, and was refreshed. The Nawab had turned back as he had been bidden to do, but he sent continual messages of inquiry, and was told in reply that the youth still slept. So the day passed in perfect quiet to all, and when the sun was declining, and the birds were coming to rest, the young Khan woke quietly.

At first he could not remember where he was, or what had happened, and his first glance rested upon Zóra, who was gently fanning him, and he said, almost in a whisper, "Who art thou? I know thee; thou art the angel that came to me in the night and gave me sherbet of Paradise. Who art thou?"

"I am only Zóra," she said, modestly, while she covered her face with her scarf, as if for the first time she became aware that a man gazed at her. "But you are not to speak, sir; I am bid not to let you speak; close your eyes and sleep again."

"No," he said; "I have slept enough, and the burning fever hath departed."

"She is right, Meeah," said Runga Naik, bending over him. "Sleep now, again, for danger is past, and Huzrut says you will live. When you wake again you may have some light food."

"Runga, thou here! I thought I saw thee in a dream, and had thy hand in mine. But why is thy head bandaged?"

"'Tis only a scratch, and the Huzrut has dressed it," he replied. *"I will tell thee all another time. I am well of it now that I hear thy voice."*

"It seems all like a hideous dream, Runga; the fight, the ride through those billows of heat and dust; and I remember, too, seeing a cataract, and seething water below, tossing like horses fighting. Who told me that? And then I thought I was on a

raft, dancing on the waves, and thou supporting me; and I swooned, and remember no more except the angel who came to me and cooled my parching thirst."

"Enough!" cried Zóra, stamping her little foot. "Do I not tell thee thou art not to speak? Art thou mad?"

The oddity of the child's vehemence, and her tone of absolute command, seemed to amuse the sufferer, for he smiled gratefully as he looked up at her.

"Yes, fairy face," he said, "I will try to sleep again, and do thou come to me in my dreams."

The next day, however, the Nawab was not to be silenced. His physician had arrived from Moodgul, and having visited the wounded man, declared that he might now be removed to the upper fort in a closed litter with safety, and that the comparative freshness of the air of the citadel would conduce to his recovery. Towards evening, therefore, the young Khan took his departure, promising to return to see them when he was able.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRIESTS OF MOODGUL.

THE town of Moodgul is situated in the western division of the district which lies between the Krishna river to the north and the Toongbaddra river to the south, and has always been a place of importance in the country. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was a never-failing object of contention between the Hindoos of Beejanugger and the Mussulman kings of the Dekhan, and many a bloody action between immense armies on both sides had been fought near it for its possession, and that of its dependencies. Ráichoor, the capital of the eastern portion of the Dooab, as the province was called, was at that time of comparatively small importance, and Moodgul was the capital of the province and the seat of the local Government. The league of the Mussulman kings of the Dekhan against the Maharajah of Beejanugger terminated in a desperate action called the battle of Talicota by historians, but

which was fought in December 1569, on the south bank of the Krishna, about thirty miles west of Moodgul. The destruction of the Hindoo kingdom ensued, and at the period of this tale the town and its fortress were in quiet possession of the Mussulmans, who have still retained it. It was then the chief station of the south-western province of the Beejapoor kingdom, and a very considerable force was always stationed there ready to act against any disturbance of the frontier, and to overawe the various military tribes of Beydurs and others, who, though they paid tribute and professed allegiance to the Mussulman Government, were yet turbulent and often defiant, and much given to marauding, cattle lifting, and other nefarious practices.

Even now, ruined as it is for the most part, the fort of Moodgul is a striking and picturesque object. Built partly by the Hindoos and partly by the Mussulmans, it occupies the summit of a group of singularly fantastic granite rocks, which seem to have been raised one upon another, but which belong to one of the great eruptions that took place at some immensely remote period. They are quite isolated, and rise from a level plain, which is fertile to their very base. Necessarily the fort is of very irregular construction, advantage having been taken of the highest accessible portions of the rocks on which to build bastions, while the intervals between each group are closed by single, double, and treble rows of curtains and bastions, as the ground requires. On the north side is a considerable tank, or lake, for irrigation, which is still perfect, and affords means of cultivation of a tract of land; and there are many groves of fine mango and tamarind trees about its shores, which soften the otherwise rugged character of the landscape, and above which the rocks and towers of the fort rise with very picturesque effect. The town lies to the eastward of the fort, and is still tolerably populous; but the ruins on every side show that the prosperity of the place was at one time much greater than at present, and the fort itself is utterly deserted: many of its proud towers and long portions of the curtains have become heaps of ruins, and those that remain only show how strong the citadel must have been in the early times we write of. The place was famous for two kinds of manufactures: one of weaving cotton fabrics of all kinds, for which the adjacent parts of the province furnished ample material; the other, of a kind of camlet blankets, some beautifully fine and others coarse, woven from yarn spun from the fleeces of the large herds of sheep which were tended on the wide plains by local shepherds—a powerful and numerous clan, which, though ostensibly

following a peaceful, industrious calling, had notwithstanding taken part in local wars and the defence of their fort ; and both weavers and shepherds remain still in their normal condition.

It will be deemed strange, perhaps, that these shepherds and blanket weavers were Christians at the period of this tale, and that they have continued faithful through all vicissitudes to the present time. At what exact period they were converted, or by whom, is not precisely known, but a Jesuit monk belonging to the mission of St. Francis Xavier had penetrated to Moodgul, gathered the shepherds about him, and, preaching to them in their own language—Canarese—had converted and baptised them, and they proved steadfast and obedient. In the town of Ráichoor other conversions followed, chiefly among the potters, and there were, and still are, smaller congregations in other villages ; but the most numerous flock was that of Moodgul, and the church there is pre-eminently the head of all others in the province. The building itself is a small one with a tiled roof, and in the Goanesque style of architecture, and there are two supplementary chapels. The decorations of the cathedral, as it may be called, are poor and tawdry enough ; but there is, or was, one picture of the Virgin by some Portuguese artist which has merit. There are schools attached to the mission in which Canarese is taught, and which are presided over by the priest, if he be present, or, in his absence, by one of the deacons.

King Ibrahim Adil Shah I., who died in 1557, was the first benefactor to the mission by recognising it, and conferring lands upon it by his Royal deeds of grant ; and Ally Adil Shah followed with settlements of money from the customs duties and other sources, which have hitherto been respected by local and general rulers. Dues are also collected from the congregation, both in money and in kind, and in all respects the mission is self-supporting and independent. The service, when by a priest, is generally in Latin ; but the offices of the church have been translated into excellent Canarese, as also homilies, which are preached, and selections from the Old and New Testament. Portions of these are read on saints' days and other solemn occasions, and invariably on the Sabbath by the deacons of the Church, who, when the priest is not present, carry on the regular services, except the mass, which is reserved for the priest alone. Some of these manuscripts are exquisitely written in a somewhat older and stiffer character than prevails at present, and the authors of them were unquestionably excellent scholars in the copious language they had to deal with,

though it is impossible to conceive how they could have acquired it so perfectly.

It may be difficult also to account for the unusual toleration of the Mussulman kings of Beejapoor in allowing Christian missions to be established in their territory, and endowing them with Royal gifts; but Ibrahim Adil Shah I. and Ally Adil Shah had intimate relations with the Portuguese, who had assisted Ibrahim on one occasion with 3,000 European infantry; and though both kings had quarrels with their neighbours, and Ally Adil Shah on one occasion beleaguered Goa for nine months and was obliged to raise the siege, yet the Mussulmans and Christians contrived to make up their quarrels, and at the period we write of were very good friends. The mission at Moodgul was, therefore, in an easy and flourishing condition—outwardly, at least—but within there was trouble.

There were two priests in charge of the Moodgul church and mission. One, Dom Diego di Fonseça, had been for some time in the office of the Inquisition; and the steadfast character of the missions being doubted, he had been sent specially to relieve his predecessor, who had been suspected of laxity in morals and practice. This man professed himself to be a champion of the Church, a Jesuit. He had already visited Bengal and China, and had, after the fashion of the time, made many converts, and examined the internal discipline of the missions with a notorious severity; but his private character was infamous, and, but for his official zeal and services, he might, indeed, have been condemned to the horrible death to which he had assisted to devote so many. Dom Diego was of a noble family in Portugal, and had been intended for the Church there; but his fiery disposition would not brook control, and he chose a missionary life in the Indies, where his peculiar qualifications would find full employment. In person Dom Diego was remarkable. His noble figure towered over all around him, and the haughty expression of his features was in accordance with his bodily power; but though handsome, they were vicious and repellant. In complexion he was dark, and the sun of India had still more bronzed his face and hands, till they were darker than those of many of his Moodgul flock. All soon feared him; none loved him. He was to their simple minds an incarnation of power and force which must be obeyed, and, knowing his official authority and rank, the native Christians did not dare objection, much less disobedience. God would punish his evil ways some time—in His own time—they said among themselves, and they watched his

actions alike with wonder and amazement. Could this fiend be a priest of the Holy Church of Christ and His tender-loving mother, whom in their simple faith they adored?

Dom Diego's colleague was a very different person. Francis d'Almeida, a Franciscan friar, was a very personation of a devout and humble follower of his order. It was some years since he had left Portugal, and on his arrival he applied himself with great assiduity to the study of the native languages. Canarese and Mahratta were both used and spoken at Goa, as well as the rough Oordoo of the Dekhan, used by the lower orders of Mussulmans; but he had devoted himself to Canarese as the most copious and expressive language of all, and best suited to the translation of the Scriptures and the offices of the Church. In the stirring ecclesiastical affairs of Goa he took but little part, and succeeded in avoiding them, and only prayed to be sent to some distant and lonely mission in Canara, where he could finish the work he had begun. The two priests were as different in appearance as in character—the one, dark, saturnine, and vindictive; the other, fair for his country, with clear, soft, brown eyes, brown silky and curly hair, which flowed over his shoulders, a gentle, expressive face, full of devout thought and pity for the religious ignorance he found to be existent. A selection from a thousand could not have supplied a teacher and guide more fitting for his post than Francis d'Almeida. His flock adored him. His gentle teachings and admonitions, delivered with a purity of language which only a Brahmin could equal or surpass, attracted others besides his flock to the mission church, and his eloquent illustrations of true Christian life often moved his hearers to tears. To the simple shepherds he was an incarnation of Divine love and mercy, and under his pastoral care many new converts had been registered and baptised, who had been prepared by teaching, for the new creed.

He was not alone. His sister Maria, whom he had left in Portugal a child, had grown up, and married Colonel Dom Philip de Pereira, who commanded a battalion of infantry not long arrived from Portugal; but he had been speedily affected by the climate in jungle warfare on the frontier against the Mussulmans, and he had succumbed to the treacherous, deadly malaria of the forests. Doña Maria might have returned home, or, staying at Goa, might have re-married; but she had seen her brother Francis, listened with wonder to tales of the manners and customs of his flock, and at once dedicating herself, as she said, to the Lord's work, she was sent up to Moodgul under an escort, and had joined her brother

some three years before the time we write of. She was clever and studious. Under her brother's care she had learned Canarese as perfectly as he had, and in her beautiful handwriting had copied all her brother's rougher translations into the great volumes of the Church, and these manuscripts were illustrated by her own simple and elegant designs and quaint initial letters.

If her brother were almost worshipped by the shepherds, she herself had a place in their affections even more tender. She visited the sick and afflicted, and could comfort them; her sweet, persuasive tongue soothed many a sad death-bed. Her instruction to the children of her school was received by them as a joyful treat rather than in dull routine. All she knew she communicated to them as they showed capacity. It was not very much, perhaps, but it was pleasant to teach and pleasant to be taught, and teacher and pupils enjoyed themselves. Doña Maria was also a welcome guest in the Nawab of Moodgul's family. Dilawer Khan, a famous general of the Beejapoor army, was no bigot; he loved the Padré Francis for the good he did and for his consistent piety. He even enjoyed arguments between the Padré and the local Mussulman priests and learned men; and the fair Doña Maria was not only admitted to his hareem, but was a welcome guest whenever she came. Then noisy children gathered round her, and matrons too, and she told them of the holy child Jesus of Nazareth, and what He did as He grew up; and taught the elder ones embroidery, and almost persuaded some to be Christians. Doña Maria was very fair, and the bright colour of her native land had come back to her cheeks with the fresh Dekhan air; and it was a great delight of the younger children to declare she had painted her face, and to insist on washing it, which only brought out the rich colour more vividly. And she sung to them in her sweet voice, accompanied by her lute, the ballads and songs of her native land, and the noble hymns of the Church, and these were ever welcome.

So in peace and love with all around them the brother and sister had lived with great happiness. They had pleasant morning and evening walks among the groves and by the little lake. They had each a Dekhan jennet, and a gallop over the downs beyond was a rare pleasure, and gave them health among their hard labours. They had their garden too, and grapes and oranges grew well, and still grow in the Padré's garden. What could they require more? What they had was spiritual wealth and comfort, and as to worldly affairs, they needed no more. Would it but last! but since Dom Diego's arrival, now a few months, they had had many grave anticipations for the future.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INSULT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

WE need not describe the progress of difference between two such men as the priests of Moodgul—the one violent, overbearing, and unscrupulous, the other gentle and peaceful, but enduring, and, after the manner of such men, brave, and, in the service of the Church, undeterred by threats or persecution. Often had he remonstrated, as it became him to do, against his colleague's violence towards the congregation, against repeated instances of notorious immorality and irregularity in his ministry, but in vain. Dom Diego knew that he had strengthened his influence with the Archbishop of Goa; that the Inquisition at large were his friends, and that he need not fear the remonstrances of the humble Franciscan friar who was associated with him. He had formed, too, a party among the shepherds, which consisted of some of the most unmanageable of the youthful members, who scoffed at the friar's devotion, resisted his admonitions and decrees of penances, and, in short, set him at defiance. This was Dom Diego's first step towards ridding himself of his colleague altogether. What more easy than to denounce him to the Inquisition for interference with his own measures?

What more certain to succeed than to accuse him of the laxity in spiritual affairs which he himself had been despatched to redeem? Even were that not sufficient, accusations might be made of improper intimacy with Mussulmans, the worst enemies of the Church, and constant visits to the Nawab of Moodgul paid by him and his sister, Doña Maria. Ah! could he but separate them, who could protect the beautiful girl? From the first sight of her, so young, so lovely as she was, a guilty passion had absorbed any better feeling he possessed. No risk could be too great to run for her possession, and yet, to take any active part—to carry her away by force—would but be to ensure his own ruin, and perhaps death. No, the event must be gradual; and when her brother was once made over to the Inquisition he would be in Goa for months, nay, possibly years, where no possibility of aid or even news from without could reach him. It was a fiendish plot, and day by day he

found it more and more difficult to restrain himself, for the constant sight of her great beauty inflamed him, and in the services of the Church he was brought into constant connection with her.

He had written his report to Goa. He had described Francis d'Almeida as a mere bookworm, careless of the honour and discipline of the Church, and absorbed in studies of heathen books; that his most intimate friends were Brahmin priests and Mussulmans; that his lectures in the Church to the shepherds were, so far as he could comprehend them, mere adaptations of heathen doctrine, into which if he had not lapsed himself, he might do at any moment, and thus the Church, which had been built up with vast labour by faithful missionaries in a foreign land, might be lost, and relapse into heathenism, a scandal and a reproach to Christianity. As to his sister, Doña Maria, though she openly made profession of faith, yet she was in reality more corrupt than her brother. One of her constant resorts was the Nawab's house, where she was admired and courted for her beauty and accomplishments. The Nawab was very wealthy, and had a son, now absent in the wars, but it was currently reported that he would marry Doña Maria when he returned. Finally, Dom Diego advised that Francis d'Almeida should be at once sent for alone, admonished, and, if needs be, prosecuted for his laxity; and that his sister might remain for the present to await her brother's return, or to be forwarded to Goa, as the Council might decree.

There was no suspicion of sinister motives to be gathered from his document, no violence of expression. It led to the conclusion that an able but over-studious character had been gradually led into laxity of observance, and could only be recovered by admonition from his superiors, and it had been determined by the ecclesiastical authorities to order the priest to appear before the Council on as early a date as practicable. It was not easy to communicate with Goa from Moodgul. Special messengers could only be employed, men who at some personal risk could traverse the country intervening and return with replies; and sometimes merchants and carriers from the two cities made their annual journeys with coast produce, to be exchanged for the cotton and woollen stuffs of Moodgul, and who took letters to and from Goa, and delivered them safely enough; and by one of the parties returned from the coast, Dom Diego had received the long-expected despatch from the Council.

To him it was all that he desired. It authorised Dom Diego to suspend his colleague from all Church offices, and to despatch him to Goa as soon as practicable, and it contained a citation

from the Inquisition to appear. It praised Dom Diego's vigilance and zeal for the welfare of the Church, and admitted the justice of his proposal in regard to Doña Maria, whom he was enjoined to watch, and keep within the precincts of the Church, till she should be required.

Dom Diego was not long in deciding on the course he had proposed. After the morning mass, on the Sabbath after he had received the despatch, he proclaimed the suspension of his colleague from ministrations, and delivered to him the citation from the Council, which was received by D'Almeida with reverence; and Dom Diego also announced, through his interpreter, that another priest, well skilled in Canarese, had been despatched, and would shortly arrive.

Doña Maria heard the proclamation with dismay that cannot be expressed in words. Her brother was officiating at the altar, and she, with her children classes, was seated at the side at some distance. She saw her brother depart sooner than usual, for he generally came to examine the children, and he now omitted to do so. So she dismissed them, and went at once to their house, where she found her brother, in his chamber, on his knees before his crucifix, and the citation lying at its feet. He had been praying, and the drops of sweat stood out on his brow, in his agony, as those of his Lord's had done when He endured the cross and the shame. Doña Maria did not interrupt him, and withdrew behind the door, hearing only the last words of the prayer.

"And now protect me, O my Lord, if Thou wilt, from this danger. If I have to endure shame, or torture, or death, do Thou in mercy support me. I am not conscious of neglect of thy work, but I am conscious of many errors and shortcomings, of many secret sins. Chasten me, then, O my Saviour, as Thou seest I have need of; for I commit myself into thy pitiful hands and care, doubting not, fearing not, but saying, with all my trust and faith, O Lord, thy will be done."

Then he bowed his head to the foot of the cross, and wept passionately for some moments, and arose calmed and prepared for the worst. His sister met him at the door of the chamber, and cast herself upon his neck. She could not weep, though the humble prayer had moved her; her mind was in utter and blank despair, which no ray of comfort had penetrated. "My brother! my brother!" she cried, continually, "how wilt thou bear this? What hast thou done to deserve this shame he has put on thee?"

"I will bear it, Maria," he said gently, touching her forehead

with his lips. "He, our Lord God, endured the shame that He might win the victory, and I fear not, neither shouldst thou fear. The soldiers of Christ and the Church should never flinch from danger. I say to thee, fear not."

"I am but a weak woman," she said, "and women have not the power of men; but even I could bear what is the Lord's will, though against Dom Diego's I should rebel. Is the citation regular and legal?"

"It is both," answered her brother, returning with the document which he had left where he had laid it. "It is both; nay, the purport is even tender, sister; read it yourself. I now go to receive the admonition and instruction of the Holy Council, and they may think I need them. Surely a son of the Church need not fear to meet his fathers in the Lord."

"I know not," she replied, with a shudder. "I know not. When I was at Goa many were led to a fearful death, and——"

"Nay, but dearest sister, it was because they deserved death. Incorrigible sinners and apostates the Church deals fiercely with, as it needs do in a heathen land; but I fear not, and our beloved flock will testify for me; and the translation of the homilies, which no one hath attempted to produce but me, will plead for my devotion to the Church's interests. Nay, Maria, thou shouldst not fear, but the rather rejoice that I have this opportunity of making known what I had too modestly kept back; and thou wilt remain at peace in this our home, and do thy work fearlessly, as thou hast done. It will not be long ere I return in safety, under the Lord's guidance.

"Oh, do not say that," she cried, clinging to him in fear. "Not alone with that fearful priest. Oh, for the love of the Mother Mary, leave me not alone; I dare not stay."

"If thou hadst been summoned, too," he returned, "we could have gone together; but bethink thee of the fierce heat now, and the rain and wind that is to come, to which I dare not expose thee. No, sister, it is well as it is, and in the good Nawab and our own people thou hast protectors enough. What dare *he* do to thee?"

"Perhaps it is idle fear," she said, sobbing, "and I am but a weak woman to bear solitude and anxiety alone; but if thou thinkest it is my duty, I bow to the Lord's will and thine, and will surely do my best."

"Ah!" he returned, with a proud smile, "there my brave sister's spirit speaks out again; and I tell thee, Maria, if he or anyone threatened thee, there is many a sword among our shepherd

flock that would be drawn for thee; peaceful as they are, they are yet soldiers to a man, and would defend thee. Fear him not; he dare not hurt thee!"

Maria was silenced, but not satisfied. She did fear the priest. She could not conceal from herself that his foul, sensual admiration of her sometimes overpowered his discretion, and that his looks and demeanour were not those of a priest, but of a dissolute soldier. Still, he had never offended her in speech; and, except in the affairs of the church, she had held no conversation with him whatever. When he came to the house she invariably withdrew to her chamber, and left her brother and Dom Diego to consult together; but what virtuous woman could doubt the expression of those burning eyes? But for these secret fears, fears known only to herself and to God, she would have bid her brother Godspeed, and rejoiced in the prospect of his holy useful labours becoming known to those who could really appreciate them.

Many of the congregation came to them that day, both men and women, and the time passed in prayer and conversation with them, as was usual on the Sabbath; and both were consoled by the sincere professions of affection made by all, and the assurances of help and protection, if necessary, given by women as well as men.

"We are three hundred stout fellows," said one stalwart old shepherd, who held the office of deacon, "and most of us have seen war in our time, and we are well armed. So fear not, lady, for three hundred good matchlocks can escort you anywhere, were it even to Goa or Beejapoor. Thou art our loving friend, and if the noble Queen Chand could but see thee, she would take thee to her heart, and the good old Nawab would be thy protector too. Bah!" continued the old man, "with all these to do thy bidding thou needest not fear."

So the day passed; and though her brother could not perform his afternoon duty, Maria went to the church as usual for the service, which, on account of the great heat, had been deferred till evening. She took her guitar with her, for she purposed to teach some of the elder girls a new hymn, and they could only be taught by ear. Only the altar was fully illuminated, and the rest of the church had a light here and there from dim lamps.

Dom Diego performed the service as usual, and apparently departed; and Maria, begging of the sexton to allow her the altar lights for a while, led in a little troop of girls to the altar steps,

and sat down there, tuned her instrument, and began the simple music of the hymn. What a voice it was! full, rich, and penetrating, it echoed through the empty building with a peculiar resonance and sweetness. No one could have heard it unmoved. The hymn was a Canarese translation of a Latin one used in the church, and accorded with the music perfectly. Presently, after an interval and directions to the children, she began the air again line by line, and the shriller pitch of the girls' voices required much patient instruction to modulate. At last she was satisfied, and dismissed them. It was but a step to her house across the small enclosure of the church, and she had no fear of meeting anyone, although it was now quite dark. The day had been very hot, and the fierce hot wind had continued almost without a break from before noon; now it had quite fallen, but the heat had not decreased. All was still around the church, except the cicadas, who kept up their shrill chirrup in the large tamarind trees, and the little grey owls, who seemed to increase their strange twittering hoot as the night advanced.

Maria knew she was alone, for the old man who would put out the lights was snoring in a corner. "One more hymn," she said to herself, as she made a deep reverence to the picture of the Virgin, on which the light shone brightly—"One hymn and prayer to thee, O pitiful, gracious Mother! to whose care I commit him—thy servant—and myself;" and striking a chord on her instrument, and playing a simple prelude, her voice rose through the building with a power and effect of which she was not conscious. Who could have heard it without emotion! But she herself was refreshed, and felt strengthened by the exercise. "And now, sweet Mother," she said, looking up at the picture above her, which almost seemed to smile, "I have sung to thee with all my heart, as I used to sing in my own beloved Portugal; and thou must graciously accept the hymns, and protect us. Good night, sweet Mother. Good night!"

She had spoken aloud, but now her lips moved in silent prayer; and as she stood upon the lower step, with her tiny bare foot resting on the one above it, and her arms stretched out to the picture with closed hands, her exquisitely-moulded figure and attitude were seen in perfection. As she had raised her arms the sleeves of the loose black dress she wore had fallen back nearly to her shoulders, displaying their pure whiteness and rounded contour against the gloom beyond; while the delicate white throat, and soft, bright complexion, stood out in strong relief. Her large blue eyes were

raised in a rapt devotion, in accordance with her thoughts. Such faces and such attitudes are seen in the great old masters' religious pictures, but even such as Maria de Fonseca's are rare.

She had finished her prayer, when, as she turned to depart, she saw the figure of Dom Diego standing close beside her, and she shrunk back instinctively and cowered down to the ground.

"Forgive me for disturbing thee, lady," he said; "and I dispense with thy salute to thy superior; but as I sat alone, thy voice—so tender, so sweet—reached me, and I stood at the door till thy vesper hymns were finished. Would I could hear thee more frequently; but thou art chary of thy voice, except to the children, and to thy brother. Why am I excluded, and have to listen in stealth? Nay, I have a voice, too; and, I have heard it told me a good one. We might join together in some of the old duets of our land, even here among the heathen."

"I pray thee let me pass, Signor," she said, timidly, for he stood between her and the door. He was not dressed in his robes, but in rich black velvet, and wore the plumed hat of a cavalier, which he carried now in his hand.

"Nay, be not hard on me, sweet lady, now that we shall have to spend so much of our time together till thy brother returns from Goa. Thou knowest thou art to be under my pastoral care, and fortunate am I to have so beautiful and so accomplished a companion. Ah, yes! thou wilt be kind to a solitary priest like me, and we can be happy if thou wilt till thy brother returns."

"Will he return?" asked the girl, eagerly. "Is this a true citation? Will he be safe? Answer me, Dom Diego, before the Mother of God, who seest us."

"Nay, if she can see," he cried, sneeringly, "if she can see, she will know what is in my heart. Safe? Thy brother safe? Yes, if thou wilt, he is."

Her pleading face, her hands uplifted to him, as it had been to the Virgin's picture, made him think for a moment that she had yielded to him; and the temptation in that foul heart was sudden and irresistible. "Maria!" he almost hissed between his teeth, "I repeat, if thou wilt, he is safe; but——"

"Speak," she said; "as a priest of the Holy Church give me thy assurance, and I will pray for thee day and night."

"Priest!" he exclaimed, with scorn. "I am a priest when it suits me to be so, and for the rest a cavalier of the world, like my Jesuit brethren. Love me, Maria," he cried, bending his knee; "love me, as I have loved thee for months in secret, and I can

make thy brother pass through the terrors which await him at Goa with safety; but if not, he is a doomed man, and will die at the stake. Ha! ha! for the love of God! Nay, Maria, think me not cruel; 'tis thou who art cruel, my sweet. See, before the Virgin, to whom thou wert crying, I devote myself to thee; I am thine henceforth. If we may not stay here, there is the world before us. India, the Moghul, the Chinese, the sweet Spice Islands, where we may dream away our lives. Europe, if thou wilt, where many a priest like me hath his sweet leman, and no one unfrocks him. Come! I say," he urged tenderly; "come! Thou art young, thou art lovely, thou mightest be a queen. Come! the world is wide enough for us."

The girl's passion had risen with every sentence he spoke, but his utterance was rapid, and she could not speak; her bosom was heaving with scornful emotion, and her bright eyes flashed with angry fire. She was more beautiful in her wrath than in her submission and petition.

"Traitor!" she cried, as he ceased to speak; "perjured priest and liar. Thou hast insulted the Holy Mother; thou hast proposed infamy to her votary; thou hast denied thy Christian faith. I defy thee! I, a poor, helpless widow, defy thee in her name, and spurn thee. Let me pass, Dom Diego. If I walk barefoot to Goa, those whom thou boastest of shall know this. Yea, if they send me to the stake, I will testify against thee till I die."

"Thy beauteous limbs would fare ill on the wheel," he said, with mock piety. "Thy charms should be seen by another than thy executioner, lady. Dost thou wish thy brother's safety? Do as thou hast spoken, and he dies; listen to me, and he lives. Speak! the last chance resteth with thee." And he drew up his tall figure, and folded his arms on his chest. "Not now," he added hurriedly; "not till he is gone, then thou wilt be alone and I with thee."

Maria could make no reply, her speech seemed paralysed with terror. She essayed to escape, but he stretched out his arms and prevented her, caught her in his own, and strained her to his heart. "Maria!" he said; "Maria!" But with a piercing shriek, which resounded through the church and through the grove, she sank down insensible. "Fool!" cried the priest, "I have betrayed myself, and they or I must die." And he fled out of the building.

Francis d'Almeida had sat musing over the events of the day, and wondering why his sister stayed so long, as the music had

ceased. "She may have gone to see Catarina, who is very sick; or—or—but it is late, too late." And as he was thus thinking, the shriek reached him. "'Tis Maria's voice!" he cried, snatching down his sword from the wall. "What can have happened?" And he ran out.

In the church the altar was still ablaze with light, but no one answered his anxious call. "Maria! Maria! Where art thou?" He dashed towards the altar, where, partly on the steps and partly on the floor, he saw his sister lying insensible. Though at the first sight of her body he had thought her dead, as he gently raised her he felt a strong shudder pass through her, and a plaintive cry escaped her, in which he could only catch Dom Diego's name; and had he appeared he might not have escaped.

"This, then, was that fiend's object," he muttered to himself, as he raised his sister's form and bore it out of the church. "Before God, and before men, I swear he shall answer for this outrage. Courage, Maria! be brave, and have no fear, the miscreant has fled, but he may be found. Come, if thou canst walk; if not, I will carry thee; when thou art in the house thou canst tell me all."

The air had revived her, and the strong arm of her brother was around her; and, though still dizzy, she went on, her brother supporting her till they reached her chamber, where she fell prostrate upon her little bed. For some minutes she could not speak, but as she drank some of the water offered to her, she rose up, and seeing her brother's naked sword in his hand, cast her arms around his neck.

"Not by that, Francis," she murmured, "should he meet thy punishment. He hath insulted God and the Holy Mother, leave him to them, leave them to chasten his cowardly insult to me; but, oh, brother, we cannot remain here now; let us fly while we have time, and escape from his infamous purposes."

But Francis d'Almeida was not to be restrained; there had been an insult done to his sister, and his gentle nature was inflamed to desperation. Without answering her, he tore himself from her arms and rushed out of the house. He searched every part of the church and the enclosure; he rushed impetuously into Dom Diego's dwelling, but he could not find him, and his servant told him that his master had dressed and gone out some time ago, where, he knew not. Again Francis searched the grove and the adjacent bushes, but there was no one. It was no use searching farther, for Maria might need his aid, and he turned towards his house. As he approached it he saw a number of figures standing near the

gate, and for an instant his thought was that there might be danger, but he was relieved by the hearty voice of the old deacon, who cried—

"We are friends, your own people, and are watching the house for you. Come, thou art safe among us; come!" Then the old man took Francis aside and said, "There have been ugly rumours about for several days, O Padré, that some violence was intended against the Lady Maria, your sister; and to-day many Beydurs of Jalhali were seen about the town, who are known to my clan as bad and desperate characters. Some of my men mixed with them, and one who was intoxicated declared, only just now, that there was a dacoity planned upon your house, which would be attacked before daylight in the morning. So I thought I had better bring some of my lads; and here are thirty of us, enough to guard thee and them from all danger. Whom dost thou fear? Hast thou any enemy?"

"None but my superior," he said; "I have no enemy but him."

"Ah!" returned the old man, "and he would possess thy sister."

"Even so, friend," was the reply. "He hath already insulted her, and had I met him ——"

"Thank God," returned the deacon, piously. "Thank God that thou hast not his blood upon thy sword. Let it pass. If thou hast to depart to-morrow, we will guard thee and thine, and watch here till morning, and till we can get a guard of soldiers from the Nawab. Come, see to thy lady sister, for she hath been anxiously asking after thee."

"How can I thank thee enough for this care of us; we are strangers in a strange land, and feel your interest keenly. Ay! I do thank the Lord that I met him not, else I should have been a murderer."

Maria had heard her brother's voice, and ran out to meet him. "Oh! thou art safe," she cried; "but I have been miserable. I prayed, I asked the Holy Mother that thou mightest not meet him, and thou didst not. Oh, say thou didst not, Francis."

"Thy prayer was answered, sister," he said. "I searched for him everywhere, but I did not find him, else, for my blood was hot, I had not spared him. Soldier as he is, I had not spared him, or should have died myself. Oh, I am grateful, Maria, for thy sake, that I met him not. But what shall we do to-morrow if I obey the citation? I must depart to Goa; who can protect thee? Thou canst not remain in the Nawab's family

without scandal to thy fair name and the Church, and dire offence to the Inquisition; nay, wouldst thou be safe, even then, among the Moors, who little respect even their own women?"

"I see it," said the girl, sadly, "we have no friends but the Lord and these faithful children of our flock; but my remaining with them would only bring trouble and his vengeance upon them; and if, as the deacon told me, he has allied himself with Beydurs, it is an alliance with the evil one, and in your absence what would become of me?"

"It is all true," said her brother, burying his head between his knees. "Only for the citation I would accept our deacon's offer, who would, doubtless, know of some place of concealment; but I dare not disobey it without danger, even death at the stake. Lord, look thou down upon thy servants, and direct us in thy mercy, for we know not what to do!"

They were both silent for some minutes. At last Maria said, "Let us go to the Nawab and ask his advice. He is kind and wise, and is our local governor, with all temporal powers. His wife, Zeenat Khanum, is my friend, whose kind heart I could not doubt; yet though she would press me to stay with her I could not, brother; thou art right, there would be scandal to me and to the Church, and he, our enemy, would make the most of it. Perhaps he may send us both to Goa, and he hath the power. It is not late yet, brother, and I am now strong. I was not harmed but in heart, brother, when he asked me to be his leman when thou wert gone. Then, indeed, I fainted, and till you raised me I was bereft of sense. Come, now, we linger, we have not long to deliberate; our choice must be decisive;" and throwing her usual scarf over her shoulders, and putting her feet into her sandals, she stood ready, and, with a smile, beckoned her brother on.

"All thou needest is already packed, and old Pedro is ready for his journey. Anna," she said to her attendant, who was Pedro's wife, "do thou pack up what I may need, and be ready."

"Stay," said her brother, as if struck with a sudden thought, "I will deposit the manuscripts in the sacristy, and the deacon will see that they are kept safely;" and when this was done they set out, escorted by twenty of the shepherds, leaving the deacon, as he said, to watch, and bidding him a loving farewell, with their blessing to all, men, women, and children, whom they loved so dearly, and by whom they were so deeply loved.

The gates of the Nawab's palace, as it was called by the people, were shut, but at the earnest entreaty of Francis they

were opened; all knew the good Padré, and the officer on guard saluted the brother and sister respectfully as they passed him. "The Nawab is sitting in the audience room," he said, "playing at chess with a learned Brahmin; but I know you will be welcome, pass on. Need your men wait?"

"Not all of them," said the priest, and, calling out several by name, he bade the rest return to the deacon.

They knew the premises well, and were ushered through the outer court to the inner one, where the Nawab sat, apparently deeply engaged in his game. A woman servant took charge of Maria and led her to the hareem, while the Nawab, rising, saluted Francis courteously, and bade him be seated. "I have nearly beaten my enemy," he said, laughing, "and it has been a stiff fight, so, with your leave, we will finish this game;" and they played on.

"Mât, at last," cried the Nawab; "but never mind, Gunnesh Punt, thou shalt have thy revenge to-morrow; methinks thou hadst too little fear of the pawn which beat all thy forces; but we will not discuss the game now. The Padré Sahib has no doubt come to me on business," and he ordered in the usual offerings on a guest's departure. Presently all were gone, and he beckoned to the Padré to draw near and speak freely.

"What is this I hear of disputes between you, my friend, and thy new priest, who looks to me more of a fop and dissolute soldier than a peaceful Padré? Speak out fully to me as a friend, and I will help thee if I can."

Then Francis d'Almeida told all; how he had been suddenly cited to Goa to be admonished; how he dare not refuse the summons; and how that enemy, Dom Diego, had made his vile proposal to his sister.

The old nobleman took his flowing beard in his hands and meditated. He had always avoided interference with the affairs of the Mission, and had had no trouble in regard to it while D'Almeida was in charge of it; but he saw things were changed. He had been an ambassador to Goa, and knew of the Council of the Church and the Inquisition, at which he had marvelled, and then blessed God that neither among Mussulmans, nor Hindoos, though they were deemed infidels, could such a thing be. He saw that D'Almeida must go to it, and to dissuade him from doing so would be to give the worst possible advice under the circumstances. The only difficult point was the Lady Maria.

"I could send thee safe, my friend, to Goa," he said, "but the

Lady Maria is ordered to remain, and is not safe. My house should be her home, and she is loved by the Khanum and all the children. But, Padré, she is so beautiful; and I have a son, who is now absent, as you know, but who is expected by us in a few days. I dare not risk a sight of her by him, nor should you, and I speak of her as I would were I truly her father. Let me hear what the women say," he continued. "Do thou remain here, I will not be long away;" and pushing aside a curtain near him, he went into his Zenana.

For some time the priest sat in a very confused state of mind, from which he could see no means of extrication. To take his sister to Goa when the citation forbade it, to risk the chance, having no special friends in the great Council, of accusing his colleague when he himself was under suspension, might be even worse, and would, he thought, be courting self-destruction. To leave the dearest object of his love on earth to the chances which the Nawab more than hinted at, was equally impossible. Whither should he flee? There were other Christian churches he knew in India, but they were far distant, and held heretical tenets. What could he do? He was naturally timid, though brave when aroused, and unable to restrain himself: he wept silently.

Meanwhile the discussion had continued above, partly before Doña Maria, who was surrounded by the children, many of whom had roused from their slumbers, and partly between the Khan and his wife, who was weeping plenteously at the tale of distress. But on one point they agreed perfectly, that to expose the lovely Christian lady to their son's admiration would not only be dangerous, but bring scandal on the family and the Church; while, as the remedy appeared to be in their own hands, they were bound to provide one. All that Maria could say was that she was ready to face death if needs be, but to remain for further insult by the superior she would not, and death were better.

At last a thought seemed to strike the Nawab. "I have it, I think, now," he said; "the remedy will not be pleasant perhaps to either, but they must be saved, and I think the Padré will agree with me."

"What is it? Ah! what wilt thou do with Maria, tell me?" cried the Khanum.

"I had better not," he said, laughing; "women's wit is sometimes great and ready, but sometimes small, as thine hath been to-night. O wife! if I were to tell thee what hath passed my thought, thou and Maria might set thy wits together and spoil all; but 'tis

a sure plan, and bethink thee, wife," he added, gravely, "we must save them from shame and from death," and, so saying, he departed.

"We have been consulting," he said to D'Almeida, when he returned to the audience chamber, "but my wife can suggest nothing, all her wits have departed with poor Maria's, and so far we are as we began; but I think I have a good plan now, and, Inshalla, thou wilt make no objection. I must make State prisoners of ye both for a while."

"State prisoners! and of what are we charged?" said the priest, drawing himself up proudly. "Do you forget that Portugal can defend its servants?"

"Nay, I mean no offence, Padré Sahib," said the Nawab, laughing; "we all know what Portugal can do when she has a blow to strike. This morning only, as the flood has subsided, I received despatches from the Court, written by the Queen's own hand, the King being absent in the field. You may not have heard of it, but the Prince Ismail rebelled against the King, and, aided by Eyn-ool-Moolk, raised the standard of revolt, and offered to your people at Goa any terms they liked to ask, even to half the kingdom, if they would give him aid in troops and arms, especially in guns. The Queen was much alarmed, and Humeed Khan had marched against the rebels; but it had transpired that intrigues with Eyn-ool-Moolk and the Prince had been carried on with the Church here, and I am ordered to watch it carefully.

"Now, listen further," he continued, as the Padré was protesting his innocence of any political intrigue. "I know thou art innocent as a babe, though the superior may not be, and I shall watch him. I shall put it out of thy power to obey the citation. I shall not separate thee from Maria. I shall place you both in absolute safety, and when thou wilt thou canst fulfil the summons. Thou art not a free agent now, nor shalt thou be, perhaps, for a few months; but ye will be treated with all distinction, and all your expenses will be defrayed. I do not even ask your permission, but prepare at once to send you to Juldroog, where, from all your enemies, bodily and spiritual, you are safe."

Then he clapped his hands, and by an attendant sent for Peer Mahomed, his secretary and chief scribe. "Write to Jan Beg Risaldar to send fifty horsemen for service here, at the third watch of the night, with two closed litters. Write also to the Nawab Osman Beg of Juldroog to receive the Padré D'Almeida and his sister with honour, and afford them the best accommodation possible. The

last, Padré Sahib, I shall write myself to my old friend the Dervish, who lives there, to give ye what ye need freely."

There was no use resisting the Nawab's impetuosity. "As to your effects, do not fear. I will have the house, &c., shut up under attachment, and everything will be safe till ye, as I hope, return to us. Some of your people once there, send for what ye need, and I will despatch one of my own men to see they are brought."

Padré Francis thought of the centurion who had men under his command, and obeyed. His sister came to him, and the Nawab kindly explained what they would have to do. "If our beloved Queen can send for you, 'tis but a short journey, and a special messenger will leave to-day for Beejapoor to tell her what I have done, and that ye are noble, and ye have not only nought to fear, but joy and peace will await ye. Remember, ye are not free agents. I do not ask you to go, but send you hence and for your good.

Then the Nawab embraced him, and as a priest of Jesus asked his blessing. Maria, with one of the children, lay down to rest; and, as the cool morning air began to blow, Francis d'Almeida was roused from his sleep, as he had laid down, and going to the gate was saluted by the officer in command of the party, a grave old warrior; and on Maria's arrival, closely covered by a shawl the Khanum had insisted on her taking, they entered their litters, and the cortége moved on. It was not more than fourteen miles to the river fortress, and they would arrive before the sun was hot.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW ARRIVAL.

A FEW days had elapsed since, badly wounded and in strong delirium from sunstroke, Abbas Khan had reached the solitary fortress of Juldroog. He was now recovered from the fever, and his arm and breast were partly healed, but not sufficiently to allow of his proceeding to Beejapoor, as he desired to do. Momentous events were passing there. Humeed Khan, his uncle, had routed the rebels, who had supported and encouraged the Prince Ismail

in his revolt. The chief of them, Eyn-ool-Moolk, a man who had in turn been true and faithful or rebellious to the kingdom, as his interest seemed to sway him, but whose reputation for consummate ability was believed by all—a man to be feared as well as loved—had been at last killed in action, and his head sent to Beejapoor, and stuck upon a pole opposite to the chief gate of the citadel, a warning to all traitors. The King of Ahmednugger, Boorhan Nizam Shah, was in the field with a powerful army and large train of artillery, intending to strike in with Eyn-ool-Moolk and the young Prince. Ibrahim, King of Beejapoor, himself only a youth, was in the field also, watching his uncle Boorhan's movements, and prepared to check him if he advanced, or succeeded in inducing the Portuguese to join him in a combined movement with Prince Ismail and Eyn-ool-Moolk on Beejapoor. But the whole scheme had been stopped, in its apparently successful course, by the death of one and the defeat of others of the conspirators. The Prince Ismail was in confinement, and the King of Ahmednugger was the last enemy to be dealt with, to give to Beejapoor the rest and peace it had so long yearned for. During the King's absence in the field, the Queen Dowager Chand Beebee carried on the Executive Government, as she had done for the many years of the King's minority, with the same calmness and profound ability she had always shown since she was called upon to take part in public affairs.

On the morning we write of, the Governor of the fort and his guest had risen early, performed their stated devotions, and were sitting in a cloister of the Governor's house, which, for distinction, was called "the Palace." It was a plain edifice, built of hewn granite, stuccoed inside, and contained some few comfortable rooms, but much confined, as the space on which the building had been erected, the very apex of the cone of the hill, was necessarily very limited. Around it were huge masses of smooth granite rocks, in every fantastic form, which rose almost perpendicularly from the river bed on three sides, sloping more gradually to the east, where, on a portion of tolerably level ground, lay the little town of the fortress. To a lover of natural scenery, if such a person had existed among the unobservant and indifferent Mussulmans who formed the garrison, Juldroog would have been a welcome residence; but Osman Beg, the present governor, was not one of such persons. The son of a distinguished officer in the army of the State, by birth a Persian, he had been unruly and disobedient at home and strongly disposed to intrigue, which had

made his presence at the capital somewhat dangerous for him ; and the command of Juldroog becoming vacant, he was, as it were, rusticated for a while, and his father held responsible for his fidelity.

He had now been two years in the fortress, and though he had written many penitential letters to his father, and petitions to the King and the Queen Dowager, he had not been relieved. The times were too exciting for a restless spirit like his to be allowed full liberty, and he had been kept at his unenviable post sorely against his will. If the Prince and Eyn-ool-Moolk had succeeded in their enterprise, he would, no doubt, have joined them ; and this, from his intimacy with the young Prince, being more than suspected, his petitions for return were, for the present, disregarded.

I have already said that the situation of Juldroog was eminently picturesque and beautiful, but it was beauty of a savage kind. The river Krishna, in the course of ages, in which the great cataract had been formed, had cut its way through a range of rocky hills which continued northwards and southwards from the brink of the ravine, through which its waters flowed. Throughout the ravine, which was about three-quarters of a mile long, its sides were formed of rugged and precipitous rocks, amongst which there was enough foliage to redeem them from entire savageness. Towards the end of the ravine the fort was situated, evidently a portion of the main range, through which the river had cut its way. Looking from the crest of the cataract above, it seemed as if the giant mass of the fort blocked up the narrow ravine altogether ; but at the angle opposed to the river it separated into two branches, one to the north and one to the south. Abbas Khan had crossed over the northern branch, which was comparatively narrow, and at a somewhat steeper incline than the southern, which was more spread out and more full of scattered rocks.

Both branches united at the end of the island thus formed, and the noble river flowed on unbroken, except by low rocky islands covered with wood. In dry weather the stream was reduced to a comparatively small compass, the cataract was divided into many portions threading through the rocks in their white streams, and disclosing the whole of the wonderful construction of the fall, huge masses of granite rocks crossed by veins and dykes of basalt. From the crest of the cataract to the pool beneath, the measure by level of the descent is four hundred and eight feet in about a quarter of a mile ; and, as I have before attempted to

describe, the fury of the descending mass of water when the wide river is in flood, is majestic and wonderful in the extreme; but the place is so lonely, so entirely out of the way of ordinary travellers, that few, except the people of the country immediately around, know of its existence.

The young men were sitting together near an archway, which commanded a noble view. To the west was the ravine of the cataract, with the majestic fall now reduced, but still showing sheets of rushing water, and its foaming, agitated passage through the rocky channels and bed of the ravine. The sun had not risen, and the east was full of orange, purple, and crimson clouds rising almost to the zenith, with a pale green streak of clear sky near the horizon. To the north and south the sky was flecked with fleecy cloudlets, which caught, now golden, now crimson, now orange and pink rays, growing fainter and fainter as they receded; but the glory of all was in the centre, which glowed like molten metal, and was reflected in the large pool where the two streams met below. To the east the river pursued its course through a level, fertile plain, its pools and current glistening in the morning light, till it seemed lost among the hills far beyond.

Suddenly the sun appeared to leap into the sky, and for a few minutes his glowing rays touched every object with gold and crimson colour; the hoary pinnacles of the hills beyond the river north and south, the rocks and foliage of the sides of the ravine, flamed in the brilliant light, the foam of the river seemed to flow in crimson flakes, and the cataract glistened and shimmered like streams of fire.

For a brief while the spectacle was one of extraordinary grandeur and beauty, and even the two young men were affected by it, for both had started up from the soft cushions on which they had been reclining, and were looking out in silence, when, as suddenly as it had broke forth, the sun entered the bank of cloud above it, the gorgeous light faded, and all became dull and grey.

"'Twas a pity it vanished so soon, brother," said Abbas Khan, as he went to his hookah again, and the gurgling murmur succeeded. "'Twas, methinks, like the glance of a beauty's eye, which sets one aflame, and when withdrawn leaves one as grey and desolate as yonder rocks, which a moment ago flashed like jewels. Hast thou often such exhibitions?"

"If I had them every day, Meeah," was the reply, "dost thou think I should waken to see them, or care if I did see them? No; if thou hadst been here two years like me, thou wouldst

send thy curse against every rock and tree, against all that roaring water, and most especially against yonder frightful cataract, which for three months in every year seems to clamour at me like a devil; mingles with my dreams if I am asleep, and carried by the wind when it is in flood, the noise and spray even enter here, and I am deafened and drenched. Thou hast heard of the hell where infidels burn, but this is a water hell for poor fellows like me, who have no friends. For the love of Alla, when thou art at Court again, and of thy brotherly love, say a kind word for me, and get me withdrawn. Surely even our prim Dowager Queen can see no evil in me now. Wilt thou speak for me, O brother?"

"I will," answered the young Khan; "and if they listen to me, we will soon play our jerreeds in the plain before the palace, to be looked at by the Queen mother herself, or her pretty maidens. But tell me, brother, how dost thou spend thy time?"

"Attend," he replied, with mock gravity. "Behold there are no women, so I cannot ogle them, or make love to them. There are no dancers or singers, for they are afraid to cross the river and come up here for fear I should never let them go again. God help me! I never see a woman's face, except when I go down to the old Dervish—who hath a granddaughter like a fairy—and hear the few singers who come to visit the tomb of the old saint on his anniversary."

"Then thou hast seen the maiden, brother?"

"I have seen her but once," he returned. "She came in when I was speaking to the old blind man, but she vanished like a flash of light. By and by she will be of marvellous beauty, and she reminds me of what we have just seen. Hast thou noticed her?"

"I do not know," he said. "I was not in my senses when I was taken to their house; and dreams only linger, now well-nigh forgotten, except the faces of Elias Khan, as I slew him, and a girl——"

"Protection of God!" cried the other. "If one were to be haunted by the face of every man one slew in fair fight there would be no more war, men would fear ghosts, not enemies! So forget Elias Khan, or wait till thy next charmer drive him out of thy head and put something better of her own instead. But to resume my history of myself. I smoke; I drink sherbet when it is hot, and coffee when it is cold, and I eat; and when that is done I begin over again. Sometimes I play at chess with my doctor or the Moonshee. I have letters to write. Sometimes I read Hafiz

or Saadi, but only with vexation at the tantalising descriptions they give of nymphs with lotus eyes, ruby lips, cypress waists, ivory necks and bosoms, and wine, which I have none of. Sometimes I ride over to Moodgul and pass a day with the old Nawab, who, I hear, has a marvellously pretty daughter, who will be well dowered; but the old man is too good for me, and the worst of it is, I cannot get to them in private; else there are some choice spirits among the force there with whom time would pass merrily enough. I cannot ask them here, where I have nothing to show them but rocks and tumbling water; and, what is more, they do not care to come.

"If I go to the north side, I am among those unsainted barbarians, the Beydurs, who shriek and yell like fiends; but I have some good sport at times, and the savages are always ready for a hunt. Once, will you believe it? I made a vow of pilgrimage to Sofy Surmurt's tomb at Sugger (may he have entered heaven), that if he would procure my relief, I would send a hundred rupees to his shrine; but he has not relieved me, and I have not sent it, nor shall I. There, too, the old Naik of Wakin-Keyra waylaid me, and insisted on my staying with him; but the whole was barbarous, and I was afraid of being fed on wild pig; he ate so much of it that I felt polluted by his very touch and got away. But look! what is that yonder? A party of the Nawab's horse, as I live, from Moodgul; and see, two closed litters, which the bearers have set down. Prisoners, no doubt, of whom I have to take charge. Could he not have kept them himself?"

Abbas Khan could not help laughing at his cousin's doleful account of his life, though he felt its truth, and then an uneasy thought of the sweet girl who had attended him flashed across his mind. Even his cousin, callous and licentious as he was, had remembered the only glance he had ever had of her. But the thought was but for a moment, and before Osman Beg's exclamation passed away, he, too, had risen, and was looking out towards the ferry far below, and the two basket boats in waiting on the river's bank.

"Who can they be?" said the Khan; "ladies of rank evidently, but from where? The Nawab would hardly send his hareem here, when other ferries are open. Let us go down, brother, and see, it will pass an hour; or they may be State prisoners only. Come!"

"Not I," said his cousin, again throwing himself idly on his cushions; "not I. My people will report to me who they are, and it will be time enough to go when there is need; in the evening, perhaps, when the town is in shadow."

So they remained looking out. They saw the boats leave the shore beyond, shoot into the rapid, and carried down; then enter a backwater, by which they were floated up again, finally stopping at a point whence the boats were towed up by ropes close to the town.

"Now we shall soon know," said the Governor, "all about these people; but for my part I am not the least curious; and I object to State prisoners, as I have sometimes to see them beheaded."

"But I am curious," said his cousin, and they sat together for some time in silence.

Then one of the attendants brought in a packet of papers, covered his hands with his scarf, and offered them to his master, who opened them and began to read.

"A Christian priest and a woman," he cried, with derisive laughter. "Now, Meeah, tell me, hath the old man gone mad? Am I, Osman Beg, master of Juldroog, to guard a priest and a woman?—a Christian priest, a Nazarene, whom may the Lord confound! By the saints, I have a mind to send them back as they came. A Nazarene priest and a woman. Bah!"

"Do nothing of the kind," exclaimed Abbas Khan. "Thou hast not read half the letter; perhaps thou hast forgotten how to read, and needest a scribe to read for thee. Give it to me."

"I see," he continued, after running his eye over the letter. "Señor Francis d'Almeida, of Goa, priest, and Maria, his sister, sent by order of Her Majesty, the refuge of the poor, to be kept under surveillance till she sends for them herself, or gives orders regarding them."

"Hem," said the Governor, gravely, "there may be some mischief even in a Nazarene priest and his sister, and I must see to their good keeping."

"Stay! here is a postscript in the Nawab's own writing; shall I read it?"

"Surely," was the reply. "I can never make out the Nawab's crabbed characters; they are worse than a schoolboy's."

"Here, then, brother, listen. These persons are not to be treated as prisoners. Let them go where they will about the fort; it is enough that they are quietly watched, and not suffered to leave your fort till they are wanted."

"Where, then, can I put them except in the prison?" said the Governor, with vexation. "If they get away, my head must answer for it. Ho! Ahmed!" he cried; "bid the darogah have

the two best rooms in the prison cleaned out, they are good enough for these Christian swine."

"May I be your sacrifice, O Nawab," said Ahmed, joining his hands, "but they are already provided with lodging. The priest had a letter with him, and took it to the Dervish. His child read it, and the old man came out and bid them welcome in the name of God. Are they to be removed to the prison?"

"No!" shouted the Governor; "let them remain where they are. By the Prophet," he continued to his companion, "a Christian priest, a holy Syud, and a woman; was there ever the like before? What can it mean?"

"Never trouble thine addled head about them," said the young man, laughing; "let them be where they are, and treat them well."

"And the priest is one beloved by every man in Moodgul," added the attendant, in the brusque manner common to many confidential Indian servants; "and the lady, Doña Maria, is an angel of goodness and beauty, and the poor adore her; so be kind to them, my master."

"Then thou shalt look after them thyself, O blockhead. Go, see that they get rations of all they require; will that satisfy thee? Go! Will that satisfy thee, too, Meeah?" he added; "wilt thou have them up here with us? The girl is an angel I have heard from many, and——"

"Peace with thy ribaldry, cousin," said Abbas Khan, gravely. "They are holy people committed to thy hospitality and care; wouldst thou break those ties sacred even to Nazarenes?"

"Nay, I have done, Meeah," returned his cousin. "Thou art too good for me. I swear to thee they are my brother and sister henceforth; can I say more? Let them be, and tell me how thou camest across Elias Khan, and how thou slew him. It will turn our thoughts away from the priest and the beautiful Maria, and thou hast not told me yet."

"It is not a pleasant subject to tell thee of," said his companion; "but I have to tell it to all who may ask me. You know Elias was an Abyssinian."

"Yes, Meeah; but far removed from the parent stock. If I am right, we were both his relatives, though we are Dekhanis."

"Distantly," was the reply; "but listen. I was at Korla with my cavalry, to watch the ford there against Eyn-ool-Moolk's marauders, when one day my spies brought me word that my uncle's force was pressing on to Belgaum, and I determined to join him, as everything was quiet where we were, and my spies, out in all directions,

said there was not an enemy within fifty coss. I marched, then, early one morning, the morning of the day I came here, before daylight; but before we had proceeded more than a little distance, there was an alarm in front, some shots were fired, and in galloping up to the head of the men, I met Elias, with a cloud of his horsemen charging furiously. There was no time for flight, even had I been a coward, so as I had a few men with me I charged right at Elias, and called him by name. The confusion and the war cries, Dekhan and Abyssinian, were frightful; the light was as yet very dim, but I saw him when he was close to me, and cut at me with all his power, beat down my guard, and wounded me, as you know. I had not time to feel sick or faint, but struck at him with all my force. Had he worn his usual chain armour, I had failed, and he would have slain me; as it was, I clove him through the shoulder, and he dropped from his horse dead, but his frightful curse as he received my blow, and his scowl of hate, haunt me still.

"When I looked round there were only three men with me, and one was badly wounded, my brave Jumal, who died at Narrainpoor the day after we arrived there of the heat and his wound, and Runga Naik, who was wounded also, but I did not know that at the time. All the rest of my fellows, pursued by ten times their number of Abyssinians, were flying for their lives, and the fight had gone away some miles. I could only hear the shouts as we at last proceeded. There was no place of refuge but Juldroog, and it was now clear to me that the rebels had crossed the river somewhere in the night before the flood came down, with the intention of cutting off my party, which, weak as it was, they would easily have done in a surprise. It was a long and weary ride, cousin, and the heat and the dust were frightful, and you know my condition when I arrived."

"A fair fight, a fair fight between you, and you won it, my brave brother. The worst of it is that Elias Khan was the chief of a large faction of the Abyssinians, and they will make a party quarrel of it. You will have to be careful when you get back to Beejapoor, and guard against surprise and treachery; but so, indeed, has everyone nowadays."

"I do not fear that," returned Abbas Khan, quickly; "but what I do fear is that my conduct may be misrepresented. It may be said that I fled and left my poor fellows to their fate; and if that time come it would have been better had I died of heat and thirst. One is already dead; one is still with me, and brought away my standard, and he and Runga Naik are the only two who saw what happened."

"But your wound is a witness, Meeah; and I am one also, when thou wert sick to death; and the old Dervish and his child as well."

"Ye all know that I came and was in truth sick unto death, but ye did not know how I had come, or why."

"But thy uncle, our uncle, Humeed Khan, thou art sure of him; and now he has overcome Eyn-ool-Moolk and the Prince, he will be high in favour with the King, and no one could oppose him."

"Alas!" returned the youth, "our uncle is a stern man, and if he thought I had done a dastardly or cowardly act, would slay me with his own hand. It is not death that I fear, but dishonour, which is worse than death. That it is that preys on me, and that is why Elias comes often to me and cries, 'Thou shalt die!'"

"He was a devil in life and he is a devil in death," said his cousin with a shudder. "Bethink thee, brother, hadst not thou best have his evil spirit exorcised and made to quit thee? The old Dervish is a holy man; hundreds come to him for charms and amulets, and he can give thee one against Elias and all other evil spirits; nay, even against the Shytán himself! We will send word to him, and go down in the cool of the evening. Canst thou walk so far?"

There is no Indian Mussulman who, more or less, does not believe in the worth of charms and amulets against the effect of the Evil Eye; and there are none who do not believe in the malignity of evil sprites and demons who, wicked in life, have taken possession of innocent persons. In the Dekhan and south of India generally this belief is peculiarly strong, and it would have been impossible that Abbas Khan should not have shared a superstition which was so universally prevalent among all classes of the people.

"Yes; I will go, brother," he said, "but not to-day, for my soul is heavy. The old man's guests, too, are hardly settled, and he will have too many cares for them to think of me. So let us have a game at chess, and this cloud may pass away. My wound, too, is painful, and I would have rest, instead of a rough walk over your rocks."

"By all means, Meeah, let us play. There is thunder in the air, and there will be rain, and therefore thou art suffering. When thou art at ease we can go; till then, the Dervish and his guests are best left to themselves." And the cousins betook themselves to their game.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORM AND THE FLOOD.

MEANWHILE, the good Padré and his sister, having been ferried over the river, as already mentioned, and their litters removed from the boats, looked around in amazement at the wild and impressive scene before them. High above, the fantastic rocks of the gloomy fortress towered majestically, and bastion after bastion revealed itself among them, glowing in the rising sun, and by its ruddy beams bereft awhile of their actual grimness. Below, the small village, with its half-ruined walls, seemed astir; for cattle and goats issued from the gate enveloped in clouds of dust, attended by shepherds, who drove them forth to graze on the level ground at the lower point of the island.

A company of women, with bright water-pots on their heads, were going for water, and some people had collected in groups to watch the unusual sight of the strangers' arrival. Among them were some of the Governor's attendants, to one of whom the officer from Moodgul explained who the priest and his sister were, and, delivering his letters, bade the Padré a courteous farewell, and proceeded to return; while the attendant, after a few civil questions, bidding the litters to be taken to a shady spot under some tamarind trees, accompanied the party.

"Can you tell me where the Dervish, who lives here, resides?" asked the priest of the man, who appeared civil.

"Certainly," he replied, "it is close by. Come with me and I will call him."

Zóra answered to the summoner, and the priest, taking off his hat, saluted her. He could not help being struck with the extreme beauty of the girl. "Can you speak Canarese?" he asked, "for I have a letter here for your father."

"He is my grandfather," she said, modestly, "but if you will give me the letter I will read it for him, for he is blind." Then the girl retired with it, and in a few minutes returned, leading the old man by the hand, saying, "Abba, this is the Padré Sahib, speak to him."

"You are welcome, Sir, to my poor house, in the name of the God we both worship, and in the name of Jesus and his mother.

Your friend, the Nawab, asks me to give you shelter for a few days, and I do so with pleasure. My house is your own, if you can put up with scant room and such attendance as we can supply; my child, Zóra, must be your hostess. Where is your sister?"

"Close by," said the priest, "under the trees; I will bring her to you."

"Maria," he said, as he opened the curtain of the litter, "I have seen the old Dervish, who is kind and hospitable. He has offered us shelter, as the Nawab said he would; and he has one of the brightest and sweetest-looking of grandchildren, whose very smile will cheer you. Come! I will see to our baggage and dismiss our escort."

"O gentle lady!" cried Zóra, clapping her hands and advancing to greet her guest as she passed the threshold, "surely thou art as beautiful as an angel," and the girl's face was expressive of her wonder and admiration.

Her large, liquid eyes were dilated to the full; her lips open, showing her white glistening teeth; and her first look of amazement had expanded into a beaming smile as she stretched forth her arms to embrace her guest. Nor was Maria slow to express her confidence, and took Zóra in her arms and held her to her heart in a warm embrace.

"I shall be a trouble to you," she said, "and I cannot speak Persian like my brother."

"But you speak my own language, you speak Canarese, lady, like a Brahmin; but see, there is my grandfather, he would welcome you, too."

"Would that I had eyes to see thee, lady; but thou art welcome truly," said the old man kindly, and feeling in the air for his guest.

"Let him put his hand on thy head, lady," said Zóra, "'tis that he wishes to do;" and she guided her grandfather's hand to Maria's head.

"May God and the Holy Mother of Jesus keep thee, my child," he said reverently. "If thou art in trouble, or pain, or grief, thou wilt find peace in this poor house, and Zóra will love thee, and watch thee. That soft silky hair of thine is not of Hind, but of Europe, and thou wilt tell me of thy sweet country."

Maria had removed her hood, and her fair, silky hair was clustering about her neck and shoulders. She had never looked more lovely than at this moment; the rich complexion glowing with excitement and pleasure; her fair white throat rising out of

her kerchief of fine white muslin, as she stooped down to receive the old man's blessing of welcome; and as he put Zóra's hand into hers, he said, "Take her, and guide her, for she is alone."

"Come, lady!" said Zóra, "I will show thee where thou wilt live. Long ago, they say, my grandmother and my mother lived there; but the place is too large for me alone, and my old servant and I live in a room apart, near my grandfather. Come and see!"

They passed through a room, which was used as a kitchen, and entered a small court, which had low cloisters all round, from which doors opened to apartments within. The whole was small, but exquisitely neat and pure; and in the centre was a plot in which were some purple amaranths, marigolds, and other common flowers, and some bushes of several kinds of jessamine.

"These are my flowers," she said; "and I love them so; and yonder is a vine, which gives us grapes in the cool weather; and one fig-tree, which shades me from the sun; and I love to sit here and read, and feed my pigeons and the birds that come to me. And they know me so well now, even the parrots and mynas, though they are wild. Coo! coo!" she cried, raising her voice, as a flock of beautiful pigeons flew in, and alighting, pressed round her. "They belong to the mosque, you know, lady, and no one molests them."

"Call me Maria now," said the lady. "There should be no veil or restraint between us."

"But I am only a poor orphan," she said.

"As I am also," Maria returned, sadly, "and a widow, too."

"Thou a widow, and so young and so beautiful?" said the girl. "May I love thee, and serve thee? See! the pigeons are not afraid of thee, nor am I."

"We will love each other," said Maria, gently stroking the girl's head. "And if we stay ——"

"Oh, you will not depart," said Zóra, pitifully, "and leave me alone again! I have seen you only to love you, and without you all would be dark. I have had no world but this to live in, and I was happy; but now you are come from a far country, and brought with you a joy my heart has never known. Ah, yes, the Mother Mary would not take you away from Zóra! And now see," she continued more gaily, "here are your brother's rooms, and a door to go out by to the mosque, if he wishes, and whithersoever he pleases; and a room for your servants, which can be your kitchen. No one will come near you, and you can do as you please."

The apartments were indeed ample for all purposes, and when the priest had got up their few possessions, and the two old servants, Pedro and Joanna, had arranged them and their own, the rooms lost the bare, uninhabited look they had had at first, and became cheerful and comfortable. Zóra's old servant had prepared an ample repast of omelette and kicheri, to which the travellers did justice after their night journey.

The morning had been oppressively hot, and indeed all day the sun's rays had beaten down upon the narrow valley and its bare granite rocks with an intensity of heat hardly supportable, yet the court had remained refreshingly cool. In the evening, however, the radiation from the rocks increased the heat, and the brother and sister betook themselves to the terrace of the court and looked around them. Heavy clouds were gathering overhead, and flashes of lurid sheet lightning every now and then seemed to spring from their depths and rush across the sky, lighting up the grim fort for an instant, and again leaving all darker than before. Low mutterings of thunder came down the ravine, accompanied by fitful gusts of wind, which again ceased, and all was still; but the darkness grew more intense, till not even the fort or the rocks could be seen.

Maria was no coward of the elements, and she and her brother watched the sublime progress of the storm which was evidently approaching, with intense interest, hardly speaking. A few large plashing drops of rain fell on them, and warned them to retire, but they only rose and gazed around. The low moaning of the cataract above, came down in the still silence, and the river murmured with a kind of measured plash among the rocks; there was not a breath of wind to stir the flame of the small lamp which burned below, and the very suspense was fearful.

Suddenly a heavy shower fell, with an almost sulphurous odour, forcing them to retire, when, and as if that had been the signal, a stream of forked lightning burst from the clouds which hung, as it were, immediately over their heads, illuminating in a ghastly manner the fort, the town, the river, and hills beyond; yet but for an instant only, one which was never forgotten, for thunder crashed above them. Peal after peal broke over the ravine of the fort, and was re-echoed among the rocks and wild hills with tremendous and deafening roar, which for a time was almost continuous.

Brother and sister performed their evening devotions, thankful for the shelter they enjoyed; and when Francis had withdrawn to

his room, Maria sat long, meditating over the events at Moodgul and their consequences, grateful for having escaped violence, the cause of which, but for Dom Diego's uncontrollable passion, she would not have been aware; thankful, too, for shelter in their trouble to both.

Whether they were to be prisoners, or whether guests, she knew not; but at least they had found friends who seemed real and sincere, and anything, even a prison, would be welcome rather than the ordeal of the Inquisition, or the dangers of her own once happy home. What the end might be, whither she might be led, she had no thought, for all the future was dark; but she could rest her hopes on Jesus and his Holy Mother, and in sure faith in both, she knelt down before her crucifix and prayed fervently.

As she prayed she heard the door open softly, and amidst a glare of lightning which soon ceased, the terrified face of Zóra appeared, pale and anxious. "Forgive me," she cried, as she entered, "but I was frightened by the thunder and lightning, and have come to thee. Abba sleeps soundly, and I was alone; may I stay here with thee till the storm is past?"

"Thou art welcome, child," said Maria, gently; "lie down on my little bed, and I will be with thee presently. It is truly a fearful night, but God protects us. When I have finished my prayer I will come to thee."

Then Zóra lay down, and covered herself closely at first, but now and again peered out, her large eyes distended with wonder as she watched the Christian lady's simple devotions. "She prays," she thought, "and yet men say Christians are godless and infidel; but they are false and wicked who say so."

After a little while Maria rose, combed out her silky hair, divested herself of her upper garments, and after her usual ablution, kissed the child, and lay down beside her; and though the thunder still roared and the lightning flashed, sleep came to them as they lay locked in each other's arms; thus they rested peacefully, while the thunder clouds passed away down the river to the east, dispensing their cooling and fertilising influences far and wide, and the stars shone out with a dewy brilliance over the fort, the river, and the ever-moaning cataract. It was the opening of the monsoon.

In the early morning they awoke. Zóra raised herself on her arms, and looked with earnest eyes on her companion. "How beautiful thou art, Maria," she said, as she smoothed the soft hair from her brow; "and how fair, and thy cheek like a pale Oleander flower. Alla pity thee, and protect thee!"

"I have rested well," said Maria, smiling; "I do not think we awoke for all the thunder, and now 'tis calm and fresh. When it is time, if thou wilt, we will go abroad for awhile. I am used to do so, alone at Moodgul, for I had many sick people to look after who expected me. Thou art not afraid?"

"Oh, no!" returned the girl. "I, too, have sick people in the village, and I will show them to thee. I am not afraid, and every one is kind to me, even the rough soldiers salute me; and I had such sweet dreams, Maria. Angels of Paradise seemed to be tending me, and there were flowers around me, and all because I lay in thy arms like a child."

"Would thou wert a child of hers, Zóra," and Maria pointed to a little picture she had hung beneath the crucifix; "but go now, and when thou art ready come for me. See, there is my old servant to help, and I will not delay. And how hast thou passed the night, Joanna?" she asked. "A good day to thee."

"We barely slept," said the old dame, in the broken snuffling Portuguese spoken by the lower orders of Goa. "We shut the door, and the lightning would come in, whether or no. It used to be bad at Goa, but this seems worse; the saints help us. How are we to get away from this terrible place, where the rocks seem ready to fall on us and crush us, and the fort looks like a gloomy prison? Yet thou hast a smiling face, Señora; dost thou not fear?"

"No," said Maria, "I dread nothing; and these new friends, whose guests we are, seem truly kind; why should we fear?"

"No, mistress, the house is well enough, I allow. There is a bathing-place for thee inside, and I have water ready, and the cocoa-pot is simmering, and——"

"But where is my brother; hath he not risen, Joanna?"

"Oh, yes!" returned the dame, "he rose about daylight, for a soldier came from the fort and said the Governor wished to see him before the sun was hot, and he thought it best to go, so he went with the men—for there were several—and said he would be back as soon as he could, and you were not to be anxious, for the messengers said he was to come without apprehension, for he would be taken care of, and sent back." But notwithstanding Joanna's assurance, a thought of possible treachery and a dungeon floated into Maria's mind. Yet she remembered the civil messages of the day before, and the ample allowance for maintenance which had accompanied them.

"And there is plenty to eat, Señora," continued the dame,

when she brought the cup of warm cocoa, after Doña Maria had bathed, "plenty. There are two lambs and many fowls, and rice, and butter, and spices, and flour, salt, and cocoa nuts, and coffee, and sugar, and sugar candy, and plantains, and eggs, and—— "

"Enough, enough!" cried Maria, laughing outright; "why there is more than we could eat in a month, Joanna."

"And the man told Pedro that this was to be the daily allowance, and he would bring it every morning. He is a Brahmin scribe, I think, for he had a pen stuck into his turban. I will bring him to you when he comes, and you or the Señor can tell him what you please; and when you come in, a good breakfast will be ready for you and the master, I can tell you."

"I am troubled to hear about all the food that has been sent us by the kind Governor," said Maria to her young friend, when Zóra entered. "What are we to do with it?"

"You can give it to the poor if you can't eat it all, lady," replied the girl. "It is because you are great people that the Nawab has sent a feast for you, and you will get it every day. Ah! he is rich, and the Government is rich, and will never miss it; but come, the Señor is gone up to the fort to see him, and we may meet him as he returns."

So they went out towards the village. The sun was rising veiled in clouds, which, as the remainder of the storm, lay in a dark bank far behind the distant hills which bounded the horizon. The slight breeze was fresh and cool, the rocks glistened, wet as they were, in the light, all the birds—mynas, paroquets, and others, flew about, chattering and calling to each other, and there was a clearness and transparency of the air which revealed rock and tree, hill and ravine, with far greater distinctness than on the previous day when they had arrived. How beautiful it all seemed to Maria.

"And what is that sound I hear?" she asked of her companion; "sometimes it is loud, sometimes a low murmur. Is it the river?"

"Yes," replied the girl, "it is the river. Not far above, the water falls over a great rock as high as the hill yonder, with a terrible foam and clamour, and you can see it from yonder bastion. It is not far from here, and I often go there when the water is in flood to look at it."

"Alone!"

"Oh, yes, alone! I am only Zóra, and no one minds me. Sometimes one of the soldiers we know, Ahmed, comes with me if he sees me, and says I ought not to go alone, and tries to frighten me about

the panther which sometimes comes here; but I never saw one. Now here we are in the village, what do you think of it?"

It was a poor place; the main street contained a few shops where grain and flour, butter and spices, were sold, and some of the soldiers of the garrison were grouped about them, most of whom saluted the two girls civilly enough. The rest of the houses belonged to weavers and cultivators who had fields at the end of the island, or had lands across the river, which, except in the highest floods, they could cross at any time on their floats of gourds. Many of the houses were comfortable and in good order, and their dames standing at their doors were well clad, and welcomed them with kindly greeting.

We will not follow the companions on their little tour. Zóra had several sick people to visit, chiefly women and children; but it was easy to see how much she was beloved by all. Maria was soon at her ease among them; her sweet face, the softness of her manner, and the perfection with which she spoke the Canarese tongue, charmed and affected many deeply. Indeed, most of them knew her and her brother by report, and some had even seen them when they went to the Moodgul fair. To some Maria promised her own medicines, and invited others to come and tell their ailments to her brother, for the medicine chest had not been forgotten, and long practice and reading had made Francis d'Almeida a skilful physician.

They were returning through the little bazaar, when Maria heard her brother's voice calling, as it were, from above, "Maria! Maria!" The sound seemed in the air, and on looking up she saw him descending by a steep pathway. "Wait!" he cried, and was presently with them. He told them that though he had obeyed the Nawab's summons with some misgiving, yet he had been received kindly and courteously; and though he might be delayed a short time till instructions arrived regarding him, he must remain at his ease without apprehension, and that the whole fort was free to him to come and go as he pleased. "And it is the most wonderful place you ever saw, sister," he continued. "The view up the ravine of the river is glorious; and though there is not water enough now to fill the cataract, it is still surprisingly beautiful, and I will take thee to see it some day. The Nawab has a guest, too, a cousin, in whom I am much interested. He is suffering from some delusion, which, I think, I can remove by tonics, and he is to come to me this evening to consult with me. He was wounded, too, in some battle, but the wound is very nearly healed.

I will put a simple dressing on it, and he will be fit to travel in a week. I was much interested in him, for he is a brave and modest youth, with a stamp of greatness about him which the Nawab lacketh, who is altogether of a coarse type, but he was kind nevertheless. I have enjoyed the climb and walk greatly, Maria, and am hungry for my breakfast;" and they passed on.

At the entrance to his dwelling their venerable host met them, with anxious inquiries about their health and comfort; and Zóra told him how they had already visited her sick folk, and how the Señora had won all hearts, and the children hung about her; and as the old man was praising her, Maria simply said,

"I am vowed to good works, and have renounced the world, Sir. This is only my daily care, to be fulfilled wherever I may be; and it rejoices me to find Zóra so efficient a guide. The people all love her, and so do I already."

"Nor will she fail you, lady," returned the Dervish. "She is the light of these sightless eyes now, and is all that is left to me on earth. But go, you will be hungry. I only hope you and your good brother have all you need."

He said this with a combined dignity and courtesy which struck Maria forcibly. "Surely he is no ordinary Fakeer," she thought; "perhaps some great person who, weary of the world, has taken refuge here, and Zóra, I dare say, will tell me."

It was in the afternoon when Zóra came into Maria's room, where she was busy copying some of her brother's translations. "Come," she said, "there is no sun, and we can walk to the bastion. I know a short way by a postern, and Ahmed is here and will go with us, and your brother will come also."

"Yes, he will come, and it will be so pleasant to have a stroll with him; we always go out together."

"We must not be long away," he said, "for I expect the Nawab's cousin at sunset, and would not fail him."

"No! we need not even be so long. They say the panthers come out as the sun goes down," said Zóra, laughing gaily, "but we never met any of them, did we, Ahmed?"

The bastion could not be seen from where they were below, and they followed a path behind one of the curtain walls of the fort; but as they got round a shoulder of the hill the ascent grew steeper, and turning a corner of the wall the bastion stood before them. It was built on a high, isolated rock, one side of which could be ascended by steps that rose from the ground. The rock completely shut out the view up the ravine, and the curtain wall

that of the river; but they could hear it roaring and dashing against the rocks far below. It was evident that the whole ravine above could be seen from the bastion, and Zóra, leading the way, bounded fleetly up the steps.

"There," she cried, helping Maria up the last one, "look! but the rocks are not half covered with water."

The wildness of the scene before her, and its extreme beauty, caused Maria to start back and almost feel dizzy; but Zóra held her by the hand. "Do not tremble," she said, leading her up a small circular platform on which there was a long iron swivel gun placed. "Sit down on the gun here, and shut your eyes, as I do, then you will not tremble when you open them."

Maria followed the girl's advice, and waited for a few moments, then she looked out. The gun was raised some feet above the parapet of the bastion, and the view around was completely clear. The stream dashed against the foot of the rocks, more than a hundred feet below, rebounding among other rocks in its bed, throwing up waves and spray, and rushing down the gorge with violence.

Above, to the left hand, she could see where the hill was cut in two by the point of the island, which ascended nearly perpendicularly for hundreds of feet; but of all, the bed of the river above the fall, the sides of the ravine, and the huge cataract itself at the end were the most impressive. Maria sat in a sort of trance, unable, for several minutes, to speak, clasping Zóra's hand as the girl nestled to her. Zóra said, "Is not that God's power? I thought you would not speak. I can hardly breathe sometimes when the flood comes down. Ah!" she cried, with a half shriek, "look, it is coming; but do not be afraid, we are quite safe here. It is last night's rain."

Maria looked up to the crest of the fall, which, such was the clearness of the air, seemed to be quite close. She saw a swell of water gradually rising over it. It appeared to move slowly at first, but as the momentum and the body of water increased in volume, it dashed down the rocks with irresistible fury and velocity, foaming, sending up clouds of spray, and roaring with a sound deeper than thunder.

Gradually the whole of the crest was covered by the flood which, pausing as it were in the great pool below, now rolled in majestic force down the ravine in a seemingly compressed column, rising every moment. The effect of this huge mass of water in the comparatively confined space was very singular,

and almost indescribable, for it appeared to grow in height every moment, and, thundering down before them, to look almost as if it would overwhelm them; but there was a fascination in the superb sight that was irrepressible as the torrent came on, its crest feathered with white foam, while it seemed to lick up the huge rocks and boulders in the bed, to rush into the hollows of the ravine sides in furious waves, and gradually to fill the whole gorge with tumult.

Presently they saw the foremost wave strike against the base of the fort and divide, the chasm beneath them becoming filled by the torrent.

"The flood seems rising up to us, doesn't it?" cried Zóra, clapping her hands; "that's what I like to feel, sister; but it could not, you know, we could escape up there;" and she pointed to the rocks above, "and the good Alla would not let it carry us away. But what is that? Ahmed, Ahmed! what is that?" and with wide distended eyes she looked at a spot on the side of the hill, only a little distance from them, pointing at the same time, "What is that?"

A panther had crept out from its den under a rock, and after stretching itself, yawned and gave a slight growl, then looked about warily, and seeing the group on the bastion, crouched as if to spring.

"If I had but brought my gun," said Ahmed in a whisper. "Do not notice the brute, he will not attack us. Oh! if I had but my gun."

Almost as he spoke a shot was fired from behind a bush at a short distance, which stood near one of the zigzag paths which led up the ascent. The panther staggered for a moment, then sank to the ground with a scream, and falling, rolled down the steep bank below him on to the pathway, quite dead.

"A good shot! well fired!" exclaimed Ahmed, as he prepared to descend the steps from the bastion, while a voice cried from above, "Take care, Ahmed! take care! he may not be dead!" But Ahmed hurled down a large stone, followed by several others, which hit the carcase; but it did not move, and he cried to the man above, "Come down, it is quite dead."

Then a small party emerged from the position they had taken up behind some rocks, which consisted of the Nawab and his cousin, and several attendants.

"We saw you from above," said the Nawab, saluting the Padré

courteously, "but we did not like to disturb you. May we come down?"

"I do not like him," said Zóra, clinging to Maria; "he always looks at me when I chance to meet him, and his eyes are evil. Let me be near you. Oh that he would go away. Why does he intrude upon women?"

But Osman Beg and his companion, after inspecting the dead animal, ascended the steps and were soon among the little party.

He did not address Maria, but saluted her courteously; and of Zóra he took no notice, save by some furtive glances from time to time.

"It is well we came down by the path yonder, or that brute might have alarmed your sister," he said to the Padré, "but it is fortunate for me that I have the unexpected pleasure of seeing her. Perhaps she will accept the claws of the panther in memory of this incident; they make a pretty necklace, and shall be cleaned and sent to her. I cannot dare to ask her to my poor house, but she has seen the flood from here, which is grand to-day."

"It is, indeed, wonderful," replied Francis, curtly. He did not like the manner with which the Nawab regarded his sister. "But we cannot stay now, it grows late. May we depart?"

"Nay, Señor, it is I that should depart, and leave you to enjoy yourselves; but my cousin has promised a visit to you, Sir, and the Dervish, and he will accompany you, if you have no objection, with two or three men, in case more panthers may be abroad. So I will take my leave of you, Señor; may you reach your house safely." And, descending the steps, they watched him ascend the path by which he had come.

Abbas Khan, though he had not seen Zóra since his night of delirium, yet remembered her perfectly, and his eyes beamed with delight.

"It was such a flood as this when I was brought across this torrent, wounded and sick almost to death," he said very quietly to Zóra. "Hast thou forgotten it? It was thy face then that I saw as an angel's, who gave me cool sherbet of Persia; and I would have come to thank thee and the old man, but I was too weak till now. Dost thou remember?" he added, after a short pause; and as she did not speak, "I remember thy name—Zóra, is it not?"

"I have not forgotten," she said, looking up to him timidly with her soft eyes, and then casting them to the ground; "I remember all, and we thought thou wouldst have died."

"I have no remembrance save of thee, Zóra," he continued, tenderly; "only an angel seemed to visit me, and soothe me. Then Runga Naik came, and . . . . but it is all a dream, for I knew little more till I was taken to the palace, where I have since been, except that an old man with a long white beard visited me often, and a servant brought food. Where wert thou?"

But she did not reply.

"Come, then," he said to the Padré; "come, the evening draws in; and, as my cousin says, we may perchance see more panthers;" and after a lingering look around her, Maria rose, and followed Zóra down the steps, for the continuous roar and turmoil of the waters oppressed her.

Almost at the foot of the steps lay the dead panther, its glossy skin flecked with blood stains, and its eyes glaring and glassy. The claws had been cut off, but the skin was perfect. "'Twill make a good carpet for Abba," he said to Zóra, "and I will send some men to skin it presently."

CHAPTER VII.

CONFIDENCES AND FAREWELLS.

"O sister, I have seen him once more!" cried Zóra, as she flung her arms round Maria's neck, when they had reached the privacy of her room. "I have seen him, and he looked kindly upon me, and has not forgotten me. Oh, sister, I am so happy!"

"Who is he?" asked Maria; "and how camest thou to know him?" she said in some surprise. "Is he thy betrothed?"

"Oh, no," replied Zóra, shyly. "I have no betrothed; if I had he would not speak to me, nor I to him, till we were married. But I have no betrothed; I am only Zóra yet, and I shall never change. Who would ask for a Fakeer's child but a Fakeer? and I would not go. No, I am with Abba now, and while he lives I will not leave him."

"And after that, Zóra?"

"I do not know. Whatever is in my fate will surely come," she said, simply. "I hear of many good women who live by good deeds, and even my poor people here would not let me go."

"And thou hast no relatives, no friends?"

"None in all the world, lady," said the girl, with a sigh. "No one but the good Abba, and he always keeps me safe. I have no one but Abba in all the world, and he is very old now, and often tells me he shall die soon; but I pray to Alla that he may live many years—oh, many years! And I shall have no care. But did you not see, sister, *he* remembered me. Ah, yes," she continued, her eyes flashing with excitement, "he had not forgotten me, though I saw him only one night, and they would not let me go to him next day; and I never saw him again till the panther was killed, and then I dare not look at him."

"And who is he?" asked Maria, with some curiosity. "Tell me; thou art not ashamed, Zóra."

"I am ashamed only to myself," she replied. "I only think of him sometimes as he lay shouting his war cry, and cowering down as he cried, 'Elias! Elias! away, away, to hell!' I don't know who he is, but they call him Abbas Khan; and Runga Naik told me he was a brave soldier, although so young, and his uncle was a proud warrior at Beejapoor, in the good Queen Chand's favour; and he is an orphan like me, sister. That is all I know."

Did the Señora remember the first dawning of love to her own gallant soldier husband in the far-off home-land of her youth, where he had wooed her and won her? Perhaps she did, as her heart softened to the girl, and she took her in her arms, and laid her head on her own breast. But she said naught of love; what Zóra had said was but a premonitory symptom, if, indeed, it was even that.

"Yes, it is pleasant to be remembered," she answered, "especially when one has tried to do a kindness. But he is a noble of rank, and will go away to his people and leave thee here. Why shouldst thou think of him?"

"Yes," she said, sadly. "I did not think of him before, but I was so happy; and now, if he had not spoken kindly to me, I should not have cared. He would have been as others who have come and gone. Ah, well! it is my fate, my fate; and when Abba is gone there is no help for me but Alla;" and she burst into a flood of tears, while Maria held her to her breast and soothed her.

"There, it is gone now," she said, half sobbing. "Forgive me, sister, that I was so foolish;" and she looked up with a bright smile, though her eyes were wet with tears. "And you will not forget the river, and the cataract, and the foaming, whirling waters?"

"No, indeed, Zóra," she said, with almost a shudder; "but it was almost too terrible. Hark! how it thunders now, and the river roars!"

"We who live here," returned Zóra, "are accustomed to it, and seldom heed it; but I love it at its wildest, and Ahmed and I often go to the bastion and sit there wondering till I can hardly get away, and sometimes even weep. Think, lady, it was in such a flood as that that Runga Naik brought him here; but it was the good Alla that protected him, and it was not his fate to die."

"You promised me you would not think of him, Zóra!"

"Only when the flood comes, lady; then, indeed, I cannot help it, perhaps, and he will be far away with his people."

Meanwhile Abbas Khan was in consultation with the old Dervish, to whom he had told his mental trouble, and the appearance that tormented him. It would have been impossible for the old man to have ignored the affection, for he was himself a thorough believer in such appearances, and Zóra had drawn up for him many an amulet and charm against evil influences; but he thought also, with a physician's experience, that the illusion was more of the body than the mind, and resulted from the effects of the delirium, which it had been so difficult to relieve. He had charms and amulets of many kinds, and knew where they were all kept by Zóra; and he got up, went to a cupboard, and brought a paper divided into sixteen squares, in each of which there were Arabic figures.

"Wear this, in the name of Solomon, son of David," he said; "it will be good for thee; and let me press thy head while I say the prayer over thee, my son." And while Abbas Khan kneeled at his feet, the Dervish placed his hands on his temples and compressed his head as tightly as possible, muttering a prayer or exorcism in Arabic, of which the young man could only distinguish a few words, which appeared to be from the Koran. "If the vision trouble thee again, Abbas Khan," he resumed, "go, when thou art at Beejapoor, to the Chishtee Peer Sahib; tell him what I have done to thee, and he will relieve thee more than I have power to do; and for thy body, let us consult the Padré Sahib. I have long heard of his skill as a physician."

"And is it lawful to take the medicine of a Feringi when I have my charm about me, O Dervish?" asked the Khan.

"Medicine is from Alla," he replied, "who directs its operation upon all. Feringis are men of the Book, and believe in the Lord Jesus and His mother Mary," said the old man, solemnly. "They

have not our light, for that came later to the world; but their light is to be honoured, my friend. And this is a Padré, a holy man of whom all the country, Moslim and Hindoo, speak well. Yes, his medicine will be blessed to thee, and need not be feared. I will send for him presently, or, better still, I will ask him to see thee to-morrow, then thou wilt be calm and thy pulse even; now I find it is agitated more than usual. Meanwhile let the charm work."

"If I knew whom to thank," said the young man, earnestly, "I would revere thy name, for what do I not owe thee, for help when I was raving, and rescue from death? What can I do for thee, O holy man? If I, or my uncle Humeed Khan, could do aught, thou hast only to speak. Surely I and mine are grateful to thee, and to her who tended me alone."

"Ay, Zóra, sir; but she did only her duty, and has passed away from thy mind. Who am I? and how art thou to call me? May I trust thee? The nephew of Humeed Khan should be as true as he is, and to no one yet hath my tale been told here, while at Beejapoor the old Syud is forgotten now. Yes, it matters not for me, but for Zóra much," he continued, after a pause, "very much. When I am gone, who shall defend her? She is an orphan, and alone."

"I promise to be secret and true," returned the young man, fervently, as he touched the feet of the Dervish; "treat me as a son, and before Alla I will be true."

"Listen, then. Didst thou ever hear of Syud Ahmud Ali?"

"Yes, father," he replied, "I have. Men speak now of the holy Syud as a great physician, and use his prescriptions; but he is dead many, many years. Was he aught to thee?"

"I am Syud Ahmud Ali," replied the Dervish.

"Then why art thou here?" asked Abbas Khan, eagerly.

"Because I am forgotten," said the old man, with a deep sigh. "All my contemporaries are dead, or have passed away elsewhere; if any live they have forgotten me, and new men have sprung up who never heard of me. Listen! When I was a youth I went on the pilgrimage to Mecca with my father, who was a noble of the Court of Ibrahim Adil Shah, of honoured memory, and our family had been nobles of the court from the time of the great Yoosuf Adil Khan. My father died of plague at Jedda, and, having ample means, I desired to see the world. I had been studious also, and had no desire for a military life, and wished to be a physician. I went to Cairo, where I studied deeply, and learnt the Arabic tongue

to perfection. I then visited Constantinople and Morocco, where there were Western Syuds of great learning. I even crossed into Spain, where some devout Mussulmans still remained. I married one of their daughters, a Houri in person, and I returned to Beejapoor with her, where the King Ibrahim Adil Shah received me with honour, gave me an estate—it was Almella, near the Bheeman—and all its dependencies; and I became known as the Syud of Almella. The King attached me to himself, and I served him, not only as a physician, but as a counsellor, and often in the field also, with all the fidelity and ability I possessed; and I grew in station, in rank, and in wealth.

"Perhaps I was too proud, perhaps neglected service to God which I ought to have done; but who can fathom the purposes of God, or question His decrees? for at the zenith of my fame and fortune I was overthrown so utterly that I have never risen again—and yet so unjustly.

"You have heard of the King's cruelties in his debaucheries during the latter days of his life; how he banished some of his physicians because they did not cure him, imprisoned others, and even had some put to death. What medicine could cure a man who, when he had obtained the least relief, disobeyed all directions and became infuriated with wine? I had obtained leave to visit Almella for a few days to arrange the cultivation of my estate for the season, and the King gave it willingly. I left medicines for him, and instructions to the physicians who were to take my place, and I thought all was secure. But, alas! it was a false trust. No sooner had I reached my home than dreadful rumours began to arrive of how the King had become more and more furious; how he had caused several of the doctors to be trampled to death before him by elephants, and how he raved for me. Should I go or fly? I could have escaped easily into the dominions of the King of Golcondah, to Beeder, or to Ahmednugger; but I knew if I did that I should be followed by an army, and that the wars which had been happily ended would be renewed. But I had little time to think. The day after I had received the first message a large body of cavalry, with two of the eunuchs of the palace, came to fetch me. I was torn away from all I loved—my beautiful wife and my son—and hurried to Beejapoor.

"I expected no less than death; but when I arrived the King was calm, and his manner even affectionate. 'I have missed you much,' he said, 'and you are the only attendant in whom I can trust. They are weary of me, and want to poison me. Even now

my son Ali is plotting with Kishwur Khan; Sikundur Khan and others are raising armies to dethrone me. I have no peace. I have constant tormenting pain and agony, which only you can relieve. They told me you had fled, like many traitors, but I believed none of them, and sent an escort for you. O Syud Ahmud, forsake me not now! but bear with me, and relieve me;' and he bowed his head into my arms as I sat beside his bed. And I wept, for I was much affected; and the dread I had felt passed away.

"But not the danger. I had sent for my wife from Almella; riches poured in on me, for the King, in gratitude for the relief I was affording him, was lavish in his generosity. A large addition was made to my estate, and I received the Royal deeds for it. I was more than ever courted by the great and noble of the city; but still I felt that I might be dashed to the earth at any moment, yet I did not betray my feelings, though I often knew it was all I could do to restrain them, and the fatal hour overtook me at last. Who can resist the decrees of fate? Who can avert their final doom? As in life men are suddenly stricken with death, so I, at the zenith of my fame and fortune, was stricken down to this living death, which does not close.

"One morning, very early, I was summoned to the palace by a eunuch, who said the King was dying, had asked for me, and again relapsed into insensibility. I could not account for it, for when I left him he was cheerful and well. I only thought his time had come, and he must yield up his soul to God. When I arrived at the palace all was confusion and every one excited; and I heard loud wailings from the ladies' apartments; yet I went on, for my trust in the King overmastered fear. 'Beware!' whispered a eunuch who stood at the entrance of the chamber; 'beware! he is furious; some one brought him strong wine last night, and he is mad. Beware!' But this did not stop me. I had often soothed him in his furious excitement, and I trusted to do so now. I heard him calling out my name, for the devils were tearing him to pieces, and I must send them away; and I entered the chamber, calling to him that I was present, and to fear not.

"He was lying on some cushions on the floor, almost naked, and as I approached him he rose up suddenly, and glaring at me with eyes that appeared starting from their sockets, cried, 'O traitor! who left me to the devils, thou shalt not escape me now; I will kill thee!' And the King was a powerful man, and I was never strong. He threw me down, and tried to strangle me, but I escaped and cried for help. Again and again he attacked

me, but he was too much intoxicated to effect his purpose. At last he cried to the eunuchs who had clustered together at the curtain of the door, and were afraid to interfere, 'Away with him, put out his eyes, send him to Juldroog that his name may be forgotten;' and he sank back on his cushions exhausted.' There was no delay; there, before him as I lay, one of the slaves, an Abyssinian armour-bearer, put out my eyes with his dagger, while others held me; and when it was done he said to the King, 'It is accomplished,' and I was led away.

"Not to my home, where I might have been soothed and tended in my agony, but to a cell, while preparations were made to send me away. Some pitying soul—who it was I never knew—gave me water and applied a dressing of cool herbs to my burning eyes; and at nightfall I was despatched hither. What had become of my wife and child I knew not. I remember nothing of the journey, except that I heard the sound of rushing waters, and was told I had reached Juldroog. My eyes healed gradually, but the beautiful world was gone for ever. After some months, when the King was dead, and the Prince Ali Adil Khan had succeeded, my wife and child were sent to me. She said all my wealth had been taken away, but she had secreted some gold, and brought it with her. I sent petitions to the new King, to the Ministers, to every friend I thought I had, for release and for justice; but the seeming friends had only been the companions of prosperity, and not one stretched out a friendly hand. I was told by the Governor then here, Azim Khan, a worthy kind man, that he had been told to forward no further petitions from me, and he exhorted me to bear the will of God with submission.

"I then determined to build a small house near the tomb of the holy Syud, which is yonder among the trees, and make myself its guardian. No objection was made, and I expended what my wife had brought upon it. I directed the observances at the tomb, and the sick came to me for help. In some years my wife and helpmate died. My son Luteef, becoming impatient of a lonely life, went to Beejapoor, and being of a fine presence entered a body of Dekhan horse, where he soon rose. He once came to see me, after many years, and having married, left his wife with me, as she was pregnant, and could not return with him. Luteef told me that he had tried all he could to interest his commander in me, and to procure my release, but failed. I had been forgotten. Not long after we heard that my son had fallen in a great battle, and his wife, being taken in the pangs of labour, brought forth Zóra; and I was left

with a helpless infant, who is now growing up, and is the prop of my remaining years, many or few, as Alla will. I have lived here forty years!"

"But surely," said the young man, earnestly, "justice is not dead in the kingdom; and though more than a reign is past, some of those old friends are living. Surely the noble Queen Chand would interfere in such a case as this, father; and she hath ever been like a mother to me since I was an orphan; and my uncle, too, Humeed Khan, who hath overcome Eyn-ool-Moolk, the traitor, who died in battle, and must be in favour. Ah! do not despair, for my heart tells me we shall yet meet in happiness."

"It is not for myself, for they give me all I need, and more," returned the old Syud, "but for the child that I would fain be free. Who is to tend her as she grows up? And if I died, who would shelter her? What would be her fate alone? Ah, thou knowest well that such as she, poor and unfriended, are little respected. She is no longer a mere child, running wild and free among the people. No, as yet she hath gone everywhere unveiled and unfettered; but she hath learned no evil, no breath of evil thought hath touched her pure mind, but I cannot but feel that she is in danger. Wilt thou make one promise to me, Abbas Khan? Thy grandfather was a loved friend once, and Alla seems to have sent thee to me. If I should die, wilt thou rescue this poor child from want, if not from infamy?"

"I will, father, else I were false and ungrateful both to thee and to her. I would she were present that I might tell her so myself!"

"Nay! it were better not," returned the old man, gravely. "I will tell her as much as I need to do, and she will rely on thy truth and honour as I do. And now depart, for the evening is closing fast, and the road is not smooth. Rest peacefully to-night, and the Padré shall attend thee early to-morrow. For the rest, fear not; the talisman will keep thee from harm."

For many days there was no change in the daily life; the old Syud made his ministrations at the Saint's tomb; the priest laboured at his translation, and now and then visited his patient, in whom he had taken much interest. From him he had heard no ribaldry or banter, like that of the Nawab's, but was treated with respect and consideration; and Abbas Khan only awaited answers to letters from the capital, and the priest's permission, to proceed. With renewed health his illusions had ceased, and he longed for the bustle and stir of the capital, and the chances of employment in the field. An event, too, which seemed unavoid-

able, was to happen—his own marriage to one to whom he had been betrothed in childhood; a thought which he detested, but of this more hereafter.

It will not be doubted that Maria and Zóra had become fast friends. Maria did not feel the time pass wearily. She had copies to make of her brother's daily work; she continued her embroidery and her lace-work, in which she was particularly skilful, and she taught it to Zóra, as she in turn admired the girl's own industry and its effects. The illumination of her manuscripts was also a delightful occupation, at which Zóra used to marvel greatly; but it was Maria's music that was her greatest attraction. The chanting of their morning and evening services was listened to even by the old Syud with delight, and by Zóra with positive rapture. Often, too, would Maria sing the sweet ballads of her country, and play on her guitar, and was surprised at Zóra's quick ear, and the readiness with which she learned to play simple airs and accompaniments. So it was again a peaceful time to all; and letters came from Moodgul bidding the Padré to be patient, and they were generally accompanied by baskets of ripe mangoes and sweetmeats from the Nawab's children. The old deacon, too, and some of his people had come also, and told how Dom Diego had become morose and sullen; how he often neglected the services of the church; and, it was reported by his servant, drank too much strong wine at night. How the garden was flourishing, and, indeed, the mangoes he brought were delicious.

Thus a month had passed at Juldroog; the floods had come and gone, and come again; and so departed: but Maria never endeavoured to reach the gun bastion, or to enter the precincts of the fort. She had no desire to encounter the claws of a panther again, and, above all, she feared the licentious look of the Governor, whom she might meet at any time. Even Zóra failed to persuade her to revisit the place she had seen, and ceased to urge it. At home they had ample employment: the flowers were tended in the little garden, the vine and the fig-tree were pruned by the priest after the Portuguese manner, and for a morning or evening stroll they had the lower end of the island, where the grass was now green, and filled with pretty wild flowers, and the lovely wild oleanders were in full bloom.

Neither of the young men came down from their airy pinnacle except once, when they went to hunt on the left bank of the river, and to meet Runga Naik, whom Abbas Khan desired to see; for when he returned to Beejapoor, whom could he trust

to send him intelligence of the Syud's death if it occurred? who could protect Zóra? But Runga Naik, who resided within a few miles, whose men served in the fort, would be sure to know everything. Taking him aside, then, as all were resting for a while, Abbas Khan easily obtained his promised co-operation.

Runga had known the old Syud from his youth upwards, and had a superstitious regard for him. They had always been good friends, and for Zóra's care of his young chief during that memorable night, he had felt gratitude and love. Yes, he would watch over them and protect them; Zóra should never come to harm; and if her grandfather died suddenly he would bring Zóra away, and his wife should receive her, and she should be sent to Beejapoor whenever he got an order to do so. Meeah need not fear, the fort should be watched, and every night the Syud's home should be guarded. Perhaps the Beydur chief had no good opinion of the Nawab's morality, and feared for the fate of Zóra if she should be unprotected, and in fact in any case.

And the inevitable day of separation came at last. A letter from the Nawab of Moodgul came to Francis d'Almeida, and with it other despatches to Osman Beg and the young Khan.

"The Queen desires to see you," wrote the Nawab to Francis, "and commands you to come in all confidence to her feet. There are many events pending between the Government of Portugal and that of the Adil Shahies, in which your presence will be of great service to both, and Her Majesty wants your confidence. A suitable escort will be sent for you, and you will be under the charge of Abbas Khan, who is directed to accompany you. In three or four days you may expect the escort, and you will have time to make your preparations. I am sorry to lose you," he continued, in his own rough writing, "but before the orders of the Queen regrets are unavailing. I have only to trust that you may return to your friends here and your people, who grieve at your absence; but they hope, as your friend does, that you may return in peace to dwell among us. The Khanum Sahiba salutes your sister, and prays for her."

The priest took the letter to the palace, where he found his patient in the highest spirits and good humour. The prospect to him of an honourable return to Beejapoor, and the few lines addressed to him by the Queen Dowager in her own hand, had charmed him. His uncle had not returned, but was soon expected; and the sincere regard he had contracted for the priest made the prospect of his company the more acceptable. "My cousin," he said, "has

received his own orders to send you on, but he does not relish the idea of future solitude, and is vexed about it. As for myself, the prospect of escape from here is too joyful almost to realise, and my only regret remains with your host, to whom, under Alla, I owe my life; yet I think I may be able to serve him, and poor little Zóra also, sooner than they think. Tell the old man I will come to take leave of him before we depart."

As to Zóra, her misery was more than can be told. In one short month a new life had opened to her under Maria's influence which was now to cease. Who would teach her? who would sing to her? who would give her holy counsel? The communion with Maria's sweet pure spirit had raised the girl's ductile mind from many imperfections, which were the result of neglect and uncontrol, and till the day of parting she was inconsolable; but to Maria's surprise and gratification the girl rallied.

"I can let you go," she said, simply, "for I know we shall meet again. You will send for me if you go to Moodgul, will you not? And if Abba dies I will come to you. I have no trust but in you and in God, and Abba tells me that will never fail."

When Abbas Khan came to take his leave of her grandfather, she could not help hearing what he said of thanks and gratitude to him and to herself, and his renewed promise of care and protection. She heard his sob as he embraced her grandfather, and for a moment saw his face as he turned to go away. It was a new joy and comfort to her to know that she had not been forgotten, and might look to him in any trouble.

We will not follow the little events which made up the departure, and farewells between persons who had been so strangely cast together are too often painful. Zóra did not go to the river side with Maria; she sat on the terrace of the house, whence she could see her, and pressed the little cross that Maria had given her to her heart. It seemed to her a talisman of safety. All the little gifts Maria had given her—some drawings and other trifles—she had put away carefully. They were her only treasures. As she looked, with her eyes blinded by tears, she saw the elephants and horses on the farther bank, and palanquins and bearers, and camels for the baggage. Then Maria and her brother and the two old servants entered one basket boat, and the Khan another with his attendants; Runga Naik and his men directing everything.

As they were leaving the shore, all waved to her a last farewell; the rowers took their places, and the boats shot down the swift

current with speed, edging, however, gradually to the land opposite. Then all landed, and Abbas Khan, after caressing him, mounted a fiery horse, which bounded and caracoled under him. The Padré and Maria seated themselves in palanquins, and the whole procession moved on. Zóra watched it ascend the bank, and her eyes followed it, while the jangling bells of the elephants came fitfully on the wind among the brushwood and trees, till she could see it no longer. Then she left her seat, and betaking herself to her grandfather, fell on his neck, weeping passionately.

CHAPTER VIII.

MÁMA LUTEEFA PROPHESIES.

IN the lonely fortress its late visitors were sorely missed by all those with whom they had resided for nearly two months, and by none more impatiently than by Osman Beg, its governor. By nature cruel, self-indulgent, and profligate, he was a man of all others most unlikely to endure a lonely life with ordinary firmness, or accommodate himself to banishment, or at least seclusion, of which he could see no means of enlivenment or termination. He had no companions, for he had no sympathy with the Hindoo zemindars who were his neighbours, for the most part rude and uncultivated men, who despised his affectation of superiority, and did not disguise their opinion of his uncourteous, and often insulting, language. They seldom visited him, indeed, except to pay the usual rents of the dependencies of the fort, which they held from the State. The Moolla of the mosque and his own physician were intense bigots, whose conversation was limited to the subject of the Koran and its various commentaries, of which they were diligent students; and from the Moolla the Nawab had to endure many rebukes as to laxity in observances of the faith, or license of speech and conduct, and the meetings of the men often resulted in bitter altercations, which only made matters worse.

The Moolla had no respect for a Governor who had neither wife nor family. His predecessor was a respectable elderly soldier, a plain man, who cordially mixed with all classes, and

was much beloved. He had a lady wife, who bore children, and the palace was often the scene of small domestic festivals, of general religious observances, in which the Moolla acted as chief manager, and received ample rewards for his services. His wife, too, was always welcome after her long trudge up the hill, and was hospitably entertained, contributing, on her part, all the gossip of the country round.

It was very different now. The Nawab had no wife, and no hareem of any kind. There were no entertainments, for the dancing women of the country were afraid of the Nawab's grim solitude, and declined even to cross the river while the water was high, with the chance of being cut off by a flood at any time and confined for an indefinite period.

The "Nawab," too, had other troubles which were even harder to bear. Soon after his cousin left, he had ridden over to Moodgul, and in company with some of his old associates, who belonged to the force stationed there, had indulged in excesses with a zest augmented by long abstinence, so that he became more notorious than was good for his reputation. The consequence of this being that his brother Nawab, the old friend of the Christian friar and his sister, a moral and devout man, treated him coldly, restricting his hospitalities to such ordinary observances as could not be dispensed with, considering the relative position of both.

Not in any way abashed by this, Osman Beg determined, if possible, to gain the beautiful daughter of the Moodgul commander and governor in marriage, and to this end he employed one of the professional female agents, who are well known among Mussulman communities, to make advances for him.

Máma Luteefa was a mistress of her art. She carried gold and silver ornaments, entrusted to her by the goldsmiths, from house to house; rich cloths also—portions of Portuguese velvets and silks; and while selling these had ample opportunity of carrying on her vocation. In the course of a few days she had contrived to make a proposal for her employer in a manner suited to his rank and her own importance. But it was rejected peremptorily; and when the old dame returned a few days afterwards with some valuable offerings, she found herself warned never to enter the precincts of the hareem again on a similar errand. Osman Beg also received an intimation that his presence in Moodgul was not desirable, and he had better withdraw. He therefore returned to his solitary life, but he took Máma Luteefa with him, in case, as

she observed, there might be anyone in the fort, or near it, who could be considered a fitting person for the distinction which would be the lot of Osman Beg's wife.

We may consider, then, that the Nawab's cup of vexation was full, as far as his present position in the fort was concerned; and without it was equally gloomy. The issue on which he had set his heart was the victory of Eyn-ool-Moolk and the young Prince. He had already offered his sword and the fortress, which, as a frontier position, was very valuable. He should at once rise to rank and favour, and whether a new Court was established at Belgaum, or the present Court at Beejapoor became head of the Beejapoor kingdom, he should in either case fill a prominent position.

Nothing had, however, happened, except to increase his vexation and cut away the last chances of extrication. The Prince Ismail, we know, rejected by the Portuguese, had been apprehended and put to death. Eyn-ool-Moolk had been slain and beheaded, to which his grim head, stuck on a high pole opposite the gate of the citadel at Beejapoor, bore ghastly witness, and that fondly cherished hope was gone; whereas his numerous letters, which, in their offers of aid and counsel for the extension of the rebellion, contained the most conclusive evidence of his treachery, might have been preserved among the papers of Eyn-ool-Moolk, and would furnish incontestable proofs to his enemies, and lead directly to his condemnation. Once only he had received a few lines from his cousin to say that he had fallen ill on his way and was detained, but when anything affecting him could be heard of, he would write again; but nothing more had arrived. Yet, could he be recalled at any sacrifice, how easy would it be, if he escaped death, to carve out a path of his own, if not at Beejapoor, at Golcondah, at Ahmednugger, or with the Moghuls, who were steadily encroaching upon the kingdoms of the Dekhan. No, Osman Beg was not happy; he was, on the contrary, more discontented than ever, and his very body servants lived in terror of his outbreaks of ill-temper and violence.

The venerable Syud-Dervish had also grieved at the departure of his guests. Francis d'Almeida's knowledge of Persian brought him into intimate acquaintance with the old man, whose remembrance of Spanish, which he had learned from his wife, assisted their means of communication very sensibly. The Dervish missed the pleasant arguments and discussions on religion and other

subjects, the descriptions of European life, the histories of the countries he had once visited with so much enjoyment. He had grown interested in the good Padré's translations, and, a man of the world himself, could rise out of the humble place he occupied to the enjoyment of better things. He had now nothing to fall back upon, no cheery word from the Padré or gentle compassion from his sister. There was no one to sing to him either in early morning or the evening worship; and though both were sinful according to the strict rules of the Mussulman faith, yet they were fascinating all the same. The old man's days passed listlessly now, in prayer or meditation, and in prescribing for the sick brought to him; but, for the most part, in a state of vacancy from which it was difficult to arouse him.

But to Zóra the parting with Maria was more than a· regret, it had become a grief for which there was no relief or consolation. It was Maria who had quickened the girl's dormant spirit, which before lay dead under an outer covering of ignorance and neglect, and might never have been moved but for the Señora's gentle teachings.

The natural intelligence of the child would have died out under the ordinary life of a Mussulman woman of the lower orders, a station which she at best could hope to fill. The intercourse with Maria, short as it had been, had opened to Zóra an apparently unbounded vista of the world without, and of knowledge which she burned to attain. Now that hope seemed dead within her; she could only revert to her former condition of life, to the care of her grandfather, to her Persian books, and the habitual services to the sick, in which she had made no alteration, and in which now lay her principal interest. Day after day the little memorials of her sisterly friend's visit were taken out, looked at, kissed, and put back again. Day after day she sang the little hymns and songs she had learned. She talked to her sick folk of the kind Christian lady, of her gentle, soothing presence, and her wise words; and here she found sympathy, such as gave her comfort.

