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K U Z Z I L B A S H .

A TALE OF KHORASAN.

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ADVENTURES
OF A
K U Z Z I L B A S H.

CHAPTER I.

MUSHED.

NADER having thus succeeded in one great object of his wishes—recovering the holy city of Mushed, the capital of Khorasan, from its rebel usurpers—resolved to make it his residence for some time, in order to regulate the affairs of the province, now wholly submitted to his authority. With this view he made it the head-quarters of his troops, sent for his harem and his son, Reza Koolee Khan, from Abiverd, and took up his abode in the ark, or palace.

This proved a holiday-time to me and many others besides: the fatigues of war, the calls of

duty were relaxed, and we enjoyed ourselves, as soldiers are wont to do when their toils are over for a time. And there was food enough to satisfy the most voracious curiosity,—ample scope for the indulgence of pleasure in all its varied forms.

Since the period when I quitted my Desert life, although it had been my fate to witness much that was dazzling and exciting, nothing resembling a town had yet fallen in my way; for the Koordish villages were mere collections of wretched mud-huts, scarcely more imposing in appearance than our fair and well-made tents. Now for the first time I entered a city, and that city one of the first in the empire, the capital of Khorasan, and above all, the seat of that holy shrine to which every pious Sheah turns with reverence, as to a second Kibleh.*

Many a day, while we lay encamped at the Khawjah Rubbee, within a short fursung of the walls, I gazed with intense interest on the lofty gilded dome of the shrine, the tall slender minarets, and the magnificent assemblage of buildings that surround it, composing a group in the centre of this great city, which never fails to attract every eye, even when it gazes from the greatest distance. How I longed for the anticipated moment, when

* The point where Mecca and its holy temple lie, and to which every true Mussulman, wherever he may be situated, turns his face when he prays.

the road would be free to enter and devour all its wonders ! What fanciful pictures did my imagination form of every thing it contained ; and all how unlike the truth !

On the morning we entered the city, we were all too much occupied with our duty, too busy in pursuing the enemy, and securing his abandoned positions, to pay much attention to other objects ; but on the succeeding days, when all was comparatively quiet, and when the completion of our General's arrangements permitted his servants to enjoy some leisure, I wandered about with some of my companions, determined to satisfy my curiosity to the full.

We first made for the Sahn, or great square. What a splendid scene ! Its high arcaded buildings, covered with porcelain of the richest colours disposed in the most tasteful devices, all glittering in the sun ; the two lofty gates at either end, and noble archways in the sides, all similarly adorned, and one of which gives entrance to the holy mausoleum !—the gilded Succah khaneh, with its numerous conduits filled with streams of water perpetually supplied,—the ample gilded dome, and slender minaret covered with blue and gold, rising like a mighty sceptre to the skies !—these were the first objects that fixed me gazing to the spot, and filled me with wonder and delight.

Nor was the living picture that occupied this

splendid scene less curious or less attractive ; the crowds of moollahs, priests, pilgrims, soldiers, merchants, and every variety of trade and denomination among the faithful, that passed and re-passed through each avenue to the Sahn ; the rich goods displayed under the arcades of the lower story, which, like those of a caravanserai, are let out as shops ; the groups of people bargaining at these shops, or praying upon the grave-stones with which the place is paved, formed a scene of very varied interest ;—and the buzz of business and religion which rose on the ear ; the hum of prayer ; the cries of saints and pilgrims on the blessed names of Allee, Hoossain and Imaum Reza ; the gabble and the quarrels of those who were driving their hard bargains, mingled in a roar of sounds as incongruous and confused as the groups that uttered them.

We entered the Mausoleum ; what a striking contrast from the scene that led to it ! Its lofty and dimly-lighted chambers seemed boundless in their obscurity, and the awe which overwhelmed my faculties was heightened by the deep silence, the mysterious character of the long-gowned figures that flitted about with soundless step, and the low, measured voice of prayer that issued from the chamber of the shrine.

“ Seek you to perform your devotions ? ” demanded one of the Khadums, in a low whisper,

"behold me ready to conduct you." Even the gay thoughtless youths my companions, who came but to gratify their curiosity, were infected with the awe which I sincerely felt; and we all followed our conductor in silence.

Prostrating ourselves, with our foreheads touching the sacred threshold, we prayed a blessing upon the departed Imaum, and all the tribe of Allee, his predecessors; and then entered the vault of death, which no infidel may approach and live. Here repose the bones of the departed Imaum (blessings be on his name!) and here also is deposited the dust of him whom all Sheahs abhor for his persecution of the blessed race of Allee, while they respect his great name, his liberality, and justice to all the world besides—the mighty Haroon-ul-Rasheed.

The shrine, with its rich screens, its brocaded canopies, and numerous glittering ornaments, presented a striking contrast to the groups of grave turbaned priests and humble devotees, all prostrated in prayer around it; and the impression made upon me by this solemn pomp was so strong, that I no longer wondered at the endless crowds of pilgrims that resort to this celebrated shrine from every part of Persia.

After reciting the customary prayers, and walking three times round the tomb, we made a trifling present to the Khadum, and quitted the Durgah,

by the entrance which leads to the mosque and square of Gauher Shahud,* so called from their founder. Even after gazing on the splendour of the Sahn, we were struck with delight at the beauty of this most elegant of mosques, with its slender, porcelain-covered minarets, and single majestic dome. But it would be endless to describe the various mosques, medressahs, and caravanserais, of this great city, the pride of Khorasan, and whose fame is over all the East.