But when could she hope to see Maria again? Perhaps when she returned to Moodgul; but the wicked Padré was yet there. Perhaps—ah! who shall tell the seeming possibilities presented by hope to a young, ardent mind, which yearns for fulfilment? Sometimes, once or twice only, she had persuaded her friend Ahmed to take her to their old seat on the gun bastion, whence she could follow every event of the day on

which she had taken Maria there—the sudden flood, the dead panther, and the presence of one who to her was a new and trembling joy. "Forget him!" "do not think of him!" had been her friend's injunctions; but she only shook her head and sighed, and the unceasing moan of the river plashing at her feet seemed but an echo to her sad thoughts, which, as yet, in her young heart, had no definite meaning. Memories only of that terrible night, and of his manly, gracious bearing and kind looks, which had no expression in words—these would not depart, and yet she knew them to be fruitless. Had she possessed a mother, or even a friend, she could have spoken freely of those absent; but she was alone, quite alone, and the future to her was very dark.

Máma Luteefa had been at Juldroog some days. The Nawab had had one of the rooms in the zenana of the palace prepared to receive her, and made her as comfortable as he could; but the old dame was in no good humour, indeed, was in the last degree of indignation and vexation. Máma Luteefa was about fifty years of age, with delicate features; her hair was grey, and became her, neatly braided as it was; and she wore a green satin petticoat, a scarf of the finest muslin being fastened into her waist and cast over her head. Her small feet were bare, and round her ankles were a pair of costly gold anklets, with some heavy rings on her toes. On her left arm she wore an armlet of solid gold, a late present from her employer the Nawab, and a plain necklace of sequins about her neck. Thus attired, Máma Luteefa presented a good specimen of a high class confidential female servant in a Mussulman family, and was quite aware of this herself.

"To take me away from my own house, and all I had to do," she said, "to deprive me of all my society and the sweet confidences of damsels eager to know all about the husbands I propose to them—what sort of noses they have, and lips, and eyes; whether they are merry or sad, stout or lean, rich or poor. And of course, Shireen-bee," she continued to a somewhat elderly dame who was her servant and companion, "I only tell them that the men are all they ask me, though they may be lame or blind, ugly or old, or poor as Fakeers. What is all that to me? If they marry, they only fulfil their destiny; and water may be married to fire, or air to air, according to the law of temperaments, for all that I care. It is the astrologer's business to do that, not mine; and if he blunders, what care I, so long as my fee is paid! But, ah! 'tis a pleasant life."

"But you are so wise, mother," said the woman, "and so

honoured, and everyone is so glad when you come to see them, and give you the best pán and sugar candy, and I have to carry home sweetmeats by the basket-load. And was I not proud to see you in your palanquin, smoking a whiff now and then from your bright silver hookah, and eating your pán; and to see all the people in the bazaars making humble salaams to you as you passed by, and to hear the cries, 'God speed you, mother, to a happy marriage; we wish you luck in your business. Ah! Máma Luteefa is one of the old true sort, may her prosperity increase.' Did I not feel proud then as I walked by the side of your palkee and handed the choicest leaves of pán to you, neatly rolled up and fastened with a clove. Ah! that was honour and reputation to me; and how anxiously I looked to the issue of every case you took up."

"And did I ever fail, Shireen-bee?" she asked, with an air of confidence. "Never, by the saints, never! When this unsainted Nawab told me to propose him to the mother of that fairy-faced Nujm-ool-Nissa, I told him he wouldn't be accepted; and when he employed a low wretch, the very mention of whose name ensured his refusal, he got his answer—a rough one if I know right. It is only a respectable woman like me, I tell you, who can manage these delicate affairs in great families;" and the old dame took a pinch of snuff with an expressive snort.

"And what induced you to come to this rude place, Mother Luteefa?" asked Shireen-bee. "Don't you remember all I told you about it, that it was only a place for State prisoners who have to be beheaded? Whom dost thou expect to get for *him* here, unless it be a ghost or a ghoul?"

"Yes," replied her mistress, with a deep sigh, "it is truly an unsainted place altogether; bare rocks, a roaring river which fills one's head, makes one dizzy, and even cotton cannot keep it out. One cannot stir out for fear of falling into the holes between the rocks and being eaten by panthers or bears. Yes, if it had not been for the bag of five hundred rupees he brought me, and this gold ring for my arm, I had never come—never come," cried the dame, whimpering; "and now I am here, what can I do? Hast thou heard of anybody?"

"I swear by your neck, mother, I have seen no one, and I have looked all over the village. The Moolla has a daughter, who is seven years old and squints; she would not do; and besides, she is betrothed. There are two weavers who have daughters; one is sixteen, but she is deformed and is seamed by small-pox; the other two are mere children. There is a Brahmin's daughter who

could be brought up here, and the belief and Fateha said over her, but I suppose the Nawab Sahib would be afraid to do that."

"May the kind Alla help me!" cried Dame Luteefa, wringing her hands, "is that all? O Shireen-bee, any one with a petticoat, so that we escape! Even if he got vexed and turned us out of the fort I should be thankful, and I vow Fatehas to Sofy Surmust and all the saints if they will grant us a safe deliverance. But is there no one—no one across the river—no one anywhere? Do not say there is no one?"

"Not a soul, mother," said Shireen, letting her hands drop on her lap. "They are all Hindoos and Beydurs; there is not a true believer within miles. Yet, stay; there is the old Syud's daughter, she might answer. Some say she is as beautiful as a fairy; others that she is a tall, lanky girl, with big eyes, kind to the poor, and learned, and all love her."

"She a Syud, and he a Mogul—a bad conjunction; and her name is——?"

"Zóra."

"Zoé and Alif, water and fire. The one puts out the other. They won't mix. No, that won't do, Shireen-bee."

"You are thinking of a real marriage, when both houses are good and wealthy, not Fakeers, as these are," returned Shireen, rather tartly, as she rolled some tobacco in the palm of her hand, with an extra quantity of lime to make it sharp. "If this won't answer, what are we to do? How are we to get out of this den? But what does it matter? If it won't do, it won't; that's all your slave has to say;" and she turned herself away rather doggedly. The prospect of a prolonged residence in Juldroog was anything but agreeable to her. There was no gossip, no bazaar to go to; and even the pán was old and green, only fit for goats to eat.

Luteefa-bee reflected. "Would the old Syud give his granddaughter? Could there be a marriage of any kind in such a place? Suppose the girl would not hear of it. And, last of all, dare she propose even a 'Nika,' to so great a man as the Nawab, with only a Fakeer's daughter, or whatever she might be? If she were indiscreet she might loose her reputation altogether; and she only, to her credit, dealt with honourable marriages."

"I might try him," she said to her servant, hesitatingly, "and see what he says. At the worst he might get angry, and send us away. But, then, the money! I should have to give up what he has given me; and it is much, too much, not to risk a chance for."

"Of course it is, mother," said Shireen. "You would be a fool to give up five hundred rupees. Why, it is riches, mother, riches! Do not sit there thinking; people who sit thinking never do anything. Get up, and go directly, and you had better go alone."

"Well, if it must be, it must be; what is to happen is to happen, and no one can help their fate," she said, with a great sigh, as she got up from her seat. "Fire and water, fire and water, they won't mingle."

"Go, I tell you," cried Shireen-bee; "you are thinking again, and if you want to do that, you had better not go at all. Are you a coward?"

Luteefa-bee went away sadly, wiping her eyes, and, asking to see Osman Beg, was ushered into his presence by an Abyssinian slave.

He was alone, smoking, and idly looking up the glen from one of the arched doorways, where a pleasant breeze entered and cooled the room.

"What news, mother?" he said; "what hast thou been doing, and when am I to have a wife?"

He spoke good humouredly, but she did not like the expression of his eyes. They looked to her perception as if he would have added, "if you do not get me one soon, I will have you flung down the rocks into the river." And she shuddered at the bare thought.

"Ah! it is cold here," continued Osman Beg, who observed the action; "come, and sit out of the wind, and tell me what news thou hast."

"Protector of the poor," cried the woman, "forgive your slave, but she has no news. Shireen has been everywhere, but there is no one worthy of you, no one to whom Luteefa-bee could unite you. Had there even been one, however lowly in birth, your slave would have gone herself and arranged everything. But one is lame, another deformed, two are little children; and as to anyone of decent station, we cannot hear of anybody in the whole country, even at Sugger. All the Mussulmans are only poor weavers. Therefore, your slave begs permission to depart. She is full of grief; but, who can control destiny?"

"You are a cheat!" cried the Nawab, furiously. "A cheat, like all your people. Where are the rupees I gave you? Give them back; and may the Shytàn burn you. I say, where is the money?"

"I left it at Moodgul, with the banker," returned the woman, whimpering. "Send some one with me, and I will give it back. But the Nawab Osman Beg's generosity is great," she added, soothingly; "and what is given is given. Who ever asks return of a gift?"

"That is a lie, mother," he said, grimly. "I know that money is in thy waistband in gold pieces, and, by the saints, I have a mind to have thee stripped by the eunuchs, and I would fling it into the river, and thy carcase after it. Dost thou hear, liar and cheat? Thou hadst as well trifle with the devil as with me. Beware!"

"Ah, my lord, do not be angry with your poor slave!" cried the dame, casting herself before him, and pressing her forehead against the foot that was extended. "Forgive me! I have no refuge but you in this wild place. Do not be angry with me, else I shall die. There is yet one thing I would say, if I were permitted, only I was afraid you would be angry."

"Well, get up then, and say it," he returned, sulkily; "but, by Alla, if thou try to cheat me again, I will do as I said. May the blessed Koran be my witness;" and he took up the book and touched his breast and forehead with it.

The woman trembled. She believed Osman Beg to be perfectly capable of doing any violence to her, and he, and his Abyssinian slaves, bore an evil reputation in the little village. The only gossip that Shireen could pick up in the bazaar was that several respectable farmers had sent away their wives and children to villages beyond the river. She must speak now, however, or run the chance of death.

"My lord, my lord, mercy!" she cried, putting up her joined hands. "The Fakeer's daughter, his child. My lord, forgive me for mentioning one so mean, so far beneath my lord's station."

"Ha! so she is to be my fate after all," he said to himself; then added, "Is it to be so, dame? Hast thou seen her? She is beautiful!"

"No," she answered, "I have not, but Shireen has; and says she will be beautiful when she grows up; but she is too young at present to judge."

"I have seen her," returned Osman Beg; "she will, indeed, be beautiful;" and he sat silent for some minutes.

"But, my lord," returned the dame, after the silence had grown too long to be safe, "according to my science, which was taught me by the blessed Saint Geesoo Daraz, of Gulburgah, the union

would not be propitious, and I warn thee of danger. Thou art water and she is fire, and would consume thee; so let it pass, I say there is danger to thee."

"Peace with thy jargon, O fool! Am I not burned already by her? Doth she not consume me night and day? By Alla, I believe she is a witch, and the old man a sorcerer, and they have been plotting their hellish magic against me. What care I for thy jargon?"

"Well, if my lord doth not fear it," she returned, "it can go on. Else — never mind, I did only my honest duty in telling and warning thee. Shall I go down to the Syud, and make my proposal for my lord? I can offer money, rank, dignity, jewels, and my lord's heart, which is already devoured by the flame of love. What girl could refuse all these, much less a Fakeer's child? May I go?"

"No," said Osman Beg, savagely; "if she is my fate, I will manage it my own way. Begone! when I need thee I will send for thee."

"What made the unblest woman name her?" he thought aloud. "Zóra! her fate is not mine according to the dame's vile jargon; and yet she is my fate, as I have known long, oh, so long. Zóra, so beautiful as thou art, how often have I watched thee, bounding among the rocks like a deer, going demurely through the village to the sick folk, and hearing blessings showered on thee by every tongue! Yet she avoids me, and shudders when she meets me. Dare I ask her of her grandfather? Useless, the Syud was insolent before, and told me the holy brotherhood could not mate with the sons of Turcoman robbers. No, she is my fate, were there a thousand dangers; and I dare it, for I cannot avert what is written. Ho, Johur! art thou without?"

The huge Abyssinian drew aside the curtain and entered, clasping his hands upon his broad chest, and stood like a bronze statue before him. "Johur," said his master, after a pause.

"I am here," was the reply.

"Johur," continued Osman Beg, after a while, "thou knowest the girl Zóra?"

"I know her—the Syud's grandchild; every one knows her."

"Does she ever come about the fort as she used to do, gathering flowers or leaves for her goats?"

"Of course she does, master; no one hinders her; we often speak to her, and she has ever a merry word for me. I pull flowers for her when she cannot reach them."

"You must bring her to me, Johur; I have much to say to her."

Johur started; he feared evil to the girl, but he dared not disobey. He well knew that his life would be the instant forfeit, and the rocks his grave, where a fellow slave had gone before him.

"She will not come readily with me," said the slave, as the tears ran down his cheeks, and his chest heaved.

"That is for thee to manage. Take Abdulla and Raheem with thee if thou wilt. Else thou knowest what will follow, and that disobedience is death. Go, be wise, and bring her."

"When? master."

"It is late to-day, the evening closes; to-morrow, if you see her, is enough; watch and see."

"I obey," said the man; "your orders are on my head and eyes;" and he withdrew. "But, oh! Zóra! Zóra!" he cried with a bitter cry as he went out, "that it should be I to have to do this deed. I would that I were dead."

CHAPTER IX.

TREACHERY.

THE next day Zóra was sitting in her little court alone, thinking of Maria, and every now and then the tears welled up in her eyes. She was sad, she knew not why, for all around her was bright and beautiful.

"She is thinking of me," she said, "and her thoughts are sad to-day, as mine are. Why doth sadness gather about me, while all are so happy? Coo! coo!" she cried; and her beautiful pigeons, rising from the roof of the little mosque, fluttered down into the court and clustered around her feet. "Say, what message shall I send her who loved you, and fed you every day? Yes, I will tell her you love her still; and I will send her one of your beautiful feathers, Zumrood!" she said to one of the birds; "you know she loved you more than any. Come hither, pretty one!" and she stooped and picked it up. "Now kiss me as you used to kiss her, you faithless bird; and let me take one of your glossy feathers for

her whom we have lost. Ah! thou shouldst not peck me, darling; it will not hurt thee. And if it does, what matter? Thou shouldst not grudge pain for one that loved thee. Behold, I suffer pain always now—always, always! and there is no relief for it. Now go;" and she cast the bird fluttering into the air. "Go, thou at least art free. Yes," she continued, smoothing down the feather glowing with bright emerald hues, "this will remind her of her pet, and she will put it to her beautiful white throat as she used to put Zumrood's soft breast, and think of me. Yes, her thoughts will come back to us; and though she is far away among great folks, when she shuts her eyes she can see us all as I see her—me, and the birds and the flowers, and the trees, and even the sick children who loved her so. And now I will write. Ahmed will be here soon, and the letter must be ready;" and, bringing out her writing materials, she sat down in the shade of the fig tree and vine, and began her simple letter, which ran thus :—

"To my sister, beloved in the Lord Jesus and his mother Mary. Greeting, from my heart; and the blessing of Alla, the Most High, and peace be with you.

"I am not used to writing, and my composition and spelling will be very bad. You must forgive them. But I must write, for my heart is full and sad because I have no news of you, which fills my mind with grief. I used not to be sad; but now you are gone I seem not to be here, but far away with you. And yet I am here, and am sitting under the fig tree, and all the pigeons are cooing about me; and I have just taken a feather from Zumrood's breast, where you used to lay it against your white throat and teach it to kiss you. They all remember you, and we all want you so much to be with us; but we cannot go to you, nor can you come to us, at which our hearts are full of grief, and my tears will fall as I write. Abba is well, but he is sad too. 'When will the Padré Sahib return to Moodgul?' he asks very often; but how can I tell him? So we are lonely, and I often lie down and weep; but that is no use, and you will say, 'Oh! foolish child to weep.' I have gone twice to the bastion with Ahmed, and sat there, and remembered all that happened. I would be there every day if I could, but they are beginning to tell me I am too old to go out by myself, and what will all the sick children do if I do not visit them? If you were here, I could go with you; but I look round and see you not. Remember I have no one in all the world but you, Maria; and when Abba dies, according to God's will, I will put on the green dress of my order and beg my way to your feet. It is sad to be alone, my

sister, very sad, and more than I can bear sometimes, and I suffered to-day; but you will read these broken sentences of mine and pity me, for I am so lonely. Abba salutes you and your brother, and even old Hoosein-bee. All the village people salute you and pray for you. I hear that Abbas Khan is well, and am thankful. What more is there to write? Behold, I have written you so long a letter that you may be angry; but my love for you urged me on, and I thought you would like to have one of Zumrood's feathers. Do not forget me."

Then Zóra made up the letter carefully, and enclosed the bright feather, and wrote the address. It was to go by a special messenger whom Abbas Khan had sent with a letter to his cousin, who was to depart in the afternoon, and who would reach Bcejapoor in two or three days. He had promised to deliver it to Maria herself, and as Ahmed had now called to her from without, she took her letter and gave it to him with many injunctions to be impressed upon the messenger about its delivery, and a rupee, which she had asked of her grandfather for the purpose. "And, oh, Ahmed!" she said, "return soon and take me to the bastion in the afternoon. I have been writing to the Lady Maria, and my heart is sad; and I would go and sit there a while, for I am always better when I do so. Wilt thou come, or shall I go alone?"

"Not alone," he replied; "not alone. Have you forgotten the panther? and you are getting too old, Zóra-bee, to go out by yourself. You should have a proper veiled garment on, for you grow too beautiful for the rough soldiers to look on. I must speak to Abba about this."

"Oh! no, no!" cried the girl, "who would harm a Syudanee? I shall never wear a veil. When I put on the green dress I shall not be veiled, Ahmed."

"May the Lord forbid thou shouldst ever wear it, my fairy," said the man, fervently. "Surely a better fate is thine than a Fakeer's life! Touba! Touba! why didst thou say that, lady?"

"I am not lady, Ahmed," she said, petulantly; "I am only Zóra, the Fakeer; and thou wilt see me go forth in the name of God and the Prophet some day. No one will harm me, Ahmed, and I fear no one."

"Thou hast a brave heart, Zóra," he returned; "but I pray Alla I may never see the day when thou hast to face the world alone. Ah, do not weep, child. I will take thee to the bastion presently, when I have got my gun; do not attempt to go alone. And this is to be the last time, remember," he continued, shaking

his finger at her as he strode away—"the last time, I swear by your feet!"

"Ah, he always says that, poor fellow!" said the girl to herself, "and yet he comes with me all the same. Now let me get my sheet and cover myself. No one shall see me, if he does not like my face to be uncovered. Abba," she continued to her grandfather, who sat thinking in the doorway, telling his beads, "I am going out for awhile with Ahmed, but I will not delay. I have not been out all the day."

"Go, Zóra," he said quietly. "May Alla keep thee! But do not delay long. My heart trembles for thee sometimes when thou art long absent; but Ahmed will be with thee, and I do not fear."

Ahmed soon returned with his matchlock over his shoulder, and its match lighted; and they set out together, and were soon at the spot so dear to the girl. Ahmed saw that she was sad, and thought she would be better alone, and, telling her so, sat down on the lowest step of those which led up to the bastion, and bidding her be careful as she passed him and went on to her old place. It was a beautiful afternoon. The fleecy clouds were no longer in motion, but were settling down into the west in thin, straight lines. The waters of the river were much diminished, but streams, touched by the sun's light, were sparkling as they descended the rocks of the cataract, and the river bed was full of gentle murmur as the water plashed among the low rocks and shallows of its course. Even the precipices and the foliage glowed with rich colours, and a sense of beauty was more predominant than the terror the scene often inspired. I think we can partly guess the girl's thoughts.

"It would have been better I had never seen them," she said to herself, "or known them as I do, for now I yearn for Maria; and though she told me not to think of him," and a blush spread over her fair face as she drew her covering over her face involuntarily. "But it is as if he were there, when he stood that day and looked kindly on me; and how can I forget him? I cannot forget that night. I may be old, I may wander among the people as one devoted to God, and the world may be hard to me, but I shall not forget."

Hers was an untutored mind, with no experience, filled only by two seemingly painful objects—her friends, for so they had seemed to her, whom she should never meet again; and the life she might have to live were she alone. What refuge, or chance of refuge, had she to look to when her grandfather passed away? And it was clear to her that he grew weaker month after month. The decay

was gradual, but it was impending; and when the end came, her battle of life would begin. It was a gloomy prospect, filled with terror, and the girl's tears fell fast and often as she sat alone, while the great river seemed to moan and sob in sympathy. How long she would have sat there it is impossible to say; the place and its recollections were too precious to her to desert; the evening was so calm and balmy, the clouds in the west were becoming golden, and the ravine and the cataract were veiled with a thin, glowing vapour, mingled with spray.

Suddenly a powerful voice from a place high in the rocks above her called out, "Ahmed! Ahmed! Where art thou?" Zóra knew the voice: it was Johur's, the Nawab's Abyssinian slave, who had often helped her to climb rocks, and gather flowers of the beautiful creepers which hung over them. "Ahmed! Ahmed!"

"I am here," shouted Ahmed, who had ascended the bastion to see who called him. "What do you want with me?"

"The master wants thee; come up: he is angry that thou art not present. Take care, he is in no humour to wait."

"I will take Zóra home," he replied, "and come to you by the main road."

"That will not do," cried the slave; "come up directly. If I go and say I have seen thee then, and thou wouldst not come, what would happen? Ah, thou knowest too well! Come, I will protect the lady."

"I must go, Zóra," said Ahmed, "or I shall be flogged. Johur will see thee home. Thou art not afraid of him?"

"No," she said, "I do not fear Johur, he is always good to me." And as she spoke, Ahmed laid his gun over his shoulder, and ran up the narrow pathway to the palace. Meeting Johur, who was descending, he asked, "What does he want with me, Johur?"

"As if I knew," was the reply. "It is some message to be taken somewhere. Go and see for thyself, and be quick," and Ahmed hurried on; while Johur, calling to Zóra, bid her wait, for he was coming to her as fast as he could. He had two other slaves with him, but she did not fear them. She had risen as he approached her, with a humble reverence, but sate down again. Her thoughts were now blurred and indefinite; her thread of meditation and enjoyment had been broken, and she seemed unable to renew it in any form. The negro had seated himself a little distance from her, on a stone, and appeared to look at her with sad eyes; and gradually a gloom as of apprehension began

to steal over her. She was about to rise, and was drawing her sheet about her, when she heard a low sob from the man, and saw tears trickle down his face.

"What is the matter, Johur?" she asked kindly, as she advanced a step towards him; "has the Nawab punished thee? Is he angry with thee?"

"It is for thee I weep, lady," he said. "I have to take thee to him; but I wish I were dead."

"Me!" exclaimed Zóra, shivering with fear; "me! to him! Oh, thou wouldst not do this evil, Johur? Hast thou not carried me over rocks, gathered flowers for me, sat here with me, and treated me like thine own child, Johur? Dost thou remember? Oh, it is not true! Tell me it is not true, and I will kiss thy feet. Take me to Abba, and he will reward thee; but do not this cruel evil in the sight of God to a Fakeer's child."

"If I speak to thee I shall fail," the man answered between his closed teeth. "If I do not take thee I shall be beheaded; my life is in thy hands, lady. Come quietly with me, I will not hurt thee."

"To him?" shrieked Zóra; "to him, the merciless? O Alla, take me!" she cried, with an exceeding bitter cry of despair, as she rushed to the low parapet of the bastion, with intent to throw herself over; but Johur caught her in his arms in time to prevent her.

"Are you mad?" he cried; "nay, if thou art, I cannot help thee. Only forgive me, Zóra-bee, for I must do this deed or die! Do not struggle so, child, you will but hurt yourself, and I shall be blamed. Ho! Abdulla, come up, quick! There, swathe her sheet round her, while I hold her; now thy blanket, Jaffur. So, now, hold it out, and I will put her into it, and walk by her side. Go gently down the steps, while I hold her."

What could the girl do. In Johur's powerful arms, strong and active as she was, she felt a very child. There had been no chance to run, else the fleetest of the three might not have overtaken her; and now, swathed as she was, and her hands tied to her sides, what could she do? It was in vain that she besought Johur to let her go; in vain appealed to his pity, to his good, kind heart, or adjured him by his mother, by his sister, and by Alla and the saints, to let her go. It was all in vain. Nor could her piteous shrieks be heard among those grim rocks, or attended to by the men who bore her on at the utmost speed the rocky path would admit of. In her agony she bit her lips till the blood flowed.

Her incessant cries grew hoarser and hoarser, her hair had become loosened, and hung dishevelled over her face, and her throat and eyes were parched and burning. Her piteous cries had dwindled into low moans, of which "Alla! Alla! Alla!" was all that could be heard; and under the shock of seizure, and the horrible anticipations which it involved, the free, active life of the girl, perhaps, only preserved her senses.

At last she was sensible of having reached level ground, and saw that a door was opened, which, as the men carried her in, was shut behind her and bolted. Then two of the palace eunuchs, whom she knew by sight, took her, as she was lying in the blanket, across the court to another door, Johur remaining by her side, blubbering like a child, and praying her to forgive him, but she could answer nothing. She could not then collect her thoughts to speak even a word; but they returned to her as two women advanced as she arose from the ground where she had been deposited, one of whom took her in her arms, and then cracked her finger-joints against her own temples.

"Welcome!" she cried, "O bride. Welcome, in the name of Ibrahim and Zapoora; welcome to thy lover's house, where thou hast gold, and jewels, and dignity, and a noble love awaiting thee."

Zóra looked at the speaker with her great eyes distended by terror and outrage, and would have flown at her like a young tigress had not the other woman intervened.

"Do not speak to her, Máma Luteefa; be quiet!" cried Shireen-bee. "Don't you see she is mad? Is this a time to speak of jewels, and riches, and a lover? Be quiet, I say. Come, my lamb, my dove, my pretty bird, come; do not be afraid; drink some cool water, and sit down and rest, thou wilt recover presently; come!"

But Zóra pushed the woman fiercely away, dashing the silver cup of water to the ground, rushing to a corner, where she crouched down like a wounded animal, drawing the scarf round her head and body. The women were afraid of her. Her utterly dishevelled hair hung in wild masses about her breast and neck; her lips were white and dry, flecked with blood and foam, which had dried there; her cheeks were already hollow and sunken, and of an ashy grey colour, while her eyes seemed sunk in their sockets, and flashed with the angry glare of a panther.

"Mercy on us!" said Máma Luteefa, trembling, "she looks as if she would spring on us like a wild cat, and tear us to pieces. What is to be done with her? Yet she is beautiful, Shireen-bee,

most beautiful in her passion. Hush! here is the Nawab; what will he do?"

As the woman spoke, Osman Beg entered the apartment. "What have ye done with her?" he said, sharply. "Johur told me she was here."

Máma Luteefa pointed to the corner, which was somewhat dark. "There she is," she said, rising. "We cannot get her to speak; she will not drink water, and sits there growling like a wild cat. We are afraid of her, Nawab Sahib."

"Afraid!" he said, savagely; "afraid! Why 'tis thy trade, Máma Luteefa, to fit brides for their husbands. Afraid!" and he stepped hastily across the room, and seizing Zóra by the arm, dragged her to her feet. "This the beauty they promised me?" he said scornfully, flinging away the girl's hand.

"Do not fling away thy destiny, my lord," said Máma Luteefa. "Behold she is beautiful, more lovely than I ever thought for. That is no low-born maiden; but whoever she is, she hath blood as good as thine, Osman Beg."

The action of the Nawab had roused all Zóra's dormant energy. "Let me go! let me go!" she cried, passionately. "Let me go! Abba is waiting for me. He will die if I do not go to him! For the love of Alla, let me go! Thou wouldst not insult a Syud's child? By your mother's honour, stay me no longer, and I will pray for thee during thy life. By the honour of and life of Queen Chand I implore thee to let me go, or I shall die, and Abba will die. How often hath the old man been kind to thee; how often sent thee medicine when thou wert ill." She had brushed aside the hair from her face mechanically as she spoke in broken words, and stood before him with her face flushed and her eyes blazing. "Insult and dishonour to me, to a Syud's child!" she continued, indignantly; "it cannot be. Nawab, if thou hast ought of justice and mercy in thy heart, have the door opened and let me go free!"

"Ha!" returned the Nawab, in a low, hissing voice, "let thee go? No, a thousand times no! Thou art very beautiful, Zóra," he continued, almost tenderly, "and I accept my destiny. For good or for evil, for honour or dishonour, I accept it as it was sent. Thou shalt be my wife, Zóra, whether thou wilt or no. Need I, Osman Beg, ask permission of a wilful child? Go to! be not a fool, Zóra! Riches and jewels may not tempt thee, but I will have thy love, if it be only to trample it in the dust and fling it away. Dost thou hear? Who defies Osman Beg perishes; yet thou mightest live in honour, and have children about thy knees, and

thy grandfather living in peace until he died. Choose, then, what thou wilt. Once thy grandfather rejected me with scorn, now my turn has come."

Zóra had been tottering as she stood; and as she watched the horrible expressions which followed each other over the Nawab's face, she became terrified, and sank fainting to the ground.

"Do not kill her, Nawab Sahib!" said Máma Luteefa, rising to support Zóra, as did also Shireen. "Do not terrify her to death. If anyone had said such words to me, and looked so fierce, and twirled his moustachios as you did, I should have died outright. It is well if this child be not dead already. Look up, my sweet, and drink. Good! now thou wilt be better." But Zóra was not better; as the water had touched her lips she fainted again.

"Instead of all your violence," said Luteefa, drawing herself up, "you should have approached her with blandishments, filled her mouth with sugar-candy, and put a string of pearls round her neck, and greeted her with a blessing. Instead of which, Alla defend us! you have terrified her out of her wits; and she is but a tender child;" and she took up the girl's head and laid it on her lap, smoothing away the dishevelled hair and wiping the dry lips with a moistened handkerchief. "Look how lovely she is, my lord, and bless Alla and me that she is thy destiny."

"Máma Sahiba," returned the Nawab, with a sneer, "thou knowest the old saying, 'Pigeons mate with pigeons, and hawks with hawks.' I am no pigeon, nor is she; we are hawks, and will live in our own fashion. She hath ever been free and wild, with no control; now she will find she hath a master, like the young colt who rears and plunges when he feels the bit and the spur, but soon discovers that it's best to go quietly. Take her up, and put her on a bed; bathe her and soothe her; put on any clothes ye will. To-morrow the Nika will be performed, and the old man will submit to what he cannot avert."

"To-morrow!" cried the women, in a breath. "Do you think we can prepare her by to-morrow? Weeks might pass before she consents."

"I have said it," he replied; "and did I wait for her consent, I should not fulfil my destiny. I cannot recall spoken words. See ye to what ye have to do; why need she know? When the Moolla has spoken the Nika, she is mine, and cannot escape. See ye to it!" and he went out haughtily.

"What can we do? what can we do?" cried Máma Luteefa, whimpering, and wringing her hands. "If it were known in Mood-

gul that I had any hand in this violence, I should lose all my practice, and my honour, and my respect—and she counted these upon the tips of her fingers—and my wealth, and my reputation. Yes, I knew they were five. But I never had a hand in anything like this before; and I will tell it in the bazaars; I will cry it from the house top; yea, I will sit in the gate of the mosque and cry it to the faithful as they go to prayers," exclaimed the dame, by way of climax. "I will even go to Queen Chand's feet, and tell it there. What do I care?"

"Beware! Máma Luteefa," said Shireen-bee, with her finger on her lips; "those unblessed eunuchs are always prying about, and might hear thee. Let us take the girl in from this cold place; and, I think, if we sent for Goolab-bee, who knows her, she might be of use; Zóra would speak to her!"

Now Goolab-bee was the seller of pán. Her husband kept the only shop in the village. Of course she knew Zóra perfectly. It was her hour for coming, too; she never failed, for she must deliver her parcel before sunset, that she might get home again before dark.

Zóra had recovered from the faint, and had sat up, looking wildly about her. Her mouth was so parched that she now drank with avidity the water that was offered to her, and held out the cup for more. She would not speak, but covered up her head in the sheet that had been thrown over her. Máma Luteefa, thinking that a familiar name would rouse her, said kindly, "Do not fret, my fairy, Goolab-bee will be here directly, and you can talk to her."

"Goolab! where is she? Oh! bring her to me if ye have any pity!" cried Zóra; and, almost as she spoke, the voice of the woman was heard without, and she was called in as she entered. Zóra rose from the bed, and rushed into her arms. "Oh! save me, mother! save me!" she cried; "take me away, they have brought me here by force, and I shall die!"

No one in the village had yet heard of the outrage; the old man only fretted that his child was away so long.

"Zóra," said the woman, bursting into tears, "thou here! My child! my child! this is no place for thee. Come away with me. Abba will be missing thee, and grieving sorely."

"She cannot go," said Máma Luteefa, grimly. "She is to be the Nawab's bride. This is only the usual shyness, and thou canst explain all to her."

"Leave us alone, then," said Goolab. "I wish to hear all from

her own lips;" and the others, thinking this but reasonable, left them alone.

And Zóra told all—how she had been carried off by the slaves; how the Nawab had threatened her, and how she feared the worst. "The two women are kind," she said, "but I cannot trust them. How can I escape, mother? he is merciless."

"There is no hope from him; but do not live without hope, my child. Alla, the Most High, protects the orphan. I will go to my husband, who is a wise man, and can advise us. I will take him to thy grandfather, and tell him too. If he consent, all may be well."

"No! no! no!" cried the girl. "I would sooner die!"

"Wait, then. I will persuade Máma Luteefa to put off the Nika, and I will come to thee early to-morrow. Thou art quite safe to-night; but eat nothing. As you live, do not trust them. Here is some parched rice. As I left the shop I filled my pocket from the basket, to eat as I came up the hill. There, tie it in the end of the sheet; there is enough to stay hunger till I come again. And now I must go, and I shall need a torch as it is. Fear not, my child; you have more friends than you wot of."

"Oh, tell him all, mother!" sobbed the girl, as she clung to Goolab's neck. "Indeed, indeed, I had no thought of this! Oh, mother, I had no thought! I was taken unawares, and tried to leap from the bastion into the river; but Johur held me, and I had no strength to escape. Tell Abba all. I have no wish to live: my honour is gone, and I can but die; and even the river is kinder than he is, for it will hide my shame."

"No! no!" sobbed the woman. "Wait, and put thy trust in the Lord, and do not think of death."

"Have you pacified her?" asked Máma Luteefa, anxiously. "Will she be quiet?"

"Yes, if you do not meddle with her," was the reply.

"And you will come to-morrow?"

"I will," replied Goolab, and hastened away.

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE NIGHT PASSED.

THE evening wore on, the golden sunset faded, and the stupendous mass of the fort became grey and dim; while on the uppermost towers the light lingered, as if loth to leave them. Still the old man hoped and hoped, and his old servant comforted him, or tried to do so, though she could not conceal her own sad fears. Had Zóra slipped and fallen into the river or into a crevice of the rocks? Had she and Ahmed been attacked by the panthers, which began to growl as the day declined? Whom could she send to see? She dare not venture herself or leave her master. Then the night fell on all suddenly; and the old man, blind as he was, knew the change from day to night had come. He was very restless, groping his way into the courtyard, and feeling in every room and corner with his staff. "Zóra! Zóra! Zóra!" he cried almost unremittingly, "where art thou? Come to me, come to me! I bid thee not delay. Oh, I shall die if thou comest not." Then he went into the little mosque, cried the evening call to prayer, and waited, but no one came. "Why had all deserted him, and Zóra too?"

When he had finished his prayer he got up and went into the house, and sat down in his usual place. "Where is Zóra?" he asked of the old servant; "hath she not come?"

"No," replied Hoosein-bee; "I daresay she is with her sick children. One is very ill, she told me so this morning; perhaps it is dying, and she is with it." It was a poor attempt to satisfy herself and calm the old man's fears, and it was all she could do to check her own sobs.

"It is night now," said her master, in a trembling voice; "the pigeons have ceased to coo, and the air is chilly. Why delayest thou, Zóra, Zóra, Zóra?" and the piteous, wailing cry began again, as he rocked himself to and fro. Sometimes he thought the panthers had killed her; again that she had fallen between the frightful crevices of the rocks and was lost. "Oh, child! so beloved, art thou dead? Dead! and the old man living? Nay, there is no justice in it. Why did Alla let her die?"

"Peace!" cried Hoosein-bee, rebuking him; "art thou accusing

God? I loved the child as well as thou didst, but if the Lord hath taken her, dare we refuse her to Him? What does it matter for us, who are old and will soon die? Peace! someone will find the child and bring her in, then it will be time enough to weep."

"I have sinned," returned the old man, submissively; "I will not complain: whatever her destiny was, I could not avert it, Ameen! Ameen!" and he rocked himself to and fro as before. "And yet," he muttered to himself, "her horoscope was fine, and there were happiness, and honour, and children, and wealth in it. And I believed that; but it may have been a deceit of Satan; and I shall never hear her sweet voice again, nor feel her soft hands about me, alas! alas!"

"I see a torch coming from the village gate," cried Hooseinbee, who had been watching from the door. "There are a man and a woman, and the torch-bearer. Master! master! they come hitherwards; they will surely have news. Let us vow offerings to the saints if Zóra be safe! Oh, Syud, dost thou hear?"

But the old man could not speak; he only rose and tottered to the door. "Are they come?" he asked, tremblingly. "Hooseinbee, who are they?"

"I see them now, master," she said; "only Peeroo and his wife Goolab-bee."

"What can they know about the child?" he returned, peevishly. "Why do they come when I am in grief?"

"Be quiet, master," she replied; "they know, else they would not come. Hark! they are calling."

"Here; I am here," she continued. "Is Zóra with you?"

"No! we will tell thee;" and they hurried forward. But when they entered the house it was no easy matter to break the tidings they brought to Zóra's grandfather. He sat trembling and speechless at first. His darling gone, only to be returned to him dishonoured and impure. His little Zóra, his beloved, his stay and support; and he blind and aged. His fairy-face, his apt scholar, all the endearing terms he had ever spoken, came from him with sighs and groans. "Oh!" he cried, "if she were only dead, so that she were pure; but polluted!"

No one could offer a word of comfort, and the pán seller and his wife could devise no means of consolation.

"Let me go to him!" cried the Syud, passionately, as he rose up. "Give me my sword, I will cut him down on his own threshold—before his slaves. Let him kill me! Ah, that would be welcome, now honour is gone! Dishonoured!" he exclaimed,

after a pause. "Dishonoured! Pain has come, blindness has come, and helplessness and poverty, but never dishonour. Yea, O merciful God, I would die, I would die! O friends, take me to him, that he may slay me."

It was no use trying to soothe this incoherent raving, and they let it have its course, till the old Syud was nearly exhausted; then Hoosein-bee brought him a cup of water, and he drank it greedily. "I am ready to go," he said, "let us depart;" and he tried to wind his scarf about his waist, and groped for his staff.

"Huzrut," said Peeroo, speaking for the first time, "what the good Alla sends us we must bear; and thou, our teacher, and a man devoted to his service, ought to show us an example. Listen, Zóra is not harmed yet, and no harm can come to her but from violence from thee. I have thought over all my wife told me, and we must get the child away while she is safe. If the Nika be said, neither thou nor any of us can help her. When Ahmed heard what my wife said, he drew his sword and swore he would go and kill the Nawab or die. Foolish man! His head would have been off his shoulders in the twinkle of an eye, and his body cast out to the jackals, and vultures, and kites. I made him reasonable, and he put up his weapon. Then we consulted. 'No one can help her but Runga Naik,' said I. 'That is a blessed thought,' said he. 'Someone must go for Runga,' I said; and Ahmed said someone must go; and we sat with our fingers between our teeth thinking. Then my wife said, 'What are you thinking about? There is only one man, and that is Kaloo, the Beydur; send him.' Kaloo is a true man, Huzrut; and would go through fire and water to serve thee, Huzrut, and Zóra, for ye saved his child. Well, Ahmed went for Kaloo, and we told him how the matter stood. 'I know the way into the zenana by the broken wall,' he said, 'and I will go and stab the Nawab in his sleep; who will know of it? I am not a Beydur if I fail.' Well, we thought this would do, but my wife said, 'Let there be no murder, it would bring a curse on Zóra. Leave the Nawab to Alla and his destiny. Send for Runga.' And Kaloo said, 'Yes, it is good, and I will go for him. He is at Kukeyra, I know, for I ought to have been with him; they have a play there, and will be up all night. I will call on him to come in the name of the Syud, and if he won't, I can only return and kill the Nawab as he is asleep.' 'Very good,' we said; 'if there is no other remedy thou shalt slay the Nawab;' and he bound up his loins, took his bundle of gourds from the roof, and his sword and shield, and is gone: he will be far across the river by this

time, and by daylight Runga will be here. That is what we have done, Huzrut, and here is Ahmed to speak for himself."

"It was all my fault, Huzrut," exclaimed the worthy fellow, bowing his head between the old Syud's knees, and sobbing. "I ought never to have left her, but I was afraid, and she knew Johur so well. It was true the Nawab wanted me, but it was an idle message to the Moolla that he wanted him; and I was going up to say he could not come then, when I met Goolab-bee, and she told me all. So, my prince, thou must be patient, and wait for Runga. Inshalla! all will be well. He and his men are able to take a man and his bed up, as he sleeps, and carry them so that he never wakes. Kaloo is gone, and we shall hear by daylight what comes of his errand. Let me see; three hours to Kukeyra, and it is now the first watch of the night. Then three hours to return, and perhaps an hour there. Men can't fly you know, my prince; but Runga Naik and Kaloo are no laggards. Let Peeroo go; I and Goolab-bee will watch by you till daylight."

"Ye are kind, ye are kind," said the Syud, "but there should be no murder. If I should never see my child again, let there be no murder. Let him live, and let the just Alla deal with him as He listeth. But, O Zóra! O my child! may all be well with thee, for I am helpless and blind, very helpless."

"Give him his opium," whispered Goolab to Hoosein, "and let him sleep." It was a merciful thought, for the aged man slept quietly through the night. As day was near the dawn, he woke, but felt as it were stunned by his great grief. "Zóra!" he cried, "get me water for the ablution, it is day." Then he remembered his great sorrow. "Zóra! who told me she was with the Nawab? Is it so, or have I had an evil dream?"

"Why should we tell you a lie, father?" said Hoosein-bee; "Zóra is not here, she is in the palace. God help her!"

"Yes," returned the Syud, "she is dishonoured," and he lay down again and moaned piteously. "O my darling! wert thou dead and in honour I should mourn thee till I die. Now, what will become of me? Alla! merciful Alla! send thine angel quickly, that he may take my spirit; behold thine aged servant is ready. I will await him," he murmured softly, "let him come;" and he lay downagain, turned to the wall, and covered his face.

"I think he will die," said Goolab, wiping her eyes; "the shock has been too great for him."

"It were perhaps better he should die than hear of further misery," said her companion. "Why do not they come? Runga Naik should be faithful."

Hoosein-bee had hardly spoken, when she heard the door of the outer court opened gently, and the voice of Ahmed, who had been watching without, speaking to some others. After a few moments he entered the room, and said, "Is he not awake? Runga is here! Is he to come in?"

"Runga!" cried the Syud, rising on his arm; "ah! he alone can save the child: let him come. Save her, friend," he continued, attempting to get up, as he heard Runga Naik enter. "Save her, and she will bless thee. And I—what can I do—who am blind?"

"Give me your blessing," returned the Beydur; "put your hands on my head, and I shall not fail. If I return not with Zóra, believe that I am dead. Have no care how we bring her, but ere the morning breaks to-morrow thou shalt have her in thy arms. Under God's help we will bring her to thee."

"But there will be bloodshed—murder, perhaps. O Runga, shed not blood!"

"It would be easy for me, with fifty good fellows, to hide in the panthers' dens, and carry the palace before any one knew of us," returned Runga, laughing; "but no force is needed, only contrivance, unless violence has been done; and then the Nawab dies. Nor would it be justice to save him. We Beydurs often take justice into our own hands if we can get it by no other means; and who can say we are wrong?"

"And who will protect us if thou bring Zóra here? I cannot help her."

"It is a sad thing, father," returned the Beydur. "Listen! but I must speak boldly. If I bring her, ye cannot stay here; ye must come with me. Across the water the Nawab and his slaves have no power, and there a thousand good swords and guns are ready to protect ye both. But wilt thou come, even for a while? Zóra and you saved his life whom I love, and shall I abandon you to grief?"

"Let it all go, though I loved it. I am but a Fakeer, and fear no change, for Alla will keep me."

"We will take what we can with us, Huzrut; and now lie down again and sleep, for we have much to do. When art thou going to the palace, Goolab-bee?" he asked of her. "Come with me, and I will explain what is to be done;" and he took her out into the court. "Ahmed tells me thou art true," he said, "else I am silent; but thou canst do much."

"She and Abba saved my child, my Pearoo, and I would go through fire for her," was the reply. "I am going up the hill at

sunrise to deliver my first bundle of pán, and I shall see her. In the afternoon I go again. What am I to say?"

"Tell the child not to sleep, not to eat; 'tis but a day's fast. At the third watch of the night two great owls will hoot near the wall of the kitchen where it is broken. If she comes after the third hoot, well; if not, I will come for her. Where is she?"

"In the court next to the kitchen court," said Goolab; "and there is no door to it. I went in yesterday by the broken wall, for the servants all use it now, and have made a pathway."

"Good," he returned; "mind, the third hoot. She must be awake and ready, and fear not. Tell her Runga Naik comes to her for Meeah's sake—would he were here, dame; would he were here. Now go! I shall rest here, and we will get what we can down to the boat as best we can."

Goolab-bee hastened away, took her bundle of pán on her head, filled her capacious pocket with parched rice, and hied up the hill with all the speed she could. She entered the kitchen court by the gap in the wall, meeting the Nawab's cook, who was one of her gossips.

"That won't be half enough, Goolab-bee," said the woman, pointing to the bundle of pán; "we are to have the Nika to-night, and more will be wanted. There will be a great feast for my lord's Nika, and you are invited to it."

"I suppose he has satisfied Zóra-bee, then," she returned, carelessly. "I will bring more pán in the evening."

"Oh, yes, she is quite satisfied; Shireen-bee told me so. She is quite ready. You know all brides require a little smoothing down. But go and see her yourself; some good fresh pán will refresh her."

"Goolab went into the next court. There was no door between them, only a curtain made of coarse black blanket. She pulled this aside, and saw Zóra sitting in the cloister of the court before the door of the room she had been in. The two women sat by her, and one of the eunuchs stood with his arms folded, at a short distance from them, idly leaning against the wall.

"Mother!" cried Zóra, in a husky voice, stretching out her arms; "mother, oh, come to me; they will not let me go to thee!"

"Ah, poor darling!" said Máma Luteefa, "we brought her out here into the cool morning air, for she did not sleep; we watched her by turns all the night, and offered her food and water, but she would not eat or drink. Now if she would take a mouthful of plain kicheri she would be better. Take her in, and speak to

her; she knows you, and will tell you we have done all we could; and my lord sent early to know how she had slept, and is anxious about her, as the Nika is fixed for to-night," she whispered, "but don't tell her."

"Come, my darling," said Goolab, "come with me, I will put thee to sleep, and watch by thee." She led Zóra to the bed where she had been laid the night before, and they were alone. The women sat without, looking in now and then, but did not disturb them.

"I have not slept, mother, though I feigned to do so. I have not spoken to them. They have been trying to persuade me to submit, but, oh, mother, I hate him! I should die if I remain longer here."

"Not long, my treasure," replied Goolab. "Runga Naik is come. Now listen, for we must not be seen to speak much; at the third hour of the night he will come and hoot like an owl, and at the third hoot thou art to go out to him by the gap near the kitchen wall. There is nothing to prevent thee. And if thou dost not go to him, he will come to thee. Fear not, and may Alla love thee and keep thee."

"I will do it," whispered the girl, throwing her arms round Goolab's neck. "If they see me, they will kill me; but I do not fear death. And Abba, how is he?"

"He is looking for thee." Till then they had spoken in Canarese, now Goolab spoke in the Dekhan dialect of Hindostanee, so that the women could hear. "Now sleep, Zóra; sleep, my darling. I will not leave thee." And she patted the girl gently, and crooned a low lullaby, as she would have done to one of her own children, holding up her finger to the women who were chattering outside. When Zóra's soft breathing assured her that the girl slept, she got up and joined the two women outside. "Zóra sleeps," she said; "she was weary, and in a strange place. No wonder she lay awake. Now, when she wakes, I will get her to eat something."

"Oh, do!" said the women, in a breath. "We could never do it. Poor child! if she only ate."

Zóra slept an hour or more, woke, and called to her old friend. "I have had pleasant dreams," she said, simply. "I was with Maria, and she looked like an angel; and he was there," and she hid her face in Goolab's bosom; "and he said, 'Zóra, do not fear;' and, oh! his voice was sweet and tender."

"Now thou must eat, my soul; I will go to the cook myself.

The Nawab's kicheri will be ready now, and it will be certain to be safe." The cook was very amiable, and readily gave what was wanted, with which Goolab-bee returned. "See, she will eat now," she said to Máma Luteefa; "I thought I could persuade her."

"Thou art a blessed woman," returned Luteefa. "If I had gone on my knees to her she would not have touched a morsel. Let her use my basin and ewer, the water will refresh her!"

And Zóra ate as much as she could, for she was weak from hunger and violent excitement, and felt strengthened. Her features resumed much of their old expression, but there was a look of determination about the eyes, and in the set lips, which was new to her old friend, who rejoiced to see it. Goolab could not delay longer. "I shall be up again in the afternoon," she said, "and will tell Abba thou art well; meanwhile be not afraid."

CHAPTER XI.

SAVED.

MEANWHILE the day wore on. To the world without in its usual fashion; but to Zóra in inconceivable misery and terror. She dare not ask the women what was going to happen; she dare not even think of her danger, which was an ever-present weight, impossible to throw off or shape into reality. Her mind was indeed in a chaos of thought. She prayed incoherently, sometimes to Alla and the Prophet, sometimes to the blessed Mother of Jesus, of whose tender pity and compassion Maria had often told her, and taught her some brief Canarese prayers. The two women sought to draw her into conversation, but she remained silent; and offered to bathe and dress her, but she refused, and resisted them with a glare of defiance which frightened them both, and they at last desisted. Nothing could induce her to eat a morsel, though their own food was savoury enough. Zóra only took a few grains of her friend's parched rice now and then from her little store, hiding it under her, and concealing her face while she ate them; and the women chattered together, smoked their hookahs, ate pán, and sometimes dozed; but the horrible eunuchs sat at the door, conversing in a low tone in a language which she did not understand.

The evening arrived at last, and the lamps were lighted in the palace. Zóra had been sensible that something was going on in the hall of audience, for the noise of men's voices and pattering feet came to her sometimes. The Nawab's furashes were in fact decorating the hall with a few garlands of leaves and flowers, and spreading a clean white cloth over the usual carpet, placing lamps in the niches of the wall, and others near the Nawab's seat on the floor.

Presently the Nawab, after proclamation of his titles by the attendants, came in and took his seat in the usual place. He was gorgeously dressed in cloth of gold, as befitted a ceremonial; but all the usual preparations for a marriage were wanting. No women sang the marriage greeting and blessing, or hung garlands of flowers about his neck. No marriage music was played without. His slaves and attendants stood around in silence, and some of the soldiers of the fort and petty officers came in one by one, saluted the Nawab, and sat down on their heels close to the wall, grimly, and with their swords resting across their knees.

The abduction of Zóra had become known to all in Juldroog, and all wondered while they deplored it; and those who had assembled were speaking in low whispers. It seemed as if, had any one given the signal, the Nawab's life would be terminated at once; but no one moved, and the Nawab preserved the same gloomy silence. "She is my fate," he murmured to himself, "and I go to meet it. They say that she has neither eaten nor slept; but what of that?"

"I beg to represent," said Janoo, who was a privileged buffoon and jester, "that these worthy gentlemen are like a court of horned owls; when one hoots they all hoot; and if no one hoots, they sit blinking at each other in silence. Cheer up, brother owls! for here comes the Moolla, and he will hoot to some purpose."

"Peace, fool!" cried the Nawab, angrily; "is this a time for mockery? Be silent!"

"Indeed, no," retorted the man, with a grimace. "This, O friends, is to be a marriage, and his reverence there is to perform it; and if ye are all as solemn as ye are at a funeral, ye had better take out your handkerchiefs, and keep them ready for the crying when the final blessing is given. But this is a marriage, friends, and the beautiful Zóra is to be the bride. Congratulate the master."

"A marriage!" cried the old Moolla, scornfully, and while the company, who had risen to salute him, were still standing. "A

marriage between thee, Osman Beg, and Zóra, granddaughter of Huzrut Syud Ali? Impossible! I forbid it in the name of the Queen and the law. I have seen the Syud, who protests. I must hear from the girl's own mouth that she is willing, and all the ceremonies must be completed, ere I can perform my functions. Is there no one here to answer for the girl?" As no one stirred, he resumed: "Will no one act as her agent? will no one answer for her dowry?"

"That is my care, Shékhjee," said the Nawab, haughtily; "it is no concern of thine."

"Is it not?" continued the old man; "is it not? Nay, every true Moslim who is present knows that it is. Would any of ye sirs, suffer daughters of yours to agree to a marriage like this?" And a low murmur arose that they would not, which sounded ominous; and some shrank away through the open archways.

"I have but asked two questions, and there is no answer," said the Moolla, looking around. "There are no messengers from the bride, no preparations for a procession. Therefore, friends, bear witness that I refuse to repeat the Qools; * that I refuse to abet violence. I am a helpless old man, who has no force to resist thee, Osman Beg, but in the name of God and the Prophet, peace be on him, I bear witness, even to the death of a martyr, that thou hast done a foul wrong, and I demand the girl Zóra from thee, in the name of Queen Chand. Dohái! Dohái!"

"Insolent!" cried the Nawab, half drawing his sword; "insolent! Thou to call me to account!"

"Be quiet, brother!" cried the buffoon, seizing the Nawab's hand; "thou art a valiant soldier, but wouldst thou murder a man of God?" Meanwhile, as he spoke, many present gathered round the brave old priest, and escorted him out of the assembly. Only a few remained, the profligate, boon companions of the Governor.

"The beginning of my fate!" exclaimed the Nawab, aside. "It is soon begun; but it shall never be said that Osman Beg was frightened by a priest. Away! one of ye take the riding camel, and bring a kazee or a priest from Moodgul before to-morrow evening closes. The camels are beyond the river. See that he takes a hundred rupees with him," he added to the treasurer. "Go! and see it done."

"Now, why be in a hurry," said the buffoon; "I will manage the marriage without further trouble. Where are the two Mámas?"

* 100th, 112th, 113th, and 114th chapters of the Koran.

Luteefa-bee had been sitting behind the curtain, listening to every word that was spoken. "Here am I, Máma Luteefa," she said, advancing into the assembly. "Your slave is present; what would ye have of me?"

"Is Zóra-bee ready, mother?" said the jester, "and willing, and accepts the dowry? And are you her agent? Whisper in my ear."

But the dame was silent. She had been at hundreds of marriages, and this was only insolent buffoonery; she knew the Nawab must wait.

"There," cried Janoo, "behold she tells me that the bride is ready; she is in the trembling condition of ecstasy and love; that she will take all the dowry she can get, and live to enjoy it as long as she can; and so I say the 'Qools,' which his reverence stuck at;" and, sitting down, he began to gabble a jargon which sounded like Arabic, ending with the usual prayer and blessing. The imitation of the old Moolla was complete, and some laughed. But the buffoonery was even too gross for those present, the imitations of the bride's modesty too absurd, and the jest fell cold even upon those profligates.

"Ye may depart," said Osman Beg, rising and passing into his chamber. As he brushed by Luteefa he said in a hoarse whisper,

"Prepare her for to-morrow; she hath escaped me to-day."

"If it had been done," said the dame to herself, "he would have wedded a corpse. Can't he wait, and let me manage things regularly and with order? What can I do by to-morrow? If Goolab leaves us, the girl would dash her head against the wall and die."

Goolab had been a spectator of the jester's mummery, and had a worse opinion of the Nawab's honesty than Máma Luteefa. She had, in fact, the utmost suspicion that foul insult was intended, and only partly veiled by the mummery of the buffoon; but she heard his whisper to the Máma, who now made no secret of it, and that consoled her.

"We have escaped for to-night," she said, as she sat down, with a pious ejaculation. "Ul-humd-ul-Illa! Nothing hath been regular, and there was no kazee present, only the old Moolla, who defied him. Now it is to be to-morrow night, if a kazee can be found, and thou must be willing then, my pearl. The Lord put away evil from thee, and truly from us all."

With what horrible fears Zóra had been filled we will not attempt to describe. She had heard indistinctly the commotion

when the old Moolla departed, and she knew his voice well. Then there had been strict silence; but when the buffoon's jargon began, she had believed it was the real service, spoken by another priest, and she lay trembling and gasping for breath in unspeakable horror. But Goolab-bee had already assured her in some degree, and Máma Luteefa's speech gave her a confidence she had hardly hoped to feel.

She lay down on the pillow, and covered herself up. She would eat nothing, though Goolab pressed her, for she was sick with apprehension. After awhile Máma Luteefa and Shireen lay down on their thin cushions, and drawing the heavy coverlets over them, for the night was chilly, were soon fast asleep and snoring. Now and then the eunuch on guard without looked in, and, seeing all quiet, seemed content; and after a while another came and sent him away, and she heard midnight struck on the fort gong. "Three hours more," she thought, "and it will be time;" and she could almost hear the beating of her own heart. The eunuch on guard moved about now and then, and looked in through the door, yawning. At last she saw him fold his blanket about him and lie down close to the door, and heard him begin to snore loudly. She waited for some time, then arose noiselessly and put out the lamp that was burning in a niche above her head; but there was light enough from without to see by.

The Máma and her servant slept profoundly, and Goolab-bee, who lay beside the bed, did the same. Zóra noiselessly approached the door, but was close to the eunuch. She could see his face distinctly in the moonlight. He lay on his back, his sword in his hand, but was dead asleep like the others. Then, after an interval which seemed interminable, and she had begun to think that Runga could not come, a blessed sound fell on her ear—a low hoot, which seemed answered by another at a short distance among the rocks. Her heart beat violently, but she pressed her hand to her side to still it, while a smile passed over her face as she raised her eyes in prayer. Again the owl hooted, louder than before, and was almost immediately followed by another somewhat shriller and more sonorous, and she could hear the faint echo from the precipices beyond the ravine. "He is ready now," she murmured. "May the good Alla save me!" and she stepped into the court.

The moon shone brightly upon the side of the court where the apartment was, but she moved noiselessly and gently into the

shadow opposite, and in an instant more she had gained the door of the kitchen court, drawn aside the blanket curtain, and fled across to the gap. For an instant she paused to notice if any alarm had been given, but all was quiet; the silvery moonlight fell on every object around her, and revealed them. Rock and wall, and the ravine of the river beyond, and the cataract, bathed in her rays, and sparkling in flashes as her light struck the moving water.

Above her, on the highest bastion of the fort, a sentinel stood watching, and she saw the glint of his match-lock barrel as he moved. Then she descended a few steps, and a loose stone rolled down the path. She heard the soldier above fling a stone at the place with a curse, conceiving, no doubt, that the noise was occasioned by a prowling panther or hyena. But Zóra was safe now; a tall figure emerges from behind a high rock, and in an instant more she was taken up like a child in Runga's arms. "Silence!" he whispered; "silence, lady! we are not quite free of danger, but there is no alarm as yet; fear not." Then two other men joined them, and they sped on as swiftly as the rough ground permitted.

"I am quite strong now," said Zóra; "let me go, Runga, I will follow thee."

The relief from Zóra's weight enabled Runga to step more surely, and he led the way. They descended among the rocks for a time, till they reached an apparent hole, where two huge masses of granite met each other. It was all black darkness within.

"Art thou afraid, lady?" asked her conductor; "but have no fear," he added; "the beasts are all away seeking food. Hold by my waistband and tread firmly."

Zóra felt no fear, though she almost shuddered at the intense darkness, and the smell of beasts and bats made her sick and faint. Presently she saw a glimmer of light at the end, and was reassured. "Let who will awake now," said Runga, laughing; "we have thrown dirt on the Nawab's beard, no one has been killed, and thou, Zóra-bee, art safe. I say for his sake, even my master's, you are safe; but had you been harmed, by Krishna! the Nawab had died."

They stood on a small piece of level sward, and she could see the three Beydurs distinctly in the moonlight. They were dressed in their leather caps, and hunting suits also of leather; and their figures, unless they moved, could not have been seen. Zóra could not resist the impulse; she felt she was free, and that these men had risked their lives for hers, and passing rapidly from one to

another, she stooped down and touched their feet. She could not speak.

"Look!" said Runga, "yonder is the mosque, and a light is burning; they are looking for us. We have come by the panthers' den, and who dare follow? Come! we must cross the river ere the dawn rises, and the boats are ready."

There was no need to urge Zóra on. She felt no weakness now, and she ran down the slope, lightly as a fawn, into the well-known path to the bastion. The postern was open, and at her utmost speed she ran along the soft sward to the house, and rushing into the door abruptly, stood panting amidst the group within. "Safe! safe!" she cried; "the good God and Runga have saved me! And Abba, where is he?"

"We have sent him down to the boat," said Ahmed, who was crying like a child. "Come away! come away! All the things are gone; and your books, and clothes, and the lady's picture, all safe long ago."

"Only let me look round the court, and I come," she said; "I will not keep you." All was bare and empty. The morning breeze was just rising, and sighed among the tops of the tamarind trees. Some pigeons had just awakened in the mosque, and were cooing gently. All else was still. It was no time for thought, and Ahmed was calling. They were all assembled now, and Runga led the way at a rapid pace. By the side of the river was a fire of thorns and sticks, and a group was standing around it, amongst it her grandfather, leaning on his staff; and running forward Zóra fell at his feet, and clasped his knees. "He saved me, Abba! he saved me!" was all she could ejaculate. It seemed to her that her heart was bursting with ecstasy. As for her grandfather, he stood holding his child in his arms, casting his blind eyes up to the sky, and his lips moved gently in prayer. Old Hoosein-bee was already in the boat, sobbing for joy.

"Look!" cried Runga Naik, stretching out his arm. "They have missed you, and are looking for you, Zóra-bee. Look at the torches flitting about the rocks; but thou art safe now, child. Safe, Abba! Say, have I done what I promised? Away with ye!" he cried to the rowers; and under the vigorous strokes of eight oars the boat shot rapidly down the current, and soon reached the opposite shore in safety.

END OF BOOK I.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER XII.

BEEJAPOOR.

WESTWARDS from the city of Beejapoor the ground rises in a succession of barren downs, which decline in gentle undulations towards the broad valley of the Done river to the east, the valley of the Krishna to the south, and the general plateau of the Dekhan to the west and north ; and they form the most elevated portion of the country lying between the Bheema river to the north and the Krishna to the south. At the period we write of, these downs were uncultivated, as, indeed, from the shallow nature of the stony surface soil, they still are for the most part ; and the natural grass was preserved, partly as forage for the great city, and for the Royal cavalry stationed in its vicinity. In a military point of view also it was necessary to keep the ground beyond the suburbs of the city as open as possible on all sides; and in consequence there were few villages, and but little cultivation, except market gardens, attached to any of them.

Beejapoor depended for its supplies of grain upon the fertile valley of the Done, a singularly productive tract exemplified by the Dekhan proverb, "If the crop in Done fail, who can eat? If the crop ripens, who can eat it?" The Beejapoor downs bore neither trees nor jungle of any kind to break the loneliness of their aspect. Here and there a little low brushwood appeared to struggle for existence ; but the demand for firewood was so great in the city, that the bushes were cut down almost as soon as they sprung up, and afforded no corn for wild animals of the larger species. Antelopes, however, were very numerous, and roamed in large herds over the grassy slopes ; while wherever a tiny rill, issuing from some spring below the crests of the highest portions of the tract, trickled down a very small valley, its borders were plentifully stocked with feathered game of all kinds and hares.

From the highest points of these downs many a noble view is obtained of the country around. The heights descend by gradual

slopes into the less elevated tracts on all sides, producing long, wavy lines, not only of conformation, but of tints blending in exquisite harmony, from the decided though monotonous colours of the foreground to the greys, blues, and dim purples of the far distance. For the most part, on three sides there are no objects to break the continuous uniformity, whose monotony is only varied by difference of colour; but to the northward lies the noble city, then, as now, changing the dreary expanse into a vision of superb splendour; and it is evident that the aspect of the city cannot have altered in any great degree in effect for the last three hundred years.

The isolated palaces of the suburb of Torwéh, and the gardens which follow the course of the little stream on which they were laid out, appear from a short distance as perfect and as fresh as ever. The groves of tamarind and mango trees, out of which they rise, are still luxuriant; and here and there the feathery palm foliage of a cocoa nut lends additional grace to the view. Even the palaces, though now ruined and roofless, have the appearance of being yet perfect, and stand out of the foliage as if decay and the spoiler had not touched them.

Beyond Torwéh, northwards, the vast city spreads over the plain to the fort and citadel, which terminates the view. The lines of streets are distinct, and that of the principal one, three miles in length, remarkably so; and it is only when the traveller draws near that the illusion is dispelled, and the streets are seen to be lanes amidst borders of crumbling walls, and the whole to be a mass of ruin only broken by the tottering remains of a house, a mosque, a palace, or other building which has resisted the effects of time and desolation. Here and there a few houses remain in clusters, which have, as it were, survived destruction, and have become, indeed, separate villages; but even they seem to be out of place among the general decay of all around them.

As the fort wall is approached at the end of the long street it is seen to be quite perfect. The noble gateway, with its flanking bastions and loopholed defences, rampart and towers, with their fausse-braye and broad ditch and counterscarp, lead to the supposition that within, at least, prosperity still endures; but this, too, is a delusion, for on every side is ruin even more melancholy and more impressive than that without. In the outer town there had been few buildings calculated to resist time. For the most part built of rough stone, with clay for mortar, and terraced clay roofs, yet it had fallen when abandoned to disrepair; but within, the most

costly palaces, the magnificent citadel, public edifices which have been palaces, mosques, bazaars, mausoleums, have toppled down into ruins, or show, if they are still entire, the condition of neglect into which they have fallen. Thanks to the British Government, a few of the finest edifices have been placed in good repair, and are so maintained; but all that was private property, palaces, gardens, mosques, mausoleums, have already crumbled away, or are disappearing as fast as their wonderfully tenacious construction will admit of.

With the ruined aspect of Beejapoor, as the traveller now sees it under feelings of wonder and admiration, I have no concern. Those palaces, now desolate, from which the horned owls hoot the night through, have to be restored; those miles of streets have to be rebuilt and repeopled; the busy population which thronged the deserted expanse presented as they were at the period of this tale, when Beejapoor contained upwards of a million and a half of people, and its Government was the most powerful in the Dekhan, for the power and prosperity of the State and its people were then at their zenith, and all that wealth, taste, and art could do to embellish the Royal city was being freely lavished by men of all conditions, from the young King Ibrahim Adil Shah II. to the nobles, merchants, and religious orders over whom he ruled.

Then, as the spectator, turning round, looked back from the heights we have mentioned beyond Torwéh, the scene was, indeed, magnificent. The palaces of Torwéh, perfect in their noble extent, with their bright terraces, their large carved lattice windows, some of them open, which showed them to be inhabited, were in bright contrast to their present condition of huge misshapen apertures, from which the windows have been torn and removed altogether.

People were moving about these terraces and gardens in all directions, and the song of the drawers of water at the garden wells was borne upon the morning air. Beyond was the busy city and its countless objects, with the smoke rising up from the early fires, and covering it as with a thin blue veil of mist. Palaces, mansions, bazaars, mosques, temples, with their spires, domes, and minarets, were intermingled with the terraced roofs of the houses, and showed no break in the continuity of the streets and suburbs, leading the eye onwards to the fort itself, which terminated the view, for here the chief interest of the great panorama centred, and the noblest buildings seemed clustered together.

To the right, a little way outside the south-east gate of the city,

the noble mausoleum of the Ibrahim Roza was now rising slowly to eventual completion; and at the period we write of, the mere outlines of one of the most superb buildings in India were hardly recognisable; but beyond that, within the fort gate, all the public edifices which now claim the admiration of those who see them, were then at their gayest and brightest—the great grim cavalier which overlooks all; the splendid bastion, on which the largest gun in the world is mounted; the domes of the mausoleum of Ministers of State, Princesses, and Royal servants, rising out of the soft foliage of the Royal deer park. Again, the citadel, with its lines of ramparts, bastions, and wet ditches, its crowd of Royal palaces and public offices, among which the graceful and elegant seven-storeyed edifice reared its dizzy height. Many of them rich with gilding, and all with the perfect appearance of residences and use.

On the northern edge of the citadel stood the Asar Mahal, then recently constructed to contain the sacred relics of the Mussulman faith which had arrived from Mecca, in itself a noble edifice, which of all the Royal buildings is alone perfect as it was left. To the right of the citadel rose the fine domes and minarets of the Jooma Mosque, where six thousand men could kneel at prayer; and thence the eye, passing over a plain partly bare, used as an encamping and exercising ground, and partly covered by mosques, private palaces, and dwellings, rested upon the huge mass and dome of the mausoleum of Sultan Mahmood; all else seeming to lie at its feet like pigmies. As the dome of St. Peter's towers above all other objects at Rome, so in Beejapoor all seemed dwarfed beside and around this huge structure, which, second only to the Pantheon in outward diameter, was then, as it is still, the glory of Dekhan architecture. Away to the north was a wide, barren plain, often the scene of heavy general actions, dotted here and there with groups of mausoleums, or single edifices, and with a crowd of more humble tombs, lining the high way to the small village of Allapore, which occupied the summit of a height behind; and thence away to the north spread the wavy lines of undulating distance, till they mingled together in the distant horizon.

As yet all was grey, for the sun had not risen; but his beams were fast filling the eastern sky, and tinging the light clouds with crimson and gold, heralding the birth of a new day, and in a few moments more the fiery globe, magnified by the earth mists, rose over the horizon. The change then was as striking as it was

superb. The eastern plain seemed filled with a rosy, golden light, and the distinctness of objects was blurred by it; but nearer, every object in the city and plain assumed a new beauty; the sombre mass of the great mausoleum shone with a roseate glow, its gilded spire flashing in the sun; so also the Jooma Mosque, the delicate Mehturi Mahal, the palaces and gardens within and without the citadel, with their gilded spires and white terraces.

All that the eye had followed while they were yet dimly grey, burst on the sight as if endowed with a fresh life from the new day which had come; even the Royal flag, which had drooped against its staff on the high cavalier, was stirred by the faint breeze which rose with the sun, and fluttered out as if rejoicing in the freshness of the dewy morning, and flags waved from bastions and palaces, and Moslem and Hindoo shrines and temples; while the early Royal music playing out as the sun rose, followed by that of nobles who enjoyed the privilege of the "nóbat," came fitfully and sweetly upon the clear air even to that distance; and the rosy light of morning passing from the higher buildings to the lower, lighted up all in an effulgence which was almost dazzling in its collective splendour.

Ere the sun had risen, a numerous party which issued from the Royal palaces at Torwéh had ridden slowly up the rising ground beyond, and spread out very considerably, evidently with the purpose of beating the grassy slope for game. On the right and left flanks of the line, nearly a mile from the centre on both sides, heavy bodies of cavalry marched at a slow but steady pace onwards, regulating their movements by those of the party in the centre; sometimes halting, if they had proceeded too far; sometimes despatching parties further to the right and left, to drive the game as much as possible into the centre.

The cavalry—one division being Abyssinians, the other Dekhanis—were accompanied by their accustomed bodies of elephants in their war panoply, and green or scarlet housings; but there was no noisy clash of bells, as was usual when war elephants moved, lest it should disturb the deer, and both bodies of cavalry marched with that deep, hollow, rustling sound which proceeds from large numbers. In the distance, and before the sun rose, they appeared to be dark, heavy masses; but a nearer view would have shown the men to be handsomely, not to say gaily, clad—many wearing shirts of mail, or other defensive armour, and steel morions, round which gay scarfs were wound; while the housings of their horses were as rich and gay as their

own dresses. They were by no means uniformly armed, for each man wore what arms he pleased, or in which he was most expert; but with the Abyssinians, with whom were bodies of Persians, Tartars, and other foreigners, the bow seemed to be the favourite; while with the Dekhanis the national spear showed gay fluttering pennons over the mass of their superb force, which gave a livelier effect to their detachment than to that of the other party.

In the centre was a small cavalcade consisting of not more than twenty persons, all gorgeously attired, who were in attendance upon one to whom all, it was evident, paid extreme deference. Some of these were the chief eunuchs of the State, who, for the most part, were Nubians or Abyssinians; others the chief officers of the hunting establishments, and the commanders of the bodies of cavalry, who attended to receive any orders that might be given to them; and although their splendid costumes and martial figures might well command attention, all seemed to dwindle in interest before the strikingly attractive figure on whom they were in attendance.

This was a lady, who, after the fashion of a man, as was the custom of the Dekhan, rode a milk-white Arab or Dekhan palfrey, of beautiful proportions and evidently high spirit. Its caparisons were of the richest, softest bright blue Genoa velvet, deftly quilted and padded, so that the seat of the saddle was luxuriously soft and comfortable. The whole of the saddle-cloth, housings, and broad crupper piece, as well as the neck and head pieces of the suit, were richly embroidered with heavy gold patterns, studded with seed pearls, in the style for which Beejapoor was then famous, and of which some of the embroidered carpets, throne seats, and curtains, still preserved in the Asar Mahal, frayed and faded now, are interesting examples.

On its crest between its ears stood a plume of glittering feathers, composed of bright gold tinsel, which stood in a socket of gold set with flashing diamonds, which sparkled at every toss of its beautiful wearer's proud head. The bit, a short curb, was of steel, inlaid with gold and diamonds, while the broad bridle rein, of the same velvet as the housings, was embroidered with seed pearls like the rest of the trappings. The beautiful animal in its perfect caparisons was in all respects an object of true admiration; but, compared with the rider, at once lost interest and dwindled into a secondary place.

She, for it was the Dowager Queen Chand, sat her horse with

the most perfect grace and mastery of its often fiery spirit, and her costume, though simple, was suitable to her high rank. On her head she wore a light steel morion, round which a white muslin scarf of the finest texture was bound as a sort of turban, and a handkerchief of the faintest rose colour, with borders of narrow gold tinsel, was tied over the crown and below the chin, so that the face, except the eyes, was concealed. Her tunic, worn high to the throat, was of white cloth of gold of the richest texture, and her breast was crossed by a baldrick of broad gold lace, which was confined at the waist by another white muslin scarf, the gold brocaded ends of which hung down at her right side.

Thus, except the light yellow Persian boots of the softest leather, which reached high above her knees, and were embroidered in white floss silk, there was no positive colour about the Queen's figure, and yet the richness and beauty of her whole equipment were strikingly chaste and elegant.

The Dowager Queen had worn no colour since her widowhood, and that was now long ago. On her arms, from the wrists to the elbows, she wore light gauntlets of steel, inlaid with gold and set with diamonds, which were clasped over her rounded arms; and upon her right hand and wrist was the strong glove and gauntlet on which her favourite falcon sat proudly erect, his light musical jesses clashing with the gentle motion of the well-trained horse. Nothing could have been more perfect than the figure of the Royal lady. Her face could not be seen, but the close-fitting tunic showed a perfect grace of contour; and though the figure was very small and slight, like that of a girl, yet it displayed by the firmness of the seat unwonted ease, strength, and confidence.

The Queen's seat was perfect, not even that of the most practised cavalier could have excelled it. She was seemingly part of the horse itself, while the animal appeared to feel the light weight he bore only as a pleasure to urge him to those bounds and caracoles in which his Royal mistress delighted. It was not often that the Queen could enjoy a morning ride over the downs with true zest, but the freshness of the air, the gallant company around her, the Royal falconers, the gaily caparisoned carts, on which sat the hunting leopards, and the crowd of beaters, grooms, mace-bearers, and others who followed the Royal cavalcade, were for the time truly inspiriting.

On the crest of the first of the long waves of elevation which have been described the Queen drew rein, and turning round looked over the city. At first the distance was grey and misty, as we

have seen it; but as her eyes wandered over the expanse, they seemed to fill with tears, as her bosom heaved responsively.

"I have loved thee like a mother her child," she thought to herself; "and thou art still mine in all thy beauty. How long, how long, O Alla! wilt thou continue it to me and mine? But with all its faults thou hast blessed it, and thy poor servant; and thy mercies none can tell. Other cities have been ravaged, but as yet no enemy hath placed foot in this; and what could a weak arm like mine have done without thee!"

Almost as she spoke the sun rose up, and the golden and rosy light we have already mentioned spread over the whole scene, even to her very feet. Her slight veil had somewhat fallen from her face, and the light now showed a soft rounded cheek, flushed with rich colour by exercise, on which the sun's light rested lovingly; while silent tears, also catching the golden ray, welled up in her eyes, fell over the lids, and trickled down her cheek. There appeared to be no sadness in them, only the outpouring of a great loving heart before its Maker. Then, too, while the light flashed over her own beautiful dress, it caught the spears, the morions, and the armour of the bodies of the cavalry in glittering points, which dazzled the eye and lent fresh splendour to the martial array.

"Come!" cried the Queen, as she turned her horse, "thou hast been impatient, my pearl; and thou, too, Diamond," she said to the horse and the falcon; "but I promise ye a race this morning, if a quarry rise, that shall content ye. Come, sirs, we linger."

Now that the Queen was once again in motion, the main bodies of cavalry on the wings fell back, so as not to interfere with the Royal sport. Two of the light carts of the hunting leopards came to the front, and took their places considerably in advance of the Queen's line, one on each hand, while men with sparrow-hawks or small falcons flew them continuously at quails or partridges as they arose from out of the thick grass. Now scouts on a crest about half a mile in advance made signs that a herd of antelopes was near, with several black bucks in it, and the leopard carts pressed on with somewhat increased speed, the Queen and her line keeping pace with them.

Thus the carts reached the crest of the rise, whence the view to the front was open; but the Queen waited below the crest till she should see whether either of the leopards should be loosed or not, and in a few moments the result was apparent. One of the leopards had its cap removed, the antelope pointed

out to it, when it leaped gently from the cart to the ground, making its way gradually towards the herd, which, partly lying, partly grazing, was in the little valley below; while the cart in which it had been fastened was driven on to the right, to keep up the notice of the deer, who appeared to watch it unconcernedly. Meanwhile, the Queen, with some of her footmen and attendants, pressed up the ridge, whence the scene could be easily and completely watched.

They could see the leopard distinctly making its way down the slope, taking advantage of every inequality of ground, of small bushes, of ant-hills, and even of tufts of grass; creeping softly from one to another, and crouching to the ground if the deer showed the slightest symptoms of alarm. Once a huge black buck, the monarch of the herd, rose from the ground where he had been lying, stretched himself lazily, and ran playfully after some young fawns who had dared to approach him; and the leopard seemed to understand this, for it lay as if dead among some grass of very much its own colour. Presently it looked up, and saw the buck grazing with its head turned away; and a few more moves were made, the leopard crouching whenever there was a chance of being seen.

It was a strange sight to watch the extreme sagacity of the leopard in securing its natural prey. Until it got within a certain distance from which the deer could be run down, anything might cause a failure; some skittish doe or fawn might run and alarm the whole herd, and if so all chance of capture must be abandoned. Now, however, the leopard's runs were shorter and more frequent, and yet there was no alarm; the deer were lying on a spot where the grass was short and sweet, and there were little mounds here and there which afforded ample cover for their enemy, who was now so near that the Queen could not help exclaiming to one of the falconers near her,—

"Fie on the brute! he is a coward, Ahmed, and shall be shot if he fails!"

"Nay, lady," was the reply, "he is no coward. Your slave never saw him miss. Look!"

As the man spoke the leopard had made at last one spring forward towards the buck, from a distance of some yards; but ere it could seize the deer, it had bounded off at a pace which can hardly be described, followed closely by its pursuer, and for a few seconds it seemed doubtful whether the speed of the deer or the leopard would be the greater. The actions of both were beautiful;

the deer with its head thrown back, its body stretched till its belly almost touched the ground; the leopard's movements so rapid that they could hardly be followed by the eye. But there was no doubt at last; putting forth all its speed and strength, the leopard seized the buck by the throat with its powerful teeth, and with the impetus both rolled over together.

"Shabash! Shabash! Well done, well done! good Julloo!" cried the Queen, enthusiastically, as she raised her bridle hand and cantered down the slope, as at the same time the leopard's cart was rapidly driven to the spot, and the customary offering made to the animal to induce it to quit its prey. "Shabash! Julloo! Shabash!" said the Queen, as, reaching the spot, she guided her snorting horse up to the cart, and patted the sleek skin of the leopard. "Thou hast done well, my son."

"And he is ready to do the same again, lady," said his keeper, with a profound reverence, "if he may, and if your Majesty be not weary."

"Nay, Hussein, I am never weary of good sport. Time has been, as thou rememberest, when I, a girl, rode with our Royal master on the plains beyond the Krishna from morning till sundown, and the sweetest meals we ever ate were those that thou and thy fellows used to cook for us. Well, some such thoughts as these came over me as I stood on the top of the crest yonder, and 'tis no harm telling them to thee, for thou hast not forgotten old days."

The man looked up, his rough cheeks and grizzled beard wet with tears, and kissed her foot reverently.

"No, lady," he said, gently. "Those who never forget the humble offices of their poor servants live in their hearts, and those of their children. Such an one art thou, and wilt be till Alla calls thee to join him who is gone! Surely thy poor servant is blessed this day that he hath brought back the memories of old times that were so happy!"

"And now away; take thy place; there will be no more deer till the next ridge is passed; and this herd took to the west, I think. Then we will go southwards, and beat round by the Talikota road; perchance we may find a heron or a floriken, for the falcon is impatient;" and she rode on up the gentle slope before her, which was clothed with the low soft white grass in which floriken like so much to lie; and she had not reached the crest before a fine bird rose silently out of the grass and flew lazily on.

In an instant, however, the Queen had loosed the hood of her

favourite, and cast off the cord which tied its leg to her wrist, and the noble bird at once darted in pursuit of its quarry. The Queen followed, and her spirited horse strained at the bit to increase his speed; but the Queen contented herself with keeping the birds well in view, and watching the final swoop, though it might be prolonged. Indeed, few of the Royal falcons could ever succeed in striking down a floriken strong on the wing; its powerful swift flight, its endurance of distance, were very different from the comparatively sluggish flight of a heron; and it required a really good rider and horse to follow the direct flight taken. Fortunately, on these downs the ground was firm if sometimes stony, and the Queen rode on nearly at full speed until she saw that except a few distant horsemen she was quite alone. Still she did not slacken her speed, and alternately ridge and valley, valley and ridge, were passed; and still the birds flew. At last the floriken turned, and strove to evade its pursuer; but the effort was futile. After a few turns the falcon struck it down, and began tearing off its feathers.

Just then a man, who was evidently one of the cavaliers of the city, dashed up at full speed, and dismounting from his horse began to call in the usual manner of hawkers to the falcon, but the bird did not know him, and paid no heed to his endeavours; and at this moment the Queen, dashing over a slight eminence by which she had been concealed, and crying to the stranger to refrain, drew rein and called to the bird herself, at the same time tossing a small strip of flesh in the air, which she took from a pouch at her saddle-bow.

"Who art thou that interferest with the Royal falcons, and who taught thee falconry to attempt to secure a hawk in that clumsy fashion? Who art thou?" she said, sharply.

"Your Majesty has forgotten me," said the young man, removing the scarf with which he had tied up his face during his march; "and yet may allow your slave, Abbas Khan, to kiss your feet;" and the young man advanced and made a low obeisance, even to the ground.

"Mercy of God!" cried the Queen; "and thou art surely in the flesh! Why, they told me thou hadst been killed in battle; then that thou wert sorely wounded, and dying in some fort."

"Thy slave is in truth here, and his destiny is propitious that he hath thus met your Majesty alone. But is it seemly that my Royal mistress should be thus alone? Where be all the laggard attendants?"

"No one could ride with me, Khan. None of their heavy war chargers have so fleet a foot as my Mótee. Nay, by all the saints, he seems as if he had not forgotten thee."

"Nor need he, lady," was the reply, "for I have often fed him and exercised him, and have taught him some of his paces." And Mótee had not forgotten his kind teacher; he buried his nose in his hand, and rubbed it gently against the young Khan's breast.

"And who is this?" cried the Queen, smiling, as a strange figure rode up on an ambling palfrey. "By all the saints, was there ever so strange a figure on a horse!"

"It is my friend, the Senhor Padré of Moodgul, whom I received orders to bring with me. Dismount," he said to the priest; "this is the Queen, and thou shouldst give her thy salutation."

"Nay, but my blessing," said the priest, humbly, kneeling on one knee, and taking off his hat and bowing low. "The blessing of God and Mary the mother of Jesus be on the most noble and virtuous lady of her time!"

"The blessing of a holy man is ever acceptable to me," said the Queen, with a gentle inclination.

The Padré had made no alteration in his usual priestly attire. His broad-brimmed shovel hat of his order covered his head; his black cassock descended almost to his feet; inside, he wore a pair of strong riding drawers and his under garments, and a pair of simple sandals on his feet.

"A Nazarene Fakeer," continued the Royal lady; "as such thou art welcome to our house. But who taught thee to speak such excellent Persian? I could follow thee at once."

"I learned it in my Lord's service, as I learned Canarese also," replied the Padré; "but I speak Canarese better."

"Wonderful!" cried the Queen; "it is even as I heard when I sent for thee. Abbas Khan, wilt thou see to the good man's comfort till I can give my own orders?"

"And his sister, Doña Maria, is in the litter which they have set down yonder."

"I had hoped so," returned the Queen. "I fear I shall not be able to see her at once. We shall be at Torwéh till to-morrow evening, and the next day there will be a durbar in the gilded palace. Fail not to come."

"And my uncle, lady?"

"He is away with the King towards Purendah. There is no peace, I grieve to say, with Ahmednugger; but thou hast heard this. And thy wound is well?"

"It is quite healed, and now I am strong again, ready for my Queen's service wherever it needs me."

"Ah, well! we will speak of that by-and-bye, Abbas Khan; but meanwhile have great care to thyself, for I have heard unpleasant rumours, and thou knowest I am thy well-wisher. Do not cross the Abyssinians; they are not friendly, I hear, to thee. But I cannot explain more here, a body of them is in the field with me, and it would be well if thou couldst avoid them. Take the road by the Roza, it will be the safest."

As she spoke the Queen turned her horse, and without waiting a reply, cantered up the slope by which she had come, and meeting her attendants at some distance, displayed her trophy of the chase.

"Ye were but laggards," she said, with a smile, to the eunuchs. "I, and my Diamond, had all the honour, had we not?" and she stroked her glossy favourite's plumage, caressingly.

"But how did your Majesty get the bird? Who held your stirrup? Surely you have been too rash!" said the head falconer.

"I did not dismount, my friend. A passing traveller picked it up for me, and Diamond came to my wrist at my call. Enough, sirs, for to-day; we are far from the palace, and the sun grows hot, even though my umbrella is over me. Take Diamond from me, one of ye, he is too heavy for my arm now that the chase is past."

CHAPTER XIII.

A RETROSPECT.

As the Queen rejoined her party she rode on in silence, musingly. "They told me," she thought to herself, "I should never see the boy again; that he lay wounded and dying in a distant fortress; and there were many who wished, doubtless, in their hearts that he had died—many to whom news of his death would have been welcome, to prevent strife. Yet, would that have prevented it? Alas! how many times hath it sprung out of trifles! How often the streets of my city have been red with the blood of my own people! And now, again, these scenes may be renewed if this poor fluttering heart be not firm! Ever since his dying mother put him, a babe, into my arms, and said he was my son—ever since his father, wounded to death, gave his hands into mine, and

asked me—for the sake of the blood shed for me—that I would be a mother to him, have I not been so? Brought him up with the King, as his foster-brother; borne with all his waywardness and rashness, and yet loved to hear of his gallant deeds, and his devotion, and his honour? And now am I to believe that he is an assassin and a coward? that he slew Elias Khan treacherously, and abandoned his people to destruction without striking a blow in their behalf? No! His face is as fair and open as ever. His eyes could not have met mine so frankly had they been those of a coward and traitor; and I must hear from his own lips all the particulars of what has occurred ere I can make any decision. I should not fear were the King present; but he is far away, and some time must elapse ere he returns. Yet why should I fear? Greater crises have passed over me than this; and the just Alla will help me to avert strife, as He has done before. My boy will come to me to-morrow. He shall attend the durbar, and in that he will hold himself, as he ever doth and ever will, as a true and brave man should. I will caution him to speak the truth fully, yet not so as to give offence, and among soldiers who hear him that will carry greater weight than my poor words. So, O beating heart, fear not, for the Lord is just, and thus I trust, though I am but a weak woman."

The little colloquy with herself seemed to have revived the Queen's confidence; her joyous spirits returned, and, as was usual with her, she chatted gaily with those around her; and the field duty being concluded, many of the leaders of both Abyssinians and Dekhanies joined the cavalcade which preceded and followed her to the Royal palace.

I think, however, that it would be interesting to my readers to know something of the real antecedents of this Royal lady; and without attempting history, which would be out of place, I may be able to review some of the events of her life briefly, yet with sufficient distinctness to furnish materials from which her character may be judged, at least, in some respects. The Mussulman historian, Mahomed Kasim Ferishta, is fond of the character of Queen Chand, and very simply, yet on every appropriate occasion, holds it up to admiration. Yet this is little in comparison with the traditional knowledge of the Queen which lives still among the people of Beejapoor and Ahmednugger, and displays the popular affection for the Royal lady in a manner at once affecting and sincere.

Chand Sooltana was the daughter of Hoossein Nizam Shah,

the King of Ahmednugger; and at the period at which the crusade against the Hindoo Prince of Beejanugger was determined on, the alliance of Beejapoor and Ahmednugger was cemented by a double marriage. Ally Adil Shah of Beejapoor gave his sister to become the bride of Moortuza, the Prince Royal of Ahmednugger, while he took the beautiful daughter of the King of Ahmednugger to be his own bride. The great battle which decided the supremacy of Hindoo or Moslim in Southern India was fought on the right bank of the Krishna river in 1563, with immense loss on both sides; but the powerful artillery of Ahmednugger, equipped and used in the field under European system, mainly contributed to the victory which the cavalry of Beejapoor secured. On former occasions there had been alliances by marriage between these Royal houses which had had good effect in preventing those jealousies and wars which had been but too common; and onthis occasion the result was no less beneficial.

After the war was over, the Royal pair betook themselves to the settlement and pacification of the new provinces which, under the terms of partition, had fallen to the lot of Beejapoor. These had been ruled over by petty Hindoo barons and chieftains, who held these possessions in feudal tenure, and had always been noted for turbulence and disorder. They belonged, indeed, for the most part to the clans of Beydurs who had held them for ages, and acknowledged the rule of no power, Hindoo or Moslim, except when they were too weak to resist. In this delicate work the Queen took a very active and most beneficial part. She visited the Hindoo Princesses, was their advocate with the King, and gradually brought them to yield to love and consideration what they would never have yielded to threats or violence. Gradually, too, the King's authority was established over all the new territory, and though the work occupied some years, it was complete. All this time the Royal lady was her husband's constant companion. She was not secluded, and rode with him as he marched or hunted, without a formal veil, though in deference to custom her face was always slightly concealed. She was never absent from him in case of any resistance or skirmish, and she became as familiar with war as he was himself. All this time, however, her education proceeded. She became skilled in Persian and Arabic, and spoke Turkish, Toorki, and the dialects current in the army with ease and fluency, as well as Canarese and Mahratta, which were the vernacular languages of Beejapoor and Ahmednugger. And she had many other accomplishments. She drew and painted flowers with great

delicacy; she played upon the vina with skill, and sang with a delightful voice many Persian ghuzals, and the pathetic Hindoo ballads of her own native tongue. But, alas! she had no children.

Ally Adil Shah, her beloved husband, died in 1580, or sixteen years after her marriage. At this period she must have been twenty-five years old, or thereabouts. The King left no male heir, but by his will appointed his nephew Ibrahim, son of his brother Thamash, to succeed him, and the Queen Dowager as his guardian and Regent of the Beejapoor kingdom, then, except the Moghul Empire of Dehly, the largest Mussulman power in India; and thus the Queen's independent political life began. Heretofore she appears to have led a joyous and peaceful existence, without care. Her husband, though of a warlike disposition, fostered trade, literature, and arts of peace; and after the destruction of the Hindoo power he became at liberty to prosecute those great works for the defence and adornment of his capital which still remain as monuments of his enlightened liberality. By him the city was surrounded by a superb wall of stone and a broad deep ditch. The Jooma Mosque, which held six thousand persons at prayer, was begun and completed. The whole of the city was supplied with water the pipes of which were laid through every street. A magnificent reservoir, called the Houz-î-Shahpoor, was excavated and surrounded with apartments and cloisters for merchants and travellers. In all these works, including the King's mausoleum, which, however, was never completed, the Queen, according to the traditions and contemporary records of Beejapoor, took an active part, and was the King's constant companion in directing them. She was his chief almoner also, and her charity and sympathy for the poor were unbounded. In all this love and confidence she had no rival; the King had no other wife, nor yet a mistress.

There is a portrait of the Queen still, I hope, in existence at Beejapoor, taken before her husband's death by some Persian artist at the Court. It is a profile, exquisitely painted in body colour, with none of the stiffness which usually accompanies Oriental pictures. The features are regular and very beautiful; the eyes large, of a soft brown, with long dark eyelashes, the eyebrows arched. The mouth is very sweet and gentle in expression, and bears a slight smile; but there is a decided tone of firmness about the full round chin and graceful throat; and the forehead, though not high, has a breadth and power which must have been very re-

markable. Altogether the Queen's is one of those faces which, once seen, is never forgotten ; and the complexion is fair, with a faint tinge of carnation through the cheeks, which makes it almost European. Could Titian but have painted the face, it would have been one of the most perfect and interesting in the world. Her acknowledged beauty, her talent, and her sweet disposition, rendered her a popular favourite, and though local parties at Beejapoor were often seriously divided, all accepted her regency with enthusiasm.

Kamil Khan, a nobleman at the head of the Dekhany party, who had been employed as Executive Minister by her husband, was confirmed in that capacity by the Queen Dowager, while she herself superintended the education of the young King as her especial duty. Every day, except Wednesday and Friday, he was seated on the throne to hear the transactions of public business, accompanied by the Queen, who sat veiled immediately behind him; and for a time Kamil Khan behaved with every apparent respect and fidelity, but the man was base and treacherous at heart. His constant endeavour was to sow dissension between the Queen and her nephew; and his ill-usage of the people and general unpopularity reached such a pitch that the Queen, finding remonstrance of no avail, determined to remove him from office.

Kishwar Khan, a friend of her late husband, and whose character was hitherto above suspicion, was invited to Court, and on his arrival in the citadel with a small retinue, Kamil Khan, who had no friends, fled to the outer wall, leaped into the ditch, swam across it, and eventually passed the outer wall of the city by letting himself down by his turban. He was pursued, however, and overtaken in his flight towards Ahmednugger, and perished in a vain attempt to resist the parties sent to apprehend him. But it was a rare thing in those times to find any Minister of a native kingdom true to his duty and his faith. Submissive, and apparently faithful for a time, Kishwar Khan was unable to escape the temptation to which his office exposed him. He became, according to the history of the time, haughty and insolent, not only to the Queen, but to the nobles and officers of State, and she was strongly advised by many to dismiss him. It had been well had she done so at once. She had resolved to appoint Syed Moostafa Khan, Governor of Bunkapoor, to the office, but her desire was frustrated by a horrible and base act of treachery. An order under the Royal seal was secretly written by Kishwar Khan, and despatched to Bunkapoor to a confederate,

who, in concert with the officers of the garrison, and believing the purport of the Royal order to be true, put the unfortunate nobleman to death.

The Queen's grief and anger at this infamous transaction, which had resulted in the death, under her own supposed order, of one of her oldest and most valued friends, knew no bounds; but she was helpless before the power of the Minister who held sway over the Dekhany portion of the army and the civil administration, and began to propagate rumours that the Queen was secretly instigating her brother, Moortuza Nizam Shah, now King of Ahmednugger, to invade the territories of Beejapoor, and even to annex the kingdom to his own. Pretending the utmost consternation on the subject, and fidelity to the young King, he rushed with disordered clothes into his presence, and demanded for the safety of the throne either that the traitorous Ahmednugger Princess should be put to death, or confined for life in a distant fortress. The young King bravely preserved his aunt's life, which was in imminent danger, at the hazard of his own; but he could do no more, and under acts of the most studied and offensive insult, Queen Chand was forced out of the harem, and publicly carried off to the hill fort of Sattara, one hundred and twenty miles distant.

The Minister had, however, only increased the love and sympathy of the people of the capital for their beloved mistress. He endeavoured to regain popularity by a splendid entertainment to the King, but as he rode in the Royal cavalcade through the streets he was hooted by the women, dust and ashes thrown upon him, and he was reviled as the oppressor of the Queen and the murderer of Moostafa Khan. On such occasions of violent popular excitement in the East, there is seldom time or opportunity for flight, and the Queen's partisans were not idle. Advantage had been taken of the absence of the largest portion of the army on the northern frontier to force her from the city; but these troops were now hurrying back to Beejapoor, and the very day before their arrival, Kishwar Khan took the King to one of the Royal gardens, not, as was believed by most, with the intention of putting him to death and usurping the crown; but, as is perhaps more probable, of concealing his own flight, for, leaving the King in the gardens, he fled at once towards Ahmednugger. He arrived there, but was refused shelter, and proceeding to Golconda, was slain by one of the relatives of Moostafa Khan, in revenge for his kinsman's death.

Delivered from Kishwar Khan, the young King at once sent for his aunt, and her office of Regent was resumed. The new Minister, Ekhlas Khan, was an Abyssinian, but, like all his tribe, violent and uncontrollable, and the factious dissensions which ensued between Dekhanians and Abyssinians, which led to bloody contests in the streets, encouraged the invasion of the kingdom by the Kings of Berar, Beedu, and Golconda, and the close investment of the city followed at a time when there were not two thousand troops for its defence. Ekhlas Khan, though turbulent as a Minister, was, however, a brave and faithful soldier, and the city was well defended. The Queen, accompanied by her nephew the King, went from post to post at night, though the weather was the severest of the rainy season, cheering, encouraging, and directing all. Two divisions of cavalry without the walls did good service in cutting off supplies and forage from the enemy and harassing their flanks, but at last twenty yards of the city wall fell down after a night of heavy rain, and an assault was imminent, but, owing to dissensions in the enemy's camp, did not take place. Meanwhile the Queen, taking advantage of the respite, not only guarded the breach in person, but collected the masons of the city, and setting the example herself, and freely distributing rewards, had the breach completed in time to prevent any chance of attack by storm. She had never left the spot by day or night, and all entreaties for her to spare herself from the inclement weather and take rest were unavailing.

The sore straits to which the kingdom had been reduced by the violence and obstinacy of the Abyssinian party now struck them so forcibly, that their leaders went in a body to the Queen and laid down their authority, beseeching her to do what she pleased with them so long as she and the King were safe. The Queen received this evidently earnest submission in a generous spirit. A new Minister, who possessed the confidence of all, was appointed, and in less than a month an army of twenty thousand of the old troops had collected at the capital. The Queen's devotion and spirited personal valour had inspired confidence in all, which now amounted to positive enthusiasm. The city had been invested for more than a year, its weak garrison was often mutinous and despairing, a large breach had occurred in the works, and without them anarchy prevailed throughout the whole kingdom. Yet this noble woman had redeemed all by her personal example, and the siege was raised, the several allies retiring to their own dominions. And now the Queen hoped for peace.

Alas! it was not to be yet. Dilawar Khan, one of the military commanders, attacked the Minister, and blinded him, usurping the Executive power. Many other atrocities were committed, and again the Queen's authority was reduced to the mere control of the palace and education of the King. But, in spite of many cruelties, Dilawar Khan was an able administrator; the resources of the kingdom were again developed, its Government began to be respected, and no more attacks were made upon its possessions. The events I have detailed were crowded into the space of four years, and as the King was approaching the age at which his majority could be declared, the Queen hoped that with it the rest and peace she so intensely longed for would come to her. But there was still more to be done.

Not at Beejapoor, but in her native city, Ahmednugger. The King Moortuza asked for the hand of Khodeija Sooltana, the sister of his ward the King, for his son the Prince Hoosein, and considering that all trouble at Beejapoor was at an end, the Queen Chand accompanied the bride elect, the Royal party being escorted by the choicest of the Ahmednugger cavalry. She had hoped to find peace in her old home; but she found that home more convulsed with faction, and more distracted within and without, than when she had left it. Her brother, Moortuza, always violent, had become in reality mad, and had attempted the life of his son Meerass, who, in revenge, attacked his father in the palace at Ahmednugger, and caused him to be suffocated in a hot bath. An account of this revolution is given minutely by the historian Ferishta, who was in command of the palace guards, and which is very dramatic in its details, but too long for extract. He does not, however, mention the Queen Chand, who must have been in the fort at the time of the tragedy. The new King did not long survive this act of parricide, and, after a few months, was seized by his Minister and publicly beheaded amidst the execrations of the people. After his death a frightful tumult arose: the fort was carried by the mob, and hundreds of persons of distinction, chiefly foreigners, perished. A period of anarchy then ensued, when Ismail, a son of Boorhan, who was brother of Moortuza Nizam Shah, and, therefore, nephew of Queen Chand, was declared King; and Jumal Khan, head of the Dekhany party, constituted himself Regent and Minister. This revolution was opposed by Beejapoor and Berar, and the troops of the latter were defeated by Jumal Khan; but peace was concluded with Beejapoor, and Queen Chand, wearied by constant strife and atrocities which she had no power to control, was allowed to

join the Beejapoor army then in the field, and returned with it, though with no authority, to the capital, there, as she trusted, to end her days in peace. She was received by the people with their former enthusiasm, and by the young King with no diminution of his old affection; but she took no part in public affairs, which, under the young King, were very prosperous. At Ahmednugger other revolutions followed with which this tale has no concern. Ismail, who had succeeded, was, after some time, attacked by his father, Boorhan, who had obtained the aid and sympathy of Akbar, Emperor of Dehly, and was deposed, and Boorhan himself reigned till his death in 1594 in comparative peace. He was succeeded by his son Ibrahim, a weak, violent prince, and the fortunes of the kingdom will be understood from the course of the present story to its close. At Beejapoor Queen Chand lived in peace, and only assumed local authority at the request of her nephew whenever his temporary absence was necessary in tours of his dominions or in the field.

Such were the real antecedents of our "noble Queen." I trust they may not be considered out of place in a work professedly of fiction, but tend to make more intelligible that which would be otherwise, perhaps, strange and confused. Few in England know that the contemporary of our Queen Elizabeth in the Dekhan kingdoms was a woman of equal ability, of equal political talent, of equal, though in a different sense, education and accomplishments, who ruled over a realm as large, a population as large, and as intelligent, and as rich as England; a woman who, surrounded by jealous enemies, preserved by her own personal valour and endurance her kingdom from destruction and partition; who, through all temptations and exercise of absolute power, was at once simple, generous, frank, and merciful as she was chaste, virtuous, religious, and charitable—one who, among all the women of India, stands out as a jewel without flaw and beyond price.

CHAPTER III.

THE EVENTS OF A DAY.

ABBAS KHAN had no intention of disregarding the Queen's directions to avoid the body of Abyssinian cavalry which he would have met if he had gone by Torwéh and the main streets of the

city. It would have been pleasant, no doubt, to have exchanged greetings with old friends of all kinds, merchants and others, who lived in the great thoroughfare; and at one time he had thought of lodging the priest and his sister with a certain Armenian banker and jewel merchant who was well known to him; but the priest had expressed some doubt as to consorting with the Armenians, who were, as he explained, heretics in faith, and chances of disagreement were better avoided in a strange place. "No matter how humble they may be, we should prefer our own people. I have heard they are numerous in the city, in the service of the King, and have no spiritual guide among them," said the priest; and they rode on together.

Musing on his own affairs, and arranging in his mind how he should lay the whole best before his Royal mistress, Abbas Khan rode slowly on towards the city. Passing through the great cemetery known as the Roza, or Garden, in which the mausoleum and mosque of the reigning King were then in course of erection, and entering by the south-eastern gate, he had completely avoided the outer portion of the city, and was on the direct road past the citadel, to his uncle Humeed Khan's house, which lay to the north-west side of it, not far from the stupendous mausoleum of Mahmood Adil Shah, commonly known as the Gól Goomaz. This was, if we may call it so, the most aristocratic quarter of the fort. Here were the mansions of Ankoos Khan, of the Nawab Mustafa Khan, of Khawar Khan, and a host of other noblemen, all surrounded by pleasant gardens and courtyards, according to their pretensions. That of Humeed Khan was by no means one of the largest, but it was a substantial, comfortable residence, and its well laid-out garden was perhaps superior to most others in its vicinity.

Abbas Khan had sent on his own baggage and the priest's overnight, with a note to his aunt to announce his arrival; he was met, therefore, at the gate by his trusty steward and a crowd of retainers, and by several of the chief women servants, who, with trays containing mustard seed, flowers, spices, and small lighted lamps, waved them over his head, with cries of welcome; and bidding the steward see to the comfort of the priest and his sister, Abbas Khan passed on into the inner court of the Zenana, where his aunt, with her chief attendants, was ready to receive him.

And it was a warm welcome that the Lady Fatima accorded to her long absent nephew. She stroked his face fondly, and passed

her hands over his person from head to foot, kissing the tips of her fingers; and at last, fairly casting ceremony aside, took him in her arms and embraced him heartily, holding him from her from time to time as if to assure herself that he was in very truth her own son. Fatima Khanum had, however, no real son; one had been born years ago who had died young; her two daughters were married, and with their husbands in different parts of the country, and the good lady had adopted Abbas, the son of her husband's late brother, as her son; and the boy had grown up before her, the foster-brother of the King so long as his age permitted of his living at the Royal palace, and afterwards with herself, until the service of war and of the State called him into active life, since when she had seen him rarely, and till the present occasion it was months since he had been near enough to ride home to see her.

"Yes, thou art the same Meeah," she said, as the tears coursed down her face, and an occasional sob of joy broke from her; "the same, only stronger and more manly. But take off thy heavy mail and morion, and sit here by me till thy bath is ready, and tell me all thy adventures. Nay!" she continued, as he was about to seat himself on his cushions, "not a word will I hear till thou hast bathed and eaten. I have provided for thy friends in the garden pavilion, where they will be quite private, and more at their ease than among us. Now away, and return as soon as thou canst, when thou art refreshed."

The return to his old luxuries was by no means unacceptable to the young man. The delicious bath, the offices of the eunuchs in attending him, and their skilful manipulations; the absence of his heavy mail shirt, greaves, and gauntlets, and the light fresh clothes ready for him, gave him a sense of relief such as he had not enjoyed since he left home months ago. Since then he had had unremitting active service in the field, and was, indeed, never at rest even for a day; for alarms were constant, skirmishes with rebel parties frequent, and anxiety always present that he might be outwitted or overwhelmed by superior forces. Nor was he quite easy about his men. Except ten retainers, all the household troops were with his uncle, and the rest of those under his command were at best uncertain, and often, indeed, insubordinate and mutinous.

For before the plans of Eyn-ool-Moolk were developed, the Beejapoor soldiery in the western part of the kingdom were much divided in opinion as to whether it would be most profitable to join the Prince Ismail's party, and to obtain the rewards in money, rank, and estates that were so freely promised, or to hold to their

own old position in the State army, and be faithful. Abbas Khan's situation, then, had been a trying one in many ways; but it was one he had sought himself, and through all risk or positive danger he was determined to do his duty. His stern uncle would accept nothing less in any case, and under any failure would, he knew, cast him off for ever. Part of this we have explained before, but it is necessary that his position should be entirely known to account for its peculiar interest.

I need not recapitulate the events which had occurred, and which, now refreshed by his bath and breakfast, and with his aunt's own hookah specially provided for him, Abbas Khan related with animation. His wound was long since healed, but the discoloration of the cicatrix showed clearly through the thin muslin tunic he wore, and the history of it was none the less interesting that it could be seen and felt. The Lady Fatima sat in an ecstasy, now weeping, now flushing with anger, fascinated by the detail as it flowed with an eloquence and power which were new to her; but when her nephew pressed her to tell him what account had been given of him by those who had returned and by general rumour, she was silent.

"I was sent for yesterday," she said, "by the Queen, who ordered me to tell you nothing. She expects you to-night, and purposes to tell you all herself; and you must bear me witness, by the love you have for me and her, that I have told you nothing. I sent a messenger to inform her that you had arrived, but she is still at Torwéh, and will not return till after the afternoon prayer, and you will not hear till then. Meanwhile many will come to see you, and you may hear something, but believe nothing till you hear it from the Queen herself."

"And why this mystery?" asked the young man; "why do thine eyes fill with tears? Danger is too familiar to me to dread it, and I know of no enemies but the faction of Elias Khan; what have I to fear from that?"

"I cannot tell thee, my son," said the worthy lady, her eyes at last fairly overflowing, "I cannot tell thee; danger I fear not for thee, but for thy honour and the fame of a noble house I do fear. Do not ask me more; when the Queen tells all to thee thou wilt know how to act. Now go forth into the audience hall, and sit there. Many have come to see thee, and may tell thee somewhat of the common gossip; but the opinions of an old woman like me are little worth, and I have said already that I am under promise to tell thee nothing. She, the Queen-mother, loves thee,

Meeah, and she is wise beyond the wisdom of men. Now go, and forget what I have said."

We do not suppose that Abbas Khan's mind was much assured by this mystery. Arrival at home, after a long and painful absence, is a time to look for sympathy and for a joyous welcome; yet, after his aunt's loving reception, there ensued a painful reticence which was entirely unexpected, and foreboded something intensely disagreeable, if not positively dangerous. But this depression did not last long, and gloomy thoughts disappeared before the pleasant gossip of the crowd of visitors who poured in as the day drew on. How much he had to hear of old companions, of their fortunes and misfortunes, of political events, and the progress of public affairs! He expected, perhaps, some allusion to his own proceedings; but, beyond congratulation on his recovery from his wound, nothing was said of any moment, or that could excite the smallest suspicion; and, so far, he was assured. The Queen would return from Torwéh in the evening, and had convened a full Court for to-morrow, in which some business of importance was to be transacted, but what it was had not transpired.

So after his visitors had departed, Abbas went into the small mosque for the afternoon prayer; and this finished, he strolled into the garden, where the priest and his sister awaited him with profuse thanks at the comforts he had bestowed upon them, and the kind hospitality of his aunt.

"Maria has been with her a long time," said her brother, "and she presses us to stay; but we feel that Christians residing in a Moslim's house would be out of place and inconvenient to you, and in this bigoted city might bring obloquy upon you. We have, therefore, made arrangements with the artist, Miguel de Furtado, whom you kindly sent to us, to lodge with him. And as, by order of the Queen, an empty mansion, which lies close to this garden, has been given him to reside in, we shall all be able to live together in comfort. His wife, and sister, and children are with him; and among them and others, our countrymen, we shall live happily, so long as our presence is needed, and with your permission, noble Khan, we will remove there in the evening."

Indeed, it was an arrangement which suited every one. There was evidently truth in the good Padré's remark, that obloquy might attach itself to Abbas Khan's family if they entertained a Christian priest and his sister as guests. Miguel Furtado was a person much respected, and was then employed in the decoration

of the chambers of the Asar Mahal, and was treated with much consideration. He had originally been a stenciller of ceilings and room panels in his native country, and had been engaged at Goa; but the Royal offers from Beejapoor were too attractive to be refused, and when decoration there became fashionable, he found ample employment and remuneration for his work in the palaces and private mansions of the city; and the paintings still to be seen in the Asar Mahal, though sorely faded and obliterated, are yet distinct enough to be easily followed.

The muezzins had barely proclaimed the evening call to prayer from the mosques around, including that in his own garden, when he was informed that one of the messengers of the Palace desired to see him; and, bidding his friends farewell for the present, Abbas Khan returned to the house, and in his own private apartment awaited the Queen's message. The Mirdha, or Court usher, who delivered it, seemed as mysterious as everyone else. He looked right and left, then over his shoulder, to see if any one followed, made a profound obeisance, and, stooping down and covering his mouth with his scarf, whispered,—

"The Queen Mother desires to see you, my lord, about the first watch of the night, when the night council is over; but you are to come before that, and be in attendance in case you are wanted. Perhaps," added the man, "my lord had better come well armed, though not so as to excite suspicion, and with a few followers."

"I thank thee for thy caution, Meer Sahib," said the young Khan. "Surely thou wert ever careful of me, even when I was a wild boy; and now cares come on me, and warnings of danger which are not to be put aside heedlessly."

"Nay, God forbid there should be danger to my lord, and in presence of the asylum of the world," replied the man; "but precaution is needful in one who has enemies, and the passages of the Palace have not been safe on some occasions."

"Good!" returned the young man, "I will be careful. And the Queen is well?"

"She rode to-day, my lord, as she did when she was a girl with her husband of blessed memory, and brought back her hawk's quarry. Ay! and when she spoke of old times to us as we sat by her side, there were many eyes wet with tears. And what should we do here, my lord, with Dekhanies and Abyssinians ever ready to fly at each other's throats, and duels in the streets as common as ordinary greetings, but for her?"

"Between Dekhanies and Abyssinians?" asked Abbas Khan.

"Nay, not so much, but among themselves; and the Dekhanies have been the worst by far. 'Twas only a few days ago that nine of them, Bhylmees and Siah Chuttrees, were lying dead and dying between the citadel and the great well; and one survived, who will be tried in the Adalut, and we hope beheaded for an example. The Queen has vowed to put an end to this shameless license. But I must depart, my lord. Fail not to come, and I will be ready at the entrance of the private audience room to await you."

"I will be there without fail, Meer Sahib, and will be cautious," was the reply. Abbas Khan saw at once that more than ordinary care was necessary. Before the Queen, indeed, there might be no danger; and yet even her presence or the King's was no safeguard against deeds of violence; but in the precincts of the palace, and especially at night, there was little security, save that which resulted from a man's own personal bravery and caution. As the time drew near, then, at which he must proceed to the palace, Abbas Khan dressed himself with unusual care, selecting a very light but extremely flexible shirt of Italian chain mail of exquisite temper, completely dagger proof, which he could wear under his ordinary costume without chance of notice, and the lightly-quilted yellow satin tunic, indeed, completely concealed it. Into the folds of his turban also he twisted a chain of steel links, which could not be noticed, and which protected his head. Thus secure in his person, a light sabre usually worn at Court completed his equipment; and a rich brocaded muslin scarf tied round his waist, and a handsome Cashmere shawl over his shoulders, formed a costume appropriate to his first visit to his Royal mistress. From the house guard of spearmen he took six, and his trusty standard-bearer, Yasin Khan, with four others of the household cavalry, composed his escort. He had inquired about the men who had been with him in the skirmish, but only a few had returned home, reporting him dead, and had been sent on to his uncle with other drafts for the main army, which was still in the field. Of the rest he could hear nothing, but he trusted to discover them as time wore on; though it was only too probable they had joined the rebel forces of Eyn-ool-Moolk and the young Prince.

From his house to the main gate of the citadel was only a short distance; and though it was dark, the light from his two torches borne before him was ample. As he entered the citadel by the bridge over the ditch, the gloomy, narrow passage and traverses were lighted up by the torches, though the dark battlements above

seemed to frown upon him as he passed under the lofty archway of the gate. Within, the officers of the guard, whom he knew, greeted him kindly and with a hearty welcome; and he passed the deserted Hindoo college and the streets which led up to the Palace itself, meeting crowds of accountants and officials of all degrees on their way home after the labours of the day. Not far beyond the gate of the Royal treasury the old messenger who had brought the Queen's order advanced to direct him, and informed him that the Queen was in her private audience chamber with some of the Executive Ministers, and that he was to wait in the ante-chamber till he should be called; and bidding the groom in charge walk his horse about till he should require it, and his escort to keep together, Abbas Khan dismounted, and entered the door which led to the Queen's apartments.

He was in no humour to converse, though the loquacious old Mirdha, and others of his acquaintance, crowded around him with humble greetings. Strive as he would, Abbas Khan felt as if he were approaching some crisis in his life which he could not avert, and to which—even though it might be death—he must, as a true Moslim and soldier of the State, submit without question. Several of the Ministerial officers passed out as he sat: the Peshkar, or Hindoo Ministers of Revenue and Finance, with their bundles of papers tied up in coarse red cloth; the head judges, civil and criminal; the Superintendent of Public Works, and the Kótwal, or head of the police of the city, with his deputies; the Secretary of Correspondence, and others—the whole representing an immense mass of public business of many kinds. But every night, ere she slept, the Royal lady had heard and passed her orders upon all, and signed the documents and warrants presented to her. It was some labour for a woman, mentally as well as physically, for during the whole of every day, from early morning till the afternoon, with but little intermission, the current business of the State was constantly before the Queen. No accounts were kept more accurately than those of the State as to its revenues; and though there might be laxity in some respects if contrasted with a modern standard, yet in the main it was systematic and regular, and the old revenue settlements of Beejapoor often met with in the country are more minute and more practically useful than can easily be credited.

Abbas Khan had not to wait long before the first watch of the night had sounded from the gongs of the citadel; the curtain of

the Royal chamber was drawn aside by the eunuch in waiting, and he was directed to enter into "the presence." All the Ministerial officers had withdrawn, but the blind and venerable Ekhlas Khan, Hyat Khan, the head Kotwal of the city, who had first denounced Eyn-ool-Moolk's conspiracy, and had rendered service during the short rebellion, and Kureen-oo-dein Chishtee, the head of the orthodox religious party in Beejapoor, who was the Queen's spiritual adviser as well as the King's, and might be termed keeper of the Royal conscience—a man from his calling and position bigoted, but in the main just and reasonable as he was eminently charitable and benevolent. All these persons were seated near the cushion which formed the throne, and seemed to be in earnest conversation with the Queen as Abbas Khan entered, and with the necessary respectful salutation kissed the foot of the throne thrice, and, presenting the hilt of his sword to his Royal mistress, stood before her in an attitude of humble expectancy, as the Queen, with a gracious smile, bade him welcome.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVENTS OF A DAY.—*Continued.*

THE Queen was seated in her usual place in the beautiful room which Abbas Khan had known from his childhood, and where for years he had been the fellow-student and joyous playmate of the King. She was dressed in her usual Court costume, a white muslin robe of the Persian fashion, with a filmy white muslin scarf over her head, lightly edged with gold tissue ribbon, which, passing over her head, hung down over her right arm. She was not unveiled entirely, but the almost transparent muslin, of which the covering of her face was composed, allowed her features to be distinctly visible to those who sat near her. They seemed to the young man even softer and more tenderly beautiful than they had appeared in her hunting dress; and though he had been long absent, he did not observe any change, for she was to him, in his intense love and admiration for his foster-mother, the most beautiful woman, in his eyes, that he had ever seen. There was no alteration in the Royal seat, in the room whose clustered shafts, rising from the corners and sides in slender columns of the whitest polished stucco, looked

like marble, and spread out into the bewildering tracery of the roof, while the spaces between the shafts were covered with the most delicate arabesque patterns, portions of which shone with burnished gold. There was no perceptible change in those who sat before him; was the difference then in himself, that all, except the Queen herself, appeared to regard him with suspicion?

"Be seated, Abbas Khan," said the Queen, in her soft, low voice. And with a courteous reverence to each of those present, which he was now at liberty to make, and which was kindly returned, the young Khan took his seat below the rest.

"Thou hast none but elders and friends to listen to thee," continued the Queen; "friends of thy father and uncle; tell them and me in what manner Elias Khan was slain, and why thou took refuge in Juldroog."

"If I might hear any accusation there is against me first, I might reply the better," answered Abbas Khan. "Nevertheless, if this be withheld from me, I am not ashamed to tell my Queen and mother, and my elders, the truth, as the Lord knoweth."

"Conceal nothing, my son," said the Queen, gently. "Even if thou hast chanced to err, speak freely and truly."

"Ye all know," he continued, addressing Hyat Khan, the chief Kotwal, "how Elias Khan was surprised by our lord the King, and how, as he did to Eyn-ool-Moolk, in the generosity of his heart, Elias was released. Ye all know, too, how he fled to Eyn-ool-Moolk and the Prince Ismail. Then he became a declared rebel."

We need not, perhaps, follow the young Khan's narrative of the skirmish in which Elias Khan was slain by him, nor the subsequent events which have already been detailed; nor how he declared he had been sick unto death, while he was living with his cousin, Osman Beg, till relieved by a holy Dervish, and afterwards a Portuguese padré, who had been sent to Juldroog by Dilawer Khan, of Moodgul, and whom he had brought with him under the order of the Queen herself. The young man's narrative was clear and distinct, and the frank manner in which it was given carried with it conviction of its truth to all who heard it.

"Yet," said Hyat Khan, "it was believed, it is believed, that thou wert the traitor, and slew Elias Khan treacherously, because he was thy rival."

"And," added the priest, with a scornful sniff, "that thou hast been consorting with the Nazarene woman, who is a reputed witch and sorceress."

Abbas Khan looked from one to another of the speakers, by turns, with amazement, his fair face flushing with excitement. "Who are my accusers?" he asked. "I can reply only to them on these points, and I pray the Royal justice that I may be confronted with them, and then let Alla judge. As to the Christian lady, let my Queen-mother examine herself; to me she is as a mother or a sister—a holy woman devoted to the service of God by her vows, as her brother is by his."

"As-tagh-fur-oolla! may God forbid!" exclaimed the priest, contemptuously; "as if a Nazarene infidel could devote herself to God! Touba! Touba!"

"While she was in Juldroog," retorted Abbas Khan, with some bitterness, "she was the guest of the holy Syud and his granddaughter, who lived below the fort, while I, weak as I was, resided on the top of the mountain, with my cousin. Till she had been sent for and welcomed by my aunt, the Lady Fatima, I had never seen her face, for she was always closely veiled."

"And she is in thy house still," cried the priest, with a sneer.

"Not so, holy father," was the quiet reply; "as soon as accommodation could be provided for them they went to the house of Miguel Furtado, the painter; and they are there now, waiting the Queen's pleasure."

"They say, too," said Ekhlas Khan, "that thou left thy people to be slain by rebels, and fled like a coward!"

"A coward! Nay, there are few living who dare use that word before me; but I respect their age and infirmity, noble Khan, and am silent. Nay, think; had I been a coward could I have slain Elias Khan? He was no puny antagonist; and could I have borne the wound I bear here," and he pointed to his breast, "had I been a coward?"

"Did he speak to thee?" asked Hyat Khan.

"He cursed me as he struck at me," replied Abbas Khan. "And it was a fair blow, sirs, as one would give in fight to another; but he spoke no more, for I clove him to the breast, and he fell dead from his horse. For many days I could not sleep, for he seemed ever present, with his dying look of hate; but the Syud Dervish gave me an exorcism which I wear, and that has delivered me from him. I have yet ceremonies to perform, as I vowed, at thy holy shrine, Huzrut," he continued to the priest, "and I will not delay them."

"An exorcism!" exclaimed the priest, "and from a poor Dervish; may I see it?"

"It hath never seen the light since he gave it to me, Huzrut," said the young man, respectfully; "but one so reverend and so learned as thou art may see it," and he unloosed it from a cord by which it was suspended round his neck. The paper was enclosed in a thin sheet of silver, which was easily opened, and the priest looked at the diagram and figures with wonder and admiration.

"No novice hath written this, but the writing is that of age. Happy is the possessor of it, for unto him can come no evil of man's device," said the priest, reverently placing the paper to his lips, his forehead, and his breast. "And a Dervish wrote it? Who is he, living in so lonely a place unknown?"

"He told me who he was, Huzrut, and I have no concealment to make. He is a State prisoner since the time of the first King, Ibrahim, by whom he was blinded, and has lived ——"

"Protection of God!" interrupted the priest and Ekhlas Khan, in a breath. "Can it be the learned Syud Ahmed Ali, the physician?"

"Even so," replied Abbas Khan. "I was to speak of him to the Queen, and interest her in his fate; and I do so, most gracious mother, now;" and the young man rose, kissed the foot of the throne, and stood with his hand folded in an attitude of supplication.

"He is forgiven," she said, firmly, "since, under the help of Alla, he saved thee, my son. There will be many who remember him."

"Yes, many," said Ekhlas Khan. "I am one of his contemporaries who well remember how he was most trusted of all save the King, who, after he had banished the blind Syud, was never sane again."

"And he is blind, too, Abbas Khan! Merciful God! and hath passed forty years in that prison," said the Queen, from whose eyes tears of pity were stealing.

"Quite blind, mother; but he can write, as the priest has seen; and he hath a child, a granddaughter, who leads him about, as he doeth works of charity."

"We will send for them, Inshalla! to-morrow, and Osman Beg shall be directed to forward them with all honour. As far as can be, the sin of my house to him shall be redeemed. You will see to this, Hyat Khan?"

"Your orders are on my head and eyes," he returned, respectfully; "nothing shall be left undone. But will your Majesty, refuge of the world, pass orders on the Khan's case?"

"I see no order to pass, Hyat Khan," returned the Queen; "surely ye are satisfied?"

"We may be, but the people will not be," said the Kotwal, decidedly. "There is a blood feud now between the people of Elias Khan and Abbas Khan. Put thought of him aside, O noble lady, and prevent bloodshed, a renewal of the old scenes which brought the kingdom to the verge of ruin. There is a public durbar to-morrow, let the case be decided; I have force enough to prevent riot."

"I beg to represent," humbly said the fiery young Khan, who could hardly restrain himself as he bowed reverently before the throne, "let there be no doubt so far as I am concerned. I claim the ancient privilege of all accused persons, that, to clear my honour from stain, I shall be allowed the trial of ordeal. I am alone, except my poor stupid standard-bearer, Yasin. One follower, Jumal, died of his wounds at Narrainpoor, and one, Runga Naik, the Beydur, is far away in his own country; and as he is a Hindoo," he added, turning to the priest, "he might not be believed. I am alone before God, and to Him I commit myself. Do not hinder me, friends and elders; ye know I am right."

"No! no! no!" cried the Queen, stretching out her hands in turns to all around her; "let there be no duel, let not blood be shed. As ye love me, as ye love the King, let there be no duel; it will but increase the feud!"

"It cannot be avoided, lady," said the priest and Ekhlas Khan, speaking almost together. "This will be no brawling duel, but a solemn appeal to the All Just to decide the truth. It is a custom of the State which no one, not even the King himself, would dare to infringe. If I know his brave uncle's heart, he will be the first to rejoice that Abbas Khan offered of himself to undertake the risk."

"But," added Hyat Khan, "let there be no precipitancy, no previous challenge, which would cause new irritation. Let the issue rest upon the events of the durbar to-morrow, when, though rough words may be spoken, there can be no violence, and even the need may pass away. In any case, there is the sanctuary of the Ark if the Khan claims it.

"God forbid I should do so!" returned Abbas Khan. "The sanctuary is but for cowards, who have doubtful hearts; whatever be my fate, it is the judgment of the Lord, and I have faced it too often to fear. Mother! my noble Queen, be just, and deny not to me what is the privilege of all, even the meanest."

"Thou art weak, Abbas Khan," she said; "thy wound is still tender."

"It would take little to prove to thee that I am strong enough, mother," he said, with a smile; and, advancing to the foot of the throne, he took up both the heavy silver lampstands and held them out at arms length without trembling.

"Well done! well done! 'tis the feat of an athlete," cried the priest. "With a strong arm and that holy amulet he is safe, O lady; let it be as he wishes."

"Put your hand on my head, my noble mother," said Abbas Khan, "and fear not. Give me thy blessing as thou didst the first time I went into the field; and if I live, believe me true and honest; if I die, rejoice that Alla hath so dealt with one faithless and a coward. Mother, may I come near?"

"Come," she said, though she was weeping. "Chand Beebee commits thee to God;" and as he knelt down and put his head into her lap, she laid her hands solemnly upon it, and her lips moved; but they who watched her saw she was too much affected to speak.

"And now, friends," she continued, after a while, and as Abbas Khan took his seat once more, "we thank ye for your aid to-night, for your aid and your direction, and ye have liberty to depart. Bring the pán and atar," she called to the eunuch without, and in a few moments all had received their dismissal, and rose to depart, Abbas Khan giving the precedence to his elders, and assisting the blind Ekhlas Khan to descend the steps of the Royal chamber. Outside, in the street, were the palanquins and horses, with the attendants of the councillors; and one by one they departed, the priest saying as he took his seat in his litter, "Only satisfy me about the Christian woman, Abbas Khan, and I am your friend for ever. Alas! they are but too beautiful I hear."

"Let to-morrow pass, Huzrut," was the reply. "If I am spared thou shalt believe me true as my father, thy friend, was before me."

"Ameen!" said the holy man. "Ameen! may it be so."

For a minute or two Hyat Khan, who had a large retinue, stood conversing with the young Khan, suggesting that he should see him safely home. But this he gracefully declined, and Hyat Khan had put his horse in motion to give his companion room, and Abbas Khan's retinue had moved on into his place and awaited their master's coming. There was no one near Abbas Khan but his groom, who was holding the horse's head, and an attendant,

who held out the stirrup for him to mount; his old friend the Mirdha and two or three of the eunuchs were looking on. Suddenly a man of tall and powerful frame appeared to leap from behind a buttress of the building, and exclaiming, "Elias sends you this!" struck at the young Khan with all his force. The blow was so powerfully dealt that his intended victim, helpless from his position, staggered, and, as his horse plunged, fell to the ground. Many who saw the transaction thought he had been slain, and for an instant the assassin was in the grasp of several of the eunuchs and others, but he shook them off with ease, and fled into the dark recesses of the citadel, where concealment was easy, or whence he might leap from the wall and swim the ditch, and so escape into the city. A few men with torches followed him, but returned after a vain search.

Had it not been for the shirt of mail, Abbas Khan had never spoken more, for the assassin's dagger would have reached his heart. As it was, except feeling a severe bruise, the young man was unhurt; but the shock had caused his old wound to bleed in some degree, and the warm blood, trickling down his chest, warned him to obtain assistance as soon as possible, and the good Padré was close at hand. As he was about to mount his horse one of Hyat Khan's attendants, looking on the ground, had found the assassin's dagger, and it was at once recognised by all. The point had broken off with the force of the blow, and was found where Abbas Khan had stood. As Hyat Khan examined the weapon, he declared it to be that of Yacoot, the chief retainer of Elias Khan, and commander of his body guard, who was a native Abyssinian, and had brought the weapon from his own country.

"He cannot elude me," said the Kotwal to Abbas Khan. "Ruffian as he is he hath long been notorious for his crimes and violence. But thou hast had a narrow escape, my friend, and mayest thank the Lord and thy good mail for thy life; but, hark! the Queen calls; go, I will wait for thee, and, ushered in by the eunuch, Abbas Khan was again in the Royal presence.

There was no formality now. The Queen stood in the centre of the hall, before the throne, with her arms outstretched. She had cast away her veil, and an agonised sob broke from her, while her slight frame still trembled with the horror she had endured when the first cry of "Abbas Khan is dead!" fell upon her ears.

"Thou art safe, Meeah!" she murmured, stretching out her

hands, while he stooped and touched her feet; "tell me thou art safe!"

"I am unhurt, mother," he said, "though it was a fierce blow. I am always safe with thy blessing on my head; and see, is not that proved to-night? Inshalla! to-morrow will pass as safely, for I fear not, O my Queen! my heart is true and my cause just; but suffer me to depart, mother, for Hyat Khan is waiting for me."

"It is well," she replied, "else I should have ordered the Palace guard to escort thee home. Khoda Hafiz, may God have thee in his keeping! Ere morning breaks my thank-offerings will be at every shrine and mosque in the city."

"Thou wilt need to be well armed to-morrow," said Hyat Khan, as he parted from his young friend at the gate of Humeed Khan's mansion. "Make no show of preparation, but, I say, be ready. But for this vile attempt on thy life, I had thought all might pass off quietly, but Yacoot will have his faction at his back, and he is not a temperate one. Sleep and rest, for the events of the day have been exciting, and so may the Lord keep thee!"

Abbas Khan did not disturb his aunt, but retired to his private apartment; sending word that he was tired and needed rest, and would see her in the morning; and he at once sent for his good friend the Padré, writing him a line to bring remedies, for his wound had broken out afresh. Meanwhile he used what precautions he knew, and before the priest arrived the bleeding had nearly ceased. Francis d'Almeida, and the household of his worthy host, had long been asleep, but as the Khan's note was brought to him, he took some strong adhesive plaister and other remedies, dressed himself, and went at once.

"Have I understood thy writing?" he said, as he entered the quiet chamber where the young man was reclining on his cushions, bathing his wound. "Ah! I have always feared this; the bandages were loosed too soon; but let me see. . . . . Ah, well, 'tis none so bad; only the old part which had been mismanaged. So lie down straight, and I will see what I can do."

"Thou art a good fellow," said the Khan, pressing his hand, "and I owe, next to life, the use of my arm to thee. I have been careless, and must take the consequences."

"Nay, there is more than carelessness here," said the priest, as he examined his friend's body; "there is a bad bruise under the shoulder which has been the cause of this. Why dost thou conceal it?"

Then Abbas Khan told him of the blow he had received, and

of the dagger having been recognised. "All will be settled to-morrow, Padré, and in the afternoon thou and Maria will be sent for by my noble Queen. Ah! yes, that is easy now, and I shall rest. It must not bleed again, Padré, for these are stirring times, and I may be needed for duty, perhaps—who knows?—ere to-morrow passes."

"I will come at the first watch of the day to-morrow, and see if the bandages hold well; till then, sleep if you can, Khan Sahib, for there are some nervous symptoms about thee which may hinder thy recovery if they continue. May God keep thee! Thou wilt not sleep the less soundly for a priest's blessing." "Let him sleep till he wakes of his own accord," he continued to the head eunuch of the chamber, "and do not wake him. I will be here ere the first watch close."

Abbas Khan slept soundly. All anxiety as to the future was past; his way was clear before him, and it must be death or life, as the Lord willed, which is the true solace and comfort of every devout Mussulman. In his dreams, too, once more came the memory of the Dervish and her who had watched over him that memorable night, and who again seemed to be near him as an angel of Paradise, and ministering to him tenderly.

CHAPTER V.

THE ORDEAL.

ABBAS KHAN slept soundly and refreshingly. As he woke long after his usual hour, his first action was to stretch his arms to the full, and he was gratified to find that the blow he had received had left no permanent pain or stiffness. The bandages put on by Francis d'Almeida were firm in their place, and the wound felt easy. He remembered that he was not to open them himself, or allow them to be meddled with; and on his attendant informing him that the worthy man had already arrived, he was desired to send him in, and keep out everyone else, and in a few moments the Padré entered.

"I trust you have slept well, my lord?" he asked, after the usual salutations had passed. "You did not suffer from the wound, or the blow upon your back?"

"I slept as a child sleeps, my friend," replied the young Khan; "never stirring, and with no pain; and had most delightful dreams. They appeared so real too, that when I woke I seemed to see sitting by my bedside, where thou art, the figure and the lovely face of her who had given me sherbet in my dream, as she did during the first night I saw her, when the sun fever had stricken me down, and I was nigh unto death. It was a happy omen for the day, Señor Padré."

"May it be fortunate to you," said the Padré, smiling. "And she you thought of—pardon the liberty—was Zóra, the granddaughter of the old Dervish. Ah, poor Zóra! Maria, my sister, loves to speak of her, and loves her truly. You have not heard of her?"

"No," replied the Khan; "but I have not forgotten what I owe her and the old man. I spoke to the Queen about him last night, and a retinue will be sent for him as soon as it can be prepared. When I was at Juldroog he told me his history, and I found it confirmed at once by two of the Royal councillors—old men who knew him well. I will tell you of it another time; but Zóra may have told it to your sister?"

"No," returned the priest, "she cannot have known it, or she would surely have mentioned it. They were like elder and younger sisters; and there is not a night as we pray together that I do not ask the Virgin's blessing on her. Dear child! she used to speak much of thee, my lord, to my sister; and she was so beautiful."

"Of me!" cried the young man, eagerly; "of me! What did she say? What did she tell Maria?"

"Do not excite yourself, my lord," said the priest, gravely, as he now began to examine the dressing of the wound, "else I may do hurt. When she arrives you may perhaps meet her. In truth, I know nothing. And I should have been more cautious in what I said," he continued, blushing. "Think not upon it, my lord."

"It is no use thinking of the girl, Padré Sahib, for it is not likely I may ever see her, and—but no matter. How do you find the wound?"

"Better than I expected," was the reply; "much better. My lord is in excellent health and strength. The muscular development is great," he continued, stroking down the powerful arms; "the livid appearance of the blow behind has gone. I will take off some of the upper bandages and replace them with lighter and easier ones, and my lord will be able to use his arm more freely. Forgive me the question, but was that blow from behind a stab? Nay, conceal it not from me."

"It was, Padré Sahib, a coward blow as I was mounting my horse; and but for a suit of Genoa mail I wore, I had perished."

"And your people apprehended the assassin?"

"No, he escaped in the darkness; but he had fallen and dropped the dagger, and that is witness against him."

"So he is known?"

"As far as his dagger is concerned he is, and is champion of the party of the man I slew, Elias Khan. To-day will decide the question, and all the nobility and officers of the durbar will be present. I would you could see the noble sight; but you are unknown, and had better remain quiet, for it is impossible to say when the Queen may send for you and for Maria."

"In my country there might be an honourable appeal to arms in such a case," said the priest, musingly. "It is a savage custom, but one which satisfies many."

"We have the same here, Señor."

"I understand," replied the priest, the tears rising to his eyes, "and can be secret. If thou art wounded send for me. I will come instantly, and may save thee pain. Meanwhile all is safe and secure in regard to the wound; but the bandages may be strained, and if so, suffering will follow. Take my blessing, noble Khan," and the good priest, kneeling down by the Khan's bed, prayed fervently.

"I am grateful for thy affection and thy blessing," returned the Khan, deeply moved, "and will be careful; but do not mention this to Maria."

"Not even to Maria," he said; "and I will be ready."

"Then Zóra has not forgotten me," thought Abbas Khan, as he mused for a while before he rose; "and that was why she came to me in that sweet dream last night;" and as he shut his eyes and thought of her, the scenes at the mountain fort seemed to be repeated. But it was time to rise, and the soft smile on his bright face lingered there as his attendant Oomur entered, who could not help remarking it.

"May the day be happy and fortunate to my lord!" he said, making his usual profound reverence; "he had happy dreams last night, and rested well?"

"Indeed I had both, and feel strong and refreshed; and I thank you for your good wishes, Oomur."

"The Lady Fatima has inquired often for you, my lord; and once came and looked on you, but she said you slept like a child,

and had a happy face, and were not to be disturbed. Now your bath is prepared, and your breakfast also."

"To which I am ready to do ample justice, I assure you. Where is Deenah, the armourer? Bid him come hither; I will follow you directly."

Deenah was in the ante-chamber, and entered with the mail shirt hanging over his arm.

"I have looked over every link of this, my lord," he said, after touching his master's feet, "and it is sound now," and he looked up significantly.

"Here, my lord, there was a dint, which had displaced two of the rings, but none are cracked or broken, and I have made them as good as ever. Mashalla! what workmen those were who made it; what temper in their steel! I am trying to imitate this, but my work will be clumsy. Look, my lord, you cannot see the place where the blow was; but I found some blood where the mail had touched your wound, and have sewn a little soft silk padding over it, and there can be no chafing now. My lord will wear this to-day."

"Yes, Oomur, my other suit of armour is too heavy for one with a partly open wound; and this is just as secure, thou sayest?"

"More so, my lord," was the reply; "against any sword or dagger blow it is perfect protection, and yet so light that it would not fatigue a boy. And what sword will you take?"

"The one I bought from the Portuguese merchant, who said it was Spanish. I have a fancy for that to-day."

"Nor will it fail you, my lord, if there be need. It is quite ready, and I put a fine edge upon it only two days ago. Yes, it is a rare weapon, and there is none like it in the armoury. On foot or on horseback, it is alike useful. If I may, I will bring it."

"Not now, Deenah, I am too hungry; have it ready for me when I dress for the durbar. I have no other orders, except that I shall ride Sooltan to-day, and that I do not require heavy caparisons. The light new set which hath hardly been used will suit me to-day exactly; those of green velvet."

Abbas Khan was soon attired in his morning dress of light muslin, and his skilful barber's operations had removed every straggling hair from the yet tender beard and moustachios, and given a new beauty to his face, while the rakish tie of the beautiful brocaded scarf which he had wound carelessly about his head, gave his handsome face an additional charm.

Very different was it from the pale shrunken features of the period of residence in Juldroog, or even from the anxious expression upon them with which he had visited the Queen the night before; and as he entered his aunt's apartments, the easy swinging gait, the cheerful smile with which he returned the salutations of the grave old eunuchs and the women servants, seemed so different to what she had seen on the preceding day, that his venerable aunt rose with a cry of joy that she could not suppress, and folded him in her arms.

It is not the custom of Mussulmans in India to congratulate any one upon improved personal appearance, for that is considered unlucky; but the blessings the worthy lady poured upon her adopted son went nigh to exhaust the names of saints in the Mussulman calendar, while she vowed thank offerings to every shrine in Beejapoor.

"Lallbee has tried to remember every dish thou art fond of," she continued; "and thou must eat well, for thou hast a long day before thee, Meeah."

"And an eventful one, mother," he said, earnestly, "as I will tell thee presently. Wait till I have eaten."

What a breakfast it was! The old cook was a Persian by birth, and was mistress of her craft; and not only her national dishes but those of the Dekhan were perfect under her skilful hands. She would not be denied the privilege of bringing in the milk pilao, which she esteemed her *chef d'œuvre*; and, after blessing the young man, by passing her fingers over his face, and cracking her knuckles against her temples, sat down near the edge of the white cloth on which the dishes had been placed, and sometimes selecting a choice morsel herself, and feeding him with it, encouraged him to eat, and watched the gradual disappearance of the viands with a satisfaction that could not be repressed.

But even appetites like the young Khan's cannot endure long under such circumstances; and, after a hearty meal and ablution, he betook himself to his aunt's cushions, where her own hookah was brought to him, and, asking her to send away all the servants, he told her what had happened the night before, omitting nothing, not even the cowardly stab he received which had proved harmless.

At times the dear lady wept plenteously, but silently. She had been a brave soldier's wife from her childhood, and had often sent him to the field when there was little hope of seeing him again. Even now he might be in the heat of battle any day, and was

old, with only a portion of his original strength and vigour; and what could she do but pray for him and commit his safety to the Lord?

So it was now. Precious as Abbas Khan was to her, she at once declared that he had decided wisely; that malicious tongues would be silenced, and his honour, and that of the noble house he was heir to, freed from even a suspicion of unworthiness. "Go, Meeah," she said, "I have no fear—none. As thy Royal mistress hath blessed thee, so also do I;" and as he kneeled before her, she put her hands on his head and prayed fervently.

"And now, mother," he said, "in case my fate is against me, and I fall, weep not, for thou wilt know I was unworthy to live. Yet I have but one request to make of thee, mother; one only. I have discovered that it was the old physician Syud Ahmed Ali, who was blinded and banished long ago, who saved my life at Juldroog; and his granddaughter, Zóra-bee, watched by me. She is but a child, mother, and for what she did I would see her safe. The Queen will despatch messengers for the old blind man to-morrow, and she will be with him. But think of her being alone in this evil city, all beautiful as she is, and what chance hath she of escape?"

"She is no unworthy leman of thine, Meeah, I trust," said the lady, doubtfully. "Swear that to me!"

"Mother! mother!" he returned, reproachfully, "it were better I had never spoken. Oh! darling mother! what have I said that thou shouldst suspect me?"

"I was watching thee silently in the night, Meeah, and thou wert dreaming of her. 'Zóra! Zóra!' escaped thy lips, and thy mouth was full of love."

"Yes," he said, gently, "I did dream. She came to me, mother, as a Houri of Paradise, with the celestial nectar, as she gave it to me the night I was stricken down with fever and my wound, and I hope she will tell thee of this herself some day. She is but a child yet; and if thou dost not believe me, ask Maria and the priest about her, they perhaps will satisfy thee more than I. Have I ever been a wanton profligate, mother?"

"No! no! no!" cried the lady, bursting into tears; "thou art true; never hast thou been false; and I believe thee fully. When didst thou ever deceive thy mother? Yet if thy dream had been of thy horse, thine armour, the jewels of thy house, or thy lands, I could have understood thee; but for a girl of whom I had never heard, what could I think, Meeah!"

"If I had been like others, mother," he returned——

"No matter," she said, interrupting him. "I tell thee before a woman's wiles and love the best have ever been weak; why not thou, my son? And yet I promise thee to do thy bidding. If Maria speaks for her she shall be to me as a daughter."

"Enough! enough! beloved mother!" cried the Khan, joyously clapping his hands; "what I have told thee was the only weight on my heart, and that is gone. As for property, surely my uncle is my heir, and may do as he pleases with it. If God wills I should die, what need I to think of it?"

"And I shall see you ere you depart, Meeah?"

"Hardly so, mother; a glance of regret, or tears in thine eyes might unman me, and I need all the composure I can command. Embrace me and let me go." And she did so, as he wished, without any outward display of emotion, though her heart ached for her boy.

Abbas Khan attired himself carefully. His turban was of gold muslin brocade, and the links of the Milan chain were twisted into it as on the night before; but three twists were passed over his ears and under his chin, which protected his neck and side of his head completely. The shirt of mail over his muslin tunic felt easy and light, and the padding of the armourer prevented pressure on the wound. Over all he wore a splendid suit of rich cloth of gold of Benares, and jámahs, or petticoat-like trousers, which belonged to the full court dress, but which could be easily cast off if necessary.

Hastily he examined the beautiful Toledo blade he had ordered to be ready for him, which was a broad, double-edged rapier, sharp as a razor on both sides. It was stiff, yet in the highest degree flexible under pressure, and might have been, probably was, once the weapon of a matador. Its quaint handle of inlaid gold balanced the sword exactly, and it was a weapon which inspired confidence in strong, skilful hands. Abbas Khan bound his waist with a rich brocaded scarf, the ends of which hung down on the right side, leaving the sword handle free. His retinue was ready, and at the lucky moment, directed by the family priest, he mounted his gallant horse, with a shout of "Bismilla!" echoed by all his followers, and passed on to the citadel.

He entered the gate with many others, strangers, friends, and acquaintances, and made his way direct through the main thoroughfare between the buildings attached to the Seven-Storeyed Palace, and the main edifice in which lived ordinarily the King and

his Queen Taj-ool-Nissa, Sooltana, the Queen Dowager, and other members of the family; and finally reached the Futteh Mydan, or plain of victory, a large open space which lay before the great archway of the hall of audience. This is now covered with brushwood, stones from the buildings around, and masses of crumbling masonry; but then it was smooth and clear. Not even a pebble was discernible among the short soft sward, which at that period of the year, the end of the monsoon, was in its greatest perfection.

It presented a noble and picturesque spectacle. Such was well calculated to stir the young soldier's heart. Around, at a little distance, stood the elephants and retinues of those who had already arrived. Some of their rich caparisons were of cloth of gold, others of European cloth, embroidered with gold, or thin native leather also embroidered. On their backs they bore howdahs; some large with canopies, some smaller without coverings, but all bearing the weapons, bows and arrows, lances, or matchlocks of their owners, with their distinguishing banner or pennant.

Many of the noble beasts were excited and restless, and were trumpeting loudly, and blowing dust into the air with their trunks. Others were gentle and quiet, and steady, while their drivers made them play off the little tricks they had taught them. In front of the elephants were a line of horses, for the most part splendidly caparisoned; and from their armour, the morions and coats of mail of the riders—from spear heads and sword hilts by thousands, as well as from the many dresses of cloth of gold, the blazing sun flashed with a power and brilliance that the eyes could hardly endure.

It was a sight at once most gorgeous and impressive in itself; the costumes and banners of the ranks of infantry, interspersed with the cavalry—Dekhanies, Arabs, Persians, Oozbaks, Circassians, Tartars of many tribes, Georgians, Turks, and many other foreigners; while a strong division of Beydurs, in their peculiar costume of conical leather caps, and leather drawers, which has been described on a former occasion, were by no means the least conspicuous or remarkable of the motley assemblage.

"Oh, that Runga Naik were among them!" thought Abbas Khan, as he looked towards the body, whose peculiar long-barrelled matchlocks and broad-bladed spears formed a glittering mass, from which the wild, quivering notes of their brass trumpets sounded at intervals. "Oh, that Runga were here!"

"Go, Yasin," he continued, to his standard-bearer, "see if

Runga Naik is among the Beydur people yonder; if so, tell him I am here." But Runga was not there, and it was not known where he had gone; he had taken his men from Korikul and proceeded westwards.

Abbas Khan dismounted at the foot of the steps of the corridor from which the great hall was entered at several points by open arches, and passing by that which was nearest to his "misl," or appointed place, he paused for a few moments before he took his seat, and looked around him.

The vast area was entirely filled, except the middle, by rows of nobles and superior officers, and leaders of the divisions of tribes and troops, and formed a striking scene. All the civil officers, heads of departments, secretaries, and the like, were attired in the usual court dress of white muslin, with simply tied turbans of the same. All else, and they were by far the majority, wore, like himself, vests of cloth of gold, with the loose petticoat trousers, which, when seated, completely concealed their persons from the knees downwards. The varied colours of the cloths of gold, and of the numberless brocaded muslins, scarfs, and turbans, especially where a ray of sun lighted upon them, was dazzling and gorgeous in the extreme, and led the eye to the effect outside, where, from the basement of the hall to the utmost limit of the open space, the divisions of the troops stood in their appointed places.

On the opposite side of the hall sat the grim-looking body of Abyssinians, for the most part clad in black chain mail, worn over their ordinary costume; and in a prominent place among them Yacoot, their champion, who, as he saw Abbas Khan enter, twisted what moustache he possessed with a defiant air, as, indeed, did most of the rest. On his own side, more towards the entrance to the hall, sat the chiefs of the Dekhanies, attired with all the brilliance they were famous for; and he saw that Hyat Khan, the head Kotwal, who, with the chamberlains, had marshalled the assembly, had placed between the several doubtful factions strong parties of Arabs, Turks, Persians, and other foreigners, so that collision between any was nearly, if not quite, impossible.

It was a spirit-stirring sight, and Abbas Khan, as room was made for him by an old friend, looked around him proudly. I shall have a goodly company to witness my fate, he thought, and be the issue as the Lord wills.

The audience hall is still in existence, but only as a noble ruin. The central arch of the façade is ninety-two

feet in span, and of noble height, and the hall is perhaps two hundred feet in length. It is plain in character, but the groined shafts spring up to support the roof in graceful contour, like those of a Gothic church, and were once covered with a profusion of gilding which has been scraped away. The King's throne on the upper dais, which was reserved for princes of the blood, religious dignitaries, and prime ministers of the State, was empty; but a small balcony, which projected from the main wall of the edifice, was usually the seat of the Queen, and it remained to be seen whether the actual Queen Taj-ool-Nissa would use it, or whether the Queen Regent would, as was frequently the case, occupy the throne on the dais.

The suspense was not of long continuance. After a short interval eunuchs were seen to pull down the transparent blinds of the balcony, which denoted the presence of the Queen, and almost at the same time the Queen Regent's slight figure was seen to issue from one of the archways on the basement, and, accompanied by a crowd of eunuchs and Royal slaves, seat herself upon the Royal throne. The whole assembly to a man rose to greet her, and the hearty shouts of the troops outside proclaimed the presence of the honoured and beloved lady.

Then the business of the day commenced. Some accounts were signed and audited, some messengers from foreign States bearing despatches were introduced by the Mirdhas, or ushers. Some officers, who had been on service and had returned, arose, and, their names and style being proclaimed, went forward, kissed the steps of the dais, and presented the hilts of their swords to the Regent.

As Abbas Khan advanced and passed close to the ranks of the Abyssinians, he was greeted by a scowl of fierce eyes, and murmurs which could hardly be repressed. But he took no notice, and resumed his seat without interruption.

"They will not be quiet long," said his friend, in a whisper; "they have vowed to be avenged on thee to-day for the murder, as they call it, of Elias Khan; but thou hast many friends, Abbas Khan, and should have no fear."

"Fear!" cried the young man; "I know no fear in this matter. Wait and see; but let there be no violence before the Queen."

Then the ushers called for petitions, and many were delivered to them to be read before the Queen; but, as one approached the Abyssinians, Yacoot arose, and in a loud, harsh voice, and broken

Persian, mixed with his own uncouth speech, demanded permission to lay his petition at the foot of the throne.

"Let him approach and speak," said the Regent, in her sweet, clear voice, which was heard through the hall like a silver bell; and, indeed, at that moment a breathless silence had fallen on the whole assembly.

"He cannot speak so that the fountain of justice can understand," said a secretary, "but the paper can be read. Lay it there," he continued to Yacoot.

"She will not get it, someone will take it away; I will give it to herself only," was his rude reply, as he drew his bulky figure to its full height, and twisted up his moustachios with a fierce gesture.

"Let him give it," said the Queen Regent, stretching out her hand; and, apparently satisfied, Yacoot knelt on a step of the dais and delivered it into her hand.

"Now I have seen you receive it," he said surlily; "and we look to you for justice, and I will take it if not given."

At any other time such a threat would have had short shrift and a bloody ending under the great Adansonian trees, where traitors and other criminals were beheaded, and several persons advanced to arrest the speaker; but again the Queen's voice was heard.

"He means me no evil," she said; "he is only rude and unmannerly; do not molest him; let him go to his place, and he will hear his paper read."

But Yacoot seemed to have no intention of moving, and might have created a disturbance, but that two or three of his brotherhood dragged him away and forced him to sit down. The petition was then read, and purported to be from the whole of the Abyssinians, claiming justice from the State for the murder of Elias Khan, and charging Abbas Khan with rebellion and cowardice in having acted on behalf of the rebel forces.

"Let Abbas Khan reply," was the Queen's answer. "Let him come before the throne and speak freely and truly;" and the young man came forward, with the same easy, graceful step which all knew, and not least his noble mistress.

We know what he told the assembly, addressing them as his friends and fellow-soldiers, praying them not to spare him if he were guilty. "The headsmen are near," he said, "and if God wills it I am ready to meet my fate. What matter how I die for my Queen!" and he said this with so smiling a face and so frank

a manner that a murmur of applause ran through the assembly. But the Abyssinians rose to their feet as one man, and their swords, as if by one action, flashed from their scabbards.

"He hath a cunning tongue!" cried one. "We will cut it out of his mouth!" shouted Yacoot.

"Your Majesty had better quit the hall," said Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, joining his hands, "and leave these brawlers to me. Whatever happens, Yacoot must be arrested for last night's work, and I have force enough."

"Ah! Khan," returned the Queen, "that would be the sure way to begin bloodshed. No, I will remain as I am; I have no fear."

Meanwhile Abbas Khan stood where he had taken post as he addressed the assembly. He was exactly in front of the Abyssinians; but their action had no effect on him. Calm and unmoved, he felt secure though a hundred flashing swords were threatening his instant annihilation; but no one struck at him.

"Listen, all of ye, friends and brother soldiers," he cried in his manly voice, which echoed through the hall. "I am accused of murder, of which I am innocent; and of cowardice, which is worse. With my honour I can live, but without it I must die under your contempt. I appeal, therefore, to our time-honoured custom of ordeal, to be decided before our noble mother and Queen. Who of my enemies will meet me now? Even now, in the field yonder, and let Him who knows all hearts decide between my enemies and me. Behold, I am ready!"

Then arose from all parts of the hall cries of "We believe thee, noble Khan; thou hast no enemies among us."

"But I have enemies, nevertheless," he continued; "and, but for an accident, I had not been alive before ye to-day; and even in the precincts of the Palace I was not safe last night from attempted assassination. I see the man before me who struck the blow; he is the champion of the Abyssinians, and it is he I would meet in fair combat unto the death."

"I will not fight him," said Yacoot to his friends; "he bears a charmed life, else——"

"Thou art named Yacoot; and he means that thou wert the would-be assassin. Behold!" cried Hyat Khan, taking the remarkable Abyssinian dagger from his waistband. "Ye all know to whom this belonged; and, look, the point is broken, yet Abbas Khan is safe!"

"He is a coward; I will not forget him," murmured the Abyssinian.

"Thou art accused of attempt at murder, Yacoot," said one of his companions; "'tis thou who art the coward, if thou refuse to fight Abbas Khan. Either to him and to God or to us thou must answer, for we tolerate no assassins."

"Come!" cried the young Khan. "Come, Yacoot! art thou afraid? Come, like a brave man as thou hast been. Nay, if thou dalliest, will this rouse thee?" and drawing his sword he slightly touched his antagonist on the shoulder, and escorted by a body of his friends turned to depart.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMBAT.

ABBAS KHAN walked slowly out of the hall to the steps where his horse awaited him. There he removed his court drawers and pulled on his boots, which had been fastened to his saddle. "Thou must be steady and sure, good Sooltan, to-day," he said, stroking the head of his beautiful charger, who rubbed his nose against his master's breast, and answered by a low, loving whinny; and the young man, vaulting lightly into the saddle, loosed his shield from the saddle-bow, drew his sword, and paced gently round the front of the vast assembly, welcomed by shouts of generous greeting, and cries of "God keep thee safe!" His adversary did not delay to follow. He had replaced his turban with a steel morion, which flashed in the sun, but otherwise nothing relieved the dull black of the heavy chain mail by which he was protected. Many remarked that he looked livid as he mounted his horse, and that he impatiently jerked the bit of his fine Kattywar charger till it became violent and unmanageable; and he rode at full speed, as if it were his intention to overwhelm his antagonist. But Abbas Khan was too good a horseman to be suddenly surprised, and he evaded the charge by a dexterous turn of his horse, which required that the Abyssinian should follow him into the centre of the field, where now the combat commenced in earnest. The Abyssinian had armed himself with a short, very heavy, and much curved sabre, his favourite weapon, which was known by the epithet of "Kussab," the butcher, from the deadly wounds it inflicted; and he had also a large shield, which nearly covered his person, and with his armour rendered him almost impenetrable. But Abbas Khan now felt the

advantage of his longer weapon, by which and his skilful horsemanship he was able to keep his enemy at bay.

Who can describe the changing nature of the combat? Each now charging, now retreating, wheeling round, again closing, while blows enough to have beaten down the guard of a stronger man than Abbas Khan were showered upon his shield. The Queen saw the whole from her seat, and her lips were moving in silent prayer as she looked towards the whirling figures, and clasped her hands; and the faint shrieks and cries from the balcony above proved that excitement existed there also. But the combat was of no long duration. Abbas Khan had tried his antagonist again and again, and almost despaired of finding a vulnerable point, when in a fierce charge by the Abyssinian he saw that a portion of his helmet at the side under his ear was open, and as the encounter continued he drove his long narrow sword through it with all his force. There was a gush of blood; and after reeling in his saddle, the huge champion fell to the ground heavily, and did not rise.

"He falls! he falls!" cried hundreds in the hall. "Look, noble lady," said Hyat Khan to the Queen, "he has fallen!"

"Who has fallen?" asked the Queen, faintly. She had been unable to look on to the end, for to her perception Abbas Khan seemed to have no chance before his enemy.

"Yacoot, the Abyssinian," replied the Kotwal. "Such is the wisdom and justice of the Lord. Ameen! Ameen!" and he hastened away to the spot. Yacoot was not dead, and was trying to speak; but he was too weak to rise.

"Some of ye tie a bandage round his neck," said Abbas Khan, "else he will die."

"Let him die," returned Hyat Khan. "Wouldst thou interfere with the sentence of the All Just and Powerful, Abbas Khan? Leave him in His hands. He hath met a soldier's fate, and that is more than he deserved. But what is that he is trying to get at behind, and clutches at though his fingers are stiffening? Take off his mail, some of ye, and untie his waistband. See, he is dead even now, noble Khan, and this is no indignity."

The searchers were well skilled in their work, and soon produced two humeeanas, or long narrow bags of soft leather, which appeared heavy with gold and silver coins, and which Hyat Khan himself took charge of; but there was another, broader bag, which appeared to contain a great number of papers and letters, some of which seemed to be in Portuguese writing and some in Persian.

"Give them to our Lady Mother yourself, Abbas Khan; they may be Elias Khan's, and, if so, we need no more," said the Kotwal, who handed the bag to Abbas Khan. "Come, we delay; and, by Alla! 'twas well we found them. Take that away," he continued to his men; "lay it on the grass without the gate; some of his people will get it buried."

The shouts, the cries of joy and congratulation, the peculiar yells of his friends the Beydurs, had been overpowering; and as Abbas Khan rode past, making his horse caracole and prance at every step, and giving his graceful salutations to all, the enthusiasm was unbounded. As he was preparing to dismount at the steps of the corridor, his old retainer, Runga Naik, rushed through the crowd to embrace his feet. "I saw him die! I saw him die, Meeah!" he cried, "and I have brought in the rest. Do as thou wilt with them, for thou art safe, O my lord, and my prayers have been accepted."

"All of them, Runga? All of whom?"

"The men that were with us at Kórla. One by one I have tracked them down, even to Belgaum. Look!"

As a space was cleared, loud cries of "Amán! Amán! Mercy! mercy!" broke from a crowd of captives tied together; and one of them, who had been Abbas Khan's duffadar, cried out piteously, "Let me speak; let me speak before the assembly. I am a traitor and a rebel, and deserve death, but not before I have spoken, O my lord."

"Let me and my people take charge from thee, Runga Naik," said the Kotwal. "Thy men are weary and footsore."

"I thought to have been here yesterday, noble Khan, but it could not be done. Yet I am not too late, and the duffadar should speak before the Queen."

"Let him follow me," said Abbas Khan; "this alone was needful to complete all." And as he advanced into the hall, hundreds poured forward to greet him. Nor was the Abyssinian party less demonstrative than any of the others. Then the duffadar, humbly prostrating himself before the throne, gave a clear account of the skirmish at the first onset by Elias Khan. He, and his men whom he had gained over, deserted to the rebels, and, but for the confusion which followed Elias Khan's death, Abbas Khan could not have escaped. Yacoot had followed them for some miles, but eventually lost them in the dust storm.

"God has judged the right," said a venerable officer of the Abyssinian party, making a low obeisance to the Queen with

tears in his eyes as he presented the hilt of his sword to Abbas Khan; "and we pray the Queen's and your own forgiveness, noble soldier, that you were falsely accused, and some day in battle we may prove our devotion to you."

But who can describe the thankful joy of the noble Queen, who, impatient to greet her adopted son, and with her eyes streaming with tears, and in a broken voice, blessed him as he advanced, kissed the step of the Royal dais, and bowed his head before her. "Again I bless thee, O true and faithful," she said; "and the Lord hath done justice openly and before all men. My son, may thy years be long and honoured."

"Ameen! Ameen!" said the chief priest, devoutly; "he is worthy."

"Let no one leave," cried the Queen, in her clear, sweet voice, which all heard. "Keep silence till your lord the King's letter is read."

It was very brief, but he wrote that all the army of Ahmednugger, headed by the violent young King who had just ascended the throne, was advancing upon him; that his own troops were suffering from sickness; and that all the men available in Beejapoor, that could be spared, should be sent under any leader selected by herself; and, at its conclusion, the Queen Regent rose, her slight figure appearing almost visionary among the crowds of warriors who rose with her.

"Nobles and warriors," she said, gracefully, "when I name Abbas Khan for this service, can I choose better? Bismilla! let it be so." And as Abbas Khan took the leaf of pán which was handed to him, and turned to the groups behind him and cried, "O friends, will ye accept me?" a shout arose through the vast building, and was taken up by the masses without with an enthusiasm beyond description. But what is there in life so fickle as the breath of popular favour?

"I must ask permission to return home for a while, mother," said the young man in a low voice as he stood by the throne; "but take this packet of papers which were found on him who died. My wound is uneasy, and needs my good physician's care. And as I saw there were Portuguese letters among them, I will bring the good Padré with me to the evening council. Do not allow them to go out of your own possession, they may be important."

"I will not," she replied. "Go, refresh yourself; I shall expect you and the Padré at the evening council."

CHAPTER VII.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

AT the loud cries of the Mirdhas and silver-stick bearers of "Burkhast, Durbar Burkhast!" "The durbar is dissolved!" the various masses of troops filed out of the square before the Hall of Audience in the same gorgeous array as they had entered. Indeed, the effect was even more gorgeous, for before the assembly the sun had been slightly veiled with thin clouds, and had only occasionally shone out with full brightness; but now the clouds had cleared away, and the sun's rays descended on the glittering masses with a power which materially enhanced their splendour. One by one the nobles left the hall, making their humble obeisances to the Throne, and, joined by their retinues, passed onwards through the citadel to the gate, and thence to their respective abodes within and without the citadel. The prospect of immediate service in the field, too, enhanced the spirit of the many different bodies of men, and their party, or national war cries arose from time to time, mingled with shouts of "Victory to Abbas Khan!" which, entirely spontaneous as they were, filled his heart with joy. The Queen again reminding him that he was to return at the usual hour of council, attended by the Portuguese priest, left the hall before it was emptied; and when most of the nobles had gone on, he mounted his horse, and rode home at a quiet pace.

In truth, his wound was painful, for his shield was somewhat heavy; and the rapidity and strength of the blows showered on him by the Abyssinian had required his utmost skill and vigilance to parry. He had no doubt, therefore, that the Padré's bandages had been strained, as, indeed, they proved to have been, on examination. In the heat of the encounter, all pain had been forgotten; and it was now great and increasing, and he longed for relief. But his mind was full of joyous gratitude, not only for preservation in the ordeal, but for the establishment of his innocence of cowardice or of treachery; and the papers found on the Abyssinian might even prove more, since it was evident, from the addresses on them, that they had belonged to Elias Khan, and before the night had passed all would be clear.

Thus Abbas Khan rode on through the streets of the

fort which led to his uncle's house, slowly and deliberately, receiving the salutations of the crowds which filled them with grateful acknowledgments. As the troops broke up from the durbar, great numbers of them had betaken themselves to these streets; and the real joy with which they now greeted the young nobleman, always a favourite, was more real and more genuine, perhaps, than that evinced before the ordeal. Abbas Khan was the popular hero of the day; women stretched out their arms from the housetops and blessed him, and wished him a hundred years of life and joy. Stalwart veterans would not be kept off; and some kissed his feet, others put portions of his garment to their lips, and with a blessing turned away. It was almost too much to bear.

At his gate he was met by the whole household, and the usual ceremonies of welcome were performed ere he crossed the threshold. Lighted lamps were waved over him, incense was burnt in the name of the protecting saints, and vows of offerings at their shrines promised by the venerable Moolla, who was present on behalf of his aunt. As he dismounted from his horse, he caressed it fondly. As if he had understood his warning, Sooltan had been steady and perfectly manageable through the combat, and nothing but his perfect temper, and the ease and certainty with which he had followed every turn of his master's wrist or pressure of his knee or heel, could have ensured victory. As he ascended the steps of the hall of audience all that were present rose and greeted him, many came forward to embrace him, and several poets of the city presented addresses in verse, of a very florid and laudatory description, comparing him to Roostum and the champions described in the "Shah Nama" with painstaking fidelity, which, whatever the merits of the composition might be, were sufficiently tedious. When these were finished, and suitable rewards ordered, Abbas Khan, fairly wearied out, excused himself to the rest of the company, and went at once to his aunt, who had already sent several messages to him to come as quickly as he could; and truly it was grateful to him to find himself once more encircled by the arms of one so revered by him and so dear.

"Oh! thou art safe, thou art safe, my son!" she cried, as she clung sobbing to his neck. "I feared for thee; I wept for thee; I prayed for thee to the Lord and His saints, and I was heard; and as soon as the news was brought to me that thou hadst won the combat, I sent Fatehas to all the mosques and shrines; and to-morrow, Inshalla! I will feed a thousand poor

people in the name of the Imams. And thou art not hurt, my son?"

"Not hurt, mother; but the old wound needs looking to by the Padré Sahib; it is sore and stiff. It is he alone that can give me rest and ease. He is waiting within, and I must go to him; for there are other matters on which he must be consulted. I will come to thee at the evening prayers, after which, when I have eaten, I must return to the Queen for the evening council."

"So soon," she said, "so soon to leave me; and I had hoped to sit and talk with thee a whole evening! Well, thou must do thy duty to our Royal mistress; and why should I regret that thou doest it? God forbid. And she was gracious unto thee, Meeah?"

"Mother, she wept; she could hardly speak as I went up to her; but I saw that she believed in me, and she was happy. Happy, mother; and your son was proud, too, when she rose and declared I was to lead the division that goes to the King's aid. Ah! that was too much honour; may I be worthy of it!"

"I have no fear, Meeah," replied the old lady. "Go where she sends thee, and win honour and fame as thine uncle has done; but go now and get relief."

Abbas Khan found the priest in his own apartment, who, after very sincere congratulations, helped him to divest himself of the mail shirt he wore, when he fell to an examination of the wound.

"No doubt, my lord, it is sore and smarting from the weight and strain of the armour; but it is sound, and there hath been no more bleeding. I will change all these dressings now, and put on lighter ones, and in a few days there will be no more danger of relapse."

The new, cool dressings were a delicious relief, and left his arm at full liberty for action of any kind. Until he reached the King's camp, he should have no occasion to use it in any but the most ordinary actions.

"And now, Padré Sahib," continued Abbas Khan, when the operation was finished, "make yourself ready to come with me to the Palace to-night. The Queen-Regent desires to see you on a matter of much importance, and I am ordered to bring you with me."

"Do you know why?" asked D'Almeida. "Nothing in regard to the mission at Moodgul could have given offence to Her Majesty? I wish we had had longer notice; Maria might have made some sweetmeats, for an offering, or some of her work. Yet

I remember, she hath an exquisite lace veil, and it could not be presented to one more worthy."

"The matter is this," replied Abbas Khan. "On the body of the Abyssinian was found a case of letters. Some of them are in Persian and Mahrathi, others in your language; at least the writing is in the Frangi character. No one that she can trust can read it, and assuredly no one among the Portuguese artisans and gunners could translate the papers. Do you remember anything which might give a clue to these letters?"

"I do," he replied. "Was your adversary a very tall, very powerful man, with hard, black features?"

"He was, Padré; why do you ask?"

"Because, some months ago, soon after Dom Diego came, a man such as I describe, mounted on a big chesnut horse, and with several attendants, arrived at Moodgul. They came to me first, but the letter they brought was addressed to my colleague, and I directed them to him. The man was so remarkable that, as he rode away, I called Maria to look at him. There was a renegade Portuguese with that man, who spoke to me in our language, and interpreted what I said to him."

"Ah! that is valuable, my friend; but you do not know of what passed between him and Dom Diego?"

"Nothing whatever, my lord. Once only the good Nawab, my friend, hinted that some intrigue was in progress between my superior and Eyn-ool-Moolk, but warned me against having any concern in it. But what could Dom Diego do, even if he has engaged in intrigue?"

"Ah! my friend, you are too simple," returned the young Khan, laughing; "he could get money; he could promise your nation's troops."

"Those he will never get," interrupted the priest. "Our Government has declined from the first to mix itself up in the affairs of kingdoms whom our nation esteems to be heretical. I have heard there have been many offers by the Emperor Akbar, and others before him, but the policy of our Government is consistent and friendly to all."

"And yet you are a nation of valiant soldiers. It is strange to see such without ambition."

"Which might lead to our ruin, my lord. No; wise minds have determined and guided our course hitherto, and we only defend ourselves when we are attacked."

"As we know to our cost, Señor Padré; and as they of Ahmed-

nugger found to theirs in the siege of Ghoul," returned Abbas Khan, laughing. "But enough now; be ready when I send for you. And your sister is well, and hath all she needs?"

"All, my lord, and is grateful. She is busy preparing for her school; and our poor folks are thankful for even the few ministrations we have afforded them."

"Only be careful, Señor, lest you excite bigotry among mine. Alas! there is bitterness between Moslim and Nazarene; but you have only to be careful."

"Yet at Moodgul no one molests us, my lord."

"There are many who would do so if they dared, my friend; but you are under protection there by order of the State, and here it may be different. I only say be cautious, and you are as safe here as there."

The priest bowed and retired. What his young friend had said to him he did not tell to his sister; but some of the castles they had been building had already been shaken, and caution was at least necessary, lest they should crumble down altogether.

As the Padré left him, Abbas Khan threw a light sheet over himself, and slept profoundly. The Lady Fatima stole in several times to see him, and at last seated herself near him; and, with a light fan, drove away the flies which would have settled on his face. How proud she was of her boy. "The Lady Queen is as proud," she said to herself, "I know; but she could not do this like me. Am I not the happier? for I can watch him while every mood of his mind leaves its expression on his features. See, now, there is a frown, and the fingers seem to clutch something; it is his sword, and he dreams of the combat. And there! now all is changed, and there is love on the moist lips and in the smiles. Why dreams he of her? Ah, well! may she be worthy."

So the young man slept, and so his good aunt tended him as she had done when he was a child And the time flew rapidly, and the muezzin from the minaret of the garden mosque began to chant invitation to the evening prayer, "Allah-hu-Akbar! Allah-hu-Akbar!" and then Abbas Khan woke, and found his aunt sitting beside him, watching.

"My sleep was sweet," he said, "because thou watchedst over me, mother. Ah, so sweet! may God reward thee. But I must go to the prayer now."

"There are many who wish to speak with thee, my son," she said; "and one is very urgent, Runga Naik, a Beydur."

"Bid him wait; he is, indeed, most needful. I will not be long away, mother, or I will send for him."

Entering the garden by the private door, Abbas Khan performed his ablutions at the little fountain, whose cool, sparkling water refreshed him. The garden was refreshing also; and, as he knelt down, a soft feeling of grateful adoration stole over him. Many of his friends were assembled there, and their salutations, with the warm grasp of the hand which accompanied them, were more grateful to him than he had ever remembered before.

"I will attend ye speedily, friends," he said to them, "but I have some private affairs to see to first here, and ye must excuse me;" and, calling to an attendant, he bade him bring in Runga Naik, and seating himself on the rim of the fountain, awaited his coming alone. Presently he saw the Beydur chief enter, peering about as though he were in a thick forest, but directly he saw his young master, he bounded forward with a cry of joy, and threw himself at his feet.

"I was not in time, Meeah," he said, as soon as his emotion had subsided, "to see thee slay that villain. Would I had been! But I could not travel faster with the prisoners; and it was only at the last stage that I heard thou hadst reached this the day before, when the Lady Queen was hunting. What had delayed thee?"

"Only the wound again, friend," said the Khan, laughing. "One day—it was our second march—my horse, it was one of Osman Beg's, stumbled and fell with me, the stitches of my wound burst open, and the Padré Sahib insisted I should not travel till I was well. Notwithstanding his skill, I could not move for more than a month; but I had good lodging at Talikota."

"So near to my town; and why did you not send for me, Meeah?"

"I did send; but thou wert gone, they said, to Belgaum, and thou hadst not returned when I resumed my journey."

"Then you have heard nothing, my lord, of the old Dervish and his child? Are they with thee?"

"No!" replied Abbas Khan, starting at the question. "Not with me. I have never even heard of them. By your soul, tell me what you know."

"I had been absent from home tracing our men who had deserted us at Kórla, and had three hundred of my best men with me. You were then in Juldroog, and I heard afterwards you and the Moodgul Padré had departed. There was one of our Beydur

festivals to come on after that, and I returned home for it, when I was suddenly sent for by the Dervish, and I delivered Zóra from the palace of Osman Beg, where she was confined under the charge of two procuresses from Moodgul. Yes, Burma Naik and Bheema and I did it; and to this day I regret that I did not slay thy profligate cousin as he slept."

"But, but!" cried Abbas Khan, horrible thoughts rising in his mind, "she was safe, she had not been dishonoured?"

"Thanks be to the Gods, she was safe, Meeah. There had been an attempt at a marriage that afternoon; but the stout old Moolla refused to perform it, and the ceremony was deferred till the morrow. I saw there was time for me to do what was needed, and we three brought her away, through the panthers' cave. Who dared to follow us?"

"And then?" cried the Khan, breathlessly and anxiously.

"Only this," continued the simple fellow; "I had a boat ready, and the old man's property was placed in it as evening fell; and when we three brought the girl away safely, we crossed the river, and I took them to Kukeyra, where I have a house, and where I bestowed them safely, with six hundred of my people there to guard them."

"And they are there now, Runga?"

"No," he replied, "they are not there; and that is what troubles me. One of the Kukeyra men met me here to-day, and told me that the old man had grown restless; and though Zóra had entreated him to remain, yet he had left Kukeyra and gone to our Rajah at Wakin Keyra, who was protecting him; and that Osman Beg had sent spies across to trace them, and even attempted to follow with his retainers; but who can cross the river mother if the Beydurs say nay?"

"Now may God be praised, Runga, for this protection of them! Oh, think, if that child had come to harm! And it was a foul plot and outrage of Osman Beg's, for which he shall answer to me as surely as the sun shines or as the Abyssinian died. But art thou sure it was a forcible abduction of the child?"

"There is no doubt of that. Jooma and another carried Zóra from the bastion, as she sat looking at Cháya Bhugwuti; and only that the good old Moolla refused, Zóra would have been married by Nika, and would have now been in thy cousin's zenana. Yes, that is true, Meeah; I heard it from Zóra, and others have told me since."

"He shall answer this before the King and his mother,"

said Abbas Khan, fiercely. "Ever treacherous! who can trust him?"

"He has other things to answer for besides this, Meeah," was the reply. "Look! here are more papers, more letters;" and he took a packet from his waistband; "and I have secured all Elias Khan's Duftur, and his scribe. There are plenty of Osman Beg's letters in it—and other people's too, for the matter of that—quite enough to give him a seat under the Goruk Imlee trees, and to find the executioner making him a last salaam."

"Then he should be summoned at once, Runga."

"If you were not to go to your uncle and the King he might be; but as it is, he had better remain. He thinks he is quite safe; and, indeed, he is safe, for it is impossible for him to stir; but here he would intrigue while you are away. He might even learn news of the old Dervish, and carry off Zóra in spite of us; but now I will send word to my people, and to the twelve thousand, that her honour is your honour and mine; and they know what that means. I, Meeah, go to the war with thee, for the men here who belong to the Rajah are mad to go with us, and I will not deny them."

"Oh, true friend and brother!" exclaimed the young Khan, with a choking sensation in his throat, and tears welling up in his eyes; "what can I render to thee for all this aid, and thy good counsel? Yes, come with me, Runga; we have fought before together, but none know thee but me. Now all shall know thee, and thou shalt be honoured and rewarded. First, let us do our duty to the King, and then," he continued, rising, "I call the holy saints to witness, our duty will be done to others. Hast thou eaten food, Runga?"

"No," he said, "not since yesterday; but I have bathed, and am hungry. Tell them to give me something from thy kitchen, Meeah; and suffer me to eat here, where I can offend no one, and put my dinner on fresh plantain leaves. Ah! that will be a luxury, indeed!"

The servants brought to him portions of the savoury food which was ready in the kitchen, and deposited it on a huge plantain leaf which he had gathered. They saw him eat as it seemed to them voraciously, but in truth little food had passed his lips for two days; and when he had finished, they saw him wrap himself in the sheet which had before served him as upper covering and waist-band, and lying down on the bare earth fall into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIGHT COUNCIL

As on the previous evening, Abbas Khan arrived at the entrance to the council chamber at the usual hour, accompanied by Francis d'Almeida. They had come in palanquins, for convenience sake; and, on this occasion, Abbas Khan had dispensed with his inner mail coat and soldier-like costume, and wore the ordinary Court dress of his rank—simple white muslin, with a Cashmere shawl; and carried only a light Court sword in his hand. He felt that there was no danger now. The priest wore his best cassock and the gown of his order; and, rejecting the advice of Maria, went in his bare feet, and sandals which he could easily put off. His dress formed a strange contrast with the flowing robes of his companion; and the heavy slouched hat made it even more remarkable in comparison with the turbans of the Palace attendants. Yet his frank, handsome face, bright fresh colour, silky moustachios and beard, which, as a missionary, he had allowed to grow, denoted at once elevated birth and extreme intelligence. Abbas Khan had given him some general instruction as to his demeanour in approaching the throne, and the worthy priest appeared by no means flurried or anxious as to the result. As he knelt down on one knee, doffed his hat gracefully, and bowed his head as he would have done to his own King, the Royal lady was satisfied that the priest had seen Courts, and was well born and bred; and her surprise was not a little enhanced by the excellent Persian in which he replied to her inquiries after the health of his sister and himself.

"And you speak Canarese also, I hear?" she said; "and thy sister too?"

"It is the tongue of our people at Moodgul and of our Church there, which the beneficence of your Royal ancestor, Ibrahim, established," he replied; "and it is more familiar to our lips than Persian, which we have seldom need to use. In Canarese, my sister is as good a scholar as I am, and we are now translating the New Testament, or Unjeel."

"May I be your sacrifice," cried the chief priest, who was in

his accustomed place; "but the Nazarenes have no correct version of the Unjeel. Did not the Prophet (may his memory be blessed) denounce them? In chapter——"

"Nay, reverend sir," interposed the Queen, "we are not met for a religious discussion, but for State affairs; and I pray you to be silent. Here, in the court of the refuge of the poor, my son, all men are equal in His and my sight, whatever may be their faith. We leave that to God, before whom we are all equal. Be seated, sir," continued the Queen; "we have pressing business to do ere we can enter upon what thou canst aid us in."

It seemed as if there were no place vacant, except one close to the chief priest, who evidently did not relish the idea of being touched by an unbeliever; and he fidgeted in his seat, crowded as much as possible into his neighbour's, held up his scarf to his mouth, and in every way expressed his objection to any proximity to the Padré, who in his turn was much embarrassed. But the Brahmin Minister of Finance, whose heart had warmed towards the Padré in hearing his own language spoken so fluently and so well, offered him his own seat, and took that assigned to Francis d'Almeida. Thus peace was for the present secure, but when it might be broken by the chief priest's intolerance it was impossible to declare.

It was a busy scene. Orders for the pay of the troops about to march had to be signed by the Queen and by the heads of departments present, to be paid from the treasury next morning; orders also to district authorities on the road to provide supplies and forage at each stage, and to have the roads made practicable for the artillery. Public carriage cattle out at graze had been recalled; but more were necessary, and Hyat Khan's requisitions were heavy on the city. These, with the usual revenue and district papers to be signed and made up, correspondence to be written, and drafts of letters to be read, occupied a long time, and was watched by the Padré with the utmost interest; while his neighbour the Brahmin kept up with him a lively conversation in Canarese. He had heard of the Padré's learning from other Brahmins, who came periodically for their dues to the Royal city; and his manner was kind and considerate. At last, as his business was concluded, and his assistant was tying up his bundle of papers, he whispered to the Padré—

"I must depart, sir. Sit quietly where you are, and do not stir, unless the Queen-Mother calls you or sends for you. Above all, beware of the chief priest; for he would make no

scruple of quarrelling with you, even before the Queen. He barely tolerates our presence, being, as he calls us, Kaffirs, and is certainly less tolerant of you, a Nazarene. It would not be wise to cross him."

"Yet if he should revile my Church?"

"I say still, answer him not," returned the other, "nor speak at all, except the Queen herself bid thee. He is most intolerant, perhaps dangerous."

"I thank you sincerely for your warning, and I will be very discreet, you may be sure," was Francis d'Almeida's reply; but he was not the less determined to bear testimony in the cause of his faith, should it be needful. Was he not a missionary of Christ, and a soldier of the Church militant? So he sat quietly, much amused and interested in the scene passing before him, in the multiplicity of business, and the ease and regularity with which it was conducted. Abbas Khan was busy with the details of the force he was to command, giving instructions to the various leaders of companies and divisions, and was for the present absorbed in his work, now and then exchanging a word with the Queen-Mother, and explaining to her what was being done. Here also he learned more of the political state of the country than he had ever known before, or was likely to learn elsewhere. Boorhan Nizam Shah, King of Ahmednugger, who had supported the conspiracy of Eyn-ool-Moolk, had been defeated by King Ibrahim of Beejapoor and Humeed Khan. Subsequently his own son Ismail had rebelled, but was defeated by his father, who, after the battle of Hoomayoonpoor, being seriously ill, returned to Ahmednugger as his successor, and died soon afterwards, having nominated as his successor his son Ibrahim, a fractious and violent youth of sixteen. The Beejapoor army, after repulsing the attack by King Boorhan, had taken up positions at Sholapoor and Juldroog, otherwise called Shahdroog, during the rainy season, and the King was with these troops; but the express received by the Queen Dowager contained the important news that King Ibrahim of Ahmednugger was making immense preparations for an immediate invasion of the Beejapoor territory; and though this might possibly be averted by negotiations, yet considering the violence of the young King of Ahmednugger's character, such a result as was desired did not seem probable by any means, and troops must be hurried on without delay. The Padré saw that Abbas Khan had been the best selection possible for the purpose, on account of his present popularity, ability, and activity; but the prospect of being left

with his sister alone in the great city was anything but agreeable. He had, however, acquired such entire confidence in his young friend, that he was sure he would not be left to the issues of chance, nor unprotected.

At last the long sitting was concluded, and the Queen, rising, excused herself for a while, and went into an inner chamber for refreshment, while the courtiers chatted freely among themselves; and D'Almeida now allowed his eyes to wander over the sides and fretted ceiling of the beautiful room, to admire its rich Gothic architecture and the elegance of its proportions and decorations; but there was an absence of light to show all to advantage, and he thought he might perhaps, through Abbas Khan, be allowed to see it by day. How he wondered, too, at the immense blocks of buildings which formed the palace, for all was new to him; and except the Palace of the Seven Storeys, and the roofs of some of the edifices which he could see from the roof of the mansion where he and his sister resided, he knew nothing, all else being hidden by the high walls and towers of the citadel.

When the Queen re-entered and took her seat, all present rising to receive her, Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, produced a list of those persons who had been tracked and apprehended by Runga Naik Beydur, who, he said, was without, and could give a clear account of them. He was, certainly, only a Beydur, but might be allowed to stand before the daïs.

"God forbid! God forbid!" cried the chief priest, putting his hands to his ears, who was evidently brimming over with suppressed fury. "I have been sitting in this durbar for two reigns of illustrious and pious Kings, and I never heard of a Beydur being admitted to the presence. Pah! thooh! an uncircumcised dog—not even a Hindoo—who lives on pig, and whose breath would taint the air of a whole city. God forbid! God forbid!"

"And yet he is a good and faithful soldier of the State, and an honest, God-fearing man," said Abbas Khan, stoutly. "I, for one, do not feel as if I should be polluted by his presence. What say ye, noble friends?" and he looked around. "As for our Queen-Mother, ye have already heard her sentiments; and do we dare to dispute them? One thing is certain, we shall know nothing of these prisoners unless he explains why they were apprehended."

"True!" said the chief Kazee; "and to hear evidence is necessary to attain justice. I care not for pig——"

If there had been any chance of a skirmish between the two learned authorities, as some hoped who had witnessed such scenes, they were disappointed; for the Kotwal, at a sign from the Queen, ordered Runga to be admitted, and as he entered was shown where to make his obeisance. And he finally stood after his own fashion on one leg, pressing the sole of the other foot against the calf, and with his hands joined in supplication.

"You can speak to him, Abbas Khan," said the head Kazee. "Ask him to tell the Queen who these men are?"

"I represent," humbly returned the Khan, "that I am his commander, and am interested, beside, in what may transpire. Can the interpretation of the Padré Sahib be accepted? else some Brahmin might be sent for."

"The Padré's evidence I could not take," returned the Kazee, "it is not admissible by law; but his interpretation we can accept, my Queen and my lords, if he swear on the Unjeel. Hast thou the book, O Padré?"

"It is here, my lord," returned D'Almeida, taking a small copy from his pocket, and removing the clean white handkerchief in which it was wrapped.

"Place the holy book on thy head, or as thou wilt, and declare that thou wilt interpret truly," was the Kazee's reply.

"Holy book, indeed!" indignantly snorted the chief priest. "Holy book! sacred to Satan! Well, times are changed; a Nazarene priest and a pig-eating Beydur before the Queen, in the Royal palace. What next, I wonder!"

Francis d'Almeida was burning to reply, but he remembered the words of his Brahmin friend, and was silent. "I am ready now," he said, simply, "and I will speak truly."

"Let there be entire silence," cried one of the Court ushers by order of the Queen, and Runga Naik began his history. We know most of it already; but the latter portion, relating his rescue of Zóra, his tracking of the rebel members of Elias Khan's band, the escape of the Abyssinian after a close pursuit, gave a new interest to the narrative. Runga himself, though dazed at first by the beauty of the room and the presence of the Queen, of whom he had heard so much, was now assured; and the story was told with a simple modesty and confidence which, to every hearer present, conveyed an assurance of truth and reality. Elias Khan had endeavoured to tempt him into disloyalty; he had promised him money and an estate if he would cut off all the Royal outposts on the north bank of the Krishnah. "But I did not do that, mother,"

he cried to the Queen in his homely speech, and stretching forth his hands; "my people have been faithful to Beejapoor since it was a kingdom, and was I to turn traitor for villains like Eyn-ool-Moolk and Elias? Meeah, there, and I were old friends, and he was my superior. I went to him as fast as I could, and three hundred of my people were to follow on foot, but they were too late; for the day after I reached him was that of the fight in which he slew Elias, and was well nigh slain himself. I have heard it whispered he was a coward, but who dare say that now? I could not bear it, and hunted down most of the men who deserted him, but some have escaped. Let the Kotwal Sahib tell what they have said to him."

"I humbly represent to the throne," said the Kotwal, "that one and all have confessed to having been seduced by messengers from Elias Khan, and humbly beg their lives. They have shed no blood."

"Abbas Khan," said the Queen, in reply, "if it please thee, I give their lives into thy hands; do with them as it is good unto thee; unless, indeed, the Kazee demands them for trial."

"They have committed no murder, noble lady, that they should come before me," returned the Kazee. "If they have offended, it is against the State, and the State has power over all traitors."

"Then I accept them as our Queen-Mother's gift," said the young Khan, rising and making three obeisances at the foot of the throne; "Hyat Khan will help me to arrange about them. I have no fear of them, and they have been with me in many a fair fight. But we delay, lady; wilt thou not order the papers to be examined which were found this morning?"

"They are here, my lords," said the Queen, "and first we should hear those in the Frangi character, and the Padré Sahib can translate them for us. Approach, sir," she continued to Francis d'Almeida, "sit at the foot of the throne."

"Touba! Touba!" muttered the Peer Sahib, as the chief priest was usually designated. "For shame! for shame! an infidel sitting on a step of the throne! Inshalla!— —"

"I advise your reverence to be silent," whispered the Kotwal; "it is necessary he should do so, and any interruption will not be allowed by the Queen. You know what she can do if she pleases; and I say let her alone."

The Peer Sahib made no reply; but it was clearly visible to all, that what had been said to him had increased his previous ill-humour.

By this time the leather case had been opened by one of the Queen's secretaries, and the contents counted. The letters with the superscription in Portuguese were then separated from the rest, which were placed at the Queen's feet. "You will be pleased to read them and translate them afterwards to Her Majesty. If possible in Persian; if not, in Canarese, which she understands."

"I will translate them into Persian," was the priest's reply, "for that is known to all;" and he took up one of the letters and began to read it. It was of no consequence, however, being from the authorities of Goa to Elias Khan in reference to several points in regard to transit duties, of which the secretary made a memorandum on the back. After several others of trivial import, came one with an elaborate refusal of the Government of Goa to assist the designs of Eyn-ool-Moolk and Elias Khan on behalf of Prince Ismail, which it gave the Padré much satisfaction to expound. He had heard of the refusal of his Government to countenance the rebellion, but here was ample confirmation under the signature of the Governor, Don Mathias de Albuqurque, and his councillors; and threats of denouncing the conspirators to the King of Beejapoor in case the correspondence was renewed.

Prince Ismail's party, then, appear to have begun an intrigue with Dom Diego, superior of the Moodgul Mission, imploring his advocacy with the Viceroy, and offering not only increased powers to the Mission, but large perquisites to himself; and these terms being recapitulated from the original Persian letter, Dom Diego's own requests followed, which the Padré read with astonishment, mingled with terror; for he had demanded not only the large province of Dharwar as his own perquisite, but four lakhs of hoons to maintain it and the European troops he should need. He undertook to obtain presently two thousand Europeans from Goa, and two thousand more from Portugal as soon as possible, and with this force and those of the Prince he undertook to deliver Beejapoor, with all its treasures, into the possession of Eyn-ool-Moolk and the Prince. It was a cunningly devised scheme, and inside the letter was found a copy of the Persian reply from Elias Khan on behalf of his master, Eyn-ool-Moolk, agreeing to the whole, and urging Dom Diego not to delay, and sending him a thousand hoons as earnest money by the hands of Yakoob Khan, Abyssinian. Again the correspondence was continued up to the time when the rebels were attacked by Humeed Khan, and the death of Eyn-ool-Moolk; and when the translator had finished, there was a general

murmur of approbation and congratulation to the Queen Dowager on the danger which the State had escaped, and of thanks for the important services rendered by so able an explanation of the letters; and the Queen herself was profuse in her acknowledgments, given with the charming yet dignified manner of which she was so admirable a mistress.

Little used to such profuse compliments from so exalted a person, the simple Padré was at first overwhelmed with emotion; but he gradually took courage, and, rising to his feet, excused himself for ignorance of Court customs in not having at first presented the only offering he and his sister had to make, of which he now begged the Queen's acceptance; and, drawing the small packet of lace from his breast, unfolded the veil and laid it at her feet. It was at once evident that she was much gratified as well as surprised at the delicacy and elegance of the beautiful fabric, and examined the pattern with curious interest. Nor could she quite credit the Padré's assertion that it was his sister Maria's own work with her needle only. Having examined it, she passed it round to those present, but the Peer Sahib would not touch it, and folded his hands in his robe, as though he might be contaminated.

"We can offer little in return for this priceless work," said the Queen, when she received the veil; "nevertheless, if you will accept this"—and she took from a cushion near her a costly Cashmere shawl—"on behalf of your sister, we shall be gratified." And as she spoke she handed it to one of the Court ushers, who, with the usual dexterous flourish, threw it over the shoulders of the Padré, where it formed a curious contrast with his plain black robe. But he could not refuse the gift without offence, and again making an obesiance to the Queen, allowed it to remain.

Meanwhile the secretaries had been separating the Persian correspondence, and arranging it by names and dates, and the Queen now desired it to be read. All that related to those who no longer existed were put aside, but that of Osman Beg contained painful revelations. He had offered to give up his fort to the rebel troops; he had furnished them with information in regard to movements of troops from Beejapoor to the westward, and had advised Elias Khan to attack his cousin's party, which guarded the main fords of the river, and cut it off before the floods came, and when the road to the capital would be opened. But we need not, perhaps, follow a detail which may have been anticipated, while there was little doubt that the letters he had received from the leader of the rebel faction were, possibly, still in his posses-

sion. What should be done then? As was usual with her, the Queen left this point to the determination of the Council, reserving her opinion for the present, and an animated discussion followed. The treachery of his cousin in regard to the State, in advising his destruction to Elias Khan, the treacherous abduction of Zóra, had sunk deep into Abbas Khan's heart, and declining to be a party in the discussion, he took his seat near the Padré, who, by this time, had taken his original place; but he separated the Padré from the irate Peer Sahib, which was, perhaps, fortunate.

The question most important to be decided was, what to do with Osman Beg? Was he to be recalled at once, or sent to some distant fortress, or to Moodgul, for detention? or was he to be brought to the capital, and imprisoned till the King's pleasure was known? There was no question that he should be arrested without delay, and his successor, Meer Kasim Ali, an officer who could be entirely depended upon, was at once named by several in the council as the fittest person, and Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, vouched for his leaving the city before dawn. He knew Juldroog perfectly, and was acquainted with the garrison. There was no doubt of his surprising Osman Beg, and placing him under detention, pending further orders; and he was at once sent for, and arrived as the reading of the correspondence was concluded, and was ushered into the presence, a fine soldier-like young man, somewhat older than Abbas Khan, but with equally bold and frank features. He was immediately made acquainted with the duty assigned to him, and a grateful smile passed over his features as he felt that his success would involve promotion to the grade held by Osman Beg, and he received the Royal commission, putting it to his forehead and eyes, and making a profound reverence.

"And now," said the Queen, "we give our opinion and instructions at once. We would not have Osman Beg, whose father is honoured among us, and honoured by the King, imprisoned in a fortress, or sent to Dilawer Ali Khan, at Moodgul, where intrigue may take place. We would have him kept in Juldroog, under watchful care, till the King's return, when, in full durbar, he may plead what he can in extenuation. You will, also, Meer Sahib, inquire, and report to me, as soon as possible, under what circumstances the venerable Syud, long known as the Dervish, and his granddaughter left Juldroog, and where they are at present. Should their place of residence be known, you are to despatch them to the presence without delay."

"And," added the Kazee, "with the Royal permission, we ask you to ascertain from the Kazee and Moollas of the fort whether any ceremony of marriage, Nika or otherwise, passed between Osman Beg and Zóra-bee, the granddaughter of the Syud Dervish, and who performed it."

"The Royal orders are on my head and eyes," returned the young man, "and I am honoured by them. Nothing shall be left undone."

"And your escort?" asked the Queen.

"I have twenty good soldiers of my own, lady," he replied; "and when one not in favour is to be displaced, a hint is sufficient."

"I would also ask you," continued the Queen, "to ascertain whether one Dom Diego, the head priest at Moodgul, is still there."

"I think I can answer that question, noble Queen," said the Padré, joining his hands. "When Abbas Khan was ill from his wound, at the village near Talikota, I heard that Dom Diego had left Moodgul for Goa, being succeeded by two humble priests who had taken charge of the mission; and this was confirmed by some of my flock who came to the fair at Talikota, who told me they were satisfied with the new comers until I could return to them."

"And you are a physician, too, sir," cried the Queen, "as well as a master of languages. Oh, that thou wouldst see the real Queen, Taj-ool-Nissa, who languishes sorely, and can obtain no relief, though we have sent even to Beeder for learned men. Will you see her, Padré Sahib? it is not late even now, and she is still awake."

"Before I entered the Church," replied the Padré, "I studied both medicine and surgery in my own country and in Spain, from the Moorish physicians, who are most wise. There I learned somewhat of Arabic also, which, perhaps, led me to the East; and though I joined the Church as a humble servant of God, I was not without hope, like many of its missionaries, I might use my medical skill in its service. Yea, noble Queen, I am ready to use any humble skill I possess in behalf of the Royal Queen, your daughter."

"There is no time like the present," returned the Queen; "our nobles will excuse me while I conduct you to her. Rise, sir, and follow me."

The Peer Sahib could contain himself no longer—

"Astagh-fur-oolla! God forbid! Touba! Touba! Shame! Shame! that I, a humble priest of Alla and his Prophet, whose

name be honoured, should see this. Touba! Touba! that an infidel should have honour in the palace of Beejapoor. He a servant of God! He, an eater of pig and bibber of wine! He, an agent of Satan, a disseminator of the abominable doctrines which Mahomed Moostafa, Prophet of God, hath cursed! He who worships images, who——"

It was in vain that Abbas Khan, the Kazee, and others present, strove to stop this tirade, which, as the priest raised his voice, rose into a shriek.

"Be silent!" he cried; "hear the words of the Prophet," and he made a long quotation from the Koran, which we may spare our readers. "I forbid this! I denounce the lying Feringi! I doom him to hell! I——"

The Queen stood erect on the pile of cushions which had formed her throne, her slight figure appearing to dilate with excitement and indignation as she stretched forth her arm and pointed her finger at the insolent divine—

"Peace!" she cried, "Peer Sahib. This is the first time in my long life that the piety or the hospitality of this great house was called in question. Peace! know thy place before the throne, and be silent."

But the Peer heeded not. "It is sorcery! It is sorcery!" he cried. "Was not she, that woman, accused of sorcery in the time of Kishwar Khan? Did he not denounce her when he sent her a prisoner to Sattara?"

"This is too much insolence for your Majesty to hear. Pass in, we pray thee, and leave us to silence him," said the venerable and blind Ekhlas Khan, who sat nearest to the throne.

"Nay," returned the Queen, "I never fled from man yet, noble Khan, and I await the Peer's homage and apology;" and she reseated herself with dignity.

"If I allowed a harsh word to escape me in the heat of argument," said the Peer, rising and crossing his arms on his breast, "I humbly beg pardon; but as for that——"

"You have said enough," cried Abbas Khan; "be content. The Mother is not to be trifled with, as you know. See, she speaks."

"I forgive you," she said to the Peer, "because thou art a holy man; but beware, for thy tongue is apt to transgress the bounds of respect. And now, my lords, I rise again and take this respectable man of God with me. I will not long detain ye." Nor did she. The young Queen's apartments were close to the council chamber,

and she was raised and carried to the archway door, where a screen had been let down, and a thin pale hand was put forth. D'Almeida feared the worst; there was a low cough; the pulse was weak and thready, and the girl complained of want of sleep and thirst. He could not then judge of her case, but he could alleviate present symptoms.

"Can your Majesty send anyone with me who can be trusted to bring the medicine? I shall seal it up with my own seal, and it will not be found disagreeable."

"Certainly," replied the Queen; "I can send one of my own eunuchs, who is known to Abbas Khan. But you have a messenger whom I desire to see, that is thy sister Maria. Can she come to this poor sufferer and cheer her? I will send a palanquin and an escort to-morrow, at noon."

"She shall wait on you with pleasure. Anywhere that she can be of use, Maria will go, as a point of duty to God and to her order. Yes, I will send her to-morrow."

"And she speaks Persian?" asked the young Queen, clapping her hands.

"A little," was the reply; "but Canarese better."

"Then we can all speak together, and she shall be my friend. And she is beautiful?"

"I think her most beautiful, lady; but she is my sister, and it ill befits me to speak. You will see and judge for yourselves."

"We may now rejoin our companions," said the Queen Regent. "And you love Abbas Khan?" she continued, inquiringly

"I do," replied the priest, "as I would a son."

"And have seen no fault in him?"

"None. He is true and gentle, as a brave soldier ought to be. We were by chance cast together when his wound broke out again, and I could not leave him till he was fit to travel. He would have died alone."

"And thy sister," asked the Queen, "do they know each other?"

"Not at all, except by hearsay; and she hath never seen or spoken to him. In the village where Abbas Khan was ill for a month or more we had a different lodging; and, if abroad, she was always closely veiled. Since we have been here we lodge with a painter, for whom Maria makes designs."

"Now may God bless thee for this assurance! I had feared that Maria's beauty might—might——"

"Nay, lady, she is bound to God by her vow, and he is too

honourable to think of her; but I may tell you, who are as his mother, that from snatches of his dreams when he raved and occasional remarks, his heart hath gone out to the child who watched him in his first attack at Juldroog, Zóra."

"Ah!" cried the Queen, smiling, "it may be so. I saw him start when I used her name; but keep thy secret, Padré Sahib, as I will keep it, and we will see to this when he is gone."

"I will be silent," he returned. "Had it not been that my sister hath the same opinion, and that thou, noble lady, art as his mother, I had not told thee; but Maria can explain all, better than I can, and I will bid her make no concealment."

The assembly rose as the Queen entered the council hall, and, as she seated herself, again took their places. Francis d'Almeida, being conducted by a eunuch along a side corridor, entered by a curtained archway lower down, and took his seat as he had done before. Abbas Khan was completing his business with the Minister of Finance and various other officers, and the affairs of the sitting seemed well nigh concluded.

"Let all the officers of the army about to march appear at early durbar to-morrow," said the Queen. "Inshalla! there need be no delay."

"All is ready, may it please you," returned Abbas Khan. "My intention was to make a short march to-morrow afternoon, and afterwards to hurry on as fast as possible to the Royal camp, which lies somewhere between Sholapoor and Puraindah."

"We shall send to thy shrine at early morning, O Peer Sahib, offerings to be distributed to the poor, and ask thy prayers for a victory over the State's enemies. Alas! that they should be our near relatives."

"My prayers and blessing will not avail much, I fear, lady, against what I have witnessed to-night," returned the Peer Sahib, haughtily and ungraciously. "Those that ask for them should obey the commands of Alla and his Prophet; nevertheless, I will submit my poor supplications to the searcher of hearts."

It was well, perhaps, that the Royal lady affected not to hear what had been said, for she merely made an inclination of acknowledgment; and directing the usual complimentary dismissal gifts to be brought, rose after they had been distributed, and left the throne.

"Have you been mad to-night, Peer Sahib? Was your afternoon dose of opium too strong for thee?" asked Hyat Khan, who feared no priest, and in particular despised the Peer. "It is well she did not order thee to my humble dwelling."

"Silence!" cried the Peer, furiously. "Begone! and let me pass;" and gathering up the skirts of his robe, lest they should be polluted by the touch of anyone, he struggled out of the hall, leaning on his long staff.

"His jealousy has been aroused by you, Padré Sahib, and he is spiteful; take my advice and do not cross him again. I will send a guard of my people to thy lodging, they can both watch and protect."

As D'Almeida made his acknowledgments, Runga Naik, who had been busy writing in a corner, in a large, sprawling hand, approached the new Governor of Juldroog, and gave the letter to him.

"Take my advice," he said, "do not attempt to cross by the western ferry above the fall; turn off the main road at Talikota, make for Korikul, which belongs to me; ask for one Burma Naik, or if he be away, for Kèsama, my wife; give either of them this letter, and they will give thee men and boats to cross the town ferry to the fort; this will save thee more than a day's march. Thou wilt be landed privately, close to the village, and the rest is in thine own hand, with three hundred of my people to help thee."

"If thou wouldst only go thyself, Runga," said Abbas Khan.

"No, no, Meeah!" was the reply, the tears springing to his eyes; "where thou goest I follow. If the Meer Sahib follows my advice, he will secure Osman Beg ere he rises from his bed the day after to-morrow. The people there will rejoice to be delivered from his insolence and tyranny. By Krishna! do not send me, I should slay him; and his life—well, it is in the Lord's hands, worthless as it is. No, not with thee, Mecah; I must go to my people; I shall meet thee at the early durbar."

CHAPTER IX

A DAY IN THE PALACE.

IT was late in the night before Francis d'Almeida reached his abode, but he found his sister awaiting his arrival; and his account of the events of the evening, after he had made up and despatched by the Queen's messenger a sealed bottle of medicine for the young Queen, was in the highest degree interesting to her.

Francis had not intended to tell her of the rudeness of the Mussulman priest, but she told him that a guard of twelve men had arrived some time before, which had alarmed the whole household as well as herself. Nor when she had ascertained that they had been sent for their protection, could she imagine what danger threatened them; or if there were no danger, were they to be prisoners in spite of Abbas Khan's assurances? A few words from her brother soon, however, explained all; and he made light of the Peer Sahib's rudeness, which he told his sister was only what they must expect to endure as Christian missionaries.

"We have been spoilt too much," he continued, "by the good old Nawab of Moodgul and by our friend Abbas Khan; and in a city like this, full of fanatics and different religious bodies of Mussulmans, we may hardly expect to escape notice. But we have a good friend in the great Kotwal, and under the Queen Regent's protection we should have no fear. You will see her and her daughter-in-law to-morrow, at their special request, and we shall accompany Abbas Khan to the Palace at an early hour. I think you may be of use to that poor sufferer, the young Queen, whom they believe to be under a malignant evil spell; but who is either weakened by fever, or by some insidious complaint, which I humbly trust may not be decline, and yet I fear it. I want you to watch, since I may not see her face; and the eagerness with which she bade me assure her that you would come proves to me you will be heartily welcomed. Rise early, therefore, as I shall, and prepare yourself. Take some drawings and work with you, and I can promise you a happy and interesting day. You will not see much of the great Queen Regent, perhaps; but after she has given audience to the officers about to march to-day, she may have leisure."

Maria had no apprehension. Accustomed as she was to visit the harem of the Nawab of Moodgul, and to friendly and intimate association with his wife and children, she felt no embarrassment in visiting another Indian lady, even though she might be a Queen. Accordingly rising at daylight, she set aside what she needed to take with her; and her brother having prepared the medicines he purposed to administer, they partook of an early breakfast, and were ready when the palanquins sent from the Palace arrived for them.

More than ordinarily lovely did his sister appear to Francis d'Almeida that morning. She had selected the finest of her lawn coifs and kerchiefs to wear, and their exquisite

whiteness enhanced the rosy colour of her complexion, and harmonised with the purity of her fair neck and arms; while her soft brown hair, in natural ringlets, escaped from the coif and hung about her shoulders. To anyone who had never seen a pure European lady, she must, in spite of the sombre robe which concealed her graceful figure, have appeared a vision of beauty.

Old Donna Silvia, the wife of the painter, took her in her arms as she prepared to enter the palanquin, and kissed her affectionately and warmly, and bade her fear naught; and throwing the Queen Regent's beautiful Cashmere shawl around her head and shoulders, she entered the palanquin, closed the doors, and proceeded onwards with her old servant shuffling by her side.

At the gate of Abbas Khan's mansion they joined in his cavalcade, which, as well from his own retinue as the number of officers by whom he was accompanied, was of an imposing character. Maria would have liked to open the doors of her palanquin and look out at the richly dressed crowd of officers, many of them in glittering mail—at the magnificent caparisons of their horses, bounding and prancing as they went, and of the huge elephants which accompanied them, the incessant clash of whose bells was almost deafening; but modesty forbade it, and she contented herself with such glimpses as she could obtain through the small jalousies of the doors which let in light and air. She could catch passing glances of Abbas Khan, whose noble figure and spirited charger were remarkable over all by whom he was surrounded, and inwardly prayed for a blessing on him, and protection in the new scenes of war into which he was about to plunge. She had not forgotten poor Zóra, nor her apparently hopeless love. She could discover no trace of her in the huge city; and far away as she must be, must inevitably, she thought, be forgotten in the excitement of the young Khan's life. She had not heard then from her brother the story of Zóra's violent abduction by Osman Beg, and her strange release by Runga Naik and his companions.

In this order the cavalcade passed on through the gloomy gate of the citadel, till their palanquins were put down at the private door of the female apartments of the Palace. Then, with cries of "Gósha! Gósha!"—privacy—by the eunuchs, a high screen of cloth was raised, and the door of Maria's litter was opened by her brother; and entering the deep archway, she observed the tall figure of Abbas Khan at the entrance of a wide corridor, beckoning them to advance. At the curtained archway in front she saw him hold a

brief colloquy with one of the men who guarded it; and the curtain was raised to admit them, as they entered what the Padré now recognised as the council room of the previous evening.

Involuntarily Maria started, as, looking up, she cast her eyes around, and followed the clusters of pillars which led up to the groined and fretted roof, covered with exquisite arabesque designs in pure white stucco, the principal lines and rosettes of which were of burnished gilding. Never could she have imagined so beautiful an apartment from the plain and almost mean entrance; and her brother, who had only seen it at night, when partially lighted, was equally charmed and surprised.

"How very beautiful!" she said, in a whisper. "Can all the interior of the Palace be like this? How exquisitely graceful is the tracery which covers the panels of the walls, and, mingling with the light clustered shafts of the corners and centre, leads the eye up to that richly ornamented ceiling. Would we could linger here, and that I had time to sketch portions of the designs."

"The Alhambra, which I once saw," returned her brother, "is perhaps more wonderful, and even more elegant; but this has been designed, probably, by some Spanish Moor with equal skill; and I hope you will have many opportunities of making drawings from it; but we must not tarry now, for the Queen-Mother awaits us;" and, leaving the council chamber, they entered the corridor by which the Queen had proceeded the evening before, until Abbas Khan paused before the entrance to the private apartments, while one of the eunuchs gave notice to the Queen-Mother of their arrival, and returning immediately bid them enter. It was an antechamber to the room in which the Royal lady was awaiting them; and directly they approached her, she rose and greeted them with evident kindness and interest, bidding them welcome. When Abbas Khan had made his usual reverence to her, he said—

"I may leave my friends with you, mother, there is no need of me as interpreter; and it is time I should take my place in the durbar, for it is filling fast. I will return when your Majesty has dismissed it, if I am permitted to do so."

"Certainly, my son," she said; "but will not she take off her veil? We are longing to see the face of one in whom we have so strong an interest."

"Not before me, mother," returned the Khan, smiling; "but I depart, and commit them to your care;" and he left the room.

With a modest confusion, Maria now removed the shawl which

she had thrown over her head, and also the embroidered veil by which her features were concealed, the finely crimped coif of her order, and the pure lawn handkerchief, being all that remained; but her soft curly hair had escaped in some degree, and fell over her neck and bosom in rich tresses, which, now the light touched them, shone like threads of gold.

"Power of God!" cried the Queen, "was there ever such beauty seen? Rise, child; let me embrace thee! Wilt thou be to me as a daughter?"

They both rose, and the Queen, stretching forth her arms, enfolded Maria in a warm embrace, kissing her on the forehead and cheeks. "Sit down beside me, and do not tremble. If I be a Queen to all, I can be a mother and a friend to thee. How is it, Padré Sahib, that she is so lovely? Is this rosy colour real, or is it the custom of ladies of your country to paint their faces as we hear the Chinese beauties do? Nay," she continued, laughing heartily, "I see there is no need to doubt, for your fair sister's rising colour betrays her, and she blushes."

"She is like our mother," he returned, "who was perhaps more beautiful. But she is not used to compliments, which confuse her. Besides, she is vowed to the service of God since her husband's death, and can take no pride in self-adornment."

"And your mother lives?"

"We trust so," returned the priest; "but she hath other children near her, who follow worldly callings. We two have devoted ourselves to the service of the Lord, and are to her as though we were dead.'

"And your sister would not marry again, for she might have done so under your law?" asked the Queen.

"She might have done so to her worldly advantage," returned the Padré, "for several, both nobles and wealthy, sought her at Goa; but she preferred the service of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and took her vows of poverty and relinquishment of the world upon her, joining me in my humble labours at Moodgul, where we were so happy, till Dom Diego insulted her, and Dilawer Khan sent us to your protection."

"Ye are brave people," returned the Queen, with a sigh, as it appeared, of admiration. "And ye desire nothing, and will accept nothing. Is it not so? Ah! where shall I find such devotion among the priests of our faith? The higher they are in rank and presumed holiness, the more they desire—estates, gifts, houses, elephants, money. Have you none like these in your Church?"

"We have, indeed, lady. We have priests who live like princes, and who rank as princes; who amass wealth and are greedy of honours. But we poor friars, and Sisters of Charity, have no part with these great dignitaries, and are content and happy with what God sends us, though it be humble food and poor raiment, for are not our souls cheered and warmed by Him; and care we know not."

"And we honour ye the more for this; and had it been seemly to do so, we had rebuked the insolent priest who was disrespectful last night. When my lord the King returneth he shall know of this, and respect thee, O Padré, as I have already learned to do, in truth. But come, Maria, I must lead thee to my little Queen Taj-ool-Nissa, and leave ye together, while I take my place in the great assembly."

"I was about to ask, lady, whether she felt relief from the medicine I sent last night?"

"Ah! I had forgotten, Padré Sahib; and I fear it is Maria's fault; or is it that our poor natures too soon forget the highest benefits? She will tell Maria more than she has told me, I dare say; but her cough was better this morning, and she rested quietly, and had no evil dreams, and has eaten well. But come, we must lead thee to her, Maria; she is sitting in the balcony above the throne, where I must take my seat presently, and thou wilt see all that passes. Come!" and taking Maria by the hand, she led her through another antechamber into the young Queen's presence, bidding her make the same reverential salute to her that she had done to herself.

Taj-ool-Nissa was a slight girl, about seventeen years old; not so fair as the Queen Regent, but with an air of good breeding and distinction that could not be mistaken. Her seat of rich yellow satin cushions, accorded well with her full petticoat and tunic of heavy cloth of gold, and the filmy brocade scarf of light blue muslin, which, confined at the waist, passed over her head. Several strings of large pearls and Venetian sequins hung round her neck, and her wrists and ankles were ablaze with bracelets and anklets of diamonds. Her features were decidedly pretty, though the expression seemed vacant. Naturally so, it was possible, or under the influence of weakness, which was indeed very visible. The contrast between the girl and the Regent Queen was most striking; the one loaded with ornaments, yet not remarkable; the other wearing only pure white muslin, yet with a noble, intellectual expression which could not be mistaken.

For an instant, while the two ladies embraced each other, Taj-ool-Nissa did not see Maria except as a black figure taller than either of them; but when the Queen Regent took her by the hand and presented her, the expression of wonder and admiration in the young Queen's face was even more decided than the elder lady's had been.

Maria's expressive, soft blue eyes, her colour, the perfect whiteness of her skin, her delicate hands and silky hair, were so different from anything she had ever before seen, that her astonishment was even ludicrous, for the Queen-Mother laughed heartily, and chid her for apparent rudeness to a stranger; but this continued only for a moment, for Maria found herself drawn gently to the young Queen's heart, and held there.

"I have no one to be a companion to me," she said, the tears rising to her eyes. "Our beloved mother has too many cares and too much labour to sit with a weak, ailing girl like me, and you would be as a sister to me, Maria. And I hear you know so much, and can teach me so much, that my heart looks to you as it would to a dear sister. Will you be one to me, and never leave me? See how well I am to-day, owing to your good brother's medicine; and I slept so pleasantly and did not cough. Oh, Maria! if he will only make me strong and well ere my lord returns, he will be rewarded by him gratefully."

"My brother will use all his skill, lady," returned Maria; "but it is only God who can restore you to health, and we will pray for you, if Christians may."

"Ye are both devoted to the Lord," she replied with feeling. "Oh! pray for me, and He will hear; but be seated near me that I may feel and caress you, and we can look out from the balcony into the great hall while the durbar is held; for all you will see, warriors and chiefs, are going to the aid of my lord and King. May God bring him to me safely!"

"My brother has sent some medicine for you," said Maria; "and if you will call for the person who is to have charge of it, I will give her directions."

"It is too precious, Tajoo," which was the familiar appellation of the young Queen, "to have any keeper but me," said Queen Chand, "and I will ask your brother, Maria, what to do with it when I return. Till then, sit here and see what we do, and he can feel Tajoo's pulse, if he will, meanwhile."

As she passed out they heard her speaking to Francis and a eunuch, who a moment afterwards summoned them both to the

door. Although he could not see Taj-ool-Nissa, Maria's description of her was sufficient, and her own assurance that she already felt better was very encouraging.

"She has narrowly escaped the decline which precedes consumption, for they have been keeping her too low; but as she gains appetite she will eat freely, and will do well if the Palace doctors and old women will let her alone."

"What did your brother say?" asked Taj-ool-Nissa, eagerly. And when Maria had explained it to her, she said, "He need not fear; I will do faithfully all he directs, and my beloved mother will give the medicine to me, and I will take it only from her hands. But tell him that I have always been delicate. I was so at Golconda, of which my dear father is the King; and he hoped I should be well here, which is a healthier place. And for a time I was better, and have even been out hunting with my lord and our mother; but lately I have fallen back again, and I have mourned in my heart that I should see my dear lord no more. Oh, Maria! he is so noble and so kind to me; he hath none else to love but me!"

And as she spoke, her large liquid eyes filled, and she laid her head on Maria's shoulder and sobbed gently, smiling through her tears. That place seemed to be a refuge to her already. "Hundreds of the ladies of the city come to visit me, and some pity me, Maria; but there is no one to whom my heart goes forth but thee. But, hark! the nobut is beating, and we must take our seats in the balcony." Then, drawing a warm Cashmere shawl about her head and body, she took her usual place.

They looked out over the wide, lofty hall of audience, which has been described before. To Maria's perception it was a wondrous sight, both in regard to the hall itself and its magnificent proportions, and also as to the level space beyond, now a rich green sward filled with troops, whose armour and weapons glinted and flashed far more brightly in the unclouded sunlight than they had done on the day of the ordeal. The interior of the hall, though in shadow, was brighter by far than on that occasion; for the sunlight through the noble entrance archway—it is ninety-two feet in span—reached a considerable distance into the hall at that comparatively early hour.

All the commanders and officers of the army about to march, attended by their standard-bearers, had already taken their seats in rank down the hall, which, as there were no

pillars, arches, or other obstruction to the sight, seemed almost to expand as the crowds of chiefs poured into it. Then the deep kettledrums of the nobut began to beat, and as the Queen Regent entered and took her seat upon the throne, all stood up and bowed themselves before her with profound reverence. Abbas Khan, who stood near the steps of the throne, as it were, leading the movement.

"Is it not gorgeous, Maria!" exclaimed her companion, clapping her hands in joy. "Does not your heart swell at the sight? And they are all my lord's, and will go and fight for him. Hark to the shouts, 'Futteh-i-Nubba!' ('Victory to the Prophet!') 'Deen! Deen!' 'Futteh-i-Shah Ibrahim!' Oh, Maria! I feel as though I could go and fight with them for my dear, my noble lord; and, oh, our mother would go if she were at liberty, for when her husband was at war she was a warrior too, and never left his side. But, ah! I have been weak, and my king would not let me go. And I tell you truly, Maria, my father has as many soldiers as my lord, but he has no hall like this. Our durbar is a small place in comparison, but the troops assemble below the black terrace, and we used to look at them from the terrace of the palace. When the durbar is over I will take you to the rooms I like best, for they are higher than these; and if you open the windows you can see the whole city at your feet. All mine! all mine, Maria! because it is my lord's."

Thus she prattled on in high spirits, though Maria feared for the excitement, while the business of the durbar proceeded. One by one, as the names of the commanders were called, and the amount of their forces cried out, they presented the hilts of their swords to the Queen Regent and received her blessing; and many of them, rejoining their men, marched them forth to the place of assembly. But some remained, and Abbas Khan was the last to offer his homage and take leave to depart. As he came up to the steps of the throne the Queen motioned him to come to her, and with her own hands tied round his right arm a small light green muslin scarf bordered with silver tissue, in which a coin had been folded in the name of the Imám Zamin, as she whispered, "Go, my son; honour and advancement are in thine own hands, and I know thou wilt not fail me or the King. Go; may Alla keep thee and restore thee to me as safely as I dismiss thee."

Then, as the Queen rose, the kettledrum sounded again, and Abbas Khan, stretching out his arm over his head, cried with a

loud, manly voice, "Victory to our Queen-Mother!" which was taken up by those who filled the hall, and by the thousands without; and in a short time the hall and plain beyond were empty, except for a solitary court usher, or other attendant, who, flitting about singly, gave to the vast edifice an appearance almost of desertion.

As Abbas Khan passed the private entrance he sent word to the Padré to come to speak with him, and waited in the street for him. "How is the little Queen?" he asked. "Tell me truly for my lord the King."

"She is very delicate," was the reply; "but I do not fear. If my directions are fulfilled, she will ultimately recover; and, though she may never be strong, she will pass an easy, happy life. But, if she be neglected, I fear the worst. My lord, I will see to her as much as possible myself; and for part of every day Maria will be with her and direct her."

"And now farewell, my friend," said Abbas Khan, "for I have yet business at home, and we must assemble at Allapoor before sunset. Be careful of yourselves, and may Alla keep you. Do not cross the ill-natured old Peer Sahib; yet do not avoid him, or show any fear of him, nor, indeed, of anyone, for our noble Queen-Mother is your true friend and protector. Do not stay long to-day, for she is excited and wearied, but go every day to her, and take Maria with you; she can do more for Taj-ool-Nissa's happiness and the King's than she imagines. If you are at your house soon, come to me once more before I leave; but as the third watch begins to strike, I must put my foot in the stirrup and can wait for no one. Maria will often see my aunt at the Palace; let them be loving friends, as they should be, and may God have you in his keeping."

"What can I say for your kindness, my lord?" returned the Padré. "Our humble prayers attend you. Be not too rash if there be war, for a good leader ought not to expose himself to undue danger. All else I will remember, and the poor little Queen shall be closely watched. Maria was once in a similar condition, and I feared for her; but you see how healthy she is now."

It was no easy matter to get away from the Palace. Taj-ool-Nissa had taken Maria up to the set of her own private apartments she most liked to live in. They were under the terraced roof, and were both lofty and airy, commanding, as she had said, a view over the whole of the citadel, including the elegant Palace of the Seven Storeys, and the city, as far as the high ground beyond

Tórweh, a wide expanse, which was filled with noble palaces, terraced roofs, with streets, mosques, and minarets without number. To the north the huge mass of the mausoleum of Mahmood Adil Shah towered over all; and beyond the wall was the broad plain of Allapoor, dotted over with the white tents of the army.

They were interrupted by the Queen Regent, who appeared weary and anxious, as she threw herself on a pile of soft cushions and pressed her temples with her hands. "Alas!" she cried, "alas! and woe that it falls to-night to despatch our army against my own kinsfolk of Ahmednugger. Pity me, both of ye, my children! May such necessities as mine be far from ye. But they are factious and desperate, and would invade us if they were not checked. Yet I pray they may return within their boundary before there be blood shed. So grant it, O Lord most mighty!"

Then she was silent for a while, and seemed to pray; but in a few moments she looked up more brightly, and rose to a sitting posture. "I have been taking my instructions from your good brother, Maria, about Tajoo's medicine, and talking to him about his life, and about the Dervish of Juldroog, and Zóra. He says you have, or had, a drawing of her made by yourself. Is it in your book? If it be, let me see it."

Maria feared she had left it behind at her house, but found it in the portfolio; and as she glanced at it, thought she had never done anything more correctly. It was a faithful likeness of the girl, with her sweet lips parted as if to speak; an earnest, glowing face, to be loved at first sight. She put the drawing into the Queen's hands, and observed her start visibly. "What a dear, loving face it is!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, it is all that," returned Maria; "and her heart is the same. I could show you a letter which reached me only yesterday, which she has written as she speaks, if your Majesty would like to see it;" and taking a small case from the pocket of her robe, she placed it in the Queen's hand. It was that we have already seen.

"It is charming, indeed," she said; "and I think there is a clue in my mind as to the person remembered."

"Ah!" cried Maria, "I had forgotten that. I ought not ——"

The Queen smiled as she interrupted the fair speaker. "Have no concealment from me, Maria; for he is my son, and I am her truest friend if she can be found."

"Found!" exclaimed Maria; "why she is at Juldroog, surely?"

"Alas, daughter! man's passion has been busy there also. Osman Beg offered her violence, but she was rescued by Runga Naik; and her grandfather and herself are wanderers. Yet she is safe, and we may be able to recover her. Osman Beg we have removed from his office, pending the King's arrival and pleasure."

Then Maria remembered the scene of the cataract, and the dead panther lying beneath the bastion, and Zóra's dread of the libertine Nawab; and was thankful for her rescue and escape.

"He ought to be rewarded, that brave Runga, for he loves that child, and would give his life for her."

"And he shall be rewarded, Maria; for he is, indeed, a noble fellow, simple and truthful."

"Who is Zóra?" asked Taj-ool-Nissa; and she looked at the drawing, which was wonderful in her eyes.

"One who is very dear to Maria, and will, I hope, be dear to thee, Tajoo; but let Maria go now, for thou shouldst take thy medicine, and after it thou art ordered rest. I, too, am already weary, and would sleep awhile before the afternoon sitting."

"And Maria will come to-morrow, mother?"

"Certainly," said the Queen, answering for Maria, who felt as if excuse would be impossible.

When Abbas Khan returned home he found his aunt cheerful and resigned to his unavoidable absence. The family astrologer had predicted a favourable journey, leading to honour; and it was Thursday when the Rujub-ool-Ghyb pointed to the north, the way he was to go. Other homely proceedings had removed all doubts. Yet the thought that to stay behind would have been a disgrace, and the charge of so large a body of troops would lead to high honour; above all, that her boy would be with his uncle and his foster-brother, the King, comforted her.

On his own part, he could only commit the Padré and his sister to her care; and ask her if she heard of the arrival of the Dervish of Juldroog in the city at any of the shrines to send for him, and offer him her hospitality till he should return himself, as he trusted shortly, and perhaps his granddaughter might be with him.

So the dear old lady embraced him, and tied a coin, dedicated to the Imám Zamin, in a green scarf upon his arm, with a fervent prayer. Her cheeks were wet with tears, but she had never seen him depart with so much confidence as now. Then as the Palace gongs sounded the third watch he mounted his horse and rode out of the courtyard; and the large nagaras or kettledrums of

his household guards beating their hollow booming notes, they were taken up by those of the force, some of which through the north or Delhi gate were already in motion along the Allapoor road.

He had barely departed, when the Padré and his sister reached home, and sent word to the old lady that they had to deliver a message from the Palace, and would come, if permitted, through the garden ; and a kind answer being received in reply, they went to her. Maria had not, as yet, seen the Lady Fatima, and found her just the dear, kindly person she had imagined, and she was taken to her breast with unfeigned affection. On Maria mentioning that her brother was without, she desired a woman-servant to bring him in to her apartment. "I am too old not to be seen by a man of God," she said, laughing ; and as Francis entered, she rose and saluted him.

"Your sister and I have already dispensed with ceremony," she said, "and I beg you to dispense with it also Señor Padré. I am a plain, homely woman, and desire to know one who has rendered such inestimable service to my son. And his wound is well?"

"Almost," he replied. "I have no fear about it ; and he will be careful now, for it only requires rest."

Then he delivered the Queen's message, that she would bring Maria with her the next day, which she gladly assented to do ; and gradually leading them to speak of Juldroog and their hosts there, she said frankly, "Ah! I fear Meeah left his heart there. Can you describe Zóra, whose name he murmured in his dreams?"

"I can show you a poor likeness of her," replied Maria, taking the drawing from her portfolio. "This is true, but it is not equal to her beautiful, innocent face."

"Ya, Alla! thou art merciful," said the old lady. "Such an one I had dreamed of for him ; and I am thankful that such a face lies at his heart. May she be his in the end. And she loves him, Maria?"

"Nay," she said, modestly, "I cannot say ; but her letter, which I may show to his mother, is, I think, true. Listen, and I will read it. Oh! that the motherless child could obtain such a protector." Then they conversed long upon past events, and Francis and his sister returned late to their home, grateful but wearied by the events of the day. And till the King's return the intercourse between Donna Maria and the Royal inmates of the Palace continued to afford deep gratification to all ; while, under the skilful care of the Padré, the young Queen regained health

and strength such as she had not enjoyed for a long time previously. She had proved an apt scholar in ornamental work, had made progress in drawing, and in reading Persian under the instruction of the old teacher who had taught her husband the King. Her former lassitude, weariness, and petulance had disappeared, and, instead, her bright, simple, ingenuous nature promised to be the foundation of a happy and useful life.

END OF BOOK II.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

A RAPID MARCH.

THE new Governor of Juldroog was a bold, active young officer, by no means likely to delay in assuming charge of the first considerable office with which he had been entrusted. Taking with him ten picked men of his own retainers, on whom he could thoroughly depend, and relying on the effects of the Queen's commission upon the present garrison of the fort, he left Beejapoor not long after midnight; for, accustomed to move anywhere at the shortest notice, he had little else to do than order his men to be ready, to give a few simple directions in his house, and to warn his scribe and secretary, Jewun Rao, an active young Brahmin, skilled in writing both Persian and Mahratta. All this was soon accomplished, and before the day broke the little party, with their lightly-loaded baggage ponies, were some miles on their road southwards, travelling at a steady pace, as befitted persons who could not risk failure by too great haste. They avoided, too, the larger villages and small towns; and as all knew the country perfectly, they had no difficulty in following the nearest routes without guides.

The day was cool and overcast, with a fresh breeze blowing from the south-west, which rendered travelling pleasant; and as there had been no rain for some days, the roads and the country in general were quite dry, and easy to traverse. About noon the party halted under a grove of mango trees, by which a small stream ran, and preparations were made for a good meal, which, indeed, was needed, and welcome to every one, for half the journey was already accomplished; and after taking a little rest they again mounted and pushed on. Here and there, as they passed near villages, the bastions were manned by matchlock men; but the Royal flag which the Governor used as his standard was too well known to be disputed, and as the evening closed in, they found themselves on the borders of the Beydur territory, only a few

miles from their final destination, Runga Naik's town of Korikul. Now a doubt arose as to whether it would be most advisable to halt where they were for the night, or to proceed; but, all things considered, and to give rest to their horses, they determined to stay where they were.

The Patell, or head officer, who chanced to be a Mussulman, and the other authorities being summoned in the Queen's name, came, humbly offering forage and shelter and such food as the place afforded, while the Moolla conducted them to the humble mosque, and bade them welcome. The hospitality of an Indian village is generally very sincere when those who need it belong to the ruling Government of the country, and come in a peaceful cause; and the new Governor of Juldroog was no bully to extort what he could obtain by conciliatory request. Comparatively soon, therefore, a sheep was slain, and converted into savoury kabobs, with the accompaniment of an excellent pilao, to which our friends, we need hardly say, did ample justice, for their first meal of the day had only been a very light and unsubstantial one. After it was over, the Patell was summoned, and questioned as to the nearest road to Korikul, which none of the party had seen.

"Korikul!" exclaimed the Patell, in amazement; "that is not your way to Moodgul, if you are going there! Runga Naik's people are not used to the sight of soldiers of the Queen, and are likely to give you a rough reception, Meer Sahib. Of course I can give you a guide if you wish one, and my own son shall attend you, who is well known there; but still I advise you to avoid the place, and go by the high road, where there are good boats at the ferry, for the river is not fordable yet."

"But we have business with Runga's people; and with this," and he drew the chieftain's letter from his breast, "we shall, I hope, have no trouble."

"It is, indeed, Runga Naik's writing," said the Kurnum, or village scribe, "and sealed by his seal, and addressed to his wife, Késama, and to Burma Naik, who is in charge of the place; but for all that it depends upon your business there, Sahib, what sort of a reception you get; and the Patell's son, whom they know, will be able to explain all you need. Or shall I come myself?"

"If I can only get speech of them, I will explain my own business," said the Governor; "and it is private, so that I have to tell it myself. Settle among yourselves who had best accompany me, and be ready before daylight; for as soon as the horses have had

rest we ought to proceed, and there will be plenty of light from the moon."

"Yes, you should leave this soon after the second watch of the night," returned the Kurnum; "and while you sleep we will settle who is to go. There will be no trouble, Meer Sahib. You do not want any of them."

"Not I," was the reply. "Runga and three hundred of his men march to-morrow with the army, and I am to tell this, and something else, which is, as I said, private. Now let me sleep, Rao Sahib, for I am somewhat stiff and tired."

"It is time to get up, Meer Sahib," said the Kurnum, some hours later, shaking the shoulders of the sleeper. "I am ready myself, and the Patell, who will not trust his son, is ready also. He and his wife are seeing to a light meal which you had as well eat before you start, and your men and servants are taking theirs. So get up, sir; your horses are already saddled."

"How I have slept, to be sure!" said the Meer Sahib, yawning; "and I could have lain there till daylight; but I shall be ready directly;" and a servant entering with a vessel, poured water over his hands and feet, while the whole ablution was quickly completed, and the slight breakfast was a savoury and unexpected pleasure. Then the stout old Patell came ready equipped for travel, apologising for his early disturbance of his guest. "But the road is long and very stony," he said, "and I go with you because I know Burma well, better than the Kurnum, for he hates Brahmins in general, and if he happens to be in a bad humour, will open the gate to no one. If he thought you wanted him or any of his people to account for anything, your first welcome would be a shower of matchlock balls which would empty some of your saddles."

"I am heartily obliged to you, my friend," replied the Meer Sahib. "By all means take the matter into your own hand. With any one but a Syud, as you are, I should be suspicious; but I can depend upon you. Now I am ready, Bismilla! let us proceed;" and with an echo of the cry from his men, the party set out at as quick a pace as the narrow path would allow.

At first it led through fields; but when they ceased, a short thorny jungle began, while so narrow was the path, that only one person could proceed at a time. This thorny tract was in fact the frontier of the Beydur district, and was kept as unbroken as possible to keep out enemies or marauders, as also parties of the clan who might be returning pursued from freebooting expeditions

in the adjacent countries. Every path that led into the open country beyond was made or left as crooked as possible, constantly breaking into other smaller ones, which, unless the right one were known, led into wilder spots, or ceased altogether.

They were tracks, too, that could easily be defended upon any emergency. Sometimes small breast-works, like low walls of rough stones, crossed the road, which could be held against a large number by a few men; and, again, similar breast-works occupied the crests or sides of low rocky hills, or isolated piles of granite rock. At night the tracks, the thorny bushes, and rude fortifications seemed more formidable than they really were at daylight; and the dim moon, partially overcast with clouds, made every object indistinct and mysterious after a strange fashion.

The young leader saw at once that without a very competent guide he and his men might have wandered through these ever-varying tracks and jungles, which continued for several miles, without a hope of finding their way to their destination; and it was fortunate, indeed, that he had chanced to find a friendly village and a hospitable Patell of his own faith whom the Beydurs of Korikul could trust.

"We could never have found our way, Sheykhjee," said the Governor, "without you or without torches, and I am grateful to you."

"You would not have discovered it with them, Meer Sahib," returned his companion. "If torches had been seen gliding about in this jungle you would have found yourselves beset speedily and helplessly. There would have been no parleying with you; but instead, you would have been in the power of my not over scrupulous friends. It is, indeed, a mercy that you did not attempt it. But see, the last small pass brought us out of the jungle and the rocks; and we are now in the open country, which, as you will see, is fertile and well cultivated; for the Naik of Wakin-Keyra is careful of his people. Now we can push on faster, Meer Sahib; and we shall be at the gates of Korikul by daylight, or soon after; shall we not, Ramana?" he asked of his horn-blower, who was walking beside his master's palfrey, holding on by the crupper.

"Sooner, perhaps," said the man; "and you need not arrive before the gates are opened for the day."

So they proceeded, answering challenges from village towns and bastions by a few notes on the Patell's horn, which seemed to be

understood, for they were not molested. Gradually the chill wind which precedes dawn blew over the face of the country, and moaned through the trees they were just clearing. Packs of jackals began their last howlings before they went to rest, and others took up their cries, which seemed to extend far and wide. Lapwings and plovers had roused with the last watch of the night, and piped or wailed to each other as they took their early flights; or, roused by the travellers, flew up into the air, and, caught by the wind, flew screaming to leeward. The moon was fast sinking into a belt of dark grey clouds near the horizon, while the eastern sky showed a perceptibly brighter tint which spread gradually over that region, though, as yet, there was none of the colour of dawn. Then, on the banks of a small stream, the Patell called a halt, waist cloths were spread, and the early prayer said by all the Mussulmans of the party; and, after it, hookahs went round with many a jest and laugh of good companionship. As the cocks began to crow and the dogs to bark in a village not far off, they mounted again and pursued their way.

As daylight increased, it would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, for the young leader of the party to have made his way through the country without his guide, for at every village men armed with long Beydur matchlocks manned the bastions and gate-towers of the villages, as well as the central place of refuge, which, in appearance and size closely resembling a Martello tower, commanded the village and adjacent approaches. Drums were beaten, the village horn-blowers blew quivering blasts upon their instruments, and men shrieked and yelled in that peculiar manner which, when Beydurs are excited, is not pleasant to hear; but a few notes from the guide's horn seemed to have the invariable effect of quieting the commotion, and in most instances parties of the village guards ran out to hold a brief colloquy with the old Patell and his companions, only to be assured of peaceable intentions and the Queen's service. The Governor saw that all the villages, neatly built of the laminar limestone of this part, and covered with thinner portions like slate, were evidently prosperous and thickly inhabited; and that their lands were well cultivated and bore heavy crops of grain and pulse, while the people were comfortably clad and cattle were abundant. If the Beydurs were vicious and robbers without their boundaries, as they had the reputation of being, they were, at least, quiet and industrious within; watchful and prepared to resist any irrruption of marauders from without.

The sun was just rising when the old Patell, who was leading, stopped and pointed out smoke, which appeared above a grove of tamarind trees at a little distance ; and as they gained the summit of a slight rising ground, the town of Korikul lay just before them. In the centre was a castle, with walls about fifty feet high, and towers well built of stone, from the highest of which floated the standard of Runga Naik, being a large green field with a white border, and a figure of Hunooman (the Monkey God) and patron saints of the Beydurs displayed on it ; while similar flags were flying from the gate towers and bastions. Some neat buildings in the upper part of the castle, cleanly whitewashed, were evidently the dwelling places of the family ; and below was a large open courtyard, which led into other yards—all surrounded with stone walls, with bastions at intervals—and containing large stacks of grain and forage. The entrance to the outer gate of the castle was intricate, leading through a succession of narrow traverses between bastion loopholes for musketry. Before modern artillery such a place could not be held for an hour ; but at the period of this chronicle the Castle of Korikul was a strong place, and could be defended by a thousand or more stout Beydurs, many of whom lived in the town and others in the villages around, who held lands for their services—all forming part of the numerous militia of the province, which was twelve thousand strong.

The space around the outer walls of the castle, and between them and the inner wall—which was also of stone, and protected by circular bastions—was filled with narrow irregular streets, and stone houses roofed with slate, tiles, or thatch, as it pleased the owners. One street—broader than any other, and leading from the gate to the castle, or palace as it was called—was pointed out by the Patell as the Bazar, in which there were shops of cloth merchants, money dealers, braziers, and grain and flour dealers. Beyond the inner walls was a large populous suburb of weavers, each house having its yards for dressing yarn for the loom ; while, mingled with them, were dyers' yards, where white yarn was dyed of various colours to suit the manufacturers. A small stream ran past the town, the bed of which was already crowded by bathers, washers of yarn, cattle drinking before they went to graze, or standing and lowing in the shallow pools. Altogether, with the fine tamarind and mango trees around, the low rugged hills covered with brushwood, stretching into the distance, the scene was cheerful, prosperous, and peaceful ; and a softened beauty seemed to pervade all the landscape.

Such was the thriving town of Korikul at the period we write of. But it is sadly different now. The outer walls and bastions as well as the inner ones, are broken down in many places, part of the castle has fallen in, and the whole is in a ruinous condition. The town is full of heaps of stones and earth which once formed substantial houses, and the Petta, or weavers' suburb, has almost disappeared. The chief, a descendant of Runga Naik, no longer resides in the ancient castle, but in one of the outlying buildings, which may have been that inhabited by Burma. He retains his ancestral lands, and the Beydur militia on the frontier are under his charge; but heavy oppressions and exactions drove most of the families of weavers from the town; their places have not been filled, and though some of the old stock remain, the amount of manufacture is not a tithe of what it used to be. As to the Beydurs, they have no forays now, no expeditions into more peaceful lands to boast of, or wealth of spoil. They are reduced to the condition of quiet husbandmen and farmers, retaining, however, their pride of race, kept up by recitations by their bards of the deeds of their ancestors.

From the rough character of the country beyond the town, and, indeed, surrounding it on two sides, it was evident that the open cultivated tract did not extend further; and this, we may observe, resulted from the change from the trap and limestone formation to the rugged granite hills, and strange piles of rocks, which continued to the ravine of the cataract and to Juldroog, about eight miles beyond, to the south.

As the strange party stood for a few minutes on the summit of the ridge, it was evident that they were observed by the watchmen in the castle towers, for drums were beaten, horns blown, and a general stampede of people and cattle ensued from the river bed and fields around. Then some matchlock shots were fired, and a ball from a heavy wall gun or field-piece which stood upon one of the castle bastions, which went whizzing over their heads at a high elevation.

"That was not meant for us, Meer Sahib," said the Patell, laughing, "but only as a warning. These poor Beydurs have many enemies, and they need to look out carefully against surprises. Blow, Krishna," he said to the hornblower beside him; "let us see if that satisfies them."

This time the blast was much longer and more elaborate, and ended with a wonderful flourish, which did the performer much credit; and almost immediately was answered by exactly the

same blast from the tower of the castle. "That is Krishnya's horn, and his master is with him. I see the old man," said the horn-blower, "and it was a friendly blast."

"Who, then, are the Mussulman soldiers with him, and what has he to do with the King's men?" said the head watchman. "Go and tell Burma Naik or the lady, while I go to the gate and inquire. It seems something uncommon."

The lady Keysama had been long astir. She was an active, homely woman, with a decidedly uncertain temper, amenable to none but her husband, whom she feared as well as respected, and loved, in her own way, very faithfully. In her Runga Naik had absolute confidence, for fear was unknown to her; and had there been occasion at any time, she would have defended the castle while one stone remained on another. The lady was a practical and active housewife, too; and, on the churning day, when ghee was to be made, and Brahmins feasted, and the whole house must be absolutely pure, it was not likely that fresh plastering the floors with liquid mud would be neglected. This was a duty which the lazy hussies, who were her slaves, could not be trusted with; and accordingly the town trumpeter found her overlooking the work, with her sáré tucked in above her knees, and a chubby child sitting astride on her hip, in the long front verandah of the entrance to the castle.

"What hast thou been blowing thy horn so much for, Bheema, disturbing everybody? If thou wantest to blow, couldst thou not have gone into thy fields and scared away the birds?"

"But, lady, some people are at the gate and demand entrance in the name of the Queen Chand."

"Tell them to go away. If they don't go, wake Burma Naik, and tell him to fire on them. Be off, and do not interrupt me! Ah! dost thou dare to look up at my girls, Bheema," she continued, aiming a blow at him with the long bamboo staff on which she was leaning. "Away with thee, impudent, and do what I tell thee."

"Unless Burma comes to her, I might as well talk to a stone," the man muttered to himself, as he turned away; "and Burma is asleep after the feast on wild hog he had last night. I hope Arjoona has awoke him, for I dare not."

That had apparently been effected some time, for as the horn-blower entered the outer court of Burma's house, he saw him sitting in his usual place. He was tying a checked handkerchief round his head, loosely and very much awry; his face was bloated,

greasy, and swollen ; his eyes red, and with evident signs that his potations had been long and deep the night before. He was yawning, and spluttering out Canarese oaths at every interval, and was, indeed, by no means pleasant to behold. We have seen him before, a stout, active soldier, assisting little Zóra to escape ; but now he was in a different mood, and of different aspect. The vermilion marks on his forehead, nose, cheekbones, and eyebrows, were blurred and partly rubbed off ; his hair was dishevelled, and hung about him in unkempt locks ; and the scowl on his face bespoke impatience of anything he might have to hear, and vexation that his sleep had been broken.

"The King's soldiers," he said, contemptuously, "what do they want? What brings the King's soldiers here? What induced that meddlesome old Patell, Shekh Abdoolla, to show them the way? By the Gods! he shall answer for it; let him look to his cattle pens. What does he say? what does he want?"

"He will not tell me," replied the man, "nor the Chitnees, who is talking to him from the bastion by the gate. He says the jemadar of the Royal troops has an order from the Queen, and a letter from Runga Naik to our lady ; but he will give up neither except to you and to her together."

"Some requisition for forage, or grain, or money, I suppose," returned Burma, with a sneer ; "for the Queen does not write to us except to make a demand. Why did you not tell me this first, and they would have been gone before now with a shower of balls flying after them."

"But," urged the man, putting up his hands in supplication, "what about the master's letter? There may be some order in it."

"If there were," retorted Burma, "he would have sent some of the men with it, not the Queen's jemadar. It is no letter of his, but only a decoy. Go, tell the men to give them warning, and if they don't depart, to fire on them."

Thus it seemed very probable that no message would be delivered, and the Queen's party and their guide driven away ; but the last spokesman to Burma Naik was pertinacious, and insisted that Runga's letter should be received, even from the Mussulman leader.

"Suppose there is anything important in it, and you turned it away. I do not think you would be very safe, master, if my lord knew of it, though you are Burma Naik."

"Humph!" grunted Burma, "there is something in that ; and what does the lady say?"

"She will have nothing to do with it, and you are to act as you please. If there is anything addressed to her, you can come and tell her."

"How many want to enter? And how many are there in all?"

"Ten men and their leader, with old Shekhjee and his Kurnum, and some grooms and baggage ponies, and a Brahmin."

"Sons of vile mothers!" exclaimed Burma, as he aimed a blow at the horn-blower. "Could ye not have told me this before? By your long face one would have thought there had been five hundred of the King's horse. Go! Admit the leader, his grooms and scribe, old Shekhjee and the Kurnum. We shall soon get to the bottom of all. Tell the rest to remain without."

All this had taken much time, and the Meer Sahib's patience was well nigh exhausted; but the old Patell kept him quiet. "Burma Naik was drunk last night, I suspect," he said, "and was not easy to wake, nor in good humour when awakened. Be patient, and we shall soon know."

Nor, indeed, was it long before the horn-blower and his companion arrived; and, speaking from the wicket of the gate, saluted the Meer Sahib and the Patell, and informed them they had permission to advance and present the letter. The ponderous gate was then opened, and, the Patell leading, both entered the outer enclosure, and rode up the Bazar.

The residence of Burma formed part of the entrance to the outer court of the castle, for he was a near relative, and entitled to dwell in the vicinity of the lord of Korikul. So they were ushered in. They found Burma Naik more presentable than he had been—now washed, and with plain but decent clothes. His usual seat had an embroidered cloth spread over it, cushions were placed for others, and his sword and shield laid out before him. As they approached he rose and saluted them with an awkward but courteous gesture, and bid them be seated, apologising for the precautions he was obliged to take against marauding parties, which came upon all sorts of pretences. "And where are the letters?" he asked. "They say there are some from the Queen, and from my cousin Runga Naik, to me and the lady Keysama. Pray deliver them. This, indeed, is from the Queen," he continued, observing the Royal seal, and he put the letter to his head and "eyes, and it is addressed to the lady Keysama in Persian, which I cannot read, and in Canarese which I can read, by Runga Naik himself. There is no doubt now; may I open that addressed to me?"

"Certainly," returned the Meer Sahib; "you will then see what is to be done, for Runga Naik wrote it before me with his own hand."

"Sure enough, it is his own seal and superscription," said Burma, opening the cover, while, unfolding the letter, his eyes ran rapidly over the contents. "Will I help, O Meer Sahib!" he cried, the whole of his face brightening with excitement. "Ah, sirs, it is a welcome service to perform; and you, too, are my lord now," and he rose and saluted him. "Under Runga Naik's order, this place and all that are in it are at your disposal. I grieve only that there was any semblance of rudeness shown to you. I will send for your companions, and ye are all to be the lady Keysama's guests as long as ye stay, yet ye ought not to delay."

"We are ready to go on now, sir," said the Meer Sahib, "if it be advisable."

"Not yet," returned Burma; "the boats have to be prepared, and some men who are the oarsmen summoned. We require two more boats than are now at the ford; but they will be all ready by the evening. Meanwhile rest yourselves and take food; to-morrow we shall break our fast in the fort, and you, sir, will be its Governor, instead of that false traitor and tyrant, Osman Beg. What sayest thou to that, O Sheykhjee? Dost thou not rejoice to hear it?"

"I do, I do, with thanks to the Almighty," said the Patell, "who has heard the prayers of his servants. If it were only for his violence to my poor old friend's granddaughter, who should have been sacred in his eyes, he deserves death. Would I could go with ye."

"Thou wilt soon hear," replied Burma; "and if thou wilt remain till to-morrow, when we are quiet, come to us. Thou hast done good service in leading my lord hither direct, for if he had wandered to the upper ford, Osman Beg would have heard of it, and filled the fort with loose characters, of whom there are always enough and to spare. To do him justice, the Nawab can fight, and we should have had much more trouble than we shall have."

"I will come down to Jumalpoor early to-morrow," was the old Patell's reply, "and so make no delay. You had better fire a gun at daylight, that will be enough for me; and perhaps when my lord writes to the durbar he will mention the little service I was able to render."

"That I will, my friend," said the Meer Sahib; "but come now

to the mosque, and you shall tell me about Osman Beg, and what he has done."

"Certainly," returned the Patell, "I have some business in the fair to-day, but that does not fall till late; come, and take my blessing, and prayer for the success of thy good work."

The lady Keysama did not appear. She could not admit strangers, aliens in faith, while the holy ceremonies were going on, but she sent her thanks for her husband's letter, and garlands of flowers with her blessings and prayers for success.

In the afternoon the whole party again set out, guided now by Burma Naik, who took with him fifty additional men, and skirting the rugged granite hills which border the Dóne, they reached the hamlet of Jumalpoor, about two miles from the great river's bank, opposite to the town end of the island fort, as night closed in. Then they heard that the boats were being dragged up from below, and would be at the ferry before midnight.

CHAPTER II.

A SUCCESSFUL SURPRISE.

"IT is time for us to go on, Meer Sahib," said Burma, as he reached the place where the new Governor was lying, under some trees close to the half-ruined village. "Come."

"And our horses; what is to be done with them?"

"Leave them here, under charge of the grooms, and you can send for them afterwards; if indeed you care to have them in the fort, where you cannot ride. They will be quite safe here. At present they would be a serious embarrassment to us; and if one neighed, the whole fort would be alarmed, and I cannot tell what would happen."

"And can you tell now, my friend?"

"Pretty well. We shall land at a spot not far from the old Syud's house. May God have him and his child in His keeping. I will send to the Jemadar Sheykh Baban Sahib, and tell him to come to you with a few men on whom he can depend. He has always disliked Osman Beg, but they have been nearly at open feud since the night poor little Zóra was carried off, and was almost married to the Governor. Sharp words passed between

them on that occasion, and the act produced such indignation among the garrison of the fort and our Beydurs who are on duty in it, that I marvel Osman Beg escaped, or was not put to death. I am taking thirty more of my best men with me, and with yours and mine together, we are more than a match for any who may dare to oppose us. But no one will draw a sword, Meer Sahib," continued Burma, laughing, "except it may be the four Abyssinian slaves he has and his actual retainers, who are not more than ten in number, if there be so many. I spared him once, the night we, Runga and I, and Bheema, the horn-blower, who hooted like a horned owl as our signal, rescued little Zóra, for Runga would not let me go in and slay him as he slept; but if he crosses me now, by all the Gods, he dies."

"No, no, my friend, it must not be so," returned the Governor, earnestly. "His life must be spared, for there are many accusations against him, which our Royal mistress would fain have unravelled."

"Ah! about Eyn-ool-Moolk and Elias Khan, and the Padré at Moodgul, who is gone to Goa," returned Burma, laughing; "but we know all about that. Why did not the Nawab send that fierce priest instead of the gentle Padré, of whom all lament the absence? Then they would have found out everything at Beejapoor. But it is an old story now."

"Hardly, my friend. It is not three months since Abbas Khan slew Elias, and Eyn-ool-Moolk was then at his busiest. To me it does not matter, but the Queen's orders must be obeyed; and Abbas Khan could not be sent here, as he has taken a division of the army to the King's camp; and Runga, as you know, has gone with him."

"Yes, so Runga wrote in the letter; and his wife fell to crying about it, and would not see you. Runga, methinks, is a fool for his pains; but he loves that boy as if he were his own son, and there is no use in any of us trying to persuade him that he is a fool for following him. But we loiter, Meer Sahib. Come! my people are already departing in small groups, and your men had better divide and follow; we shall meet them again at the river side, where the boats are." And after a few directions to their followers, Burma and his companion entered the narrow intricate path through the then thick jungle which led to the water's edge.

Very different now was the appearance of the Beydur Naik from that he presented when he had been awakened that morning. He had bathed and thoroughly purified himself

from the excess of the previous night. He had put off the gay clothes in which he had dressed himself at Korikul, and was now attired in the usual war dress of his clan, the conical leather cap, with soft leather drawers, leggings, and sandals.

For arms he wore in his waistband a long knife-dagger, and a sword with a long Genoa blade, while a small shield hung at his back completed his equipment. Nor, indeed, were there many matchlock men among the party, for the place, if it resisted at all, must be carried sword in hand. No one spoke except in a whisper, and the Governor felt assured that the men who were with him knew their work thoroughly, and were confident of success.

Such was the interest that this stealthy march excited in the young Governor's mind, that they had reached the bank overhanging the Krishna before he had thought it even near. He had not yet seen the fort, for it had been concealed by trees; but he had heard the dull plashing murmur of the river, and occasionally a deeper moaning sound which mingled hoarsely with it, and for which he could not account.

Presently the path rose a little, and the broad river and giant mass of the fort were disclosed. Not clearly, however, for the waning moon was dimmed with clouds, and none of the details of the rugged hill were visible. What could be seen of it seemed to blend with the hills beyond the river, indeed, to form a part of them. But the gloom, the strange conical hill, and the rushing water of the river, formed altogether the most impressive scene the young Governor had ever looked on.

"Ha!" said Burma, in a hissing whisper. "Look! our friend up yonder holds revel to-night, and the Gods favour us. O Krishna! I vow to thee ten sheep at the Temple of Gopalswami, and to feed a hundred Brahmins, if thou aid us, as thou didst Arjôona, in the field of Kooroo Kshétra; and to thee, O gentle nymph Cháya, a pooja and a feast to a hundred Brahmins at thy shrine." And he held up his joined hands towards the river, while, at the same time, he bowed his head in reverence. "She lives there, Sir," he said, simply, "up in the rocks yonder, above the pool; and we, who live here, reverence her, and propitiate her."

"Her! who?" asked his companion.

"Only Cháya Bhugwuti, who dwells in the cataract, which you will see to-morrow. Now, I know she is placable and kind, as she was the night we crossed for Zóra; and she is always to be depended upon when justice has to be done."

"But you said he was at his revels. Who?"

"Who? why Osman Beg to be sure. Don't you see the lights in the palace up yonder, and torches flitting to and fro?" and Burma pointed to lights which seemed high up in the sky. "That steady light is in the palace; and hush! do you not hear music?" The sound was music, of beating of drums, and of fiddles, and women's voices mingled, which faintly reached them, as a light puff of wind blew from the fort.

"What fun it will be, Meer Sahib! what fun!" cried Burma, rubbing his hands and chuckling. "What fun to catch the Nawab Sahib and his companions altogether. But we must wait awhile till they are properly drunk. They are pretty well on by this time, and to judge from what I have seen and tasted, the Feringi wine the Nawab gets from Moodgul is not weak. Come down to the river side and watch; I see my people there, though to you they appear like so many stones," and they descended the rocky path together.

"Ye have done well, Nursinga," said Burma to a tall, powerful man, who came forward as they reached the foot of the descent. "How many boats have ye brought?"

"There are six in all, four large and two small; and we should have been here earlier but for people who will attend the anniversary to-morrow, and two companies of dancing women who have vows to perform, and are singing to the Nawab. It took a good while to take them all across and bring back the boats; but they are all ready. Will you cross now, master? Cháya Bhugwuti is very quiet at present; but there have been clouds in the west all day, and if rain has fallen, who can answer for her?"

"Is there any one in the house of the old Dervish?" asked Burma.

"Not a living creature near it except Zóra's pigeons. I went through the place before sunset, for some of the dancing women wanted to put up there; but I told them and their people that since the old man and Zóra left, ghosts and devils had taken possession of it, and tormented those who went there. Then some of the girls looked in, and something moved in a dark corner—I think it was poor Zóra's old cat—and I cried out 'Tiger! tiger!' and they all ran away. Yes, it is quite empty, master."

"Then we will cross as soon as the lights up there are put out, Meer Sahib; and meanwhile I will send a small boat-load of men across. Go, thou, Nursinga, send for some of our men from the village; and tell the Jemadar that he must meet me with a few of

his men on the King's service, for there is some work to do, and that I will meet him in the Dervish's house; and tell him what it is. Go at once, and, when you are ready, light a small fire on the terrace roof of Zóra's zenána."

The man made a deep reverence, and stepping into the smallest of the basket boats, in which six men were lying, roused them, and pushed it into the stream; and it was anxiously watched over the rapid current till it entered the backwater beyond, and was quickly rowed along until it reached the landing-place close to the house we already know.

Nursinga did not delay in his errand. First he ran to the house of the head of the Beydurs who were on duty in the fort, and roused him. "There is some work to do, brother," he said, "and the master is waiting to cross. Take twenty men, and go to meet him at the Syud's house."

"What is it?" asked the other, anxiously.

"How am I to know? Are we in Burma Naik's secrets? Enough that we obey. Is Sheykh Baban Jemadar gone up to the palace?"

"Not he, nor any of the men, except a few profligates who would go anywhere after the women that dance. And they are drinking much; twice have the cans come down for spirits."

"Come, then; let us take the old man with us to meet the master, and he will know what he wants."

The house of the Jemadar of the garrison was close by, and the two men went at once to it. Some persons on guard were sitting in the outer verandah, near the door, smoking, who challenged them; but taking the message to their master, he was soon aroused, and understood what was required; and, having given orders for the assembly, very silently, of his men at various points, so as to be within call, he, with a few attendants, accompanied Nursinga to the deserted house.

"May his house become desolate who made this desolate!" said the old soldier to one of his subordinates. "How pleasant it used to be to hear the holy Dervish preach the word of the Prophet, and to see Zóra, like a beauteous flower, among us! I say, Let his house be desolate who made this desolate; for Alla is just, my friends—just and watchful!"

"Ameen! Ameen!" was the response from several as they sat down in the verandah so well known to all, and began to smoke, while the Beydur had proceeded to the roof of the cloister, collected a few dry sticks and leaves, and, striking a light with a flint

and steel, blew some tinder placed between dry leaves into a blaze, and lighted the little fire, which flamed up for a moment and went out.

"That is enough, Meer Sahib," said Burma, who had been watching. "Now we know that Sheykh Baban is there, my men are there, and the lights have been out some time in the palace. There is no need for delay now; come. 'Bismilla!' as you say; or, as we Beydurs cry, 'Hari Ból!' Let us embark and lead, and the boats will follow in turn, one after another. Bring half of your people with you, the rest can follow, and with me and some of my folk the boat will be heavy enough. Now, friends, sit close and sit steady. Jey Cháya Bhugwuti! Jey Krishna Mata!" he cried, throwing water into the air at each invocation, while the boat danced down the rapid for a little, and was soon turned into the backwater by its powerful rowers, who worked with muffled paddles. An instant more and they had landed, and, under cover of the thick wood, were making the best of their way to the house, while two of the rowers pulled the boat up the stream, and fastened it to some bushes near the back of the old house.

The movement had been so silently effected that those who were concealed there knew nothing of the arrival of the new party, and it was not till the burly form of Burma Naik stood among them that they were aware of his presence. All had started to their feet, but their apprehension was at once relieved when the Naik, in his hard Canarese tongue, so that all should understand, said aloud, "Sheykhjee, I bring you your new Governor from Queen Chand Beebee; come and kiss his feet and salute your new chief, for he is honourable and worthy."

There was not a moment's hesitation, dark as it was. While the Jemadar Sheykh Baban offered the hilt of his sword, and grasped the hand of the new-comer in an earnest "Salaam Aliekoom," his example was followed by all the Mussulmans present; while the Beydurs, after their own fashion, touched the Meer Sahib's feet and neck, and thus swore fealty to him.

"Make a torch of straw," said Burma, "and let the Governor read his own commission and show the Queen's seal before we advance, which will assure all that this act is done on the part of the Government, and not as robbers or rebels." The materials were soon found, and as the twisted grass burst into a blaze, the commission was well read by the scribe whom the Meer Sahib had brought with him; the Queen's seal, and the green official paper on which the order was written, were examined by all.

This brief process formed a strange scene ; the figures of those present stood out from the black darkness beyond with vivid distinctness, while their faces, in which wonder and excitement struggled for mastery, wild and strange as many of the Beydurs were, formed a sight which none who witnessed ever forgot ; and a shepherd boy who had paid an early visit to his fold declared next day that witches and demons were holding revel like the Nawab above, and that he had seen forms moving about in a bright flame that was burning, which wonderful story was confirmed in the minds of many simple folk by seeing that day the black ashes of the fire scattered about the verandah.

"Now then, Sahib, I humbly represent that I and mine are ready," said the old Jemadar. "Any one the noble Queen sends to us is as our father and mother ; and, as your face is bright and kind, we hope you will be good to us, your servants, and protect instead of oppress us ; and so your name shall be honoured while in future our evening lamps will be lighted in your name. Bismilla ! Come on !" and, drawing his sword, he led the way to the gate of the village.

In the little market-place many men had gathered together, doubtful as to the real nature of the movement ; but it spread quickly from mouth to mouth, while the three leaders pressed on up the steep ascent without pausing, being joined by parties stationed in various bastions and guard-houses, one after another.

At the last division of the ascent, where the party must emerge from the narrow pathway overhung with rocks, by which they had been concealed hitherto, there was a brief colloquy among the leaders and a division of the work made to each. Burma Naik with his men were to turn in by the broken wall, near the kitchen ; the Meer Sahib and the Jemadar were to carry the front court and verandah of the palace, while a third party of Beydurs were to prevent all chance of escape on the north side.

As yet no one had given an alarm ; but a man posted on the highest look-out tower fancied he smelt the smoke of match-rope and heard low whispers, and looking over the edge of the parapet saw the forms of men gathered together in groups. His vision was not very clear, for he had been drinking hard ; but there was evidently no doubt, for the men below him were moving, and he fired his matchlock. Happily the ball hit no one, or the consequences would have entailed bloodshed ; as it was, and in the condition in which those in the palace were, the report had little effect in arousing anyone, and the approach of a hostile party was of all events least expected.

As Burma turned into the rear entrance, the Governor and his men were in front, and with a sudden rush they leaped upon the basement of the palace and burst open a door of the audience hall. Johur and another of the Abyssinian slaves tried to oppose those who entered, but it was only for a moment, when they were bound and passed outside to be guarded. The hall itself was a strange sight. As the latter part of the night had been chilly, the dancing women—when the dancing ceased—and the musicians and followers lay down where they were, wrapped in sheets, and had fallen into profound sleep; and now one and then another of those sleeping figures awoke, rubbed its eyes, and, in the case of the women, rent the air with piercing shrieks and cries for mercy. First it appeared as if a band of dacoits or robbers had surprised them, and the loss of their jewels and ornaments was the least they expected. There was a dim lamp burning in a niche which partly revealed the scene, and the agitation of some thirty helpless women now huddling together on the ground, and imploring mercy. It was well that the entrance doors were guarded by the Meer Sahib's retainers, for the Beydurs would have had little scruple in tearing off all the women's ornaments as their spoil.

Meanwhile Osman Beg lay in his private chamber. He had sat in the audience hall as long as he could, but the strong European liqueur and its pleasant flavour had beguiled him, and at last he had rolled over in his seat insensible, and was carried by his slaves to his bed. Then it was that the music had ceased, the torches had been put out, and all, rolling themselves in their sheets, lay down where they were, like swathed corpses; and it was thus the Meer Sahib had found them. When the shot was fired from the high tower, the two servants who had remained by their master, conscious of some imminent alarm or danger, tried to arouse him, and even raised him up, but with a muttered curse he fell back again. In this condition—entering from the back passage—Burma Naik found him. As he entered the chamber, the Nawab's servants fled, and conscious of a strange presence, Osman Beg tried to rise, but with a drunken hiccup fell back on his bed.

"It would be easy to end thy vile life, Osman Beg," said Burma to himself, "but I leave thee to the Lord. God forbid that my hand should slay one who cannot help himself. Look here, Sahib," he said, as the Governor entered the chamber; "there lies this disgrace to his faith and to his office; do as thou wilt with him, he is in thy hand."

"Let him lie, my friend, his fate is not in my hand; but he is

helpless now. All I want are his papers, and the accounts and moneys of the fort; and these, especially the papers, must be found. Had he no servants?"

"My lord," said a man who emerged from a bathing room, "I am one; and if my life be spared will tell you all."

"Fear not," replied Burma Naik, "I know thee; and your new lord will not hurt any one who is faithful; but beware if thou attempt deceit."

"Well, then," replied the man, humbly, "the private papers are all in a leathern case on the floor under my master's head; he would allow them to be nowhere else. See, here it is;" and kneeling down, he drew a small leather travelling box from its hiding place. "The key of that box is round my master's neck, and the key of the treasury is tied to the string of his drawers; they can easily be removed; and the moonshee has the accounts. I have charge of all his valuables, and can give an account of them, or show them if it is ordered."

"We will have an inventory made of them before your master, and they will be sent with him to Beejapoor when the King's order comes. Meanwhile they will be under attachment," said the Governor. "I will leave thee with thy master, and some men of mine to guard him when he wakes."

"We have done all we can do at present, Burma Naik," said the Governor; "even to getting the papers, which can be examined presently. Meanwhile the day is breaking, should not we give the signal?"

"Certainly, my lord; I will see to it immediately. One of the fort gunners ought to be without, and," continued Burma Naik, "I have sent word to the authorities of the fort, those who have to recognise all new governors, and they also will be here before sunrise, or soon after it. Meanwhile this hall may be swept out, for everyone has departed. Ho! without, bring the Furashes, and let them lay down the cloths for a durbar."

While this was being effected, the heavy gun on the highest bastion was fired with a tremendous report, which rattled from side to side of the ravine in a thousand echoes, and at last died out among the hills far away.

"You do not know where you are, my lord, as yet," said Burma Naik; "come and see;" and he took the Governor down the steps of the verandah to another short flight that led to a small but elegant pavilion perched upon a rock, from whence the glen could be well seen in the daytime. Now, however, it seemed as though

they looked into unfathomable darkness, and the effect was almost painful; but as the dawn rapidly advanced, the agitated river, the rocks, the rugged sides of the glen, and the cataract at its head, gradually grew into form, and the Governor stood gazing at them in a silence which partook of awe.

CHAPTER III.

ZUFFOORA-BEE COOKS THE GOVERNOR'S BREAKFAST.

OSMAN BEG'S cook, whom he had brought with him when he came, an old slave of his father's house, was a practical woman, well used to camp life, sudden alarms, and long marches, and in any emergency was ready to prepare food for considerable numbers. She and several helpers, boys and women, had betaken themselves to the shelter of the kitchen, which, being situated in a yard adjoining the "Palace," had beyond it another yard, where was a small dwelling house, in which, as her own peculiar property, the old lady lived. We call her lady, because she was invariably styled so by all. No one dared, except her master, call her Zuffoora, which, having been born on a Thursday, had been chosen as her name—but "Bee," as short for Beebee, or "Lady," was always added; and those who did not know her well, or were afraid of taking liberties with her, called her Beebee Zuffoora, which, no doubt, was most pleasing to her of all.

Zuffoora-bee had been seriously exercised in her mind the day before. Her master, in one of his wild fits, had, without any previous notice, taken into his head to invite all the dancing girls who came to the Saint's festival, with their musicians and attendants, to dinner that evening; after which the women were to sing all night, relieving each other. Now the dancing and singing did not concern the old dame at all, but the dinner did, for her master had sent word by Johur that some of the dishes were to be of her very best style of cooking, for himself and the chief singers; and for the rest, pilao and hot kabobs would suffice.

To do her justice, Zuffoora-bee had done her best. Sundry dishes that we could name were delicate and delicious, whether fish, flesh, or fowl; and her master had sent her a present of

two rupees as a token of his satisfaction, an unusual occurrence, which Johur explained by several of the dancing women having declared they had never tasted such food before, and insisting that Osman Beg should then and there send his cook a liberal present, on their behalf, which was accordingly done. I say, then, if this had been all, Zuffoora-bee would have been highly delighted, and might even have invited one or two of the girls to come and eat pán with her in her own house.

But the proceedings of the evening had disgusted her. She was very strict in the observances of her faith, also regular in the performance of stated prayers five times a-day. And no Moolla could have possessed a more perfect knowledge of the details to be observed at festivals, the ablutions and purifications of women at such seasons, and also of the needful fasts; or, on the other hand, the cooking necessary on such occasions. As to strong liquors or palm wine, she held them in the utmost abhorrence, and would as soon have cooked and eaten a piece of the abhorred animal as taken a drop of spirit into her mouth.

Her person was always scrupulously clean and neat; her almost white hair braided so that not a straggling lock appeared, and the rest neatly tied up in a simple knot behind her head. She had two satin petticoats for grand occasions, one green, the Prophet's colour, the other red, and both were striped with white. But for every day wear she used petticoats of soosi, a common kind of cotton cloth, which was made everywhere by village weavers, and could be bought in any village fair or market. This stuff was very neat and durable, and was worn, in various colours and degrees of fineness, by all Mussulman women of the lower classes. Zuffoora-bee was rich in possessing four of these petticoats, three of which were always put by nicely washed and ironed.

On the upper portion of her person she wore, first, a boddice, and over that a shirt of stout muslin, which descended a little below her waist, covering the band of her petticoat; and over all a doputta, or scarf, of tolerably fine muslin, which, tucked in at her waist, was passed round her head, falling gracefully over her back and hanging down over her right arm.

Zuffoora was a widow, and therefore wore few ornaments; and what she did wear were chiefly of silver, such as bracelets for her wrists, a silver ring round her neck, and silver rings on some of her fingers and her toes. She had also one very precious massive silver ring, which she wore over her right

ankle. This had been given her by the King Ali Adil Shah of blessed memory, when, on one occasion, she had cooked a delicious meal for him after a battle, when his own servants had lost their way. The old lady was always eloquent on the subject of this ring of honour as she called it. "To men," she said, "the King gave estates, and lands, and jewels, and why should he not give them to good cooks? because if there were nothing to eat, who could fight? and there was nothing so valour-sustaining as a good pilao and well-spiced kabob."

The proceedings and mode of life and temper of her master had long been distressing to Zuffoora-bee; and if, by any possibility, she could have escaped from him and returned to Beejapoor, she would have done so; but she felt she was virtually a prisoner. When Abbas Khan had arrived sick and wounded, she had not only nursed him through his illness, but cooked the most delicate and nutritious food for him; and when the young man was about to depart, she begged permission to return to the great city and the old family house; but her master was cruel to her, abused her in vile language, and called her slave, and had told Johur to beat her with a shoe. Johur dared not do that, and besides loved and respected the good dame; but one of the vile eunuchs had done it, and the insult had rankled deep in Zuffoora's heart, as an act which years of protection could not atone for.

We have not mentioned Zuffoora-bee sooner in this history, because when Abbas Khan came to the fort she was incessantly occupied by his needs. She had a perfect knowledge of his family, and respected it, and most particularly his aunt, the Lady Fatima, so that she did not go to the old Syud's house as usual; indeed, perhaps had some misgiving in her mind as to the presence of Christians there; but, like all others, she had a great reverence for the old Dervish, and especial love for little Zóra, to whom she had taught numbers of savoury dishes, such as it delighted the old man to eat, and which could be made out of very simple materials.

When the two women we know of came from Moodgul, she did not like them. She thought Máma Luteefa had more the air of a common procuress than of a decent God-fearing agent for matrimonial arrangements. Her clothes were too gaudy, her look too bold, her conversation too free. She never said her prayers, not even once a-day. She ate too much pán; the bells on her anklets were too loud, even louder than those of a dancing-girl; in short, she was offensive to her in many ways; and finding Zuffoora-bee inde-

pendent, and by no means inclined to be dictated to or to be schooled in the manner of cooking her dishes, sent her orders to the women under the cook, and was gratified in having garlic and red-pepper enough in her kabobs to suit a labouring woman; and Zuffoora-bee was obliged to complain to her master that the marriage agent was insolent and overbearing. But when poor little Zóra was brought up to the palace by force, the grief and indignation of the worthy dame knew no bounds. Her master was well aware what she would think of the act, and set eunuchs and some of his garrison to guard the kitchen and Zuffoora's house, and not allow her egress, lest she should come and upbraid him—for we take upon ourselves to say that Zuffoora-bee's remonstrance would have been neither weak nor timid, but, on the contrary, unflinchingly bold and defiant.

During the whole of the day Zóra had been confined to the palace Zuffoora-bee had prayed and wept by turns, but that she knew was useless; but, when the pán-seller's wife came to her in the evening, she gave Zuffoora-bee a hint, though others were by, that Zóra was not without friends; and when the alarm that she had escaped was given, Zuffoora fell on her knees and thanked God that it had been so, and that her master's wicked designs had been foiled. She was not afraid of him. He loved her good food too much to deprive himself of it, either by putting her in confinement or sending her away.

In either case, who would supply her place? But she had not spared him; she had appealed to his honour, to that of his noble father, entreating him to reform his evil ways, and to abandon the vicious courses into which he had fallen. She who had nursed him as a child, who had attended on his mother, to see her son degenerating into a drunken profligate! "Better he were dead, far better that he were dead," murmured the good old dame. "I could say the last salutation to the dead as they covered up his body, and wish the peace of God to attend him, rather than I could join in the adulation which these miserable men and women pay to him. Touba! Touba! for shame, for shame!"

When the party under the new Governor and Burma Naik, with the Jemadar of the fort, was passing the wall which bounded her own court, she was already awake, preparing to rise and perform her ablutions previous to the early morning prayer, and the shuffling tramp of the men sounded ominous to her. What can it all mean she thought! Then the shot from above followed, but there was no response, and in a few moments more the shrieks of

the dancing-women came loud and fast. She was not afraid, and got up, went through the high-arched kitchen to the door, unbarred it, and looked out into the yard, where several Beydurs whom she knew, and Mussulmans of the Governor, were standing, the latter of whom saluted her civilly as she asked them what had happened.

"Nothing," said one of the men in reply; "nothing, but that the new Governor is come, and we have a new master. The new Nawab came from Beejapoor, and has taken possession, and the old Nawab is a prisoner—that's all."

"And who is the new Nawab?"

"Nay, mother, we know not yet, for we have not seen him. But they say he is a God-fearing man; and so he appears to be, for when the Azàn was proclaimed, he spread his waistband, and knelt down and said his prayers in the little pavilion on the rock before the palace. And his men love him, and declare he is a true, kind man and a brave soldier, and that is the reason he was sent here."

"It is a lonely place to come to," returned the old dame; "but he is married, perhaps?"

"Oh, yes, mother! and has two children; and he will send for them by-and-by."

"From Beejapoor?"

"No, mother, from Juldroog, where he has been serving."

"I know it well, friend. My lord, that is his father"—and she pointed with her thumb to the palace—"commanded the troops there, and I was with him and the Begum Sahiba. Ah! times are changed since then. Well, such is the will of God. And Osman Beg?"

"He was found asleep, mother, and they did not harm him."

"Asleep! Not drunk, I hope?"

"I fear he was, mother; quite without sense."

"Fie upon him! fie! How can he waken and show his face to pious men? It were better that he died; but he must fulfil his destiny, good or evil as it may be. I must, however, see to breakfast for the new lord and his people. Some things are left from last night; they will do for his men, but he shall have everything fresh, and as good, too, as Zuffoora can make it."

The old dame had gathered all the information she needed, and now retired to her own private room, where she dressed herself in an entirely choice suit of clothes, braided her hair, and put on her small stock of ornaments; and, thus prepared, crossed the court, and entered the women's apartments of the palace. They were quite empty, but littered with faded garlands

of flowers, broken pán leaves, and jars which had held palm wine, the stale smell of which was very offensive. Then she rolled up the curtains of one or two of the open arches to let in the wind, and called to the eunuchs to come to her. No one, however, replied, and she went on through the passage. The door of Osman Beg's chamber was open, and she looked in. He was still on his bed, snoring loudly, and two strange men were guarding him, and his two personal attendants were by him. They had thrown a warm coverlet over him, but she could see his face, which was flushed and bloated, and in Zuffoora's sight he was disgusting.

"Come to me, Boodun," she said to one of the servants, "when he wakes, and I will send him some kicheri." Then she peeped into the hall of audience, which was a busy scene; and as it was quite light, though the sun had not risen, she could see everything. The new Governor was sitting in Osman Beg's seat, and the Moolla, the physician of the fort, the old jemadar of the garrison, and some of the inferior officers, were sitting near him in their usual places. Others were coming in and presenting their nuzzurs, or offerings; some seating themselves, and others, retiring after having made their reverence, went out. There were two moonshees present looking over papers, of which one recorded the dates and addresses, and the other read them out to him; and beside these, there were the agents of the Zemindars who chanced to be in the fort, the Hindoo Patell and Patwari, and many others; so that the hall presented a busy aspect. Zuffoora-bee did not very well know what to do. Who was to tell the new Nawab that the cook was there, asking for orders; and the question would sound so odd amidst all the grave business going on, that she hesitated, but not for long. She was no coward, and she would at least show that she had the means of sending him food of which he must be in need, of ordering him a bath, and generally providing for his comfort. She therefore slipped forward confidently, yet modestly, and watched her opportunity till the Governor should look up, for he was reading a Persian letter, with a shade of anxiety upon his handsome face.

"Who art thou?" he said, with a pleasant smile, when he put the paper down, and looking up saw a neat, respectable-looking woman saluting him with due reverence. "Who art thou? Thou art not such an one as I looked to find here!"

"Your slave, Zuffoora-bee, is the cook, my lord, and offers her services. My lord must be hungry, and she wishes to know what

he prefers, what his usual dishes are, and she will do her best to please him."

"Thou art thoughtful and kind, Zuffoora-bee," he replied. "Any other woman would have run away, but thou art here and doing thy duty. Why dost thou trust me?"

"I can trust one who is kind and gentle, as I hear my lord is. I can trust one who greets a poor slave with a smile instead of a curse, and who accepts her homage instead of having her pushed out of the durbar."

"You are a flatterer, Zuffoora-bee," said the Governor, laughing; "but go now, we are busy; send me anything you like; I am a plain soldier, and can eat anything God sends me; and if you will show my people where I can bathe now and sleep to-night, I shall be thankful. When my food is ready, you can send it."

"I will bring it myself, my lord, and see to the chamber and bath for you directly, for you must bathe ere you can eat comfortably," and making another respectful salutation, Zuffoora-bee walked proudly out. Inshalla! she, at least, had done her duty, and had been kindly treated, and now she would have her proper place in the new household, for she held her allegiance to the fallen Osman Beg to be already dissolved.

The Furashes, who had been witnesses of her reception, were again her obsequious servants; the women's chambers were washed out and purified by pastiles; one of the spare beds was set out, carpets were spread, and the bath prepared; and when the Governor had bathed, put on clean light clothes, and sat down on the soft cushions prepared for him, he felt invigorated and refreshed; while in regard to his assumption of his charge of the fort and its dependencies, there was nothing to be desired: all had been perfectly successful and satisfactory.

Then when Zuffoora-bee brought what she had prepared with her own skilful hands, some delicate kicheri, fresh fish from the river, some savoury kabobs, and an omelette, and spreading a neat dusturkhan, or dining-cloth, set the viands before him, and encouraged him to eat, he felt as though his lines had fallen in pleasant places, and that even among those rugged rocks he could be perfectly happy. He might, too, hear something of the old physician and his granddaughter, whom he had been directed to trace if possible, and in regard to whom his first report to the Queen must contain intelligence. Whether, however, he could obtain any from Zuffoora-bee or not was doubtful; and if it were given, it might not be true. Women of her standing were but too often ministers to

their master's worst vices; and though the Moollas and all respectable persons in the morning durbar gave Zuffoora-bee the highest character, yet who could speak to her inner life? There was, however, no time to be lost; and after the excellent breakfast had been fully extolled, the Governor opened at once the subject of Zóra and her grandfather.

Now, if there had been one subject more than another on which Zuffoora-bee desired to open her heart fully to one in power, it was that of poor little Zóra and the old man, her grandfather; and if her account were prolix, it was interesting to her hearer, and the details were given with tears and sobs which attested their sincerity and truth. Yes, often and often Osman Beg had endeavoured to persuade her to entice the girl to the palace, and become the means of her forced marriage and ruin; but since the old Dervish had—in consequence of his great astrological science and Osman Beg's character—declined to receive him as a husband for the girl, and as Zóra herself feared and detested him, nothing was done till the women came from Moodgul, and Johur and Yacoot carried her up to the palace.

"Then," continued the old dame, "the Nawab confined me to my own apartments, and the entrance to the kitchen was guarded. Zóra and the two women lay in this room, and I was near. Oh! to hear her! Yet what could I do? If she had even sent me a message, I might have helped; and perhaps she did, for I heard the pán-seller's wife insisting on being allowed to pass to me, but she was turned out. I warrant, however, that she it was who sent word to Runga Naik, and then at night Zóra fled with them. At least some say so, though others believe she fell into one of the deep holes between the rocks, and will never appear till the Day of Judgment. But I think she fled; and I, old as I am, would travel to Delhi if I thought there was any chance of finding her."

"Yes, she fled, Beebee," said the Nawab, with a sigh; "but she cannot be traced now. Runga Naik has been absent. Burma Naik, who has also been absent, did not find her on his return; and now no one knows where she is gone."

"Send me, my lord; send me; I will find her wherever she may be hidden away. God knows," she continued, sobbing, "she was so beautiful and so helpless that anyone might have seized her; and as to the old man, he is not only blind but hopelessly simple, and yet very obstinate. Ah, my lord! the more I think the more I fear."

"And was Zóra so beautiful?"

"I never saw anyone like her," returned the dame. "I don't know what it was, but there was a sort of witchery about her ever since she was much younger than she is now, which no one could resist; and Osman Beg always said she was his fate, and he would have her even if he went to hell after her, for that was the wild way in which he talked to me."

"And she escaped free and unhurt, and with her honour?"

"She did, my lord. Osman Beg made a wild attempt to marry her the night Johur brought her up, but the Moolla protested against it; and though the buffoon Pundree, who is a Hindoo, my lord, made some pretence to be a Moolla, and to say the blessing, it was of no use, and Osman Beg waited till he could get the Kazee from Nalutwar. But send for Johur, if he likes he will tell you the truth; but you might cut him to pieces before he would say a word if he did not please."

"I will examine him before you, Zuffoora-bee;" and, calling to an attendant, he bid Johur, the Abyssinian, be brought in.

The slave's arms had been tied behind his back, because he had made some resistance, and bound so tightly, that he was in pain; and he piteously besought relief by loosening of the bonds. Two of the eunuchs who had charge of him, on being directed to do so, at once loosed the rope; and the Governor could see the tears spring to the slave's eyes as he knelt down, rubbed his forehead in the earth, and rising, stood before him, with his chest heaving and his cheeks wet.

"Why are you kind to me, my lord? Do I not deserve death? Bid some of thy people behead me, then I shall not see Zóra as I do now."

"It is of her we would speak to thee, Johur; fear not, and tell the truth."

"My lord," he replied, "your slave will tell everything truly. Often had I been asked to entrap the child, often to bring her here, but I would not. I was flogged for that, but never mind, I could bear it; see, here are the marks of the whip. Then Jooma was ordered to go; and he, too, refused, and was instantly beheaded before Osman Beg himself; and I can show you the hole between the rocks where his bones lie, where the stain of his blood is upon the rocks; even the rains have not washed it away, nor the sun bleached it. Then, again, when the two women came from Moodgul, he sent for me, and said, 'Go and bring Zóra; if not, yours will be Jooma's fate before nightfall.' I was a coward, my lord; I ought to have slain him; but I trembled and I

went; and Yacoot and I brought Zóra and put her here, with the two women. But I watched. If he had attempted violence I would have slain him, for I never quitted his side. When the Moolla refused to marry him, my dagger was loose in its sheath. I watched him all that day, without taking food. I lay down at the head of his bed at night, only when all were asleep stealing out into the court here to see if the child slept. I was here when the owls hooted, and I watched her steal out silently, step over the eunuchs, cross the court, and pass on through the broken wall. I saw her last when she paused once on the top of the gap, and looked around her, and the moonbeams rested on her sweet face, and it shone like that of an angel. Oh, my lord, I am only a poor Abyssinian, and have no proper speech to tell thee all; but that is the truth, and I would have followed her then, only that one owl hooted again, and I knew she had friends to help her, and was safe. Harm! no harm came to her, my lord. Osman Beg was afraid of what the Moollas, the old jemadars of the fort, and the worthy men who sate in the hall said to him; and he knew there would be a mutiny if he dared to dishonour the girl. Indeed, had she not escaped, there would have been one when the second attempt at marriage was tried. And now, my lord, bid them give me water, for my throat is dry; and do not have me bound, for I can be true to thee, my lord, and can help thee to find Zóra, my pearl, my lily, my Peri. Oh, my lord! how I love her! I, the poor slave, and would give my life for her. Will you not answer for me, Máma Zuffoora?"

"I will," said the old dame, earnestly. "Let my lord send us both to find the child and the old man, and we will go. Inshalla! we will bring them back, and the old house shall be desolate no longer."

"I will think about it, Zuffoora-bee; and when all means here are exhausted, I will send ye on their track, well believing your faith and love for the child. But, hark! they are calling me into the audience, and I must go. Come with me, Johur, and I will make thee over to my people."

As the Governor entered the hall, he saw that a violent struggle was going on. Osman Beg had awakened from his drunken sleep with confused intellects, and seeing strange faces beside his bed and none of his own attendants, had risen, suddenly pushed away his guards, and rushed, half naked as he was, towards his usual seat in the hall; but he was held fast by many of the

new and old garrison, and the new Governor advancing, bade him sternly return to his apartment. Osman Beg, who was a very powerful man, still resisted violently, and could he but have possessed himself of any weapon, would have done serious injury. It was in vain that the new Governor explained who he was, and even showed him the Queen's warrant. Osman Beg was in no humour to hear or to understand, and the struggle was renewed. After several warnings, therefore, and being obliged to listen to all the vile abuse poured out against him, to being called a coward, and a Kafir, a traitor, and a slave, the Governor directed the attendants to tie Osman Beg's arms behind him easily with a soft turban, and to take him back to the room whence he had come. It was the act of being tied, perhaps, which first really awakened him to a clear sense of his position, and after a time he began to weep. No one came to him, none of his slaves or servants, and he was parched with thirst, with a craving for food. Now, therefore, the services of Zuffoora-bee were called into requisition; she had food and some cool sherbet ready for him, and when he became more reasonable the Governor went to him. They had been old acquaintances, and knew each other perfectly well; and Osman Beg, promising to be quiet, was relieved from his bonds, which had only been loosened when he ate.

"So long as it is not my virtuous cousin, Abbas Khan, who has been sent to relieve me, I do not care," he said. "The Queen has a right to appoint whom she will, and to recall whom she will, and you, sir, are welcome, though you have come in a rough fashion. I think you will find all the records correct, and I now give you the key of the treasury;" and he felt in his waistband for it, but neither was it there nor that of his private papers, and his countenance fell.

"I have possession of all your private papers also, my lord," said the Governor. "It was for them that the surprise was made, and I already see that they are important. Nay," he continued, "may even imperil your life, my lord, and tally sadly with those which were read before the Queen in council the night that Abbas Khan slew Yacoot, the champion of Elias Khan, in the combat of ordeal. Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, found them, and I was present at their examination."

"When did this happen?" asked Osman Beg.

"Three days ago, my lord; I was present on duty at the palace that night, and I left the city before daylight next morning."

"Then give me my papers, Meer Sahib, and let me depart to justify myself, and seek my wife, whom Abbas Khan has spirited away."

"Your wife, my lord; who is she?"

"She is Zóra," he replied, "who lived here. Oh, Zóra!" he cried in bitter pain, "this comes of thy sorcery. Let me go, sir!" he shouted fiercely. "Let me go! by what right do you detain me?"

"By this, the Queen's warrant," replied the Governor, "which my secretary will read to you. You will see that your person is to be kept securely; your papers sealed up and sent to Court, where you will be summoned when the King's pleasure is known. I am not in the habit of exceeding my orders, or of using hardly men of rank superior to my own. Your papers are even now being fastened up, and two of my own men, with a party of the garrison and some Beydurs, will escort them to the city."

From that time Osman Beg gave up hope, and fell back on his bed with a groan, covering his face. Had he possessed a dagger he might, perhaps, in his despair have stabbed himself, but as the first excitement was blunted, he grew sullen, would speak to no one, and refused for several days the food which Zuffoora brought herself, and vainly tried to persuade him to eat.

Meanwhile, Zuffoora and Johur were impatient to be gone. Johur had discovered that Zóra and the old man had left Korikul, and Burma Naik had even traced them beyond Kukéra, on the way to Sugger. It was most likely that they were there; and the old dame, provided with a comfortable litter, a strong pony for an attendant, and her little baggage, and Johur, and ten stout fellows of the garrison, were despatched one day to their great joy with the almost certainty of recovering the child and her grandfather. They followed them easily for several days by slow marches. They heard of them at the shrine of Sofee Surmurt at Sugger, but beyond that there was no trace. A worthy weaver's wife told Zuffoora that a good matron of Gulburgah, when on her pilgrimage to the shrine, had taken charge of Zóra and her grandfather; but as she belonged to a city beyond Gulburgah, who could tell where she might be? And thus it was that Zuffoora-bee and the Abyssinian returned to Juldroog weary and disappointed.

Had Abbas Khan spirited away the girl on any pretence? The Governor could not believe what Osman Beg repeatedly asserted; but still it might be so, and he doubted. Otherwise the affairs of the fort went on regularly and comfortably. The

Governor received deputations from the Nawab of Moodgul and the Beydur Naik of Wakin Kéra, and all respectable neighbours round; but the only thing in which he had failed was not being able to trace Zóra. We, however, who have much interest in the child and her old grandfather must endeavour to do so.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW HOME.

I NEED hardly take the reader back to the day when, rescued from Osman Beg's vile designs, Zóra and her grandfather abandoned their peaceful home. All the incidents relating to that event will, I think, not have been forgotten, and need not be recalled. It was a piteous sacrifice, but it was well for the girl that it had been, as it were, forced on her grandfather and herself, and that no compromise was made with, or trust reposed in, the unscrupulous tyrant of the fort.

I say it was well that they had abandoned all, and fled. They were indeed passive instruments in the hands of a more experienced and powerful person who long before had taken a just measure of the Nawab's violent and treacherous character, and most especially dreaded his designs against the orphan girl who, as all knew, had no friends among her own people, except the poor inhabitants of the village in which she had lived all her life, and they were helpless to protect her. The result justified Runga Naik's extreme measure. No sooner was the escape of Zóra known to the two women who had charge of her, than their shrill cries aroused the eunuchs, who were supposed to be keeping watch outside, and instant search was made for her among the rocks in the vicinity of the palace, but in vain. They then in turn raised an alarm, and Osman Beg himself, it being now daylight, was roused by his attendant, and a new search was begun, which, as we know, ended in disappointment. The two eunuchs who had already been pinioned, and were expecting no less punishment than death, were put into heavy chains, and flogged till they could bear no more, and thrust into a dungeon. There one of them had died of his wounds and of neglect; the other, worn to a skeleton, being released by the new Governor as soon as his place of confinement and condition were known.

After the two eunuchs had been disposed of, Osman Beg, attended by his Abyssinian slaves and some of his retainers, descended from the palace to the village, where every one with whom Zóra or her grandfather was known to have associated was flogged, or otherwise tortured, to disclose the place of their concealment. The old house was ransacked in vain, and every hiding place among the rocks that was in any way accessible searched for the fugitives. It was soon known, however, that they had crossed the river, and that Runga Naik and Burma had carried them off; and the Nawab would willingly have seized the Beydurs of the fort if he had dared; but they set him at defiance, and he was too weak to attempt interference with more than a hundred stout, well-armed men. Nor, indeed, was the proper garrison of the fort in at all a placable mood. They were, for the most part, Mussulmans, and were disciples of the old Syud, and had Osman Beg meddled with them in any way, he might not have escaped with his life; and he wisely retired to the palace, while Zóra's friends contented themselves with drawing up an account of the whole transaction, and transmitting it to Beejapoor, but not at once; for in Indian subjects of this kind there are always discussions as to the expediency or otherwise of complaint.

If successful, remedy is obtained; if otherwise, the complainants fall into an infinitely worse plight than before. In this case the formal petition of the garrison, the village people, the Moollas of the mosque, the acting Kazee, and all other respectable persons, had reached Beejapoor the day after the new Governor had left; and the Queen Chand Beebee, already in possession of the facts, had given a very gracious reply to the petitioners, promising them justice as soon as the officer whom the Government had despatched should make his report.

From all this it may be inferred that had poor Zóra and her helpless grandfather not been taken away, very serious consequences might have ensued. If there had been an attempt to conceal the girl in the island, and she had been discovered, there can be no doubt that the last indignity would have been inflicted upon her. If, again, she had been openly protected by the garrison, much bloodshed might have taken place; and though Runga was sure of his own Beydurs, he was by no means so sure of the Mussulman portion of the garrison who might adhere to their Governor.

For himself and Burma he was quite regardless of conse-

quences. He was too strong at Korikul and Kukeyra, as well as in every village of the frontier, to be meddled with. He had no fear of Beejapoor, to which he was rendering important services every day; and he knew that Osman Beg dare not complain against him, because of the forcible abduction of a holy Syud's granddaughter, and the connection with Eyn-ool-Moolk's conspiracy, the threads of which Runga held in his hands. Osman Beg, though he would have given all he possessed to be revenged upon Runga Naik, knew him to be beyond his reach; and perhaps the most unbearable indignity he suffered on his deposition from power, was the hearing from Burma's own lips in the public cucherry the story of the rescue of Zóra, and the means by which it had been accomplished, which was corroborated in every point, and which, delivered with infinite zest and humour, caused roars of laughter.

There was, however, one point on which Osman Beg seemed to be inflexible. He declared that though the Moolla and Kazee of the fort had refused their offices in regard to Zóra's marriage to him —and those present on the occasion gave equally clear and convincing testimony as to the non-performance of the ceremony, and the indignity put upon all by being asked to partake in such a mockery—in spite of all this, Osman Beg steadily persisted in asserting that Zóra was his wedded wife; that he had had means in private of having the ceremony performed, to which Zóra had consented; and that wherever, and howsoever, he might meet her or find her, he would claim her as his wife before the King, the Queen, and all the ecclesiastical or other courts of law in Beejapoor.

The Governor could not account for this, and he could not obtain the evidence of the two women from Moodgul. Osman Beg, in his blind fury, had, without reflection, had the hair of both cut off, their faces blackened, and mounted them barebacked upon asses; they, with the money he had given them, which he was too proud to take back, were sent across the river towards Moodgul. There they had complained to the Nawab, who declined to interfere; and all that was known of Máma Luteefa and her confidential servant was, that they had gone to Golconda, to pursue their avocations in a place where they were unknown, or at least were not remembered. It is possible, I think, if Osman Beg had retained them in his service, or had not ill-treated them, he might have instructed them how to support his unvarying assertion that Zóra was his wife, though she had escaped from him, as he believed, to join

his cousin Abbas Khan, with whom she had had communication while he was confined to the fort by his wound. Day after day did the Governor return to the case, and had gradually accumulated all the evidence procurable, which was attested by the Moollas, Khadims of the mosque, and Sheykh Baban, the Jemadar, all of whom expressed not only their willingness, but their desire, to be sent to Beejapoor should the case go to trial in the head Mufti's court. Of this, however, there will be more to say hereafter; and in this seeming divergence our only wish is that the reader should lose no point of importance in the thread of this history.

On the night, or rather the morning, of Zóra's escape, she and her grandfather had been taken from the bank of the river direct first to Jumalpoor, and afterwards to Korikul. The old Dervish had been a passive instrument in Runga's hands. He had heard with the utmost terror of Zóra's abduction; he had cried to the Lord in an almost perpetual moan for the child's protection, and he had wandered from the house to the mosque to pray, and, finding no comfort, had returned to the house and moaned there. He had searched all the women's apartments, and called her name repeatedly, almost to the weariness of old Mamoolla, who had chidden him for not putting better faith in God and in the child's friends. Had not the pán-seller's wife twice come and declared that as yet the child was safe, and would be rescued before any harm could reach her. But all in vain. The old man could not be brought to understand how the Nawab, with all the forces of the fort at his disposal, could be outwitted by at most two or three men; how his darling could be brought to him openly through the fort, even though it might be by secret paths. The poor old man's mind was a chaos of utter misery and despair, which found no rest or hope in any assurance. He suffered Runga's men to remove all his property, which they did carefully and honestly; and, as even Mamoolla said afterwards—for she, also, was too much excited in her mind to be capable of any thought—without losing an end of a thread or a bit of string. All the old Syud's books, his drugs, his medicines, his charms and amulets—in short, everything that he prized on earth—had been carried away.

And so it was with Zóra, her two cows and the goats, her books and simple clothes, and the strong box which contained some gold and ornaments which had belonged to her mother. And when they reached Korikul, which they did the next day, Runga Naik had all opened in her presence, and his Brahmin

scribe made inventories of what belonged to both, as also did Zóra at the same time. So far, therefore, all was well; they had lost nothing, but the change was very sad and very hard to bear. From the first glance at her, the Lady Keysama had taken a prejudice against poor Zóra, who appeared to her like a young dancing girl; and although her clothes were poor, not to say mean, and she had no ornaments, indeed, presented only the appearance of an ordinary Mussulman's daughter, yet, with all, there was a look of intelligence and of superiority in her glorious eyes, in the carriage of her head, and her figure in general, which at once separated her from anyone of inferior grade to herself.

The Lady Keysama did not like this. She even felt jealous of poor Zóra when she arrived and was led in by Runga Naik, preceded by two Beydur slave girls. Keysama had, indeed, risen to salute her, bade her be seated, asked a few questions, to which Zóra had replied timidly, for the fame of the lady's fiery temper was notorious through the country, and was not unknown to her, and almost immediately dismissed her with the gift of a new sari, a muslin scarf, and a piece of soosi cloth, with some pán, hoping that she would find comfortable lodgings and live happily. In truth, the dame had already entertained a violent jealousy for Zóra, and, in the course of a day or so, told her husband that she doubted the whole story of the abduction, and that it was evident he had brought her for his own purposes.

The Lady Keysama was not, ordinarily speaking, a jealous wife, but she was suspicious, and mistrustful of anything out of the ordinary course, such as the rescue of Zóra; and as she said to herself, if the Nawáb had carried off any one from Korikul, would not her lord resent it; and what did it matter to Runga whether the Nawab married the pale-faced girl or not, it was no business of his, and his bringing her to Korikul was, in her estimation, entirely unnecessary and unjustifiable. I do not mean to say that she openly accused her kind lord of infidelity to his face, or that he had to endure lectures upon the subject, but what has been recorded was in her thoughts; and it is not extraordinary, if the tempers of Eastern women be considered, that she set herself to watch, and that her ears were open to any reports and conjectures which her humble friends might bring to her.

Meanwhile for some days Zóra and her grandfather were very comfortably established by their friend in an empty house which had belonged to a weaver, who, for reasons of his own, had left the town and established himself at Sugger; and as the house he

had lived in was the property of the lord of the town, it was now at Runga Naik's disposal. True, it was not so commodious as that at Juldroog, but it was more than sufficient for them. It was close to the mosque, and a door from a spacious yard behind opened into the ground which surrounded the mosque, part of which was a cemetery overshadowed by some fine trees. The Moolla lived hard by on the other side, and his wife was a kind, motherly woman, and paid them frequent visits. As usual with most mosques, there was a large colony of pigeons attached to it; there were parroquets and mynas, with other birds in the trees, so that Zóra and her grandfather were soon at their ease, and rested thankfully under the shelter of their protector's hospitality, and the old man soon began to find his way to the mosque at prayer-time; and as Mussulman weavers are for the most part pious persons, there was always a good attendance, especially at afternoon prayer, when the day's work was done.

The fame of the sanctity of the aged recluse of Juldroog had for years past been spread throughout the country even to a distance; and though he had not assumed the title of saint, or made any pretensions to be one, yet had he died in Juldroog, there is little doubt he would have received all the honours of one after that event. Miracles would have been asserted as proceeding from the worship of his last resting-place, and there is no doubt it would have risen in popular esteem. Indeed, it was evident that, even in this strange place, the veneration for the old Syud was increasing.

As he sat daily in the mosque, and discoursed eloquently upon the sublime subject of "Turreequt," or path to Heaven, he charmed and delighted his hearers; and the rank of the old recluse as a Syud, his eloquence and kindly manner of teaching, had a wonderful effect on his audience, who had never listened to words like his before—unless, indeed, they went on some pilgrimage to any celebrated shrine, where holy and learned men assembled and instructed the people in sermons. Then the Syud's fame as a physician was perhaps among the lower orders even greater than that of his learning, and was not confined to Mussulmans but extended to Hindoos, to whom, although they were unbelievers, he was as charitable and attentive as to his own people.

Thus between morning prayers and noon, and frequently afterwards, he was asked for advice; and he wrote charms, amulets, exorcisms, and the like, with the help of Zóra, who, except when

he was expounding doctrines in the mosque, never left him. Every day at the hours of prayer, when the muezzin had cried the Azán, or invitation, Zóra used to lead him forth by the door in the yard-wall; and some considerate poor folk had made a smooth path from thence to the steps of the mosque, where there was always someone present to help him up; and Zóra would either return to old Mamoolla, or, folding her scarf over her face, say her prayers in some corner of the building where men did not look at her.

Runga Naik did not come to them very often, he had many things to look after—his people, and their caste, and other disputes, such as shares of land and produce—and for this purpose he sat daily on a chubootra, or platform of earth, which had been made hundreds of years before, around the trunk of a venerable neem-tree, and where his father and grandfather, and ancestors long ago, had sat before him. This, indeed, was his public court, open to all comers; and was simple and effective, because he was patient and listened to everyone, either giving a summary decision himself or referring cases to arbitration. It was a patriarchal mode of proceeding, which was the custom of his clan; and if there were no lawyers, no agents, no pleaders, or indeed anyone but plaintiff and defendant and their witnesses, perhaps the justice meted out was none the less efficient, and, at all events, the people desired nothing more. Sometimes Runga was absent for a few days on business with his chief at Wakin-Keyra; sometimes he went with a large escort to collect his dues or blackmail in the district west of his own territory; and whenever he did go, he provided liberally for his guests during his absence, and they had rations of flour, pulse, ghee, and vegetables direct from the house, with which the Lady Keysama did not interfere. She only, and that perpetually, threw out hints to her husband that "that great girl Zóra ought to be married; that she was ashamed of seeing her come to the house (for Zóra did pay a visit sometimes to the Beydur lady, though her castle was an unclean place to her), and that he ought to insist upon her grandfather's settling her in life; and no doubt some worthy man might be found who would gladly marry one so learned and so beautiful."

But Runga Naik had no such intention. I think he remembered that first night at Juldroog, and that Abbas Khan desired no better blessing in life than to gain Zóra for his own. Before he attempted to bring that about, it was necessary to follow up the

scattered parties of Eyn-ool-Moolk's rebellion, especially the members of Abbas Khan's troop who had deserted him; and, as he thought, allowing ample time for his young friend to reach Beejapoor, he set out for the western districts in the direction of Belgaum; and yet at that very time, within a distance of thirty miles, Abbas Khan was lying in a small village grievously ill with the return of his fever and the reopening of his wound, of which the reader has already been informed. But so it is in life, when a blessing, above all things precious, lies at our very doors, we often fail to know of it, or even of its very existence. Runga had no time to lose, he thought, and his desire was to hasten to Beejapoor direct, should he have any success in his expedition. Should he have none, he could return and take on Zóra and her grandfather to Beejapoor, that the old man might lay his complaint of ill-usage before the Queen, or the King if he returned. Runga had no idea of who the old Syud was—that was known only to Abbas Khan, whose intention was, as we know, to have him sent for; but the gracious message of the Queen had gone too late, and when all attempts to discover Zóra and the old man were fruitless.

Before he left Korikul, however, Runga Naik and his wife had come to extremities about poor little Zóra. We need not detail the gradual increase of acerbity and jealousy on the part of the Lady Keysama. Now he was going away (she put the matter in that light), who would be responsible for the girl? She herself—and she put her hands to her ears, and called all the gods to witness—would not, and could not. She had enough to do in attending to her own poor folk, about whom she knew, or could find out everything, whereas about these strangers she knew nothing. He might be very fond of the girl, there was no doubt of that; but an unmarried girl of her age and appearance, with nobody near her but a feeble old servant—well, she would say nothing herself, but let him ask the neighbours, let him ask the Choudhree of the Momins, and hear what they said about Zóra, who, she thought, was only fit now to become a public dancing girl, and if she took to that profession she would be welcome. Had she not been heard singing words that no one understood to unknown tunes? Where did she learn them? As to the defamatory part of the Lady Keysama's tirade, we decline positively to enter into it. When a woman of the Lady Keysama's temper, whatever be her station in India, or whatever her caste or sect, condescends to be abusive, her words cannot be translated, or even paraphrased; and such was the excitement the lady worked her-

self up into, that Runga, who had never been subjected to the like before from his wife, got fairly alarmed. "They must go," he said; "but how to tell the old man and Zóra!"

Yet it must be done. With Zóra and his old friend he must part; but with his wife, the mother of his children, the admirable mistress of his house, the respected and beloved of all, he could not part; and she had distinctly said that if the girl were not sent away, she herself would go to her father's house at Wakin-Keyra, and tell the story so that all should hear. Her father was the brother of the Rajah of the clan, whose enmity Runga Naik dare neither risk nor provoke; and he knew enough of his wife's determined spirit to believe she would do exactly as she threatened if he did not do as she requested. No; on those hard conditions he could not afford to protect Zóra; her grandfather, whom all, even his wife, loved and honoured, could not be separated from her, and, therefore, they must go.

So several days before the Brahmin astrologer had predicted one favourable for the departure of his little expedition, he went privately to the old man, knelt down reverently at the threshold of his door, and confided to him what has been recorded, and besought pardon for the apparent rudeness he was obliged to commit. The tender-minded fellow's heart, as he said, was broken by his wife, who, without cause, had put this shame on him privately, and was ready, to her own shame, to make it public. Now it was known to his friend only, and he might offer counsel in his extremity.

The old Syud was inexpressibly shocked and grieved. The very last thing he had thought possible had come to pass. Was, then, Zóra, his little Zóra, so much advanced in girlhood that it was immodest or dangerous to allow her to go about unveiled and untended, as she had used to do? Was she, indeed, of marriageable age, and in permitting her to go abroad was there even a suspicion of immodesty? He could not see, and his experience of worldly matters had faded out. Still Runga Naik, and above all his wife, could not be mistaken. Else why should suspicion and jealousy have arisen? And now a horrible thought flashed into the old man's mind. Could Runga have carried off Zóra for his own purposes? It might be so; otherwise, why did his wife suspect him? "Ya, Alla Kureem, protect us!" he cried in his misery. "We are but two helpless creatures, a girl and a blind man, trying to serve Thee! Oh! suffer us not to fall into misery, which Thou alone canst avert!"

Zóra was visiting the family of the Choudhree, or head of the weavers, that day; and she was fond of doing so, as his wife was in reality kind and motherly, and much interested in her helpless condition. That day she and her children had insisted on bathing Zóra, dressing her hair, and putting on her a suit of new clothes, for which her husband and his men had woven the materials, and his wife had made them up. And when Zóra, duly dressed and anointed, was placed in the seat of honour, and the children were decking her with garlands of jessamine, and calling her bride, their mother said gravely to Zóra, "And it is time thou shouldst be so in reality, darling, to be able to live a decent, respectable life, and bear children. I was not thy age, Zóra, when I was married; and what has thy grandfather been doing that he has not arranged this long ago? It is time thou, child, shouldst no longer have the mantle of reproach cast over thee."

"Of reproach, mother?" said Zóra, her lips quivering and tears starting from her eyes. "No one has ever reproached me; no one wants me; no one has ever asked me in marriage; and many have told me, that one of the noble Syud race would have honour in putting on the green dress, and renouncing the world, living a humble and devout life, doing good works. Oh, mother! speak no more to me about marriage, for I cannot bear it."

"Well," said the dame, "I will tell my husband what you say; but of late both he and I have been distressed by hearing things that ought not to be spoken."

"God help me!" said the girl, "for I trust in Him. I will speak to Abba when I go home, and pray him to take me away from this. No, mother, wherever we go we are Fakeers, and the world is open to us, and the ears of the Hearer of prayer are never shut. Yes, I see it all, mother, now, and we must go."

"And have you any means of support, my child?" asked the dame.

"Oh, yes," returned Zóra, "God feeds Fakeers as He feeds the ravens and the wild birds, who cannot work. True, I can embroider, and do many things for myself if there be need; but Abba can be rich if he pleases. The offerings he receives every day amount to many, many rupees, and yet he refuses almost all; and those he keeps are only what I take up from his carpet, when people leave them. No, mother, there is no fear of want; only to beg for our daily bread is painful, and we take only what the merciful Alla sends us." The dame could say no more; and the children were awed into silence at seeing their mother and Zóra

so grave; and though Zóra tried to be merry, and did what she could to amuse her little companions, even to singing Maria's songs, her heart was heavy and sad, and the children instinctively clung to her and tried to cheer her, when they saw the tears welling from her eyes and coursing each other down her cheek. Zóra did not rally, and went home.

Meanwhile, Mamoolla had come from the Bazar, and her master called her to him, and questioned her in regard to Zóra, and as to whether any remarks about the child had come to her ears. Of course they had. Who could keep a great girl like that in the house, and allow her to go about without restraint, and not hear reproach. At Juldroog everyone was accustomed to see Zóra abroad, but here, in a populous place like Korikul, it was quite another matter, and people would talk; who could stop their mouths? As to the child herself, there was not a suspicion of immodesty about her. She was as pure as an infant, but still that would not help her if the world were uncharitable.

Mamoolla was talking to her grandfather when Zóra returned, escorted by two stout journeymen of the weaver's; and as she threw off the sheet that had covered her, she hastened to her grandfather, and laying her head in his lap, burst into tears.

"I know, I know, my darling," he said, putting his trembling hands upon her head, "thou, too, hast heard the foul reports, and may God forgive those who set them on foot. Ameen, and Ameen."

"Let us go, Abba," she cried, sobbing. "The world will not have us as we are, but the merciful Lord is our refuge. Let us go, Abba; whither He guides us we cannot fail or perish."

CHAPTER V.

AMONG FRIENDS.

THE next day being Friday, or the Sabbath, there was a larger attendance than usual in the mosque, for all God-fearing men, and some women with them, did no work, and attended the stated prayers. After the noontide devotions, there gathered round the old Syud a great number of people, and he thought it a good opportunity to take leave of them. Accordingly, after begging all to be seated, he addressed them much as follows:—

"You have been kind to me, friends," he said, in a voice much broken by emotion, "and had it been the will of the Disposer of all events, I would have remained with you till I died. But man's will is not God's will, and my heart tells me, nay, whispers to me unceasingly, by the Lord's prompting, 'Thou hast not attained what is desirable and necessary for those who aspire to perfection in the holy calling of a true Syud. Thou callest thyself a Dervish, and some call thee Mushâekh, or holy one, but thou hast not attained even the rank of a Fakeer. Thou hast never been elected; thou, old as thou art, hast never chosen a leader in the way of heavenly life (Turreequt), and that above all things is needful for thy acceptance before God. Thou hast led an easy life, never undergoing privation, and it is only in relation to thy charity and good works that thou hast been protected so far; and thy removal here was an act of divine mercy, and thy first step in the Turreequt, which thou must fulfil. Seek, therefore, some godly saint of great knowledge and experience in holy mysteries, and tarry not till thou hast found him.' 'Tarry not! tarry not,' my heart cries to me day and night. 'Thou art old and growing feeble, and if thou delayest, a blessed portion may not be thy lot. Death may claim thee, and after this warning what answer canst thou make to Moonkir and Nukeer, the angels of death, who will examine thee in the tomb? and how wilt thou be enabled to cross the bridge Al Sirat, sharper than a sword?' Therefore, O beloved friends and brothers, my soul trembles as it dwells on these divine truths. I cannot rest under them; I must seek rest; I must follow the path of eternal life which has been opened to me. I must not fear to meet the angels of death.

"I have been spared nearly eighty years, and have been idle and slothful. True, I can plead that I was a prisoner and had no free will of my own; but I am a prisoner no longer, and must go forth and speed on ere it be too late; and therefore I go as I am, guided by the Lord, and must not tarry, lest I be too late and fail."

Then the whole congregation burst into passionate weeping, and many cries arose of "Stay, stay with us, and fear not, for thou art holy and aged, and the Lord will have mercy on thy infirmity! Thou art leading us as no one ever led us before. May the Lord reward thee!"

But the old recluse had prepared himself for all this. If it were necessary for him to leave the town on Zóra's account, and that seemed to him imperative, he had for some years past meditated the assumption of the order of a Fakeer leading to that of a

Mushâekh. He had applied for permission to visit some holy shrine and make his public profession, but in vain; no one had had the authority in Juldroog to grant such permission to a State prisoner, even though his name and rank were unknown; and the Nawab Osman Beg's denial, on his application, had been peculiarly offensive and discourteous. Now, however, he was free; and, although that might have been matter of accident, the old man had come to the conclusion in his own mind that it had been appointed by the Lord, and he reproached himself bitterly that he had ever murmured against the seeming violence, and, indeed, dishonour, which he had had to undergo on his sweet child's account.

The people saw it was no use to urge the old man further. He had determined upon his own course, as most believed, by divine influence, and who dared to oppose that? He told them finally that his friend, Runga Naik, their lord, had provided him with a residence at the quiet village of Kukeyra, where he should rest for a while in solitude, and that any of his friends who desired ghostly council, or medicine, or amulets could visit him there. Then he got up, and placing his hands upon the heads of the children who were brought to him, and on those who surrounded him, he departed amidst the prayers, blessings, and good wishes of all.

On his return home he found Runga and Burma without, sitting under the tree in the court-yard, who came forward and touched his feet with a lowly reverence.

"I have taken leave of them all," said the Syud, with emotion; "but it is well, it is as God wills, and whatever our destiny may be, it must be fulfilled. The Lord has vouchsafed to me a much clearer view of my duty than I had at Juldroog, and that, whatever betide, I must follow. My only anxiety is about Zóra; and I have no fear, for the Almighty will raise up friends to her; the orphan will not be deserted. To Abbas Khan I have confided who I am, which even you must not know yet; and, I think, he will help her, wherever she may be, when I have passed away."

They could only weep, for the old recluse was dear to them both, notwithstanding their difference of faith. And the old man continued—

"To you, Runga Naik, I commit what worldly property I possess, which is all in the box we have sealed up; and I pray you to keep it, to be reclaimed by Zóra if ever she is in a condition to do so. Keep it in your own treasury. There is not much in it;

some ornaments of her mother's, some gold that belonged to her, and such jewels as I was presented with when I was at the King's court in honour. If I die, my child's rank would be known by them. Now she shares my condition of a Fakeer, and we can live on the alms the faithful may bestow upon me. And you spoke of a temporary resting-place at Kukeyra, is it ready for us?"

"Burma has been arranging it, and it is now ready for you, Huzrut; but it is a poor place, only a thatched dwelling, in which an old Fakeer lived for many years, and died lately. It is in a little garden by itself, just outside the village gate; but my men there have orders to watch it day and night, and no harm can come to you. You will be nearly alone, for except the Moolla, who is very ignorant, there are but few Mussulmans, and they are only poor weavers and cultivators. Ha! who are these? Some visitors to ask your blessing, Huzrut; are they to be admitted? By the Gods! I see men from Juldroog, and one of the Nawab's slaves, what can it mean?"

"Has Zóra returned?" asked her grandfather. "Mamoolla, is the child there?"

"I am here, Abba," she replied, coming to the door of the house. "What need you?"

"Runga tells me that some persons have come from Juldroog, thou hadst better keep thyself close;" but, as he spoke, the women entered by the outside door; and as she slunk back into a dim corner, she saw that the arrivals were Máma Luteefa and Shireen-bee, her servant, who saluted the old man with respect.

"We have a letter from the Nawab," said Máma Luteefa, "and he has sent us to deliver it and to plead for him."

"As-tagh-fur-oola! God forbid!" cried the Syud, putting his hands to his ears, "that any message should reach me from that bold, bad man. Leave me; I will not hear you."

"He is penitent now," returned the Máma, wiping her eyes. "He will do whatever you please."

"He is worn to a shadow," said Shireen-bee, sniffling and blowing her nose. "He will die of grief, Huzrut, for Zóra-bee. Will she not relent? Osman Beg will have the grandest marriage performed."

"Here," interrupted Máma Luteefa, "if Zóra wishes, in the midst of her friends. He will come without a following, and place himself—he—he—in voluntary captivity to the beauteous Zóra. He will settle on her a dower of fifty thousand rupees, and an elephant could not carry the clothes he has provided. If my lord will read his letter he will see that I tell the truth."

"Let Zóra open and read it," said the old man, gently. "She can choose for herself. I will say nothing, for rank and wealth may have favour in her sight, though they have none in mine. Zóra! Zóra!" and she came forth, veiling her face, and sat down beside him.

"Read this," he said; "it is from Osman Beg; and I would that these his emissaries heard thy decision from thine own lips. Open the letter and read it to me."

The epistle was from Osman Beg himself, whose orthography and spelling were none of the best. He had evidently not trusted his moonshee to copy it. It contained all that Máma Luteefa and Shireen had enumerated, and much more in a fulsome style of flattery; and he would come to Korikul, with his body servants only, to celebrate the marriage at any time, or by any person, that might be approved of.

It was as much as she could do to read the letter. Zóra's face flushed, and her eyes glowed at the remembrance of the insult and indignity which had been put upon her; and when she had read it and put it down, she burst into a violent flood of tears. "He might have spared thee this last indignity, Abba," she sobbed, "knowing, as he does, that we have been obliged to fly from his tyranny and become wanderers. And these women, who failed to persuade me once when I was in their power, might have guessed what the result of their mission would be when I was free. Yet you are not to blame, Máma Luteefa. You were following your trade, and he was giving you gold. He has even bribed you again. Enough that you think it honourable and good. Now hear the last words I will speak to either of you. Go! tell your master that I am now, even as I was then. No wealth can tempt me, no threat can terrify me; I go whither he cannot find me, and am henceforth a Fakeer with my grandfather, whose lot I share, whatever it may be, till he passes away. Go! and trouble us no more."

"And that is your answer, Zóra-bee?" said Máma Luteefa, somewhat scornfully. "You refuse, child, all that I had contrived for you."

"I have spoken," returned the girl; and she sat still, idly picking up pebbles from the sand.

"And how didst thou cross the river, Mámajee?" asked Runga, in his rough Dekhan dialect.

"What business is that of yours?" said Shireen-bee. "My mistress does not speak with Beydurs."

"Perhaps she would speak; perhaps she would be made to speak if I had her head shaved and she were set on an ass. I am master here, and can do justice after my own rough fashion. Will ye answer the question?"

If it had not been painful to witness, the terror of the two women would have been ludicrous. They looked hither and thither without seeing the possibility of aid, and at last fell down before the old Syud in an agony of alarm. "Mercy! mercy!" they cried frantically. "Spare us; we are only poor women earning our bread. There in the fort he threatened us; here we are also terrified. Mercy! mercy! let us go, and we will hasten away."

"Ye have not answered my question, Mámajee," rejoined Runga. "How did ye cross the river?"

"The Nawab sent us by the lower ferry, and we said we were on a pilgrimage from Moodgul. We went round a long way before we could reach the place. They would not let us cross from the fort."

"Good," said Runga, with a smile of content. "Then our people are not to be tempted, and we must secure the boats below, Burma. As ye did not come by the upper ferry, ye shall return by it," he continued to the women; "and when ye get back offer fatehas that your hair is on your head. Take them, Burma, and despatch them by Jumálpoor; and if ever I see you again here, or hear of any of the Nawab's people being on this side the river again, I will have their ears cut off and tied about their necks."

"And there is no answer to our master's letter?" said Shireen, somewhat impudently. "And what shall I say to him from thee, my fairy?"

"Begone!" shouted Runga. "Up, and begone! Else beware! I am not used to have my will disputed;" and seizing them by the shoulders, he pushed them out of the door into the street; and in a few minutes more, with fresh bearers for Máma Luteefa's litter, they had passed the gates under an escort of Beydurs, and were on their way. We need not detail their reception in the fort; suffice it to say that two days after Osman Beg directed their hair to be shorn, and, riding on asses, as we have already mentioned, they were expelled the fort.

"Shookr! Shookr! Thanks, a thousand times, that they are gone. Runga, I owe this to thee; else they had persecuted me, and Zóra, too, poor child. Do not weep; you are safe now.

Blessed be the Lord! Safe from persecution! Hast thou the letter, Zóra?"

"It is here, Abba. What shall I do with it?"

"Keep it for me," he replied; "I would fain have it shown to Abbas Khan. Wilt thou take it, Runga?"

"Nay," he replied, "I should but lose it; let Zóra keep it safely. And now, Huzrut, be led by my advice. Meeah must have reached Beejapoor before this, and some of my people are going for their yearly State services. As I have told thee, I am obliged to go westwards; but they will escort thee safely, and make ye both over to Meeah if he be there; and if not, get ye a lodging near the Chishtee Saint, in the quarter of the Dervishes."

The old Syud shook his head. "No," he said; "the path of my salvation lies to the east, and the Murdan-ool-Ghyb points thither on Monday, when we must depart. I cannot, under the revelations made to me, change my direction or my purpose; and after what has happened to-day, I feel as if there were additional pressure put upon me to depart speedily."

"As you will, Huzrut, as you will," said Runga, kindly; "only I wish it were otherwise. I wish you would go direct to Beejapoor, and sit down at the palace gate till you are recognised and relieved. This travelling is a sore trial both to you and the child; and who have you to help you?"

"Do not care for me, Abba," said Zóra, with a sweet smile. "Now they are gone I have no fear—none. And you know we shall have Ahmed with us, Runga Naik; he refuses to leave us, and says he will become a Fakeer with Abba. So we shall not be alone. And perhaps I shall become one also, if Mamoolla does; but I have not felt the call yet, and shall wait awhile."

"Take my advice, my child," said Runga. "If I am not wrong, and my Brahmin astrologer is not wrong, there are better things in store for thee than the skirt of a Fakeer, even if there be some pain in attaining them; and Vishnu Punt is a strangely wise man, who can tell everything. Shall I bring him to thee?"

"No," she said, quietly. "That might not be lawful for me. Nothing can possibly turn Abba from his purpose, and I should only be perplexed and terrified if your Brahmin's directions were different from his. No; let me be. I do but follow my fate, Runga Naik; and be the way rough or smooth, it must be travelled in faith and trust."

No more remained to be done. All Saturday and Sunday there were other sad services in the mosque, and during both days

visitors were constant, begging for charms, amulets, and medicines; and by many small gifts of money, vermicelli and other simple necessaries were provided. Finally, early on Monday they left Korikul, soon after daylight, after partaking of an early meal which the Moolla and his wife had prepared. Burma Naik, with an escort, accompanied them, the old Syud and Zóra riding easy ponies with saddle-bags, which Runga had procured for them, with Mamoolla mounted on another, which carried their small amount of cooking utensils, while the simple Ahmed drove another pony laden with their worldly goods. So the little procession was formed, which went out of the gate of the town eastwards to Kukeyra, and which was followed with dim, tearful eyes by Runga. "When shall I see them again?" he murmured. "Whither may not the old man's new projects lead him? Free, after years of seclusion, he will not now readily settle down, even for Zóra's sake, and in respect to her is as simple as a child. May the Gods protect them, and lead them safely."

It was a fresh pleasant morning when the little party left Korikul, and the strange, novel motion was delightful to Zóra. All her life she had been confined to the gloomy fortress and its rocks, with the roaring or murmuring river ever in her ears. Now there were green fields and luxuriant waving grain; cotton with its bright yellow blossoms, and wayside plants and flowers all new to her. In place of the frowning rocks of the ravine of Juldroog, there was an open fertile country, with some low hills on the left hand, and a level plain to the right which sloped gradually down to the great river, which could be seen at intervals gleaming in the sun, while the rugged peak of the fortress seemed to rise out of the basin of hills and rocks; and Zóra could even see the small white pavilion on the high rock before the palace, where, in days gone by, she had often sat to watch the cataract and the boiling foaming river beneath it. Should she ever see them again? Even her grandfather, generally so silent, was stirred by a new sense of freedom which he had not known for years. Ah, so many now! Aged as he was, he felt a new strength and power as the stout beast he bestrode with the air of a cavalier walked on firmly and speedily. "This is delicious, Zóra!" he cried. "No longer the few steps between the house and the mosque, no longer the close stifling air of the narrow ravine of Juldroog, but the free fresh air of the country and the fields. I cannot see them, child, but their perfume refreshes me, and I feel new life and vigour. Surely it is

a blessed beginning of the path we have chosen; and thou, be thankful then in thy heart, child, as I am."

"I am thankful, Abba," she replied, urging her pony up to his side. "And I am free, too, from the danger that threatened me. I could never have been at peace in Korikul after those women had found us out; and Burma tells me there is no danger now, for there are Beydurs in every village, and there will be orders given to pass us on from stage to stage, and to guard us always. So we can go miles and miles, further and further; and he will take care of the cows and the goats while we are away, and send them to us when we return, or wherever we may be."

And thus they travelled on their first stage of a few miles, chatting with each other, while the old man every now and then recited portions of the Koran, or from Persian poets that he remembered, and even passages in Arabic of the Turreequt, which at last he had undertaken. Presently Burma Naik, who had been riding in advance, stopped and said to them, "Yonder is the village, and my horn-blower will sound a signal that we approach. It is my own village, the Beydurs there belong to my division, and my wife and family live here, but when Runga is away on his duty I reside at Korikul. Is not my home pretty? I think it the most beautiful of all our villages, and there is not one empty house in it. But you will see it better when we get nearer."

Even from the distance they were, the appearance of Kukcyra was very inviting. It seemed like a large cluster of houses rising towards the centre, and was embosomed in trees and gardens. To the left the low range of hills rose considerably, and were covered with wood, part of which extended along the road by which they were travelling, and being without underwood or jungle, looked like a park. Cattle were grazing in large numbers on the short green sward, or lying under the shade of large trees. "This is our hunting ground, lady," said Burma to Zóra, "and there are plenty of wild hogs in the small ravines up there; and when they are driven from thence they take to the islands in the river, so we always know where to get them when we have a hunt. And look! yonder are antelopes grazing in a herd, and there are hares and pea-fowl among the grass, and my people protect them all. You have never seen these things before."

"No, indeed," replied Zóra; "how could I in the fort? But I have seen panthers and bears climbing about, and pea-fowl sometimes came down to the river side to drink, and I and other girls used to look at them."

"Well, you shall see all here, if you like—that is, if Abba does not object. But here no one is veiled, for we are all Beydurs, except a few farmers and weavers, and but seven families of Mussulmans, one of whom is the Moolla; but he is not like Abba; he cannot read or write, and, indeed, is not very different from a Beydur, and he is a capital shot."

Zóra's eyes opened wide at the idea of a Moolla who could only shoot well. "And there is no mosque, then?" she asked.

"No, lady, not even one; there is only a thatched shed which is used for the Mohurrum, which the Beydurs keep as well as the Mussulmans; but you will see all yourself. Now blow thy horn, Bheema," he said to the trumpeter, when they had reached the summit of a slight elevation, which gave them a better view of the village. "Blow stoutly, that they may hear;" and the blast was long and varied, with a peculiarly strange cadence at the close. It was evidently heard, for after a short interval, during which they remained where they were, a similar blast was blown from one of the towers of the gate, on which there was a red flag with a figure of Hunooman, the monkey-god, on its field in white. "Well blown, Krishna," said Burma, laughing; "'tis a hearty welcome to you, Huzrut. If the Rajah himself had been approaching it could not have been more complete; and hark! there are the pipes."

As they neared the village, Zóra saw how prosperous it looked. All the houses to be seen were perfect, and the wall itself was perfect too, and its bastions firmly built of stone. Gardens filled the space up to the wall, among which were some graceful clumps of bamboos, with mango and tamarind trees, with gardens of lemon trees for supplying the dyers at Korikul with the juice of the fruit, as well as the population for domestic use. Here and there, too, a solitary cocoa-nut tree waved its graceful foliage in the air; and as to date palms, they were numerous in groves to the south. Zóra expected to see their new home at every turn, but there were only solitary huts in the gardens, for watchers and labourers.

At last, near a large bright green sugar-cane field, they met the village procession and the musicians, who kept up a spirited but shrill piece of music intended for a welcome, accompanied by their own drummers; and four Beydurs, with their large tambourine drums, leaped, strutted, circled round and round, and performed their most elaborate exercises. The din of the music prevented Zóra from asking questions, and the party could only follow the lord of the place, who rode first. At the gate of the

village, however, was the real reception. Pointing out the venerable Syud to all, the authorities, that is, the head man, or Patell, who was not a Beydur, the Kurnum or accountant, a Brahmin, the blacksmith, the carpenter, and many others, touched the old man's feet and Zóra's, and bid them welcome; and they waved trays with lighted lamps in them, and flowers over their heads; and when this was all done, the little procession formed once more, and proceeded through the main street of the village, which was cleanly swept, and the houses ornamented with bright cloths which hung over the parapets of their roofs.

The street was lined with men and women, holding up their children to see the holy man; and Zóra already saw several faces among the women that she knew, who had come to Juldroog for medicine for their children or their husbands, and it was evident she was not forgotten. Every one was dressed in heir best, and the whole place seemed what it might be at a festival. Thus they passed out of the eastern gate of the village, and almost close to it, a little withdrawn, was the Tukeea, or "Pillow of residence," which was to be their abode.

It was a low, long thatched cabin, whitewashed without, standing in a small piece of ground by itself, and shaded by a noble banyan tree and others about its precincts. A cloud of parroquets, green pigeons, mynas, and other birds, rose from the giant branches, and flew screaming into the air as the music passed from under the gateway, and gladdened Zóra's heart. When had she not had birds about her? Then Abba was lifted from his pony, and a carpet spread in the shade, and everyone came and bowed before him, and bade him welcome. Even little children were held out by their mothers, that the old man might lay his hands on them. And the Moolla was there, who looked like a Beydur soldier more than a priest, and besought Abba to teach him something. Then the time came at which they might enter the house, which, it must be told in secret, had been fixed by the Brahmin astrologer, as there was none other; but he was present also, as were others belonging to the temple, to welcome one for whom all the country round had respect and affection. Indeed, it was a moving sight to see all these people, strangers in faith and previously unknown, receive the venerable Syud as they did, and pay him honour; and Zóra's heart was stirred within her, and she wept tears of joy as she sat behind part of the trunk of the giant tree and heard women calling to her, "We bless you because you helped the sick and denied no one."

Then her grandfather was led into the house by the Moolla and the Patell, as accepted by the whole community; and Zóra and old Mamoolla followed, and found the place neat and clean and very commodious, for there were three comfortable rooms, that in the centre being the largest. There was a kitchen behind, a shed for the two cows and the goats, and a verandah along part of the front, in which her father could sit. There was a well near the house, where many people from the village came to draw water. Above all, it was very quiet, fitted for religious meditation, and, as Zóra thought, the very place for her grandfather in his present frame of mind. And when all had retired, and the beds they had found ready for them were covered with their thin mattresses and quilts, and the old man lay down to take rest after his unaccustomed exercise, he called Zóra to him, and she went and put her head into his lap, and he said, with a quivering voice, "The Lord has been good to us, my child, forget not this in thy thoughts;" and he lay down and slept peacefully. Without were the songs of birds; the cooing of ringdoves and pigeons in the great tree; the fresh breath of the sweet air came through the doorway, and the murmur of voices in the village seemed assuring. Without, a bed of purple amaranths and marigolds glowed in the sun, and pretty lizards basked in it, and chirped, or sometimes looked towards the house as if to say, Who have come to disturb us? Yet it was a pleasant place, and full of rest and peace; and she was thankful, very thankful.

CHAPTER VI.

A DARING ATTACK.

IT is very probable that the readers of this tale have never even heard of the Beydurs who have some part in it; but their history and position are interesting, and at the risk of a short digression we will endeavour to explain enough of both to help to assure the reader that they are real people, and not mere invention.

The Beydurs, under the name of Veddur, still used by the wilder part of the tribes who inhabit the mountains and forests of south-western India, are what is termed ordinarily one of the aboriginal races, as seen in their native condition in the

forests of Travancore and Mysore. They are savages, wearing little or no clothing, cultivating no land, except in isolated instances, and subsisting upon fruits, roots, and the like, and collecting honey, bees-wax, and other forest produce, which they exchange for such articles of clothing and such necessaries as are indispensable. These portions of the tribe are now comparatively few in number, and altogether unimportant. They have been driven at some ancient period from the plains into the mountains of the west, and have not emerged from their original barbarism.

Other portions of the tribe which remained in the plains of southern India and in Mysore became, in some respects, civilised, and at one time attained a considerable degree of power, which, however, was shattered by the great Hindoo dynasties that gradually arose long before the Christian era, and the Veddurs, now adopting the appellation of Beydur, became soldiers and tillers of the soil, but never artisans, or reaching any degree of education. Under chiefs of their own, some small principalities were formed westward of Madras, some of which still exist, but most have disappeared in wars with the first Mussulman invaders and with ourselves. In North-Western Mysore, also, the Beydurs attained considerable power. They held many strongholds, and were feudal vassals of several Hindoo dynasties before the arrival of the Mussulman invaders in the twelfth century; and although the last of these dynasties, that of Beejanugger, fell to the Mussulman arms after the battle of Talikote in A.D. 1564, yet the chiefs of the Beydur tribes submitted to them, and became powerful feudal vassals.

The wars between the Hindoo kingdom of Beejapoor and the Mussulman kingdoms of the Dekhan had continued for several centuries, and their great field of battle and object of contention was the province which lies between the rivers Krishna to the north and Tamboodra to the south, the capitals of which are Moodgul and Raichore. It was sometimes in possession of the Hindoos and sometimes in the Mussulmans; thus the allegiance of the Beydur clans became divided; and as the Mussulmans confirmed their hereditary rights and privileges, many of the Beydur chiefs entered their service; and, as the tribe at large were the best infantry soldiers of the period, their service was always valuable.

This portion of them were the allies and servants of the great Bahmuny Mussulman dynasty of Gulburgah and Beedur, and

rendered essential service in guarding these southern frontiers, as well as in many general actions; and from having in the early period been confined to the frontier of the Tamboodra river, they gradually extended themselves over the Raichore Dooab, and their chiefs formed small principalities which originally must have been independent, or held in feudal service, but which now exist only in name. In northern Mysore, the chieftainships of Chittledroog, Hurpunhully, once powerful minor states, were overwhelmed by Hyder Ali and Tippoo Sultan, and the present representatives are now pensioners under the British Government; and the last Beydur state, Shorapoor, situated in the Dooab, which lies between the Bheema to the north and the Krishna to the south, having rebelled in 1858, was attached, and is now the property of the Government of His Highness the Nizam.

At the close of the sixteenth century, however, the period of our tale, this Beydur principality held a high position. A portion of the tribe had at first, probably about the fourteenth century, crossed the Krishna, and their earliest settlements were at Korikul, Kukeyra, and the villages on the left or northern bank of the river; thence they spread all over the province, their chief or naik selecting Wakin-Keyra, a village at the extreme end of a rugged chain of hills, where there was a strong position, as his capital, which he fortified. The tribe then could muster twelve thousand well-armed infantry militia; and beside these the Rajah had a force of other soldiers, horse and foot, amounting to about four thousand more. His revenues were not derived from the land only, but from dues in various provinces, being a percentage on the revenues—this, in most instances, being literally the Beydur's black mail; and as the militia not only assisted the reigning King of Beejapoor, but protected the whole of his eastern frontier against aggression by the King of Golconda, the tribe was held in high estimation, and certainly fought bravely wherever they were employed.

Thus, in this history, we find them not only at Juldroog but at Beejapoor, and marching under Runga Naik to the King's camp, which was in the field north of the Bheema. These intimate relations between the Beydurs and the kingdom of Beejapoor continued till its fall before Aurung Zeeb; and almost the last resistance the great Emperor encountered in the Dekhan was at Wakin-Keyra, which, after a noble defence, through several separate seiges, fell at last under the attack of a very large army which had been summoned from the south of India for the pur-

pose; and the Rajah, finding Wakin-Keyra too weak and too confined for a permanent residence, took up a new position in a secluded basin of the range, and founded the town of Shorapoor, which is the present capital of the district. Shorapoor had held its own against the Nizam, the Mahrattas, and Tippoo Sultan. It had avoided collision with any one, and had increased in wealth; but of late years it had been misgoverned and oppressed, and the name only of its former power remained, and it at last fell to rise no more, under the effect of a foolish attempt on the part of its Rajah to attack a British force, in which he suffered a disgraceful defeat.

The Beydurs as a people are essentially different from ordinary Hindoos. Some of them attend Hindoo services and conform to the ministrations of Brahmins, but for the most part they are followers of the Lingayet doctrine, or hold to their ancient aboriginal worship of natural objects, glens, water-falls, rocks, trees, and the like. They do not accept or desire education in any form, and are of a freer, bolder type—both in manner and customs—than ordinary Hindoos. They are great sportsmen in all respects; bold in following tigers, panthers, and bears on foot; and ordinarily they live upon whatever game they can shoot or snare. In person both men and women are remarkably neat and clean, and their homes and villages well kept. They are also industrious cultivators and farmers, and own a great quantity of land in their province. They are likewise public carriers of cotton and salt to and from the coast; and, in short, are rarely idle, and by no means dissipated. Formerly they were dreaded for raids on their neighbours, and in cattle-lifting especially were most daring and expert; but those times and deeds have passed away, though their memory lives in many a song and legend.

Beydurs hold themselves to have no caste, and they eat everything except carrion, and such birds or beasts as feed upon it. They also object to beef, because the slaughter of kine is offensive to Hindoos, and especially to Brahmins. They marry exclusively into their own tribe, and rarely have more than one wife, though their chiefs take as many as they can support.

Perhaps we need not follow the Beydur clans further, and we have recorded enough to explain the position they occupied at the period of our tale in the country in which its action is laid, and where the clan still exists, not in its former rude splendour and strength, but as peaceful and industrious inhabitants. I may mention that I had intimate experience of them for eleven years,

when, during the minority of the late and last Rajah, I ruled over them and their province alone. But to resume.

The time passed pleasantly and quietly in the new home, and there was no jealous wife to disturb it. Burma's wife was his second, a fine young woman of hardly twenty as yet. His first wife had died while yet very young, and had born him no children. The present, Enkama, had two, and her home was a happy one. She managed her great good-natured husband admirably; and so long as she did not interfere with his office as part guardian of the frontier and head of the Kukeyra portion of the tribe, she had full liberty to do as she pleased with household and farming affairs. She had many buffaloes and cows, and her dairy produce was large. She was fond of her gardens, in which all kinds of vegetables abounded, which she sent regularly to the market at Korikul; and when the river was fordable, even across the river to Goorgoonta and other towns. She superintended the ploughing of the land, sowing, weeding, and gathering in of the crops, with a delight she did not conceal; and while ready to punish lazy labourers, men or women, was kind and considerate to those who served her well. Most charitable was she, too, and kind to all; and, as the people said, there was ever a blessing following her, and increasing her store. In the house or out of the house she was never idle. When the morning meal had been served to all, consisting of piles of jowarree bread, pots full of boiled pulse, and vegetables, of which she and her husband partook also, and the floors were plastered with liquid clay, she sat down to her spinning wheel with her servant, and so worked till it was cool enough to go out again. Sometimes she rode a strong pony; at others, with a long staff in her hand, trudged over ploughed fields, or watched the weeding of crops which, without her supervision, would be carelessly done by the lazy hussies who were hired to do it. A clever cotton picker, too; not ashamed to work all day in the field, and carry home a bundle on her head bigger than any one else's. Withal a pleasant, cheery woman, of no particular beauty, truly, but of an upright graceful figure, whose lines were like those of a Grecian statue, with a pleasant good-natured expression of face, and the whitest teeth. Not fair in colour, but a rich ruddy brown, which had strong healthy blood coursing under her skin.

Here was a new friend for Zóra, for whom she took a great liking, and whom she constantly came to see, bringing with her whole baskets full of household sweetmeats, vermicelli, fruits, vegetables,

and whatever she thought would be liked; and she always enjoyed a short chat with the girl under the verandah, or most generally, when the ground was dry, under the great banian tree. Enkama knew nothing, so to speak, except tales of the deeds of the Gods, especially of Krishna, and scraps of the Mahabharut and Ramayun, as she had heard Brahmins and bards recite them; but she was a great authority upon the subject of the old wars between the Hindoos and the Toorks, as she called the Mussulmans, and could recite the ballad legend of King Firoze Shah and the Goldsmith's Daughter of Moodgul, and the death of King Majahid Shah, who had broken the image of Hunooman at Humpee. She was thus a pleasant companion to Zóra, and Zóra in turn appreciated the good dame's sound practical sense, industry, and kindness. They could not be intimate friends, because Enkama saw how much she was below Zóra in knowledge, and how different were the courtly manners of the girl from those of her own Beydur class; indeed, Zóra's language in ordinary conversation was so refined in comparison with her own, that she felt birth and intelligence had separated them very far. Very often she sent her children with the servant to play under the great tree, and would find Zóra with other girls, making dolls'-houses or dressing up dolls, and making dolls' feasts to amuse the little ones. Reader! there is the same common humanity everywhere, and a Beydur child with a rag or wooden doll and a pennyworth of sugar to feed her companions is as proud and happy as the aristocratic child whose doll has cost, we will not say how much, and whose cradle is trimmed with lace and covered with eider down.

Then there were a few Mussulman girls in the village who, though young, could learn something; and their mothers, who knew nothing, gladly brought them to Zóra, who could teach them sewing, to mend their father's clothes, how to knit his drawers-strings, and to begin embroidery. Zóra had sold all her stock of embroidered caps and boddices, and had gained a good many rupees by them, and she was working others as fast as she could to get more. So these were pleasant occupations, and she had pleasant, innocent company; and, besides all this, she had to help Abba in his "Turreequt, or path to Heaven;" and, as he could not read, and the books he had were Arabic, she had to follow his recitation, and when he missed a passage or a word, to spell it for him as well as she could, when he would give her the proper pronunciation and explain the meaning, and thus she felt, if he persevered, that she should gain some

superficial knowledge of that language which might be of use to her hereafter. And was Maria forgotten? Ah, no! but was the more preciously remembered; and when Zóra was tired of reading or working, and lay back on the little carpet she had spread under the giant tree, she could look up among its interlacing branches and watch the doves and wild pigeons, the flocks of paroquets, flying in play from branch to branch; the old horned owls come out of the holes in the tree and peer about, the little grey owls twitting and constantly on the move, and the beautiful lizards chasing each other from hole to hole along the deep furrows of the bark; and listen, too, to the pleasant singing birds, who, though seldom to be seen among the deep foliage, yet twitter songs of their own which were pleasant and soothing to listen to. Yes, those were happy days, and they passed smoothly and uneventfully for some weeks, and as if they were never to come to an end. But Zóra knew better than this. She knew that her grandfather's restlessness would again come on him, and that the Turreequt could not be fulfilled in Kukeyra. Meanwhile, her dreamy life continued; nor will we say how much the night scene with the wounded and delirious Abbas Khan mingled with it. Had he forgotten her? Ah, no! she hoped not, for he seemed ever present with her; but their lives had drifted so far asunder. And Maria had not replied to her simple little letter, to which an answer might have arrived by one of the messengers who constantly brought letters from Beejapoor before she left the fort. Yet still she trusted and hoped, and the faith of the girl was not shaken.

Nor was her grandfather idle; and though he was evidently becoming more and more absorbed in his religious meditations, he had not given up the concerns of the world. There were only a few families of ignorant Mussulmans in the village, most of the members of which could not even repeat the Belief; but these were gathered together on Friday (the Sabbath) for instruction such as they could comprehend; and as Friday was the weekly market-day of the little town, many Mussulmans came with their field and garden produce, and weavers with their manufactures; and then the old man had larger gatherings and regular prayer services, and preached to them on simple subjects, most especially against drinking palm wine, which, not being wine or spirits, was held to be excusable and allowable. So the residence of the Syud and his granddaughter at Kukeyra was not devoid of usefulness; and, in spite of its being a Beydur town, and there-

fore held to be generally unclean, their lives were peaceful and undisturbed. But this was not to be of long continuance.

Huleema, the eldest daughter of the Moolla, a handsome and intelligent girl, and Zóra's most advanced pupil, had long been betrothed to the son of the Moolla of a town some miles to the north, where resided the only Kazee of the province, and where a number of Mussulman weavers lived. Now, the period of marriage was fixed, the Kazee had consented to perform the ceremony, and had appointed the day. Invitations had been issued to all friends, but that to the old Syud was brought by the girl's father and mother, who besought of him to come to their house and pronounce the final blessing. There would be such amusement in the course of the evening as poor folks could provide, and there was an empty room at his service, while Zóra could remain with the women of the family.

The old man demurred at first, but Zóra pleaded that he should go. She had promised the girl to be with her at her marriage if her grandfather remained at Kukeyra, and as yet he had not signified his intention of travelling onwards.

The day arrived, and in the afternoon Zóra, casting a sheet about her, led her grandfather through the village gate and small Bazar up to the Moolla's house, which was in one of the principal streets, and from the high roof of which there was an extensive view to the south, west, and east. A screen of bamboos, covered thickly with date palm leaves, had been erected as a sunshade, and here most of the women guests were assembled, who received Zóra with homely courtesy and welcome; but Huleema could not spare her friend, and Zóra was soon engaged in the preliminary ceremonies of bathing, anointing with ground turmeric and sandal wood paste, similar offices being performed by men for the bridegroom, and these ceremonies, of which we spare the reader the detail, necessarily occupied some hours.

Meanwhile the old Syud was very happy. The men, and especially the Kazee of Kembavee, had received him with affectionate courtesy, and they had placed him in the seat of honour, and offered him sherbet to drink. Of course there was no one so learned as himself, but the Kazee was a man of some education, both in Arabic and Persian, and had read some religious books of an easy character. He had also a knowledge of law and logic, and a slight acquaintance with ordinary works on medicine. He had studied in the colleges of Beeder and Beejapoor, and from the high court of the latter held his diploma as Kazee. The appoint-

ment he occupied was a lucrative one, as his dues extended all over the province. Some other intelligent guests were present, and the evening passed pleasantly enough. Then the Shubgusht, or marriage procession, formed before the house, and the bride being seated in a palanquin, her husband followed on a stout pony, both being dressed in red muslin garments as gaily as possible. It was a public procession, the gates of the village were open, and strangers from other localities mixed freely with the crowd that thronged the streets. Burma Naik, who, being a Beydur, could not take a part in the ceremony, nor sit among the chief guests in the house, had nevertheless held a court of his own in the outer portion of it, now headed the procession on his fine horse, and was accompanied by a number of his men, who fired their matchlocks and cheered the bride with those strange shrieks and yells in which the Beydur youth delight. Thus, what with these, the blasts of many horn-blowers, the pipes and drums of several villages, and the general noise and clatter, nothing could be distinctly heard, and all was merry confusion.

The procession was to pass along part of the Bazar, then traverse the main street to the west gate, and, returning by the only other wide street to the Bazar again, proceed as far as the east gate, whence a deputation would convey an offering to the old saint's tomb, which was under the Banian tree. Such had been the programme, which was rudely interrupted. As the procession had reached the western gate, a sudden shouting of "Thieves! Thieves! Dacoits!" was heard, and several shots were fired. There had been strong guards posted at both entrances, and some of the armed men ran up the Bazar to reinforce the eastern gate, while Burma and about fifty of his men dashed through the western gate, and guided by the shots and shouts, passed down a lane which ran round the south side of the village among the gardens. Here was a point at which several roads separated, and here he stationed some of the men, posting himself opposite, so that no one could escape. It was evidently an attack by Dacoits, under cover of the noise and merry-making of the marriage procession, but against whom? And he set his teeth, drew his sword, and awaited the approach of the fugitives and their prisoners, and in a few moments they had arrived, some twenty men, a strong band, who might have overpowered by their sudden rush any weaker persons than those who now met them face to face. Crying to his men to spare none, he attacked the strange party, and in a few moments several were wounded, two

killed outright, and six taken prisoners. The rest, many or few they knew not, escaped through the hedges which lined the road into the thick gardens and sugar-cane fields, and were beyond pursuit. But Burma had as many as he wanted, and the men's hands being tied with turbans, they were escorted to the village gate, where the Chaoree, or town hall, was situated. This was common ground, and Beydurs, as well as others of all castes, crowded into it. Among those who had come down from the Moolla's house were the Kazee of Kembavee, some respectable Moollas and weavers, with Brahmins, and generally most of those who had not joined the procession. A few, however, remained with the old Syud.

"I was about to send for you, Kazee Sahib," said Burma Naik, "and you must help me to inquire into this. And do ye all, sirs," he continued to others, "assist me to do justice. One of my men, a fine young fellow, first in the pursuit, has been speared by one of the Dacoits, and is already dead; another, I fear, is dying. This is murder, and justice must be done. Were I alone, indeed, I should dispose of them at once without mercy; but as the representative of the King is present, I shall do nothing till he has spoken. Bring up the prisoners. Ha!" he continued, as one was led forward, "thou, Kalloo! Methought thou wouldst not have tried thy hand here."

"Be quick," said the man, a tall, powerful fellow, who still held a spear shaft in his hand, from which the blade had been removed, "be quick; hear what I have to say for I am dying. Give me a drink of water;" and someone handed a vessel full to him, from whence he drank greedily. "Enough!" he said, as he gave it back. "Listen, Burma Naik, you know me, Kalloo Jutt, and I deny it not. I have done my last deed. There, read that, and you will see why I did it, and what it was to have been. Ah! I was a fool to disobey the omens, but there was no time to delay. I can speak no more."

Then the Kazee opened the paper in which a letter was wrapped, and which the robber had taken from his waistbelt. It was in the Mahrathi character, and the village accountant was called upon to read it. Twice he cast his eyes over it, and seemed as if afraid to do so, when Burma Naik snatched it from him, and said, "Now come and read it, while I look over it with thee. But, Kazee Sahib, it bears the seal and the signature of Osman Bey, the Governor of Juldroog, and I can guess what its purport may be." And the document ran thus :—

"To Kalloo Naik Jutt, from Nawab Osman Beg, Bahadoor, greeting, and health and grace from Alla attend you.

"Whereas Zóra, the granddaughter of the Syud Dervish who lived here, has escaped, and is now at Kukeyra, under the protection of the rebel Burma Naik, and lives in a house outside the entrance gate of the village, you are therefore to go there with your men and take her up and bring her to me, without hurting even a hair of her head. I do not want the old man, he is useless to me; but if he resist he can be slain. These are my orders; and if this service is well done, and without hurt to Zóra-bee, who will belong to my harem, I will hold you free from all question by the Government in case any trouble shall arise; and I will give you, on recovering Zóra-bee aforesaid from your hands, the sum of five hundred hoons of gold.

"You are to believe this fully, and act on it fully, and without fear.



"The seal and signature of Osman Beg, son of Heidur Beg, Toorcoman."

"How strange!" cried the Kazee; "I received a letter from him only yesterday, asking me to come to Juldroog to-morrow, and having rested here to-night, should have gone to him."

"Yes!" said the dying man, faintly, "Mother Bheemee, from Raichore, was to have received her; and I sent my aunt Chimee to find out about the marriage here."

"I thought I had seen the old witch once in the Bazar, and only that it is not safe to cross her, would have had her head shaved."

"It was a narrow escape," said the Kazee; "the Lord be praised for it, and that I am delivered from seeming connection with this sin."

"And I say," continued the robber, who sat up, with staring eyes, as if making a supreme effort, "I say, and bear ye all witness, that the Nawab told me to get the child to him before morning, and he would dishonour her. That the Kazee was only a sham, and would not be allowed to cross the river;" and then, with a violent effort, he tore away the bandage which had for the time restrained the bleeding from the wound in his neck; the blood rushed forth, and with a shrill scream he fell back and died.

"A sad event for a merry marriage," said the Kazee; "but it is evident to us that the innocent are protected by the Almighty. Let no one tell the lady or her grandfather; let them sleep in

peace. As to the rest of the prisoners, deal with them according to border custom. There is no law in the case."

"Yes," said Burma, grimly, "I will deal with them; and see, this has been brought from beneath the banian tree."

It was a common rough bedstead, with bamboos at each corner tied together. Underneath the place where they joined one large thick pole had been introduced to carry it by, and over all a thick black blanket was cast, which would have at once concealed and secured the inmate; and had anything occurred to prevent Zóra going to the marriage, the expedition of the Jutts might have been successful.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST ALMS.

THE old Syud had heard nothing of the alarm of the previous night, which had been carefully concealed from him and also from Zóra; and after early morning prayer, they took their leave and returned home with Ahmed and their old servant, Mamoolla; but as soon as they arrived, Mamoolla's tongue was at once loosened when she saw that the chain and padlock of the door had been cut in two, and two of the Beydur guard at the gate followed them to ask if anything were missing.

"Oh, Zóra-bee!" cried the old woman, who seldom spoke except on small domestic matters, "only to think that robbers attacked the house last night, and have carried off my two best cooking pots that were tinned newly last Bazar day, and were as bright as silver. How shall I cook your breakfasts? Where shall we get others? Alla! Alla! And the master's quilt and mattress are gone, and your petticoat and scarf that I had washed and hung up to dry! Oh, Zóra-bee! And they have taken everything, perhaps, and we are Fakeers in earnest. Oh, child! ask Abba to return thanks for our deliverance, for had we been here we should all have been murdered. What would have become of thee, my child?" And the old dame flung her arms about Zóra and wept plentifully; nor was Zóra herself less affected. She saw at a glance that violence had been done; but the door of her own chamber, which had been locked also, had not been disturbed, and all her grandfather's books, papers, and medicines were safe.

"Why are ye both wailing?" cried the old man, petulantly. "What is there to cry about? Where are my quilt and mattress, and my prayer carpet?" he continued, feeling for them in their accustomed places. "Who has taken them? Cannot that meddling old dame let them alone? Bring them to me quickly, I need them."

Then Zóra went to him, and put her arms round his neck, and sobbing as she was, said to him, "Abba! why have we enemies? We have been robbed while we were away last night. Let us return thanks to God that we were not here when they came, or we might have perished."

The Syud was soothed at once. "In the path to Heaven," he said, reverently, "there are many dangers to be encountered, child; pitfalls everywhere to the soul and to the body; weary rocks and stones to travel over; and whatever happens must be endured. O Alla Kureem! I thank thee," he continued, raising his joined hands, "for this thy deliverance. The enemy truly came, but thou hadst provided us with help, and in thy name we will distribute Fatehas."

"What enemy, Abba?" asked Zóra, trembling, as her heart suggested only one.

"I may be wrong," replied the old man; "but my heart tells me plainly, nay, as if that bad man had said it to us, that none other can have done it but Osman Beg and his men; or perhaps he himself came, under cover of the noise, and shouting and firing of guns last night."

"Let us go, Abba; let us go wherever God leads us; we are ever safe with Him; but not so near our persecutor. Let us go now, to-day. Oh, Abba, do not stay!"

Just then there was a sound of many footsteps near the door, and Burma Naik cried in a cheery voice, "Is all well with thee, Huzrut?" and the Kazee of Kembavee and others cried out, "Is all well with thee, Huzrut, and the child? Arise, and come to us, for we have much to say to thee." And the old man, led by Zóra to the door, went and sat down in his accustomed seat, while all present crowded round him with congratulations. "And see," said Burma, "here are thy mattress and pillow, and quilt, and two cooking vessels, and some other things which the robbers dropped in their flight. Here, Ahmed, carry them inside."

They were, indeed, all that had been taken; and old Mamoolla hugged the vessels to her heart, kissed them, and cried over

them like one distraught. No, they had lost nothing but Zóra's muslin scarf, and that was an old one.

"Now shut the door, Zóra-bee," cried Burma, "for we have that to say to thy grandfather to which thou must not listen. He can tell thee afterwards if he lists." Then Burma proceeded to relate how, when the bridal procession had passed out by the west gate, some men had been observed by the guard on the east gate bastion moving about the trunks of the great banian tree, but were not noticed at first; but when the door of the house was broken in, and a torch lighted, it was certain they were dacoits, and the whole of the guard rushed upon the robbers, firing their matchlocks at them to give an alarm. Then one Beydur related how the gang had fled, and were pursued and overtaken, on which a combat, hand to hand, took place, and one of the Beydurs had been speared to death and another badly wounded, and several of the robbers were wounded and two killed. How, then, the gang, which consisted of about thirty men, again fled, and was met by the Naik himself, and all was soon over.

"My men at the gate were watchful and brave," said Burma; "and when any man of mine does a gallant act I reward them after our simple fashion. Is it your pleasure, Huzrut, that they should receive what I have prepared for them? and will you honour the poor fellows by giving it to them with your own hands?"

"Surely, surely," said the old man, much affected. "Where are they, that I may bless them?"

"Here are four silver armlets for those who fought best, and here are the men; put your hands on their heads, and give each one." When this was done, a bundle of new turbans and scarves was brought, and one of each being laid together, some twelve or fourteen sets were distributed as the armlets had been.

"I have to feed them, too, Huzrut," said the Naik, laughing, "and give them plenty of séndhee (palm wine) to drink; and they will all be happy after the poor lad who died has been burnt. Now, away with ye all!" he cried to the crowd of Beydurs assembled. "Away!" And the pipes and drums struck up a wild march, and played them into the town.

"We are now alone, Huzrut; and the Kazee and I would tell thee what we have discovered. The durára was one planned by Osman Beg."

"Ah! if that could only be proved," interrupted the old man, sadly, "I could take it before the Queen, and pray for justice."

"We have proof enough," said the Kazee; "proof that I, a

humble servant of God and the State, can testify to, if needs be. But it is hardly required, for we have a document, signed and sealed by Osman Beg himself, addressed to Kalloo Naik, who died before us last night, and which he gave up of his own free will, else we had not, perhaps, discovered it. I have appended a Persian translation to it, and a certificate as to the manner in which it was found; and before the King or the Queen, or the Mufti at the court, that testimony cannot be shaken."

"Ajáib! wonderful!" exclaimed the old Syud. "When we see the finger of the Lord following us and directing us, O Kazee Sahib, can we doubt?"

"Indeed no, father," returned the Kazee, simply; "but there is still more. Here is a letter from Osman Beg to myself in his own handwriting, bearing his seal, which is exactly similar to that on the other paper, and the writing, too, of the Persian letters agrees perfectly. This is an invitation for me to come to Juldroog to-day, and perform the ceremony of marriage with one Zóra-bee. But how was I to understand who that might be? So it is clear, if the Nika was to be performed, Zóra-bee must have gone from hence, for there is no other Zóra-bee that I know of, and it is not a common name in these parts. But if I had even gone," continued the Kazee, "as we all heard from the man who died, it would have been too late, for the last dishonour that woman could suffer would have been inflicted upon her. Nay, even a litter had been provided to carry the child away."

"And it shall be hung up in the Chaoree as witness against him," said Burma, "just as it is."

The old Syud turned from one to another of his informants with wonder and thankfulness expressed in his aged features, and the tears were coursing down his cheeks as he listened to the details of the affair as given to him by the speakers. "Alla, the merciful and ever-present, protected the child before, and will ever protect the helpless and the orphan; and we owe our lives and honour to Him, and, next to Him, to thee, O Burma Naik. Wouldst thou belonged to Islam, as we do!"

"My ancestors were Beydurs, Huzrut, before Islam existed," returned the Naik, proudly. "No, Huzrut, we are better as we are. But now, what shall we do for thee and Zóra, whom all love here, as she is loved everywhere? What dost thou think, O Kazee?"

"If I may speak, and advise one so superior to me in wisdom and learning, I should counsel thee, O Syud, to proceed at once to Beejapoor; lay thy complaint, and Zóra-bee herself, at the foot of

the throne, and cry for justice. Our noble Queen Chand Beebee would not, could not deny justice to an old man, and a holy Mushâekh like thyself, O Syud! Consider this, and go. To remain here is only to run a fearful risk; and worse than that, to endanger strife between the Juldroog troops and the Beydurs, and so lead to reprisals and blood feuds. It would be well to prevent any chance of bloodshed, Huzrut."

Had not the worthy Kazee used the title Mushâekh it is most probable perhaps that the Syud, thoroughly alarmed, might have proceeded at once to Beejapoor, where he knew Zóra desired to go—if only to meet Maria once again; and he felt sure of justice whenever he might appeal for it. But the mention of the title sent his thoughts on their old errand.

"Sir," he said, "for many years I have been preparing myself for the Turreequt, and without that I can be neither a poor Fakeer or rise to the dignity of one of God's divines, a Mushâekh. The Lord has directed my path hitherto by wonderful events, and I follow the Eastern way; but I see the need of changing it; and you, Kazee Sahib, to whom such mysteries are known, can direct me to the proper course."

"I see but one," he replied. "There is no saint in all these provinces, but the descendant of Syud Geesoo Duráz of Gulburgah, to whom thou couldst go for reception into the Divine order. All other shrines are inaccessible to thee, Huzrut, on account of their distance and thy venerable age. Within a short time is the oorus (anniversary) of the holy saint, Syud Sofee Surmust, at Sugger; and there thousands of Fakeers assemble, of whom many go on to Gulburgah. I can direct thee to Sugger, where I have many friends and some humble disciples; and they will guide thee, and further thee on thy way. Let me see! Thy route is changed to the north, therefore—

Kunujgin Bamshin, Kunujgin Bisma,
Kunujgin Bamshin, Kunujgin Bimash.*

"And then"—and he counted rapidly on his fingers—"Wednesday will be your day for proceeding on your journey, and the Rujub-ool-Gyb will be in the northern quarter, which is good for thee, at the first watch of the day, which is convenient. And if ye all eat a little sour curds for your breakfast, the journey will lead to a happy result. But there is no other good position of the

* Letters which denote points of the compass.

Rujub-ool-Gyb for many days after that, and in a strait like this ye should risk nothing."

The Kazee was an experienced director of journeys and well versed in casting nativities, selecting proper days for marriages and betrothals; and in these respects there was no one who could compete with him; and as the old Syud saw that he was not a pretender, he put the more confidence in his directions.

"I would you could see my granddaughter's horoscope which I cast at her birth myself, or perhaps you have not leisure?"

"I have leisure before me ere it is time to depart, and you will do me a favour if you will show it to me, Huzrut. I will return after I have broken my fast; and the food is even now ready in the worthy Moolla's house, and I must not disappoint his hospitality."

"I have been thinking," said Burma, "how we can best convey the holy Syud to Sugger; and I have a plan in my mind which, if it is approved of, I will put in execution. Syud Moostafa, the Persian secretary of the Rajah, is my friend, and Daood Khan Bhylmee, the leader of the Bhylmee division of horse, is a chief to whom my force is attached. I will write to them now, if I may, and beg that an escort of horse may be sent to meet Huzrut at Hoonsigee, where he should sleep, and, rising early, go on to Wakin-Keyra; and this could be done without any fatigue. From hence I can send my own palkee, and a litter for the child, and my people as escort."

"A good thought," said the Kazee; "I do not think Huzrut will make any objection."

"Indeed, no," returned the old man; "ye are only too kind to one who has been a trouble to you both. But before we proceed to make other arrangements, may I inquire whether any of the Dacoits are here, I should like to ask them some questions. Who were they?"

"Jutts and Káikarees," replied Burma; "the boldest of all Dacoits and robbers; and who would not be tempted by the sum assured? The leader was Kalloo Naik, a bold, reckless fellow, whom I wounded last night in the scuffle; and, as the Kazee Sahib knows, when he had thrown that paper to us, he tore the bandages from his wound, and died at once. The rest the Kazee Sahib gave over to me, and as one of my people had been slain, they were all hanged but one. It will be a lesson to the tribe not to attempt dacoity here, and recently there has been more than we liked. I only sent away one, a boy, who was, perhaps, a spy; and I

wrote a letter to the clans that for every duróra they committed inside our boundaries, I would hang two men, one Jutt and one Káikaree; and this will keep them quiet for some time, for they know that Runga and I always do exactly as we say. If we did not, none of us could sleep safely in our beds. Care for nothing, Huzrut, all shall be prepared for ye, and my wife will come to Zóra presently, and comfort her."

After a while, therefore, the good lady came, bringing with her bags of rice and vermicelli, baskets of sweetmeats, and provisions enough to have lasted them for months. She told Zóra all that had happened, and other women dropping in, related every event of the night with wonderful increase of incidents at each narrative. The Kazee, too, returned, and Zóra's horoscope was produced and discussed. We will not trouble the reader with particulars of astrological predictions in regard to her, but no doubt certain dangers, as well as strokes of good fortune, troubles, and joys, were set forth, which, as they will have their places in this history, need not be anticipated. On taking his leave to depart, the worthy Kazee gave the Marathi letter of Osman Beg to the robber, and that to himself in Persian, to Zóra, bidding her keep them about her person, for the time might come when they would be of use.

Although they had been in Kukeyra less than two months, yet they left the place with regret. Zóra and her grandfather had both established separate interests in the place. It was one in which Zóra could go about at all times of the day as she had done in the island fortress, and all her old vocations found ample scope for exercise; for in attendance on the sick, and in distribution of medicines, her charitable heart knew no difference between Beydur and Hindoo, or Mussulman. Then it was pleasant to stroll with Burma's wife to her pretty garden, and sit among the cool plantain groves, and under the shade of great mango trees, and hold her little school there, when Abba could spare her; or, when at home, to dream in her seat by the old saint's tomb, under the great banian tree, and watch the lizards and grey squirrels at play, and the shy and pretty tree birds hop silently from branch to branch. But Zóra would not have remained after the incidents of Friday night; she dared not. The unscrupulous attempts of her enemy to possess himself of her, the narrow escape she had had of capture—perhaps death, or worse—caused her to shudder as she thought of them; and all she wished for was to be at rest, far away; where she cared not, so she and Abba were safe.

Even Beejapoor, Burma said, was dangerous, so long as her position was unassured; and he explained to her how lawless bands of men existed there who were ready to undertake any villany for money, and who, in any number, might be hired by Osman Beg, and prove more successful than the robbers had been where she was. It had been a weary thought, this wandering of her grandfather's, but under the terror that possessed her it had even become welcome now, and Zóra accepted it as part of her fate which could not be averted, and must be endured. Every hour, as the day of departure drew nigh, her grandfather grew more and more petulant and doubtful. They must walk, he said, for they were Fakeers, and had no right to ride. They must beg their daily bread, for they had no need to care for food, and the good Alla would send them what they wanted. At every village they should sing an invocation or a hymn, and he had by heart a great number of these; or they should go about villages and towns with a wallet collecting handfuls of meal, or rice, or pulse. And the old man's determination on this subject seemed unalterable. He even one day sat down at his gate, and spread a sheet, and blessed the passers by, and some threw pice and others cowries, and in the evening Zóra came and took them up; but there was hardly a rupee's worth in all. That, however, was only a trial, the old man said, in a place where they were known to be well provided, and they would do better elsewhere. Still it was a dreary prospect.

They had not to walk, however. During the night before the day of proposed departure, a small party of horse arrived from Wakin-Keyra, and informed Burma that two litters with bearers would meet them at Hoonsigee. So Burma provided his own palanquin for the old man, and a light litter for Zóra, and the ponies were driven on by Ahmed, and the little baggage was distributed as before; but Zóra gave the two pet cows and the goats to Burma's wife, with many tears, and that good lady kissed her feet, and the children wept aloud at parting with their kind friend. Finally, before noon of Wednesday they set out, and travelled to the end of their stage comfortably; nay, so luxuriously, that the old Syud declared it was more like a nobleman's journey than a poor Fakeer's, and would have no more such after he reached Wakin-Keyra.

So, passing low hills and rocky ground, but with many pretty villages surrounded by green fields and gardens, they reached their destination; and the old Syud, who had been thinking about

it all the way, as soon as they arrived at the gate of the little town, desired his litter to be set down. Zóra spread a sheet before him, and seated herself on one side, but rather behind him; and Ahmed, giving up charge of the ponies to Mamoolla, bid her go into the mosque, where they were to put up, and unload the animals, with the help of some of the horsemen's grooms. Then, to the astonishment of the horsemen, one of the little invocations was sung every now and then by all; and, as people began to collect, small contributions were thrown upon the cloth till it was fairly covered; and after her grandfather sung a thanksgiving, though his voice was thin and quavering, Zóra gathered the ends of the cloth together, and, leading him, she carried it to the mosque, where he first took the cloth as it was, and, kneeling down before the pulpit steps, offered the whole to God, and then sat down to count it. There were more than seven rupees in all, and he gave two to the Moolla and Patell of the town to distribute in charity. "We can live on less than five rupees a day," he said, chuckling, "and we can save two for the expenses of the Turreequt. Oh, blessed day that I departed from slothfulness and idleness; and blessed be Alla, the gracious, who thus leads me, a poor sinner, to his salvation."

It was pleasant, too, in the evening to find people gather about him in the mosque. Zóra and Mamoolla, with Ahmed's help, had nailed up a carpet across a corner as a screen, and sat behind it close to him, and warned off those who would have disturbed his meditations by idle questions; but after he had gone through his daily exercise on the points of salvation and the means of its attainment, people came in, and the conversation became general, and to the Syud delightful, for several of the horsemen belonged to Beejapoor, and some had family or clannish surnames which were familiar, and it was difficult to preserve the entire *incognito* which he had assumed. Presently the call to evening prayer was well sung by the muezzin, and after a plentiful meal they lay down and slept. Not for years past had Zóra remembered her grandfather so cheerful or so full of hope. He woke early, for the azàn was proclaimed; and they prayed together, for none else had arisen. Then he said to Zóra, "Come, child! we must do our duty;" and taking a long piece of strong cloth, used to make a bundle, she held it by the four corners, and they went their way through the streets, with the simple cry of "Alla diláya to leónga." If God gives I will take. Now and then they stopped to sing an invocation, and the clear voice of Zóra sounded sweetly in the fresh

morning air. Good housewives were grinding at their mills with many a rough unmelodious song, but none refused to put a handful of meal, or pulse, or rice, into the extemporised basket, which soon became so heavy that Zóra could scarcely carry it, and they returned. When it was all poured out, it formed a goodly heap, and the Syud patted it with his hand and was thankful for it. "We could not eat it all in two days, child," he said; "and we have the money besides. Why need we fear, so long as we put our trust in the granter of prayer?"

After they had all eaten they proceeded as they had done the day before, and the road was less stony and rugged; and when they had passed through a small range of rocky hills and over the embankment of the pretty irrigation lake of Bohnal, with the widespread waters to the west sparkling in the sun and the green rice fields to the east, the fortifications of Wakin-Keyra at the termination of a high and rugged mass of mountains fell on Zóra's sight; and one of the horsemen, dashing up to the Syud's palanquin, told him that he was going on, and that if he would remain for about an hour under the shade of one of the great banian trees of the embankment, and then follow, he would find all prepared to receive him. So the litters being placed together, they got out of them and sat down, while the waves of the lake dashed among the stones which formed the facing of the earthen bank, with a pleasant refreshing murmur.

CHAPTER VIII.

CASTING OUT DEVILS.

IT was but a short distance, barely more than a mile, to the entrance to the strange fortress in which Pám Naik, the Beydur Prince, held his Court. All that could be seen from a distance were two separate forts on each side of what might be called the gate, well built of granite, and picturesquely and commandingly situated on the summits of high rocks, much after the fashion of the bastions of Juldroog. From these forts, and from bastions below them, two lines of fortification had been carried along the face of the hill to the top, where they were lost in woods that crowned the summit. Flags were flying on all these towers and

bastions, which gave the grim-looking works a cheerful expression; and the great standard of the Beydur flew out from the highest tower, fluttering in the western breeze. At the barrier itself the friend of Burma Naik, Syud Moostafa, the Naik's Persian secretary, with others, were in attendance, who received the old man with profound salutations, while some respectable-looking mámas in like manner saluted Zóra, and bid both welcome. They were to remain in the Syud's house, where apartments had been prepared for them; and while her grandfather was carried off, much against his wish, to visit the great Naik himself, Zóra was conducted to the house in which they were to stay.

Wakin-Keyra was a strong place. Inside the second barrier of huge natural rocks the valley extended into a considerable bay or basin, filled by a small artificial lake formed by damming up a stream which descended from the hills. This lake was nearly circular, or perhaps more of an oval shape, and was surrounded by a short sward, always green, except where rocks jutted out from the mountain side, and dipped into the water. All round the sides of this natural basin were the houses of the inhabitants, of all castes, built of stone, cemented with clay or mortar, according to the ability of the builder, and with terraced roofs of lime or clay. The houses seemed to end with a level piece of ground at the eastern end, but from its height, the houses that covered it, and extended to some distance among the woods, could not be seen. The Naik's house, or palace, occupied the greater part of the south side of the amphitheatre, and, though it consisted of a great number of separate buildings and courts, could hardly be distinguished from other private houses that adjoined it, being built in the same manner, in very homely fashion.

The old Syud's account of his reception by the Beydur Rajah Pám Naik was amusing. He had accompanied the Persian secretary to the palace, as it was called, and had been ushered into the presence of the Prince, to whom he made his salutation. "I would have given much to see him, as he spoke kindly to me in Canarese—his own language—but that was impossible; so I had to listen only, and the secretary and a Brahmin Moonshi, who spoke good Persian, interpreted for me. The Rajah had a number of wants, which I must try to satisfy. In the first place, the new part of his palace, where he wishes to live, is at present haunted by sprites and demons, who must be exorcised and sent away. He has tried many Hindoo exorcists, Brahmins and Bairagees, and some Mussulmans, of whom a saint, who is called the Kala Peer, or Black Saint, was partly successful in one building; but in

the others the spirits answered that they would not depart, as they were very comfortable, and they remained. Then the youngest Ranee is troubled with bad visions and dreams at nights, and has become thin and weak, and several children in the house are ailing, and the Prince himself has low spirits; and I found his pulse very irregular. So all these things have to be looked after; and thou wilt have many amulets, charms, puleetas, and exorcisms for the house to copy for me, Zóra, and I shall be several days at the work. I have told the Rajah that I cannot begin so arduous and delicate a task without purification and some fasting for three days; and our host, who knows a little of the science, will afford me every facility. And besides, Zóra, he is rich, this Prince, and will give me a great donation, and that will help me in the Turreequt. Ah, child! we shall win that, by the blessing of Alla, and live happily till death."

"If you will show me which figures you wish for," replied Zóra, "I will get the book, and copy them for you."

"Not yet, not yet," replied her grandfather. "I have to ascertain what sort of spirits they are who have taken possession of these poor people, who are but low caste infidels; and they must be questioned in order that they may declare themselves. And thou wilt have to come too, Zóra, to help me with the women, for they are in private, it seems, and cannot see a man, though I am old and blind; which is foolishness. But they are very ignorant, I fear. And how hast thou been received and cared for, my child?"

"Very kindly, Abba," replied Zóra; "and we have several rooms, and this open verandah to sit in, from which we can see over the whole of the strange city which lies before us—the strangest I ever saw or heard of. There are not so much as ten ells of level ground in it, and the streets are mere paths up the mountain side, and they rise from the pretty tank which fills the bottom. All appears to be a mass of houses, tier above tier; and there is no level ground except at the top, where I see more houses and trees, and green grass. But they are all Beydur houses, they tell me."

"Then where can we go for our evening and morning begging, child? Once we have begun that, we must not abandon it."

"I know not, Abba; but why beg now? More food has been sent from the palace than would last us a week; and the Brahmin clerk who came with it said the same quantity would come every day."

"I tell thee, child, it must be, even if we sat at the door in the street. Once a vow is vowed to the Lord, can it be recalled? God forbid! Our host is too pious a person to object to it, and I will explain all. Now I must bathe. Tell Mamoolla and Ahmed to prepare the hot water while I lie down for a while to meditate, or perchance sleep. At the time of evening prayer the secretary will return home, and we can go together, for it is but a step from hence. Perhaps letters may be sent for us."

On her own part Zóra was curious to see the ladies of the Beydur Prince's family, and the deportment of a perhaps barbarous Court; and as she arrived at the palace in a closed litter, several women servants took charge of her, and she was conducted up a flight of stairs which led to an open gallery, fitted with transparent screens of fine bamboo work, about the middle of which sat the Ranee of the family and several children, who rose courteously to receive Zóra, and—owing to her perfect knowledge of Canarese—put the girl at her ease at once. Never had she met with any persons so loquacious and inquisitive.

They had heard of Juldroog; and an elderly woman present had even paid a visit to Cháya Bhugwuti in fulfilment of a vow, and seen the river mother in her fury. And Zóra had lived within sight and sound of it all her life. Was she married? Was she even in seclusion? And why not? She was too old and too beautiful to be allowed to go abroad into the world. Had she no jewels, no fine clothes? nothing but the coarse soosi she wore, and coarse muslin over it? No, Zóra had replied, they were Fakeers, and every day they begged for alms in the name of Ali, the commander of the faithful. Long they had talked thus, and in the evening lamps were lighted, and Zóra could see how homely everything around her was, except the ladies' persons, for they were covered with valuable jewels and diamonds, which flashed in the lamplight, while they wore magnificent saris of silk, with rich gold borders and ends, very valuable.

Then, after a while, her grandfather's approach was announced, and the ladies rose and retired into an inner room, and the Rajah entered, followed by the old man, led by the secretary and some Brahmins and Beydurs. He did not notice Zóra, who had retreated into a corner with some of the women servants or slaves, and was awaiting the result of her grandfather's visit with some anxiety as to what would happen. Presently he sent for her, and bade her sit by him, and observe for him.

The Rajah, a short, stout man, of fair complexion for a Beydur, seated himself, after a proclamation of his titles by his silver mace-bearers, who then withdrew; and the girl who was possessed by the evil spirit was sent for, Zóra having been cautioned to observe exactly what happened. As he had seated himself, her grandfather had called for a censer and some incense powder; and as Zóra told him the girl was entering the room he threw it on the live charcoal with a paper charm, and a great smoke arose; during which time he was muttering Arabic to himself. Zóra noticed that the girl, who might be about her own age, now trembled violently, and seemed slightly convulsed. She had made efforts with her arms and hands as if to put away the censer, and even to cry out and escape; but she was held firmly by her attendants.

"Bring her to me, that I may breathe upon her," said the old man. "I will not hurt her, but that evil spirit must come out of her, else she will suffer and die. At present it is living in her life."

But the girl would not move; and though they raised her to her feet, she sank down again, shivering and screaming; but the women took her up, and laid her on the carpet before the old man, so that he could place his right hand on her head. Then he said to her in a gentle voice, after repeating another charm, and casting more incense into the censer,—

"Who art thou that possesseth this girl? Speak!" But there was no reply.

"I adjure thee, in the name of Solomon, son of David, of Jibbreel and Azraeel, and of ye, O Abd-ool-Zadir, Zadir Jillaneo, Bhytab, Hunmuntoo, Nursimha, and Bhyraon; speak, and give me thy name!"

Then the girl foamed at the mouth and cried with an exceeding bitter cry, "I am Bassuppa! let me dwell in peace. I love this body, and will remain." The voice was hoarse and deep, like that of a man, and contrasted fearfully with the slight girlish form from which it proceeded.

"Who was Bassuppa?" asked the Syud, but the girl did not answer; she only groaned and sighed bitterly, "Let me alone, let me alone, lest I kill her."

"Who was Bassuppa?" asked the Syud of the Rajah.

"He was her attendant bearer when she was young, and he loved her much, as she did him. He died, and they carried him on a bier down from his home to the burning place, and she saw

his body from this balcony over the gate, where the nobat plays. She was immediately attacked by convulsions; and when again she became sensible, declared that Bassuppa had turned his head, opened his eyes, and looked at her, and had remained in her ever since."

"Enough! I understand now what is to be done," said the old man to the Rajah. "It is a powerful spirit, but one over whom I have command. Fear not, thy child shall be well in three days, and restored to thee."

"She is my pet, my darling," replied the Rajah, with emotion, "and her mother's too. If thou drivest this spirit from the child thou shalt know that a Beydur Prince can be grateful."

"Speak not, my lord, lest you break the spell; it is already working, as I see the child's lips moving. Listen!"

"I must have time to think," she said. "Let me alone till the third day, then I will answer thee."

"Keep her very quiet," said the old man; "let her be amused; make a doll's feast for her, or take her to some garden where she can play, and I will send my granddaughter with some powders that must be given to her as she goes to sleep at night, and as she rises in the morning. And now, Rajah Sahib, may we depart?"

Then pán and uttar were brought, and garlands of flowers; and on a silver tray, covered with brocade, were a few pán leaves with five large gold coins on them; and the old man, when Zóra whispered to him, took them up and tied them in the end of his scarf. But in regard to his vow of begging he would not relax, and when they reached their house her grandfather called to Zóra and said, "We must go, my child," and she led him into the street, along which he walked with difficulty nearly to the palace gate, where they stopped to sing one of the invocations; and Zóra's voice was so sweet, that many of those who came to the evening Court dropped money into her bag; and after a while they returned, and she found that there was more in it than had ever been before.

Zóra saw little of her hostess, who was a proud woman of a high Syud family, relations of the Wallee, or saint, of the city, and she had by no means approved of her husband inviting the old Dervish to her house. "Thank the Lord we are people of family," she said to him, "and in my father's house. I never heard of a Fakeer being invited to reside in it, or to be attended by our servants as if he were a Nawab. They used to live without, and take what was left of our meals, and that was

good enough for them. But this old Syud has very fine notions; his servant and grandchild must cook for him all sorts of dainty dishes, which, I own, they do very well; but they are Fakeers all the same; and though they earn riches, ay, riches every day, they go out at night when that great girl ought to be shut up, and go and sing and bring back a bag of money. I saw them count what they had gained, and there were many rupees, and even some hoons among the coppers. Can this be right?"

"Peace!" said her husband; "thy mouth is bitter, Sitara-bee. Thou shouldst not complain, for all that comes from the palace goes to thee. I tell thee, learned as I am esteemed to be, I have never met his equal yet, whether in medicine or exorcism. Peace, therefore! the time will come that thou wilt esteem it an honour to have had such a guest beneath thy roof."

"And the girl embroiders caps and knits drawers-strings," cried the dame, with a sneer, "and sells them; and bodices too. Is that a holy occupation?"

"Peace, I say again, Beebee! Thy mouth is bitter and thy tongue long, and it is not good to speak evil of a holy Syud;" and he went out before his wife could reply, as he saw she was determined to have the last word; but she sat down to her spinning-wheel and grumbled notwithstanding. "Shall I ask the girl to get me an amulet against barrenness?" she said to herself, after a while. "I am yet young enough. I wonder what it would cost, or whether the Dervish would give it in exchange for his lodging. I must see about this, for such things are." And she stopped her wheel and sat meditating, with her forefinger between her teeth; while, by the smile that spread over her face, her thoughts were apparently pleasant ones.

The Ranee and the children had departed to the garden at Bohnal, where they were always glad to go to escape the confinement of the palace. There they played about, sat under the shade of the fine trees, went to fish in the lake, and had a play performed by some strolling weavers and stone-cutters, who had joined together for the occasion. They represented scenes in the life of Krishna, the tutelary divinity of the Rajah's family, and their performance always afforded a great treat. The girl who had been affected by demoniacal influences was now the merriest of the party, and her mother, with a thankful heart, recognised the improvement with gratitude. But what would be the final result? Would the science of the Dervish prevail over, as she

believed, the Satanic influence? Well, the third day had arrived, and they returned early in the morning; and soon after a message was brought to the Dervish that the child had fallen down in a fit, and was talking and raving incoherently. A palanquin had been sent for him, accompanied by the secretary, and he was to come directly. But he did not go. He sent word that he had to keep himself pure during the day, and must remain in prayer till evening, when he would come. Meanwhile the child was to be kept quiet, and would most likely sleep.

Zóra heard him during most part of the day repeating incantations, or verses from the Koran, but he would eat nothing. Altogether Zóra was anxious; and though she continued at her embroidery all day she was not the less disturbed, for how many stories had not her grandfather told her of failures in exorcism when the demon had, in spite, entered into the body of the exorcist. "What charm would her grandfather use?" and she had the book on the science, written by His Excellency Mahomed Ghous, upon her knee, when her grandfather called to her.

"Child," he said, "my soul is troubled, for I do not remember a passage in the holy book that I need to recollect. Refer to it, and follow me while I repeat the exorcism entirely. If I fail anywhere, stop me. The puleeta to be used is one where the demon is strange and unknown, and begins, 'Whoever ye are.' It is a square, with a smaller square at the right hand upper corner, which is divided into sixteen even portions."

"I have it here, Abba; say on."

We need not quote the incantation, but the old man repeated it correctly, and was pleased. "Inshalla, child!" he said, "we shall gain the victory. I ought to wield the charm myself, but there is no help for that, blind as I am; thou must do it for me, and as I shall recite the incantation very slowly, thou canst copy the figures, which must be burned while the ink is wet. Meanwhile study it well, that thou make no mistake."

In the evening they proceeded to the palace, where the girl was still moaning in her heavy sleep. All those around her could distinguish, were the words, "He must not come! I will not depart!" The old man had prepared an earthen pot with a cover, which contained some fruits and seeds, and placed some silver pieces of money in it, and smeared the inside with ground sandalwood paste. Then he passed his hand over the child several times from head to foot; and as the earthen lamp placed on the top of this vessel was lighted, three kinds of oil being used,

those sitting around observed the girl become restless, flinging about her arms and sighing deeply. Her mattress, which had been laid on the floor, was now removed, and the place washed with liquid red clay and cow-dung, and she was taken up and laid upon it; then the exorcist passed his hands over her again, and incense and perfumes were lighted, which cast up volumes of smoke, so that the old man's face as he sat at the girl's feet could hardly be seen. When this had subsided a little he told Zóra to be ready; and she, taking up the pen that had been provided, rapidly drew the outline of the charm large enough to admit of her writing the incantation. The group formed a strange and solemn picture. The girl, lying restless and insensible, extended on the floor, with the venerable old Syud, with his anxious yet benevolent face and long white beard, sitting at her feet, with Zóra by his side. At the patient's head were her mother and several other ladies and servants, weeping bitterly, while the Rajah himself, with the secretary, who was a privileged person, watched the result with intense interest. The room was dark; except where the lamp cast a dim yellow light upon the group, and wreaths of smoke still eddied about the ceiling and walls, seeking egress. The only sounds were the sobs of the women, the occasional low moans of the patient, and the grating sound of Zóra's pen as it passed over the paper. At last the old man, with the usual invocation, "In the name of God most clement and merciful," began the incantation, "Whoever ye are;" while Zóra plied her pen as fast as she could, copying from the book before her. Every name pronounced was cried with a loud voice, and a considerable pause made, so that Zóra was not hurried, and the whole ceremony being repeated three times, her grandfather took the pen, and Zóra directing his hand to the place, he wrote the concluding words and breathed over the whole. Then the paper was sprinkled with some scented powder, and rolled up tightly, a thread of fine cotton being passed round it; then it was lighted, and as the old man recited passages from the Koran, green and red-coloured flames issued from the burning roll, which all could see; but the girl opened her large eyes, shuddered, and tried to hide her face in the floor. As the paper burned out, she was convulsed for a short time, and then lay still; finally she sat up, opened and rubbed her eyes, and stretching out her arms, said quietly to them all, "Where am I? What has been done to me? There was something sitting on my chest," she continued, innocently, "and it is gone!"

"Shookr! Hazar shookr! Thanks, a thousand thanks!" exclaimed the Dervish. "Lord, thou hast heard my prayer. Friends, he that possessed the child is gone, but he is here among us!"

At this announcement every one shuddered, and the old exorcist called to the spirit to reply; but there was no answer. He then asked the girl whether anything had been said or whispered to her, and she replied innocently, "Yes. Bassuppa told me he was going away for ever, and would never return; he could not remain, because some one was too powerful, and he cried very much, and I saw him no more. Then I awoke and saw you all;" and she arose, went to the Dervish, and prostrating herself, kissed his feet, and laid her head against them, and then kissed Zóra's feet, and then her father's and mother's, and sisters' all round; and all of them wept tears of joy, while her mother became so excited and hysterical that she was led away for awhile, and the old man gave directions as to where a strong charm was to be pasted up over every door and window; and, calling the girl, he placed another amulet in a handkerchief, and bound it round her arm, till a proper silver case could be made for it; also one to be worn round her neck, attached to her necklace. And he put his hands on her head, and wished her joy and peace in her life, and children to cheer it.

(Perhaps some of my readers will say, Why was this piece of superstitious observance introduced? To which we reply, that it is only as one instance of the many strange beliefs in supernatural effects which exist among Mussulmans and other classes of the people now, and have done so from the earliest times. Many curious and interesting episodes of lives turn upon them, and the belief in them is universal, with exorcisms of evil, mischievous and malignant demons and spirits. There are charms supplied against every mischance of man or womanhood, youth or age, against haunted houses and the evil eye. On the other hand, there are charms for evil purposes, which are believed and practised as much as the others. The incidents of the exorcism described here took place in presence of the writer of this tale when in India, and he could adduce many equally strange and affecting, or, in some instances, detestable.)

"We can ill repay this kindness, Huzrut," said the Rajah, as they adjourned into the hall of audience, and sat down; "but if you will accept of what I offer, and keep it in remembrance of me, I shall be thankful."

"I would rather, my lord, wait till I am assured that what I

have done is effectual," replied the old man, respectfully; "and I must see your daughter every day."

"As you please," returned the Rajah. "I will have my gifts sealed up, and the day you have to depart they shall be given to you. As to your granddaughter, I must leave her to the Lady Ranee, and you must promise me not to interfere with her."

"But at least you cannot refuse this to shield you from the chill night wind," he continued; and he threw a delicate white Cashmere shawl of some value over the old man's shoulders. As to Zóra, she was newly dressed by the good Ranee; and when she emerged from her palanquin at the secretary's house, she appeared in a gorgeous green silk sari, delicately shot with crimson. She had a valuable gold ring round her neck, and a pair of gold bracelets, and the whole formed a very costly gift. "Would that I could see thee, Zóra," said her grandfather, as he felt the soft rich silk and its heavy gold borders, and touched the ornaments; "but they befit thee, and some day——' and here he broke off suddenly, and was silent. As to Zóra herself, perhaps, there was a touch of vanity as well as gratification in her mind, for she did not take off the grand clothes immediately; and old Mamoolla came and peered at her all over, and went and lit another lamp; and the secretary's wife came and looked also, and cried aloud her congratulations in wonder; but she was jealous and envious in her heart, and I am afraid her husband had much to bear in her accusations of idleness, in that he was not so good an exorcist as the venerable old Dervish. "Those people get money by their work," said the dame, with a sneer. "The girl has presents worth hundreds of rupees; when wilt thou give me a gold neck ring and bracelet, or a sari like hers? And who knows what the old Syud has got besides. Touba! Touba! Thou a Syud, and a man of letters, shouldst be able to do as much as he."

The secretary did not vouchsafe a reply. He had been looking at Zóra's glorious eyes and expressive face all the evening, as they sat around the ailing child, and I think that more beautiful visions than his wife's shrewish face excluded thought of her more than she would have liked.

The fame of the old Dervish's cure, or, as some now called him, the Hukeems, or Physician, spread not only through the town, but through the country, and applicants for relief thronged upon him, making offerings which were sometimes considerable; but

from most people he would take nothing; yet to Zóra's perception they were growing rich, and, as Abba said, with a look of satisfaction, there was enough to make the Turreequt easy; and, after that, to settle in some pleasant place and to become a Wallee, or saint, at whose tomb people should come and pray.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SYUD TAKES TWO DEGREES IN HIS TURREEQUT.

FOR a few days there was nothing more to be done. The Rajah's child was well, and her complexion was already changed from the grey, livid colour which had before existed to a healthy ruddy tint, and she slept without waking. Every day the old Dervish visited her; and the child, now fearless, nestled in his lap. What if she were a Beydur! The haunted rooms had been freed of evil spirits; and by way of giving assurance to all, especially to the servants, the family went and slept there without being disturbed. A packet of medicines was made up for the Rajah by the old man and Zóra, and the use of them explained. Finally, the day arrived on which they must depart. The oorus, or anniversary, of the Saint Syud Sofy Surmust would take place on the third day; and among the crowds present, it would be difficult to find lodgings. Finally, the Rajah proposed that his secretary should attend the old man, and see him safely through the festival. "And," added that worthy person, "if your friend the Kazee of Kembavee is there, so much the better." Then the presents to the old Syud were brought from the treasury; and the seals, as they had been made on them, were inspected by the Rajah and broken, and the list that had been placed inside read out. It was, indeed, a princely gift, suited to the age and holy profession of the recipient; and with a bag of five hundred rupees the list closed.

"Nay, but I protest against this," said the old man, earnestly. "I exercise my art not for gain; but for the love of God and His name."

"Well," replied the Rajah, "if thou wilt, give it away in charity. A gift cannot be recalled; and so I pray thee take it for the remembrance of one who, though he is only a Beydur, can at least prove grateful."

And after this no more objection was made; it would have been an insult. Then, as the Syud rose, the Rajah rose also, and went and touched the dear old man's feet; and the Ranees were called and did the same; and the child, with many tears, hung about his neck, and her hands wandered over his face; and it was with difficulty that he and Zóra got away, under the blessings showered upon them. But all was finished, and the secretary's wife had obtained the dearest wish of her life, and drank a charm, which was washed from the paper on which it had been written into a silver cup filled with water, in entire faith in its efficacy. And now the Turreequt awaited them at Sugger, and they must go. The money that had been given them was converted into the small gold coin called hoons, which were then in circulation, and could easily be carried; and Wednesday being the proper day for proceeding northwards, according to the Rujub-ool-Ghyb, and a fortunate conjunction of planets to boot, they took leave of their hostess and departed. The day before, when they had gone to pay their respects to the Rajah, he said he had provided two palanquins for the old Dervish and Zóra; and though this interfered with the vow to walk the whole distance, yet it had become evident to Zóra that her grandfather's life would be endangered by fatigue; and, after much remonstrance, she agreed to a compromise, that on approaching Sugger or any other town he should alight from his conveyance, spread a sheet on the ground before him, sing the invocation, and await the alms of the passers by. So with Ahmed and Mamoolla mounted on their ponies, the baggage animals loaded and led behind, a guard sent by the Rajah, and the secretary mounted on a palfrey of his own, the little procession passed out of the gate of Wakin-Keyra amid the blessings and prayers of a crowd which had assembled there.

The road to Sugger lay through some low rocky hills for a while, and, passing through a natural gap in them, the valley and town of Sugger came in sight, at the distance of a few miles; a pretty scene, for the town seemed embosomed in trees; several considerable tanks for irrigation lay blue and still in the hollow, and the bright green rice-fields below them formed a pleasant and remarkable feature in the landscape; while the newly-erected mausoleum of Ankoos Khan, a late Minister of Beejapoor, rose in an imposing mass above all. To the right were high, rocky hills, which seemed to increase in height till they broke suddenly into the plain a few miles to the east, and were composed of rocks like

those so vividly remembered by Zóra at Juldroog, piled on each other in huge masses. On the north side of the valley was a still higher and more massive range, which the secretary pointed out to her as he rode by the side of her palanquin, and told her that the great fortress of Shahpoor occupied a portion of it. All over the valley between the two ranges the land was well cultivated, and the early crops were now ripening, while others were still green. To Zóra, who had never seen such a sight before, the whole valley appeared a perfect paradise; and, indeed, under the glowing sunlight, it was no doubt very beautiful.

A strange feature in the latter portion of their journey was the number of touters who now met them, crying the praises of the rooms they had to let; and these soon increased to a crowd. The occurrence of the annual festival was a source of profit to all in the town, and everyone who had even a vacant cowshed to offer, cleaned it out and proclaimed it a palace. Lodgings had, however, already been provided; and the Moolla of the great mosque hearing from his friend, the Kazee of Kembavee, of the proposed visit of the old Dervish and Zóra, had kindly offered such accommodation as his house afforded. Now, as they approached the town the procession halted, and the arrangement Zóra had proposed was carried out. Near the great mausoleum of Ankoos Khan was a grassy bank shaded by a large tree, and they sat down and sang the invocation, while on the sheet spread out cowries and copper coins soon began to rattle as they fell; and the result, as the old Dervish declared, as he stroked his long beard, was evidence of the goodness of the Almighty. "There will be many poor folks at the evening prayer, child," he said to Zóra, "and thou art to distribute all there is to them." Then, after a while, he rose, and led by Zóra, for he would allow no one else to perform this office, he walked slowly on.

The Bazar, and indeed the whole of the town, was full of people; and the sight of the venerable old man, led by his beautiful grandchild, created no little excitement. "Who is the holy Dervish?" cried some. "We welcome your holiness to our town in the name of His Highness the Prophet and Sofy Surmust, on whom be peace!" cried a body of Mussulman weavers, all with long beards as though they were Dervishes. "That is the holy saint who cast out devils at Wakin-Keyra," cried others; "may he live a hundred years! And that is his grandchild, who leads him everywhere, bless her sweet face!" And it was, indeed, sweet to look upon.

Zóra had had a green dress made for herself at Wakin-Keyra, and this she wore that day. It was a tunic like that of a man, with loose skirts. She wore a turban of green muslin, into which her beautiful hair was gathered and bound up. Her loose trousers were also green, and the scarf which was tied round her waist, crossed over her head; so that, if needful, she could at any time conceal her face. Women, as she passed them, held out their children to her, and, stretching out their own hands, kissed the tips of their fingers, or cracked their knuckles against their temples. "God defend thee from evil glances, holy one," cried some. "Ah! she has taken the vows of a Syudanee," said others, "and is not ashamed." Ashamed! no, indeed. Zóra seemed triumphant. She, too, had her humble place in the Turreequt, and, God willing, would go on with it, leading her beloved grandfather to the last. No wonder she was admired, nay, almost reverenced, as, with a firm, confident step, and a look of modest reliance in her great brown eyes, she passed through the thronged street. Even the soldiers who were lounging about respected her, rose at her approach, and saluted her humbly. Thus they passed on till they were near the mosque, where their friend the Kazee awaited them, attended by their host the Moolla; and they were led into the great court of the mosque, and then through a door into a private enclosure, which was always kept, as the Moolla told them, for visitors of distinction; and Zóra at once saw that there was ample room and privacy for all. While behind was a yard which would contain their ponies, Ahmed, and the men they had hired to accompany them.

Presently the call to afternoon prayer was sung from the roof of the mosque, and crowds began to assemble, Fakeers, weavers, soldiers, and many strangers. The Kazee had requested the old Dervish to give a discourse, such as might suit the people assembled, and he had consented; and after prayer was ended, he recited a verse of the Koran, and began his sermon on the Turreequt, or path of salvation. Never had such a discourse been heard in that mosque. It seemed as if, translated by his enthusiasm above the ordinary life and occupations of men, as indeed by his blindness and reverential spirit he had been for so many years, the Dervish was like one inspired, and his eloquence, so pathetic, so practical, and so truly fitting his subject, powerfully affected his audience, and many groaned, many wept; and at the close of the address all his hearers crowded round him to interchange the salutation of peace which is exchanged among Mussulman worshippers.

Thenceforward the afternoon services at the mosque were attended by crowds; and when she led her grandfather to his apartment, to take rest, Zóra could not help exclaiming, in ardent tones of love and admiration, "Oh, Abba! I never heard thee speak as thou hast done to-day. May the Lord bless and sustain thee to make the people like thyself." But he could not reply; his own heart appeared too full for words. That evening, too, he performed his vow of begging, and people said, "That is the Dervish who preached to-day, and his child; they have a vow to beg." And so no one molested them as they sang their invocations; and Zóra carried her wallet on her arm, receiving alms from those who heard her sweet thrilling voice, whether they were Mussulmans or Hindoos.

But it was necessary to choose which association of Fakeers the old man should belong to. What had he to hope for in the world? What had Zóra? Her religious enthusiasm had been aroused, and she, too, would fain have made an open profession of her faith, but her grandfather objected. "It is not in thy horoscope, child," he said, as she urged him to consent with sobs and tears. "In that are children, and the rank thou art entitled to. These cannot come through profession as a Fakeer; and shall we, who have given ourselves up to the guidance of the Lord, dare to misinterpret his will? Be patient, then, my child, and fear not, for I believe that what will come to thee will come out of thy faith and thy endurance." So she was silent, and wept no more; but, instead, dwelt upon his form whom she had once watched, and which seemed to rise to her mental vision more vividly than ever.

It was, however, necessary to decide this serious question of election. Our old Dervish, by his first and subsequent discourses, had given proof of his fitness for any grade, even the highest one of Mushâekh, beyond which only remained that of Wallee, or saint, and, in concert with his friends, a whole day was spent in deliberation on the subject. At Sugger were assembled representatives of all the hundreds of sects of Fakeers existing in the country, of which we spare the reader the enumeration of, to him or her, unpronounceable names. There were some who sung odes and hymns, some who danced, some who played instruments; many who led lewd, riotous lives, and pretended to do miracles; others who walked through thorns and danced on hot embers, or took red-hot chains or ploughshares in their hands, and, dipping them in powdered resin, wiped off the blaze with naked hands. Some kept bears, or tigers, or monkeys, which they had tamed and

taught to perform ingenious tricks; others had tame snakes living in their sleeves or in the breasts of their tunics. Again, there were others who seared their tongues with hot wires, or scored their arms or breasts till the blood flowed, or put live scorpions into their mouths.

In short, if I, the writer of this chronicle, enumerated all the sects and their particular professions and means of getting their livelihood, my readers would see plainly, as the old Dervish did, that these were but contrivances to get money, or to lead dissolute lives under the pretence of a godly vow. "And what," he said, "could a quilted cap and an iron rod like the Kullundurs, or black turbans and clothes like the devotees of Shah Zinda Mudar, signify as aids to the Turreequt?" He therefore said to his friends,—

"All these divisions of Fakeers are delusions, my brothers, and many of them are delusions of Satan, and work for the ruin of souls. My own faith is simple, and my course of life is also simple. Whatever I have been able to do, either in the relief of the sick or the casting out of evil spirits, I have effected under the invocation of the noble Saint Peer-i-Dustugeer, the Prince Syud Abd-ool-Qadir, on whom be peace! Should there be any professors of his doctrine or ceremonies in this great assemblage, I pray ye, friends, bring him or them to me, that I may make a public profession, and be received into the sect as a Moorsheed (scholar, or novice). I shall henceforward be a Fakeer, and fight for the faith under the banners of my chosen Lord."

The Moolla of the mosque, the secretary, and the Kazee, who had each become devotees of other sects, would fain have had the old man join that which they themselves had professed; but after much earnest and learned discussion they could not succeed in weakening their guest's resolution, and they let him have his way. A professor of the Qadirea doctrines was soon found, who was a respectable and learned man from Golconda, who had taken the degree already, and, in conjunction with our old friend, a fitting day was soon named and fixed. What a pleasure, too, it was to receive visits from the officers of the troops stationed at Sugger, who were mostly Dekhanies! How pleasant to hear the old surnames, which he had not heard for years! For here were Bylmees, Alla-ool-Moolks, Siah-poshas—white standards, black sunshades—and many others, whose familiar war cries he had heard in the field. And the commander had the Akhbars, or news-

letters of Beejapoor, and left them for Zóra to read to her grandfather.

How pleasant it was to hear of old names, and of the King's progress against the armies of Ahmednugger; watching every movement of the enemy, yet not striking a blow; but striving to bring them to reason. Then in one of the latest, the arrival of Abbas Khan was mentioned, and the accusation against him and the trial by ordeal, and the praises of the young man and description of his noble bearing before the Queen, a stripling as he appeared before a giant, were, you may be sure, dear reader, read by Zóra with feelings of exultation she could not repress. She even set to work and copied the whole passage. Then also Meeah's appointment to command the reinforcement for the King, and his march out of the city; and that Runga Naik accompanied him. So he was well, Zóra thought, with glistening eyes and beating heart, and has cleared himself before all, even his Queen. I think her grandfather was too much bound up in his Turreequt to care much about the Beejapoor news, though he appeared to rejoice at Abbas Khan's victory; but in the Akhbar of the next day, in which the discovery of Osman Beg's treason was detailed, and read by Zóra with emotion, and that he would be tried before the Queen, the old man suddenly burst out into an unexpected display of feeling. Hitherto he had not complained of the outrage to Zóra, except at first, but now he was passionately excited. "Spare me, O Lord!" he cried, raising his hands to heaven. "Spare me to help thy justice before men; then Thou wilt give me tongue to speak his shame who purposed shame to my child—yea, shame and insult. Ameen! Ameen!" and again he relapsed into silence. "Thou dost not say Ameen, girl," he said at length.

"The Lord, who forgives our sins, can do as He wills, Abba, in this matter, and forgive if it be good," replied Zóra, gravely. "Yet I can say in truth Ameen and Ameen to whatever He willeth. Doubt not, Abba, that truth will be declared, for so my heart tells me daily, and that this our journey is the way to its attainment."

He was again silent for awhile, and then said, "And hast thou forgiven him, Zóra?"

"I have forgiven him," she replied, humbly. "He can do me no harm; and, under the protection of the Lord, he did me none. For what he purposed to do, Alla will judge."

"And where didst thou learn this, child?"

"From your own lips, Abba," she said, humbly; and going to him, bent down and kissed his hands and his feet. "From your own lips, Abba. Dost thou think I forget thy teaching, when all who hear remember it?"

"I am rebuked, Zóra, and justly so. If I do not what I bid others do, of what use is this Turreequt? Let him be mentioned no more between us. No, he cannot harm thee now; and let the Lord deal with him as He pleaseth;" and the old man lay down and fell asleep.

Everything had been arranged as to the initiation. The Mushâekh from Golconda, who was a learned and wealthy man, who lived in an ancient saint's garden and shrine near that fort, and was much respected by the King, had been one of the audience when the first of the Dervish's sermons was preached, and he had continued his visits to the mosque every day, and after the last he was brought into the old man's apartments, and introduced to him. He had believed that the venerable preacher was already a Mushâekh of high degree, and was considerably surprised by his request to be now allowed to enter the order, and fixed the second day afterwards for the ceremony, giving a detail of what would be needful. And we will not say what culinary preparations were made under old Mamoolla and a staff of cooks, who were hired and put under her orders; but there were sundry pilaos, birianees, kabobs, and other savoury and delicate viands.

The cooking, which was for over a hundred Fakeers of all denominations, had begun early in the morning, and before noon the Mushâekh arrived, accompanied by his friends, and took his seat in the mosque. Then our old Dervish came forth, and many wild-looking Fakeers, who had assembled, were led by the Kazee and the secretary, and being presented to the holy man, they placed their hands on his head and bade him welcome. Being asked whether his choice of the Saint Peer-i-Dustugeer was a true one, the old man produced a diploma he had received in Tunis, where he had become a disciple, and which had been sealed with the seals of eminent men. This the Mushâekh put to his forehead and eyes, and kissed it; and it was handed round for the edification of all who were present; and no other certificate of the performance of the first ceremony being needful, the admission to the second was proceeded with.

Strictly speaking it would have been advisable to have had all the hair shaved from the old man's head, beard, eyebrows, and chest; but because of his age this was dispensed with, and a few

hairs were cut from each with a pair of scissors, and his nails pared. Then he was bathed carefully, and his new garments, carried before him, accompanied by chaunts from the Fakeers, were given to him one by one, and certain texts of the Koran repeated. Lastly, his crown, or cap, which had been beautifully embroidered by Zóra, was placed on his head. It was of green velvet, and his new tunic was of green muslin, with a green scarf over all. After that he had to recite the four forms of belief. He was asked three times whether he acknowledged the Mushâekh his spiritual leader and guide, and the whole of the assembly as brethren, and he replied he did. Whereupon a loud shout arose that he was welcome in the name of all the saints, each man calling out that of his own.

After that the crown, which had been removed, was solemnly put on his head again; his grave cloth was hung about his neck with spices and perfumes; a new loongee, or waist cloth, was put on, and a round piece of mother of pearl tied round his neck. When all this was completed, the Mushâekh took several sips out of a cup of sherbet, handing it to the old man, who drank it all, while the Mushâekh at the same time bestowed the new name which he was to bear hereafter. This was Luteef Shah, or King, every properly elected Fakeer bearing that title; and when the new name was pronounced, every one greeted it with a joyous shout. Then the feast began, which had been so liberally provided, that hundreds of the poor of the town were satisfied as well as the Fakeers, and the installation of Luteef Shah was long remembered.

"When you have remained three days in your present grade," said the Mushâekh, "we will raise you to our own, for we are more in number here than is needed by the order; but it will be a simple matter in comparison with this, and confined to our degree alone." We may, however, spare the reader the detail of these ceremonies, which were, in truth, simple enough. They all paid a quiet visit to the tomb of Sofy Surmust, which is a short distance to the north of Sugger, and is a most unpretending earthen mound, white-washed; and a carpet being spread, the head Mushâekh delivered a short address to the old man, requiring him not only to repeat the confession of faith, but confess all the sins of his life to be known to God, and to declare in the presence of the Almighty and that assembly that they would never again be repeated.

After this had been done, the instructor repeated all the names of the chiefs of the sect as they had descended from the founder and inherited; and a copy of this, which is called "Shujra," was given to the novice, who was asked whether he acknowledged. A few gold pieces, as part of the ceremony, were presented to the Moorsheed, for the old Dervish was still rich; and the sale of Zóra's pretty caps, drawers-strings, bodices, and other articles, had produced much more than she anticipated, and the evening collection more than sufficed for their maintenance. In any case they had still enough to bear the heavier expenses at Gulburgah, for the highest order of all, which the old Dervish, under his new title of Luteef Shah, was determined to attain from the descendant of the most celebrated saint in the Dekhan, Syud Geesoo Duraz, the lineal descendant of the original Wallee, who had come from Northern India years ago, and become the spiritual leader of the Moslems' Bahmuny Kings.

"I am going there myself," said his new friend, "for the Syud is a great man, and what is more, a truly devout man, which some of his race have not been. He will welcome you warmly, I know, for he is, besides being my superior in a religious sense, my truly loved and intimate friend. I think he will not object, and I have met with none so worthy of the highest honour as yourself. The representatives of the Saint Syud Abd-ool-Qadir, of Oodgeer, and of Sheykh Fureed, of Gooty, and perhaps others, will be present, who knows? The anniversary at Gulburgah is a very world of religious zeal, where, if I mistake not, your daily discourses in the mosque will be attended with the best results; you had better therefore come with me, for my hareem is with me, and your child may need both society and protection. We are well guarded, too, for your kind Sovereign sent soldiers with me, who are enough to protect us both."

The proposal was a welcome one, and, after explaining the vow he had made to beg his way to his destination, wherever that might chance to be, our old friend finally agreed. It was impossible for him to walk long stages day after day, but he could at least do as he had done when he and Zóra entered Sugger. "Yes," he said, "the Lord carries us on, and finds new friends and protectors as we go; we desire He will lead us to some resting-place, where, like our friends from Golconda, we may find peace."

As to Zóra, she was supremely happy. The wife of the Mushaekh who had performed the ceremonies was a comparatively young woman, related to the Saint of Kullianee, a man of the

highest temporal and religious distinction. She had heard of Zóra through her own women, and welcomed the girl kindly. Zóra had gone to her in her Syud's dress at first, and was shy, as she always was; but when her Abba was in the mosque, and when she could gain time, she ran across the street to the Mushάekh's lodgings, and soon became intimate with her; nor was it the less pleasure to the lady that during the journey onwards she should have so pleasant a companion.

Gulburgah lay to the north, and, therefore, the day of the Rujub-ool-Ghyb was again Wednesday. Before that, however, a curious scene occurred between the secretary and her grandfather, which Zóra, who was seated in the inner chamber of the house, working diligently to complete an order for some new caps, which she had to finish before she left, overheard involuntarily. The worthy secretary was speaking with her grandfather on the subject of the Turreequt generally, and, indeed, as was his wont, using gross flattery, which the old man always detested, and checked sometimes in not very mild language.

"If I were the blessed messenger of the Lord Himself you could not flatter me more," said the old man, roused out of his ordinary submission to such inflictions. "I pray you cease, and be silent, as it behoves a modest man like you to do, Meer Sahib. If you want to pray, why not step into the mosque, and offer your prayers to the Most High?"

"But your holiness can assist me in my desire. You can intercede for me, and without you my prayers will gain no favour."

"I object to two things in your speech, Meer Sahib. First, that I should be called your holiness, which is a title for Wallees and Owleas only; and secondly, to knowing aught of your prayers and desires, which I cannot assist."

"But you can assist them," persisted the secretary. "Huzrut, Huzrut, I am beside myself; unless you help me I shall go mad."

"Now, God help thee, poor man," returned our friend. "Why shouldst thou go mad? Art thou poor, I cannot help thee; art thou rich, pray Alla to send thee grace to spend it. Thou hast no children! Well, I have given thy wife a powerful charm, and I pray it may be efficacious; but still, once more, if any fair one hath captivated thee, go to the gipsies, and others who sell charms, and they will take thy riches for them; but come not to me, my friend, for in that case thou wilt become my enemy."

"Oh! say not so, Huzrut; say not so," said the man, prostra-

ting himself. "We are alone, and I fear, yet I would conceal nothing. I love Zóra-bee, your grandchild, and I cannot live without her. Pity me, and grant my prayer. See, I eat dust, I cast it on my head; I am your supplicant, and our friend the Kazee is here, and we could at least be betrothed, and I would follow you till——"

Now, while Zóra within was bursting with suppressed laughter at seeing the little fat secretary sprawling on the ground before her grandfather, she saw too, through the screen, ominous signs of a storm gathering upon the dear old man's face; nor was it long before it broke.

"Thou, Meer Sahib, thou, to ask for the only child of one who is vowed to God. Hast thou considered her birth, her position, and thine own? Hast thou no perception of thine own meanness? Oh, good man, verily thou hast eaten dirt, much dirt, and I feel the helplessness of age and blindness to be a bar against thy chastisement for the insult. Hast thou said aught to her? Get up and speak!"

"I—I—I. No—no. I could not be so rude; but if thou wilt permit me, I will send a vakeel to her to-morrow."

"Thou shalt do no such thing; she can tell thee herself. She hath seen thee often, and is not afraid of thee. And thou hast another wife, O mean blockhead! Zóra! Zóra!" he shouted, "come hither. God forgive me if I have been rough with him," he continued, as Zóra approached the screen hanging across the door, and said, "I am here, Abba, but I must stay within."

"Nay, I cannot tell thee," said the old man; "it is too ludicrous. Let the Meer Sahib speak for himself." And without further ado, the secretary got up, adjusted his turban, which had become awry, pressed his waist-belt down on his hips, twisted up his moustachios, and, in short, improved his appearance as much as was possible, and began to address the girl in the most high-flown language he could command. He quoted line upon line of Persian poetry, comparing her to the rose and himself to a nightingale. He discoursed on the loves of Joseph and Zuleeka, Potiphar's wife, of Abraham and Zuppoora, and would have proceeded after the same fashion, but the old man burst into a peal of laughter so hearty that the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Enough, enough!" he cried, "O Meer Sahib; I am not used to laughter, and thy speech is irresistible. What sayest thou, Zóra, wilt thou have this jewel among secretaries, whose tongue is sweet as honey, to be thy husband, and share his love with the lady we have left?"

"He is very kind to me," said Zóra, with a mischievous tone of raillery in her voice. "Very kind, and I am utterly unworthy of him. Should so great a man as a Rajah's secretary stoop to a Fakeer's granddaughter? Touba! Touba! Fie! Fie! And what would his wife say?" And Zóra could hold out no longer, but laughed in her turn.

"Come, Meer Sahib," said the old man, "let us be friends again, and forget this folly. Return to thine own wife and comfort her. Thou knowest thy life would not be pleasant if she heard of this. Go, now, lest others tell her. Go, and God's peace be with thee, and my blessing, though it is little worth. Go."

So the poor man departed not a little chagrined. But there is an old proverb, that men with small round heads, and thin, long beards, do foolish things, and in this case, at all events, there was no error.

Zóra was coming in to speak to her grandfather when the Kazee entered the court. "What have you been saying to the Meer Sahib, Huzrut? I met him in the street crying. I think I can guess; but no matter."

"What did he tell you?" asked the old man.

"Well, that my services might be required, and I was not to return home."

"Indeed! It is a strange conceit," returned the other, and the conversation passed into other subjects. They were to set out on the morrow, and it had been arranged to travel by Shahpoor and Gogi; for when the old Syud had heard that that town was so near, he could not resist the opportunity of paying his devotions at the tombs of the Kings he had served; and in the morning the whole party mustered by the mosque and set out on their way northwards. Next day he would be at Almella. Would anyone be alive who could recognise their once prosperous master?

CHAPTER X.

BY THE WAY.

AT the gate of the thriving town of Shahpoor, a few miles distant, they were met by the Governor of the fort, an officer of the Beejapoor Government, and pressed to stay to dinner and such entertainment as he could provide in the evening; and they

consented, and an excellent house was placed at their disposal. The town lay at the north-east corner of the great mass of hills which Zóra had seen from the pass by which they had entered the valley of Sugger; and the curious fort, surmounting enormous bare masses of granite rock, stood out with wonderful effect against the sky. Groups of soldiers appeared on the bastions; the Royal flag of Beejapoor waved from the citadel, which contained the excellent house of the Killadar, or commander, and it was evident the place held a numerous garrison. Shahpoor had been originally built by the Bahmuny Kings of Gulburgah, and contains many of their inscriptions; and being a natural position of great strength, in fact, impregnable, it served at once as a frontier fort and to keep the Beydur population in check. There was a nautch in the evening, at which our friends excused themselves on account of their religious duties; and the long wide streets of the town being level and well kept, Zóra and her grandfather had no difficulty in following their hitherto practiced vocation; and, as before, the invocations were sung, and the wallet, now a consecrated one, carried from one end of the town to the other.

The day following, they all went on together to Gogi, where the mausoleum of the earlier Beejapoor Kings was situated. They found it a thriving place, full of weavers, and the station of a large body of cavalry, on account of the excellent forage with which the neighbourhood abounded; and though by far the greater part were absent, there were enough to form an imposing force, which received the holy men as they arrived. Very interesting to them was the cemetery of the great Kings, and the college attached to it, which was in daily use.* It consists of one large interior, with chapels at the junction of the sides of the octagon; and the architecture of this, as well as the gateway and front of the building,

* The college and cemetery are still perfect, but the former is used no longer, and is forsaken except at the anniversaries of the several deaths, when prayers are said in it. The tombs of the Kings are covered by printed cotton cloths, which are renewed annually. Certain families of weavers and printers in the town, descendants of the original executors of these articles, still contribute them, and are paid by the proceeds of certain lands and rice fields with which the tombs were endowed at first, and certain payments from the Customs dues; and to the last the Rajahs of Shorapoor were the hereditary almoners of this bounty, and disbursed it regularly on every anniversary either in person or by deputy. Gogi now belongs to the Government of His Highness the Nizam, and it may be hoped that the ancient custom has not been discontinued, and that the interesting and beautiful remains have been kept in repair.

is, perhaps, the finest specimen of florid Gothic in the Dekhan, built entirely of black basalt, exquisitely ornamented and finished. One by one the graves of the Kings behind were shown to them by the attendant priests, and these, with the tombs of their wives and some dependants, occupy a considerable area enclosed by a wall. When they came to that of Ibrahim Adil Shah, under whom our old friend had served, he kneeled down beside it and began to sob and beat his breast. Zóra tried to soothe him, for not, even as yet, knowing his history, she feared he had been taken suddenly ill, and would fain have run for medicine; but he put his hand on her arm, and said—

"I have not forgotten what you said to me when I called for vengeance upon Osman Beg. Here lies one who did me injury more than thou knowest, Zóra; at the remembrance of which all my worst passions rise into active being. And yet I thank Thee, O hearer of prayer," he continued, reverently raising his turban, "that Thou enablest me to say here I do forgive thee, O King and Royal master, and pray thou mayest have been accepted through his grace for all the good works thou didst to thousands. Peace be with thee, and the blessings of the Most High!"

"What was he to thee, Abba?" asked Zóra, in wonder. "The attendant tells me that there have been many Kings since he died."

"What he was to me, child, thou wilt know hereafter, perhaps soon now; but no matter! In the great King Ibrahim I had a friend who loved me. Since him there have been two Kings, and the present one, whom I may be spared to see, bears his name. And yet, O once beloved master, my heart is even now with thee in the grave, where I must follow thee; and I bless Thee, O my Lord, that I have learned to forgive even through my child."

On the western side of the cemetery was the embankment of an irrigation lake of some considerable area, and the rain having fallen plentifully, it was full of water. Then they went and sat by it, and the soft south-west wind brought the tiny waves to their feet, and sighed in the noble trees which shaded the cemetery and the college. They had brought a slight refection with them, and ate it together, while the old Dervish discoursed on the mysteries of holiness, or told many a tale of the past, when he, in King Ibrahim's suite, had halted for the day and performed ceremonies at the tombs of his ancestors, while the ground for the college was being measured and the architect explained the work he proposed

to undertake. They attended the afternoon prayer in the college, which was filled to overflowing with the people and soldiers from the town ; and our old friend addressed them in one of his loving, persuasive sermons, in which, perhaps from the unlooked-for occurrences of the day, he was even more eloquent than ever.

The Fatehas at the Kings' tombs could not be made ready that day, and as their companions had no objection, but, indeed, the contrary, they remained and formed a little procession to the cemetery, spending a day of quiet peace, such as Zóra thoroughly enjoyed. She used to say long afterwards, when she was an old woman, that her second day at Gogi was one of the happiest of her life, because one of the most thoughtful and impressive ; and how sweet it had been to her to find her beloved grandfather's mind softening to an habitual cheerfulness and submission. "Truly," as he said constantly to her, "truly, child, I feel as if the Lord were leading me in this Turreequt, and that, too, by means of thee, O beloved ! from the first."

The country from Gogi to Gulburgah is uninteresting, but very fertile and well cultivated, and for some portion of their first march many of the Royal cavalry and townspeople escorted them ; for the fame of our old friend had gone before him, and all were desirous of paying him honour and receiving his blessing. Crossing the Bheema river by the ferry at Ferozabad, Zóra saw the palace fort of the famous King Feroze Shah, situated on a high bank of the river above one of its long, deep reaches. But it is now only a ruin, and was even then in poor condition ; and towards the close of the following day the minarets and domes of the holy city of Gulburgah were in sight, and it was quickly reached.

Nothing could persuade our old friend that it should be treated like an ordinary town. His heart was full of reverence and thankfulness at having reached the end of his pilgrimage in safety and honour, and his new friend was equally reverential. So within a mile of the entrance gate they dismounted from their litters and performed a prostration ceremony by the wayside, and walked on together, Zóra, as was her wont, dressed in her pilgrim's dress, leading her grandfather. Near the gate the old man had his sheet spread for alms, and it was not till the time for evening prayer was nigh that he arose and, guided by one of the Mushàekh's servants, followed his friend to the final place of destination, which was in a suburb which belonged to the spiritual Prince of the place, the descendant of the Geesoo Durâz family, who reigned. The noise and bustle of the crowded Bazar was therefore avoided.

Zóra, whose ideas of a city were of the most limited practical nature, and to whom Sugger, Shahpoor, and Gogi had appeared immense, was fairly confounded when, in company with her new friend, they ascended to the terrace of the house which had been assigned to them by the Prince. Before them were the fine mausoleums and domes of the original Geesoo Duráz, and the cemeteries attached to them, the Prince's palace and pretty gardens, with their fine rows of cyprus trees. In the middle distance the massive group of the mausoleums of the Bahmuny Kings, standing apart on an elevated piece of ground, and forming a picturesque group, with the still populous city lying at their feet; while to the left was the strong fort, with its regular fortifications, and beyond a considerable artificial lake, which the King Feroze, the merry Monarch of Dekhan history, had had constructed for his aquatic amusements.

Gulburgah was, however, an ancient city, for when Zuffir Khan, the Viceroy of the then Emperor of Dehly, Mahomed Toghluk, founded the Bahmuny dynasty in A.D. 1347, the old Hindoo city was selected by him as his capital in the Dekhan, and continued to be so until, in 1435, nearly a century afterwards, a new city was built at Beeder, which was finally adopted as the seat of the Royal Government. During a hundred years of prosperity, however, under the early portion of the dynasty, Gulburgah had become a rich and thriving city. It was the mart for local produce and importations from the coast. Merchants of Arabia and Persia, nay, of Turkey and the Levant, resided there, and the courts of the early Bahmunies were magnificent and wealthy. Thus the city was ornamented with many public buildings, caravanseras, and mosques, almshouses, hospitals, and the like, and the fort constructed there was by far the strongest and most regular in the Dekhan; and within it the great mosque, which was to have been the exact counterpart of that at Cordova, in Spain, was begun, and roofed in; but never completed.

All these principal edifices are still extant, but much decayed and ruined. King Feroze's once superb palaces in the fort are masses of shapeless ruins; but the mosque is as it was left by the masons and architect, and could be finished were there anyone to undertake it, and the fort is perfect. The mosques and other buildings in the city are tolerably preserved; but the mausoleums of the once haughty Kings are deserted, except by grazing cattle and goats, which shelter there from the noon-day

heat; and no one lives who bestows a lamp and its oil to light at night the interior of these noble edifices.

At the period of the visit of our friends, the city belonged to the kingdom of Beeder, which, after the extinction of the Bahmunies, remained in possession of the capital. Gulburgah was one of the chief cities of the kingdom, and was garrisoned by a large body of its troops to guard the frontier of the Bheema river against the armies of Beejapoor. If not, therefore, equal to its former prosperity, the city was yet in good condition, and the religious and other edifices were in perfect preservation and in constant use.

Nearly three hundred years have elapsed since the time we write of, and Time, the spoiler, has been busy. The city has dwindled to a provincial town; the buildings are extant, but many of them in decay. The tombs of the Kings, so solidly built, are, perhaps, with the fine old fort, the least changed of all, and the lake below the palace of King Feroze sparkles as brightly as ever in the sun. The only building and premises as perfect now as they were three hundred years ago are the mausoleums of the Geesoo Duráz family, for their possessions have been continued to them, and they live in their old prosperity and religious honour, and the attendance of pilgrims at their shrine is as large now as perhaps it ever was—as devout and as full of faith. But Gulburgah has a new honour never dreamed of, truly, in the dim past. It is now a station of the railway line from Bombay, and from it diverges one branch to Madras and one to Hyderabad—the old capital of the Golconda kingdom.

CHAPTER XI.

SAINTLY HONOURS.

THE sun was just rising as Zóra and her companion, the Mushákekh's wife, looked forth on the splendid scene spread out before them. Thin blue smoke was hanging over the distant portion of the city, veiling the details of terraced houses, minarets, and mosques, and other pretentious buildings, and then passing into the grey distance which melted into blue and violet lines up to the horizon. Nearer objects were more defined, and the

mausoleums of the Kings, the fort, and the blue lake, were clear and beautiful as the sun's rays touched the white and glistening surface of the massive domes, the slender spires of the minarets, and the tops of the noble trees which stood around in almost every direction. From a higher elevation the view might have been more complete and extensive, but it would have lost the charm of that lovely combination of objects of all descriptions which their present situation afforded.

Zóra's face was flushed and excited, and her large brown eyes were half filled with tears as she looked around. "Abba cannot see it," she murmured to herself; "but he may have seen it before, when he was young, and I will ask him; but, oh! it is so beautiful."

"I used, lady," she continued to her new companion, "to think our old grim fort and its rocks beautiful; and the deep ravine, with the cataract, was beautiful, too, only so wild, that they used to make me tremble very often; but this is more soft and loving, and one seems to be wrapped in all around, and to feel it in one's heart. I shall be sorry when we can stay no longer."

"So shall I," returned the lady. "When I was a barren woman, with no hope, my husband brought me here, and the saint blessed me, and my firstborn followed. He is now four years old, and we have come, as we vowed, to return our humble thanks for him, and to pray for his welfare always in the future. When thou hast one like him, Zóra, the only thing thou wilt ever care to look at will be his eyes; and thy time will come, too. If thou hadst a mother, she would have arranged this long ago."

"Perhaps," said Zóra, timidly, a manly face she well remembered rising to her thoughts. "Perhaps; and what is written in my fate will come to pass."

"True, child," returned the lady, "but fate needs help sometimes, though truly before fate contrivance can do but little; still it may be tried. Now, my husband and I have a little plot against you both, and that is to take you with us to Golconda, where our lord the King is, a devout and learned man, who hath great veneration for holy Mushàekhs and Dervishes; and he would be charmed with your grandfather, and would never let him depart; he would give him estates, and he would take the rank that is due to him. What think you? As to yourself, I have the noblest husband for you. He is commander of ever so many horsemen, and holds estates and lands for their maintenance; and so he is very rich, and has a beautiful palace in the fort, and gardens. When I

parted with him, he said, laughingly, 'Oh, aunt, bring me the most beautiful woman you can see, for I have had every girl in Golconda inspected, and I love not what I hear of any of them.' I said, 'You are laughing at me, Shere Khan;' but his face changed, and he said, 'I am not; I swear to thee, by Ayesha, that I am entirely in earnest.' And who do I know, or ever saw, but thee, Zóra, who would be worthy of him? Dost thou know how lovely thou art, with that soft curly hair of thine hanging about thy neck, and the ruddy glow in thy fair, sweet face? Did no one ever tell thee how beautiful thou art? Hast thou had no friend in thy young life?"

"Maria used to tell me so," replied Zóra, shyly, "and I used to chide her."

"Maria! Who is Maria? That is a Nazarene name, surely."

"She is a Christian lady, one of God's servants, whom chance sent to us at Juldroog, and she and her brother lived with us."

"And she wanted thee for him, and made thee a Christian?"

"No," said Zóra, gravely, "she did not make me a Christian; and for her to think of me for her brother would have been foolish. He, too, has a vow to God, and could not marry even among his own people. No, she was only a dear friend, and I owe to her all that I know, and all that I can do."

"And where is she now, child?"

"I know not, lady; alas! I know not. She went from us with her brother to Beejapoor, and perhaps has gone on to Goa."

"Thank God!" said the lady; "then there is the better chance of my plan succeeding, and I will ask my husband to apply to your grandfather."

"I know he hath urgent business in Beejapoor, lady, and hath urgent need to see the King; but what it is he never told me, and I know nothing of his life."

"Well, then, as God wills," said the lady; "but if I told Shere Khan of thee, he would follow thee, I know, as long as he could trace thee through the Dekhan."

I will not describe the ceremonies as the travellers paid their devotions at the mausoleum of the departed saints, or their respects to the present reigning incumbent. These were no places for our old friend to display his genius, his eloquence, and his learning. These and the doctrines of his teaching only shone forth in addressing crowds in mosques, and on special occasions, when, as it seemed, inspiration came on him; but one day, when he was in the large mosque for prayer—it was some minor

festival day—and there was a crowd of worshippers, and the Prince was present, he asked leave to deliver the sermon, and the service was thankfully accepted.

As the old man took his place on the upper step of the pulpit, clad in his green dress, and, leaning on his staff, stretched out his arms, a murmur came from the assembly which cheered and excited him; and with a short text on the love of God, his words poured forth in a stream, not in the soft Persian he had adopted of late, but in the rugged Dekhan tongue--which had little of ornament or hyperbole in it—which became a torrent of alternate entreaty, reproach, and assurance, the like of which had never been heard before then by any. There were no sophisms, no mysteries, no display of profound erudition, incomprehensible except to a few; but there was instead instruction on the true Turreequt, the true path of salvation. He pleaded humility before God; charity, pity, and love to God and man; absence of any spiritual arrogance, which was but too prevalent, and of self-conceit and display. He spoke of the softer graces of habitual piety, of truth to man and to God, and of sobriety, patience, and endurance; tenderness in home duties and abroad; in short, attention to all the godly precepts of the book of God's messenger, who had inspired it, as he believed, and enjoined constant thought of the day of judgment, and the trial then of all profession. Be not offended with me, O Christian reader, for such things can be taught out of the book you have been told to hold in scorn, apart from the mystery and sensual doctrines which are so strangely mingled with them.

When he concluded, and the blessing was delivered, those present did not form into knots, to shake hands and give the salutation of blessing one to another as usual, but, as if by inspiration, shouted, "A saint! a saint! a miracle hath been done, for such words were never heard!" and the Prince was as much excited as any one else, and joined with the rest. Then he called for his own conveyance, which was a nalkee, or sedan chair, with two poles and eight bearers, and our old friend was put into it, and accompanied by the multitude, with torches and blue lights, and firing of guns, for it was now dark, the procession passed on to the palace of the Prince, with cries of "A saint! a Wallee! A miracle, a miracle! Deen, Deen!" burning clouds of incense, throwing handfuls of perfume powder over him, and in every way possible testifying their respect and admiration. Then the Prince took his seat, and called up the

dear old man, and in a voice full of emotion said to him, "Come hither, for I salute you in the title of Wallee. Thou hast done a miracle, and the people have seen and acknowledge it, and the Lord accepts it. Listen while I repeat the sacred words of the order. And now drink of this cup of sherbet, which, sipped and breathed on by me, becomes to thee the sherbet of salvation. Verily, the Lord hath brought thee to the end of the Turreequt, and all ye who are present are witness to this. Ameen! Ameen! It is the Lord's will."

And all cried aloud, with a hoarse shout, "Ameen! Ameen! So be it!"

During this time our old friend had been in a state of which he remembered very little. He recollected, and afterwards repeated, the last words of his sermon, and he remembered his being carried out of the mosque and seated in the nalkee; but of the wild procession, the shouts, the torches and blue lights, and the Prince's address, he recalled very little until he received the cup of cool sherbet, which tasted as if from Paradise itself. Now he was weary of the excitement; and after attempting to utter his thanks he seemed to waver too and fro as he sat, and while the Mushâekh and others supported him he stooped heavily forward and fell to the ground. Then a palanquin was brought, and they carried him to the house where he lodged; and, revived by the fresh air, he was able to alight and walk slowly to his chamber, where Zóra, already made anxious by the sudden rumour that her grandfather had fainted in the great assembly, received him in her arms and laid him down on his cushions. As he had been carried out of the assembly the Prince rose, and cried with uplifted hands before all—

"Pray God that He do not take the saint from us in this his present ecstasy!" And all present cried "Ameen!"

"Pray God that he may live to lead and instruct many." And again they cried "Ameen!"

Then the Prince gave the blessing to all, and they departed; and the precincts of the palace and cemetery soon resumed their quiet, peaceful character, as the stars shone out in the calm and fresh atmosphere of night. And Zóra sat and watched.

For a time her grandfather seemed to sleep calmly; but he became gradually restless and feverish; and from time to time she gave him sips of a sherbet of pomegranates, which he took eagerly. Still he did not appear to recognise her, which much distressed her. It was evident that the events of the

evening had been too exciting; and his impassioned sermon, followed by the procession from the mosque, the glare of torch-lights and noise of guns, the clouds of incense smoke, and the final acceptance as a Wallee, had been altogether more than he could bear. From time to time he muttered sentences of the Koran, and seemed to pray. Again he cried aloud, "Karamat! Karamat! A miracle! a miracle!" and tried to lift himself up from his pillow, and wave his arm.

Zóra could not weep, her eyes were dry and burning with anxiety; all she held most dear on earth lay helpless before her, and if he passed away in this ecstasy what would she do, whither could she go? Who would care for the obscure, friendless girl who did not even know her own origin? But she could not wish they had never come. If Alla pleased to take him, it would be at the crowning point of his earthly life; that which it seemed his only desire to reach, and which had been attained. Her new friend, the Mushàekh's kind wife, came to her and sat with her, and told her freely and compassionately that she must be prepared even for the last; and taking her in her arms, laid her head upon her breast, and told her she would be a mother to her, and she was not to fear; and her husband, who also came, bade her not to fear, for if the Lord took her Abba she would be his and his wife's child thenceforth. But all these alarms of that strange night disappeared by the early morning. For the latter part of it the old man had slept peacefully, like a child; and as the muezzin was crying the invocation to early prayer, and the sentence, "Prayer is better than sleep! Prayer is better than sleep! God is victorious!" he woke, and, to Zóra's infinite joy, sat up with a gentle, smiling face, such as she had not seen for a long time, reminding her of earlier days. Then she assisted him to rise and to perform his devotions; and as he again sat down, she crept to him, and very timidly congratulated him on his new dignity, and the honour he had received.

"Then it was not a dream, child?" he said.

"No, Abba; it was a blessed reality. Zeenat-bee (that was the name of the Mushàekh's wife) and I were sitting on the terrace above, after evening prayer. The air was so cool and fresh, and the city looked so quiet and peaceful; and suddenly we heard a great hoarse cry arise, and we looked, and blue lights were burned, and the tombs of the Kings flashed out of the dusk brighter than day. Then gradually the crowd appeared, and the tumult was fearful—men struggling with each other to approach the nalkee;

and other palanquins and open litters were in front and behind, and we thought it was only the customary honour done to the Prince. But as the procession passed beneath us, and I saw it was thee, O Abba, to whom they were doing honour, I cried with all the rest, and Zeenat and I embraced each other. But when they brought thee, and I looked at thee, and laid thee down, I feared, yea, I feared thy time had come; yet the Lord hath spared thee, and thou art a saint now, one that men may worship without sin."

There was, indeed, no doubt on that score. All the day, the highest in holy rank, the Wallees, the Owleas, the Mushâekhs, doctors learned in the law, and private persons in crowds thronged about the house and its courtyards, and would be content only by the assurance that the new saint would once more preach to them in the mosque, and return thanks to Alla the Most High. And on the third day the old man went in company of the Prince, and took his place, after prayers, on the upper step of the pulpit. To those present it appeared that he was taller and more dignified than before; but the Wallee's sermon was not the less passionate that day. It affected him less, though it seemed to affect his hearers more; and after it was over, his friend, the Mushâekh, led him about, and he shook hands with many and gave them the blessing. Then the great procession of the Prince's anniversary followed; and though on the grandest scale, accompanied by the troops, and midst the firing of cannon and matchlocks, and blare of sonorous trumpets and horns, with rockets and blue lights continually discharged, yet it had not the excitement of the sudden frenzied rush of the Wallee's recognition, nor the spontaneous enthusiasm of the crowds that had accompanied him; and their journey to the mosque, and subsequent return, were of the same majestic but monotonous character.

As they were all sitting together quietly after they had returned home, Ahmed entered somewhat abruptly, and cried out, "I have heard news. Our King has won a victory, and the King of Ahmednugger was killed." And on being further interrogated, he said he had heard it from some soldiers of Beejapoor, who had a vow to be present at the Prince's procession, and had obtained leave to come the day after the battle, and the dead were being buried.

"Go early," said the old man; "see those men, and bring any that will come to me;" and before mid-day several men came and gave a circumstantial account of the whole action. Abbas Khan and some Beydurs had been foremost in carrying the guns. The

young King of Ahmednugger had charged madly to recover them, but had been shot dead, and the whole army fled to Puraindah and sent ambassadors for peace; and when all was completed, the King would return to Beejapoor—he might even now be on the way.

"This decides me at once, Zóra," said her grandfather. "The Mushâekh's intentions were truly kind, and I will acknowledge them; but thy proper home is with Queen Chand, and till I give thee to her my mind will not rest. After that let it be with us as God willeth. Let us prepare to go."

There was yet one ceremony to perform, which was a solemn leave-taking of the Geesoo Duráz and his fellow spiritual princes who were at the festival, and many others; and Zeenat-bee had to present Zóra to the Prince's wife and other great ladies who would be with her. But poor Zóra's wardrobe, if plentiful for her wants, was not that of a fine lady. The valuable clothes given to her by the Ranee of Wakin-Keyra were of Hindoo form, and, therefore, for the present useless. Her best petticoat was of fine soosi, her best scarf only plain muslin, not over fine; and the new friend looked over the clothes in despair. "None of these will answer," she said; "thou shouldst have satin at least, but it should be cloth of gold."

"I have no better," Zóra said; "I have never known better. What is cloth of gold (kumkhab)?"

"And thou hast never seen it, O simple child? Stay, I see it all now." And she went to her apartments, and her servants returned with her, bringing a bundle. "That is kumkhab," she said to Zóra, shaking out a gorgeous petticoat of the material, "and thou shalt wear that, my child; the grandchild of Luteef Shah Wallee is a princess, and should be clad as one." It was in vain that Zóra protested she ought not to go at all; but there was no escape.

How beautiful she looked when Zeenat-bee came and dressed her. The cloth of gold, the delicate scarf of brocaded muslin, and all beside seemed, indeed, as the natural costume of the sweet girl; and as she entered the assembly of ladies with a modest yet dignified grace, there was not one present who was not struck with her beauty more than they cared to acknowledge. Nor would her kind friend receive the clothes back from her. "If my Shere Khan cannot see thee in them," she said, "you will need them for your Queen, and they will remind thee of me, Zóra. I see thou canst not come with us, for thy grandfather's business with the King is urgent, so I will send thee away, though my heart aches as I do so

And when the time came, for the day of the Rujub-ool-Ghyb was Thursday, for the march southwards, they took leave of all with much emotion; and, after paying for what they had used, the balance was invested in an order by a local banker on Beejapoor, for they had been warned of robbers, gangs of whom frequented large assemblies like that at Gulburgah, and dogged the footsteps of the returning pilgrims.

Nothing was wanting on the part of the local authorities to do honour to "Luteef Shah Wallee," the humble Syud and Dervish of Juldroog, now the new and accepted saint of the faithful, to be worshipped whenever he might give up his spirit to the angels of death, and henceforth to live in Dekhan history, as many as humble as he had done before. With all his yearning for Beejapoor, he had yet longings after Golconda, and should his petition be rejected, there was at least that refuge to be looked to for Zóra as well as himself. Well! they would soon see, and it could not be many days before he knew his fate. As before, the four baggage ponies were laden by Ahmed; and as the "Geesoo Duráz" insisted on supplying one palanquin and the Governor of the town another, besides a few horse and foot soldiers as far as Almella, where there was a station of Beejapoor troops, they were to travel in comfort and security. But the old man said to Zóra, as she was making her last preparations to depart, "Child, we have been dazzled by our prosperity; may Alla forgive us for having neglected our duty as Fakeers. This we must resume, and therefore keep our old dresses ready for us."

"I have already prepared them," she said; "and whenever thou wilt we will sing the invocation again." Then they set out for Afzulpoor, near the river Bheema.

CHAPTER XII.

DANGER.

THE journey from Gulburgah to Afzulpoor was altogether a pleasant one to the travellers. The morning they left the city was cloudy and cool, and the soft south-west wind blew refreshingly in their faces as they proceeded. The plain, after the stony environs of the city was passed, was rich and fertile, lying on a gentle slope towards the river Bheema, which ran through its

broad valley in a tortuous course; but unseen, as the floods had declined, on account of its high, steep banks. The soil was rich and fertile, and luxuriant crops of jowaree, bajree, and other cereals, with pulse, oil seeds, and mustard, now in bright yellow flower, were pleasant to behold, while the air resounded with songs of the cultivators, who were ploughing and otherwise preparing their fields for the autumn sowing of cotton, the larger jowaree, and other products. With the husbandmen it was the busiest time of the year, and to travellers almost the pleasantest, for the rains had given place to occasional light showery weather, which did not affect the roads, while the fleecy clouds tempered the sun's rays, and the climate was hardly warmer than that of an English summer day. Larks were singing in the air, birds were chirping in every tree, flocks of mynas and paroquets flew cheerily about, and the whole face of nature was joyful. Our old friend was very happy. His excitement was gradually subsiding, and his thoughts were assuming the serenity of his ordinary life. Though he had been raised to the highest spiritual dignity he could receive, yet there was nothing of the zealot or bigot in his nature. If it pleased God, he prayed mentally, to let him remain at Beejapoor, he might by his teaching temper some of the fierce intolerance which he knew used to exist there, and might still continue. He could select some quiet place in which he might make a garden and build a dwelling sufficient for his small requirements; and by services at the great mosque, by public alms, and the donations of the King and nobles of the city, he hoped even to build a small mosque, and establish a school and college, in which he could teach himself, and thus employ his spare time pleasantly and profitably to others. Possibly, also, some quiet, respectable family might propose marriage with Zóra. "They tell me," he murmured to himself, "that she is growing up and is beautiful; but when I asked her whether I should accept the Mushâekh's offer on behalf of his nephew at Golconda, which, indeed, appeared to be an offer in every way worthy of her and of me, she wept, and said, 'No! no! no! Abba. Not away from you; I could not leave you. But if it be the will of the Lord that thou stay not at Beejapoor, then do with me as thou wilt.' No, she hath no tie to Beejapoor, no expectation there; so let the issue be as the Lord willeth!"

Perhaps, however, the fair Zóra's thoughts were of a different character. Beejapoor had to her always seemed the goal of her

desires. Every one around her, even at the old fort, had always spoken of the city as though they belonged to it. She knew that her father had been an officer in its army, and she had gathered enough from her grandfather to believe that he had once served there, though in what capacity she knew not, and she dare not risk the chance of vexing him by asking. He had promised that one day he would tell her all, and she had left the time to his own inclination; now, however, that they were going there, he might break, perhaps, the long and painful silence. But this was not all. Despite of apparent hopelessness, and no knowledge whatever of Abbas Khan's circumstances, her heart was with him always; and from the news of him she had heard at Gulburgah, she appeared to have gained new hope. He was evidently a man of rank; he was near the King, and if her grandfather went to the King, Meeah would hear of her and inquire about her. She had no idea that he could have forgotten her; that the excitement of war, possibly of some other attachment, might have driven her from his thoughts altogether; or that he might already have been betrothed in his youth. Any or all of such contingencies never occurred to her, and she still believed that she was not forgotten. If it were so, indeed, she would continue as she was, and in the vow of the green dress would be her refuge. Had she not seen others take it at Gulburgah? And Maria, too, she might be there, and be able to direct her. In short, more than ever her goal appeared to be Beejapoor; and though anxious and excited, Zóra was full of hope; which, if it was vague and undefined, still was hope at her heart, that had of late grown more vivid than before.

Mid-day was past, and near a small village there was a garden field, and a well, overshadowed by a huge peepul tree, where the party halted for rest and refreshment. Zóra and Ahmed drew the Syud's small mattress and carpet from the palanquin, and spread them in the shade; and from her stores old Mamoolla produced a cold refection she had prepared at Gulburgah over night. The cool, fresh air and the easy journey had made the old man hungry, and he enjoyed what had been provided very heartily. Zóra had not seen him so cheerful for a long time past, not, indeed, since they had left Juldroog; and it was evident to her that as he neared Beejapoor his hopes grew brighter and clearer; but of what?

"They say, Huzrut," said the leader of the little party of horsemen, "that the ferry-boat at Afzulpoor makes only two trips

across the river on each day; one from this side, when travellers arrive about the third watch, and the other from the further side before noon. Now as we cannot reach the town in time to-day, I have, therefore, sent on two of the horsemen to arrange that the boat should wait till you arrive to-morrow, and to send word by the first basket boat crossing that you are coming, and that lodgings are to be prepared for you in Sinnoor, a considerable village, where you will be very comfortable."

"Then we had better move on, perhaps, sir," returned the old Syud. "I am grateful for your thought of me, and the mid-way stage cannot be far distant now."

"It is only a few miles; there is no need to hurry, my lord," was the reply. "It will be only my infinite regret that I shall not be able to take the whole of my party with you to Beejapoor; but it is difficult for horsemen to cross the river when it is full, and we belong to a different Government; the foot soldiers will, however, accompany you. You can get them relieved at Almella, which is customary."

"Once I am there, sir, I think I can send your men back, for I am known, or—or—used to be."

At Almella, thought Zóra; who can remember him there?

"Zóra," said her grandfather, when they were alone, as Ahmed and the old woman were packing up what had been used, "Zóra listen to me, child, for it will relieve me to tell you. We have not preserved our faith with the Lord; we have been exalted by spiritual pride; we seem to be no longer humble Fakeers, but to have changed into princes. Though I cannot see, yet I feel that everyone salutes me. I am called 'Your Holiness,' or 'My Prince,' or 'My Lord,' and this I regret. We have not begged alms as we should have done, and as I vowed to do; and I fear that the Lord will punish me for this great omission."

"True, Abba," said Zóra, laughing, "we have not begged every day, for at Gulburgah you said you could not take me among the crowds, it was not safe; but did I not spread the sheet for you at the gate of the Prince's palace, when the worshippers were entering, and in the cemetery, near the grave of the old saint? And when Ahmed spread it for you in the mosque, was it not always full? and when people came to the house to get charms or amulets, and ask for your blessing, did they not leave alms? Then, grandfather, we have much money, much more than we need, besides the order on Beejapoor. Why should we beg for more? Is it not avaricious to do so? Thou hast only to say

Luteef Shah Wallee wants, and riches would be bestowed upon thee. But, O Abba, we do not want them; we were quite happy when we were poor."

"Nay, I am not avaricious," returned the old man, humbly; "but for my breach of vow I fear. Let us resume our wonted habit, Zóra, from this evening where we rest for the night, and give all we get in the wallet to the poor; and to-morrow, as we wait for the boat, we may as well sing an invocation, and spread the sheet, and we can make a distribution there also."

So it was arranged, and they went out to beg that night, and proceeded next day to Afzulpoor. The people came out in crowds to see the new saint, whose fame had preceded him, for there were many Mussulman weavers and husbandmen at the little town, and some of them had heard the Syud preach, and been witness to the wondrous excitement when he was taken up and carried in procession. They would fain have had him stay with them and preach, for the next day was Friday, the Sabbath; but he could not be persuaded to break his journey, and must go on as had been arranged. When he came to the river side, and his sheet was spread on the green turfy bank, he addressed the people for awhile in his own homely way, and the sheet was rapidly covered with small contributions. Then he took a kind leave of all, and delivered the amount of the collection to the Patell and authorities of the village to be distributed in charity to all the poor, and applied to the expenses of the festival which he knew was at hand. Thus his mind was assured that he had at last done right, and he would continue the custom; and when he landed on the other side, it was with a silent prayer that thenceforth to his destination nothing might interfere with the tenor of his vow.

The men who had been sent forward had been able to make arrangements for our friends, and they were soon comfortable. They had arrived before the time for evening prayer, and their dwelling-place adjoined the mosque, where most of the men and some women of the village had assembled; and now, too, came an opportunity of saying a few kind words to them all, and the lights were being lighted in the village before they got up, and Zóra led her grandfather back to their apartments. He was quite cheerful then and quite satisfied with what had been done. Zóra and old Mamoolla pressed him to take his dinner, but he laughingly said he had eaten so much of the old woman's good kabobs at the

well that he needed no more, and as soon as the cattle had all come in he would go with Zóra, as the streets would be quiet.

Gulburgah during the festival had been full of thieves of every description; indeed, the place had an evil reputation for robbers at all times. There were not only the ordinary cut-purses and pick-pockets, pilchers, and night prowlers of such gatherings; but there were Thugs from the neighbouring counties of Allund, Gunjooty, and Kullianee, as well as those who lived in the city itself, carrying on apparently honest trades and occupations, who marked parties for plunder, joined with them as they departed homewards, and slew them when they had gone a little distance with them. For miles, indeed, in every direction were the unhallowed graves of hundreds, and thousands, perhaps, of those who had been thus decoyed and destroyed. There were, too, Dacoits who attacked the lodgings of pilgrims, or waylaid them on the high roads, and plundered with little regard to consequences. Among the latter were many Jutts and Kaikárees, peaceful-looking people by day, but terrible by night.

Our readers will not have forgotten, perhaps, the attack on the old Syud's house at Kukeyra, with the intent to carry away Zóra; and some of that gang who had escaped, and who lived in small villages somewhat to the south of Almella, were pursuing their usual avocations in the festival; by day selling small prayer-mats to pious Mussulmans, or their women worked bodices, new and old, or made winnowing fans for cleaning rice and other grain; but both by night and by day pursuing their hereditary avocation of thieving. Among these was the boy who had been released by Burma Naik and sent back to his people with the grim notice already recorded. He had seen the old Syud at the public mosque on several occasions; also at the gate of the Prince's palace, when Zóra and her grandfather spread the sheet at night, and had dogged them to their lodging. There nothing could be done, for they were well guarded; but the determination to exact a heavy revenge for their leader's death and the execution of their comrades had not lessened; the only point undecided being how it was to be carried out. Some of the gang were in favour of a sudden attack in a village where the Syud should rest for the night; but when they found out that the old man was proceeding to Beejapoor, their plan was formed rapidly. They would not rob the holy man; that would be a sin, and bring misfortune on them; but they could carry off Zóra, and give her up to Osman Beg, whom they believed still to be at Juldroog, and

demand from him the reward he had promised. Some of the gang had crossed the river by a basket boat early in the morning, with a small litter they had prepared, and which could be easily carried. Several actually crossed in the great ferry-boat (who could have suspected them?), and watched our travellers to their resting-place. Their habit of begging through villages on their journey in the evening was the best opportunity afforded to the robbers' plans, and they were determined to follow them up, even to the gates of Beejapoor, rather than forego their chance. The village had one large gate to the south, that which opened on the Almella road, and was in a direct line with the centre street. Two men had usually charge of this gate, who could be easily overpowered. It would be impossible to make a rush through it so long as the village cattle were coming home; but, after that, there would be no obstacle, and it was with secret satisfaction that the scouts watched the old man and Zóra, dressed in the Fakeers' garb, leave their lodging alone, and wander about the streets, singing their appeals for alms, receiving such as they were given, and so passing on. At first they had walked through side streets, Zóra always leading her grandfather, and warning him of stones and other obstacles; and at last they emerged into the broad way, not far from the gate, where there was a space without houses, which appeared to Zóra very lonely and desolate, and there were no persons moving about as in other parts of the village.

"I do not like this, Abba," said Zóra; "it is so lonely, and you would not let me bring Ahmed with us. Let us turn back towards our home. The wallet is already heavy with meal and rice."

"Why fear, child?" returned the old man, gaily. "Who ever molests the Fakeer?"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when about twenty men, some of them carrying a small litter, emerged from behind a wall which concealed a narrow lane, and came running towards them, crying out, "Clear the way for the bride!" Zóra thought they were part of a village marriage procession, especially as there were two torches lighted; and drew her grandfather aside to let the people pass; but almost before she could think, she found herself seized, a gag thrust into her mouth, and her grandfather prostrated by a severe blow from a staff. She was then swathed in a saree and lifted into the litter, the bearers of which hurried on at their utmost speed. No noise had been heard of the slight scuffle; no alarm was given. The two door-keepers were

in the act of shutting to the ponderous gates, which required their utmost strength, and were taken completely unawares. One of them tried in vain to stop the foremost of the robbers, and was pierced by a spear before he could cry out; the other, who attempted to gain the bastion, was struck down on the first step, and there died. Then the whole gang extinguished their torches, rushed on down the main road till they came to a side path which turned more to the east, among the tall fields of jowaree, pursuing their way in utter silence for the most part, only interrupted by occasional whispers among the gang.

Poor Zóra was utterly helpless. The gag which had been stuffed into her mouth nearly choked her; the cloth by which she had been swathed up to her throat prevented her moving her hands. She remembered when the slaves of Osman Beg took her up at Juldroog they had done it gently, and she could at least breathe freely and scream for help; but this attack on her had been more savage, more determined—was this also her enemy's contrivance? She could not but think so; and his emissaries must have followed her even from Kukeyra. Whither were they taking her? She could see nothing, for the cover of the litter was of black coarse blankets, and was tightly fastened down. Without, too, the night was dark, and a drizzling rain had set in. She felt stupefied by her position, and her thoughts could take no coherent form whatever. For several hours the gang pursued their first rapid pace, not halting to relieve each other under the pole of the litter, but one displacing another, as necessary. The men were not professional bearers, with their regular step; but persons unaccustomed to carry loads, and, in consequence, the poor girl was sorely shaken and bruised against the sides of the narrow crib. She could breathe, but that was all; and any chance of making herself heard was impossible. At last they stopped and set down the litter. Zóra could hear the gentle rushing of water, and supposed the gang had halted to drink, as one of them, slightly opening the side of the litter, felt about until he found her face, and, to her infinite relief, drew the gag out of her mouth. To her surprise the man was civil, and said in good Canarese,—

"You will be thirsty, lady, and here is water; drink. But if you attempt to call out, I cannot answer for your life; you must die. Do you understand?"

"Where am I?" she asked, faintly; "and what have you done with my grandfather?"

"Make yourself easy about him," said the voice; "he is safe

where you left him. Ask me no questions, for I cannot answer you; and you will know the rest in time. No harm will come to you, and we dare not injure a hair of your head; but you must save yourself by being perfectly passive. If you cried out so as to cause alarm, my brothers would spear you, and leave you as you are."

Zóra drank eagerly of the water, and felt refreshed and strengthened. The gag was not renewed, and with her teeth she contrived to bite a small hole in the blanket covering. She saw the gang at a short distance sitting together, and their hookah passing round among them. It was too dark to distinguish individual figures, but the sound of the gurgle of the hookah, and its bright light when drawn, showed her their position, and occasionally flashed upon the water which flowed by. Again the man who had before spoken said, "Wait till daylight, and I will bring you some roasted corn. The grain is full and sweet now. You are likely to get little else for two or three days, and if you are quiet you may be let out for a few minutes."

Zóra could not reply. With the drink of water her senses had revived, and the agony of her position became more and more clearly realised. She did not lose her presence of mind; but the impossibility of escaping from so many active and unencumbered men was not to be thought of for a moment. All she could do was to commend herself to the merciful Alla, who alone could effect her deliverance. Strange to say, she had still hope, which her faith served to increase; and if she sobbed and wept almost unceasingly, there yet seemed to be something whispering at her heart, "Fear not, for I, the Lord, am with thee!"

Presently the men took up the litter and moved on, but more slowly than before. They were unaccustomed to carry such a burthen, and already some were complaining of chafed shoulders. Would they put her down and disperse? Then daylight broke; but the rain did not cease, and the fields of corn and cotton, through which they held their way, grew muddy and soft, and the men could proceed with difficulty.

"We must seek for some shelter," said a voice, which appeared to have authority among the gang. "We are now on the lands of Kohutnoor, and we may find a shepherd's hut somewhere; and two of you run to Hippurgah and see if some of our people will come, for we must go on again at nightfall."

After this speech Zóra found her litter put down, and the opening of the covering was untied; then she was taken out, and

carried into a rude field hut and laid on the ground, but the bandages were not loosened. There we must leave her for the present, and relate what had befallen her grandfather.

CHAPTER XIII.

DELIVERANCE.

As we have already stated, there was no alarm at the gate of the village when the Syud was struck down. Of the two watchmen, one was dead, the other senseless from loss of blood. Ahmed and old Mamoolla were, however, now anxious about their master and Zóra, and Ahmed went to the village Chaoree to ask if they had passed that way. "Yes," said the watchmen on duty for the night; "we heard them singing a long time ago, and supposed they had gone home, as the singing ceased all at once; but we will come and look, some one has doubtless asked them to remain." But they could not be found or heard of, and all were in much fear and perplexity. Could Zóra have stepped incautiously into a well, and drawn her grandfather after her? But no, there were only two wells in the village, and though lights were lowered into them nothing was seen. At last a cry was heard near the gate, and then someone, who had wished to go out to his field, gave the alarm that murder had been done; and Ahmed and the rest ran with lighted torches, saw the two bodies of the watchers, and looking about, found the old Syud, lying where they supposed he had fallen, near the wall. At first, as blood had issued from his head, they all thought he had died, and they took him up reverently and carried him to his lodgings, where they discovered signs of life; still he had no perception of anything, and was not able to speak. The barber, who had been summoned, said the wound was slight, but that the blow had caused insensibility, and fomentation must be continued.

So the night passed, and the whole of the village was disquieted and alarmed. The idea of so holy a person as Luteef Shah Wallee, the new saint, being killed in the place, and his granddaughter carried off, was almost beyond belief. Several parties of the villagers, accompanied by the Gulburgah escort, went out to search in the fields, but returned. What could be done in the darkness and rain among the tall heavy crops? They must wait till

morning, and in the morning consciousness came to the old man, though it seemed to those around him that it would have been more merciful if he had died. Who could console him? Who could satisfy him about Zóra? Who had taken her, and why? Not for her ornaments, for she had put on only those she usually wore, of small value, all the rest were packed up. When the day dawned some light was thrown on the affair by the tracks of a number of men in the corn-fields, and by broken stems of the corn, and they continued as far as the boundary of the next village, through which they evidently went; but it was no concern of the watchmen of that village to trace the thieves unless they were well rewarded, and who was to pay them?

Meanwhile the old man raved, and called on Zóra without intermission. At times he even became frantic, and with difficulty could be restrained from attempting to proceed on foot. "Take me to Zóra! Take me to the child! Take me to Almella! Lay me at the feet of Chand Beebee, she will give me justice for my child. Oh, Abbas Khan! she watched by thy side; go to her, save her, and give her into my arms. Am I not Luteef Shah Wallee now? and my blessing or my curse are at least powerful. Yea, I will bless thee!"

"It is no use keeping him here," said the barber; "his case is beyond my skill. They have a surgeon and a doctor with the soldiers at Almella, take him thither;" and the litter was soon made ready, and the sad procession departed. It was nearly evening when it reached Almella, where it was met by a crowd of people who had heard of the outrage; and a comfortable lodging had been prepared, where the old man was reverently deposited. He was now calmer, but grief lay heavy on him, very heavy; and what could console him? When he could think coherently, he accused himself of neglect of his vows; he accused himself of incautiousness; and if she returned not, he prayed for death. Here, whence the Lord had taken him in his prosperity to blindness and poverty, would be the fitting place for him to die. Towards evening he became calmer, and asked if any of the people of Almella were present, and the Patell, and the Putwari, and the Moolla of the mosque came to him.

"Are any of ye old?" he asked; "as old as I am?"

"No!" replied the Moolla; "but my grandfather, who is very old, can be sent for."

"Ay, that will be Sheykh Oomur, perhaps; yes, send for

him." They wondered why the name should be remembered, but sent for him. When he arrived, the Syud, taking his hand, said, "If thou art Sheykh Oomur, thou wilt not have forgotten Syud Ahmed Ali."

"Syud Ahmed Ali, the physician!" cried the Moolla, peering into the other's face, for he was nearly blind himself. "Yes, it is he! it is he! Oh, master! I, thy pupil, have not forgotten; and to see thee here, and in this sore plight. Ah! it is the Lord's will."

"Tell them all; all," cried the old Syud, with fresh vigour, "that I am here once more. God, the Highest, hath brought me to recover my child and my honour. Go! arouse all to bring Zóra back to me or I shall die."

"It is the Syud, surely," said many old people who looked on the aged features with compassion, and well remembered them; and the authorities of the little town and of the detachment of soldiers sent out parties in search, one of which found the track, many hours old, as they knew from the state of the broken herbage and corn, and returned unsuccessful. And the old Syud, becoming hopeless in his grief, though relieved of much of his pain by the doctor who had been summoned, was, they thought, going to turn his face to the wall and die. But still he had not asked for the prayers for the dying to be recited, and was constantly crying out, "He will not take her to shame or death; he will restore her to me. Zóra! Zóra! come soon, else I die; and I have told thee nothing." Once he said to the Moolla and others who sat nigh him, "Oh, friends, if I die, bury me here; but take my child to the Court, lay her at the feet of Queen Chand, and say I, Luteef Shah Wallee, sent her for justice." Then, as if he had no more to say, he turned on his side and appeared to sleep.

Just as day was breaking he sat up suddenly, but with vigour, and putting his hands to his ear, said, in a strong voice, "I hear a Beydur's horn; I hear the Beydurs' drums; and they bring me my Zóra! Oh, my child, come quickly, lest I die of joy! At first those who heard him—the kind doctor, Ahmed, old Mamoolla, and others—thought what he had said was part of his delirium; but Ahmed rushed out, ran to the top of the house, and looking southwards, saw the blaze of torches and about fifty dusky forms approaching at a rapid pace, while the creaking of the gate of the town showed that it was being opened. As the procession approached nearer, the sonorous drums of the Beydurs beat a joyful march, their horns blew a victorious blast; and Ahmed ran down

again to the apartment, and cried out, "It is true! it is true! Rejoice!" and fled forth to meet the lost girl, weeping like a child. And onwards came the body of men encircling a good palanquin, and the town musicians had mingled with the Beydurs, and the din and clamour were deafening. Then, as they put down the litter at the steps of the house, Zóra stepped from it, and standing erect on the highest, cried out, "The Lord bless ye all, friends, for I am safe. By your aid ye have saved me from dishonour and from death." But she could hardly speak, and her cheeks were wet with tears, which glistened in the torchlight. In an instant more she had crossed the little courtyard, reached her grandfather's bed, and exclaiming, "Abba! Abba! God has saved me, and brought me to you again when I had no hope left!" But the old man could not speak coherently; indeed, the revulsion from a dim hope to a blessed reality had almost cost him his life.

They sat together the whole day, Zóra scarcely stirring from his side, and only urged by pressing hunger to leave him at all; for Mamoolla had said, "Poor dove, they only fed it with green corn and milk, and that was not food fitted for her; and the best I can cook shall be hers and the master's, who, after all, has only a broken head; but then he is not a wrestler or a sword-player." Zóra's story was not a long one. When she was put into the hut with only two men to guard her, the rest of the gang dispersed into the corn-fields to hide themselves, as the husbandmen would soon be abroad. Now the hut was nearer to Kokutnoor than Hippurgah, and a shepherd boy who had been watching sheep all night had seen the procession, and saw where something, he could not tell what, had been deposited. Over night a large body of Beydurs, on their road from the King's camp by Sholapoor to their homes, had put up at Kokutnoor, and the lad, well knowing their habits, went to the leader and told him that Dacoits had halted in the fields and hidden their booty in a solitary hut. "They are Káikarees and Jutts," said the lad, "and the brother of Kulloo Naik, who was killed at Kukeyra, is their leader."

The Beydur chief who was in command of the party was soon aroused, and among his men were some of Runga's and some of Burma Naik's people, and it was at once determined that the Dacoits should be surprised and their booty captured. So, through the cover of the tall grain fields, they were guided by the lad until they came close to the hut. The two men who guarded it were speared without mercy, and, said Zóra, "I expected no less than death, when several of the men who had served at

Juldroog found me, bound as I was, and were distraught with joy. They took me into the air, unbound me, and chafed my arms and my legs. They carried me into Kokutnoor; then bearers were sent for from Hippurgah, and I was fed, and had milk to drink, and I am quite well, and it is like a new birth to see your dear face once more."

What could he reply? What more could Zóra say? And so they sat without speaking much till the day waned, and the fatehas they had ordered were ready, when Zóra arose to distribute the money offerings to the poor, and the alms that had been in the wallet were part of her liberal donation.

The next day, the Beydurs having remained as their guests, and enjoyed a great feast, all those that belonged to Runga and Burma's divisions declared they would attend the Syud to Beejapoor. Runga would never forgive them if they did not; and there was no hurry about moving, as the King was yet detained north of the river. In the evenings, then, as the old Syud sat in the porch of the house, under pretence of begging, for he was weak still, and could not walk, the Beydurs came and told him tales of the war, and how Abbas Khan, Runga Naik, and his men had carried by storm the great battery of Ahmednugger guns, and Runga had been made a noble on the spot, while the blood was yet wet upon his sword. Poor Zóra! how her heart swelled at the narration, and how hope was revived, which for a time had appeared dead.

When the time came they moved from Almella, and reached Allapoor the day before the King was to enter the city. Thousands were passing on horseback, thousands were going to meet friends long absent, and no one noticed the blind old man and a girl, dressed in pilgrims' clothes, who, as they entered the gate of the great city, kneeled down, and gave thanks to God. The old Syud's face beamed with gratitude and joy. As to Zóra, the splendour of what she saw almost overpowered her; but she led her grandfather forward in the direction of the citadel, and on a piece of close green sward, near the open road by which the King would pass, they spread their sheet, and began at intervals to sing the best of their holy chants; and passers-by threw alms to them liberally and freely, begging the old man's blessing. Gradually the booming sound of the King's kettledrums, and the huge pair which were carried by the standard elephant, were heard, and the old man remembered them, and said to Zóra, "They are near now; let

Ahmed keep the sheet, dear, and you will see the King." Not long afterwards the people on the towers of the gates, the bastions, and in every available place they could get to, began to shout and wave scarves; and every house within sight hung out costly shawls, cloth of gold, and rich garments out of windows and over the parapets of their houses, till the city was like a garden of tulips. Following the procession were hundreds of war elephants, dressed in their richest caparisons, their bells jangling with a strange clamour, and the music of the nobat playing a march of victory.

These, however, were of little interest in comparison with the King's own circle, which occupied nearly the centre of the procession, and having entered the gate, advanced more slowly. In the midst rode the young King, wearing, like the Queen, a tunic of dazzling white cloth of gold, and a morion with a crown of flashing jewels. He was smiling, as he greeted the people with constant waves of his hand, while his beautiful horse caracoled beneath him. Near him rode Abbas Khan, and other officers of rank; and Zóra could see Runga Naik in his new uniform of cloth of gold. The horses pranced and curvetted, tossing their heads and neighing; and the King, drawing rein for a moment, pointed out the Syud and Zóra, asking apparently who they were, when Abbas Khan, who now saw them also, dashed up to the King, and said, "It is Syud Ahmed Ali, of whom I spoke." At the same moment the old man, who had been standing, rushed forward over the sheet, and with a loud cry of "Daad! Daad!" tottered and fell on his face, nearly across the Royal path.

"Bring him on with you, Abbas," cried the King; and the young man turned at once to his old friend, throwing a glance at Zóra, which rested on flashing eyes bedewed with tears of joy, and cheeks burning with excitement, as he cried to her, "Zóra! is it thus we meet? Fear not now, for all will be well!"

END OF BOOK III.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

THE KING'S ENTRY.

THE triumphal entry of King Ibrahim II. into his capital was not only a glorious sight to its people; but an assurance that the long and disastrous wars between the rival States of Beejapoor and Ahmednugger were at an end. King Ibrahim had kept the field against the conspiracy of his cousin, the Prince Ismail, who was supported by a large portion of his own army under Eyn-ool-Moolk, and by his uncle, Boorhan Nizam, Shah of Ahmednugger; and against the possible advance of the Portuguese of Goa, whose skill in war was well known in the Dekhan. The King of Ahmednugger, however, could make no impression on the Beejapoor troops, who defended the frontier stoutly, and, falling ill, died in his camp at Puraindah. His son Ibrahim, a youth, was placed upon the throne, and soon after again pressed the war against Beejapoor, which brought on the general action in which Humeed Khan, the uncle of Abbas Khan, had proved victorious; and as the troops of Ahmednugger fled from the field with the loss of the whole of their artillery and war elephants, the long continued struggle came to an end, and the Royal army returned to Beejapoor, escorting their King in triumph. "On the 18th Mohorrum," writes the historian of the period, "the King made a triumphant entry into Beejapoor amid the acclamation of the people, who on this occasion had adorned the streets with gold and silver tissues, velvets, brocades, and other rich cloths and ornaments." But it was not the splendour of the spectacle which gratified the people; it was the assurance of safety and security from further disturbance, for which all were thankful. Those who had wavered in their allegiance now declared a hearty loyalty; and the southern invaders, under the Hindoo Prince of Penkonda, who had joined the conspiracy on the assurance of the conspirators that they might thus regain the

dominions they had lost, having been defeated and driven back, there remained no part of the Beejapoor dominions that was not in profound peace after a long series of years of rebellion; and the people rejoiced in a real gladness which had not been felt for several generations.

As we already know, the force under Abbas Khan had marched northwards to the aid of the King; but as the rainy season was at its height, King Ibrahim had taken up his position at the fort of Shahdroog, or Nuldroog, and had left Humeed Khan with the main body of the army to watch the frontier and repel incursion should it take place. Abbas Khan, therefore, on receiving orders from the King, had marched to join his uncle, and arrived in time to take part in the finally victorious battle.

From his uncle he had received a very hearty and affectionate welcome, the particulars of which need not be recorded here; and it was with a great satisfaction that the veteran commander heard the details of the combat in the presence of the Queen Dowager, and the discovery of Osman Beg's treason. Abbas Khan had, indeed, to recount all the passages in his life which we already know of, which to his uncle had been so grievously misrepresented. There was nothing left but for Abbas Khan to show his valour in the next engagement that ensued, which proved to be a very severe one, for the left wing of the Beejapoor troops was broken by an impetuous charge of ten thousand of the Ahmednugger cavalry. Many nobles and high officers of rank were slain, and many fugitives rode at once to the King's camp declaring that the whole army had been routed. For three days the King was in the last degree of anxious uncertainty, till a despatch from Humeed Khan, sent by the hand of his nephew, who could describe the action, assured him of the most perfect victory. Then it was, too, that the day might have gone hard for the Royal army but for the exertions and daring bravery of the fresh force under his nephew; and he related, also, how bravely the enemy's heavy battery had been stormed by the Beydurs, who appeared unconscious of danger, and how both Abyssinians and Dekhan cavalry had vied with each other under their young leader. In a few days the King's forces joined those under Humeed Khan near Sholapoor, where public thanksgiving was made for the close of the war, and some rewards and honours were publicly bestowed. But the grand ceremony of all was to take place at Beejapoor on the day of entry into the capital; and the King, carrying with him the whole of his army, with the trophies in artillery and elephants, Royal camp

equipage and treasure that had been won, crossed the Bheema river slowly, and, as we know, safely reached his destination.

While in camp together, our friends Runga Naik and Abbas Khan had held many an anxious conversation on the subject of the old Syud Dervish and Zóra. Runga had told him of the forcible abduction of the girl, and of her rescue by himself and Burma; how, when he was obliged to leave Korikul, he had made her and the Syud over to Burma's care, but from that time he had no news of them.

If they had left Kukeyra they might be at Sugger, or, possibly, had gone on to Gulburgah; but nothing could be known for certain till the men who were returning from his own force should reach their territory, and either bring the old man and Zóra with them to camp or to Beejapoor. It was this very party which, crossing the country direct from the Royal camp, so providentially rescued Zóra unharmed, and took her to her grandfather; and regulating their movements by those of the King himself, arrived in time to witness his triumphal entry. I trust this slight digression will be pardoned, for, indeed, without it the position of the parties would hardly be understood with exactness.

After the slight interruption caused by raising the infirm old man, the grand march was resumed; and the young King rode on, with the bitter cry of the old Syud, "Daad! Daad! Justice! Justice!" ringing in his ears, and the sightless eyes and feeble arms raised to heaven. Abbas Khan's tale had distressed him seriously; but he was here face to face with one instance of the first King Ibrahim's cruelty, and the sin of it rested on his house. Well, it could be condoned, perhaps, for the curse of a holy Syud could hardly be averted even by penance; but he would do, as he had vowed to Alla, what it was possible to do ere the sun set. So the young Monarch rode on in his pride; Humeed Khan on his right hand, Soheil Khan and the brave commander on his left, preceded by his gold and silver mace-bearers shouting his titles, and followed by the crowds of nobles and officers who composed his train. The day was as yet young, but it was bright and clear; and the flood of light glittering on morion and coat of mail, on cuirass and greave, on trappings and housings of gold and silver cloth, on banners and standards, and the great white buildings and palaces which stood out against the clear, deep blue sky, formed a combination of splendour which the mind can hardly realise, and which was well-nigh overpowering to all who saw it.

As to Zóra, she—who had seen nothing in all her life of splen-

dour such as that—was fairly overpowered. She trembled, and her cheeks flushed as the first portion of the troops issued from the gate and passed them, drowning the feeble chaunt she and her grandfather were raising. But alms were showered upon them, and Ahmed had gathered up several times already what lay on the sheet. When the hoarse cry arose of "The King cometh! The King cometh!" and all heads bowed to the earth as he passed on, she did not think of him, but of one that might be with him. And yet, if he were, would he remember her? Would he even see her? Ah! it was an anxious moment, and her beating heart fluttered till she could hardly breathe. As the glorious pageant went slowly past, she could see the face she sought distinctly. Abbas Khan was riding near his uncle, conversing joyously with him and others around him; and the appearance of the gallant cavalier, dressed in glittering armour and cloth of gold, was almost too dazzling to look at. There were hundreds of Fakeers lining the road, crying for alms in stentorian voices. How would the faint chaunt of an infirm old man and a girl be heard amidst the din—the jangling bells of elephants, the neighing of excited horses, and the cries of the Royal titles? And Abbas Khan must have passed the group but for the sudden action of her grandfather, who threw himself forward with his shrill cry. Even then the grooms who ran by the King's horse, which had been somewhat startled, would have removed the old man, roughly enough, perhaps, from the Royal path; but the action of Abbas Khan had been rapid, and instantaneous, and decisive. What he had said to the King she could not hear; but the King's reply, "Bring him to the palace instantly," at once gave her the assurance she needed. Now Abbas Khan had dismounted, and stood embracing her grandfather; and was telling Runga Naik, who had seen all, to seek for his litter, which was under some trees at a little distance. Poor Zóra had not been able to obtain one at Almella, and she had ridden her own stout pony, which was also brought up; and she was preparing to mount it when Abbas Khan cried, "Stay, Zóra! not in this crowd; here is a palanquin of the King's for thee." So she entered it, shut the doors, and was carried on. There was no time for words. The whole scene was to her so altogether strange and unexpected that she could not find speech to thank any one; and as she shut the doors of the palanquin, and was safe from observation, her over-charged heart found relief in a burst of grateful sobs and tears.

As the King's procession went on towards the city, outside the walls, for he had to receive the blessing of the Chishtee priest whom we know of, it was easy for Abbas Khan to turn off with his charge into the gate of the citadel, while Runga Naik brought up the baggage ponies behind. All was comparatively clear in the citadel, and would be till the King arrived; so that Abbas Khan had no difficulty in speaking to one of the chief eunuchs of the private apartments, whom he knew, and putting his old friend and Zóra under his charge. He could not stay; and galloping after the procession soon overtook it, and resumed his place by his uncle's side.

"Who was the girl beside the old man who helped to raise him up, and whom my horse well nigh trampled down? I never saw a more beautiful and expressive face in my life," said his uncle with, as it seemed, a peculiar smile.

"She is the old saint's granddaughter, sir; and has devoted her life to him. Yes, she is beautiful."

"Then thou hast seen her, Abbas?"

"I have, uncle. The night I was in delirium at Juldroog she watched me, and gave me medicine and cool sherbet; but I could only see her face as that of one in a dream, and I have never looked on it since but once, and that only as a passing glance, till to-day, when I could not help seeing her, for the handkerchief she had tied over her turban had fallen off. It is evident that the Syud hath taken the vow, perhaps at Gulburgah, where His Highness Geesoo Duráz made him a Wallee."

"Was he a Fakeer before then?" asked his uncle.

"No, sir. Though he called himself a Dervish, yet he had not taken any degree as a Fakeer, and people only called him Dervish. When he confided to me his identity his chief prayer was to be allowed to go free, that he might pay his vows at Sugger and Gulburgah, where, it appears, he was raised at once to the highest rank; and his title now is Luteef Shah Wallee. His is a sad story, uncle. Dost thou remember it?"

"I was a mere boy then," was the reply, "and used to attend the durbar with thy grandfather; but I quite remember the sadness with which all the city heard that Syud Ahmed Ali, the physician, had been blinded and sent to Juldroog. Everyone grieved for him, for he was not only the most learned of all at Court, but the most charitable. Many will remember him, and Ekhlas Khan was an intimate friend. Yea, it will cause a murmur in durbar when his name is mentioned, for he has been clean for-

gotten; and it was believed he had died soon after he was imprisoned. And thou hast told the King all?"

"All," replied the young Khan. "As the old Dervish told the tale to me, so did I repeat it faithfully; and I told him, too, how, under the Lord's will, he had saved my life."

"And what said he?"

"He wept, uncle; and said that the curse of a Syud should never rest upon the Adil Shah's realm or people; that search should be made for the Dervish. Then one day there came a holy man with a great retinue from Gulburgah, and told him—I was there—how a Fakeer had preached in the mosque, and a miracle had been done, and the heretofore Dervish had been made a Wallee at once, as the people demanded. And the King said to me, 'Thou art witness, Abbas Khan, that if I ever am blessed by the old man I will restore to him and his all he has lost.'"

"And he will do it, too," replied Humeed Khan. "And amidst the rejoicings of to-day one heart will be gladdened."

"Ameen! Ameen!" was the reply; and the conversation dropped.

CHAPTER II.

PARDON.

MEANWHILE Zóra and her grandfather had been conducted by the eunuchs through the entrance corridor into a suite of small but elegant apartments, which opened into a court and garden behind the palace. Their servants were brought in by a separate passage into a little kitchen and adjoining room; and there were baths and everything necessary for a pleasant, though necessarily confined residence. Here Zóra and old Mamoolla soon spread her grandfather's carpets, and they found cushions and bedsteads already provided. Presently, when all was arranged, Zóra led the old man to the cushions, and he sat down with a sigh of thankfulness.

"Where am I?" he said. "Surely I heard Meeah's voice? Where has he gone? Bring him to me."

"You are in the King's palace," said Zóra, throwing her arms around him. "Be thankful, Abba, that all thy sorrows and trials are over. We are safe in our refuge at last."

"Yes," he said, "at last! More than forty years have passed over me since they sent me away to exile, blinded and in torment. Dost thou think I have forgotten that?"

"Oh, Abba!" cried the girl, putting her hand over his mouth, "didst thou not tell me when the Fateha was said before the tomb at Gogi that thou hadst forgiven King Ibrahim? Was it for thy blindness, Abba?"

"I am again rebuked, Zóra, and will forgive still; but it is hard to forget the past, and the joy with which I came forth from Almella, and within an hour was taken out, blind and bleeding! Forgive me, child! that I am false to thee. And forgive me, O Ibrahim! who hast received me back, that this bitter thought should have come into my mind. Yes, as I entered, I felt I was within the palace. This I am sure, by the turns we took as we entered, was the very apartment which I used to dwell in whenever my visit was prolonged. I even now scent the jessamine and tube roses of the little garden, and I feel as though I were in my old seat, with the soft south wind blowing on me. Methinks I see the blue Damascus tiles which are inlaid round the arches, and the carved window of the Zenana beyond."

"It is even so, Abba," said Zóra, much moved, as her grandfather pointed out the several objects with his finger. "Nothing has been changed; everything is as perfect now as it was then, and looks as quiet and peaceful as our little Zenana used to do at Juldroog."

"But it is only a gilded cage, my child; and I shall long to be free again, and to teach and preach, ay, and beg as I used to do even at Juldroog. And here there is more to do, else the Lord had not brought me."

"But, Abba, dear Abba!" began Zóra; and he interrupted her with, "Be patient, child! Dost thou think I do not welcome this as a place of rest, even as thou dost? And when Meeah comes he may bestow us elsewhere, when we can go and come with freedom. Then we shall have our own house, and our own servants, and palanquin, and bearers; and a sweet garden where I shall love to sit and discourse on the mysteries of holiness with the learned of the city, and on medicine with the physicians; and thou wilt have thy pigeons and flowers, and find out poor people and relieve them."

"Enough, enough, Abba!" cried Zóra, laughing and crying at the same moment. "Thou wouldst make a princess of me at once, and art tempting me by a hundred delightful anticipations fit but

for the noble and great. But I see only my Fakeer's garments, and think of my uncompleted vows. And after all, am I not your humble little Zóra?"

"Thou art my precious treasure, child!" replied the old man, with emotion; "and the most noble house in Dekhan cannot produce one like thee."

Almost as he spoke, the curtain, which was drawn across the entrance, was partly raised, and a man's voice said hurriedly to a companion, "The rooms are occupied by strangers, Maria; we must retire."

Zóra started to her feet, and rushed hastily forward. She saw two figures she at once recognised retreating into the corridor, and cried, "Maria! Maria! it is only your little Zóra; and Abba is here. Oh, come to us, we are alone."

In their turn Maria and her brother started. There was no doubt left when they saw the slight figure stretching out its arms with a low cry of joy, and the soft, flushed cheeks wet with tears; and a moment after they were locked in each other's arms, and approached the old man's seat, who was crying out joyfully, "Come! come to me, my friends; we are, indeed, with you at last. O Padré Sahib, thank the Lord with me that we are here safely, and in honour, for of a truth we have endured much."

Maria was not changed, save that the bright rosy colour of her cheeks had increased under the effects of better health; and she had attained a true majesty of beauty which far exceeded that which Zóra used to look on with wonder at Juldroog. Zóra seated her beside her on the cushions, but she could not give vent to her feelings of delight. Her loving brown eyes looked up like those of a dog to her friend; she threw her arms round her, and kissed her forehead, her eyes, her lips, passionately, hardly able to speak, except to say, "Thou art here, Maria, and restored to me. Oh, yes, to me, who in all my troubles and tears have never forgotten thee; and this which thou gavest me," and she drew the little silver cross from her bosom, "has never left me, and has been my charm and deliverer of my honour when all hope of my deliverance seemed gone. And thou hast been happy, Maria?"

"Very happy, my darling," returned her friend, "longing to hear of you and Abba, but could obtain no news of you. Your little letter and the feather reached me safely, and I have them still at home. And I wrote a reply to you, Zóra, and my brother gave it to Abbas Khan, for I was able to write that the Queen had ordered Abba and you to be sent to her, and that he would be

restored to his old rank; and I knew you would like to hear the good news from me, Zóra. But we had no reply, and then I heard of the Nawab's ill-treatment of you, and that you had escaped, and the Queen thought you might come direct to her."

"And I would have done so had I heard from Meeah," said the old man; "but I soon learned he had reached the city, and what could I have done alone?"

"Yes," observed the Padré, "we were more than a month detained on the road, as Abbas Khan's horse fell, and his wound opened again. He had a severe return of the fever, and I feared for his life. Nor did he stay when he arrived; after the combat with the Abyssinian champion, whom he slew, the Queen sent him to the army, and I hear he has returned to-day."

"Yes, and we have seen him," said Zóra; "and he brought us here. And thou art with the Queen, Maria?" she continued.

"I am with both of them, Zóra; but chiefly, by desire of Queen Chand, with the Queen Taj-ool-Nissa, whom my brother hath restored to health, and she is now strong and well. It is such a change, Zóra, and we laugh, and say the King will not know the miserable wife he left. And she has grown very dear to me, and loves to talk of you, who, she says, must be her sister. Come, shall we go to Queen Chand, she will be vexed with me if I take you not?"

"But I must change these clothes, Maria; it is not fitting for me to appear before her with these Fakeer's garments."

"On the contrary, child, she will love thee the more, and honour thee for wearing them. See, Abba, I am carrying off Zóra already," she continued, "and my brother will be security for me that I bring her back safely."

It was a strange thing to Zóra to feel herself guided through the intricate passages and corridors of the huge palace, and to see the strange deference and respect shown to Maria by all the eunuchs and Mámas on duty. At length they reached the entrance to the private apartments of the Queen Dowager, and after a brief colloquy with the eunuchs at the door, were admitted, and led to the Queen's seat by one of the women in attendance.

"Thou art welcome, Maria," she said, kindly; "but who is this thou hast brought with thee?"

"It is Zóra, your Majesty, of whom I have so often spoken. She would have taken off her Fakeer's dress; but I said I was sure she had better come as she was."

"And you were right, child. I welcome thee in the name

of the King, thee and thy grandfather. By the blessed Prophet, how lovely thou art : come hither and embrace me."

What idea Zóra had previously entertained of a real Queen it is difficult to say : something very awe-inspiring, no doubt, and magnificent ; but at the sight of the slight girlish figure and plain muslin dress of the great Queen whose praises were in every one's mouth, and who had held the power of the whole kingdom, Zóra became assured, and advanced to kiss the Royal lady's feet, and embrace her as she desired.

"Power of God!" cried the Queen as, having embraced Zora, she took both her cheeks in her hands and turned them alternately to the light, and looked into her soft glowing eyes; "Power of God! she is lovely, indeed, even in this poor dress. But thou hast not taken the vows, Zora?"

"No, my Queen, not yet; but when my grandfather was exalted in rank at Gulburgah I would have done so, but for a worthy lady of Golconda, who would not allow me."

"And she was right, child," returned the Queen ; "such vows only belong to widows and devotees ; but thou, may God forgive the thought, art neither one nor other; and if the blessing of Chand Beebee avail aught, she will live to see thy children about thy knees;" and, stretching forth both her hands, she placed them upon Zóra's head, praying for her welfare. Then Zóra sat down and told her what had befallen her since the time that Osman Beg carried her off, and the escapes she had had, particularly the last. How her grandfather attained the rank of Wallee ; and, in short, all the story we know up to the events of the morning.

"Remember that thou art my guest," said the Queen, as she dismissed Zóra ; "and thou shalt want for nothing. Perhaps," she added, "thou mayest be required to-morrow at the durbar, for Osman Beg hath arrived in custody, and there may be need of thy evidence, should he deny what is alleged against him. Thou wilt not be afraid of the King's presence and the durbar?"

"I am only a poor weak girl," said Zóra, casting down her eyes ; "but I have never yet been ashamed before God or man, and have no reason to fear the King or the durbar. But I have forgiven the Nawab freely. I have no claim upon him or against him; I have left all to the good Alla to judge between us. Yet, lady, had not my poor friends Runga and Burma Naik, whom I have known since I was a child, rescued me, I had surely been despoiled of my honour, and become an outcast. Now, blessed be the

Lord, I can stand before my lord the King, or you, gracious lady, without shame, or a thought of shame. Forgive me that I speak so freely, lady; but thou art as a mother to me, and my tears and my thoughts well up together without restraint. I know none of the manners of a court, for hitherto I have been secluded, and my speech may appear curt and abrupt; but my thoughts are not so—indeed, indeed, they are as a child's before its mother."

"Thy speech is good courtly Persian, at which I marvel, child," returned the Queen, "and thou needest not be ashamed of it, Zóra; and thy fearlessness doth thee honour. Yes, I will be thy mother truly; and though thou mayest have forgiven thine enemy, the State hath not, and it is not seeming that such acts as Osman Beg's should be passed by unnoticed. Now depart, both of ye, for I hear the kettledrums from the city, and I have much to do ere the King enters. Bid thy grandfather eat something and be ready, for I have no doubt he will be sent for soon after His Majesty arrives."

As they passed the entrance to the young Queen's apartments, Maria asked whether they might be admitted; but it was too late; the Queen was in the bath, and her attiring would scarcely be finished before the King arrived. Then they went down to the old man and his friend, whom they found deeply engaged in the discussion of the young Queen's ailments; and in the Padré's treatment of the case the old physician heartily agreed. Zóra delivered the Queen's message, and after a bath, which Ahmed had prepared, the Wallee's costly robe of honour and his crown were put on him. Zóra had changed her tunic for one of her simple woman's dresses, and they sat enjoying pleasant converse in regard to the past, while the salvoes of cannon, braying of trumpets, and loud nobat music playing on the terrace above, announced to them the arrival of the King.

Nor had they to wait long. Another salute from a battery of cannon before the Hall of Audience announced that he had taken his seat; and two of the gold mace-bearers in waiting arrived to request the attendance of His Holiness Luteef Shah Wallee as soon as possible. And then the old man rose, and, led by Zóra, whom he declared must guide him, passed by the lower corridors into the great hall. It was a strange sight to the nobles and commanders assembled there, to see the venerable man led by the simply, not to say coarsely, dressed girl to a seat apart from the rest, and near the group of holy men who had already taken their places. All rose in deference to the new comer, whose rank was indeed superior to that of any there; but he was spared the diffi-

culty of performing any act of reverence to the King himself, who, rising, went to him, while Zóra fell back under charge of one of the mace-bearers, an elderly eunuch, who took care of her; but she could see and hear perfectly whatever passed.

"We have sent for thee, illustrious Syud," said the King, as soon as silence was enforced—for the murmur of astonishment and pity had been loud and full of emotion—"to do an act of justice, which shall mark this happy day with a deed peculiar to itself. We had heard of the illustrious Syud before from Abbas Khan, who was for a time at Juldroog, and we had vowed to send for him. But, lo! as if by a miracle, or the direct interposition of the Most High, as we entered the city gate, we found him present before us. In the humble garb of Fakeers he and his granddaughter appeared by the wayside, and he fell at our horse's feet. The just and Almighty Alla had, by a strange course of circumstances, guided them to our feet, not as they were in their exile, but with increased glory and honour; for at Gulburgah the Prince Geesoo Duráz, with other princes and learned doctors of Islam, had conferred upon him, in regard to his power over men's minds, his learning, and piety, the spiritual rank of Wallee; and as such, we ourselves, as we vowed, present him to you, O friends and brothers in the faith, and pray you to do him reverence, as we ourselves do, in the presence of ye all; for the Lord hath brought to us in honour one whom our ancestor Ibrahim—may peace be on his memory!—blinded and cast out to exile, where he was forgotten and might have died, but for the aid of Him in whose service his life had passed."

Then many wept. Many who had known the old man in his prosperity, and thought him dead, pressed forward with tears and quivering features to grasp his hand once more, and kiss his feet; while cries of "Deen! Deen! A miracle! a miracle! May the saint live in peace and honour!" rose from all parts of the vast hall, and were taken up without with an enthusiasm which spread among the people even to the far ends of the city; and men saluted each other with the message of peace and the blessing of God, and the cry, "The sin of the State has been removed, let us be thankful."

When the tumult had subsided, the King, standing on the step of the throne, cried again with a loud voice, and said: "Know all men, and brothers in Islam present, that before food or water hath passed our lips to-day, we freely and entirely revoke the cruel sentence passed on the illustrious Syud Ahmed Ali, now Syud

Luteef Shah Wallee. We implore, in the name of our ancestor, forgiveness for the shame and pain he hath endured for forty years, and pray him to intercede with Alla the Most High, and His holy messenger, to wipe out this sin, and remove it for ever from us and our people. We further establish this our illustrious saint in all the possessions and estates which were granted before ; and we give, in addition to these, the pergunna of Kokutnoor, the scene of his child's delivery from violence. So let it be. Ameen ! Ameen!" Nor was a soul present who did not cry "Ameen ! Ameen !"

"Zóra ! Zóra !" cried the old man, who was trembling with excitement, and feeling about with his hands, "raise me up and support me, else I cannot speak. Zóra, the Lord hath won the victory for us, and there is no longer aught hid from thee, O my child. Let her come to me, Sir, for I need her aid ;" and there was a way opened for her, and he felt the soft warm hand steal into his, whilst her gentle "I am with thee, Abba," assured him. A strange sight was it to all that gorgeous assembly ; the venerable old man leaning on the shoulder of the slight girl. He, clad in his rich saint's robe, and his crown with which he had been crowned ; Zóra in her humble dress of soosi, and her plain muslin scarf now covering her face. But she was calm and dignified, and her modest self-possession struck those who saw her with wonder and admiration.

Then the old man stretched forth his hands and blessed the King, and the Queen who sat above, and all the people. "What can I say, my King?" he cried; "what can I say? My poor speech is dumb, but my heart goeth forth to thee and thine, and to all present who behold me. As I came hither, O King, I rested at Gogi, and distributed Fatchas at all thy ancestors' tombs ; but my heart was hot and hard and sore within me, and I was about to pass King Ibrahim's tomb, when God sent me a rebuke by the mouth of this poor child : 'Forgive him,' she cried, 'forgive him ; go not away from this place till thou hast forgiven him ;' and I kneeled down by his tomb, struck by remorse, and bared my head, and cast dust upon it, and cried, 'I forgive thee, O Royal master, all thou didst to me, and may it be forgiven to thee in the day of judgment.' And my heart was softened, and I was accepted at Gulburgah because I preached peace to the people, as, Inshalla, I will do here, and there will be no more war or trouble. And now, O King, bid me depart home to rest, for I am old, and the events of this day have overpowered me."

Then the King ordered the ushers to bring a robe of honour,

and he put it on the old man with his own hands, and hung a valuable string of pearls round his neck, to serve as prayer beads, while the people around the hall still cried blessings on them; and Zóra heard voices in the Queen's balcony crying, "Ameen! Ameen!" with, as she thought, Maria's balcony blending with them, and sobbing too. While she led her grandfather back towards their apartments, Zóra hitherto had been able to repress her emotion, but finding Maria already there, she fell on her neck and wept passionately. She felt not only thankful for the honour accorded to Abba, but for what spoke to her heart more deeply and fondly, that Abbas Khan, and a noble old officer, whom she supposed to be his uncle, had been looking at her all the time. Nay, had she not heard their cries of joy and congratulations rising high above all others! And, late in the day, Meeah brought his uncle, and they kissed the old man's feet, and delivered the King's command that he should attend the great durbar on the morrow at noon. But Zóra had retired; she dared not look on them.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRIAL.

SOMEWHAT before noon on the following day the tall, burly figure of a man, who wore a dress of red cotton cloth, advanced slowly over the short turfy sward which lay beneath some huge adansonia trees in the fort. They were situated at some little distance from the gate of the citadel, by themselves, with no buildings near them, for the spot was considered impure and unholy, being, in fact, the usual place of execution in Beejapoor. A few persons were following him, and as he stopped and seated himself in the shade of one of the trees, some of those who had gathered round him began to question him as to what was to happen, for the executioner rarely made his appearance in his official costume unless some event were to follow.

"Who is it to-day, Khan Sahib?" asked one of the bystanders, with an expressive jerk of his head. "Who is to be sent to Paradise or to Hell? Nothing has happened for a long time past, but now the King has come again, thy hands will be full of work."

"Yes, brothers," returned the grim functionary; "while Queen Chand was in authority, there was no business. She is a great deal too kind and compassionate, and she cheated me out of one fellow who was bigger than I, and the greatest bully and villain in Beejapoor, by letting that brisk young fellow, Abbas Khan, kill him. Now I should like to have slain that devil, because he was too mean for the young Khan to meddle with, and he was always mocking me and scoffing at my sword, which, he said, was nothing in comparison to his 'kussab,' as he called it, which I ought to have had also, but the Kotwal has taken it. Now look, friends, can anything be more beautiful than this?" and, rising, he drew from its scabbard a broad-bladed sword, rather broader at the point than at the hilt, with a point nearly square, with some, to him, strange-looking letters upon it, which he believed to be a charm. The motto, indeed, was—

"Inter arma silent leges,"

and the sword had been forged in Germany. "All I know is, friends, that the blade is a true 'Allemagne;' and though it is as sharp as any razor, and I got Daood Sahib, the King's armourer, to retouch the edge to-day, there will not be even a notch in it when I have done my work, and not a cloud on its fair polish. Ah, sirs, that 'kussab' of the Abyssinian's is a brutal weapon, to be used but by main strength; whereas this, my Allemagne, requires only skill, and when any great person is made over to me, I use it and no other."

"Then it is some great person, Khan Sahib, who will go to judgment to-day?"

"Nay, friends, I know not," returned the executioner. "Some one belonging to the Prince Ismail's affair was brought from the south in a palanquin which was fastened up; and I know pretty well, when Hyat Khan sends me word to go to the trees and remain there, what that means. Now, go away, all of ye, for no one must see this put into its scabbard, lest an evil glance fall on it. My art is vain, unless the edge be keen and firm. Away with ye all, I would be left to my prayers and meditations. When ye see the palanquin come out of the gate yonder, ye can return if ye will, and see what I do." And when all around him had gone, the man put the blade of his sword to his forehead and chest reverently, made a salaam to it, and slowly and carefully replaced it in its richly embroidered velvet scabbard; and as the muezzins of the neighbouring mosques sang the mid-day call to prayer, spread his waist-belt

on the green sward, and performed his devotions, for the executioner was a devout man, careful in the stated observances of his faith.

The citadel was now a busier scene than when Queen Chand acted as Regent in the absence of the King. There were so many more dignitaries to be received, so much relating to the army to be arranged, so many rewards and dresses of honour to be distributed, that the approaches to the palace were always crowded. This did not affect our friends in the least, as they were not only pleasantly secluded, but at such a distance from the exciting crowds and turmoil, that they saw none of it, and heard only a little. At the council of the night before, all the public accounts for the period of Queen Chand's administration, which had been prepared beforehand, were read to the King, and duly audited. Many new patents of nobility as rewards for service, and grants of estates, were ordered to be drafted, Syud Luteef Shah Wallee's among the number. And we are glad to record also, that not only Abbas Khan, now created Khan Bahadoor, and commander of five thousand, but Runga Naik was received into the lower grade of nobility, and created lord of twenty villages near his own ancestral estate of Korikul, and was to receive a dress of honour in full Court. Assuredly his service had not been in vain, while other rewards, in proportion to their merits, were allotted to his brave followers. But all these were minor points; the business assigned to the morrow was of a much more important nature, for as they sat in the council hall, Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, announced to the King that Osman Beg, the Governor of Juldroog, had arrived as a prisoner, and asked how he should be disposed of. The Queen Chand, who was sitting beside her nephew, said, "Son, I claim thy attention to this case first, for it is of grave importance to many that the truth should be made manifest to all, and justice be done. We would have seen to it ourselves when you were absent, but we thought thou shouldst decide upon it. It is a painful case, but justice must be done."

"Certainly, and without favour, aunt. Yet why not by thee? Is there any power thou dost not share with me? Is there any order of thine to which I do not bow? Yet"—for the Queen was waving her hand in deprecation of his expressions—"yet, if thou wilt, I will be present with thee, and we will share the task together. Let the prisoner be well lodged and cared for, Khan Sahib," he continued to Hyat Khan; "let his arrival be announced to his father, who may visit him, and let him be present

to-morrow at the afternoon durbar, when we shall be at leisure."

And now the time had come. The King as he rose had received many persons of rank, and transacted his usual business with the Ministers. He then retired for awhile; but, after the noon-day prayer, had entered the great hall of audience, and, due proclamation having been made within and without, he took his seat on the Royal throne, which had now been properly arranged. This was, in fact, a broad, low, wooden stool, with cushions of rich velvet, with a back also of wood, both being covered with thin plates of gold, inlaid, especially the back and canopy, with very rare and valuable precious stones, arranged in ingenious patterns. Queen Chand sat by her nephew, on her usual seat or cushion of velvet, and dressed in her usual simple fashion; but the King, though he wore white muslin only, had a precious jewel in his turban, and a necklace of large diamonds and emeralds, which flashed brightly whenever he moved. Before him lay a light Court sword, in a purple velvet sheath. He looked younger, as indeed he was by three years, than Abbas Khan, who, with other officers of the private Court, stood rather behind and to one side of the Royal daïs, but he was of slighter make, while his features, though delicate, were of darker colour than those of Abbas Khan, whose complexion was almost ruddy.

A little lower, on the first broad step or platform of the daïs, sat the old Syud, Luteef Shah Wallee, in the place of honour nearest to the King and Queen; and just behind him, indeed touching him, the slight form of Zóra, dressed in her ordinary coarse garb, was seen covering her face as well as she could from the earnest and curious glances of those who were wondering, as before, at her presence among so large a company of men. Behind her was the priest, Francis d'Almeida, who cheered her every now and then; but his sister, for whom Zóra was longing, sat above in the Queen's balcony with the other ladies-in-waiting and servants. The hall itself appeared the same as on the first day we saw it, except that the dresses of the courtiers were not of a military character, but of simple white muslin, crossed by a baldrick of gold lace or tissue, which was intended to hold a sword; but such weapons were carried in the hand, while a knife or dagger with jewelled hilt was stuck into the muslin girdle.

When all the presentations had concluded, the King, having had silence proclaimed, spoke with a firm voice, and said,

"Listen, O ye nobles and Ministers of the State! Sundry accusations have been made against Osman Beg, son of the brave Sooltan Beg, and we have caused him to be present here, before us, before the law officers of the State, and before his equals and superiors in rank. Let no one, therefore, say that this investigation was held secretly, or otherwise than in the sight of the Lord on high, and the day-beams of justice. Let, therefore, Osman Beg be brought hither, and let him reply to these accusations."

The old Syud could not see him, we know, but he stood directly in front of Zóra as he entered, accompanied by a party of the Kotwal's guards, and proclamation was made by the Mohur that Osman Beg, Turcoman, stood before the throne. The prisoner then made a deep obeisance to the King and Queen, which was not returned by either, but to those assembled he made no gesture of salute. He looked round defiantly as he crossed his arms, and then, letting them drop to his sides, again saluted the King slightly, and said with a firm voice, "I am present, O King, to hear any accusation."

At the sound of his well-remembered tones Zóra shuddered, for the events of the last night she had seen him were too fresh in her memory to be forgotten. But it was not a shudder of fear, it was rather a repellent action as against a foul reptile, and her cheeks flushed, and her tiny white teeth were set as if in resolution.

Then the chief Kazee spoke from his seat, and said, "This is a case of treachery, O King, against thee, and thy person, kingdom, and security. These letters were found on the person of the Abyssinian slain in the combat of ordeal, and are addressed to Elias Khan, who died in battle. Osman Beg, in the name of the King, I ask thee if these are truly thine own; look at them."

Osman Beg was not allowed to touch them, but they were held near his face and turned in every possible direction. There were many of them, the date and purport of each being read aloud by a scribe present.

What could he do or say? the writing was sometimes his own, sometimes that of his confidential scribe. All the seals were his, and corresponded exactly with that he wore on his finger as a ring. He appeared to become weary of these documents being read, and handed about to receive the criticisms of others; and, with an impatient exclamation, for which he was reproved by the ushers, and admonished to be more respectful, he said, "Do not trouble yourself, Kazee Sahib, the letters are all mine; I deny them not."

"Then I will read one, only one, for His Majesty to hear," was the reply; and, standing up, the Kazee selected one and read it so that all could hear. It was to Elias Khan, stating that the Padré at Moodgul, Dom Diego, had agreed to all conditions; that three thousand Europeans were ready at Goa; and that when Eyn-ool-Moolk was prepared he should deliver over the fort to any officers they might send, when he would join them; and, having overpowered Abbas Khan's detachment, they would march rapidly upon Beejapoor, put Chand Beebee to death, and take possession of the treasury and the capital; while another party, led by himself or Elias Khan, should pursue the King and bring him to Beejapoor, or execute him in camp, as might be most expedient.

The Kazee could read no more, for there arose a shout in the assembly of "Let the traitor die! Send for the executioner! Away with him!"

But Osman Beg turned in defiance to them all. "Dogs!" he cried, "all this would have been, and more, had Eyn-ool-Moolk not been slain, as Elias Khan was, by treachery. Ay! and ye know it, one and all of this assembly. What I have done, I have done; and what has happened is my fate. Yes, if ye wish to know what the Padré at Moodgul did, and wanted to do, get some one to read his letters. He was a brave fellow that, and would have struck in for us. Very different from the other, who, I hear, is in Beejapoor; he was too great a coward to be a traitor."

"He confesses before the King, and before God and men, that he was prepared to do all that is written in these letters by his own hand; and the law is that the punishment is death," cried the Kazee.

"My lord! my King!" cried Abbas Khan, as he saw the King was about to speak; and had he declared judgment, there would have been no delay in execution, "I cry for mercy and pardon. When I was ill and near to death in Juldroog he was kind to me; he not only gave me protection, but attended me as a brother. My King, he is my cousin, and we have played together when we were children; nor was my King absent. For the sake of his noble father, spare his life!"

Osman Beg answered not a word. He stood, as he had done hitherto, with his arms crossed defiantly, looking now to the Kazee, now to the King, and now to his cousin, apparently defying all.

"Of a truth thou deservest death, Osman Beg. Thou wouldst have, by thine own writing, put my venerable aunt, beloved of all" —and the people cried "Ameen! Ameen!"—"to a cruel death. Thou wouldst have slain me and thy cousin, Abbas Khan; and thou wouldst have prolonged war and misery in our kingdom. But it pleased Alla, the just and merciful, to frustrate all thy plots, and to bring them to naught; and for the sake of thine aged father, who fought beside Humeed Khan in the last desperate fight, and, when others fled, refused to fly with them, and still rallied men round his standard, we, in the name of the Most High, whose Regent we are over this people, give thee thy life; for He hath spared His servant through fields of carnage; and we would not, on the first day of taking our seat on the throne of our ancestors, stain it with blood. But thou art disgraced; thy rank and thy estates are confiscated; and thou canst stay here no longer. If thou, Osman Beg, returnest under any pretence, remember, the Kazee's just sentence shall at once be carried out. Hyat Khan, see that he be removed and banished, conducted ten coss beyond the frontier, and let to go whither he will."

Osman Beg did not move. He glared around him with defiance still, and, looking at the King, cried out, "I go, as thou wilt have it, King Ibrahim; nor will I return to disgrace and dishonour. But, before I depart, I claim justice at thy hands, justice which thy meanest subjects may claim from thee. Give me my wife. Take honour, rank, estates, what thou wilt, but give me my wife whom I see sitting there with the Dervish of Juldroog. There!" he shouted, as he pointed his finger at Zóra; "there! she is mine by the law, and I claim her under the law. Give her to me and I depart, and leave only my curse behind me."

Then arose another shout, more fierce, more prolonged than the first. "He has forfeited clemency; he has insulted the holy saint. Let him die!"

"Is it so, Huzrut?" said the King, addressing himself to the old Syud, as soon as silence had been proclaimed; "is it so? Speak, or let the child speak. Fear not, maiden," he continued, in a soothing voice to Zóra; "thou art in God's presence, and the King's; speak as thou wouldst do, and wilt do, in the day of judgment."

"I have no complaint against him, my lord," replied the Syud. "For what he did to my child when we were under him at Juldroog, he will answer to God, who mercifully protected and delivered my child and me from cruelty and insults. All that is past

now, and we are here in safety; and, for my own part, he is now forgiven. I say, then, leave him to the Lord's will. Ask her, she will not be ashamed to say the truth, even in the midst of thousands of men. Rise, then, Zóra, and the Lord will give thee strength, my child. Thou art a Syud, and a Syud's honour trembles not before righteous judges. Men will not so much as look at thee, child; for a Syud's honour is as precious to them as it is to me and thyself."

"Fear not, Zóra-bee," said the King, gently, "we are all thy grandfather's friends and thine; but Osman Beg hath demanded thee as his wife, and should have his reply from thyself, for thy honour's sake. Speak, and fear not."

Zóra had trembled with shame and indignation as Osman Beg made his demand, at once so appalling and disgraceful to her. Her breast heaved with sobs, her eyes grew hot, and scalding tears fell from them over her burning cheeks. She felt as though she would have choked and died. But the girl's undaunted courage did not fail her even in that dire extremity, and the solemn adjuration of her grandfather and the gentle words of the King stimulated her and assured her; and hastily brushing away the tears which still glistened on her cheeks, and murmuring a silent prayer, she rose to her feet with a calmness she had little expected, and a kind of dread silence fell on the assembly at a scene so novel and so strange. Above, in the Queen's balcony, she heard a low clapping of hands, which gave her courage; and the Queen Dowager's encouragement of "Fear not, daughter, no harm can come to thee," was timidly acknowledged by a grateful look and reverence.

As she cast her eyes around, she saw that men's faces were averted from her, and many heads bowed down; but opposite to her stood Abbas Khan, his features quivering with excitement, and his eyes as if striving to catch hers and give her strength; while near the centre of the hall stood Osman Beg, glaring on her defiantly, with a horrible expression of anticipated triumph, which thrilled through her, but from which she did not blench.

Those who saw her remembered for years afterwards the simple, modest figure, dressed in clothes hardly better than those of a peasant, and the beautiful but excited face of the maiden. And those who did not dare to look on her, heard only the tones of her soft musical voice, which penetrated to every ear, and, indeed, to every heart of the many who heard it.

"Before the Lord God, and ye who hear me," she said, slowly, "I am not his wife; and I have witnesses that I am not. I see the Moolla of Juldroog, who has known me from my birth, sitting yonder. Let him speak, if he be allowed." And as the King assented and signed to him, the old man rose.

"It is the truth, O King and brethren. I was summoned before the Nawab one evening to perform a nika between him and Zóra-bee, which I thought strange. But I found the whole affair a mockery, and a shameful violation of all law and custom. Zóra was imprisoned under charge of two women from Moodgul, and I called for her in vain. Osman Beg dare not produce her. There was no one to represent her. And to expect me, a humble priest of God, to perform a mock marriage to cover his violence, was an insult to me; and I rose and left the assembly, every respectable person in it accompanying me and guarding me. Next day messengers were sent in every direction to obtain a Moolla, but none arrived until Zóra-bee and the old Syud had escaped. There was no marriage, O King and brethren; and he lies before God who says there was."

"He lies!" cried Osman Beg, furiously; "he lies. She, standing there shamelessly, had come to me before, and what I did was to save her shame—the shame of a holy Syud, whom I respected."

This pitiless speech affected the assembly deeply. The Moolla's evidence had carried conviction to every heart; but was this terrible accusation true? Some even seemed to lose faith in the girl, but her faculties were now strung to the highest tension, and her spirit seemed to rise with the increasing danger of her situation, as she cried,—

"He says I am shameless, and that I came to him of my own will. Let his slave Jooma, who stands yonder, say what happened."

Jooma, who with other witnesses had been brought from Juldroog, being now called by the usher, stepped forward and made a humble prostration; then rose, and joining his hands, said,—

"Let my master do me no harm, O King, and I will speak the truth."

"No one can harm thee," replied the Kazee for the King. "Speak truly, and without fear."

"He," and he pointed to Osman Beg, "had often asked me to bring Zóra-bee to him; but I had played with the child, and gathered flowers for her, and I always refused; and he threatened

me. One day he ordered two other slaves like me to bring her, and when they refused, he drew his sword and slew one, and a eunuch, who has run away, killed the other; and their bodies were flung into a hole in the rocks, and are there still. Their blood was wet on the rocks when he sent for me, and he had his bloody sword in his hand. 'Go, and bring Zóra,' he said, 'else thou shalt die!' And I was afraid; God forgive me for being afraid, and I bowed my head, and said, 'On my head and eyes be it.' And I took another slave with me, who knew nothing about it; and we went to watch for the girl, and saw her come to the bastion she loved, with Ahmed. Then we went down to them, and I sent Ahmed away on a false message. Zóra was never afraid of me. When Ahmed was gone, I seized her, and she screamed; and I tied her up with my waist-band, and we took her to the palace in a black blanket; and I carried her in my arms, and laid her down on a bed where the Mámas were. Oh, my lord King, I did wrong," continued the man, blubbering, as he cast himself on the ground; "and if Zóra is to die, kill me also, for it was I that did all the mischief. Not anyone else but me, because he said he would slay me as he had slain the others. Their bones are in the hole, and the new Killadar tried to get them out, but he could not. Ask him."

"As if a master could not slay an insolent slave whom he had bought with his own money," cried Osman Beg, scornfully. "And can such as he be believed against a true Moslem's word? I say he lies, there was no force; and she came when I sent him to call her."

It was well for Zóra, then, that Osman Beg's cook, who, we may remember, had also been brought. She now stepped forward, and said, simply, "Jooma speaks the truth; Zóra-bee was brought into the harem tied up in a blanket, and I saw Máma Luteefa and her servant untying her. I went from the kitchen to look, as every one was saying the Nawab had had Zóra carried off, and was going to marry her; and I was ordered to cook pilao for the company. And, for the matter of that," continued the old woman, as she looked round confidently, as many cries of "Shahbash! well done!" fell on her ears, "every one in the palace knew it; every one in the fort. Why, I could name a score, yea, a hundred, who knew it too. Why don't they speak out like me? His wife, indeed! She was as much married to him as I was; and she is as pure now as when she was born. Does the Nawab think any one could have come to him without my knowledge? Shookr! he

should be beaten on the mouth with a shoe for all he is a Nawab. Ask Goolab-bee, the pán woman; she was with Zóra and the two Mámas of Moodgul all the night Zóra was carried off by Runga Naik, and kept her safely as her own child."

"We need hear no more, my friends," said the King. "For my own part I am satisfied. Yet I ask her once more if she hath aught to adduce?"

"Only these papers," she said, timidly, "which my grandfather told me to preserve. This is the letter he wrote, and sent by Máma Luteefa to Korikul. It bears his seal, and is in his own hand; and he says he will come to us and have the marriage done. The second is the deed he gave to the robber who had instructions to carry me off from Kukeyra, and who was killed; and with it is also the letter he wrote to the Kazee of Kembavee, asking him to come and marry me to him. Oh, my King and my lord, why should he have selected me, a poor orphan and a Fakeer, for this persecution, from which the Lord saved me many times? Even at Kokutnoor I had not escaped from the robbers but for the heavy rain that the Lord sent. If I had been guilty and shameless, as he declares I was, would the Lord have helped me? If I had been married to him, as he declares, why ask for me again? Why ask the good Kazee of Kembavee to marry him to me? I am ashamed to speak so much," she continued, timidly, "but her honour is dearer to a Syud's child than her life. I had not thought to complain, and I make no complaint. I have forgiven him freely, as I forgive him now; and I would have been silent, but when he said I was shameless, could I be silent? I have no father, no mother, my lord, but you and the Queen. I am but a poor orphan crying to you both for justice before the Lord."

The reading of the several papers produced had, to all appearance, silenced Osman Beg, and his head drooped on his chest despairingly; yet still, beaten back on every point, he made one more last effort.

"If I produce the Moolla who married me," he said, scornfully, "will ye be content? Stand forth, Moolla Aboo Bukr, and speak for me."

"I, your slave, will speak the truth, master," he said, removing the false beard he wore; and then prostrating himself before the King, cried, "May I be your sacrifice, O King, but I am not even one of the faithful; I am only a Hindoo, a poor buffoon, who frequents marriages and festivals, and tries to amuse people. The

night Zóra-bee was to be married, and when thy servant found the Moolla walked away in a huff, and we sat looking at each other like owls, I clapped on my beard and wagged it, and said, 'Good people, let me marry them;' and, God pardon me, I tried to recite ——"

"Enough! enough! this is no time or place for thy buffoonery," cried the King, who, however grave the occasion, could hardly keep his countenance. "Away from the presence. Is the Khan mad, mother, that he tried this last resource?"

"I know not," said the Queen; "but I long to embrace that brave child, who shall be as a daughter to me henceforth." The Queen had been sobbing as she sat, and her face was wet with tears. "Come to me, Zóra," she said gently to her, "and I will acknowledge thee before them;" and the girl, who had sat down weeping tears which soothed and relieved her, whispered to her grandfather that the Queen needed her, and rising, passed behind the throne to the Queen Dowager's seat; and the Royal lady, placing her hands on the girl's head, rose up, and said to all present, as Zóra stood beside her, "This child the Lord hath preserved from danger and ruin, and she is pure, and a holy Syudanee. She is an orphan, moreover, and her revered grandfather, Syud Luteef Shah Wallee, is old and infirm. Therefore, we, our lord the King and myself, adopt her as our daughter, and will marry her honourably in her own rank. As for that man," and she pointed to Osman Beg, "my lord the King will deal with him as he deserves." And then once more the great hall rung with cries of "Justice is done! May Chand Beebee live a hundred years!" "Hear the gracious words she speaks!" and the like; till, at a signal from the King, the usher again enforced silence. But before he could speak, an aged man, whose figure was still firm and erect, rose, and advanced to the foot of the throne, where, after prostrating himself and kissing the King's feet, he took the sword he had carried in his hand, and laying it in his muslin handkerchief, offered it to the King. It was Adam Khan, Turcoman, the father of Osman, who thus spoke in broken accents,—

"Say no more, my lord and my King. Spare me, the aged servant of thy house, one who was serving Ibrahim Adil Shah when the venerable Syud suffered. Say no more, for my honour's sake, for I have fought and bled for thee. I speak not for him, my unworthy son; but I admit his guilt against you, my lord, and my Queen, and against that poor orphan, whose father served under me, and died in battle. Yea, my lord, and my Queen, I admit the

guilt freely, and ye have been witness to its proof. So justice has been done before the Lord, and though I suffer, I rejoice. Now, therefore, my King, if thou hast given this wretch his life, let us go. I have no tie to life, nor children, nor wife, nor any one. Let us go, then, to Mecca, where he may pray for pardon to the Messenger, who will accept his penitence. The ship from Choule is about to sail, and we will depart, and our shame and dishonour may be forgiven. But take this poor memorial of the service of one who hath been faithful, whom thy Royal mother knoweth to be faithful. I leave to thee the estates I hold, but, with permission, all my command with the horses and men I give to Abbas Khan, nephew of the brave Humeed Khan."

"Peace, father!" said his son; "humble thyself no more. One more chance of justice is open to all. Hath this girl any champion to undertake her defence? Men's tongues are swayed by a breath of opinion, but sharp steel is the true arbiter. Again, therefore, I claim her as my wife, let who will be her champion."

Then a number of fiery young men started up; but among them all Abbas Khan was the calmest, stateliest, and most remarkable. "I owe my life to that poor orphan," he said, "and I should be unworthy if I refused her aid in her need. Listen, Osman Beg; though I have partaken of thy hospitality, thou must accept me in the ordeal if thou persist in claiming her."

"I accept!" cried Osman Beg. "On foot or horseback, with armour or without, I claim thee, and thee only. The day is yet young, the field where the Abyssinian died is open. Come! thou art welcome; and if thou refuse, thou art a coward and a liar!"

"Silence!" cried the King, angrily; "an honourable man can only fight with one of equal honour. Thou, Osman Beg, art one whose life hath been far-famed for treachery; whose honour hath yielded before falsehood, and become a thing for honest men to spit on. Away! go to the holy Kibleh with thine honoured father; haply the Lord may give thee grace to repent. Champion! nay, she needeth none; hath not the Lord been her champion in preserving her from thee? Hyat Khan, remove him; see that he is guarded and escorted with his father to the ship for Mecca."

"It is my destiny," murmured Osman Beg, as he retreated. "Must I go? But I will not cease to pursue her while I have life; and my revenge will only sleep, only sleep."

"And now, sirs, we have detained you long," said the King; "but we dismiss ye with our thanks, and grateful to the Lord,

also, that He hath manifested His justice in the protection of an orphan child."

Till the Queen rose, Zóra had been sitting beside her, but her mind was in a strange condition. What she had said, how the people had clapped their hands and shouted for her; how she had escaped from the deadly danger, worse than death, which had threatened her; what the King and Queen Chand had said to her, of all this she knew very little; but when Meeah, as she loved to think of him, rose up, and before all the assembled people declared he was her champion, her heart swelled almost to bursting, and she could only look at him with wistful eyes, while her cheeks burned painfully and her breath came in gasps. Meeah! he was true; he had not forgotten the night watch. Meeah! he would have risked his life for her honour. Oh that she could throw herself at his feet and clasp his knees, and say—— Ah! what could she have said, but that she loved him, that she would die for him, if needs be.

She was anxious to be alone, to pray and thank God in her own simple fashion, to send Fatehas to all the saints' shrines; and pleading her duty to her grandfather, the good Queen, perceiving the girl was well nigh distraught, bid her go, and she would send for her presently. And Zóra, leading the old man forth, regained their apartments quietly. And when he was seated in his old place, and had drunk some cool sherbet, he drew her to him, and said, "Child, remember this day; 'tis the end of my Turreequt, except the last when the angel calls me; but it is the beginning of thine in honour and joy. When that youth spoke, my heart leaped towards him; and, if the Lord will, he may lead thee to eternal peace."

Zóra could not reply, her heart was too full; and how could she mention Meeah? Maria came in soon after, with her brother; and while the good Padré stayed with his old friend, Zóra and Maria withdrew to Zóra's apartment, and in a burst of softening tears, the girl's overcharged spirit was relieved. Never before had Maria heard the history of Zóra's abduction and escape, and she was amazed at the girl's endurance and bravery. Then Maria took her to the Queen Chand, who laid her head on her own bosom, and comforted her.

"Thou art my daughter, now," she said, "for thou art brave and true; and I will be to thee a mother, grateful that God hath sent me such a child to love, and to be beloved by. Nay, I will not take thee from thy Abba, for without thee he cannot

live; but I shall see thee daily, and there need be no reserve between us." Nor was there from thenceforth.

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Under the adansonian trees the executioner had sat waiting, until their broad shadows stretched across the sward and were becoming longer. At last a messenger came and said—

"Get up, O Khan, no one comes to thee to-day, and Hyat Khan bids thee go home."

"Hai! hai! alas! alas!" said the functionary, with a sigh. "And thou wert so sharp, my son," and he once more drew his weapon from its sheath. "He would never have felt it. Well, so let the King have mercy; and yet thy time will come again some day or other, O my son. Well, thou shalt be ready," and with a sigh he made a deep salaam to the glittering weapon, and, returning it to its sheath, covered the sword with his scarf, and walked slowly towards the city.

CHAPTER IV.

FREEDOM.

AND now there was rest and peace; but how different to that in the old fort, to which Zóra's mind often wandered. How different grew on her day by day, more and more. Instead of the dreamy, uneventful life she used to lead, there was now excitement and active employment. Her constant attendance on her grandfather never relaxed; and he was perhaps more exacting than before—partly on account of his increasing infirmity, and partly because of strange and new consciousness of increased dignity and importance which was growing upon him, and which was foreign to his naturally humble temperament. His devotional exercises, too, in which he was assisted by some of the priests of the city mosques, were much prolonged; and he was often weary and peevish, and on such occasions the presence of old Mamoolla and Ahmed only provoked him, and Zóra became indispensable. Had he not, also, been invited to preach in the Jooma mosque, where six thousand men of all ranks sat with the King to listen to him on the occasion of the King's first visit to that noble building, when he went to

return thanks for the close of the war? He knew that he had moved many hearts; for though he lauded patriotism and bravery in war, yet he dwelt more strongly and more earnestly on the blessings of peace, industry, sobriety, and devotion; and these were themes which flowed from his lips spontaneously and with fervid eloquence. Many men who listened then, and afterwards, thought him inspired; and whether he spoke in the rough Dekhani dialect, or in the softer Persian, he was equally impressive. Hundreds became his devoted followers, and I fear the burly high priest's influence decreased in proportion.

From the high priest issued the hardest doctrines of Islam; the most difficult metaphysical arguments that learned commentators had ever supplied. The learning and study they displayed were wonderful, and immeasurably exceeded that of the old Dervish; but they were hard to comprehend, and to the uninitiated utterly unintelligible, whereas those of our old friend were sweet and consoling, encouraging to good works and love to men, as well as to love to God. Hence there arose two factions, as it were, in the city, which on any and every occasion were ready to divide into opposing portions; and Luteef Shah Wallee was denounced as an heretical and misleading preacher, not belonging to any saintly family, who neglected to preach damnation to unbelievers, but sought to win them by kindness, which was contrary to the texts and doctrines of the blessed Korán; and thus, when he had expected peace, our old friend found strife, which as time passed grew more bitter.

But it was pleasant, nevertheless, after such services, to receive the visits of his friends. And even some of his contemporaries, Ekhlas Khan, the blind old minister, several of the physicians and lawyers, some of the local nobility, and men of learning, enrolled themselves among his disciples, and sat at his feet, enjoying the words which fell from his lips with true zest. And as to the common people, there were many likewise, but the majority still adhered to the old *régime*; and the precincts of the Chishtee Palace and cemetery, which were in the centre of the city outside the walls, were as crowded as usual. The Chishtee priest had, too, many subordinate ministers, who gathered in his revenues from vows, oblations, and performances of ceremonials in thousands of families; and the shrine was richly endowed besides by estates and charges on many collections of revenue. But our old friend had none of these, and desired none. All he received he gave away in charity to the poor at the great mosque, and sent to

other mosques in the city, and to the almshouse, and the public hospitals, and travellers' rest houses. And he had no ambition to do more; certainly none to become rich; for the King had enriched him far beyond his requirements, and collections from the estates were beginning to come in. What was he to do with them? He had no wants, for the ordinary allowance at the fort was sufficient for food and clothes, and the expense and maintenance of a household were unknown both to him and Zóra.

Zóra, too, had her separate duties, apart from those connected with her grandfather. Rising early, she frequently joined Queen Chand for the first morning prayer, and then assisted her by writing fair copies of the drafts she had made over night; and when Abba rose, she was informed of it, and was allowed to go to assist him. Sometimes she sang to the Queen the few things she knew, or did embroidery for her. And the Queen liked Zóra's beyond that of all her other maidens, and entrusted her with the finishing of a precious and costly piece in seed pearls on velvet, which was to be sent as an offering to Mecca, some of the most delicate parts of which had been done by herself. Sometimes, too, she read aloud, while the Queen worked, from such books as she had studied under her grandfather, and learned from him the proper rhythm and emphasis. And Zóra's ear was so correct, and her cadence so musical, that it was like a sweet song, or a chaunt, or a spirited declamation, as the subject required.

Every day, too, while the Queen took her noonday rest, Zóra's time was her own; and Maria came to her, and they sat under a great fig-tree which flourished in the little garden, and held sweet communion with each other, or worked. Zóra, though comparatively little time had passed, was not now the shy, simple child Maria had loved at Juldroog. She found the girl's character developed and strengthened by contact with the world without, and by the experience, rough and sad as it had been, that she had endured in the wild persecution of Osman Beg, and the society of those with whom she had come in contact since she had left the fort. Over and over again had Maria requested her to tell the story of her escape from Osman Beg's treachery and violence; and she could follow it all, from the seat on the well-remembered bastion, with the grand ravine and cataract before it, to the final scene of the trial, of which she had been a spectator from the Queen's balcony, and estimate with wonder and admiration, and with many a sympathetic tear and sob, the young girl's fortitude and endurance. She could estimate, too, Zóra's dread

that she might still, by some unknown chance, fall into this ruthless man's hands; and Maria would soothe and calm her, bidding her trust in the Lord, and in the powerful friends that had been given to her. The one was a humble Christian, the other a Mussulman girl. Yet, in the sympathy and love that united them, there was nothing wanting. Sometimes, too, they now spoke of "Meeah," for Maria could not but discern, from his behaviour at the trial, that the young man loved Zóra fondly, and even passionately; and Zóra would listen to the few words Maria said on the subject with a fond and even sad interest, hiding her burning face in Maria's bosom, with secret hope and yet with trembling dread. Her one hope in life lay with him, for Abba was declining in strength, and he was over-taxing a mind and frame which had been so long unexercised, and that she knew must bring with it the inevitable consequence of death. Till that time came she declared that not even Meeah should separate her from the fondly loved old man; and Maria could understand, however great the temptation, that her vow would not be broken.

But Abbas Khan himself was not free from embarrassment in regard to taking any formal step towards Zóra. Years ago, when his uncle was by no means so rich as he was at present, and his brother, Abbas Khan's father, had been only a Silladar, or owner of a few horses in the Royal Dekhani cavalry, his little son had been betrothed to the daughter of a comrade of the same rank as himself in the army, of Abyssinian descent, but whose estates rendered his daughter, Sukeena, a desirable connection in the consideration of many families of Beejapoor, notwithstanding the report that Sukeena-bee was very forbidding both in person and features. She was, indeed, both lame and deformed; and was in addition so ugly, that she was known by a sobriquet by no means complimentary. Sukeena's mother was descended from a Nubian family, which had again intermarried with Abyssinians. But it was not from this cause alone that Sukeena's appearance was forbidding; her father was a very plain and somewhat humpbacked man; her grandmother, the daughter of one of the Abyssinan noblemen, had been only too glad to dispose of a singularly ugly daughter to a respectable man, and gave with her a dower of property which, as he said, endowed the Lady Fyzun with a beauty more precious and more lasting than that of a pretty face. From this union had resulted one daughter only, the girl who had been betrothed in her early childhood to Abbas Khan.

Neither Humeed Khan, Abbas Khan's uncle, nor his wife, the

Lady Fatima, had been parties to this early betrothal. When it took place they were at a distance; but when the Lady Fatima returned to Beejapoor, her nephew's father and mother had both died. For a time, the Queen Chand had adopted the orphan boy, and he shared in the instruction of the young King; but afterwards Abbas Khan had returned to his uncle's house, and taken his place in the Royal service. Considering the connection which already existed by betrothment, it would have been impossible for the Lady Fatima to have avoided the Lady Fyzun and her daughter. Both husbands were absent at the war, with the King. Sukeena's father, notwithstanding his partial deformity, was, as is often seen to be the case, a man of immense strength and ever conspicuous bravery, and he had risen to a rank considerably higher than it was at the time of the old betrothal. In point, therefore, of social condition the families were pretty equal, though the Abyssinian lady claimed precedence in consequence of her descent from a long line of ministers and generals, who had attained rank and power in the days of the Bahmuny dynasty at Gulburgah and Beeder.

From the period of her return to Beejapoor, the Lady Fatima had been obliged to offer civilities to the Lady Fyzun, which, of course, included her daughter; and the Lady Fyzun was a woman not only of excessive pride, but of extremely sharp, disagreeable temper, and, moreover, very parsimonious. Her husband, poor man, was especially mild and good-natured; and if he could have managed it, would have got away as far as was possible from his wife at all times. But at a season like the present, when the whole army had returned from a campaign, and there seemed to be neither possibility nor probability of the renewal of war, Zyn Khan, for that was his name, was obliged to remain at home, and to submit to his wife's conduct and remarks with all the patience and equanimity he could command. After more than two years of respite, his trials recommenced the day of the King's triumphal entry.

The Lady Fyzun was, as I have already remarked, very economical. The house-steward and the clerks who kept the house accounts could never satisfy her as to the expenditure of the cook, or the daroghas of the kitchen and stables. She was at perpetual war with them. Too much butter, or meat, or onions and garlic, or vegetables, were surely used for cooking the domestic daily food. The horses ate too much grain and fodder; the slaves and eunuchs wore out their clothes too fast. In short,

these were, and had been, subjects of altercation for years, and were by no means worn out. Now the morning of the King's arrival was a fast day, though not one of a rigid character, and few, especially on an occasion like this, would have observed it at all; but Fyzun-bee had no idea of allowing laxity of religious observances. She kept the Rumzan and Mohorum with a positively fearful exactitude, and starved herself, her daughter, and her household to the very verge of endurance. On the other hand, on joyful anniversaries, when a liberal addition of savoury food was made to the daily allowance by every, even the poorest, housewife, Fyzun-bee's feast was of the smallest dimensions and humblest character. Sweetmeats were not made in the house of good sugar-candy and fresh butter, but ordered from the confectioners, who sent, according to order, the coarsest, and but little of them. In the pilao, the cook was restricted in the use of ghee, spice, and meat; camel and even buffalo flesh was used instead of good fat mutton; and the cook, who was really a mistress of her art, would, had she not been a slave, have no doubt sought a more liberal mistress in sheer vexation.

Zyn Khan had ridden with the King's throng of courtiers and officers in the entrance procession. He had attended the durbar, and had been thus detained till late in the day; he was, therefore, not only extremely tired, but hungry to boot; and though he expected no delicacies at home, yet he felt sure that there would be food at least, and perhaps the cook might do something special for him. He had left the durbar in company with his friends Humeed Khan and Abbas Khan, and at the gate of their mansion had parted with them. Then, as they separated, Humeed Khan had said to him, good humouredly, "If the fast is observed to-day in thy house, come to us, brother; nay, stay now if thou wilt, with a hearty welcome."

Now, though only at the gate, the fragrant scent of savoury food had already reached him, for it was to be a feast for many of the inferior officers and men of Humeed Khan's household troops, which would be a warranty that there were better dishes beyond that; and Zyn Khan's hunger increased, while his mouth fairly watered. But to eat in a stranger's house just after a long absence would be a positive affront to his wife, of whom he stood in awe, and he passed on to the reception that awaited him. Certainly all the servants were at their posts. There were trays of offerings, and lighted lamps waved over him; the women servants and eunuchs chaunted a discordant welcome; but his nose was regaled

by no savoury smell; and, on passing the door of the kitchen court, he looked in, and beheld the old cook and her two assistant girls sitting dolefully on the step of the kitchen itself; and as they got up and waved their arms towards him, cracking their knuckles against their cheeks, he returned the salute by crying out, "The peace of God on you, Máma Leila; I trust you have something good for your hungry master."

"On the contrary, my lord," returned the woman, with a spiteful accent; "no firewood and no food have been allowed me to-day, else thou shouldst have eaten well."

Zyn Khan was really angry. "No firewood and no food have been given Leila-bee to-day," he cried, regardless of the approach and salutation of his wife and daughter. "No food!" and I have this day ridden ten coss (twenty miles), and been out in the hot sun all the time, and attended the King's durbar, without a morsel to eat. And this is my welcome after two years' absence. Fyzun! art thou not ashamed, O wife?"

"I ashamed! I, the descendant of Princes and Ministers, ashamed of keeping the holy fast, and of the service of Alla, instead of thy greedy belly. Touba! Touba! As-tagh-fur-oolla! Shame, and God forbid that I should hear such words from the father of thy daughter Sukeena! No; there is no food and no fire in the house to-day for gluttons; let them meditate on the saints, and feed on spiritual food, like true men of Islam. Be satisfied, O Khan, that I, thy wife, and thy beloved daughter, are in the same condition as thyself, fasting for the love of Alla and the saints. Thou canst bathe and refresh thyself, for hot water is ready for thee in the bath, and I will see (for the expression of his face was far from amiable) and get some confection which may stay thy hunger till night."

"Till night!" groaned Zyn Khan; "till night! Is this how thy mother teaches thee, Sukeena-bee? I would not be thy husband, girl." These were the first words he had spoken to her, and as he uttered them he looked over the ungainly, crooked form, the sour, ugly features, and the really mean clothing of his daughter. In his heart he compared her to the simple, lovely girl he had seen with the old saint who had so mysteriously reappeared. "Were I Abbas Khan," he thought, "they might cut me in pieces ere I would consent to mate with one like Sukeena, while a girl like the saint's granddaughter was within possibility of attainment. No, if can never be. And what does it matter to Sukeena; her money will attract some one."

"What art thou saying, father?" asked his daughter. "Thy lips move, but no words come forth."

"I was saying," returned her father, bitterly, "that if thou hadst met me with a cheerful face, brought me a pleasant breakfast, and behaved thyself like a loving daughter, I should have patted thee on the head and become more reconciled to thy ugly face. Well! ugly it always was, and that is no fault of thine. Nay, do not cry; but two years have made it sour and forbidding, and all thy wealth would not reconcile it to constant companionship."

Then he got up suddenly, put the girl aside, and went into his bath. I am afraid matters there did not improve the good man's temper. The water had been hastily heated lukewarm, instead of hot; and it had been smoked with the smoke of cowdung cakes till, as the poor Khan said, it would take all the perfumes of a perfumer's shop to take the evil smell from him He took off his armour, however, and his heavy riding clothes, put on a light muslin suit, went out, and sat down in his accustomed place.

No one was there, but presently his wife appeared, leading a small procession, at the head of which was his daughter bearing a silver plate, and several women with others also covered.

"Spread the cloth," said the Lady Fyzun, "and put down the dishes. Now, Bismilla! Khan Sahib, eat thy fill, for it is consecrated to the Lord," she said with a sniff. "It was about to go forth to the shrine of the Chishtee saint, but I have saved some for thee."

"Bismilla!" he said, as a servant removed a cover, and he expected to find some delicate rice milk or vermicelli, with which he would have been content, hungry as he was; but instead, he saw three "julaybees," very old and leathery, and, moreover, much fly-blown, on the first plate; and on the next, two large coarse "luddoos," which smelt rancid, and were covered with dust, a few very dry hard dates, and two oranges of the peculiarly sour description used by dyers; and on the last, two shrivelled coarse plantains, bruised and black.

"Ul-humd-ul-Illa! Praise be to God!" he exclaimed, "that my wife and daughter worship the saints, although they need not send them stale sweetmeats and sour and rotten fruits. Do not deny these delicacies to holy men, lady wife; but for me they are much too good, and I must seek plainer food elsewhere," and having delivered this speech with a kind of grave mock solemnity, he took up his sword, tucked it under his arm, and walked away.

"If you are going to Humeed Khan's house to eat," cried his wife, not a whit abashed, "give my humble respects, and say, that when it may be quite convenient, I should like the matter of Sukeena-bee's marriage to be settled."

"Oh, mother!" cried the girl, when her father had departed, "I saw Meeah in the procession to-day, and he is as beautiful as Yoosuf. If I do not marry him I shall die."

I think it is very possible, if Zyn Khan had had a better reception at home, he would have made an attempt to carry this point. As it was, he arrived just as his friend Humeed Khan's cloth was being spread. Nothing was said but a welcome, and the hungry man sat down to a dinner of many savoury courses, which he enjoyed heartily, and felt truly grateful for. And after this, when the three men were alone, and pleasant fumes of fragrant tobacco were being inhaled, they discussed the subject of the marriage in a friendly manner.

"The last words my wife said to me were, that I should settle something about the marriage of your nephew and my daughter; and as we can talk it over in a friendly manner among ourselves, perhaps we had better make some arrangement."

"Well," said Humeed Khan, "you know it is now a very old matter, with which neither I nor my wife had anything to do; and we have long thought that, as we were not parties to the agreement, and refuse to be so, the issue rests with Meeah alone, who, of course, can claim your daughter if he chooses, and he is now responsible for his own actions. You had better, therefore, ask him, Khan Sahib, and I will withdraw while you discuss it."

"No, no, no!" cried both, "stay with us; and," added Abbas Khan, gravely, "I have fully considered the matter, and have come to the conclusion that it would be better for us both that we continue to be separate."

"And what is to become of Sukeena, Meeah? Is she never to have a husband?"

"She has, or will have, much wealth," replied the young Khan; "and, as flies to honey, so, when it is known that she is free, a hundred suitors will send in their proposals, and you can take your choice. Besides, you are Abyssinians and we are Dekhanies, and such marriages never prosper. Have not a hundred bloody feuds arisen out of such affairs?"

"That is true," said Zyn Khan; "and there is no saying what feud might not arise even at the very marriage itself. All the hot bloods of my people declare that as Meeah slew Elias Khan and

his champion, Yacoot, there is a blood feud between the Dekhanies and the Abyssinians which may break out at any time."

"Of course it might," said Humeed Khan; "and of all occasions that of a marriage is the most probable. My friend, not only for our own sakes, but for that of the State, we ought to forbid this matter; and I, for one, shall forbid it, leaving Meeah to pursue his own course."

"Well," returned Zyn Khan, "I can guess what that will be. Sukeena-bee has not grown more beautiful since I left her, and I love you, Meeah, too well, and her too well—for is she not my only child—to join you together to hate each other all your lives! The old adage, 'Pigeons mate with pigeons, and hawks with hawks,' suits you exactly. My dame can look about for one of our own clan, who are poor enough, but they have the breeding she likes best, and Sukeena will be rich. Now, Humeed Khan, do not be offended if I speak bluntly. My lady is fond of money, and so is Sukeena. Suppose you offer something for the marriage expenses, and I think it will be accepted."

"Good!" cried Humeed Khan, laughing. "I will send five thousand rupees gladly."

"And I," added Abbas Khan, "a pair of gold anklets and a pearl necklace."

"Enough, O generous friends!" cried Zyn Khan. "There may be some difficulty, perhaps; but, after all, Inshalla! a man is master in his own household."

But when he returned home, Zyn Khan did not find the matter so easy as he had imagined. His daughter declared she should die, and would eat no food. Her mother only pointed to her as she lay, and said, "Let her die, since thou hast not spirit enough to help her." And it was only when the last temptation was offered, the money and the jewels, that mother and daughter seemed to yield before the persistence, not to say obstinacy, of the master of the house.

The affair, however, took nearly a month to arrange, until one day the parties concerned attended at the Kazee's office, in the great Adalut Palace, and mutual deeds of release having been interchanged, Zyn Khan took away with him on his elephant five bags of a thousand rupees each, and the beautiful anklets and pearls which Abbas Khan had presented. The whole had been well managed, without either public scandal or offence to either party. There was nothing in it which was against custom or law, and Abbas Khan was at last free from a connection which he had

always dreaded. On the other hand, Sukeena-bee put on her gold anklets and walked about, rejoicing in the music of their tiny bells, and fastened on the necklace, which was declared free from defect; while her mother, for a time very busy among her female friends, at last found out a young man descended from an ancient and noble Abyssinian family, and the betrothment of the pair quickly followed.

"If I had not fasted that day," said the Lady Fyzun, "we should not have secured that happy deliverance from low-bred Dekhanies."

"If I had not taken the affair out of thy hands, O wife, we should have gone on as we were, for Abbas Khan could never have been persuaded."

"Ul-humd-ul-Illa!" ejaculated the husband.

"Ul-humd-ul-Illa!" echoed the dame. "Ameen! Ameen!"

CHAPTER V.

CHANGES IN SOME POSITIONS.

FOR some weeks there was no change in the positions of the several characters of our history. The Queen Dowager gradually withdrew herself from public duties, for she found that her nephew, the King, had developed strong talent both for political affairs and internal civil administration. Rewards and dignities had been freely distributed by him; and the troops, satisfied with his liberally granted donations, were serving loyally and steadily throughout the kingdom. There were no rebellions, insurrections, or feuds, nor a spot on the political horizon, from which there was cause for anxiety, except Ahmednugger, whose local affairs were by no means in a settled condition; but with these there was no present or pressing reason to interfere. With his good aunt, King Ibrahim continued on most affectionate terms. Always considered by him as a mother, he resorted to her for advice and counsel in many affairs, of which she had more experience than himself; and as she never displayed the least desire for interference of any kind, the entire harmony between them was never disturbed. The King's fine taste for architecture had full scope in the decoration of his own mausoleum, and the works attached to it, in

which Francis d'Almeida and the humble painter often assisted him by suggestions; and with these, and other public undertakings, occasional hunting parties and short excursions, constant durbars and current business, his time was occupied fully and usefully.

Beejapoor was then at its greatest. Owing to the presence of the principal portions of the army, and the cessation of war, trade had increased rapidly, and the general prosperity of the kingdom was as assuring as it was gratifying. Congratulatory letters arrived in due course from Golconda, Beeder, Penkonda, and other kingdoms, accompanied by embassies, which gave rise to many superb entertainments; and, in the words of a local historian, "the songs of revelry and thanksgiving, which the people had not heard for many years, now resounded through the land, and weeping was heard no more."

Zóra's usual life had undergone no alteration. The King would not hear of her grandfather's proposal to change his residence, or to build a house for himself in one of the Royal gardens at Torweh; and indeed, to Zóra's great delight, he made no objection to remaining where he was, under the Royal roof, partaking of the King's hospitality. An additional court, cells, cloisters, and rooms behind them had been set in order for him, and in the enclosure was a small but elegant mosque or chapel for worship, where the old man could give his lectures to many scholars, both in divinity and medicine. He rarely preached in the great Jooma mosque now; the doing so was too great an effort for him, and, on every occasion, the exhaustion which followed was but too evident to all; and Zóra was thankful when, after a more trying sermon than usual, the old man put his hand upon her head, and said, with a sigh, "Child! I can do no more abroad. I will reserve what strength is left to me to teach here."

From that day he went forth no more, except on festival anniversaries, when, attended by his faithful Ahmed—for the Queen now objected to Zóra's appearing in public—he took his place among the worshippers. Even the great Kureem-oo-deen Chishtee was softened, and paid "the saint" many visits, with a display of kindly feeling which was in strong contrast to the bitterness he had once shown.

Zóra had, therefore, more leisure, and there were now other servants to share Ahmed's and Mamoolla's duties. She remained most of her time with the Queen, as has been previously explained, who grew more and more attached to her day by

day. Who, indeed, could resist her cheerful, winning disposition, her genial kindliness, and her entire unselfishness and devotion? while every little accomplishment she possessed improved by quiet exercise and study, under one of the Persian secretaries who, in days past, had been the King's, as well as Abbas Khan's, instructor.

She saw little of the Queen, Taj-ool-Nissa. At first, she had been a constant visitor and attendant with Maria, but the Queen was afraid of Zóra's beauty. She knew that in point of manner and of cultivation she was by far inferior to Zóra; and she sent her a kindly message, through Maria, that she must not visit her except on special occasions, when there were entertainments to ladies at which the King could not be present, or when the Dowager Chand Beebee came privately to see her. And the Queen was right. Though her health had improved vastly under the priest's treatment, yet she was still a slight, perhaps insignificant-looking girl —pretty, now that health had given roundness to her form and lustre to her large dreamy eyes; yet she could not be compared for a moment with Zóra, who, with rest, peace, and entire freedom from the anxiety which had hung over her till her innocence was proved before all, was fast attaining her full development of beauty; and it was impossible to compare the now handsomely dressed, well-cared for girl, the beloved companion and attendant of her Royal mistress, with the poorly, coarsely clad and uncared-for girl of the Fakeer's house at Juldroog. Runga Naik, too, had safely transmitted the box of precious articles which had been deposited with him, and in them Zóra found many ornaments which had belonged to her grandmother and her mother, with some garments of cloth of gold, and handsome scarves; but, indeed she hardly needed them, for the kind Queen provided her liberally with all she required; and her grandfather was constantly asking her why she did not buy clothes and jewels, for were they not now rich? But I think the simple, natural tastes of the girl predominated over all love of display or of finery, and she had enough of the latter already.

The Lady Fatima was perhaps more constantly with the Queen than any other lady of the city. They had been intimate friends for years, for the Queen's care of Abbas Khan after his parents' death, and while the Lady Fatima was unavoidably absent, was a strong bond between them. Thus the good lady had many, almost daily, opportunities of seeing Zóra, and observing her disposition in all respects. Her husband and her nephew had

enrolled themselves as disciples of the aged Syud, and thus there were already strong bonds of mutual attachment growing up between the families. How well did Fatima Beebee remember Meeah's words in his sleep after the combat; his sweet smile and sigh as he uttered "Zóra! Zóra!" in his dream. Now her husband had seen Zóra. He returned from the durbar of the trial full of Zóra's bravery—her indomitable spirit, and yet of her modesty. "Any other girl," he declared, "would have lost heart, would have sat down and wept, would have flinched from the sore ordeal to which Zóra had been subjected, and out of which she had come forth so triumphantly." Yes, she was satisfied that her nephew had yielded to no unworthy passion, and that his love was as pure as her utmost hope could desire.

When the trial was over, she told what she had heard to her husband, for Abbas Khan had not dared to tell his uncle, while they were in camp, more than of the sad situation of the old Syud, who had been so kind to him; and had left all else to chance; or, as he more reverently expressed himself, to the will of God; and the sudden appearance of the girl by the wayside with her grandfather, as the King passed them, had aroused all the feelings which had been his companions from the night Zóra had watched him till the present. Still, he had said nothing. He knew how deeply he was involved in the old engagement of childhood, which could not be dissolved rudely or suddenly; but the matter should be arranged by the family of Zyn Khan.

After a decent time had passed, and the newly arranged marriage of Sukeena Beebee was proclaimed, and when, in fact, her marriage day was fixed and invitations to it distributed, there was no occasion to delay; and one day, which had been chosen by the family astrologer, the Lady Fatima, urged by her husband, went to the Queen to ascertain whether Zóra loved Abbas Khan, and to ask advice as to how she was to proceed. She did not even mention her intention to her nephew; it would be time enough to speak to him should all be favourable to her design, for she felt certain that his heart had not changed.

Long before the good lady's visit, Queen Chand had discovered as much as she needed to know of the condition of Zóra's heart. She had hardly entered the audience hall on the day of the King's entry, and taken her seat, than she saw the eyes of Abbas Khan eagerly fixed upon Zóra, and the attempts of Zóra to conceal her face; and during the events of the succeeding day the impression was still more vivid,

rising to its fullest height when Abbas Khan accepted the traitor Osman Beg's challenge. Then, indeed, the Queen had read Zóra's heart completely, for her wistful, earnest gaze, which she had no thought to conceal, the flush on her cheek and her now trembling form, betrayed emotions which it was impossible to hide; and from that moment the girl found a place in the Royal heart which filled a long existent yearning. Yet still she never spoke on the subject to Zóra herself. She knew there was a serious obstacle, and whether it could be smoothed away or not seemed very doubtful. But the Queen's mind was more at ease after she knew that Abbas Khan's marriage was broken off. She could not, by reason of her rank, take any steps herself in what she wished; but she was ready at the same time to assist the union of her two children, as she called them, by any and every means in her power.

The Lady Fatima's visit was, therefore, a joyful one to the Queen as soon as she understood its purport; and being a woman of practical mind, she did not use any circumlocution. Would there be any objection on behalf of Zóra's grandfather, or would there be any from the girl herself? Had Her Majesty any other arrangement in view for Zóra, or had the King? These formed the pith of the good lady's communication. To the latter, Queen Chand was enabled to give a decided and favourable answer. Not many days before, the King had said to her laughingly, "It is time, mother, that Abbas Khan was married and settled. Would not Zóra-bee suit him exactly? They are both clever, both handsome, and thou wilt have the most beautiful grandchildren in Beejapoor. For my own part, though I have held my peace, I have been of the same mind ever since Osman Beg's trial; but it is thou as Meeah's mother who should make the first move in the matter; I can but aid thee by giving it my perfect approval."

So, then, the first point was gained. The second was to ascertain whether the parties would be fortunate, and this was decided by the most celebrated astrologer in Beejapoor, who discovered that Abbas Khan was Fire, and Zóra was Air, and the result would be that the utmost degree of love and happiness would reign between them; that Zóra would submit herself to her husband, and that her husband would treat her with great kindness and affection. Such was the decree of the wise man; and then, horoscopes being cast, the result was that a favourable prognostic of the planets occurred in the course of a few days, and it behoved all concerned to make due preparations for the betrothal.

So far the proceedings of the confederates had been eminently successful, and with the dear old Syud there was no difficulty. He had gradually become impressed with the necessity of confiding Zóra to the care of some one whom he could consider worthy of her. In the Queen he knew she had obtained a kind and powerful friend and even motherly care and interest, but that she should be a wife was a higher desire in the old man's mind; but it was coupled to an almost selfish wish that she should not leave him alone. What should he do without her gentle, loving ministrations? How should he find his charms and amulets, or his medicines? Who could read to him or write for him? Who could lead him about, even in the precincts of their present home? Who, in short, could be the companion to him that Zóra was, with her intellect unfolding more and more as weeks passed? He knew no young man but Abbas Khan—Meeah, as he always called him—and his love and respect for him were deep and sincere. But when Abbas Khan went to him with his uncle, and pleaded hard for Zóra, the dear old man grieved bitterly; it seemed as though Zóra were to be taken from him immediately, and he moaned in bitter grief as he rocked himself to and fro in his seat.

"Does Zóra know of this?" he asked. "Does she desire of her own free will to leave me, old and infirm as I am? I will not believe it; I cannot think that she has a hard heart—she who has been so compassionate and so devoted all her life." And it was long ere the young Khan and his uncle could persuade him that she was not to leave him, but that the betrothal would be an assurance to him that Zóra's position would be all that he could desire after the Lord's message should come to him; and so, gradually, he consented, and putting his hands on Meeah's head blessed him and Zóra, who was to be his wife.

And Zóra? She knew nothing of the pleasant plot against her. She had not known even of Abbas Khan's freedom from his former contract, much less of his present intentions; but her love had never changed. From the scenes at Juldroog up to the present time it had grown stronger. No one mentioned Meeah to her except Maria; but why was he ever present in her mind? "Well," she would say to herself, "let it be as the Lord wills!" and so waited the issue. Her grandfather and the Queen were too awful in her estimation to confide in on a subject like this. She dared not mention it to the Lady Fatima; that, indeed, would be like asking for Meeah, and would be bold and immodest; and, for the present, the girl waited quietly and patiently. But her sus-

pense was not to be for long. The day Abbas Khan and his uncle came to her grandfather, the Queen, to whom she was reading, bid her put down the book and come to her; and, wondering, she rose and knelt by her mistress. The suddenness of the request had called up blushes to the lovely face, and the eyes of the girl were cast down. Had she offended in aught?

"No, child," said the Royal lady; "but I have been thinking it is time thou wert married. Hast thou any preference for any one of the youths thou hast seen or heard of? If thou hast, tell it to me, thy mother. Lay thy head on my breast, and tell it to me. Thou canst trust me, Zora." And she held out her arms.

The child was too truthful to be a coquette, and she could not resist the appeal. Lying in the Queen's arms, and sobbing with excitement, she told all, from the night of the watch to the scene of the trial, and how she thought Meeah would never leave her. "And many have asked Abba to give me away" (and she thought of the Rajah's poor secretary with a smile), "even the great and rich; but I refused, and Abba did not press me. O, mother, I love Meeah! I do love him! Is it unmaidenly? Is it wrong? Often I have thought it was, and longed to put on the green dress and take its vows, but Abba always prevented me. Now do as thou wilt with me."

"It is enough, child," returned the Queen, stroking her soft round cheek and kissing her forehead. "Enough for thee, and for those who love thee; and may the Lord bless thee, my darling! I would retire now, and thou wilt go to Abba and Maria." And Zóra rose and went to them. Entering her own apartment, she found Maria there; and, falling on her neck, told her, with many a choking sob, what the Queen had said. Nor was her suspense continued. The Lady Fatima had followed her husband, and being announced, at once opened the subject of her visit. But Zóra could not reply till she had seen her grandfather; and as Humeed Khan and his nephew had departed, and Abba had taken his noonday sleep, there was no one to interrupt them.

I do not think I need follow the scene longer. Under their mutual explanations, and there was no needless reticence, Zóra confessed her love, and was blessed by her grandfather, whom she soothed by the assurance that she would not leave him while he lived. As to the Lady Fatima, she filled Zóra's mouth with sugar-candy, half smothered her in flowers, rubbed her hands, feet, and neck with fragrant paste of sandal-wood; and finally

cast over Zóra a rich sheet of brocaded gold tissue, and hung round her neck a costly necklace, as she whispered, "From Meeah." No professional women had been employed, and perhaps they were the only disappointed parties in Beejapoor; but when the pán leaves and spice were distributed from house to house to all the mutual friends of both parties, hearty congratulations followed; and even the female gossips of the city—who, as elsewhere, were very numerous—were satisfied that it was a good match.

There are nearly as many ceremonies to complete a Mussulman betrothal as there are in a marriage; but I do not think my readers, even my lady readers, would care to follow them through perhaps two whole chapters, and will rest content in being assured that Zóra's happiness and state in life have been secured as far as human foresight could provide, and that there were no more hearty or more loving wishes for her than those of Sister Maria and her brother Francis. We, therefore, can leave our old friends the Syud and Zóra, now familiar with new positions and new hopes, full of contentment and joyful anticipation to both—more especially to Zóra, whose mingled feelings of love, gratitude, and faith could perhaps have been hardly definable.

Among the various letters of congratulation which reached the King Ibrahim was one from the Viceroy and Captain-General of Goa, Dom Matthias de Abuquerque, which—with a valuable present of various kinds of arms, European manufactures, and valuables—was brought by a special ambassador, the Captain Don Miguel de Gama, an officer of respectability and consideration, well acquainted with the Persian language, and therefore most fitting for an ambassador. The ambassador's suite was not numerous; but as he rode into the city early one morning in a full panoply of bright steel armour, and presented his credentials at the public durbar in the same equipment, he created no little excitement. The captain, too, was of a noble, commanding presence, and had fought well against the Moors in many battles; and this specimen of the local chivalry of Goa was in every degree a good representative of its renown.

The letter was in Portuguese, and could have been translated by the ambassador himself, but the King decided that our friend Francis D'Almeida should act as secretary and interpreter; and at the early durbar of the morning, after the ambassador's arrival, the worthy captain, in no degree abashed by the splendour around him, marched up the great hall, his armour clanking as he moved,

and saluting King Ibrahim gracefully, laid his packet of letters at the King's feet.

The captain had come direct to the house of the painter, and had been comfortably lodged. And how much had Francis and his sister to hear of their friends at Goa, of the proceedings of Dom Diego, and of the innumerable changes in the local society; but, withal, there was the certainty that they would have to return to Goa, whether in his company or apart, to answer the charges which had been preferred against them by Dom Diego in the inquisition.

And when the Viceroy's letter was read aloud by the priest, after congratulations upon peace and prosperity of Beejapoor since the detection and destruction of the conspiracy and insurrection of the Prince Ismail, a passage followed which related to Francis D'Almeida and his sister, which may be quoted:—"And furthermore, it hath been represented to us that a certain priest, Francis D'Almeida, and his sister Doña Maria, were detected in intrigues with the rebels, and received from them sundry large sums of money for the supply of European troops and cannon, which would have been an act beyond the bounds of good-will and peace between us, and for which they have, very justly, been detained by the Government of our friend and ally, yet, as subjects of the kingdom of Portugal, and as Francis D'Almeida and his sister belong to religious orders of the Church of Christ, they should be permitted to answer the charges that have been made against them; and we, in the name of the King, our master, request that they may be sent to us in company with our envoy."

When they returned home, Francis learned from his sister that she had heard all from the Queen's balcony. She was weeping but was not cast down. "I knew it would come upon us sooner or later. The Church never sleeps, and we cannot delay compliance with this order," for a fresh citation had been delivered to them requiring instant obedience. "We must go, brother, even to the stake, if it be the Lord's will."

"I fear not, Maria. I have always thought from the first that it would have been best to go to Goa; and yet the inscrutable ways of Providence who can follow? Should we have discovered Dom Diego's letters to Osman Beg or Elias Khan, which on the political charge will acquit us? As for the rest, conscious as we are of innocence, I fear nothing. Those, too," and he pointed to the translations he had made in company with the Brahmins of the

old college in the fort, "will prove that I have not been lax in my work, though we have been here. No, sister, let us go. I am to attend the night council, and the King's reply to the Viceroy will be drafted."

And it was all the good priest could have wished for. The King, the Queen Dowager, Kureem-oo-deen Chishtee, Ekhlas Khan, the Kazee, and some others, discussed every point of the Portuguese letter, in the ambassador's presence (who, divested of his armour, and dressed in a suit of black Genoa velvet, looked, as he was truly, a courtly gentleman), and every incident that had occurred at Beejapoor was detailed. At first the priest of Moodgul had been under suspicion; but that had passed away owing to the discovery of the treachery of Dom Diego, and he was left to be dealt with by the laws of Portugal; but the money he had obtained from Beejapoor subjects ought to be restored.

The Queen Dowager and the King's wife, as well as Zóra and the good Lady Fatima, were sincerely grieved by the necessity of the absence of their friends, and the old Syud, Meeah and his uncle, no less so. "I shall see thee no more, O friend," said the Syud, grasping the priest's hand. "Christian and Moslem we have lived together in amity, and I am thankful. If God will, and thou return hither, we may meet again; if not, the blessing of Allah be with thee and thine."

And Maria, though her fortitude and her faith supported her in the trial, yet was sorely pained to leave her friends. Taj-ool-Nissa, who had become deeply attached to her, and also Zóra, were in despair; but Maria had her own sources of comfort which never failed her, and a few days after, with the tears and blessings of all, she and her brother, well provided with palanquins and tents, and under the charge of an officer of the Court, who spoke Portuguese, though after a rude fashion, departed from the Royal city in peace.

CHAPTER VI.

PROCEEDINGS AT GOA.

IT was now the beginning of October, and the rains had ceased; all but those occasional slight showers which lend freshness to the air, maintain the verdure of the later crops of grain, and furnish

those magnificent sunsets which form the glory of the month. Supplied with comfortable palanquins, and well provided with horses from the Royal stables, Maria, her brother, and their friend the envoy, often rode together in the cool morning air; and Maria enjoyed heartily the healthful exercise to which, in the crowded city of Beejapoor, she had long been a stranger.

And thus they sped on from day to day, accompanied by old Pedro and his wife, who were overjoyed at quitting the great city of the Moors, and beholding once more their beautiful and beloved Goa. On the plateau above the Ghâts the scenery had been tame and monotonous; fine undulating plains covered with luxuriant crops of grain and cotton presented little for admiration or for interest; but near the crest, heavy forests and broken peaks of mountains furnished beautiful combinations of wild scenery, and the view over the broad districts of the Concan was inexpressibly lovely. Away in the west, the sea stretched to the dim horizon, and here and there the tiny white speck of a sail could be distinctly seen. Nearer, however, a dense white mist filled all the valleys and covered the plain, until the sun, just rising, fell upon it, causing it to glitter like a sea of molten silver, with occasional rugged peaks rising out of it like islands. Then all seemed to break up; and while some of the mist clung to the sides of the greater elevations, the rest gradually rose into the air and disappeared.

From the last stage the captain envoy left them to give notice of their arrival. He would fain have taken the King's letter with him, and the presents by which it was accompanied, which consisted of vessels inlaid with silver and gold, cloths of gold and silver, four fine Dekhan horses, and an elephant; but Francis d'Almeida claimed the privilege of presenting these himself, especially as they were accompanied by Dom Diego's letters, and he was doubtful as to what use or misuse might be made of them. He sent, however, by the captain a letter to the head of the order to which he belonged, and Doña Maria another to the Lady Abbess of the convent of which she was a lay sister; and on their arrival in the city, Francis consigned his sister to the care of the Abbess, who received her with warm affection, for she had been now several years absent, and she felt in a short time at rest and at ease among many of her old friends and associates. In like manner Francis took up his residence in his old quarters; and it seemed to him that nothing had changed there, and that all was

as peaceful as when he had left it several years before his sister's arrival.

But within the religious society of Goa there was not peace. There were strivings between the orders, which the Archbishop strove to reconcile; and the present Viceroy, Don Matthias de Gama, a kind, benevolent man in the main, and an excellent and brave soldier, found it difficult at times to control all and keep up his own authority. Since Dom Diego's arrival, contention had increased. The Archbishop had been appealed to by the Superior of the Jesuits, to demand the surrender of Francis d'Almeida and his sister as contumacious heretics. Nothing less than their trial and execution would, he declared, satisfy the demands of the Holy Church, and preserve discipline in the distant Churches over which only a very partial supervision could be exercised. Dom Diego preached several public sermons in the Church of his order, in which the apostasy of Francis, and his sorceries and evil consorting with heathens and Moors, were set forth with violent eloquence; and these excited his hearers to a powerful degree, so that even in the Church they cried out, "Death to the wretch! Death to the apostate!"

On the other hand, the Archbishop, who well knew Francis d'Almeida's value as a missionary, his power of language in addressing the heathen, his knowledge of native dialects, and the practical use of his translations and ministerial offices, defended him, and there were many others who followed his example. In process of these disputes, the Viceroy was appealed to, who declared that the case was one of ecclesiastical interest only; and though he was bound to assist the Church, yet the parties accused were beyond his jurisdiction, residing, or perhaps prisoners, in a powerful kingdom, with which Portugal was at peace; and, moreover, that in regard to the allegations against the priest and his sister, the Church itself was by no means unanimous in opinion. He declined, therefore, to take any steps in regard to them. If they were contumacious it was no affair of his. The Church could excommunicate them if it pleased. At last, however, yielding to pressure, the Viceroy had written, as we know. The Viceroy had sent a complimentary letter to the King of Beejapoor, despatched it by a trustworthy soldier, and awaited the issue with considerable interest as to whether the accused persons would in reality make submission and appear, or whether, becoming renegades, as many had done, they would altogether defy the Church and become Moors. But the arrival of Francis and his sister,

escorted by a Beejapoor officer and a guard of the King's troops, was proof to all that no contumacy was intended; and he appointed an early Council, at which the Beejapoor letter should be read, and necessary consideration made of the whole of the circumstances.

A few days afterwards the Beejapoor envoy and Francis d'Almeida received their summons from the Viceroy to attend his Council and the Court, and they went together, the envoy being attended by his escort, which, in their suits of chain mail and rich apparel, made an imposing appearance in the thronged streets of the city; and on their arrival at the palace were ushered at once into the presence of the Viceroy, who, with his staff about him, was seated on the viceregal throne.

An artillery salute was fired in honour of the envoy, who was graciously received; and after some general and kind inquiries after the health of King Ibrahim, to which he replied in indifferent Portuguese, the rest of the conversation was carried on through Francis d'Almeida, who acted as interpreter. Then the Viceroy, receiving the King's letter, said, "As this contains matter for political consideration, we will adjourn, Sir Envoy, to our Council Hall, where it shall be read before all my councillors of State and dignitaries of the Church, who are our advisers." Then, rising and taking the envoy's hand, he led him into the adjoining apartment, which was the Council Chamber.

It was a fine room, though to the envoy's idea somewhat bare of decoration. A large Turkey carpet was laid upon the floor, and in the centre was a long table covered with red cloth, with inkstands and writing paper ready for use. The Viceroy seated himself at the head of the table, placed the envoy in a chair on his right hand, and the dignitaries of the Church, military and naval commanders, all wearing their rich uniforms and decorations, took their seats with the civil officers, according to precedence and custom. The whole formed a dignified and, indeed, august assembly, well befitting the powerful kingdom it represented.

Then the letter of King Ibrahim was read, and the Viceroy remarked that it was written in excellent Portuguese, and asked his envoy to Beejapoor who wrote it, and the captain said—

"In my presence was it written by the priest Francis d'Almeida. The King himself dictated the letter in Persian, in my presence, and the purport was fully known to me; and the priest and I compared the Portuguese version with the Persian, and they corre-

sponded exactly. Moreover, your Excellency will observe that the original Persian is written below, and signed by the King himself. There can be no doubt of the authenticity of both."

"But," continued the Viceroy, "in the latter portion of this document grave charges are made against Dom Diego di Fonseca, an eminent servant of the Church, who is now the accuser of Francis d'Almeida and his sister Maria, and at whose instance, and that of the Holy Father of the Inquisition, their presence was required in order to answer the charges brought against them, and we ought not to enter into this subject without his presence. As it is a political affair entirely, involving the risk of disagreement between our Government and that of our friend King Ibrahim the Second, we, the representatives of Portugal, have full authority to investigate it, leaving the alleged offenders against the Church to be dealt with by the Holy Inquisition. Let, therefore, Dom Diego be summoned instantly; and till he arrives we call upon Francis d'Almeida to give an account of his apparent flight from Moodgul, and his evasion of the summons of the Inquisition."

"I was not a free agent, may it please your Excellency and the members of this Council," said Francis d'Almeida. "I was preparing to leave Moodgul after the citation was publicly read by my colleague when I was arrested, by order of the Queen Regent of Beejapoor, and forwarded by Dilawar Khan, the Governor of Moodgul, to the fort of Juldroog, where we were confined for more than a month on charges of having conspired against the State in assisting the conspiracy of the Prince Ismail and Eyn-ool-Moolk, and obtaining large sums of money for the purpose of engaging European soldiers and cannon. Finally, we were sent to Beejapoor, where we remained under surveillance until the King should return, as the Queen Regent did not consider she had authority to try so momentous a question herself. Then suddenly, and as by special Providence, certain papers fell into the hands of the Queen's Government, by which it appeared that my colleague, and not I, had been in correspondence with the rebels, partly independently, and partly by means of Osman Beg, the Killadar or Governor of the fort of Juldroog, who was arrested, tried on the evidence of papers found in his possession, convicted of treason, and sentenced to death."

"And he was beheaded, Francis d'Almeida?" asked the Viceroy.

"Not so, my lord; his life was spared on the intercession of his cousin, Abbas Khan; but he was banished from the kingdom, and has taken his departure for Mecca with his father."

Francis d'Almeida's address had continued for some time, for he described minutely and concisely all that had occurred, with the particulars of which we are fully acquainted.

"And where are the papers you allude to?" asked the Superior of the Inquisition tartly. "Who can vouch for their authenticity if they are produced?"

"My lord," returned the Beejapoor envoy, "we are not careless in regard to papers of importance at Beejapoor. At the first discovery of them, after the death of Yacoot, the Abyssinian, I, as knowing somewhat of your language, was asked to read those in Portuguese; but I could not, and the Padré Sahib was directed by the Queen to do so, and to translate them into Persian; then her seal was affixed to each one of them, and she added her private signature, and all the Ministers signed and sealed them. Then the packet was sealed until opened by order of the King, and sealed again with his seal, which all men know, and which is appended to his letter."

"You were all very careful," said the chief Inquisitor, with a sneer, "but where are these letters?"

At this moment Dom Diego was ushered in. He wore the religious dress of his order, but he at once threw back his cowl, and his eyes and those of Francis d'Almeida met once more. In the one was a scowl of bitter hate, and the brows were almost knit together; but those of Francis wore their usual mild expression, and betrayed no emotion; nay, their look of innocence seemed to make a favourable impression upon all present.

After bending his knee to the Archbishop and the Grand Inquisitor, Dom Diego drew his fine figure to its full height, looked round the room towards all, and then said to the Viceroy, "For what purpose am I required here, most illustrious Sir? I have not been apprised that matters which are under the cognisance of the Holy Inquisition could be transferred to a Council like this; and I request that my protest may be entered against any interference with what has been already arranged."

"There is no intention, Dom Diego, on our part to interfere with the proceedings of the Holy Office. This is a political question, which thou wilt know of when thou hast heard the letter of the King of Beejapoor. Let it be read to him," he continued, "as also the minutes of Francis d'Almeida's statement."

Dom Diego heard all without reply; but it was easy to see that his mind was far from tranquil. A nervous tremor appeared to be irrepressible; his mouth twitched as if by convulsion, and he

twisted his hands together in continuous action, which could be seen even under his robe.

"And now, my lords," said the Viceroy, rising, "the most important part of our sitting is to commence; and I have to beg, in the name of justice, that your utmost vigilance may be employed to clear up what has been alleged. The papers alluded to in the letter are in possession of the envoy from Beejapoor. Let him produce them."

"They are here, my lord," returned the envoy, producing two small bundles tied up in waxed cloth, which was sealed with the King's seal. "First, I ask you to bear me witness that these seals are intact; and particularly you, O most illustrious Sir, into whose hands I commit the packets."

The Viceroy examined the papers carefully, and said, "I see no reason to doubt what has been said. The seals are undisturbed; but judge for yourselves, noble sirs." And when the packets had passed round, the Viceroy demanded to know whether they were to be accepted, and a general reply was given that they were.

"These are the letters which were found on the body of Yacoot, the Abyssinian. Let them be first examined," said the Beejapoor envoy; "and my lords will please to remark that all have the Queen's seal, as those first found were examined by her; and that there are forty-two documents which, with the exception of those required by the Council, should be returned to me, and a receipt given to me for the remainder. And now, noble sirs, have I your permission to open the first packet?"

"I again protest," cried Dom Diego, rising suddenly, "against any examination of those papers here. Let them be given over to the custody of the Holy Office, which will examine and authenticate them, and produce such as it considers necessary for the elucidation of the truth."

But the pretence was too shallow to escape the detection of many of the experienced men who heard the protest, and the majority at once declared that they should be opened, and publicly read and registered.

Then the Viceroy took the first packet and handed it to his own interpreter, a fine-looking Mussulman gentleman, who had just entered the room, and who spoke not only Arabic and Persian fluently, but Portuguese, for he had lived for some years in Portugal, acting as interpreter of documents sent by the Indian Government. Abdoolla-bin-Ali was a man held by everyone in the

highest esteem and honour, and his presence carried assurance with it to all the Council, and very especially to the Beejapoor envoy and Francis d'Almeida, whose personal explanations would be needed no longer.

"On the cover is written," said the Moonshee, "'This packet contains forty-two documents, eighteen in Portuguese and twenty-four in Persian, and bears the King's seal.'" Then he broke the seal carefully and unwound the silken cord with which the parcel was fastened. There appeared within several other coverings, two separate packets, one of which was labelled in Persian, "Eighteen Portuguese papers and letters," and bore the Queen's seal, which was shown to all.

"I think, my lords," said the Viceroy, "that to prevent doubt I had better read these aloud to the Council, and they can examine each separately afterwards, if they please;" and, this being assented to, he took up the first, which was addressed to the most illustrious the Vizier Eyn-ool-Moolk, Bahadoor, and dated from Moodgul. As the letter was opened, everyone could see the strong bold characters of the hand-writing of Dom Diego, which were known to all or most present, and a general murmur ran through the Council, as if of wonder and astonishment; but no one spoke, and, in breathless silence, the Viceroy read on.

It was a long letter, and we may be pardoned for not following it in detail; but the writer acknowledged the receipt of Eyn-ool-Moolk's "letter offering the Padré Dom Diego de Fonseca a command in the new Royal army. That if he joined it with a force of one thousand Europeans, his pay would be at the rate of one lakh of rupees per month, and the same for every thousand more brought to the Royal standard." It then proceeded to state, that considering the expense of European troops in the field, the pay would be insufficient; and that, in case of the force capturing Beejapoor, there was no mention of prize shares in the treasure and jewels that would become the property of the army. It would be necessary also to confer upon the writer the district of Bunkapoor, with all its forts and dependencies. That as the cowardly and imbecile Government of Goa would never be induced to take part in the war, or to send any of its soldiers, the writer must be provided with funds to go to Portugal to raise as many men as possible, with whom he pledged himself to return at the expiration of a year, and disembark them at any port on the coast that might be chosen.

In conclusion, the writer professed his high admiration for, and sympathy with, the movement to substitute the virtuous Prince Ismail for the tyrant who now ruled over Beejapoor, and ended by praying that the measure might receive the blessing and guidance of the Almighty; and at the end was written,

"By mine own hand,

"D. DIEGO DI FONSECA."

"Are there more like that?" asked the Grand Inquisitor of Dom Diego, in a whisper; "if so, thou art lost!"

"Let them read what they will," he answered. "I will satisfy my lord presently."

More! yes, there was much more. Every one of the letters contained sketches of arrangements to be made, estimates of cost, professions of good faith and sincerity. Several of them contained receipts for large sums of money, partly in gold, partly in bills; and by his own admissions Dom Diego had received upwards of three lakhs of rupees in cash, while assurances of payment as far as ten lakhs, beside a fourth share of the plunder of Beejapoor, was promised and accepted.

Then followed letters to Elias Khan, as the lieutenant-in-chief of Eyn-ool-Moolk, which were in a more familiar strain; which spoke of revelries they had enjoyed together; of the pleasures they would share when they met again; complained that he could not absent himself without suspicion, but that he was about to rid himself of his coadjutor, whose sister Maria he would bring with him, a lovely girl of his own country, who would put to shame all the dusky beauties of his friend's harem; and wine from Portugal of the choicest kind, which should enliven them. In another, the gold sent by the company under Pedro di Diaz, that is, twenty thousand "hoons," had arrived safely; with many other details, all written in the same bold hand, and signed with the same very remarkable signature. As they were read, minutes were made of them by the secretary. Every paper was compared as to the seals of the Queen Regent and the Beejapoor Ministers, and that every precaution had been used to prevent any chance of their being tampered with, was a fact which was not without significance in the assembly.

And the Persian letters to Elias Khan from Eyn-ool-Moolk, with one from the Prince Ismail, bestowing an honorary title as commander of five thousand in the Royal army, with an estate of twenty villages in the district of Bunkapoor—all confirmed the tenor of the Portuguese letters of Dom Diego; while, with the

transmission of money through Elias Khan, assurance was given that as soon as the Europeans appeared in the field, the whole of the Talooq of Bunkapoor would be made over to him as stipulated. There were others from Osman Beg to Elias Khan, descriptive of private revels at Moodgul, in a house in the town hard by the Padré, where wine of the choicest was stored up, and was plentiful, and the most beautiful dancing women of the country round were assembled. And he wrote of the Padré as being a jovial fellow, who winked at everything, and who had shown him at the chapel, privately, the beautiful Doña Maria, whom he was to bring away with him when he came with his troops. "She is more lovely than anything on the earth's face, and no Houri of Paradise could be more beautiful;" and much more to the same effect, written in the loose, not to say indecent, style prevailing among those like Osman Beg at Beejapoor. Then the letters seemed suddenly to come to an abrupt close. After May of that year none had passed between the parties; and, indeed, by this time, the whole conspiracy had collapsed in the defeat and deaths of the principal conspirators. There only remained the exposure of the guilt of all by the discovery of the letter on the person of the Abyssinian.

The second packet contained, for the most part, letters from Eyn-ool-Moolk to Elias Khan; but they gave particulars of the agreement with the illustrious and learned Padré D. Diego di Fonseca; of the moneys transmitted to be paid to him; and in one, the Padré's receipt, in Persian and Portuguese, of the twenty thousand hoons, and for other sums, amounting to about two lakhs of rupees.

"Hast thou nothing to reply, brother?" said the Inquisitor, in an earnest whisper to Dom Diego. "Thou art condemned by thine own hand; would it had been cut off and burnt before those letters were written."

Diego did not reply. He rose, and those who were watching him saw that his lips were white, and his dark complexion had assumed an ashy hue, and that he spoke as if he were choked by thirst. Yet he drew himself up bravely, and said with an assumed air of unconcern and bravado, "I am not on my trial, most illustrious Señor, else my reply would be sharp and certain. In these letters, which purport to be mine, I only see the cunning toils with which Francis d'Almeida strove to entangle me, and failed; and when they had nothing to fall back upon they fled. Their being arrested is a mere mockery. As to the handwriting of the

letters," and he took up one before the Inquisitor, "they are all like this, forgeries. The fair Maria is an accomplished scribe, and can copy any style of writing, even that of heathen characters; and I do not at all marvel at her excellent imitation of mine. But, my lords, as I said, I am not on my trial; and no opinion can be given on the subject either till I am, or till that shameless priest and his sister are pronounced guilty of heresy and conspiracy by the Holy Inquisition, and perish for their heresies at the stake."

"Let that be as the good God wills," said the Viceroy, calmly. "Meanwhile, these papers are so strong against thee, that we, in virtue of our authority, declare thee to be a prisoner, and arrest thee in the name of our gracious King. Thou shalt have honourable treatment as a gentleman, and thou shalt be lodged in this palace, till the time when the trial of Francis d'Almeida and his sister comes on. When may it be, Holy Father?"

"It is fixed for Friday," answered the Inquisitor, calmly; "that the guilty may be ready for the *auto-da-fé* on the Sabbath. But your Excellency, pardon me, errs in keeping a son of the Church in arrest till then, and I will gladly be security for his appearance when needed."

"Impossible," replied Don Matthias de Gama. "Nevertheless I will take the votes of the Council." And he did so; but none supported the Grand Inquisitor's proposal except one, another priest, and Dom Diego was consigned to the care of the men-at-arms, who conducted him to an upper chamber luxuriously furnished, and told him that his servants would be sent when they could be found to attend to his comfort.

What were the thoughts of this man as he heard the door of his large airy apartment locked after him and bolted outside. All his reliance on the comparative insignificance of Francis d'Almeida had given place to a fearful sense of his power with those terrible documents in his own handwriting to appeal to. Forgeries! who would believe that, with all the evidence of his handwriting in the Holy Office, and the Achbishop's records to appeal to for comparison? His accusation against Francis and his sister had depended for success upon his words only, which he believed would overwhelm those of the modest, unassuming priest; and in the death of him and of his sister would be future safety. But the revelation of his own conduct, of the moneys he had obtained, of his treasonable plots, denounced by the King Ibrahim, had rendered his malignity abortive. And now the grim trial, the

horrible torture, the death by fire, like that he had witnessed of hapless victims writhing in agony at the stake——

Escape ! was it possible ? He went to one of the windows and looked through the jalousies, for he could not open one of them. Impossible ! his room was over fifty feet from the ground, and the wall was smooth, without a projection ; and he turned away with a shudder.

Presently his servant came. " Have you seen Pedro di Diaz ?" he asked.

" I have, Señor," was the reply ; " and he is now waiting for me at the quay. He wants to know whether he is to stand out to sea or remain."

" Tell him," replied Dom Diego, " that he is to leave the ship's boat with six of the best of the men in it, and to take the brigantine to the mouth of the harbour, without exciting suspicion. I will be with him on Friday night ; but if I do not come by Sunday, I shall be dead."

CHAPTER VII.

THE INQUISITION.

THE appointed day arrived. The sudden arrest of Dom Diego, his confinement to the Viceregal palace, and the refusal of the Grand Inquisitor's security for him, had created a sensation in Goa which had only one chance of solution—the trial by the Inquisition. On the other hand, the well-known character of Francis d'Almeida, and the devotion of his lovely sister, gave to the case an interest such as had been rarely felt, and never exceeded, in the city. All had many personal friends, Dom Diego especially among the Jesuits, to whose order he belonged ; Francis d'Almeida among those of his own order, the Dominicans, and among the ordinary clergy of the province, headed by the noble Archbishop ; and in his sweet sister every lady in Goa was interested. Could so holy and learned a woman be actually tried on charges of sorcery and conspiracy with Moors and heathens ? And yet it was to be ; and many thought that the interference by the Viceroy with the acts of the Holy Office was at once presumptuous and wicked. From early morning the principal street of the city and the square of the Inquisition had been thronged with eager inquirers, and the

most conflicting rumours were prevalent; some, that Dom Diego had confessed his guilt, and would be made over to the Inquisition, to be formally condemned; others, that Francis d'Almeida and his sister had made similar confessions, and that all parties had been originally bound in one confederation, but had split upon the division of money of which they had become possessed. In short, the wildest rumours prevailed, particularly as to the sorceries of d'Almeida and his sister, which they had learned from heathen priests and exercised upon their coadjutor to drive him away from the place he had usurped. All these opinions, however, were set at rest by the appearance of two processions: one, that of soldiers of the Viceroy having Dom Diego in their charge; the other of monks and holy nuns, who escorted Francis d'Almeida and his beautiful sister. Among the soldiers Dom Diego marched firmly and proudly, his tall, martial figure being conspicuous from his general bearing, and the haughty manner with which he regarded the crowds who gazed upon him; the others, from the apparent simplicity of the brother and sister, who walked hand in hand, with a calm and submissive demeanour which deeply affected many. No one dared to speak, but whispered comments passed among the crowd; and women, and men, too, wept that such servants of God might be condemned ere the day passed, not only to torture, but to the horrible death by fire in the *auto-da-fé* of the next Sabbath, which promised to be one of unusual interest.

So, passing on, both parties entered the portal of the great gloomy building, Dom Diego being the first. And when a short colloquy had passed between the officers of the Viceroy's guard and those of the Inquisition as to the delivery of the prisoner, he was taken on by the familiars. Before the monks and sisters, with the two others, had entered the gate, they had recommenced a hymn which had been sung at intervals during their progress, the sweetness and solemnity of which had had a profound effect; and it again arose steadily and sweetly, with a rich and fervent melody which penetrated every heart, as knees were bent and hats doffed reverently as the processions passed, while the simple words caused many a silent prayer to arise to the Throne of Grace.

When in trouble and in fear,
To thee we cry, O Mother dear!
Behold our sorrows, bitter weeping,
Yet in all trial humbly keeping
Trust in thee, Maria!

Mother of Jesus, lowly born,
On earth by human sorrow torn;
Yet in thy glory resting now,
Heedful of all thy creatures' woe
Hear our prayer, Maria!

Those who have daily died the death
Of those who suffer slander's breath;
Those who in dread judgment's hour
Their simple hearts to thee outpour,
Pity them, O Maria!

Support them in their hour of need,
To cheer them with thy comfort speed,
Lest without thee they go astray,
Mother, with thee all bright their way,
Having no fear, Maria!

While the chant proceeded, the procession entered the door, and its sweet melody was heard faintly as it passed up the broad corridor which led to the great hall of the Inquisition.

It was a bare, whitewashed room, with narrow windows near the ceiling, which let in the cool air and a small degree of light; but when the eye, dazzled by the glare without, had become accustomed to the dimness within, everything—nay, even the emotions in every face—were distinctly visible. There was a separate place for the accuser; another for the prisoners; and a third for any witnesses that might have to be called. In the centre was a long narrow table covered with coarse black serge, with inkstands, pens, and paper at intervals; and the Inquisitors sat in tall, straight-backed, wooden chairs around, the Grand Inquisitor's position being in the centre of the right hand side, in a raised chair, so that he could overlook all. There were no guards near Dom Diego now; and his cowl being thrown back, his grim, swarthy features and bold flashing eyes were distinctly visible. The prisoners were directed to stand in their allotted space; and the venerable Archbishop, in his robes, with a number of clergy, sat on one side, but took no part in the inquiry.

After the proceedings had been opened by a prayer and a solemn chant, the Grand Inquisitor rose from his seat, and said—

"Holy fathers, we have heard with unfeigned sorrow, grief, and amazement the scandal to the Church which has arisen under the unseemly contentions in the Mission Church at Moodgul, where, in the midst of Moors and Pagans, the Lord Christ hath graciously hitherto supported our poor measures for making

known His gospel to those otherwise benighted and damnable peoples. In process of years many hundreds have been gathered to the foot of the Cross, and hundreds have died in a steady belief in the sacraments of the Holy Church, while many live in the exercise of a devout Christian faith and good works. Within the last few months, however, grievous troubles have arisen, as is known to our Father in God the illustrious Archbishop; and on the direct accusations of Dom Diego di Fonseca, the local vicar, we summoned Francis d'Almeida and his sister Maria to answer his charges. This citation was publicly made known to them both by being read in the Mission Church; but, instead of obeying it, both departed from Moodgul under the escort of Moorish soldiers, and went or were conveyed to Beejapoor, where they resided until a demand from His Excellency the Viceroy was made for them, and they were sent hither.

"Thus, holy fathers, ye have to determine in what manner the priest Francis d'Almeida is guilty, as also his sister, of the formal charges which I now read. Then you will hear the justification of the prisoners; and you will, with prayer to the Almighty, pronounce judgment upon them. Diego di Fonseca, in the name of the Holy Trinity, I call upon you to swear that what you are about to say is true;" and on the formal oath being administered to him, he stood erect, and with all the energy and musical tone of his fine voice, he spoke to the following effect.

I think, however, that I do right in refusing an attempt to detail all. In the outset of his oration, he referred to his services in China, in the Spice Islands, in Bengal, among the savage tribes of Malays and Moors; of perils by land and sea, and of the many human souls he had rescued from everlasting destruction.

"I was a humble follower of St. Francis Xavier," he continued, "and strove to follow his example. Then, worn out and weary, I came to Goa, and would have returned to Portugal for a season, but new work at Moodgul was opened to me, and in my zeal I accepted it.

"Holy fathers, when I arrived there I found a mockery of a Church. My coadjutor, more a heathen than a Christian, had suffered the most ordinary offices of the Church to be utterly neglected. He was incessantly employed in the study of Pagan languages, mythology, and Scripture, and of Moorish languages, and infidel books. To the people he invariably preached in a tongue they call Canarese. He read the services of the Church in the same tongue, and he desecrated the holy service by using

it even in the mass. Instead of our own language, his sister taught it in the schools, and thus perverted the minds of children, who might have been made wise unto salvation.

"It was all horrible! horrible! this perpetual study of books, which contain besides damnable theological dissertations; works on sorcery, divination, astrology, and all the evil sciences denounced by the Church, for which so many have suffered; and I warned him on many occasions, for I was willing to save them both, to abandon these evil courses and damnable heresies. And at first Francis d'Almeida strove to justify himself by declaring that he read Hindoo books to understand best how to controvert their doctrine; and declared that he was even translating the holy gospels and services of the Church into the language of the people, that they might understand what they profess to believe. Was any heresy ever so complete? Ye, O reverend fathers, know how the Scriptures are forbidden to be read except under ghostly direction and counsel, and how corruption and unbelief must needs arise under such proceedings as those of Francis d'Almeida towards his ignorant flock I found remonstrance of no use; he avoided me with disrespect; and in the congregation a party was growing up against him which it was impossible for me to overcome; I therefore complained to the most reverend the Archbishop and the Holy Office, and a citation to Francis d'Almeida was sent.

"Meanwhile a strange numbness of mind was stealing over me. I never saw Doña Maria without trembling and confusion. I could not pray; I could not think. I could not even eat; and I knew that her satanic influence was exerted after the heathen manner, to lead me to perdition. But from this I was mercifully preserved. On the day I delivered the citation, she and her brother left their house at night and took refuge with the Moorish Governor, who at once sent them to Juldroog, and thence they were taken to Beejapoor. I was then free; a great weight seemed to be removed from me, and I came hither to lay all before the Church and seek ghostly counsel. Fathers, my short statement is ended; but of heresy and sorcery of the most devilish kind I accuse them both, and demand that in consonance with the laws of the Holy Office they suffer death by fire, and that thus the Church be purged from their spiritual uncleanness. I could extend this address to a vast length, but it would needlessly occupy time. The books in Francis d'Almeida's and his sister's handwriting will satisfy you of the character of their work, and I have

brought such as I could find; the rest were concealed before their departure."

"Have you any witnesses to the truth of the accusation?" asked the Grand Inquisitor.

"I have none," he replied, "but God, and one of the deacons who accompanied me, who has charge of the books. How was I to confide to anyone the misery I endured?"

"Dost thou object to these being produced, Francis d'Almeida?"

"No," he said, mildly. "If they are in my own or my sister's writing, they are homilies of the Church, the Vulgate as allowed to the people even here in Goa, and some extracts from the Scriptures such as are given to children."

"Look at these," said the Archbishop. "Are these the same as thou sentest to us for approval?"

D'Almeida opened the books one by one, and looked over the contents. "These are the rough drafts in my own handwriting of the translations as I made them, and here and there I find a small portion of my sister's manuscript. These are the drafts from which she made the fair copies, which in her beautiful characters and ornamented with initial letters are now at Moodgul, in the keeping of one Ramana and other deacons of the mission, and have the illustrious Archbishop's imprimatur on them."

"Yes," said the Prelate and the Grand Inquisitor, "for we had them checked by the Fra Don Francisco da Pinto, who was the best scholar then in Goa. He is now in Madagascar, but, if I remember right, we all signed them."

"They are here, fathers," cried a venerable old man, with long white hair streaming over his shoulders, who, with several others, now made their way into the room, and prostrated themselves on the floor. "Listen to our cry for justice! When our beloved Padré was threatened, and when the pure Señora Maria was insulted, and the Governor of Moodgul sent them away as prisoners, the books were given to us, and we hid them; but when the great Padré was going to Goa, to accuse our beloved friends, I and these with me followed him, and we arrived this morning, O holy fathers, that we may be in time yet to speak the truth before ye! Day and night we have travelled, and we have had no fear save of delay."

"And who are ye?" asked the Grand Inquisitor. "Do ye know what ye have risked in intruding here unbidden? What do ye know?"

"I know everything," replied the old man who first made his way in, speaking through the interpreter, and prostrating himself on the floor. "Let me speak! Let me speak for the love of God! There are a hundred more ready to say the same thing, and the Syud has sent me in time. Oh, my fathers, let us speak!"

"I protest against him," cried Dom Diego, with a hard, shrill voice, very different to his usual tone. "I denounce this as a conspiracy."

"We are the best judges of that," returned the Grand Inquisitor. "You, Diego de Fonseca, have already stated that you have no witnesses; and now, by a miracle as it were, one hath appeared suddenly, to whom credit may be given, a deacon of the Church. You can hear his statement and reply to it if you will. Let the Deacon Ramana be sworn and cautioned."

Meanwhile the old man was sworn, and his first act was to lay open the books he had brought and point to them as Maria's writing.

"Can you read these writings?" asked the Archbishop. "They are, I see, those which were confirmed by us after examination. I see my initials on every page."

"Surely, my Prince," replied the deacon. "When the priest is absent it is my duty to read such prayers and passages of Scripture as have been marked;" and, opening one of the books at random, he put on his large spectacles and began to read from the fifth chapter of the gospel according to Saint Matthew:—

"'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

"'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.'

"Shall I go on, my Prince? These words are so holy and comforting that few of the flock hear them without tears. I trust they are understood?"

"They are," replied the Grand Inquisitor; and, turning to Dom Diego, in a severe tone he continued, "and if this is the sorcery thou hast charged the prisoners with, thou hadst better be silent."

"And now," continued the old man, "I will speak for our blessed Padré, and tell what happened on the day that he took refuge at the Governor's. I have no fear of him," and he pointed to Dom Diego, "and have no charge to make against him; but the Lord and the blessed Virgin give me power to speak, and I am not afraid before them or you."

Then he related what he knew of the priest's plot. How he

had engaged Beydurs and other lawless ruffians to carry off Maria; how on that Sunday night many of them had assembled at Moodgul, and one of them, being a friend of one of the shepherds, had told him what was to be done, and he went with some armed men to watch the Padré's church and house; how he heard Maria scream as she was alone singing vespers, and, looking in, saw her lying on the steps of the altar, and gave the alarm. We need not recapitulate all we already know; but the firmness and boldness of the narrator carried conviction with it to those who heard him. "And not only did I hear and see it all," he continued, "but these, my companions, know of it too, and will confirm it."

"God of heaven!" cried Dom Diego, casting up his hands, "I declare this to be a conspiracy against me, instigated by the prisoners! Can it be believed in Thy holy sight? Surely Thou wilt blast their tongues ere they utter malignity against Thy servant!"

But the Court heeded him not; and the letters of Dom Diego were now laid out for all present to see them, and read, one by one, in a sonorous voice by the secretary; while the Archbishop and the secretary of the Holy Office brought forward large packets of documents from various parts of the Indies, of the handwriting of which there was no doubt, and which exactly corresponded with the Moodgul letters. That in relation to Doña Maria and her seduction caused a profound sensation through the assembly, and there were cries of "Let her explain! Let her explain!" from many.

"Let her swear what she likes," said the priest. "I only say these are forgeries made by herself to cover her own shame."

But this assertion, vague as it was, had no effect upon the tribunal. One by one the members compared all the letters with former documents. Many of them had maintained correspondence with the accused, and after an impressive silence, only broken by occasional whispers and communications among the members themselves—

"Do you know any of the associates of Dom Diego?" asked the Grand Inquisitor of the old deacon. "Speak truly and freely, but beware of slander or falsehood!" And this being interpreted to the old man, he broke forth at once.

"Know them? Yes; I know many. I know Pedro di Diaz, who used to come from Elias Khan, before Eyn-ool-Moolk, with money and letters, and I and many other people have seen him

drinking with the Padré there. There was another man called Bartholomew, who sometimes came with him, and sometimes with others. All were rude, violent men. Diaz had the name of 'Pirate' among them. All of them kept out of our good Padré's way; and perhaps he never saw them—he was too innocent; but among ourselves we wondered at the profligacy that was carried on; not near the church, but in the bazaar of the town, where the great Padré used to come. One day one of the bankers in the city said to me, 'Your great Padré is very rich; I have exchanged fifty thousand rupees for him for bills on Panjim (Goa), and other bankers have also made remittances privately for him. 'Where does he get this money?' I said I could not tell, but it was reported everywhere that the Padré was a soldier in disguise, who was going to bring up Feringis and guns against Beejapoor. If that was to be kept secret, he had better not have trusted Pedro di Diaz, for he used openly to boast of it to many, and it became public talk. Does the Padré wish to ask me any questions? I will answer them, my princes, as truly as I have sworn to do upon the holy books and the holy water."

But Dom Diego made no reply. He had become ghastly pale, and his hands trembled.

"What did I or we care about all this?" continued the old man, excitedly; "but what we and every Christian man in our Church did care for was the insult to our poor, kind, blessed, saint there, who ministered to our sick, taught our children, and helped her brother to write those blessed books. Ah, sirs! though we are but simple shepherds, yet our people have fought in many a frontier war; we have maintained our faith against Moslem and Hindoo, and in the cause of right fear no man. And I tell you, my princes, that had not Padré Francis enjoined peace upon us, we would have followed up Dom Diego that night, and brought him here to make him over to you."

"And why did Francis d'Almeida and his sister leave so suddenly?" he was asked.

"The citation to him had been read," replied the old man; "and after the service he told me he should have to go, and asked me to get him ponies to ride. In the evening, after the Señora's cruel insult, I took them temporarily to the palace of the Governor, Dilawar Khan, for I feared the Padré might return with the Beydurs and attack the Señora. Then, after a time, came an express from Beejapoor, and Dilawar Khan told them they must obey the Queen Chand's orders; and before daylight they were

sent off to Juldroog in closed palanquins, whether they would or no. But for this they would have gone to you, for twenty-five well-armed youths of the congregation had volunteered their escort. Ah, sirs! it was a night of terror and alarm; and it was only when the Governor sent and put seals on everything, except these books, that we felt safe."

"We had not heard of this alleged insult before, daughter," said the Inquisitor; "and thou must speak to it, however painful, on pain of torture, to extort the truth, for this is a point which cannot be overlooked."

"My lords and illustrious fathers," said Maria, modestly, "if this truth had not transpired through the deacon I would have been silent, for I have innocence and my trust in the blessed Queen of Heaven to rely on; and whatever shame may appear in the narration belongs to him who caused it, not to me. We had never been intimate, as servants of the Church should be. My brother did not like what he heard, things he would not tell me of. I was pained by Dom Diego's licentious looks, and even, when in the Church, always sat near the children of my school. But one Sabbath evening he found me alone, teaching the children a hymn; and when they had gone he advanced towards me, and offered me such insult as no virtuous woman could endure, pressing his vile intentions with proposals to fly. And I sank down and fainted. I know not who rescued me, but when I was aroused I was at home again, and my brother, seizing his sword, rushed out to seek revenge, and was brought back; and I lay at the foot of my cross, praying that his hand should be withheld; and that was granted mercifully."

Bravely and calmly had Maria upheld her dignity and composure up to this period; but now she failed, and burst into hysterical sobs and tears, upheld by the abbess of her lay order, who had, with other sisters, accompanied her. But presently, and while all awaited her recovery, she rose, and holding out her pleading hands, cried—

"O fathers of the Church, as her child I come to you; as a woman who has been wounded in her honour I plead to you! There is not one spot of shame to my own perception upon my heart, and she can deliver me if I am true. If not, let the flame purge me, and may I be accepted! But leave me not to that vile man's machinations in after years."

She was not immediately replied to, and the tribunal took up

the examination of Francis d'Almeida with new interest. He described their happy life at Moodgul, the affection and docility of the people, the progress he was making in Canarese with learned scholars of the place, and his first essays in translation, which he had sent for confirmation; and lastly, the insult to his sister. "If I could then and there have proceeded to you, holy fathers, I would have come; but a long journey needs several days' preparation, and I was without any notice considered a prisoner and sent to Beejapoor, where my innocence was proved to the satisfaction of its noble Queen by these letters of my coadjutor, which she and her nephew, the King, have forwarded by their envoy. They are before ye, O fathers, and ye will judge whether the writing is mine or not."

Just then a messenger, who had been sent for Pedro di Diaz, returned and reported that his vessel had fallen down the river in the afternoon of the previous day, bound for Choule and Surat, and that Bartholomew Pinto, and others, with Diaz, were serving on board.

Then the Court was cleared for about an hour, for the day was fast declining; and, on the prisoners being again admitted, the Inquisitors rose as one man, while their chief cried with a loud voice, "Ye, Francis d'Almeida, and Maria de Pereira, we acquit and expurge ye from all accusation of heresy, sorcery, contempt, and other crimes with which ye have been charged; and ye go forth without shame or reproach to continue your labours as ye have done among the heathen.

"You, Dom Diego, member of the holy Society of Jesus, are found guilty, under your own handwriting, of falsehood and profligacy. You have insulted a virtuous and worthy daughter of the Church with infamous proposals. You have entered, as appears by your agreements, into an unholy and corrupt alliance with Moorish rebels to this kingdom; and you, by these papers, have acknowledged the receipt of vast sums of money. We condemn you, therefore, unless you make confession previously, to trial by the rack; and afterwards, on Sunday next, to death by fire, in order that the holy Church may be purged from your iniquity. Familiars, lead him forth; till the morrow he will have time to repent."

Dom Diego replied nothing. He well knew it was of no avail to appeal to those stony hearts which, whether just or unjust, never changed. He only bowed his head, muttered something that could not be distinguished, and was led into the great corridor whence the cells opened.

Can we describe the boundless thankfulness of the two who so lately were captives in the hands of that ruthless tribunal! As servants of God in their degrees, the brother and sister received the public blessings of the Archbishop and Grand Inquisitor; and, after that, falling into each other's arms, they wept like children before all. Before this, their feelings had been too highly strung to fail, but now they were weak with very excitement, and were considerately led back to their dwellings, to rest and receive those spiritual comforts in which their souls could now seek repose.

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"And thou wilt come at last, Balthasar," said Dom Diego, as, having arrived at the end of the corridor, he turned into a door which was open, and revealed a small bed, with a loaf of bread and a jar of water. "Thou wilt not be long." Balthasar was Dom Diego's cousin, who had been with him when he was formerly an officer of the Ajuba, and had taken charge of him.

"I will come," he said, "though I risk my life and brave the fire. I will come, and bring the rope for thee. If thou art strong and brave, as thou used to be, yon miserable window will have little terror for thee."

But Dom Diego had a surer plan in his mind than that.

"Oh, you need not bring a rope," he said; "I can manage without it, and it would betray you."

As his cousin entered shortly before midnight, and all the building was still, except for the wailings of wretches who sat alone in their misery, he closed the door, locking it inside. "Perhaps I can help you," he said, cheerfully.

"Yes," said Dom Diego. "No one can move those iron bars. You dare not leave the door open, but you can submit to be bound, and I will do it gently. Lie down there. Ha! thou wilt not," he said, from between his teeth. "Thou, too, a traitor!" And he then threw him down on the bed, and stuffed a large portion of his dress into his cousin's mouth. "Dare to stir, and I will kill thee. See, here is my old weapon!" and he drew a keen poignard from his breast. "Nay, that would be the surest way," and he seized the familiar by the throat.

"Mercy! Mercy! Diego!" gasped Balthasar. "Spare my life! Oh, spare my life! Unshriven and unrepented, wouldst thou murder me?"

"Be still, then. If thou stir hand or foot, I will slay thee, Balthasar, as thou liest there; but be still, and I will not harm thee." Then Diego took off his cousin's robe, swathed

the upper part of his person in the coarse sheet of the bed, and tearing his shirt into strips, with them and two handkerchiefs tied his legs together, so that they could not be moved. "There!" he cried, "that is the way we used to tie up the captives whom we carried off for ransom. Rest quietly there, my son, till some one finds thee in the morning; and thou must tell them they did not make so much of me as they might when I was here; they may find it hard to take me now. Addios, brother, I know my way out, and have a vow to attend midnight mass in the cathedral. How well thy robe fits me; perhaps thou wilt take mine in exchange. Addios! and pleasant dreams to thee this night, Balthasar. When thou wakest, tell Francis d'Almeida and his sister that I go to pursue them. Not till he is dead at my feet, and she grovels there in a shame worse than death will I cease to dog them, hide where they may. Forget not!" and taking up the small lanthorn, he locked the door behind him, delivering a solemn benediction as he entered the corridor.

He knew his way perfectly. In years long before he had been one of the familiars, and knew every secret dungeon and torture chamber of the great building, every secret sign and password; and he made his way to the gate without opposition. The men on guard rallied him on going out so late; but he declared his vow of midnight mass, and passed on into the open air, unchallenged and unsuspected by his voice, for he had kept his cowl over his face, and his height corresponded so exactly with that of his cousin, that the detection of the imposture was impossible.

There was no one else in the square before the Ajuba but a few stragglers, and Diego quietly found himself on the quay. One sailor was lying in the stern of the ship's boat, who was at once aroused, and slipped over the priest's shoulder a rough sailor's dress, and for a few moments was absent seeking his associates. One by one they emerged from their hiding place, gained the boat unobserved, and lay down in its bottom; and when the last one came he loosed the painter, took one of the oars, and sculled off leisurely towards the opposite shore. Near that, the men started up, took the oars, which were muffled, and rowed with all their power, and with a strong ebb tide made rapid way down to the sea, passing the forts without observation. The brigantine was not at anchor, but cruising to and fro, as if about to enter the river with the flood; but Dom Diego was soon on board, and before the fresh land wind the beautiful little vessel heeled over to the breeze and sped swiftly northwards.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DEATH, A MARRIAGE, AND A DEPARTURE.

WHEN morning broke there was much confusion in the great building. Balthasar, whose duty was to open the doors of the cells, was not to be found, nor were the keys hung up in their accustomed place. The door of Dom Diego's cell was, however, locked and bolted without as usual; but, on listening, a faint moaning sound was heard, and after some difficulty the massive door was opened, and Balthasar found as he had been left, though nearly suffocated. He had contrived to wriggle from the low pallet, but to free his hands and to release himself from his cousin's bandages had been impossible; nor could he loose the gag, for it had been tied securely behind, putting him to great pain and distress. Even to the suspicious Inquisitors there did not seem to be the least indication of complicity, and after a severe and prolonged examination, Balthasar was released. All that he could say was that he had been suddenly overpowered by his cousin, whose strength far exceeded his own; that he had been threatened with death, and even slightly wounded in the breast; that, on account of the gag, he could not cry out for aid. And even had he done so, who could have heard him among the wailings of other prisoners, and the cries and groans of those that were to endure the torture on the day following?

Then, under the information given by the old deacon, the transactions of the bankers of Panjim were examined by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities in conjunction. But no assets were found. They produced letters from Dom Diego remitting large sums by bills from Moodgul, and a considerable quantity of gold, and directing the whole, except a small portion to be kept for himself, to be paid to Pedro di Diaz, whom they knew as a trader to the East, and the owner of a remarkably fast-sailing brigantine, which he commanded. Some months before he had gone on a trading expedition with the Moors, and while some of the remittances belonged to him direct, others might have been the property of the Padré Sahib. It could only be conjecture, for it was no part of their business to inquire into their constituents' affairs;

and for the rest, their books and vouchers were ample evidence. Finally, about four days before, the Captain Di Diaz had taken away all his money, partly in bills at sight, on Surat and Oman, but by far the greater part was in coin of various kinds, the majority being in gold. There was nothing to be made out of all this; nothing to afford the least clue to the course of the vessel Diaz commanded; or, indeed, that Dom Diego was with him, though it was supposed he might be; and he was never afterwards seen in Goa, nor did it ever transpire to the authorities there what had become of him. There was, however, long afterwards, a report prevalent that he had become a renegade from the Christian faith, and joined the ranks of the Mussulman army, and had fallen in some obscure battle.

It was a pleasant duty for the Archbishop to reward Francis d'Almeida for all the trials which had arisen out of his association with the bad man who had so narrowly escaped a horrible fate. But the more the prelate saw of the zealous missionary the more he appreciated his singular, and at that period nearly unknown, powers of translation, and the evident love and veneration in which he was held by his devoted flock. Could there be a greater proof of that than in the sturdy old deacon's journey from Moodgul to Goa unasked, on the mere supposition that the long threatened proceedings against his priest were to take place? This more, perhaps, than any other circumstance touched the prelate most deeply, and he was not slow to confess it.

In the cathedral a splendid high mass was solemnised for the delivery of Francis d'Almeida and his sister from the wicked machinations against them. Sermons were preached, setting forth their labours for many years, and the translations were exhibited on the altar steps to the public at large. The Viceroy bestowed a high order upon the priest at a banquet which was held in his honour; entertained the Beejapoor envoy very sumptuously; and, from the simple communications of Francis d'Almeida, grew to have a higher respect for the kingdom than had ever been held by any Portuguese before.

Many arrangements about duties and trade generally were proposed; in fact, it appeared as though the present opportunity would throw open the two kingdoms to each other in a far more effectual and friendly manner. As to Doña Maria, we lose sight of her among her old friends, and the crowds of religious women who visited her. Many, indeed, volunteered to accompany her in her mission work, and teach in her schools;

but European Portuguese, ignorant of any language but their own, could be of little use; and finally, before she left, she made choice of two of the sisters of her own convent, who, having been born in India, could speak the ordinary language of the western country with fluency.

Finally came the grand distinction, so unexpected, that Francis was completely overpowered by it. The Archbishop, having consulted privately with his council, considered it very advisable to extend the mission, and to consolidate its several points under one head. At present there were but four churches, two under Moodgul, and two under Raichore; but there was a good chance of the establishment of one at Beejapoor, and perhaps another at Ahmednugger, under the auspices of Queen Chand Beebee. It was advisable, therefore, that Francis d'Almeida should be created bishop, with permission to travel and preach wherever he thought most advisable.

At first, as we have said, the worthy priest was overwhelmed, and requested time for consideration; but it appeared both to him and to Maria, and to their best friends, that the honour and the responsibility could not be evaded. And again, if he declined it, neither of them would be sent to carry out the Archbishop's plans. Now, there was no one who knew the people or their language, manners, and customs, at all so well; no one who could compete with the Mussulmans and Brahmins on their own grounds of theology. He was, too, used to the courtly manners and modes of life of the Mussulman who ruled the country, and was the intimate friend of Queen Chand and her nephew, the King. What would not Taj-ool-Nissa do for the physician who had aided her recovery, or for the beloved companion who had cheered her loneliness? Then, again, there were Meeah and Zóra, the old Syud, and their new schools at the painter's, and great numbers of other countrymen who had been absent with the King's army, and were altogether fallen into neglect. All these were new ties which a series of strange events had created, but which, nevertheless, were precious and binding. And these, with the boundless expanse of country before him, in which he should be free to act, caused Francis d'Almeida's heart to swell in grateful anticipation. He, therefore, submitted himself to the Archbishop's will, with earnest and sincere feelings of gratitude; and as soon as the ceremony could be arranged, he was consecrated in the cathedral at high mass, before all the ecclesiastical, civil, and military authorities of the city, and his patent made out and de-

livered to him. Nor would the Archbishop suffer him, poor as he knew Francis was, to pay any of the costs of the elevation, which were considerable; not even that of his robes, which were of their kind splendid enough.

The Beejapoor envoy was a delighted spectator of all the pomp of the Church on the occasion, and the joy with which he greeted his former humble companion was very genuine. We are bound to say also, that once they were free from the terrors of the Inquisition, Maria, like a practical woman as she was, insisted upon making a complete inspection of her brother's wardrobe, and found it in a very dilapidated and defective condition. The patchings and darnings of old Pedro, who nominally united the office of tailor to that of cook and valet, were by no means of a distinguished order, and were, to say the least of them, in the last stage of decay; and in the cold weather of the Dekhan, her brother, though enjoying wonderfully good health, was often distressed by the cold. Materials, however, and makers of all kinds were plentiful at Goa. The ladies of her convent set to with vigour to make such portions of both their clothing as they could, and the result was so far beyond the good Padré's ordinary ideas of comfort, which were limited, that he could barely be induced to cast away the old and to adopt the rich new suits with which he was furnished.

They were pressed much to remain for the great Church festival of Christmas. But this was impossible; time was precious; the Beejapoor envoy and his people were anxious to return, and the journey back was commenced. What peril they had endured and escaped, what new honour and love they had gained, was indeed wonderful to think on, and for which their thanks were due to Him whom they served; and their hearts were full of gratitude and hope for the future. And the reception they had at Beejapoor, when Humeed Khan and his nephew, with a host of other friends, one of the King's nobles of the court, ushers and others, were sent out to meet them and conduct them into the city, was almost overwhelming; and many people ran before their litters, crying out that the good Padré had come back, and was welcome. As to the children of the schools, they and their parents erected a triumphal arch of a humble character at Pedro the painter's gate; and, dressed in their best, sang a hymn of welcome very prettily, and were introduced to their new preceptresses. Pedro had made a great feast for the occasion too, and all were very happy; but they were grieved to hear that

their dear old friend the Syud was rapidly sinking to his rest, and that the physicians had no longer hope of his life. Prayers had been made for him in every mosque, and supplications sent to all other shrines around, particularly to Gulburgah. But these were of no avail; the angel of death, the old man said, was already nigh, and he should soon receive his last summons. Weary nature was exhausted; and though the few last months' excitement had caused the lamp of life to flicker up, and even to shine brightly for awhile, it was now sinking daily, and must soon be extinguished.

They did not delay further than to make a few arrangements. The King and the Queen had already sent kind messages, begging them to come as soon as possible; and in the afternoon they went when the usual palanquins arrived for them. They found Abbas Khan, his uncle, and a number of Mussulman priests, sitting in the ante-room of the old Syud's apartments, the latter chanting passages from the Koran in a low monotonous tone; and while Maria passed into Zóra's rooms, Abbas Khan rose, and led the bishop, as we must now call him, into the place where the dear old man lay. He seemed to be dozing as they entered, but hearing the sound of a strange voice, he looked up and asked who had come.

"I, your old friend, Huzrut," said the bishop, kneeling down. "I have returned to you safe from my journey and its consequences."

"Oh, give me light that I may see you once more ere I pass away," he said, eagerly. "Give me light!" and when a corner of the curtain was lifted, the old man raised himself, stretched out his hands, and fell upon his friend's neck. He seemed to have forgotten that he was blind.

"The darkness and the day are all one to me, my son," he said, feeling all over Francis' face; "all one now—so they are always to those who are trembling on the brink of eternity. Yet I shall see brightly presently, when these scales of death fall from my eyes. Fear not for me, dear friend; my time is run, my work on earth is finished, and I go to partake of that I have believed in. And thou hast escaped that fierce evil priest? Tell me how it was. First lay me down, for I have no strength."

"You must not speak," was the reply; "it excites you too much;" and D'Almeida placed his fingers on the old man's pulse, which he found now weak and fluttering. "Rest awhile, and I will tell thee."

"Is he dying?" asked Abbas Khan.

"No," returned the bishop; "he will yet live some days; and I will send him or bring him early some cordial I have brought with me. Now no one can get at it."

"Now tell me all, Francis; and how thy dear sister, Maria, hath fared. Is she well?"

"She is well," returned the bishop; "but I have said you must be silent;" and he then related briefly the particulars of the investigation of the tribunal. "I could have done nothing," he said; "he was more powerful than I; but I had truth with me, and out of his own vile letters he was condemned; nor could he make any defence. He was sentenced, and would have suffered, but he escaped."

"Escaped! Protection of God! he may follow you and Maria."

"I do not fear him, Huzrut. The same power that defended us at Goa will defend us should we meet hereafter. Meanwhile, he fled in a companion's ship to sea, and is believed to have gone to Persia, where we have churches. He escaped, too, with all his wealth."

"Shookr! shookr! thanks, thanks! and praise to God that our poor prayers were heard; prayers in which Zóra joined, as for brother and sister. Hast thou no thanks, no congratulations, Meeah?"

"I said them at first, Abba, when he told me on the road. But see the justice of God! On all that number of vile conspirators justice hath descended. And on this priest last of all, though he hath life and wealth, yet shame hath fallen upon him among his people; while this, our honoured friend, hath been exalted by them to high rank, and is now a noble of the Church."

"He is no greater now before me than he used to be, nor before God. Is he, too, a Wallee?"

"Not a saint, Abba," returned Francis, smiling; "but I have the overlooking of all the churches from Ahmednugger to Raichore and Moodgul, and can reside where I please. Before God I cannot change, but before men I have that dignity in the Church which it hath pleased my fathers in God to bestow upon me."

The old man smiled happily, and they saw his lips moving silently in prayer; but he did not speak, he only held out his hands once to Francis, as if to bid him farewell, and turning round seemed to sleep easily and comfortably.

Zóra and Maria were together once more, and what could

exceed their happiness? Zóra's great brown eyes looked wistfully at her, like a dog's, as after the first weeping and thankful embrace they sat down together. But this did not suffice, and as Maria held out her arms once more, Zóra fell into them, looking up every now and then with her happy, loving face, though her eyes were constantly brimming over, as she heard Maria's history, as Abba had heard her brother's. Only about three months had passed, yet Zóra's figure and countenance appeared to have expanded under the influence of the certainty of Meeah's love. At last her own, her very own. "And he loves me, too; for one day I was coming from the Queen Mother's apartment alone, and I met him on the stairs, and he told me so; and though I could not answer him, I remember all he said, and now I can tell it to you, Maria. We have never spoken again; and I dare not if I could, for it would not be modest in a girl betrothed to do so. Then Abba began to fail after you left, and yearned for your brother; and we thought he would pass away from us. But he is still here, though they tell me he may be called any time; and we must let him go. Day and night Meeah watches him, and when he is tired he sends me word by a servant, and I go to him. But he seldom speaks, only prays; and all he has been saying for several days has been: 'It is time they returned. Why do they linger away? Have they escaped?' But we could not make out then, though we now understand your peril." And then Zóra's tongue ran on almost without intermission, until a message came from the Queen Mother that they should go up to them, as she and the young Queen were both ready to receive them. And they went; Maria kissing the feet of both the Royal ladies, and making her obeisance, as she used to do. They, too, had to hear of her trial and her deliverance; and Zóra said plaintively, "We were sisters together from the first, though we belonged to different faiths; and God appointed me my trial, when I did not fear Osman Beg, and she had her own with the wicked priest we used all to hear so much of in Juldroog; and she was not afraid of him. And now God hath brought us together again; and we will never separate."

Then the Queen had to hear of Francis d'Almeida's new dignity; and it was very clear to Maria that he, perhaps both of them, had acquired additional honour in the Royal eyes.

"My King will be glad, indeed, to hear this, for Beejapoor hath never had an ambassador from your nation, or any accredited person on whom reliance could be placed; and much mischief has been the consequence. Now things will be different."

"I know," said Maria, smiling, "that he has been entrusted with a whole budget of matters to lay before His Majesty; and he will do this to-night, perhaps, at the durbar."

"And," added Zóra, with a merry twinkle in her eye, "bid him, mother, to come in his new robes, for Maria says they are magnificent; and then he can come and make his obeisance here also to you and his old patient."

So, after a while, Maria took her leave, and went home to carry out this little plot, and to set out her brother's finery; and, after much persuasion, the simple bishop did as he had been requested, and went in his grandeur of gold embroidery and purple satin, and lace, and biretta instead of a mitre, which, with his staff were not ready when he left Goa. He was, however, sufficiently splendid to attract the attention and admiration of all the nobles of the durbar; and even the Chishtee priest, who had been so uncivil to him at their first meeting, but who had gradually learned to respect his character, now welcomed him with sincere congratulations.

It was a pleasant evening for the Bishop. He felt himself to be now more on an equality with all the nobles by whom he was surrounded, and their respect was unmistakeable. He was the representative of his nation, too; there was much to be settled between his Government and the King's; and in all respects, in outward circumstances, he felt he was a very different person at the King's Court than the obscure priest and physician that had come there at first. The schools were flourishing, and Maria felt the help of her new assistants to be very material. The Bishop, too, found ample occupation among the Portuguese artificers and gunners, and the time was fast approaching when he must seek his new flocks at Ahmednugger and elsewhere. Would it be safe or prudent to take his sister with him? What he heard of the condition of Ahmednugger was not satisfactory. The place was not at peace within itself, and many reports were abroad. He had a refuge for her already at Beejapoor, or he might send her to Moodgul, to the old deacon's charge; but the last message of Dom Diego to his cousin, which had been duly repeated to him as a warning, though Maria knew not of it, often weighed heavily upon him. Dom Diego was free; free to join any lawless bands in the country; and he had wealth, too, to further any plan he might form. In Beejapoor Maria would be safe, under the King's protection; but then the dire separation, distressing alike to both, was hardly to be contemplated. Maria

would not hear of it; whither he would go she would go with him, and in her opinion the better plan was to wait till Ahmednugger was once more settled.

But all these plans were destined to come to a more rapid end than either thought; and the first link of the chain broken, was the dear old Syud's death. For several days the new medicine which Francis had brought with him appeared to give new energy, and they all hoped he might rally; but he was not himself deceived. "I have received my warning," he said, "and do but wait the angel's coming—be that when it may." He made his will, bequeathing to Zóra all his worldly goods and such of his estates as the King might permit. He also made provision for the religious ceremonies at his tomb, the site of which he had selected when he first came, in the Roza, or garden, in the precincts of the great mausoleum of the King, and had appointed a poor disciple, who had followed him in his wanderings from Gogi, to the charge of it. A small tomb or mausoleum, with a vault, had been prepared, and was nearly finished; and the old man on one of his best latter days had been gently taken there in a palanquin, having a particular desire to see it. To the last he preserved his faculties entire; and after hearing portions of the Koran read one night, he repeated the two creeds with a firm voice, and lay down quietly. But his breath came heavily, and Abbas Khan saw that the end was near; and Zóra came to him with Maria, who was sitting with her. The physicians and Francis felt his pulse, but it was fluttering; and one of the Moollas raising him up, poured a little sherbet into his mouth, which he swallowed and lay down again, saying, "It is enough," and seemed to sleep; nor could those who watched by him tell when the humble, loving spirit left its earthly tenement. There was no struggle, or even a sigh; and again and again during the day he had said he had no pain, and could see the flowers of Paradise and the river flowing among them. Finally the chant of the Moollas without ceased, and those who perform offices for the dead came in and did their ministering. Crowds followed him to his last resting place. Nothing that love or respect could suggest was wanting to the end; and as the Moollas chanted the peace of God to the thousands who had gathered round, they separated sadly, many weeping, and with a conviction that a faithful disciple of their faith had gone to his rest in Paradise.

For a time during the forty days of ceremonial and mourning, Zóra remained with the Queen Dowager, though apart, so as not to

cause inconvenience; and for the first few days Maria had not left her except at short periods, and to carry on her own duties. She had now many friends; and the grief at her loss, which at first lay heavy on her, gradually gave place to brighter thoughts. Often and humbly did she think on the few months that had passed, on the hopelessness which must have been her lot if her grandfather had died at Juldroog or during her wanderings. Yes, she had been mercifully protected, and was grateful to her heart's core; and as she wept out her grief on Maria's breast or that of the Queen, who had adopted her, there was ever present the secret hope and trust that she had found a true refuge, which was not far distant. For as the forty days of ceremonial were about to conclude, the Lady Fatima, urged by her nephew and husband, again protested against further delay. Zóra should have one who had a right to protect her, and in whose love a new life would open to her, and she put herself unreservedly into her friends' hands. She had pledged her faith, and had she needed to do so a hundred times over, or under any trial, she would have only been more confirmed in it. Enough that the time was come; and with all the pomp that her Royal patrons and the wealthy house of her husband could furnish, all the dressing, feasting, merry-making, processions, and distributions of charity practised on such occasions, the marriage ceremonies were at last concluded. Are not the loves of this happy pair sung by bards and dancing-women to this day? For the poets of the Court poured forth their amatory lays and epithalamiums without stint, sure of ample largesse. Many of these were set to music, and linger still to charm others, though even the traditions of the nobles of Beejapoor have passed away.

And still the good Bishop and Maria remained. Maria pleaded that she had promised Zóra to stay with her till the ceremonies were completed, and she, with much interest, and not without amusement, had helped her through all the events of each day. But when all was over, when the bright, radiant, happy girl had been carried away in a grand procession, with fireworks, torches, and firing of guns, escorted by the whole of her husband's and his uncle's household troops—the play played out, and the curtain dropped—then they turned to their work again.

Meanwhile the Queen's letters from Ahmednugger grew more and more uneasy; and she received a petition, which was signed by all the principal nobles and officers of the State, asking her to come to them and assume the administration during the minority

of the young and rightful Sovereign, who as yet was little more than an infant. This was necessarily a much more serious subject for contemplation than the heretofore task of assuaging national disquietude, and uniting the power of the State under one regency, not her own, which should have the goodwill of the people. But this was put before her as a solemn and patriotic duty, which could be effected by no one but herself. At her name, they wrote in her native city, every well affected person would unite to support her ; the few malcontents would disappear or fly the kingdom, and peace and prosperity would reign once more. Day by day, by special messengers, and by every other possible means, the frequency of these communications, as well as their urgency, increased. They had commenced before Francis and his sister had returned from Goa, and were much more frequent and more urgent now.

She had concealed nothing from her nephew, the King, or from his long tried and faithful Ministers of State. Every letter, every despatch she received, was laid before them ; but the last general petition seemed to leave no loophole of escape. So long as Ahmednugger was disturbed, Beejapoor could not be at rest. The frontiers were uneasy, and events took place which no precaution could avert, and which might at any time plunge the kingdoms into one of those interminable and bloody wars which had often nearly brought both to the brink of ruin. The last war was finished, peace everywhere prevailed, and under ordinary circumstances, there was every prospect of its maintenance ; but if misrule at Ahmednugger continued, there was no surety. Again, the Moghuls of Delhi were gathering in ominous clouds in Malwa and Guzerat, without apparent reason ; and were they to march upon the Dekhan, there was no one to resist them on its frontiers ; while at Ahmednugger each party seemed ready to sell their country to the enemy, so that a temporary local advantage might be gained.

It was a perilous time for the whole Dekhan ; and the Queen, with her habitual fortitude, determined to meet it, as she had done every political and public danger of her life. She would devote herself to her native State, for her presence was no longer needful at Beejapoor, and her Regency had closed in thankful peace. Nay, there was no time to be lost, and it was at once known by the preparations ordered, that Queen Chand was about to proceed to her native place. We need not say that Abbas Khan and Zóra were to accompany her. They would take no denial, and Abbas

Khan, in public durbar, claimed the command of her escort, as a point of right and duty. Could he leave his adopted mother, and idle away his time in inaction at the capital? Even that he had endured since the King's return had been in the last degree irksome. We know why the Bishop and his sister desired to go too; and even had that reason not existed, Maria must have gone, for the Queen had become alarmed, and she viewed with pain a revelation the King had made to her that he loved Maria.

As the time drew near for her departure, the Queen Chand had received many visits from her nephew the King, and had observed his listless manner and his evident anxiety in regard to some subject. He did not, however, complain of being ill, and his Queen, Taj-ool-Nissa, had, as well as the Queen Dowager, pressed him to consult the good Bishop on the subject. To both the Queens, the departure of the elder one, on whose counsel in all affairs he had so firmly relied, appeared to be the cause; but it lay deeper than that.

One evening, just before the march began, the Queen, Taj-ool-Nissa and Maria were sitting at the great window alone, and Maria was putting the last finishing touches to a drawing of flowers for her Royal companion, when she observed the tears well up in her eyes; and, with a sudden impulse, she put the drawing aside, and cast herself upon Maria's breast, sobbing piteously. It was in vain that Maria asked her to explain the cause of her grief, or tried to soothe her with assurances of speedy return, the Queen only wept the more passionately.

"He does not love me, Maria," she said, between her sobs, in broken words. "My lord the King does not love me. To thee, O sister, he has given his heart, and he will die without thee. I am but a child, Maria, and have no beauty or talent to charm him; but thy loveliness and accomplishments fit thee to become his Queen. Oh, do not hesitate, darling sister; consent to be mine in reality, and we shall be joined in his love till we die. Maria!" she cried, looking up through her tears, and brushing them away, "dost thou hear? He dreams of thee; I hear thy name on his lips as he sleeps, murmured in love. It is no deception, and I say it before God; and I know how essential thou art to his happiness. Kiss me, and say thou wilt consent, and I shall be happy. A few quiet prayers and some preparation, and thou art his wife as well as I."

"It cannot be, it cannot be, my darling!" said Maria, very sadly, and kissing the gentle, patient face upturned to her. "I am

vowed to God's service; I repeated and confirmed those vows at Goa, and I go forth, with my brother, to perform them. A little while and he will forget me, and thou wilt live with thy child to come, happy in his love as thou hast been. Nay, urge me not," she continued, as Taj-ool-Nissa was about to speak again; "by the love that is between us urge me not again, but let me depart in peace, and with thy blessing, on my way. Keep this, and all I have left, in memory of me; and hope, as I do, that we may meet again in happiness." Then, placing the picture in the Queen's hands, she kissed her fervently, with a silent prayer, and, rising up, departed. Yet ere she reached the door, she looked back once more. The girl was lying with her face among her cushions, weeping bitterly, while the sun's light, falling upon her rich brocaded dress, covered her as with a glory of gold.

END OF BOOK IV.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

A SKETCH OF LOCAL HISTORY.

OUT of the disruption of the great Bahmuny dynasty of the Dekhan in A.D. 1489, four independent kingdoms arose. The first secession was that of Yousaf Adil Khan, who founded the Adil Shahy dynasty of Beejapoor in that year; the second, that of Nizam-ool-Moolk Bheiry, in the same year, and Berar had even preceded them. Golconda followed in 1512, thus completing the alienation of the four largest and most important provinces of the Bahmuny kingdom, and leaving only a comparatively insignificant portion in the hands of the remaining representative of the Bahmunies, who lived and reigned at Beeder, and whose successor was afterwards set aside by his Minister, Ameer Bereed, who usurped the throne, and the great Bahmuny family became extinct.

Nizam-ool-Moolk Bheiry had been Prime Minister of the Bahmuny kingdom, and his son, Mullek Ahmud, was Viceroy in the large western provinces. After the act of dismemberment had been accomplished, Nizam-ool-Moolk Bheiry died, and his son, relying on his local power, and possessing the requisite boldness and ability, ably maintained his position; and there being no capital to the province except the hill fort of Joonair, which was inconvenient, as well from position as construction, he founded a new city and capital near the village of Bingar, which lay between Joonair and Dowlutabad.

Here he built a fine fort and several palaces, laid out gardens, and named the place Ahmednugger—or the fort of Ahmud—which appellation it still bears. Ahmednugger is now one of the large military stations of the Dekhan and of India, and is deservedly celebrated for its salubrious climate. It is, in fact, situated near the crest of one of the great trap waves of the Dekhan, which breaks into the valley of the Godavery, a few miles distant. The country around is open, fertile, and free from jungle; and in the times we write of,

the position commanded the passes from Khandeish, and Guzerat, and Berar, into central Dekhan. It had been most judiciously chosen, and, while the kingdom endured, it ruled a fair country which stretched from the sea to the confines of Berar and Golconda, and was possessed of an ample revenue. Its people, too, were the sturdy Mahratta peasantry, who made excellent soldiers; and it maintained considerable bodies of Abyssinians, as well as Turks, Arabs, Persians, and Central Asians, and their descendants of mixed blood, who, as at Beejapoor, were called Dekhanies, and held much power in their hands. In this point therefore the two kingdoms were very similar, though local customs and parties might not be in all respects precisely so. The Ahmednugger State also employed the indigenous Mahratta soldiery to a much greater extent than Beejapoor, especially as cavalry, and frequently found them of great use in checking the turbulence of the foreign levies. They were considered a portion of the regular army, and thus the hereditary native chieftains of the Mahratta people rose to power, which was afterwards rendered conspicuous when the Mahratta people, living upon the ruins of the local Mussulman kingdoms, became a nation in themselves.

We do not purpose to write the history of the Nizam Shahy kingdom. The Kings were rough, warlike, and quarrelsome with their neighbours beyond any others, and were very rarely at entire peace with any of them. And while in some of these wars the kingdom had narrowly escaped annihilation, yet because a balance of power among these kingdoms was necessary for mutual existence, no one of them could be annexed by another, and for more than a hundred years they had existed in pretty much the same condition as that in which they had commenced in 1489.

They had of course intermarried, and the families for the most part were nearly related; but the principal event of this kind was the marriage of Chand Beebee, daughter of Hussein Nizam Shah, of Ahmednugger, in 1564, to Ally Adil Shah, of Beejapoor, in order to cement the political alliance between the States, on the occasion of the crusade against the Hindoo powers of northern India. And though the object of that coalition and campaign was fully carried out, yet the peace of the two kingdoms was by no means assured; and we have already had to trace the cause of wars which ended in the death in action of King Ibrahim Nizam Shah, the seventh King, in the field of battle near Puraindah. After this event the affairs of the unfortunate

kingdom fell gradually into greater and greater confusion. There was no successor of mature age to succeed ; and a boy, said to have been of Royal birth, was sent for from Dowlutabad and placed on the throne under the auspices of the Dekhany party and their chieftain. But this was opposed by the foreign faction, who claimed that the infant son of the late King should succeed. As usual, both parties betook themselves to arms, and many lamentable and bloody engagements took place, not only in and near the Royal city itself, but also in other parts of the Ahmednugger dominions ; the result of which was the general appeal to the Dowager Queen, Chand Beebee, to come to Ahmednugger, assume the Regency, and govern the kingdom with her well-tried ability and sagacity on behalf of the minor Prince ; and, as we know, she had, after many deep considerations, consented to do so.

There was, however, a more pressing, and, to the Queen's perception, more dangerous crisis at hand. The Emperor Akhbar, of Dehli, who was gradually annexing all smaller independent dominions to his own empire, had already shown a desire for interference in Dekhan affairs. He had despatched a large army under his son the Prince Moorad to Guzerat and Malwa, to watch the course of Dekhan events, and to invade the country should he find pretext or opportunity for doing so ; and of this invasion the Queen was in dread. Domestic broils and disagreements had before on many occasions been adjusted, but the presence of so powerful a force as the Great Moghul's army, in the distracted state of local politics, was an evil which could not be overrated. Already the leader of the Dekhany party was known to have addressed letters to the Prince Moorad, imploring his intervention to uphold the claims of the boy whom he had placed on the throne ; and it was impossible to conceive that the astute Prince would neglect the very opportunity he had so long waited for. True, afterwards the Dekhany leader perceived and bitterly regretted the false step he had taken, more especially when the boy whom he supported had been discovered to be spurious. But the mischief done was irreparable, and the Queen Regent now knew that she should not only have to subdue local disaffection, but oppose the progress of the Imperial Prince with all the force and all the energy she could command. She had undertaken the duty, however, and cast ease and other personal considerations unselfishly aside. She had done what she could for Beejapoor, and was wanted there no longer, except to

make part of her nephew's happiness and share in his prosperity. And now, if in days of advancing age she was again to be thrown into those scenes of war which had accompanied her early life, it was, she said, the will of God and her duty; and she bowed to both with a submission and fortitude which never deserted her to the last.

We trust the foregoing sketch of the period, as far as Ahmednugger is concerned, will not be out of place. Without it, indeed, the course of this tale would hardly be intelligible.

CHAPTER II.

A PLEASANT JOURNEY.

THE first halt made by the Queen was at Sholapoor, which, formerly belonging to Ahmednugger, had been given to Beejapoor as part of her dowry on the occasion of her marriage; and the Royal lady once more took possession of the small, but elegant suite of apartments which look out on the lake or tank which washes the eastern side of the fort, and was evidently intended as part of its defences. Sholapoor, for the most part, has even now no pretensions to beauty, and the country around it, and that which had been traversed since the Queen left Beejapoor, is bare and monotonous; but the immediate vicinity of the fort, including the lake, with its island covered by a large Banian tree and a Hindoo temple, is undoubtedly pretty; and the pleasant sound of the tiny wavelets as they plashed against the walls and bastions was refreshing to hear, while the wind which played over the water came through the windows which looked over the lake very refreshingly. The Queen did not, however, tarry here, nor did she take the direct road from Sholapoor by the valley of the Seena to Ahmednugger. It was not only hot, but the country had been wasted by the previous war, and had not had time to recover; she, therefore, turned eastward to Nuldroog, or Shahdroog, as it had been called by her husband, Ali Adil Shah, and which he had improved by new fortifications and a noble dam of masonry across the river, a place in which many of the happiest hours of her life had been spent while the great works were in progress.

Nuldroog, for it has reverted to its own old name, occupies a crest or knoll of basalt, which juts from the main plateau into the deep valley of the small river Boree. After passing the narrow neck which connects it with the plateau, the knoll spreads out with a tolerably level surface, the north, east, and south sides being for the most part perpendicular; while the neck, through which a wide and deep ditch has been cut, is fortified by a heavy wall with curtains and bastions. These walls and bastions continue all round the crest of the precipice, and the result has been a very strong fort of an eminently picturesque character, which might not make much defence against modern artillery, but which at the time we write of was considered one of the strongholds of the country, and usually held a large garrison, especially of cavalry. And it was an important military position, too, serving to check the forces of Ahmednugger on the one hand and Golconda on the other.

King Ali Adil Shah had done much for the place. Besides the strengthening of the fortifications, and building near the east end a huge cavalier upwards of ninety feet high, ascended by a broad flight of easy steps, he had built a dam of stone and mortar of great strength and beauty across the river, which held back the waters, and created a long, narrow, but deep lake, which gave a plentiful supply of water to the town and both ends of the fort. Before this the only water procurable had been from the bed of the river, which flowed in the bottom of the deep ravine below the fort, and which in the hot weather was very scanty and impure. The new dam, therefore, gave a new value to the strong fort, and water became not only plentiful but easy of access. It is a noble work, stretching from one rocky point of the valley to another beyond, upwards of a hundred yards in length, and upwards of ninety feet in height. Over this the river falls in an unbroken sheet when in flood; at other times, the surplus water is carried off by a channel formed in the crest of the dam, which falls into the large deep pool that has been hollowed out at the foot. By an ingenious contrivance, a pretty Gothic apartment has been left in the body of the work, over the windows of which the waters in the highest floods can pass without entering, as they are diverted from the top down a tunnel, and escape at the base. At the northern end of the dam is another fort, or *tête-du-pont*, formed by the fortification of a considerable knoll, which is in itself a strong position, and materially assists the other defences.

It was a great delight to the Queen to revisit the place. The

Governor's house was cleared out for her, and for several days the whole fort was made private; and she wandered from place to place with her companions and attendants every day, pointing out to Maria and Zóra where she had sat for hours together with her lord the King, watching the works in progress, breathing the pure fresh air, and taking their simple meals on the top of a bastion, or on the high cavalier when it was finished, where a great canopy used to be pitched. Nor was it possible for the two girls not to be interested in the place itself. It was, indeed, very beautiful: the lake shimmering in the sun, with the black precipices, hung with many-hued creepers, reflected into it; while, after it had shot through the arch on the dam, the river brawled down the valley till it was hid from view by the projection of the hills below. The air here was cool and refreshing, for they had risen to a considerable height above Sholapoor: and this was another reason why the Queen had chosen the upper route instead of the lower. Here and there, from points on the table land without the fort, where the Queen took her companions, the dim blue plains of Beejapoor could be seen stretching to the horizon like a sea, and the fresh cool wind would come to them freely and soothingly. These, too, were old haunts of her husband and herself; and it seemed often to Maria and Zóra that, in the dreamy mood of mind in which she often sat alone, she appeared like one who had a consciousness of seeing these well-remembered scenes for the last time, and carrying away every possible recollection of them in her loving heart. Often, indeed, she would draw one or other, or both of them, to her side, and with her eyes brimming with tears, would say, "Look, children! here my lord received such a letter, or told me such a thing, and you must not forget even a stone of it; but, should I ask you even when my eyes are dim in death, you must describe it all to me as you see it now in the bright glowing sunlight."

I need not follow minutely the daily march in early cool morning, nor the succession of beautiful mango groves in which the party rested every day, affording cool shade and refreshing rest. They were, indeed, seldom in their tents till nightfall, for around the enclosure was a screen of tent walls, which made the whole private. The tent pitchers selected the shadiest portions of these groves, and usually contrived to enclose a number of large leafy trees, beneath which carpets and soft cushions were spread; and reading, or the Queen's business, with her clever secretary, Zóra, who had gained confidence by experience,

went on as usual; and embroidery, too, and Maria's paintings, except when she retired to her own tents to share her devotions with her brother; while overhead the birds chirped, or sang, or cooed, and screamed in their glee and freedom.

To Zóra in her new happiness this march was a perpetual elysium. Abbas Khan could not always be with her, for he had his own work to do in the regulation of the camp, the obtaining of supplies, and the payment for them, and all other current business. Sometimes, too, and indeed generally of an evening, the large Royal tent was opened; and the Queen received in durbar all the officers, zemindars, and chief inhabitants of villages around. The Queen had quitted the dominions of Beejapoor soon after leaving Nuldroog, and passed into those of Ahmednugger. Abbas Khan by no means liked what he heard from all quarters in regard to the position of Ahmednugger and the parties there, who seemed to be at constant and bloody feud; and he earnestly strove with the Queen to induce her to turn back. But she upbraided him. "Would she have the world think her a coward? and had she not brought Beejapoor through worse troubles than those?" So he was silent thenceforth. It was her fate, and whatever was to be, would be fulfilled.

The leader of the Dekhany party, Mean Munjoo, who had set up the spurious prince, was not at Ahmednugger. He had taken the boy with him, and gone beyond Owsa, towards Golconda, to urge the necessity of supporting Ahmednugger; and he was bitterly repentant that he had invited the Prince Moorad. He wrote to the Queen for forgiveness, and declared he would not return except with troops from Golconda and Beejapoor, to drive the Moghuls back. The Queen, too, wrote to her nephew, King Ibrahim, to send a heavy force of cavalry, in which the Moghuls were said to be weak, and to watch affairs from Nuldroog; and subsequently as many as twenty-six thousand of the best cavalry of Beejapoor, with six thousand from Golconda, assembled there, and occupied the crests of the plateau which stretched northwards.

With these precautions taken, which had occasioned several days' delay at Patoda, the Queen now marched on, faster than before, for it was impossible to overrate the importance of her presence at Ahmednugger. But it was the same pleasant journey throughout, the same succession of cool, shady groves and crisp bracing air. Often would the Queen wile away the march with her hunting leopards and falcons with her, and enjoy

many a gallop over the undulating downs, where Abbas Khan and the officers of his small force, and even the good Bishop, would ride with her and enjoy the sport. Sometimes, too, Maria, when the march was a quiet one, rode with her brother, to the great envy of Zóra, who, from an elephant allotted to her, looked after them as they cantered past her, longing to be with them. If there were anything remarkable to be seen, the Queen would diverge from the beaten track, as she did at the temple of Pukrode, and, looking over the crest, could follow the line of hills to Ahmednugger itself. There she had stayed an extra day to wander about, as was her wont, and enjoy the keen air of that elevation, which, while it put roses into Maria's cheeks, and made Zóra ruddy, tinged even the Queen's pale countenance with pink, and restored the bright beauty of her youth. Again from Patoda they made a day's excursion to the waterfall of the Incherna and its gloomy abrupt ravine; and they would sit for hours on the short smooth sward above, and watch the rainbows playing over the pool, nearly four hundred feet below them, and those which seemed to start out suddenly from the column of water, flash for an instant, and disappear. How glorious it all was! Even the heavy state cares which weighed upon the Queen seemed to be put aside for the time; and the noble lady's cheerful, nay, even playful disposition diffused a joy among her little party which they had never felt before. To Zóra it was perfect elysium, as she told her husband in their quiet hours; she often felt her heart too full for speech. "I had hoped, dear lord, to be happy with thee, and to make thee happy; but this reality transcends all my expectations, for you are all too kind and too indulgent to me."

"No, Zóra; all the love which inspired me as thou watched over me that first night doth but heighten by time. When I had it not, I hungered and thirsted for it. Now I have it, it groweth fresher every day, and more precious to me. Enjoy these happy days, therefore, to the full, for the time cometh, I fear me, in which there may be weeping and woe."

"Why dost thou think so?" she asked.

"I read much in the mother's sweet face," he returned. "When she gazes on these scenes of her old happiness, there is a wistful, lingering look in her eyes which seems to say, 'I am looking at ye for the last time.' When she rises to depart, it is not with a merry remark, as it used to be, but with a sigh and a silent tear, which I can read, though you may not be able to do so. But it may be only one of those gloomy forebodings which

torment us sometimes without real foundation, and from which the Lord, if He finds us faithful, delivers us happily; and so may it be with our beloved mother. There will be lip service enough to her when we go; but there are, of all about her, only ourselves upon whom she can depend. O wife! when I think on all she hath been to me since a child, I could give my life for her, even though I were to lose thee, my darling."

"And I would follow thee, my lord. Life would be death without thee; for, besides thee and our mother, whom have I in all the world to protect me against that bad, terrible man, whose last threatening still often seems to ring in my ears?"

A few days more, and through a pass in the Manikdown Hills, they reached the considerable town of Ashtee, and thence Bhatoree, a pretty village lying at the foot of the mountain, which is crowned by the noble mausoleum of Sulabut Khan. There was a comfortable summer palace there, now much decayed, but still habitable, which was then perfect, and the Queen found it ready for her reception. Groves of mango trees around afforded ample shelter for her followers and escort; and the situation was so beautiful that many from Beejapoor, who had expected to find only a savage wilderness of mountains, were now charmed with the prospects before them. One more march, and the Royal city would be gained in safety.

Here, too, all the officers and functionaries of State, with their followers and troops, came to pay their respects and offer their "mezzins" to the Royal lady. And though some had never seen her, yet there were many who remembered her marriage; and by none was the glorious campaign of 1564 forgotten, and all—old or new—were charmed with her grace and dignity, the wisdom of her counsels, and, as far as she could decide them, her own intentions; and she assured all that she should leave them no more until God willed to take her, and exhorted them to be faithful and true. So as soon as the palace in the citadel could be prepared for her, the Queen made a triumphal march into the city and fort.

Outwardly Ahmednugger presents no imposing appearance like Beejapoor. There are no lofty palaces towering over the walls, no tall minarets or domed mosques like those she had left behind her; but the city had an aspect of comfort and peace, and the gardens of the Furhat Mahal, the Bihishtee Bagh, or Garden of Paradise, were inviting and pleasant to view, and though comparatively low, the Royal palace in the fort was full of comfort.

The faithful Mullek Umber, governor of Dowlutabad, had sent from his new capital, Kirkee, large baskets full of oranges and delicious grapes, writing that in the course of a few days he would come himself; and there was no person whom the Queen more earnestly desired to see, or in whom she reposed higher confidence. Mullek Umber was, indeed, a remarkable man. From the condition of an Abyssinian eunuch he had raised himself to the rank of a viceroy of the kingdom, and governor of one of the largest provinces of the Ahmednugger dominions. He had—following the example of the Emperor Akhbar—surveyed and assessed all the lands in every village of the country, and reduced the whole to a system which operated most beneficially to the State as well as to the people. To this day the original settlements exist in many a village record, and are proof of the skill and patience with which they were executed, requiring little alteration to suit modern demands. A humane, devout man, as well as charitable and just, but not one to be drawn into the intrigues and dissensions of a Court. Whatever happened there, he preserved a dignified neutrality; too strong in his local position, and in the devotion of his numerous troops, to be meddled with by anyone. He had infinite respect for Queen Chand. He had followed the events of her career with profound interest, and he could see that except through her the affairs of the State had little chance of settlement or indeed of salvation from ruin; and he watched with much anxiety what the result of Queen Chand's first acts would be, though his counsel, when asked, was given freely and honourably.

For the first week or more events at Ahmednugger were without excitement, and nothing occurred to disturb their even current. The Queen and her companions made excursions to the Royal palaces and gardens without the fort; and even to one at some little distance, in a ravine of the eastern range of hills, built near a pretty cascade, which is well known to all present inhabitants of the English cantonment as the "Happy Valley." There the broad plain of the Godavery lay out before them; and even the grim rock fort of Dowlutabad, and the tall white minaret of the Emperor Mahomed Toghluk, were distinctly visible on a clear day. Maria and her brother were already longing to proceed thither, and visit the Portuguese who had settled there, many of whom were vine-dressers and orange cultivators; and the Queen promised that when Mullek Umber should arrive she would despatch them with him. Meanwhile, among the gunners and

artificers of the local army the Bishop and Maria had found many fellow-Christians; and as no feeling of bigotry appeared to exist against them, they promised themselves much success in their mission work; while some of the Aurungabad Christians came over to partake of the sacraments of the Church, and were heartily welcomed.

Thus passed many weeks. The Queen had received answers to all her despatches. The Dekhany leader had not returned, but remained with the Golconda troops, who were to take up their position at Owsa, while those of Beejapoor occupied Nuldroog. Although some pretenders to support the party of the spurious new King were known to exist, yet for the most part the succession in the right direct line, by causing the child Prince Bahadur to be crowned, and appointing the Queen Chand formally to be Regent during the boy's minority, as she had been at Beejapoor, was the desire of the majority. And of this course the sage Mullek Umber entirely approved. There was no doubt of the purity of the boy's descent, who, with his mother, had been confined in the fort of Chawund; and when he arrived he was welcomed with joy, and on a given day was crowned King in the great audience hall of the fort, with every demonstration of satisfaction.

There is no doubt, however, that this bloodless revolution gave secret umbrage to many, and some severe measures had to be taken. Ansar Khan, the governor of the fort, was detected in active correspondence with the Prince Moorad, representing the Queen as an abandoned woman; the boy she had adopted as the son of a minion of her own; and that the people, though they dare not complain, were in the last state of discontent; and Ansar Khan being arraigned before the chiefs and nobles, was convicted and suffered death. Secure in her position, the Queen wrote to the Prince Moorad, recapitulating the past, quoting the recantation of the Dekhany leader who had invited him. As a noble and an honoured guest of the son of the great Emperor, whom it behoved to protect an infant minor—he would be welcome, most welcome, and a friendly embassy and escort would be sent to meet him; but if hostile intentions still filled his mind, and force were resorted to, she was well supported by her neighbours, and had made every preparation to repel what she could not avert by conciliation.

But the cloud afar off only thickened, and became more and more threatening week by week, and the Queen strained every nerve to preserve the fort to the utmost, and prepare for what could not be much longer averted

CHAPTER III.

THE PROGRESS OF THE SIEGE.

THE rainy season had ceased, and operations could now be undertaken without danger of interruption from the weather. For some months past the Prince Moorad Mirza had watched the progress of events at Ahmednugger with the keenest interest; and had the Dekhany leaders been united in regard to the election of the first King, it is probable he would not have sought to disturb it, but would have made his own terms with them. But their withdrawal from their position, the spirited movement of the Queen Dowager in the coronation of Bahadur, the infant King, and the rallying about her of parties who had before been disunited, promised a very formidable coalition for defence. And when, in addition to local unity, it became certain that the very formidable cavalry of Beejapoor and Golconda had taken the field to cover Ahmednugger, the Prince saw it was time, if he was to strike in at all, to do so at once, before the eastern and southern forces could arrive at their purposed destination. He had with him thirty thousand of the flower of the Moghul cavalry, a large body of Rajpoot infantry and artillery, and several of the most celebrated generals of his father's army led different portions of the troops; and the prospect of a campaign in a new country, and with the celebrated cavaliers of the Dekhan, infused the highest spirits into all classes.

Two men had joined the Prince, in whom he had now much confidence. Not long before, as he was hunting, a cavalier, well appointed, and attended by a small body of spearmen, rode up to him, and offered his services for the Dekhan campaign. He and his family had been, he said, in the service of Beejapoor for some generations; but enemies had prevailed against him, and he had left a service in which he could not stay with honour. He knew the whole country of the Dekhan, and most of the leaders of parties, Dekhanies and foreigners, and could direct the Prince to means of success to which he would, with his own people only, remain a stranger.

This brief colloquy had been followed by a private interview, in which Osman Beg—for it was the man whom we have already seen degraded and dismissed from Beejapoor—laid before the Prince and some of his most esteemed councillors the condition of the whole of the Dekhan, that of its armies and parties, and the position of the Queen Dowager at Ahmednugger, which he did not undervalue. He told them that they should not despise the power of a woman like her, whom no danger could appal, nor ordinary resistance overcome; and that in the Dekhan there was no commander to equal her in the field; while the people loved her, and would most of them, support her to the last. The great object, therefore, should be to shut her up in Ahmednugger before she could withdraw the infant King to the protection of Beejapoor, which had ample means for defence.

"And what, sir, may be your motive for offering your services to me?" asked the Prince, doubtingly.

"Revenge," returned the other. "Ask me not for what; that may appear in time even to thee. And, for the rest, accept this poor sword, or reject it, as seems best to your Highness. To serve in the army of the King of kings, under his famous son, has long been a dream of mine, wherever that service might lead me. And now that it turns upon my enemies, can I refuse? If my star is not fortunate to gain a place under your Highness, I will seek my fortune elsewhere. I am a soldier, and know no occupation other than my sword gives me."

"Such men are among the necessities of war," said the Prince to Khan Khanan, his commander-in-chief, when they were alone. "What think you of him?"

"I see deceit and treachery in his face," was the reply. "But what can that signify to us? He has some scheme of private revenge to carry out, and he will be faithful to that if not to us. Give him a command, for he has undoubted knowledge of the country which no one else possesses, and in this he will be of use."

So Osman Beg was attached to the division of Khan Jehan, and accompanied the army in the capacity of guide and director of the marches towards Ahmednugger.

Meanwhile Dom Diego had not been idle. Acting under the advice of his banker at Surat, he had written a petition to the Prince, representing himself as a soldier of fortune, recently arrived from Europe, who had knowledge of the attack and defence of fortified places, and the direction of artillery in the field; and,

anxious for employment, offered his services to the Royal army. While at Surat he had heard from his cousin at Goa of the appointment of Francis d'Almeida as Bishop of Ahmednugger, and subsequently, that he and his sister had accompanied Queen Chand to her destination. What better opportunity could be afforded for carrying off Maria than the turmoil of a siege and assault. He had seen much service as a soldier in the East. Personally he was brave, and in his own land had studied for the profession of artillery and fortifications. There was no doubt as to his probable usefulness. European adventurers had often rendered very essential service to the Royal armies; but the best of them were at Dehli, and should the applicant be what he described himself, his presence against one of the most celebrated forts of the Dekhan, improved, it was said, by the Portuguese, would be invaluable.

A few days after this, Dom Diego, accompanied by Pedro di Diaz and a party of his sailors accustomed to the use of large guns, arrived in the Royal camp, and was heartily welcomed. The fine martial figure of the new comer made a favourable impression upon the Prince; and the complete suit of mail in which he made his entry into camp, seated on a noble Kattiwar charger, was remarkable and imposing. As before, Pedro di Diaz was his interpreter, but he found the Prince to possess a considerable knowledge of Portuguese, which he had learned at his father's, the Emperor's Court; and Dom Diego, after a short interview, found himself not only much more at his ease than he had expected to be, but appointed to a lucrative post, as inspector and regulator of the artillery.

As he was leaving the Prince's tent, an officer, apparently of the Royal army, came up to him and said, "I ought to know that face. Hast thou forgotten the mission of Moodgul and the plan of Eyn-ool-Moolk?"

"No; thou art Osman Beg," was the reply, "and I have not forgotten. But thou here, my friend? Methought the fair Zóra, whom thou used to tell me about, would have more charms for thee than war?"

"What has brought thee, O friend," returned the other, "has brought me, strange as it is. There are two women in Ahmednugger whom we would have. Nay, deny it not; and we may easily take them when there is none to defend them. Your Maria is there; and what matter if you appear as a soldier to gain her?"

"Thou hast guessed shrewdly, friend," was the reply; "it is

even so. I find my life dull without her, and such devotion as I offer to her may be accepted at last. And if not—well, we shall see. I have no relish for priestly offices, and war and its excitement suit me much better. Will the Queen fight?"

"As far as a woman can, she undoubtedly will fight. Men may feel fear, but she does not even in the face of imminent danger. If the people with her are only true to her, you will see that the result will flutter some of these silken love-birds of Dehli. Our Dekhan ways are rough, but the men of Ahmednugger are roughest of all; and some of thy countrymen made the fort what it is."

"Then it will require one of them to open the casket. Who knows where to find the key? And if my old knowledge has not departed from me, I may be able to do what force cannot do, or these wretched guns which the Prince thinks so much of."

"And the guns of Ahmednugger foundries have ever been famous since the days of Chuleby Roomy Khan, the Turk, and many have been bought from your countrymen. I would advise caution, Señor; and may Alla send us a good deliverance! When the time comes, we may be able to help each other; till then we may meet seldom, or not at all, for my place will be the advanced division."

"And mine with the main body and the Prince, where you will always find me, Osman Beg, at your service. If you will keep your own counsel, I can keep mine; and though we care for what we hope to win, there are many here who would laugh at us if they knew our desires; and, from what I hear, the Prince sets his face against any abduction of the enemy's women."

"I, at least, can demand my wife, after the custom of our law," said Osman Beg, with a swagger.

"When she is the wife of another? Ha! ha!" returned the priest, with a sneering laugh. "You are not particular, perhaps, though I am. But we need not interfere with each other; and so, farewell!"

While the great army was in slow but certain progress towards the goal of its desire, we must return for a brief while to the personages in this tale whom we left there. Since the coronation of the boy King, Bahadur, there had been no violent disturbance of the public peace; and though some of the leaders of parties still held aloof, watching the course of events, others had frankly joined the Queen and declared for her policy. The fort was now full of men, and one of the best soldiers of the State, Nihung

Khan, who had been confined at Dowlutabad for several years, was released by Mullek Umber, and sent, with six thousand good cavalry, to keep the frontier, and, if necessary, to join the Queen. The Queen herself, with calm fortitude, collected provisions till the fort granaries were quite full. Every piece of ordnance was thoroughly inspected, and made fit for service. Shot, powder, entrenching tools, and gabions were prepared; nor, in consultation with her artillery officers, was any measure left incomplete for defence. All walls, huts, and some houses which had encroached upon the esplanade were levelled, and nothing existed to obstruct the fire of the place. She was fearful of exciting jealousy in the minds of her troops, and did not therefore appoint Abbas Khan to the command of the fort, as she wished to do; but he was her indefatigable assistant in every department; nor was there a day in which the Royal lady did not visit works in progress, or go out on visits of inspection to points where it was suggested trenches might be made, or other hindrances to the enemy's advance contrived.

There continued, however, one permanent source of disquietude and anxiety to her, which was the inactivity of the Beejapoor and Golconda forces, for as yet they had made no forward movement; and as the weather was now open, they ought to have taken up the positions she had suggested. Once, indeed, when she wrote to Soheil Khan, the Beejapoor officer in command, that the Moghul cavalry were about to make a movement to turn the flank of the general defences of the kingdom, twelve thousand cavalry were despatched from Nuldroog, by way of Bheer, to hold them in check; but the movement proved futile, the Beejapoor force was defeated and routed by six thousand Moghuls, under Khan Jehan Lody, one of the best generals of the army, and the Beejapoor troops fled back from the Godavery in confusion, to tell tales of Moghul prowess, which considerably added to the existing alarm. In truth, Osman Beg had rendered essential service in this movement. By a rapid march he had turned the flank of the forces which covered Dowlutabad; he had prevented the junction of Nihung Khan's troops with those of Beejapoor; and by the defeat of the latter, the rear of Ahmednugger, the fertile plain of the Godavery, and several easy passes up to the very precincts of the fort, were left in almost perfect tranquillity to the invaders. Thenceforth the Queen knew she had no one from whom she could expect aid, but she did not relax her preparations or her vigilance. She knew her nephew could not leave Beejapoor, for without one

or other of them the capital could not be trusted; and Soheil Khan, the general who had been sent with the cavalry, though a brave man, was by no means an enterprising officer, or one on whom she could depend in an emergency. Oh! that it had been Humeed Khan, or anyone of the devoted friends who had ever supported her, then there would have been neither doubt nor hesitation. Soheil Khan was a calm, reflective man, and it was on this account, perhaps, that he had been sent. He could perceive clearly enough that if Beejapoor took any open part in the war, the Moghuls, when Ahmednugger fell, would infallibly declare war against it, and that, under all considerations, would be the safest policy.

At first, our friends the Bishop and his sister had thought that peace would not be broken. The Queen seemed so firm in her position, the fort was so strong, and the enemy so distant, that Francis d'Almeida did not like to defer taking up the charge he was responsible for to his Church; and, taking advantage of the arrival of Mullek Umber, they travelled in his suite on his return; but they found only comparatively very few Christians at Dowlutabad, who were cultivators of grapes and oranges, and a few at the new city of Kirkee, which was then being built—who were gunners and soldiers. Many years before, a lay monk had settled among them from Goa, and had contrived to keep the little flock together; but both Francis and Maria saw that it could not readily increase, and that it would be a waste of time to remain there longer than would be necessary to establish the foundations of what might arise hereafter; and when a small chapel in the city of Kirkee was completed under Mullek Umber's assistance, who, it was believed, had greater reverence for his old faith than was consistent with his profession of Islam, they took their departure, and arrived at Ahmednugger shortly before the irruption of the Moghuls and the defeat of the Beejapoor forces had closed the valley of the Godavery to general travellers.

The Queen was rejoiced at her friends' arrival. If for a brief time she had doubted whether the comparative quiet and security of Dowlutabad would not prove more attractive to them than the imminent risk of war which menaced her, their arrival dispelled all such thoughts, and she estimated at its full worth the devotion and good faith of the Bishop and his sister. They had not only returned to their flock, but were prepared to render such assistance as their peaceful calling enabled them to do very usefully and practically. As there was no apparent chance of being re-

lieved by Beejapoor, and an attack by the Moghul army appeared more and more imminent every day, from the reports of progress by the enemy, the worthy Bishop set himself to organise something in the form of a hospital, in which Maria, from former experience at Goa, was able to render her brother very essential service. A large magazine was cleared out, and fitted as well as circumstances would allow for the purpose. Bandages, splints, and such other necessaries as could be obtained, were stored in it; and while the result was watched curiously by the garrison, yet it gave assurance in no small degree that the wounded would be cared for, and not left to chance, as was too often the case.

We need not, perhaps, follow the daily routine of lives which had no change, nor any alleviation of anxiety common to all. The Queen held her accustomed durbars, and received reports; she visited the posts as often as was possible, especially at night, to guard against surprise; and with the danger growing nearer and nearer, appeared to display increasing fortitude and resignation, and this demeanour had incited in her garrison the highest spirit of devotion and loyalty. Maria and Zóra, her indefatigable assistants, had their hands full of work of their own; but at times of comparative leisure they met together, read to or conversed with their Royal mistress, or often in the still evenings sat with her on the terrace roof of the palace, looking over the wide country, and watching the bodies of troops marching to their posts, or exercising in the open space in the centre of the fort, till the evening watches were set, and all at last was at rest.

If Nihung Khan and his Abyssinians could but arrive, the accession of strength would prove an additional security. But day after day passed, and he came not. There were no means of communicating with him, while messenger after messenger was captured or cut off by the force of Khan Jehan Lody, which seemed to be as ubiquitous as it was vigilant. But the Queen did not abandon hope, she knew Nihung Khan to be wary and vigilant, and should he confine himself to the duty of harassing the besiegers and cutting off their supplies, important services would be rendered.

And at last no doubt remained. On December 12, according to the local history, the leading troops of the Moghuls advanced within sight of the fortress. All the morning their kettle-drums and trumpets had been heard in the distance, and by a little after noon the crowd of officers, of cavalry, with the Prince's royal canopy in the centre, borne upon a lofty elephant, appeared in the

vicinity of the Hushti Bihisht Gardens, which had been the scene of many a pleasant day's festival for the Queen and her companions. It was in vain that Abbas Khan, and spirited young leaders like himself, pressed her to allow them to make a sally and endeavour to throw the enemy into confusion; the Queen positively forbade the attempt. If Nihung Khan did appear, they might advance to assist him; but any reverse now would make her situation more desperate, and render the defence of the fort—in which she, perhaps, placed too much confidence—out of the question altogether.

Early next morning they watched the great army form in line—a magnificent though terrible spectacle—and the Royal Prince, accompanied by some officers, rode round the fort, out of reach of shots, pointing out to the leaders of each division the ground it was to occupy. One officer, who acted more boldly than the rest, advanced near enough to be within reach of shot, but escaped unhurt. As they all watched him from the roof of the palace, Abbas Khan felt sure he was a European; but the Royal army contained many such adventurers, and the Bishop, though he could not distinguish the features, felt a conviction that it could be no other than Dom Diego. He, however, kept his own counsel, and said nothing to his sister.

During that day and part of the next the investiture of the fort was completed on three sides—north, west, and south; but the east side was not closed. Now Nihung Khan, whose advance had been so eagerly looked for, had made a rapid march to Beejapoor, and had represented to the King Ibrahim the extreme danger of the Queen's position. He had succeeded in obtaining some cavalry, which with his own levy made up about seven thousand men; and with this he had hoped to arrive before the fort was invested, but if not, to cut his way through the enemy's lines. He had also, when within twelve miles of the fort, sent out spies, who not only reported to him that the east side was as yet unoccupied, but contrived to inform the Queen that he was at hand, and would, God willing, be with her next day; and we may imagine with what intense anxiety he was expected.

The Queen had arisen before daylight, and was watching with Zóra from their usual place, when they heard suddenly a great but distant clamour arise to the eastward of the fort, which continued for some time. At last a body of horsemen, some few hundreds only in number, emerged from under cover of some hedges, and at headlong speed crossed the esplanade. It was

Nihung Khan, who had marched during the night with his whole body, but found that, instead of an open passage to the fort, he became engaged with the Khan Khanan's powerful division of the Royal army. He himself, with his immediate body-guard, had cut his way through the enemy to join his Royal mistress, leaving the main body, which had retreated, to retire upon the Beejapoor forces. Welcome as a gallant soldier like Nihung Khan was, even with a comparative handful of men, yet, on the other hand, there was no longer any doubt that the investiture of the fort was complete, and that the siege had commenced.

The enemy's operations were conducted with skill and military science. No other measures would have been available against such a place as Ahmednugger. Dom Diego, after several feints, established his head-quarters and trenches on the south-west side of the fort, and thence continued his approaches by regular parallels to the crest of the glacis, or as near as possible to the point, whence, eventually, the breaching batteries were established; but the defenders' artillery was infinitely superior to his own, and the operations had been slow and difficult. Not only did the artillerists of the fort maintain their ancient reputation, but the practice of the Arabs in the garrison was very fatal. With their excellent matchlocks nothing could show itself in the Moghul trenches without being hit, and the real terror they inspired was very great. Then the garrison became more and more confident, and their courage rose in proportion. Day and night the Queen herself patrolled the fort, watching the terrible game with a kind of fascination. Nor could her ordinary companions be restrained from sharing the danger with her; while, at night, the well-known slight figures, passing from post to post, were greeted with many a fervent blessing and prayer for their safety. And who shall tell of the gentle ministrations of Maria and her brother; the care and skill with which wounds were dressed; the soothing and thirst-assuaging drinks that were composed and ministered? Sometimes the worthy Bishop would accompany Meeah in his rounds, or sit with him at his post, offering a hint here, a suggestion there, as far as his small military skill enabled him to do; and when the point of attack was finally established, his directions as to the flanking fire to be maintained, in case any breach was made, were eminently useful. "Priests," he said one day, laughing, "need not be soldiers; yet in my country many a Bishop has been obliged to fight for the cause of his Church, and why not I for my little flock?" Thus, in the semi-circular

bastion at the angle, which was large and roomy, and held a number of guns, he succeeded in placing two of the best pieces in the fort; and for the defence and the cover of the gunners he used large gabions filled with earth, which afforded complete protection. It was in vain that Dom Diego directed his guns upon this and other large bastions defended in the same manner. The nearer he approached, the more deadly was the defenders' fire. His trenches were raked by it, and by no means could it be silenced. Nor were the Ahmednugger gunners forgetful of the legend of the employment of bags of the heavy square copper money of the country, and occasionally a shower of it was sent hurtling through the air with a screaming noise which inspired more terror, perhaps, than it did actual mischief, except at very close quarters.

In truth, Dom Diego's position was not an enviable one. The Prince had looked to him to discover some easy manner in which the fort might be at once assaulted and taken by storm. Any sacrifice of men he would have considered of no consequence; but the admirable construction of Ahmednugger forbade any attempt at escalade with hope of success. Its lofty walls, its deep and extremely broad ditch, the height of the counterscarp and defences for musketry were unapproachable. The Moghul artillery, too, was none of the best, and was too light for siege purposes; very little effect had been produced upon the lower part of the fort. Here and there a few stones had been broken and displaced, but the facing only covered and marked the real strength which was in the earth, solidified by age, of which the rampart was composed. Day after day guns melted at the vent or at the muzzle, and became useless, and no progress was made.

On the part of the commanders of the Royal army, two anxieties of a very serious character were ever present. Provisions were getting very scarce, scarce enough to reduce the ordinary rations of the men and horses. For although the Beejapoor troops did not advance to the capital, they had command of the most fertile districts, from which grain and forage could be derived; and the circle grew narrower. This, however, was kept a profound secret, and the operations were continued as usual.

The beginning of February had now arrived, and progress in the siege was as dilatory as ever; and at a council of war the whole chances of success were discussed calmly. Should the Beejapoor troops advance, the siege must be raised; and in

regard to the siege itself all seemed to depend upon the success of mining, which Dom Diego had counselled from the first, but which the native excavators declared to be impossible on account of the firm, stony nature of the soil. If mines could be carried under even one of the central bastions, and a breach made, there would, it was considered, be no doubt of success.

Just then the Queen wrote in the most urgent terms she could to the Beejapoor officers. If they advanced at once, and operated against the rear of the Moghul lines, nothing could save the enemy from defeat, and most likely destruction, for their cattle were already dying of starvation; the fort was still intact, and there had been but few casualties; in short, that victory was within their grasp if they would but take it. These letters were intercepted by Osman Beg, who took them to the Prince, who added a few lines of his own in a chivalrous spirit, to the effect that he had marched from Dehli on purpose to cross swords with the cavaliers of the Dekhan, and was waiting for them, and trusted they would not delay the opportunity he had so long desired.

But no result followed on these letters, and the Queen almost began to despair of the good faith of Beejapoor. Why should they allow such an opportunity to escape? Again and again did Abbas Khan and Nihung Khan press her to allow them to depart secretly and make their way through the hills; but the Royal lady felt that the danger to the fort must draw to a head, and whether the Moghuls raised the siege and departed, or whether the crisis of an assault arrived, their presence was alike indispensable.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ASSAULT.

FOR several days the fire of the besiegers had much slackened, and the spirits of the besieged rose in proportion to the highest pitch. Were the Moghuls in reality preparing to abandon the attack and retire? It might be so, indeed, for a considerable body of Beejapoor cavalry had at last moved forwards and taken post in the Manikdown Hills, from whence their operations against the Moghul supplies and distant outposts were beginning to be seriously felt; but they were by no means strong enough to effect any

considerable diversion, and, up to the night of Feb. 20, affairs continued in the same position. But the inactivity of the enemy appeared unaccountable to the Queen and her council. Upon what could they be relying? The allied armies were at Bheer, and by a sudden and energetic march might be with her in three days; but it was impossible for the Queen to communicate with her friends, every egress from the fort being so vigilantly watched night and day. But the suspense only lasted till the night of the day we have named, when, as all were watching on the walls, a loud manly voice was heard from the opposite side of the ditch, which cried out—

"O ye brave friends and brothers in the faith, no longer make a vain resistance. Ye have fought well for your honour, and may save the shedding of more blood. Under the five bastions whereon ye stand five mines have been silently driven. They are loaded and ready, and they will be fired to admit the army of the King of kings. Beware, then, for I have warned ye; and your fate cannot be averted but by surrender."

Then, amidst the profoundest silence, the voice ceased. No figure was seen, for it was a profoundly dark night, and some, overcome with awe, cried, "It is a warning from the Lord; it is the voice of an angel; who shall resist it?" and a great fear fell upon all. But the strange incident only seemed to inspire the heroic Queen with new courage, and mounting a slight elevation of the parapet, her clear, sweet voice was heard above all murmurs.

"Shall we who are unhurt, and have victory in our grasp if we persevere, give up our swords, and like frightened women betake ourselves to the feet of the invader and beg for our lives? Shall we, with arms in our hands, cease to use them to protect all dear to us. Your women and children, O my sons, will hardly thank ye for abandoning them to the brutal violence of the Moghul soldiers. Behold! I am but a woman, and a weak one; but I leave not this spot with my life; and, come what may, I rely upon the most just Lord to deliver us and ye all from this tyranny. Away, bring up the miners; we know the places, so there is no doubt. Bring tools, and set to work. I would rather tear up the earth with my weak fingers, than suffer this danger to exist while we have the time and the means to avert it."

Then arose a hoarse cry of "We will not desert thee, O Mother. We will die if it be God's will, but we will not yield. Fear not then, but see what we do."

At first there was some little confusion, but gangs were speedily

organised, and with a hearty good will they set to work, led by the Queen, who, with a pickaxe in her hand, descended into the shaft, and, with those dearest to her about her, worked like the rest; going from shaft to shaft, distributing draughts of cool water and sherbet to those who suffered thirst. It was impossible to exceed the enthusiasm which her heroism inspired.

Nihung Khan, Abbas Khan, and even the pacific Bishop, excited by the turmoil, ran from place to place and encouraged all. Nor was the result disappointing. While they were thus employed, another voice called to them from the bottom of the wall to surrender, for that at daylight the mines would be sprung. But the warning passed unheeded; two mines had been laid bare, and the charges of powder removed after sharp contests under ground; and the Queen was in the act of distributing rewards for the removal of the charge of a third, when, with a fearful report and crash, a fourth mine, as yet undiscovered, was sprung just as day dawned on the scene, and a few yards of the wall fell.

When the first mine had been struck by the counterminers, and the persons driven out of it had gained the trenches, the alarm was at once given in the camp, and the Prince Moorad hurried to the spot at a moment of extreme peril to the Moghul army, for the first mines had occupied the better part of a month. But the skill of the counterminers was so evident from the rapidity with which they had discovered and disarmed them during the night, that it seemed hopeless to continue the work, as well on account of the nature of the ground as because provisions were on the point of exhaustion. His adviser, Dom Diego, had not foreseen such a catastrophe as failure. He had visited the mines the evening before while they were being charged; he had watched the skill with which the native miners laid the charges and tamped them; and the result would, he thought, inevitably be that three at least of the mines must destroy the bastions under which they were placed, and furnish three practicable breaches for the stormers, who would be composed of the flower of the Royal army. But these plans had failed. All that remained was one small mine under a part of the curtain, which had been intended to enlarge another of the main mines. It might make a practicable breach, but it would be a narrow one, and it might possibly fail altogether.

The Prince and Dom Diego stood together on one of the parapets of the temple looking over the fort, the interior of which, as the day was breaking, could be seen distinctly, with the thou-

sands of men like ants hurrying to and fro, carrying earth in baskets, in cloths, and as best they could, from the countermines. Parties of them were collecting, and even breaking the surface of the ground near the small mine we have mentioned. Dom Diego pointed out the place to the Prince.

"There is our last resource, for the other mines are not charged; and they would be useless if they were. Shall I fire it? We shall at least see what sort of a heap it makes; and I, for one, am ready to lead any party your Highness may appoint to storm it."

"Well said, sir," exclaimed the Prince, "and like a gallant soldier. When thou art within thou wilt have the treasury and Royal jewels to help thyself from, and I hear they are both rich."

"My treasure is of another kind," replied Diego, "and I do not intend to neglect it. Shall the mine be fired?"

"Bismilla!" cried the Prince. "Lose no time."

"I have laid the train," said Pedro di Diaz, who came up at the instant; "but the chamber is not half charged, not enough tamped, but it will do something."

"Then fire it in the devil's name," cried Dom Diego. "I will watch."

A few moments more, and two thin columns of smoke issued from the fort wall, and from that part of the counterscarp which was opposite. These places heaved slightly upwards, and earth and stones arose with a muffled sound, casting into the air the bodies of a number of men who had been walking on the fort wall. The effect of these explosions was a clear road into the ditch from the counterscarps and an apparently practicable though steep breach in the rampart of the fort.

"It is done!" cried Dom Diego, with a wave of his plumed hat to the Prince. "If your Highness will send for the stormers I will lead them at once, if they will follow me."

In the fort, as the smoke and dust of the explosion cleared away, some of the garrison seemed to have given up hope, and were girding their loins for flight; but the Queen was equal to the emergency. While she called to those about her to remember their oath to her, to rally their men, for the gates were closed, and there was no egress for flight, she cried, "And whither would ye fly, O sons and brothers? To the plain yonder, to perish by the swords of your enemies? Nay, for your honour's sake, desert me not now; and to the latest day of the Dekhan your deeds shall be sung by bards and minstrels. See, we women blench not from

the storm ; and she who brings my armour and my sword, a holy Syud's daughter, will die here with me, and her husband, my children both, rather than yield while we have life." Then, as Zóra, clad in the old green dress of the Turreequt, approached, the Queen withdrew for an instant, and putting on her morion and a suit of light chain mail, with gauntlets, and waving a naked sword, came forward among them, crying the old battle cry of her husband. Over her face, as it was becoming light, she had cast a transparent veil, but every feature was visible, glowing with a rapt enthusiasm and confidence.

"To the breach, my friends, with me!" she cried. "Who will follow my veil? Behold it will lead you to honour, if to death; never to infamy. If we die, we shall sip the nectar of Paradise ere night."

No one attempted to resist this appeal. With passionate cries of devotion, with tears and sobs, the leaders and men, with her beloved Abbas Khan, pressed forward to do their best in her defence. The rough veteran, Nihung Khan, with tears flowing down his cheeks, besought her to retire to a place of safety, but she cried the more that she would remain ; and in her own Battle of the Veil it behoved her to lead, and no other.

But it was yet some time before the Moghuls advanced to storm, and the delay enabled the besiegers to make some defence for the breach available. A double row of gabions was placed over the crest, and filled with earth ; the best marksmen among the Arabs and the garrison were posted on the wall above its sides ; wall pieces were brought from other parts of the fort ; rocket-men plied their rockets on the crest of the glacis opposite, through which a road had been sloped from above. Behind the gabions, and sheltered by them, dense bodies of spearmen stood in serried ranks. In short, no precaution that Abbas Khan and his companions could bethink themselves of was neglected. Even the Bishop, who the whole night through had been at work, ran from his post on the large bastion to see that all was in proper order, and his few directions were practical and useful.

Every preparation had been made that could be contrived. Every gun that the fortifications allowed of had been trained on the breach and the enemy's road thither. The garrison had been divided into bodies, so as to relieve each other as quickly as possible without crowding ; and though the enemy fired occasionally from the trenches against the breach and the parapets of walls, the precautions which had been taken of covering the men

with gabions and sand-bags almost entirely prevented casualties. As to the breach itself, though the enemy fired continually at it, they produced no effect, as their shot, knocking up a cloud of dust, only sank into the earth harmlessly. Presently, also, Abbas Khan and some of the boldest Arabs contrived to let down some gabions below the crest of the breach, where they established themselves, thus affording increased matchlock fire of a fatal character, besides opposing an additional obstacle to the stormers.

"He is sending us his best soldiers, mother," said Abbas Khan, settling his turban more firmly on his head, as he prepared to descend to his post; "but fear not, none will come near thee."

"Rather let one blow of thy good sword release me, son," she said. "'Twould be but kindness, if God will."

He made no reply; but the tears welled up in his eyes as he left her and his beloved wife together, and heard their cries of "Deen! Deen!" as he entered his perilous position.

Still they waited and no advance was made; and the Queen was not unmindful of the necessity of furnishing food for the men who had watched with her all night. Since very early, before daylight, the cooks had been busy preparing pilaos and boiled meats, which now began to arrive in huge cauldrons, and was distributed to the men by companies; and all sat down and ate their plattersful, or gathered round huge dishes, and ate their fill; but no one moved from his appointed station; while the Queen and her attendants, disdaining more delicate viands prepared for them, partook of the general mess of camels' meat and rice, plentifully seasoned with pepper and onions, and which was by no means to be despised by hungry folk. Indeed, for the time, the area of the fort in the vicinity of the breach was a place of feasting. Elephants moved to and fro with large water-skins, and men bearing jars of cool sherbet gave freely to those that needed it; and, taking example from the Queen's forethought, every private house in the fort sent its quota of food or of drink.

So noon came, and the voice of the muezzin chaunted the call to prayer from different quarters of the fort, as if no deadly strife were imminent, and the Moslems spread scarves or waist-bands where they stood or sat. The Queen had not stirred since the morning from the place she had taken up near the gabions; and the only protection she would allow the people to make for her and Zóra against the sun were a few cloths tied to spears. Once Maria had come to see her from her own post, the hospital, but there was no time for much speaking; and, committing them

to the care of God, she returned to her post with her brother, the masses of rough soldiery making way for her with the most profound respect. One look with her brother she took from the great flanking bastion along the side of the fort attacked, and it gave her an assurance she could hardly have expected.

The whole side of the fort was uninjured, except near the breach, where there had been much pelting by the enemy's shot, but no fracture. The *débris* of the mine had spread out as far as the bottom of the ditch, and partly lay on its level floor; but it seemed, even to her, a perilous place for people to ascend. Some part of the counterscarp had apparently been dug down or blown in, and it was evidently the way by which the enemy would approach. All along the wall, every gun that could be aimed was directed upon the breach, and the two beautiful bastions which formed the Queen's post.

One reason for delay was the indecision in the Moghul camp. Many experienced veterans declared that it was waste of life only to attempt to storm Ahmednugger by such a breach as had been made. Reproachful epithets were freely banded about, and it seemed a question whether any attack would be made that day. But Dom Diego's savage temper would brook no control. "I will take the place with the five Europeans I have," he cried, "and cowards can follow at their leisure, as if breaches in fort walls were to be made like beaten highways for dainty fops to strut upon." Dom Diego was, in truth, weary of the idleness of the Moghul officers. There was not a true soldier among them, and he often thought failure imminent; but Maria was there, and while it was possible to win her, even a soldier's death would be better than the hell of tumultuous feeling which raged within him.

At last the signal for assault was given from the enemy's camp. First, the huge imperial kettle-drums sounded a march in their deep booming notes, and a general discharge of all their artillery in the trenches followed; while, in the bastion of the fort, the Portuguese and Hindoo native gunners stood or lounged among their piles of shot and bags of copper coin. Many of them were known to Maria; their wives were helping her in her own work, and all saluted her reverently and affectionately as she left them with a prayer that the Lord would protect them all.

All through the Moghul trenches the silence was almost oppressive. The muezzin's call to prayer was proclaimed like that in the fort; and, for a brief space, only a distant hum from

the town and camp could be heard. As Maria stood on the steps of the great bastion, she could hear flies buzzing about her, the birds chirruping in the trees near her, and even the lowing and bleating of the cattle and sheep which were grazing in the broad ditch on the sheltered side of the fortress. The sun shone through the thunderous air with a fierce hot glare over all, and the plain and glacis were quivering in the trembling light. The wind had fallen, and the stillness and heat were so oppressive that she was glad to gain the cool shelter of the large vaulted building. Many fresh guns that had been brought to bear upon the breach aroused the echoes even of the distant hills; but the shot had little effect upon the extemporised defences of the breach, or upon the parapets anywhere; and the Queen and Zóra, looking through a loophole that commanded the breach, saw, with a thrill of delight, that Abbas Khan in his perilous post was safe.

Suddenly, on the crest of one of the trenches beyond, a tall, powerful figure, dressed in European costume, stood forth, waving a naked sword, which flashed in the sun; while with the other hand he removed a plumed morion from his head, and made a courteous salute to the fort. He wore a bright corselet of steel, with gauntlets, and a buff coat and boots, richly embroidered. In his left hand he carried a stout stick, but no shield or other defence whatever. For an instant there was a shout of "Shabash! Shabash Feringi!" and, instantly, a crowd of men scrambled over the trenches, and, as he pointed to the breach, followed him. And these, some hundreds in number, Europeans and native volunteers, formed the forlorn hope. Again, others came on in denser array; Arabs, Pathans, Afghans, Rajpoots, dressed in yellow tunics; and other tribes, many singing their war song, others shouting their national war cries, armed with matchlocks, sword, shield, and spear, flashing in the afternoon sun, which poured its hot rays on all. It was now somewhat past four in the afternoon, and the sultry heat of the day had become almost sickening, when a slight breeze from the west waved the banners of the advancing host, and slightly displaced the cloud of dust which had arisen over them. It was a glorious, awe-inspiring spectacle truly; but the defenders blenched not from it; every man grasped his weapon more firmly, and stood at his post prepared for the worst, should it come. On the far side of the ditch, along the crest of the counterscarp and covered way, clouds of skirmishers spread themselves, pouring their shot upon the defences; but the fire had little effect, and gradually slackened.

Scrambling down the road prepared for them by the mine, and without order, large bodies of stormers now poured across the ditch, the tall figure of the European bounding before them all to the very foot of the breach, when suddenly one of the large guns on each of the flanking bastions sent its deadly discharge of round shot and copper hail among the crowds beneath with fearful effect. Hundreds fell, writhing; while from every bastion rockets, fire-balls, and musketry smote them as they lay or straggled onwards. There was no chance of retreat, for the masses in the rear, which came on in a continuous stream, were not checked, and any of the foremost who faltered, or turned to fly, were thrown down and trampled into the dust. Again and again did Dom Diego attempt the breach, but the earth was so loose that footing could hardly be maintained; and the grim serried ranks which covered the crest of the breach gave little hope that could he and those with him reach the bristling ranks of broad spears beyond, they could force an entrance, while Abbas Khan and his body of Arabs plied them with shot, few of which missed their mark.

But still none of the stormers turned; on the contrary, thousands of men charged down the counterscarp, to be met with the same volleys from the great guns, which proved so deadly and so effective. Once Dom Diego and some hundreds of men, collected hastily, made a rush up the breach, and interchanged blows with its defenders; and Abbas Khan, struck with his devoted bravery, called to him to take quarter, and come to his post; but the humane effort was rejected with an oath, and he fell back among the struggling masses to seek volunteers for a task which was beyond the power of man.

Can we, even in imagination, realise in any degree that fearful maddening scene — the discharges of the great guns at intervals carrying destruction to hundreds at every shot, assisted by the rockets, the musketry, and the fire-balls from the walls? Even these were little in comparison with the frantic struggles of the masses as they were urged on by the Prince in person and his generals—the shouts, the screams, and cries of wounded and dying men, the fierce thirst which consumed all! The ditch, from the first almost covered by the dead and dying, was now rising under the heaps beneath, which every moment augmented. There was no escape and no progress; the masses contrived to descend, ignorant of what was before them; and as it was industriously circulated by the Prince and his advisers that

the breach had been stormed and the fort was being plundered, all rushed on to gain a share of the riches it was supposed to contain—only to be met by the withering fire which destroyed them, and the horrible heaps of carnage grew higher and higher as the evening wore on.

As to Queen Chand, we read in the old chronicles how—fearless among the storm of shot, dauntless among the horrid cries and shrieks which filled the air—she was seen everywhere, distributing rewards, giving water to the wounded and thirsty, and encouraging all. Nor was the green figure beside her less active or less useful. Sometimes they were at the breach, down which they looked, with a fascination which could not be repressed, upon the masses of struggling forms beneath them. But still Zóra saw her brave lord safe; and he even smiled and waved them back, as the Queen, mounting the parapet of the gabions, spoke a few words of encouragement to their defenders. All saw her as she defended the breach in person; and the flutter of the "standard of the veil," which she still wore over her bright morion, was watched by many an one of the enemy's officers, and even by the Prince himself, with unqualified admiration of her heroism.

At last night began to fall, and here and there a star peeped out from the pure ether through the thick, heated vapour from the combatants which filled the air; and the baffled Moghuls, leaving their heaps of slain as they were, retired beyond the crest of the counterscarp into their own lines. They had lost thousands, for the ditch was a mass of carcasses which no one could reckon; they had lost arms, standards, officers, and, above all, reputation. That the hosts of the King of kings should have been repulsed from a Dekhan fortress commanded by a woman was a result which none had anticipated, much less the haughty Imperial Prince who had urged on his devoted troops to destruction. Gradually, those that remained of the invaders retreated up the slope, harassed to the last by the rain of copper hail with which they had been tormented; and the Queen and Zóra, with some of the bravest of the women and eunuchs, watched the last retreating figures which staggered up the slope beyond; or a man here and there extricating himself from the horrible masses like one rising from the dead, followed them alone, or sank down and perished with the rest. And then, as if seeing each other for the first time during the fearful day, they cast themselves upon each others' necks and wept for joy. Then, too, Abbas Khan came up from his post bearing in his hand a standard he had taken from an

Afghan, who was almost the only man who had reached the little fort. "He was a brave fellow, mother, and would take no quarter, and there was little time for thought; but he died like a brave man under my weapon, and departed to Paradise. O Mother! what can we render to the Lord for these mercies? for ye are unharmed, both of ye."

"Yes," said the Queen, with her eyes overflowing, "thousands and thousands lie yonder dead and dying; but we are safe, and have lost but few; and the good Padré and Maria tend those who suffer."

"If I may, I will go and see Maria," said Zóra, timidly. What would she not have given to fall into her husband's arms and weep out her thankfulness, but that was not the time or place.

"Go, child," said the Queen. "Go! greet her from me, and say all is safe and well; but do not let her see that," and she pointed to the ditch, "it might appal her tender nature." And Zóra went, attended by Yasin Khan and some others to fulfil her tender mission, and gain relief for her overcharged mind.

"And now," said the Queen to Abbas Khan and those near him, "let us leave nothing undone. The breach has, indeed, been saved; but it must be made sure. I, for one, will not leave it till it is built up against any chance of surprise, or even of attack. Do not talk to me of sleep or rest. My best sleep would be here beside the workers. My best rest can only come with security. Ye will see what endurance this weak body hath when danger is present. It is an old employment of mine repairing breaches; but at Beejapoor I worked three days and nights without sleep, and here, with so many men, all should be ready by daylight; and then when the Moghuls see their labour has been in vain, they may leave us in peace. See and get Zóra some food and rest," she whispered to Abbas Khan, "she will need it."

"Not while thou art here, O Mother," was the reply. "She is young and strong, and can bear it better than thou. But why remain? Canst thou not trust Nihung Khan and myself to do all?"

"No!" she replied, firmly; "it is my work and I will do it. Nor shall Zóra leave me; she will be better for seeing Maria. But my turn has not yet come. Hark! there is a cry from the heap of dead. 'For the love of God! for the love of God! water!' it cries. Does no one hear? It is some Feringi."

"It may be the cavalier who led the assault," said Abbas Khan. "I saw him sink down, but he may have survived."

"A gallant fellow," said the Queen. "I, too, watched him. Go, one of ye, for the Padré Sahib; tell him to come with his bandages and medicine. Quick! Quick!"

Abbas Khan, and some men with blankets, descended the breach to the foot, but among the dead on the slope they could find no one living. They dare not take a torch for fear of drawing upon them fire from the counterscarp. They listened, and at last the faint cry of "Aqua! Aqua!" was repeated, but in a fainter tone.

"He is here," cried one of the men, "lying under others, and he is warm. I see his face now; it is the Feringi."

The Queen was right. Her quick ears had heard a low cry in a strange accent, which had escaped all others around her. It was from Dom Diego, who, as we know, had led the forlorn hope. When the mines had been sprung, he would have advanced at once under the cover of the smoke and dust which hung over the wall and ditch, but he found to his vexation that the men were not ready. The hour was not propitious, and the Court astrologer could not discover a fitting time till the afternoon. No one would follow him till the signal was given from the Royal pavilion. And though Dom Diego cursed the delay, he had no alternative but to await the general order, which came at length.

Dom Diego had done his part bravely. He had led three separate assaults of the breach, but was as yet unwounded. Nor was his example lost on the brave men who, as one party was beaten back, or sank down to make a fresh portion of the horrible bridge, still formed afresh, and, reinforced by others crowding on from behind, were led only to perish in their turn. At last, in one of the desperate rushes up the breach, Dom Diego fell from a matchlock shot, but for a moment only. He rose to his feet, and strove to rally those with him, when his leg was shattered by a round shot, and in the discharge of copper hail which came with it, his left arm was broken, and he fell insensible among the heap of dying and dead, and was trampled down with the rest. Presently, however, his consciousness returned; but it only revealed to him more certainly the hopelessness of his situation. Extrication from the mass of dead and dying was impossible, and he must die—unshriven, and without hope. We dare not follow his thoughts nor his cries, now defiant, now despairing, nor the struggles of a Christian soul which, believing in the hell which seemed opening before him, saw no hope of repentance or forgiveness. At first it was beyond his power to

move; but several men above him in their death agonies had loosened the pile he lay under, and with his right arm he had been able to push aside the dead who most oppressed him, and thus he gained space to breathe. It was, however, but a prolongation of his misery, for he felt that his leg was shattered, and even to crawl, could he be freed, would be impossible. He could see the forms of men on the ramparts and in the breach moving about, and even hear them as they spoke one to another; but his cries for help and for water had grown fainter and fainter till the Queen's ear had distinguished them.

Then Abbas Khan, and the rest who had gone down the breach, lifted away the dead from above him and raised him up, placing him in a blanket, and carried him up into the fort. At the top they laid him down at the foot of the Bishop, who anxiously looked at the face of the sufferer, who was now insensible.

"Merciful God!" he cried, lifting up his hands to heaven; "it is Dom Diego, and he still lives! Bring him to the rest of the wounded. Quick, quick!" he continued, to Abbas Khan, "or he may die without help."

CHAPTER V.

DIEGO'S DEATH AND THE BISHOP'S EMBASSY.

THEY carried the wounded man gently in the blanket as he lay. It was impossible to attempt a palanquin, as the motion would have caused him additional agony. But he was now more sensible than at first. He had drunk greedily from a cup of the Queen's own cool sherbet, which she had kindly sent him; water had been plenteously sprinkled on his face and hands by the Bishop; his pulse had somewhat rallied, and he was even endeavouring to speak, but was forbidden. "Maria! forgive!" were the only words he could utter. Thus they took him on, nor was it far to the place. There were lamps lighted inside, and wounded men lying on mattresses on the floor; and some, which were the worst cases, upon small truckle beds; and on one of these they placed the dying man, supporting him by pillows. There were several Portuguese soldiers there also, who were tending wounded comrades, and all gathered round to assist. Then they carefully un-

fastened the morion and steel corselet, took off the heavy boots, and the coat of buff leather soaked in blood; and the Bishop supplied some soft underlinen from his own stock with which to dress the wounds. But this seemed hopeless, for several were fatal in their nature, and the loss of blood had been enormous. Maria had been busy at the other end of the wide, ong room, and had not seen the new comer; but her brother sent word to her not to come till he sent for her, as the sight would be too shocking. All that she heard was that the sufferer was a Portuguese officer, and she knew there were some such men in the Prince's army.

D'Almeida's cordial, which had been administered at once, had revived the sinking man in some degree, and for the first time he opened his eyes and stared vacantly about him. Some of the men were bathing his wounds, and this, and the removal of his armour and heavy clothes, had revived him a little. Francis d'Almeida was bandaging one of the wounds, which was bleeding afresh, and Dom Diego recognised him, and, with a wan smile, put away his hand and said faintly,—

"It is of no use, brother Francis, I bleed within me, and I am dying. Hear my confession, which I will make to thee truly as long as I can speak, and then let me die."

"It is, indeed, needful, my poor brother," said the Bishop, gently, "for no man living could help thee now, and a brief time must close all thy earthly sufferings. Take this cordial, and it will revive thee. Is there aught that should be written?"

"Something," he said; "that my wealth may be secured to the Church. But write quickly, or I faint. Can masses be said for my soul, that I may be forgiven? The writing should be in Persian, for the banker at Surat to read."

Who could write Persian there except himself? But the Bishop had seen Zóra with his sister, and he sent word to her to come to him, but not to bring Maria. And she came. A sheet had been spread over the sufferer, and his ghastly wounds were not apparent.

Writing materials were at hand, and seating herself by the bedside, the girl looked up with a scared face, and asked what she was to write, while Francis interpreted the words as they dropped slowly from his patient's mouth.

"Write," he said, "to Hemchund Premchund, banker of Surat, 'I am dying, my friend, and I will that all my effects in your charge be made over to the illustrious Archbishop of Goa, or whoever he

may depute to receive them. Pedro di Diaz is dead, and all there is belongs to me. The ship is to be sold, and the crew paid their wages. Five thousand rupees are to be remitted to my brother, Francis d'Almeida, of this place, for the use of his Church. I am in my full senses, and have this written in Persian that thou mayest comprehend. Be faithful, and discharge thy trust honestly.'"

Zóra's rapid pen soon traced these words, and it was put into Dom Diego's hand by the Bishop. "It is complete," he said; "sign it."

For an instant the dying man rallied, passed his hands across his eyes, and then, taking the pen, wrote in his bold hand,

"D. DIEGO DI FONSECA, S.J.

"My own writing.

"Written at Ahmednugger by Zóra, the wife of Abbas Khan.

"Witness, Francis d'Almeida, Bishop of Ahmednugger, &c. Before us, 3rd Rujub, A.H. 1004, 22nd February, 1596."

"That will do, my brave child," said the Bishop, patting Zóra on the head. "Go back to Maria, and tell her I will send for her soon." And Zóra rose, ran quickly to Maria, and delivered her message.

"Who can he be?" she asked. "Didst thou see his face?"

"I dare not look," Zóra said; "he was too terrible to look on; and thou wilt soon be told. But the Padré Sahib seemed to know him."

"Blessed Mother of God!" exclaimed Maria, sitting down hastily; "it cannot be Diego. What could have brought him here?"

"Diego! Yes, that was the name thy brother called him. But why dost thou ask?"

"He was my malignant enemy, sister."

"And Alla hath delivered thee from him. And thou wilt forgive him, Maria, even as I forgave mine."

"Yes," she replied, slowly, "I will indeed forgive him. See, my brother hath put on his vestment; he is holding up the cross, and the men about are kneeling, and the dying man is confessing his sins. Look!"

It was as she said. And the ghostly confession was proceeding, one of the men holding a cup of cordial to the sufferer's lips as he made motions for it—a broken tale of sin and crime, which we dare not attempt to record. Yet it came forth from the dry, parched lips hardly without a break till its close. Francis d'Almeida had not missed a word; though, from his

extreme weakness, Dom Diego had sometimes spoken in low, broken whispers, gasping for breath.

"There is no more to tell," he said, faintly, at its close. "As I shall answer in the judgment, no more. I have hidden nothing; but, with the absolution of the Church, I pray thee let thy sister say, while I can hear and see, 'I forgive thee, Diego,' and I shall then die happy."

Then Francis sent for his sister, and whispered, "It is he. Dost thou forgive him, Maria?"

"Freely and truly," she said, firmly, "as I may be forgiven."

Dom Diego could not speak now, but he could hear the words which fell from the woman he had loved so madly, and with so sinful a purpose. He tried to raise his hands, but they fell back on the sheet helpless; and his large bright eyes were glazing fast, and becoming dim. "Maria! Maria! forgive—pardon!" they heard him say in a whisper scarcely audible. And while the Bishop was holding up the cross before him, and preparing to recite the Beaticum, she could not resist the impulse, but took the cold hand of the dying man, and said, "I forgive; fear not." Then a soft smile of peace and resignation seemed to pass over his features. "Forgiven," he murmured; and as the words of "Depart, Christian soul, in the name of God the Father Almighty who created thee," were spoken, the spirit passed away with a slight shivering convulsion, and the body lay still in death; and the Bishop and his sister, their sweet voices mingling, chanted the Litany for the dead, which seemed to linger amidst the small domes and grooves of the high roof, echoed, as it were, by angels.

Zóra had stood by spellbound. She had never seen a Christian die; and Maria, who had taught her many hymns, had never chanted to her the Litany for the dead. "Come away," she whispered, when silence fell on all; "come away, and weep in my arms as I have done in thine. Yea, art thou not my sister? and he knew that he was forgiven and died happy. Surely it was the Lord's doing, and his fate brought him to thy feet. Come away;" and Maria, weeping passionately, suffered the girl to lead her to the chamber she had fitted up, and saw her cast herself at the foot of her cross and pray fervently.

Yes, it had been a vast relief to Zóra to go, as her husband and the Queen told her to do, to Maria, and endeavour to keep out the impression which the horrid sights she had seen and the fearful bridge of human carcases had caused. All day long the girl had

never left her Royal mistress's side, and the green dress of the Syud's child had shared the honour of the day with the armour of the Queen and the "standard of the veil." But she hardly in truth knew what she had done; and when, after her prayer, Maria rose calm and at peace, and, taking Zóra to her heart, told her what the wounded who were brought in, said of the slight lad who gave cups of water to wounded men, helped them into litters, and still cried his boyish war cry, Zóra hid her blushing face in her sister's breast, and said, "It was not I, Maria; some other, perhaps." But Maria said she need not deny it, for that Abbas Khan would tell her more, and be proud of her to the end of his life. Then Maria bade her return to the Queen, and she departed, saying, "If he will let me come to-morrow, and the Mother does not want me, I will help thee to tend these poor fellows."

Zóra found the Queen where she had left her, but she was more at rest. Her attendants had brought her a small carpet and a pillow, but she had not laid aside her morion and shirt of mail, and she was sitting close to the breach, where the relays of masons were working by the now bright starlight; and the broken wall was rising rapidly course by course. Fortunately the old wall had not been shaken to its foundation, and on clearing away the rubbish the firm portion was soon struck. All through the night the work proceeded steadily; and as day broke about twelve feet in height of the wall had been filled in, and the breach was secure against all chances of sudden attack and surprise. The trenches were not even manned by the enemy; and as day dawned messengers came from the Prince Moorad with a flag of truce, congratulating the Queen on the heroic defence she had made, and informing her that she would hereafter be addressed by the Emperor as Chand Sooltana, the Queen Chand, instead of, as before, the Beebee, or Lady Chand, and begging her permission for the dead to be removed without molestation. And this was granted at once without hesitation. It had, indeed, become necessary to do so, for a sickening stench had already begun to arise from the festering mass, which would have become insupportable had the operation been delayed. But it was a heavy labour. Large gangs of men came by relays; but it was not till the day after, though they worked unremittingly, that the ghastly contents of the ditch were cleared away.

At last, as day was breaking, and a cold fresh wind arose refreshingly from the north, the Queen was persuaded to retire and take rest. What she had gone through, both in body and in

mind, during the last two days and nights of the siege and assault, was almost superhuman; but the heroic spirit had never quailed, and she appeared to have no sense of fatigue or want. There was no exultation in her manner, but to Nihung Khan, to Abbas Khan, and the crowd of officers who poured forth their congratulations, she simply said, "I thank the Lord, on whom I depended, and who, by the bravery of ye all, has given us the victory. Be ye as humbly grateful as I am." Zóra helped her to lay aside her armour, bathed her, and clad her in cool garments, and led her to her little King, who was awake, and asking for her. Then as the boy stretched out his arms to her, and she took him, and he stroked her face, with a child's compassionate fondness, the emotion which had been so long pent up in her loving heart burst forth with a violence which terrified those about her. But Zóra laid her down, and soothed her as she would have done an ailing child, till she fell into a deep sleep. There was no tumult of shouting, and cannon, and musketry to arouse her, and peace seemed to have fallen gently upon all.

But for a while only, for the Queen was soon in her accustomed seat in the hall of audience, doing her usual work; and she again wrote to the Beejapoor commanders, informing them of the repulse of the attack, the safety of the fort, and the perilous position of the Moghuls. She urged and entreated her friends to advance at once, when she should be able to make a sally to meet them; and she sent these letters by bold, careful messengers, who, dropping from the fort wall, mingled with the crowds who were removing the dead from the trench, and gained the Moghul lines. Here, however, they were intercepted, and taken to the Prince, who read the letters, adding what he had done on a former occasion, and inviting the reinforcements to hasten to their destination, as he was most anxious to meet them. "The sooner the better." And they did march at last.

But so slowly. The impetuous Queen, who knew they were near enough to be with them in three days at most, would fain have had them arrive even sooner, and would have helped them to drive the enemy ignominiously from their position. But they scarcely moved at all; certainly not with the desire of crossing swords with their enemies, and it still seemed as if they overrated the power of the Moghul cavalry.

And perhaps they were right, for the cavalry much outnumbered the whole of the Beejapoor forces in advance, and there had been few casualties comparatively out of the thirty thousand horse

with which the Prince had left Guzerat. The effect of the nearer approach of the southern forces told, however, seriously on the Moghul camp, which was more straitened than ever for provisions. Prince Moorad would have welcomed heartily any attack by the Beejapoor forces; he could have beaten them easily in the field, and the scope of his action would have been enlarged. He might have gained possession of the upper valley of the Seena, now teeming with plenty—nay, he might have pushed on to Purenda, and established an advanced post there; but it is most probable that the Beejapoor commander had foreseen this, and preferred guarding the approaches to a weak point, rather than obeying the Queen's hasty summons to attack. The Mussulman historians of the period blame the Beejapoor troops heavily for not attacking the Moghuls the day after the assault, or during the assault itself; and their sympathies are entirely with the Queen, who chafed sorely at their delay. But the probability is that their officers were better generals than the Queen, and could see where hidden danger existed clearly enough to avoid it. When she wrote her despatches, however, the morning after the assault, she was in the highest degree sanguine; and when she received her officers at the afternoon durbar there was not a sign of fatigue or care upon her cheerful countenance.

Among others was the Bishop, who, with Maria, had come up to see her before the durbar should commence; and they told her of the death of Dom Diego, in whose gallant advance she had been so deeply interested. Of course the Queen remembered the tale, as she had heard it before her friends went to Goa; but she could hardly be brought to believe that the man who had been mortally wounded in the assault was the same person, until the general outlines of his confession had been related to her. Then, indeed, she took Maria into her arms and congratulated her on her escape. Surely God had specially preserved Maria's honour and her own, and Maria's gratitude had not been lack of expression.

"And now," said the Bishop, "I must acquit myself of my duty to the dead and to the Church and State I serve. I cannot go to Surat myself; but the Prince, who has the reputation of being frank and honourable, may be induced to interest himself for my Government, with whom he is on friendly terms, and receive my explanation of these affairs. I would, therefore, solicit a note to him from your Majesty, and be the bearer of it while the truce lasts."

"It is dangerous, Padré Sahib," returned the Queen, musing. "My own opinion is that he would extort the money, which you say is very considerable, from the banker, and appropriate it to his own use; or that his people, who are notoriously corrupt, would make away with it. But let not this rest on my opinion alone, let us send for Abbas Khan and Nihung Khan, on whose ability and discretion you can depend, and hear what they advise." And they were sent for. Both were hard by, still working at the breach, and they came directly, and the Bishop related to them the facts we already know.

They did not apprehend any personal danger to the Bishop in his proposed visit to the Prince Moorad, but they were decidedly unanimous in advising that he should not be told of Dom Diego's hoard of wealth. The Imperial Government, they said, is, by long established law and usage, heir to all the property of persons who die or are killed in their service, particularly if they are foreigners; and the issue would be that this treasure would be lost for the purpose for which it is designed. There would be no hope of saving it.

"But suppose," said Nihung Khan, whose opinion, being the elder, carried the most weight, "that you ask the Prince for the horses, arms, and moneys of the deceased now in camp. That will only be a fair demand. If granted, it may open your way to a disclosure of the remainder at another audience. But you will see, Señor Padré," he continued, laughing, "that that will be refused on the grounds I have mentioned. And it is better you should be prepared for the truth, though it may be told in fair words which will give you no offence."

"I dare say you are right, Khan," returned the Bishop. "Dom Diego was buried early, with the rites of the Church, and I am at liberty. There is no time to be lost; and if I go at all, I would beg that the flag of truce be prepared, and that a palanquin be got ready for me."

Maria was very anxious, and now could not restrain her feelings. "Go not, Francis," she cried; "go not among those savage men. Why not wait a few days, and when they are gone thou canst write to the authorities at Goa, and send the letter to King Ibrahim, who will forward it, when the necessary steps can be taken through the bankers of Goa to obtain the effects of brother Diego from Surat without giving any power to the Mogul Government to interfere."

"Thou art the wisest counsellor among us, Maria," said the Queen, smiling kindly on her, "and I will send thy brother's

despatch to King Ibrahim myself; there will be no doubt he will do what is needful. Bankers are always true, and I see no difficulty whatever. Go, Padré Sahib; my mirdhas shall attend thee with honour, and it may be that the Prince will make political disclosures to thee which may be of importance. Go, prepare thyself, and lose no time, for the day is yet ample for thy purpose."

So the good Bishop set out. No armed men were sent with him, but only four silver mace-bearers, as a sign that he was a Royal ambassador. They were stopped at the first picket near the west end of the trenches, and thence passed on cautiously through the busy camp to Furhut Mahal, where the Prince had taken up his residence, to which a bridge of rough pontoons, or boats, had been thrown across the moat. He had to wait at the head of the bridge till permission was given to advance, and, attended and preceded by the mirdhas, he was ushered into the entrance hall, and thence, following the officer on duty, he ascended the steps which led to the upper storey where, for the sake of its coolness, the Prince had taken up his quarters.

The Prince Moorad, a fair young man of pleasing appearance, but plainly dressed in white muslin, was seated on a pile of cushions, accompanied by three elderly officers, who were evidently of high rank. He partly rose as the Bishop bowed low before him, returned the salute, and bidding him be seated, said, "You speak Persian, sir?"

"Imperfectly," was the reply; "but I am used to speak it to my Queen and in the Court at Beejapoor. I can write it also as I speak it."

"Good," said the Prince; "then tell me why you have come. Are you the ambassador of the Sultana?"

"I have the honour to bear a note from her," and he withdrew it from the sash of his robe, "which will explain the object of my intrusion upon your Highness. Will you be pleased to read it?"

The Prince took the envelope. After having examined the seal, he carefully opened it and read the contents.

"This only states that thou art a Bishop of the Christian Church at Goa; and, as such, thou art welcome. Wilt thou proceed to tell thy business? Is it secret or political?"

"Neither, my Prince," was the reply; "but personal only as regards the effects of one Dom Diego di Fonseca, who was a priest of the Christian Church, and who died of wounds received in the assault yesterday."

"Dead!" cried those present. "Dead! and thou knowest this of a certainty?"

"I dressed his wounds during the night, my lords; but it was hopeless; and I buried him this morning before the sun rose."

"He was a gallant soldier, if a Nazarene priest," said one of the elder officers. "Peace be with his memory, and the peace of God rest upon him."

"Ameen!" murmured the others. "With a hundred like him we had won the fort."

"And thy business, Señor Padré?" asked the Prince.

"The effects of the deceased; his horses, arms, pay. These are for masses, which he willed should be said; and to give peace to his soul, it is necessary they should be performed."

"Yes," said the Prince, smiling; "the Padrés do that at Agra, where the Asylum of the World has built them a church. It is called mass. But what effects had he, Señor Padré?"

"I know not, your Highness; but, he said, though only a humble priest, he had attained rank. He had not speech to tell me what he had, and was too weak to be questioned."

"It is against the law, your Highness," observed one of the secretaries present, "to surrender the effects of one who has died in the State service; but it is competent to you to give any gift in recognition of his death as a gallant soldier, and that will be more acceptable to the good Padré than horses, arms, tents, or elephants, all of which have been appropriated to the Government use."

"I demand nothing," said the Bishop; "but whatever His Highness's generosity may dictate I will take thankfully, be it the smallest sum."

"Nay! the son of Akbar Padshah knows how to be generous,' said the man who had just spoken. "Permit your slave to send for two hundred mohurs, which will be equal to the value of the Christian's effects;" and, writing a few lines on a slip of paper, the Prince's seal was affixed to it, and calling an attendant it was sent to the treasury.

Most profuse were the Bishop's thanks for, in his estimation, the princely liberality with which he had been treated; and for an instant he thought he had better have brought Dom Diego's document; but the other course, suggested by Maria, was most feasible, and freed him from all responsibility.

"And now," said the Prince, "as thou art a discreet and well-spoken person, and accustomed, no doubt, to the political affairs of Courts, we have a proposition to send, through thee, to the heroic Chand Sooltana, whose fame is spread over Hind, to which we

invite her serious consideration." Then he paused for awhile, and resumed—

"Although," he continued, "by the fortune of war we have suffered a repulse from the fort with heavy loss, which has deprived us of many brave comrades and soldiers, yet the might of this army is unimpaired; and I am prepared to resume the siege as soon as the present truce is expired. The Sooltana, we know, is relying upon succour from Beejapoor; but we have read her letters, written only this morning, and forwarded them to their destination. But she will see that it is impossible for the friends she expects to arrive in time to save her. They do not exceed six thousand horse, without artillery; and we have with us thirty thousand of the Imperial cavalry. But we are without cause of war with Beejapoor; and those who watch us we have respected, as they have respected us. If we attack the fort again, which we have determined to do if our proposal is refused, the consequences will be deplorable; for our soldiers, remembering the events of yesterday, will allow none to escape from it, and all must inevitably perish, including the Queen herself and the boy King. The consequences, therefore, rest with her alone; and as a humane and merciful woman she will not provoke them by a false estimate of her own power.

"Listen, therefore, Señor Padré; and you, a man of God and of peace, will not refuse to exert your powers of persuasion with her, too. My generals and myself, that is the Khan Khanan and Khan Jehan Lody—and he introduced them—have this morning, with the aid of my learned secretary, drawn up the draft of a treaty between the kingdom of Ahmednugger and the Imperial Government of Hind, which, if executed, will not only perpetuate the mutual good will of both States, but cement their attachment to each other as long as the Sun and Moon shall endure. This is it," he continued, taking a roll of paper from the secretary's hand; "and I will briefly explain its purport to you.

"We demand no expenses of the war. All the treasures and jewels of Ahmednugger remain in the young King's possession.

"Our Royal army will quit its present position, and retire to its own territories, on guarantee by the Queen of no molestation, and orders for grain and forage to be paid for on delivery.

"In return we demand cession of the province of Berar, which Ahmednugger cannot defend, and which is a scene of disorder and rapine, and a cause of suffering to the country at large. It is not an ancient possession of Ahmednugger, whose proper here-

ditary dominions are guaranteed, it is a province retaken by treachery from Duria Imad Shah, who asked for aid against an usurping Minister, was imprisoned, and foully murdered. No one can deny this, Señor Padré, for it is as notorious as the Sun at noonday, and has long cried for justice at the hands of the Asylum of the World, my father.

"And now, Señor Padré, you have permission to depart. Take these in memory of the son of Akbar Padshah, who presents them to you;" and, taking a small rosary of pearls from his neck, he hung them round that of the Bishop, while a mirdha in attendance threw a light Cashmere shawl over his shoulders. "And my good wishes for your success with the Sultana, to whom I forward by you my sincere admiration and respects. The sum on account of the Christian cavalier you will find in your palanquin."

Then the Bishop rose, and took leave. "I will do my best to stay further carnage, O Prince," he said, "but the question must rest with Her Majesty the Queen and her advisers." Then he was conducted to his palanquin, and passed out of the camp as he had come.

CHAPTER VI.

PEACE FOR AWHILE.

IT was yet day when Francis d'Almeida again reached the fort; and, after giving an account to Maria of the result of his embassy, and the liberal conduct of the Prince Moorad, he looked round his patients, and sent word to the Queen that he had been entrusted by the Prince with a political message which he could deliver to no one but herself; and, if she were at leisure, he would come to her presence directly, and would prefer seeing her alone at first. The result of the Bishop's mission had been what the Queen expected, and she did not hesitate to request his attendance as quickly as possible.

"I have only Zóra with me," said the Queen, when the Bishop was ushered into her presence. "There has been much to dictate, and I always feel more confidence with her, and more at my ease than with the men. But what news hast thou brought, Señor Padré? and how didst thou succeed in regard to the effects of the cavalier?"

"They would not give them to me," he replied, "as I was told they would not; but the Prince gave me a heavy purse of gold instead, which is amply sufficient—nay, a munificent gift; but methinks," continued the good man, simply, "if I had told him of the rest, it would have been confiscated. I had better obtain it through the banker with whom it is in deposit. But that is a minor matter altogether; I have much more important news to communicate to your Majesty, which relates to peace."

"Ha!" cried the Queen, clapping her hands; "so they are tired of war after the game they have played, and its consequences."

"No; your Majesty must not be deceived nor deceive yourself," returned the Bishop. "They are determined to renew the war, to reopen the siege, and to continue it until the fort is taken, and every one in it put to the sword. This is what the soldiers demand, and cry out for almost to mutiny."

"Yes," said the Queen, sadly; "we might perish, all of us, but never yield; there the Prince is right. But what terms of peace does the Prince offer?"

"He gave me this memorandum, which hath his own seal," was the reply. "Perhaps you had better read it yourself."

"Let Zóra read it, Señor. I have not patience to think of it. Remember how unprovoked this war was, and how I strove to avert it. But read, Zóra, and let us hear the worst."

Except for an expression of impatience now and again with her hands, the Royal lady heard the document to the end. "Some of it is fair, and some unfair," she said at length. "It is true we have no hope of aid from Beejapoor. When its troops might have struck in and made the Prince's position untenable, they kept aloof, and abandoned me to my fate. Oh, that Abbas Khan had led them! or why not the King himself? Has he forgotten the many times this poor life has been imperilled for him and his? But now," she continued, bitterly, "a new building, a new ornament to his palace, a new falcon or hunting leopard, has more attraction for him than his mother who made him what he is. Let it pass, it is my fate; and we have—thanks be to Thee, just and merciful Alla!—been able to defend ourselves hitherto, and may defy the worst, even death."

"If it were thine own only, noble Queen," said the Bishop, respectfully, "it might be welcome to thee amid all the factions, intrigues, and perils thou hast to endure; but, remember, thou art accountable to God for the lives of all who are entrusted to

thee as His viceregent, and there are thousands here who look to thee."

"Death!" she cried, excitedly; "did I not court it in the assault? Can anyone say that I blenched from it, or hid myself in my zenana?"

"No one, lady," returned the Bishop. "On the contrary, thine enemies do thee ample justice, and were even full of praise of thy heroism; and they would not have it subjected to the last trial in death. Consider, honoured lady, how many lives may be saved if terms can be made. But forgive me if I have spoken too freely on this matter."

"Nay, but only as a peaceful minister of the Lord," she returned, gracefully. "As to the cession of Berar, I for one would not oppose it. Its annexation was the act of a madman. He who murdered his own father cruelly, to whom massacre was familiar, and who destroyed the Royal family of Berar, was hardly accountable for his actions upon earth; and I for one would cheerfully resign all pretension to Berar, which from the first hath carried the consequences of its sin-laden possession with it. The country never belonged to this kingdom, and its retention only embroils us with other parties, and it also lies too distant to be defended as it needs with these troubles to meet at home."

"And were Berar ceded, your Majesty will observe that the King Bahadur will be guaranteed his throne, and there will be no interference with any part of his ancient dominions—which is worthy of especial consideration."

"It would be if I could trust those that make it; but my soul tells me that the lion has only tasted blood, and would have more. Nevertheless, I will lay all before my council in durbar this evening, and will not delay an answer."

The evening durbar was numerously attended; all the principal officers and Ministers were present, and brought forward their recommendations for rewards to those who had distinguished themselves by acts of valour; and these having been granted, the general assembly was dissolved, and those only remained whom the Queen specified.

"First, my lords," said the Queen, "I desire to know from you all, unreservedly, in what condition you find the fort to be after the siege, up to the present time. My reasons for the question are urgent, and I will state them presently."

Then every department was reviewed. Except at the breach where the mine had been sprung, the fortifications were uninjured,

as there had been no attack on three sides; but the mine, though but little of the wall had fallen, had shaken it for a considerable distance on each side, cracks were opening in it in various places, and it would require to be taken down and built from the foundation ere it could bear any fresh cannonade, even from smaller guns than had been employed; "and," added the engineer (for so we may call him), "any chance shot might strike a weak part and bring down masses of the masonry, which would render the fort defenceless on the side that has been attacked. I and the chief builders have examined the whole, and that is our decided opinion."

Many others followed. The powder and shot were much expended, and most of the new powder had been used. The old was not sound, and must be renewed, and shot was needed, but all the guns were in good condition.

The already long-continued siege had caused the expenditure of much provisions. About two weeks' supply remained, which might be extended for some days more, but there was no possibility of receiving any from without, as the enemy guarded the approaches to the fort so closely, and had already intercepted several large convoys of grain and ghee.

In fine, the general result of the report was unsatisfactory. If half the garrison could be dispensed with, provisions might hold out; but the condition of the wall was a peril which could not be remedied, and in regard to it there was not one dissentient voice. Then the Queen produced the draft she had received from Prince Moorad. "If," she said, "our condition for defence had been what I hoped it would be, I would have destroyed this paper, and allowed affairs to go on as they have begun; but as it is, ye, my lords, should know of it, and bear me witness that I have concealed nothing from you. Had my unworthy people of Beejapoor behaved as I expected they would, we should not have been reduced to these straits; but as they are, they are of no use to us, and the few that watch the Manikdown Hills are too weak to advance against thirty thousand Moghuls."

"It is true," said Nihung Khan, with a sigh; "they are too weak to effect more than they are doing now, straitening the supplies of the Moghul army. Yet that cannot be depended upon, since the King of Khandesh, it is well known, is now sending up large convoys from his dominions by the northern passes, which we cannot prevent, and with them come some heavy guns. All these will arrive in the course of a few days at furthest, and the

Prince does not exaggerate his resources to prolong the siege. And how could we repair the wall to meet it?"

"They are clever men, these Moghul engineers," said the engineer officer who had before spoken. "We found, this morning, as we examined the counterscarp, that five other places had been mined to be blown in. There was not time apparently to complete or load the mines, else we should have been attacked in several points at once. They depended upon the effect of the five mines, which, but for the humane man who proclaimed them, would have been fired at once, and the side of the fort blown completely open; and they can do the same again."

These ominous words fell with terrible effect on the ears of all that heard them. The question was no longer one of opinion, it was one of necessity. Was the fort tenable at all?

"Let your servant," said Abbas Khan, "go to Soheil Khan, who commands the forces at Shahdroog. If he could be persuaded to march to our aid, all these proud Moghuls might be chased from the field."

"But that would involve a delay of nearly a month, even if he marched at once," said the Queen.

"And in the condition of the wall, I could not guarantee it to stand under fire for two days," said the engineer. "I have no thought of life, as I say this; but I think on the helpless women and children, and the men who must perish before a ruthless assault which the Prince suggests, and which we, were we in the place of the Moghuls, should make. Remember that though the fort is hard of access, yet it is impossible of egress. No one can escape from it."

The Queen then laid before all assembled the question of Berar. For her own part, she desired not to retain it. Ever since the kingdom had possessed it, misfortune and war had come with it, as was known to all. It need never have been taken; and cruel murder had been necessary to its retention.

Thus the subject was debated for some hours with animation. The Bishop was called and asked whether he had been directed to carry any message to the Prince Moorad from the Queen; but his account of the object of his mission and its results, and his assurance that the draft of the treaty must have been prepared beforehand, as the Prince's seal was only affixed in his presence, assured all that the proposal was spontaneous; and after a further brief consultation, it was accepted, with some slight modification, and despatched by the hands of Abbas Khan and Nihung Khan

the next day. And no further objections being made, the treaties were mutually exchanged the day following, when a great portion of the Moghul army had already marched.

What a relief their departure was to all! How quiet the fort was now! No discharge of cannon night and day; no danger from missiles; no distress for water, which had before become serious, and for which there was no remedy. The people of the city, who for the most part had all retired to the villages at some distance, flocked back, opened their shops and secret stores of grain, and all was once more as it had been; while the public rejoicings at the victory of the assault and the departure of their bitter enemies were splendid, and attended by munificent distributions of charity in every portion of the kingdom.

The Queen's first care was for the wall, which was found, as the engineer officer of the fort had declared, in a perilous condition, and was taken down with difficulty, and not without risk to life. It was rebuilt, wherever necessary, from the very foundation. All the mined galleries of the Moghuls were traced, and inspected by the Queen in person, who could the more perfectly understand, with gratitude for the escape, the danger that the fort and all within it had escaped. In the guarantee of the dominions of the kingdom, too, she felt an increased assurance for the future; and could she only avert the misery arising from domestic faction, a terror always present, she might expect a peaceful minority, and the respect and sympathy of all surrounding kingdoms. Of the Moghuls she had no dread then. The man who had originally written to the Prince Moorad to invite his interference was detained at Beejapoor, and evinced no disposition for fresh intrigue. She therefore caused the young King Bahadur to be crowned again, and his further residence at the fort of Chawund was no longer necessary, the Queen herself taking charge of him.

It was wonderful to see, too, how rapidly and surely the internal administration was reformed, in fact, re-created. The revenue survey and assessments that Mullek Umber's great genius had suggested were carried on as fast as possible, to the satisfaction of the people, and the revenues were collected without unequal pressure, and were ample for all expenses of the State, affording, indeed, a large surplus. Outwardly, therefore, and to all appearance, the kingdom was at peace.

Nor was there any change in the circumstances of the persons whose affairs have supplied the events of this tale. The Bishop and his sister, as the country became quiet, were able to make

excursions to Aurungabad, always a source of gratification. And once the Bishop, taking advantage of the return of some cavalry to Beejapoor, visited his flock there, and was satisfied at its progress. He found the Queen Taj-ool-Nissa the mother of a fine boy; and as she put it into his arms, she besought his blessing on the child, which he gave solemnly. All his old friends welcomed him; and even the bitter priest had many a kind word for the man who, as all believed, had fought valiantly on the side of the truth of Islam in the battle of the "Standard of the Veil," for so the defence of the fort against the Moghuls had become known among the people of the country.

With the King he had many earnest private conversations in regard to the future, which to his view was full of apprehension and danger. "It was not that I would not, but that I dare not provoke a war with Prince Moorad which would set the whole of the Dekhan in a flame. One by one the kingdoms of the north, Guzerat, Malwa, and Khandesh have fallen. The Queen-Mother does not see her danger; but the Nizam Shahis and all that belonged to them have ever been treacherous, and she may yet rue the hour in which she trusted them. But I know, we all know, her heroism and self-devotion, and she will die at her post rather than abandon it. And yet, Padré Sahib, if she could be persuaded to leave Ahmednugger and come to us she would be received with all our old affection and loyalty."

"I will do what I can," was the invariable reply to many such conversations; "but your Majesty knows her inflexible and honourable nature, and nothing less than being driven from her position would induce her to abandon it." I think, however, that had it not been for what had transpired in regard to his sister, that the Bishop would have been well content to have settled finally at Beejapoor, visiting Moodgul and a new mission at Cheetapoor, among the distillers and saga makers, which his zealous coadjutor had organised; but there was no mention of his sister, nor any invitation from the Queen Taj-ool-Nissa, and it was evident that for some time to come Beejapoor was no place for her.

Of Osman Beg the Bishop could hear nothing. His father had returned from Mecca, and, at first, resided on a small property which he had retained; but he had died, and his possessions had lapsed to the State. Osman Beg had, it was supposed, joined the Moghul army, but where he was serving in its wide empire no one seemed to know or care.

There was no change whatever in the situation of Abbas Khan and Zóra. He continued to hold the command of the fort and the troops within it, and so long as the Queen lived, or remained there, he determined to abide with her. He was not ambitious of employment in civil or political affairs, and he had an instinctive dislike and mistrust of all the hereditary offices of the Ahmednugger State; of those constant petty and vexatious intrigues against each other which seemed to him, though peace from without appeared more and more confirmed, to be dangerous in their machinations, and which must, ere long, burst into open contention. Except this, nothing occurred to disturb the serenity of their lives. Their little excursions to villages round about, such as Bhatoree and others, to the Royal gardens, and to the pretty little country palace, which is known now by the name of "The Happy Valley," all served to pass the time pleasantly; and the Queen Regent had ever work for Zóra to do in the drafts of private correspondence which she carried on. Zóra, too, was now the mother of a fine boy, and the pride of her husband and herself in the thriving, crowing, little fellow, cannot, I think, be exaggerated. They were lovers in the truest sense of the word, cheering and supporting each other. She, a companion to him, whose bravery and work had been amply tried; he, to her, the same as she had watched over first in the fearful night at Juldroog, which had had so deep an influence over their lives. But the political events of the time were more and more threatening, and were not to be averted either by former treaty or by the wisdom or heroic perseverance of the Queen; and the details of the local historian, Ferishta, form a melancholy record of the last struggles of the unhappy and distracted kingdom. Without entering too much into historical details they may be briefly sketched, so as to render Queen Chand's position intelligible.

Retaining Nihung Khan as commander of the forces, as he lacked administrative ability, she had appointed Mahomed Khan, an hereditary officer of much experience, to the general direction of affairs, and for a time all went prosperously. But the ambition of Mahomed Khan was not proof against the temptation to increase his power, and he confined Nihung Khan, aspiring himself to become Regent, and to deprive the Queen of all authority whatever. This the Royal lady resisted, and wrote urgently to her nephew, King Ibrahim, to send her such a force as would keep the rebellious Minister in check. To no one better than Abbas Khan, whose friendship for Nihung Khan was sincere,

could she entrust this delicate negotiation. The King would hear from him the true state and danger of affairs at Ahmednugger; nor would he, she knew, be slow to urge, or lack eloquence in urging, the necessity of interposing to prevent further pretext for intervention by the Moghuls, which was the point most especially to be dreaded. We need not describe particulars of this journey to Beejapoor, nor of the political discussions there; nor yet of Abbas Khan's happy meeting with his uncle and aunt, and many old friends; but he was successful in the object of his mission. Soheil Khan was despatched with a sufficient force, which arrived at Ahmednugger in safety; but the Beejapoor troops found that their entry was opposed by the usurper, but the garrison, being faithful, seized him and made him over to the Queen. Meanwhile, however, Mahomed Khan had despatched letters to Khan Khanan, the Moghul general then in Berar, praying for assistance, as he was holding the country in trust for the Emperor of Dehli. Had this been discovered at the time, it is hardly possible that the usurper would have escaped with his life; but he was spared, Nihung Khan was released and appointed to the chief authority, and the Queen's power being re-established, the troops from Beejapoor were dismissed with handsome presents and grateful thanks.

The Moghuls, however, as Soheil Khan learned on his way back, had occupied districts much to the south of Berar, and he wrote to the King of Beejapoor for instructions. The King ordered him to stand fast on the Godavery river, and sent a large reinforcement aided by troops from Golconda. These allied troops advanced against the Moghuls; but after a bloody general engagement, which lasted for two days, victory remained with the Moghuls. Now the Queen Chand had sent to the assistance of the Beejapoor troops a number of her own for defence against aggression, and it is possible this was considered a cause for the new war which had commenced so inauspiciously.

Strange as it may appear, Nihung Khan, regardless of danger from without, now endeavoured to destroy the power of his benefactress. Indeed, he had attained so much local power that, inflated by pride, he sent a force to invest the town of Beer, which is situated to the south of the river Godavery, and to which the aggressions of the Moghuls had extended. He also made an attempt to invade Berar, but both these movements being unsupported, failed of effect, and he returned to Ahmednugger.

These continued disturbances naturally attracted the attention of the Emperor Akbar. His son, the Prince Moorad, had died during their continuance, not long, indeed, after the victory over the combined forces of Beejapoor; and the Emperor, now determined to prosecute the war in person, marched to the south, captured the important fortress of Asseergurh, and directed his second son, Prince Daniel Mirza, with Khan Khanan, his chief general, to undertake operations against the fort and kingdom of Ahmednugger.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECOND SIEGE OPENS.

THE political events sketched in the last chapter occupied upwards of two years, and bring down the action of this tale and the Queen's life to the close of 1598, or commencement of 1599. Nihung Khan, foiled in his ill-considered attack on Berar, in which he had been entirely unsupported by the allies of Ahmednugger, and out-manœuvred besides by the General Khan Khanan, burned all his heavy baggage on the borders of Berar, at the head of the pass he was unable to descend, and fled back to Ahmednugger. Here he vainly tried to make terms with the Queen and regain his old place. But she refused to admit one to her councils who, though a man of high renown, was fatally rash and untrustworthy; and having no other place of refuge, he fled the country and was seen no more. After their bloody defeat in the Godavery, the Beejapoor and Golconda troops made no further attempt to check the advancing enemy; and that defeat had, there is no doubt, already decided the fate of the Ahmednugger kingdom; and as the monsoon of 1598 broke up, the Emperor Akbar ordered the forces under his son Daniel and Khan Khanan to advance without delay. With Queen Chand no commander of note remained in the field. All the troops on which she could have relied to check the enemy's advance were broken and much separated, and to bring them together would be a work of labour for which there was no time, and neither Beejapoor nor Golconda were in the humour to risk further collisions with the Imperial army by an advance. What troops it was possible to collect and

organise, Abbas Khan, ever steady and faithful, collected about the city, and the fort was put in as complete order as possible, and provisioned liberally for six months.

To the command of the garrison Humeed Khan was appointed, originally a Beejapoor eunuch attached to the Queen's palace for many years. She had brought him with her on the last occasion; and, as he had been well educated and displayed soldier-like qualities, he had been employed in the field, and had on all occasions distinguished himself by valour and sagacity. In the first siege of the fort he had been selected both by Nihung Khan and Abbas Khan for command of a large portion of the garrison; and his valour on the repulse of the attack and in the general defence was as valuable as it was remarkable. Nor with these antecedents was it at all strange that he should be selected for the post he now held, with the approval of all, for he was popular with the soldiery; and had succeeded in uniting all in a determination to stand by the young King to the last, and defend their fortress to the utmost.

But it was seen and observed by all that a tone and manner of despondency possessed the Queen which was new to her character. Her only solace seemed to be the boy Bahadur, who, now about five years old, returned her affection with tenderness and a child's loving consideration; and as she often strained him passionately to her breast, would cry, "Weep not, O grandmother; when I am a man I will make all bad men thy slaves; and we will be so happy, and no tears shall come again." Yes, the little fellow seemed to be a great solace and comfort to her. Not that she put Zóra aside, or Maria, for they were her daily companions as before; but she made no new friends, and the old ones she felt had their own vocations and cares in life, which occupied and interested them more than those of, as she said, a worn-out old woman.

Yet it was not so. Never at any period of their lives had Maria or Zóra loved her more devotedly or fondly; and the patience and submission with which she endured all her vexatious troubles, and the heroism and cheerful trust with which she now prepared to meet new perils, gave her additional interest in their eyes. To all others she preserved her old calm demeanour. She held her durbars as usual. Every point of the administration was reviewed and checked as of old; Zóra had her appointed private tasks allotted to her, and, with Abbas Khan and his officers, every question regarding the completeness for defence and organisation of the defenders was discussed with her

usual wisdom. But in the quiet hours, when business did not occupy her, it was plainly visible that anxiety very often cast her down, almost beyond the power of raising herself again. At such times, if they asked her why she wept, she could not tell them, except that it seemed to her she was being drawn away from earth and all she most loved, and so the Lord was preparing her for Paradise; and as the present was her true Paradise, it grieved her to change it, and so she wept. Before her was a mystery; here there was no mystery, only the homage of loving hearts. They are wrong, she used to tell them, who prayed for death as a release from trouble and suffering. Rather let all live on that life may be purified, and the spirit exalted, till God sees fit to take it, as He will when He has purified and chastened it. And thus, she said to all, she was being prepared, and they were to rejoice when she wept rather than sorrow.

How thoughtful was she for them all! She was evidently most anxious for Maria. "Thou art more tender of heart," she would say, "than we tough Moslems. Thy faith is more tender; and the scenes thou hast endured with us here are not fit either for thee or thy brother, and ye must leave me till the peril be past. If it pass, and we have peaceful lives before us till my boy grows up, thou and thy brother shall roam where ye will, and preach as ye will; for who does not love and honour ye?"

It was a bitter parting; but the Queen sent Maria and her brother away. A body of men came from Dowlutabad, sent by Mullek Umber to escort treasure for the pay of the troops with the Queen; and the Queen sent the Bishop and his sister with them to her faithful friend. It was the only opportunity there might be for many weeks; and if peace ensued, they could at any time return again in a few days. And Maria had been absent before, and had returned safely; so Zóra was comforted, but not the Queen.

The evening before the small force marched, Maria and the Queen were alone together, and the Royal lady, taking Maria's head on her breast, said gently, "Thou hast been a true and loving daughter to me, child. All the women of my country are feeble and impetuous; but from the first even unto the last thou hast been the same. Thou hast borne with a weak old woman's waywardness; thou hast put sweet loving thoughts into my heart, and told me truths which well up, and teach me mercy. And oh, Maria! though I have never mentioned it to thee, how can I thank thee for thy conduct at Beejapoor; so gentle, yet so firm. Thou

dost not know, thou never canst know, how he pleaded with me for thee, or what he offered me for thee. And he, too, is loving, and would have been kind and faithful to thee; and at first I grieved that it could not be. But thou wast right. The Lord vouchsafed wisdom to thee, and thou art blessed with that thought, O, my daughter; for when ye meet, all will have passed away in peace. He is the father of children now, and is happy; though he hath not forgotten her who was a joy to him. I would often fain have spoken to thee about that eventful passage in thy young life; but these are my last words to thee, and thou wilt not forget them."

"Never, never! my more than mother," she returned, sobbing bitterly. "And may the Lord grant that we meet again in peace." She would have said more, for her heart was full of gratitude; but the Queen said gently,—

"It may not be, daughter. My message is coming nearer to me; nearer, nearer, day by day, and I am content. Go now, and leave me, with but one embrace—the last. I shall think of thee in safety, till the angel summons me. Lo!" and she stretched her hand on high, while a smile of triumph spread over her features, and her still lustrous eye glowed brightly, "Lo! he is near me, even now."

* * * *

We have already said there was no force in the field which could pretend to check the advance of the powerful army which was now approaching by safe and easy stages. The siege train was especially powerful and its equipment complete, and the Emperor had sent a large body of the famous miners of the northern provinces, who in their peculiar vocation were unsurpassed in skill and daring. Khan Khanan, who knew the ground perfectly, had determined to risk as few of his own troops' lives as possible, and he had already seen proved how comparatively easy and how certain it would be to destroy the fort with gunpowder.

Osman Beg was in his place as general leader and director of the marches, and he had gained the confidence of the commander-in-chief with singular adroitness and plausibility. All these intervening years the mad craving of his heart for Zóra had never diminished, nay, it had fed on its own imaginings. What would she not be now in the full possession of her matured beauty? How different to the poor Fakeer's daughter of Juldroog, whom he had so madly loved. No one, he believed, knew that he belonged to the Moghul forces at all. His name was a common one among the bodies of Turcomans who

served in the Imperial army, and in the first siege he had kept himself aloof from the camp and the siege operations. Dom Diego had asked him to command a portion of the storming party, and even taunted him with cowardice when he refused; but Osman Beg had laughed at the possibility of taking the fort as the priest imagined, and he heard of his death without surprise and without regret. "Mine shall be a sure game," he thought; "one in which the risk will be small and the reward certain. Then I shall gloat myself with revenge, and my virtuous cousin shall die at my feet or be hurled into the air to feed the vultures. Let but our position become securely taken up before the fort, and I will see what Moghul gold may not effect within.

The last march was made. The people of the city and its environs, warned by previous experience, had deserted their homes for some days, and nothing was left in the streets but starving, homeless dogs, who howled piteously night and day. There was nothing on the plain but the grim old fort and its defences, which the Moghul commander could see were in much more complete order than they had previously been. The wide esplanade was cleared of every vestige of cover; trees all around had been cut down; the defences of the parapets had been newly topped with clay; loopholes had been narrowed, and embrasures protected by sandbags and gabions. Even the covered way at the crest of the counterscarp had been cleared out and fitted for musketeers, and larger guns than before mounted in many places on the broad rampart and the bastions. The work had been that of months, and Abbas Khan was not one who would trust to others to see it performed. He and the Queen had passed their days on the ramparts, and during working hours the red umbrella of the Queen could be seen by the whole garrison, moving from point to point; while at night she went the accustomed rounds in her turn, with other officers, generally accompanied by Humeed Khan. So far as human means and the science of the time could ensure security, Ahmednugger was safe.

And the Moghul commander felt that it was so, and that all the skill of his own engineers would be needed to meet the preparations. After the first reconnaissance, in which he lost many men from the combined fire of the fort and the garrison of the covered way, the trenches were carried on by sap as before. But the defenders of the covered way, led by brave and enterprising officers, attacked the trenches at night, cut off the workmen, and vexed the whole operation until it made very slow progress in

comparison with what it had done on the first occasion. These skirmishes, too, cost the defenders little in comparison with the terror they inflicted. The hardy Mahratta Mawalees, from the western ghauts, who afterwards became so famous under Sivagee, fell on the enemy with their national shouts of "Hur! Hur! Mahadeo!" sword in hand, and seemed insensible to danger. Showers of arrows were shot into the trenches, and if pursued by the Moghuls, the lightly equipped Mahrattas ran back into their galleries, and crossed into the ditch and fort by the sally-ports which had been opened. As yet no attempt had been made upon the defences of the fort, and the garrison grew more confident even than before. The siege did not progress, and the young Prince Daniel and Khan Khanan grew impatient, for they well knew if there were the least sign of failure the Beejapoor and Golconda armies would be again in motion.

One of the chief leaders of these daring night attacks was a young Mahratta chief, one of the Sirkay family, who, with his cousin Peelagee, were hereditary officers of the Nizam Shahy kingdom, and had brought their own retainers to the defence of the fort. Both were famed for personal valour of no ordinary kind, and the Sirkay Mawalees had established a reputation for boldness in their peculiar manner of attack, which had gained them deserved fame. Their post was in the covered way in the south-east angle of the ditch, which enabled them to make flank attacks which were most annoying to the enemy; and this being part of the particular command of Humeed Khan, he had several times brought them to the Queen's notice, and had them rewarded by rings and anklets of gold, and other valuable gifts. As if to vex Abbas Khan, with whom he had had some slight difference, he said to Sirkay one evening, "Let me come with ye to-night, and witness what ye let Abbas Khan share in, but not me." So it was arranged, and taking as few of his followers as possible, Humeed Khan went to the post at night, and, led by Sirkay, the Mawalees were soon on the crest of the glacis, crouching like wild animals, to watch their opportunity. That night, however, the breaches seemed deserted. The men had been withdrawn, probably expecting an attack; and Sirkay would have returned, but Humeed said, laughing, "As we are here, we may as well see for ourselves what is doing, and whether the general is mining, as I shrewdly suspect he is."

So they proceeded warily and cautiously, leaving the men behind; but, on turning the angle of a trench, a party of men burst

upon them and secured them. Both gave themselves up for lost, for under such circumstances life was little worth; but, instead of putting them to death, they were taken roughly to an officer who sat near a covered way, which some men by the light of torches were driving on. It had been Osman Beg's turn of duty that night in the trenches, and he had taken up as secure a position as possible; and he recognised Humeed Khan in an instant, who at once saluted him wonderingly.

"Dost thou know that I could behead thee at once as a spy?" said Osman Beg.

"I know it," returned the other; "and there would be one man in Ahmednugger the less, that is all. Nor would Abbas Khan, perhaps, be sorry to lose me."

"Then ye are enemies?"

"Not so, openly; but he hates me. He it is who hath vexed ye with sallies; and as I would not be sent on one by him, I have come myself to-night."

"And the Queen?"

"She is much what you remember her, but, methinks, weary of the war. She would like to get safe to Joonair, and give up the place. She does not say this openly, but that is in her heart."

"We shall take it from her, brother."

"Never," replied Humeed Khan. "She will perish in the ruins, but she will never yield."

"And Abbas Khan?"

"You know what he is, Meeah, only prouder and haughtier than he was; and he will never leave the Queen."

"And his wife, Zóra? Dost thou see her?"

"I see her, Meeah! She is more beautiful than ever she was; and he dotes on her like a fool."

"I owe him revenge for what happened at Juldroog, and for what happened in the Palace."

"And thou sayest she is thy wife. What wouldst thou give me for her?"

"I have little to give; but hark! ere we part. Give me the fort by any means thou wilt, and we may both be rich and free. Canst thou come again?"

"Not as I have done to-night; but I may be able to send a message. Now let me escape, and pretend to pursue me;" and Humeed Khan dashed on at his utmost speed, striking down one of the men who had held Sirkay apart. Sirkay shook himself free of the other, narrowly escaping a sword cut,

and they soon rejoined the men they had left behind, who fired a volley of arrows to check the pursuers, and made their way into the fort.

"That was a narrow chance, my friend," said Humeed Khan, when he had regained his breath; "but the fellow was too busy asking me questions to see that his men held me fast. But they seemed half asleep, and I watched my opportunity to shake myself free."

"I had given up hope, my lord," was Sirkay's reply; "and I have to thank you for your part in my escape. We must be more cautious in future."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST TRAGEDY.

THE eunuch reflected deeply on the strange adventures of the night. He had known Osman Beg from boyhood, when he was the companion of Abbas Khan. He knew the story of Abbas Khan's love for Zóra, and was present at Osman Beg's trial before the durbar at Beejapoor, when Osman Beg was banished, and it was strange that he should meet him again under such circumstances. But he was not surprised that his hate for his cousin continued in all its bitter virulence. The eunuch had been jealous of Abbas Khan from the first, and he was now compelled to bear his authority and submit to his directions; and such jealousy soon turns to hate. He might make his own terms, perhaps, through Osman Beg, with the Moghul general about the fort. Its possession would be an immense assistance to the Emperor's plans, and its betrayal would be richly rewarded. As to the Queen, he hated her because she had placed him in a subordinate position under her minion; and what would it signify what became of her? She was out of place now. There would be no great difficulty in communicating with Osman Beg, and he trusted to his good luck to carry on the intercourse that had been so strangely begun.

At his morning audience of the Queen the eunuch detailed the events of the night, which were entirely corroborated by Sirkay. Both the Queen and Abbas Khan, while they rebuked them for rashness, none the less praised them for their act of valour; and

the eunuch gave his opinion that what he had seen was either the head of a new mine, or a shaft into one which had been begun at a greater distance; and this was what Abbas Khan dreaded. This was no noisy siege. On the contrary, the silence was often oppressive; and the hum of thousands which filled the enemy's camp, the boom of kettledrums, and the music which played before the Royal pavilion, were for the most part the only sounds heard from without; while from within there was nothing to fire at, and the large stone shot from the mortars, which were dropped at random in the direction of the enemy's camp, were frequently the only shots fired by the gunners of the fort. It appeared to the soldiers of the garrison as if the enemy were afraid to attack the fort as they had done on the first occasion, and their vaunting and self-confidence were unbounded. Whenever the Queen went abroad on her usual rounds on the walls, she was met with assertions that the enemy were afraid; that the Moghuls would some day abandon their fortress and march back as they came. But, though she did not undeceive them, she became more and more anxious; and, on his part, Abbas Khan well remembered what Khan Khanan had impressed upon him at his interview with the Prince Moorad regarding the first treaty, that if the siege were renewed, it would be by mines under the fort itself, which would be destroyed with all it held; and that this operation was now in progress there could be little doubt.

Alas! there was now no friendly voice to give them warning, as before, of existing danger, and implore them not to make a useless sacrifice of their lives. The proceedings were of the stern character of the eminent soldier who directed them, who never knew sympathy for an enemy who defied him.

How often Abbas Khan besought the Queen, even with tears, to save herself and the King. It might be done; he felt assured that no enterprise would be more welcome to the Mahratta Mawallees than to carry her with them in a night sortie, and to conduct them by bye-paths, and after their own fashion, to Joonair. Then it mattered little what became of the fort. Those who remained could make terms, and, in the western fastnesses, the King would be safe against all attacks from without, and could rest securely till happier times. "As to all you would leave behind, we should be in the hands of the Lord," he pleaded; "for as soon as you and the boy were gone, we might hold out for a time as a point of honour, and make terms by which every life would be saved. As to the treasure, let it perish, mother, if I could not,

as I might, offer a ransom for the fort. I say, let it perish. Is there not enough for all in Chawund and Joonair to suffice for many years?"

Thus, day by day, he pleaded, but still she would not listen. It seemed to her a dishonourable act to desert those who had stood by her with such valour and devotion all through her trials. What care or wish had she for life, except with honour? What would be said of her, but that the Queen who had fought the fearful "Battle of the Veil" had absconded secretly from her people at night to save her own life, leaving all to perish! No! if death were nigh, let it come to her there; she should be blessed.

But there was restlessness in her mind which she could not overcome. Zóra felt she had no longer power over her. She, too, had implored her Royal mistress to save herself and the boy she now loved; and the boy's mother, feeling that with the Queen he would be safe, had besought Queen Chand not to think of her, whom no one would molest by herself, and to carry him away to Joonair, which, against all attacks from without, was impregnable. But, as we have said, the Queen's mind was restless. She felt unable to decide on any course, and many arguments on both sides impelled her first in one direction then in another, which were alike impossible to her on further thought; and she had only to go out among the garrison to hear the old war cries of Beejapoor, and her own country, to feel that she was yet a Queen, and, before God, responsible for all, and no steps were taken either for flight with the Mawallees, or to obtain terms from the Moghuls.

During this period Osman Beg had not been idle. He had contrived to see the eunuch many times at night; and, after the first chance interview with him, he had gone boldly to Khan Khanan, and had privately communicated to him that he had an old Beejapoor friend in the fort, who was, in fact, its commander, and that, if he were authorised, he could enter into negotiations with him for its betrayal, or its capture by surprise. Khan Khanan felt no scruple as to the means of attaining possession of a place which had already cost him so dear, and the capture of which by siege would probably extend so long; and the miners were already complaining of the hardness of the ground in the mines on which they most relied, which were to be sprung inside the walls, and not without much risk and difficulty. Humeed Khan was brought to him once, at night. Khan Khanan was then assured of the perfect condition of the fort, the high spirits of the

garrison, and the inflexible determination of Abbas Khan to defend the place to the last extremity. "He is searching for mines daily," said the eunuch, "and should one be discovered, your whole work would be checked indefinitely."

"The difficulty, then, lies with the Queen and Abbas Khan," said the general.

"It does," replied the eunuch; "but it is not insurmountable; and I know for certain that if they are offered honourable terms of capitulation, and permission to remove all property from the fort, except guns and arms, they would agree to them."

"That would be impossible," said the general; "we have the game in our own hands, and we are ready to play it out. What is a month, or even more, to us? To them it is life or death. Were they to propose terms, indeed, it would be very different; but I know nothing less than unconditional surrender would satisfy the Emperor, and I am not prepared to modify that. I suppose," he added with a sneer, "your valiant Dekhanies would not give up their arms."

"They would not," said the eunuch; "and no one dare propose that to them."

"Not even the Queen?"

"Not even she. Her life would be the instant forfeit."

"Now," continued the general, grimly, "suppose that such a report were spread as would raise a tumult among your Dekhanies. We might take advantage of it."

"You might, my lord."

"And we should be successful?"

"That I cannot answer for. It would depend upon yourselves."

"Not entirely, sir. You who command the Dekhanies might persuade them to be neutral; to—to—in fact to throw themselves on the Royal clemency. And suppose I assured you personally two lakhs of rupees for the service, and through you all arrears of pay to your party, would that suffice?"

"Take it, friend," said Osman Beg. "My lord will give the amount in bills on Dehly or Guzerat, unless thou wait the issue and receive it here in cash. Thou canst not carry away the coin, and we cannot send it."

"I am content," said the eunuch, "for the service I shall render to the Emperor, whose name be honoured, to receive whatever may be given of his own gracious bounty."

"And remember," said the general, "that I have nothing to do with the results if the Dekhanies rise in mutiny. All that rests with them and you."

"I take the responsibility, my lord. I wish only for peace."

"You have forgotten me, Humeed Khan," said Osman Beg angrily, as they left the tent.

"Not so, friend," said the eunuch. "What I purpose will cause much confusion. The gallery of the counterscarp will be deserted, and thou knowest the way into the sally ports. Who will distinguish friends from enemies? Thou must do thy part, and I shall be able to aid thee. Fear not, one who desires a fair woman must needs do something to get her. More I cannot say; be ready on my signal, and join me. There will be enough of screaming women, and who will heed if one among them is carried away in a blanket? Surely thou hast some of thy old dare devils to help thee. If not, give up the girl."

"I cannot, and will not; she is my fate," returned Osman Beg, moodily; and for the time they separated.

For several days Abbas Khan had been diligent in his search for mines. Shafts had been sunk, and one was at last discovered which led directly under the palace. It was not loaded, and no one was guarding it; but the chamber was ready, and it could have been charged at any time. Abbas Khan, and some others with him, explored it; and, covered with dust and dirt as he was, he went direct to the Queen to tell her of it. "It will be destroyed," he said; "and even now the masons are at work building up the gallery with stones. But who can say, Mother, how many more there may be, or where they are? I have ordered cross cuttings to be carried on; but the ground is nearly rock, and the Moghul miners have skilfully followed a soft vein which they discovered, and have never quitted. Mother! mother! hear my last prayer to thee. Arise, and flee the place with the boy. When night falls, I will be with ye and guide ye forth."

"And leave ye all behind to perish? I cannot do it!" said the noble Queen, with a calm, serene expression on her countenance; "but if all could be saved, I should be grateful. I have thought over the subject night and day since it was broken between us, and this is my final determination. I am prepared for death if it should come, but not for flight, and, to my perception, dishonour. Go, see to the mine; trace others if it be possible, and to-morrow I will save all if I can. And," she added, with a confident smile, "I think I shall be successful. There is no dishonour in what the Lord hath put into my mind, and all our dear ones may be happy. Where is Zóra? Does she know of the mine?"

"No," he said, "and I will not tell her, since that danger is past."

"Then send her to me, Meeah; I would speak with her;" and he went out.

The Queen was alone in her private chamber, musing over what she purported to do. She would address the Prince Daniel himself, laying before him her desire to prevent the sacrifice of life, and offering him possession of the fort and all public property, on the condition that the garrison should march out with the honours of war.

Zóra entered as the Queen had reviewed all this in her mind, and her mistress could not help being struck with her unusual beauty and brightness. Her hair had escaped, and hung in massive waves about her shoulders; her cheeks were glowing, and her eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Oh, we have had such fun, mother; the children have been romping together, and I and some of the girls were as mad as any of them. I would thou hadst been there. But why art thou so grave: there is no bad news?"

"I have a grave task to do, daughter," she replied. "Get thy writing materials, and I will dictate. Thou canst be trusted; but I fear the secretaries, and what I tell thee must be secret till all know it." And Zóra wrote.

"And now read it all over to me again, child. While it was in my mind the purport seemed uncertain; but now that it is on paper, methinks it is clear enough." And when Zóra had read the paper, which was only a few short paragraphs, the Queen bade her make a fair copy.

"What should I do without thee, darling?" she said. "Now go and play with the children again; but be within call."

"Is Humeed Khan without?" asked the Queen of an attendant eunuch. "If so, tell him I wish to speak with him;" and he entered soon after, and sat down, making his usual salutation.

"And the mine hath been discovered," said the Queen, "under the very palace. Hast thou heard of it?"

"I have," he said. "It was dangerous; but Abbas Khan has already prevented mischief, and is searching for others."

"And the garrison; what said they?"

"There was some excitement at first, but it has subsided. All they cried was that they would defend the fort to the last, and you should lead them to victory, as you did when they followed the Standard of the Veil."

"Ah!" said the Queen, with a sigh, "those were different times. Many were with me then who have since become traitors,

and done the State irreparable injury. I have, I know, many faithful about me, but can I trust all?"

For an instant Humeed Khan thought that the remark was made for him, and the blood rushed to his dark face, almost causing it to glow. But the Queen continued—

"As I was musing upon this, Khan, it occurred to me to write a draft of a proposal to the Prince, to allow all here to pass free with their effects, and to give up the fort, which appears no longer tenable, to him, on behalf of his father. And we would fain have your opinion, as that of one of the most faithful of our officers, wise in counsel and brave in action. Read this draft, which no one but myself knows of, except her who wrote it fairly for me, and give thy opinion freely. I would save life if I can, and this appears to me the only course to pursue. Those who know me, even my enemies, will not charge me with any other motive."

Humeed Khan took the paper with a reverential gesture, and carefully perused it. As he read it he could hardly conceal his exultation and agitation. What it would have taken me days, nay weeks, to effect, he thought, she has done with her own hand, and of her own device. Surely now her time is come. Let her perish.

"It will be dangerous, lady," he said, with an affected calmness. "In their present temper the Dekhanies are not safe, and the last thing they think of is surrender. If they were to mutiny, who could stay them?"

But the Queen shook her head. "They know me and have trusted me, and I know them and trust them now. Believe me, when they know all, they will be satisfied I have done the best; but if——"

"I hear some voices without," he said, hurriedly, interrupting her. "Perhaps another mine has been discovered; perhaps ——, but your slave will return immediately." And he hastily quitted the room.

The Queen could hear no voices then without, and she sat thinking on what she had heard. There was danger, then, even from within; and those on whom she most relied might indeed, excited, be her worst enemies. "If it be so," she said to herself "I need not send this letter; but meet death here, or do as Meeah wishes me. And yet, no. Not that—not that; better death than flight!"

Suddenly a loud tumult of voices arose, and seemed to be

approaching the palace by the plain in front. "It is this he heard," she said, and waited, with her heart throbbing. "They come close now."

It was Humeed Khan who had rushed out, as he left the Queen, into the great square where soldiers were exercising, and casting his turban on the ground, took up handfuls of dust, flinging it into the air, and crying, "Ye are betrayed! ye are betrayed brothers! The Queen Chand is in treaty for the surrender of the fort! Deen, deen! She is not fit to live. Deen, deen! Follow me to her presence!" And he fired the rocket which was always ready for signals at the entrance.

There was no hesitation. At once, and with infuriated cries of "Treachery! treachery!" the mass surged into the great hall of audience with drawn swords, crying, "Where is the Queen? Cut her to pieces!"

The Queen had not moved except to rise from her seat, and she stood with her lips parted and her eyes distended with an absent fascination. How often in her life had a word from her quelled the wildest tumult—how often had her excitable people calmed down; but now? And yet for a moment the foremost were awed by the presence all had loved and venerated; but only for a moment. Humeed Khan, with a vile oath, rushed on and cut furiously at her with his sword, and others followed his example.

The noble woman fell covered with desperate wounds, but she still breathed; and Zóra, who had been at first appalled by the tumult, caught up her child in her arms, gave him to his nurse, and rushed to her beloved mistress's side. One ruffian would have struck her; but another said, "It is Abbas Khan's wife; let her be."

She raised the Queen's head and tried to give her water from the vessel which always stood at her side, but the Queen put her hand aside gently, and smiled. "This is death, my child. I hear—I hear—the angel—call," she gasped. "Lord!—I come;" and murmuring the Belief her head sank, and with a last sigh she breathed no more. The noble Queen's spirit was gone for ever.

Just then a number of other men rushed into the small apartment with their faces tied up, and in a moment Zóra found herself covered by a blanket and borne away among the crowd which was roaming through the palace, plundering all that could be found. She screamed, but what voice could be heard in that tumult? for

there were thousands there, and still others swarmed into the great hall; but rescue was at hand.

Abbas Khan, when he had left the Queen, went back to the shaft of the mine; but as the workmen told him there was nothing more to be done at present but to continue the work that had been begun, he sat there encouraging the miners, and a number of his own guards, his faithful Beejapoor men, gathered about him. He heard the first shouts of the tumult, and all ran to the wall thinking there might be a sudden assault, but a man ran up, and cried, "To the palace! to the palace! The Queen is attacked!" and, led by their master, the whole body ran thither at their utmost speed. It needed but a glance to see what had taken place.

"Who did this?" cried Abbas Khan. "What vile traitor did this foul deed?"

"Humeed Khan," said a eunuch boy, who was sitting by the body of the Queen, weeping; "I saw him strike her first. And they have taken away Zóra-bee, and little Meeah is crying. Bring her back."

It hardly needed these words to urge the Khan on. Near the entrance of the audience hall he saw something covered with black carried along, and the mass of his powerful men charging through the crowd soon came up with it. Osman Beg's covering had fallen from his face, but he did not see his cousin at first, nor till he was suddenly pulled back did he think he would be recognised; but he immediately attacked Abbas Khan with his sword. Neither spoke a word, but the ruffian had no chance of life, and lay dead at his cousin's feet almost before he had realised his presence.

"My poor darling," said the Khan, as he released Zóra from her bonds, "this is no place for thee. Go to Meeah. But thou art safe—blessed be Alla, thou art safe!" Truly it was no place for her. The floor around was a pool of blood, and the bodies of some strangers, among whom were several negro slaves, lay there in ghastly death with their master. Zóra cast one shuddering glance on the horrible group, and, covering her face, hurried back to her child, trembling and terror-stricken.

Meanwhile Yasin, with another body of the guard, had found Humeed Khan hiding in an ante-room, and brought him, with his arms tied together at his back, to the spot where Abbas Khan stood. "He did it! he did it!" cried a thousand voices. "Let him die!"

"Thou art not worthy of a soldier's death," said Abbas Khan, "but of a felon's. Yet, if thou wilt, say why thou didst this foul crime? What had she done to thee, who was thy benefactress for years?"

"It matters not why I did it," was the sullen reply. "I did it, and rid the world of one who had vexed it too long;" and he spoke no more. Then some men, taking him up, put a noose round his neck, and, throwing the end of the rope over the branch of a tree, left him to wrestle out his life in the air.

By this time the rest of the Abyssinians, the Arabs, and other foreigners, had assembled in the square, and the majority of the Dekhanies, who were deploring the Queen's murder with passionate weeping, separated quietly, crying to Abbas Khan to lead them against the Moghuls, for they were true to their King, of whom he was now the only protector.

CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

By the time Abbas Khan could reach the room to which the body of the murdered Queen had been taken, it had been laid out with the usual formalities. He could have done nothing there, and it was necessary for him to satisfy himself that no deep-laid treachery or disaffection was at work. And of these there appeared no traces. All the leaders of Dekhany parties came forward and made their salutations, as usual, and the men crowded round him with professions of attachment and devotion, which left no cause for doubt that the dreadful act that had been committed was one of sudden frenzy, enacted by the eunuch, whom he had long suspected, though undefinably, of sinister designs. He was a man in whom the Queen had reposed as great confidence as in himself; and to breathe idle suspicion to her would have been only to excite suspicion of himself, and he had not attempted to do so; but since the flight of Nihung Khan, the eunuch's manner had been changed, and the former unreserved confidence that had existed no longer continued at heart, though outwardly the two men were apparently as cordial as ever.

Satisfied that all was tranquil, and that the fort and garrison had subsided into their usual calm, Abbas Khan returned to the

palace, and reverently visited the remains of his beloved mistress and mother, for he had always looked on her in the place of one; and as such, and his Queen, paid her reverence. Outside, in the hall of audience, and in the ante-chamber of the room in which she lay, were Moollas, reading and chanting the stated portions of the Koran. Incense was burning, and its smoke hung about the clustered pillars, niches, and fretted ceilings; and within, the women and eunuchs of the household were wailing, moaning, and occasionally breaking into passionate cries and adjurations. Zóra and the young mother of the boy King were sitting at the head of the Queen, with their faces covered, and heads bowed down, wailing like the rest; and as Zóra looked up, her husband saw her face and eyes swollen with weeping, and full of unutterable woe. She could not speak, and longed to throw herself into his arms. But that was not the place for such an action, and she remained kneeling.

Nor could Abbas Khan say more than the usual salutation to the dead. "Peace be with thee, and the blessing of the Lord," and burst into an almost uncontrollable passion of weeping. All the majesty, all the heroism, all the benevolence, all the political ability of the noble woman lying there, in the last sleep of death, surged up to his memory, mingled with tender thoughts of her loving kindness, her bearing with all his waywardness from boyhood; and now a traitor's sword had closed that noble life, without a warning or a suspicion.

The Queen's face was not changed, except to wear the expression of a glorious death. A soft smile, as if of peace in the last supreme moment, lingered on her lips; and though her poor slight body was covered with wounds, the face had escaped mutilation, and had become more beautiful, if possible, in death than in life. Who could forget it? and long they gazed and watched. Who ever would forget it? Zóra would fain have had him stay, for she needed comfort; but with a few soothing words he said, "I must not sleep to night, darling; but watch, too, over ye all, as is my duty. It may be that the enemy may be unquiet, and the people need all my vigilance." Then he took up his boy and kissed him, and blessed them both.

At the earliest dawn he was with the mourners again, and what remained of the Noble Queen was reverently taken up and carried to a little private cemetery in an angle of the fort, and there laid in the earth. Abbas Khan had sent a flag of truce to the Moghul trenches to say that unshotted guns would be fired for

the Queen; and the salvoes of artillery which mingled with the chants of the Moollas and the wailings of the people, who crowded every point from which the last procession could be seen, were not noticed; while during the day a letter of condolence, in the name of the young King, was sent by the Prince Daniel, an act of unexpected courtesy.

We cannot linger on the sadness that fell over all. Under such circumstances a public calamity has greater effect than at any other; and sadly were the noble lady's cheering smile and hearty words of encouragement missed by all to whom they had become familiar. What was Abbas Khan to do? Who was to undertake the Regency on behalf of the young King? Zóra entreated her husband not to do so. Then, too, Ahmednugger was severed, and she longed for a peaceful existence at Beejapoor. Her life had been one of continual alarm, danger, treachery, and war, and still danger most imminent surrounded them; and yet she could not counsel flight.

The suspense was not of long duration, and after consultation with the officers of the fort, it had been determined to send a flag of truce into the Royal camp—not to write—to ascertain what terms would be given for the surrender of the fort, and the conveyance of the young King to Joonair. But the proposal was never made. Encouraged by the death of the Queen, and convinced that the garrison had lost heart, Khan Khanan redoubled his exertions, and though the great mine was disabled, yet those in the counterscarp and under the ramparts, five in all, were ready, and were loaded during that day and the next.

On the day following, masses of the Moghul troops were seen from the cavalier to be marching upon the fort, and taking up new positions during the morning. It seemed as though new ground was to be broken to the east and north; or a feint made to cover some operation outside. A few shots were fired at them, but they were too distant to have any effect. The movement was, however, a feint, and a successful one, for under cover of it the enemy had lodged a heavy mass of infantry as a storming party in the trenches, and soon after midday, at the hottest period, the mines in the counterscarp and rampart were fired simultaneously; and the effect was so sudden and so unlooked for, that the enemy made his way into the ditch and up the breach, now a wide and easy one, without much loss and without check, and a scene of massacre ensued which we have no need to describe.

Abbas Khan had been sitting on the rampart, watching with

several of his men, when the mine nearest them was sprung, hurling the guard of one of the smaller bastions into the air, when he felt himself struck with a large piece of stone, and remembered no more. Some of his men took him up at once, and led by the faithful Yasin, carried him to his apartments in the palace, and laid him down. But he still breathed, and Zóra, who knelt by him, could see no blood; and through the terror of assault, and the shouts and shrieks of the combat at the breach, she continued to bathe his face and hands with water, and to rouse him to consciousness. But nearer and nearer grew the tumult, spreading on all sides; and, expecting momentary death, she knelt with her boy beside his father's body and said the last prayers of the dying. While she was thus employe a Rajpoot officer of rank, accompanied by a crowd of men, rushed in pell-mell with uplifted swords, but their commander restrained them; and Zóra, seeing his action, fell at his feet, beseeching her husband's life.

"My name is Bénee Singh," he said, "and I have led the assault. To me and my Rajpoots is committed the charge of all the treasure of the fort and the command of the palace, and we have orders to spare those we find and to protect the young King. Direct us to him, and I will leave some men to guard you and yours. Do not fear, you are safe; and we bear no enmity to wounded and helpless men. See to him, Hurpul Singh," he continued to a sub-officer; "let him not be disturbed, or the lady; and keep people out—perhaps he is dying."

But Abbas Khan was not dying. He had only been struck senseless by the blow of the stone; and after a while, to the infinite joy and thankfulness of his wife, he opened his eyes, and would have stretched out his arms to her, but one—his left—was powerless.

"What has happened, Zóra?" he said. "Why am I here and who are these men?"

"Be still," she said, gently. "Thou art safe, and the child is safe; but the fort is taken by the mines. Dost thou not hear the tumult without?"

"And I was not with them to strike a blow in our defence! O cruel fate!" And he tried to raise his arm again, but it fell back.

"Be content, my lord," said the man called Hurpul. "It was your luck the first time, it is ours now; and we have won. Even now the gates are wide open, and masses of men are entering. Presently the Prince and Khan Khanan will come, and a

salute will be fired. But is thy arm broken? Let me see. No," he continued, "it is sound, but the bruise is a bad one; and thou art as helpless as a child. Thank God for thy life as thy lady doth. Get her to make a fomentation of meem leaves and turmeric and thou wilt be relieved. When the Khan Khanan comes I will bring him hither."

Zóra hid herself when the great general came in soon afterwards, and spoke kindly to her husband. "I have not forgotten thee, Abbas Khan. From the time the treaty was executed I have wished thou wert among us, as friends of Beejapoor, rather than these faithless, fickle murderers; and thou might be so yet. Thou hast held the command here?"

"Yes, my lord," returned the Khan, "since Nihung Khan, the Abyssinian, fled. After his defeat by you I have had to do my duty."

"Well, I cannot stay, sir, now, but will come to you hereafter. I have ordered apartments for you and your household in the palace, close to the city, where you will be removed this evening, and I promise that all your private property shall be sent after you. The eunuchs will, no doubt, know what it is."

That evening, in closed palanquins, Abbas Khan and his wife, the boy King and his mother, were removed to the convenient and elegant structure we have mentioned, which has been converted now into an English residence. The cool, pure, untainted air, and the pleasant shady garden, soon effected Abbas Khan's recovery from the dangerous and painful contusions he had received, and all he now desired and besought from the Prince and his general, who came frequently to converse with him, was permission to depart with his effects to Beejapoor. Both the Prince and Khan Khanan had been greatly struck by his ability and intelligence, and would fain have had him enter the Moghul army, and assume a high command, but he respectfully declined the honour. His estates in Beejapoor, with Zóra's, were very considerable. The Queen had much enriched him, and all the contents of his private treasury in the fort had been scrupulously made over to him. He had afforded all the information possible as regarded the State affairs, and he and Zóra had visited the humble grave of their beloved mistress to perform some necessary ceremonies there; but Zóra could never enter the palace; from her mind the visions of blood and slaughter it brought back would require many years to efface.

So, when a suitable opportunity offered, Abbas Khan and his

family, accompanied by all his retainers who had escaped the siege, set out for Beejapoor, travelling by the route by which they had come, past Nuldroog and Almella, where they were welcomed with joy. We may imagine, too, with what hearty rejoicing his Uncle and the Lady Fatima welcomed their long absent ones, and with what profuse entertainments the little Meeah, now a sturdy little fellow, was inducted into the general heirship of the house. But Abbas Khan's most impressive reception was from his King, who, grateful for his devotion to Queen Chand, received him in a grand durbar, and raised him to the highest rank of nobility, and conferred upon him other substantial proofs of his gratitude. Not long afterwards, Dilawar Khan, Viceroy of Moodgul, whose health had failed, gave up his viceroyalty and military command, and, to his wife's infinite delight, Abbas Khan accepted both with gratitude.

Before Abbas Khan had been allowed to leave Ahmednugger, the boy King, Bahadur Nizam Shah, with his mother and other female relatives, had been taken away as prisoners, and were confined in the fortress of Gwalior. All the treasures and regalia of the kingdom were confiscated and removed thither with him. Thenceforth the greatest portion of the kingdom was annexed to the Moghul empire ; but for some years after, the remainder, up to the frontiers of Golconda and Beejapoor, was ruled over by Mullek Umber, on behalf of a descendant of the Royal family, who was crowned under the title of Moortuza Nizam Shah, but the family finally became extinct about the year 1607.

The Bishop and Maria were miserable until they heard the real facts of the capture of Ahmednugger. The Queen's murder had been repeated with endless exaggeration, and Abbas Khan was said to have perished with her, or in the last assault ; while of Zóra nothing was known, but it was believed she had been carried away into captivity. Still they had hope, and Mullek Umber bid them hope, and despatched a trusty messenger to the city, who soon found out Abbas Khan and his wife, and brought letters from them. "We are safe," Zóra wrote to Maria, "and are going to Beejapoor. You must come too, and live together again." But the country was hardly safe yet for travelling, and they were detained till Mullek Umber could send them to Nuldroog by the way they had come. At Beejapoor they found that Abbas Khan and Zóra were already established at Moodgul, and after a short stay at the capital, they proceeded to their destination. The Bishop had applied to the King for a letter to Goa, in relation to

the wealth of Dom Diego, and it was satisfactory to the worthy man that the affair had been arranged by the banker, and that the Church was the richer by several lakhs of rupees.

How thankful and how happy they all were. Nor was it long before Maria and Zóra revisited the scene of their first meeting. The old house was cleaned out for them and purified, and their first excursion from Moodgul was to that well-remembered place. Even the Lady Keysama was not above meeting the Lady Zóra Khanum, and they talked over bygone events with interest. As to Runga Naik and Burma, they were beside themselves with joy; insisting that the ladies should see the cataract from the palace at the top of the fort; that Zóra should revisit the fearful scene of her abduction and escape; and she pointed out, with eyes swimming in tears, where she had been confined, and how delivered. "Your slave only regretted that he did not go in and slay that vile ruffian in his sleep," said Burma Naik; "but the Lord reserved him for your hand, Meeah, and we rejoice that he died at your feet like a dog." This, however, was a subject which the Khan rarely alluded to, and the Beydur saw that it had better be avoided.

They revisited the place many a time afterwards, but on the first day, neither too full to be frightful, or too empty to be meagre, the noble cataract was in its full beauty; and they descended from the palace by the small path by which Zóra had been carried by Jooma, the slave, and sat down on the gun in the bastion, as they had done before. In the distance the giant fall sparkled with rainbows, and the spray at times was full of golden light, which, from the evening sun, spread itself over the rugged sides of the ravine, over the feathery foliage which clothed the crags, and the plashing water which fretted against the rocks at their feet far below. While the little Meeah, in his father's arms, pulled handfuls of flowers from the creepers which hung everywhere around, Zóra and Maria sat hand in hand without speaking; and perhaps their hearts were too full for aught else than loving and reverent memories of the past. Nor was the place ever left unvisited by Zóra in after days, when the little mosque was repaired, and prayers were said by an old Syud whom she placed in it; and she came there with her children on the sacred anniversaries of her grandfather's death. But he is forgotten now; and of the "Peer," who receives a traditional anniversary worship to this day, no name has been preserved. We may be sure that on these anniversaries no more delightful subjects for stories for the children arose, than their mother's accounts of her early perils

and escapes. Once little Meeah said, looking earnestly in her face, "Mother, how didst thou escape from all these troubles?" And Zóra answered, gently, "I trusted in the Lord, my child."

Reader, who hast followed us in the course of this old world tale, we need hardly tell you that all are forgotten now; and there are traces of none except the two Beydurs, whose descendants still inhabit Korikul and Kukeyra, and are unchanged from what they used to be in the times of which I have written. For the rest, Beejapoor is a magnificent ruin, but Ahmednugger flourishes as an English station and cantonment, and the stout old fort is in perfect preservation. In both, and in the country round, nay, in all Dekhan, the memory of Chand Beebee, who defended the fort, and was murdered by her ungrateful people, and her heroic deeds and devotion in the battle of the "Standard of the Veil," are still sung and recited as the fittest memorials of

"A NOBLE QUEEN."

NOTE.

There are no records traceable at Moodgul of the worthy Bishop and his devoted sister, but they are believed to have remained there some years, and to have eventually returned to Portugal. But the small Christian Churches so strangely preserved under the continuous Mussulman Governments of the Dekhan still survive, and are steadfast to their faith. They are still as they existed at the period of this tale—Moodgul and Raichore, with their dependencies, Chittapoor on the Bheema, and Aurungabad, and they are ministered to by priests under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Goa.

GLOSSARY.

Adalut, *Court of justice.*
Ajaib! *Wonderful!*
Ajuba! *Extraordinary!*
Akhbar, *News letter.*
Alla dilaya te leonga! *If God give, I will take!*
"Alla hu Akhbar!" "*God is victorious!*"
Amán! *Mercy!*
Ameen, ameen! *Amen, amen!*
Astagh-fur-oolla! *God forbid!*
Azán, *Evening prayer.*

Bairagees, *Hindoo mendicants.*
Beebee, *Lady.*
Beydur, *Tribe of aborigines.*
Bhylmees, *Tribe of Mussulmans.*
Birianees, *A kind of Pilao.*
Bismilla! *In the name of God!*
Burkhat, Durbar Burkhat, "*The Durbar is dismissed.*"

Chabootra, *Earthen platform used for assemblies.*
Chaoree, *Village place of assembly.*
Chaya Mata, *The nymph of the fall.*
Chistee, *The designation of a tribe of Fakeers.*
Chitnees, *Correspondence clerk.*
Corus, *Anniversary.*
Cucheri, *Office for public business.*

Daad! daad! *Complaint! complaint!*
Dacoits, *Gang robbers.*
Dall, *Split pulse.*
Darogah, *Superintendent*
Deen-deen! *For the faith! for the faith!*
Dohai! *Cry for justice.*
Doputta, *Scarf.*
Duffadar, *Inferior officer.*
Duftur, *Record Office.*
Durbar, *Court.*
Durora, *Gang robbery.*

Fatehas, *Thank-offerings.*
Feringhi, *European.*
Furashes, *Sweepers and tent pitchers.*
Futteh Mydan, *The Plain of Victory.*
Futteh-i-Nubber, *Victory to the Prophet.*

Geesoo Duraz, "*Long Locks*"—title of saint at Kulburgah.
Ghee, *Boiled butter.*
Gopal swami, *Appellation of the god Krishna.*
Goruk Imlee, *Adansonia*
Gosha, *Privacy.*

Hai-hai! *Alas, alas!*
Hakeem, *Physician.*
Harem, *Women's apartments.*
Hari Ból, *Hindoo war-cry.*
Hoons, *A gold coin.*
Howdahs, *Seat on elephant.*
Humeenas, *Thin bag of leather worn at the waist.*
Huzrut, *Prince.*

Imáms, *Religious officers.*
Inshalla! *Please God.*

Jamahs, *Loose trousers.*
Jemadár, *Native officer.*
Jerreeds, *A game played on horseback with javelins.*
Jey mata! *Victory to the Mother!*
Julaybees, *Kind of sweetmeat.*

Kabob, *Meat roasted.*
Karámat, *Miracle.*
Kazee, *Mohamedan law officer.*
Khan, *Title of respect.*
Khanum, *Wife of Khan.*
Khedive, *Head of sect of Mussulmans.*
Khoda Hafiz, *God protect you!*
Kibleh, *Point of attraction.*
Kicheri, *Dish of rice and pulse.*
Killadar, *Governor of fort.*
Kooroo Kshetra, *The great battle between the solar and lunar races, described in Mahabarut.*
Kotwal, *Town magistrate.*
Kullunders, *Tribe of Fakeers.*

Kumkhob, *Cloth of Gold.*
Kurnum, *Village accountant.*
Kussal, *Butcher.*

Lakh, *A hundred thousand.*
Loongee, *Man's waist cloth.*
Luddoos, *Kind of sweetmeat.*

Mahabarut, *Sacred epic of the Hindoos.*
Máma, *Confidential female attendant.*
Mawallees, *A Mahratta tribe.*
Mashàek, *Religious devotee.*
Mashalla ! *Praise to God!*
Meeah, *Familiar title of eldest son among Mussulmans.*
Mirdha, *Court usher.*
Mohurrum, *Mahomedan festival.*
Mohurs, *gold coin.*
Momins, *Weavers.*
Monsoon, *Rainy season.*
Moolla, *Religious teacher.*
Moonshee, *Secretary.*
"Moonskir and Nakar," *The Angels of death.*
Moorsheed, *A disciple.*
Muezzin, *Caller to prayer.*
Mufti, *Law officer.*
Mundan-ool-Ghyb, *Spirit supposed to protect travellers.*
Mynas, *Starlings.*

Nagáras, *Large kettledrums.*
Naik, *Head of Beydur tribe.*
Nalkee, *Sedan chair.*
Nawab, *Lord.*
Neem, "*Melia ardizarachta.*"
Nika, *Marriage of the second order.*
Nobut, *Band of music attached to persons of high rank.*
Nuzzur, *Offering.*

Owleas, *A saint.*

Palkee, *Litter.*
Pán, *Betel leaf.*
Patell, *Head officer of village.*
Peer, *Saint.*
Peer-i-Dustugeer, *Respectful address to a saint.*
Peshkar, *Minister of Finance.*
Pice, *Copper coin.*
Pilao, *Savoury dish of meat and rice.*
Pooja, *Hindoo worship.*
Puleeta, *A lamp charm.*
Punah, *Protection.*
Putwari, *Village accountant.*

Rámáyan, *Hindoo epic poem.*
Ranee, *Hindoo princess.*
Roostum, *One of the heroes of the Shah Nama.*
Rujub-ool-Ghyb, *A spirit supposed to watch over travellers.*
Rumzan, *Mussulman fast.*

Salaam aliekoom ! *Salutation of peace.*
Sari, *Woman's garment.*
Sèndhee, *Fermented palm juice.*
Shabash ! *Well done !*
Shah, *King.*
Shookr, shookr ! *Thanks, thanks !*
Shoolka, *Scones.*
Shubgusht, *A marriage procession by night.*
Shytan, *The Devil.*
Siah Chuttree, *Tribe of Mussulmans* —called "black umbrellas."
Soosi, *kind of cotton cloth.*
Synd, *A division of Mussulmans.*
Syndanee, *Female Synd.*
Swami, *Title of Hindoo religious princes.*

Touba ! touba ! *Shame ! shame !*
Tukeea, *Abode of a Fakeer.*
Turreequt, *Path to salvation.*

Ul-humd-ul-illa ! *Praise be to God !*
Unjeel, *The New Testament.*

Vakeels, *Agents.*

Wallee, *Saint.*

Ya, Alla, Kureem ! *O Lord, most merciful.*
Ya Kureem ! *O merciful !*

Zemindars, *Land owners.*
Zenana, *Women's private apartments.*
Zools, *Portions of the Koran.*

THE END.

Spottiswoode & Co., Printers, New-street Square, London.

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