The extensive and well-filled bazaars were objects of a different but not inferior interest. With what delight did I traverse that long street, which, with a canal of running water in its centre, stretches from one end of the city to the other. I gazed at the well-filled shops of the long bazaars that border this canal; the rich silks, shawls, and furs, the gay cloths of India and Frangestan; the tempting booths of the fruit-sellers, the cooks, and confectioners; the neat arrangement of the apothecaries' many-coloured drugs and liquids. But the shops of the armourers and harness-makers had the greatest attractions for me. The gold and silver-mounted horse-furniture with sharp bright stirrups, and gay martingales with breast ornaments; the brilliant

* She was the wife of Shah Rokh, the celebrated grandson of the still more celebrated Timoor, the conqueror and destroyer of the East.

suits of armour, both chain and plate, bright, damasked, and clouded; the well-tempered Khorasanee blades, darkly brilliant, and dangerous as a woman's eye; the curious matchlocks and pistols from Istambol, and the endless variety of knives, khunjurs, and daggers. These were the things I coveted; I would willingly have made myself master of the whole, and, indeed, it was not long before my purse began to feel the effects of my visits to the bazaars of Mushed: it would require to have been better filled to keep pace with my thoughtless extravagance.

Another species of luxury to which I had hitherto been comparatively a stranger, was that of the baths, which were the constant resort of our idle youth, and which I now very regularly attended, for the sake of pleasant society as well as for personal enjoyment.

I had not before suspected that these public conveniences were attended not merely for purposes of health, cleanliness, and comfort, but as a lounge, where people met to hear the news and gossip of the day. There, early in the morning, might be found the grave Moollah, emerged from his cold-vaulted *ootaugh* (chamber) in the Medressah, glad to come and repeat his prayers in an atmosphere of comfortable warmth; the drunken debauchee, staggering in to get rid of his racking headache by sleep or perspiration; the

merchant, who left his caravanserai in hopes of meeting others of his trade, and perhaps of driving a good bargain; or the newly arrived pilgrim, importing all the news only a twelvemonth old from Sheerauz, Kermanshah, or Tabreez. —The soldier would tell of his battles, and speculate on the great Nader's next movement; whilst the young rakes would boast of their intrigues, or invent lies to make plain men stare.

In the spacious vault of the Hummaums, half lighted by a few wretched lamps struggling for life with the moist misty vapours of the steaming reservoirs; as the eye became accustomed to the thick obscurity, one might gradually perceive sundry groups and single figures, naked to a strip of cloth around the middle, and in a strange variety of attitudes. Some having happily undergone the full operation, seated in conversation, enjoying the enlivening fumes of the calleeoon; some who, to a stranger, might seem to be undergoing the torture extraordinary, stretched upon their backs, while attendant familiars kneeling by them, or bestriding their bodies, rubbed, kneaded, or twisted them in the most outrageous fashion, making their limbs resound with cracking of their joints, and the slaps which every now and then they bestowed on them. Others, again, undergoing the serious operation of having their beard and nails dyed; the former



black, the latter orange colour. These are forced to lie stiff upon their backs for at least three hours, having their beards, eyebrows, hands, and feet covered with poultices of pounded indigo or hinna leaves, and never daring to move a muscle all that time, for fear of spoiling the whole operation. Then again to look into the great reservoir, smoking and steaming away, with a dozen of naked creatures tumbling about in it, like as many devils in hell—all such sights, to a stranger like me, were full of interest; and though the novelty soon wore off, the other attractions of the place became strengthened by custom, and few days passed without my paying a visit to one of the best-frequented Hummaums.

It would have been well for me if such had been the most reprehensible pastime I indulged in. But idleness, saith the proverb, is the mother of mischief; and so it proved with me. The constant political duties which Nader found to occupy him in Mushed, ingrossed him so completely for a time, that his military pursuits were in a great measure abandoned, and the duties devolved on his officers. Detachments were sent to the frontiers, and to every place where there was cause to dread disturbances, but his guards and household remained for the most part unemployed; I, among the rest, was in this situation, and so ingrossed did I be-

come with my new pleasures, that I neither sought for, nor put myself in the way of active occupation.

I have already observed that quarters in camp were assigned to me in the same tent with two other gholaums; their names were Yar Mahomed, and Fouje Allee Beg. They were both some years older than myself, but both were pleasant, good-humoured fellows, so that we soon became intimate companions, if not devoted friends. Yar Mahomed was kindly in his disposition, and though far from deficient in spirit, yet of quiet, sober, and somewhat indolent habits. Fouje Allee, on the other hand, though equally good-humoured, was a thoughtless, blustering fellow, of strong passions, entirely devoted to pleasure and amusement, and careless of the feelings of others, provided he gratified his own. A headlong courage, which often carried all before it, had recommended him to Nader, but his Highness was too clear-sighted not to perceive his total want of coolness and discretion; and his opinion of Fouje Allee might be gathered from the nature of the services assigned him to perform. His bull-dog courage was not at this time required; so he was idle, like myself, and free to bully the men, and debauch the women of the capital, at his will and pleasure.

Among the evil propensities of Fouje Allee Beg was an incurable spirit of gambling; whatever

money he got, whatever plunder he procured, he was sure to lose sooner or later at some of the common games of chance; for he was by far too rash and impatient to continue long a winner. The occupations incident to a march, and a siege, had in some degree interrupted the indulgence of this propensity, but now that he was an idle man, and in a great city, he gave the reins to it with an eagerness proportioned to the previous restraint and the increased field of temptation.

A gamester is never at a loss for time or opportunity to indulge his favourite vice, and every great town is provided with receptacles for such votaries of fortune. Fouje Allee Beg was not long in discovering one of these retreats suited to his purpose; it was in an obscure lane, close to the principal bazaar, and not far from one of the most celebrated medressahs of the city. To this den of vice and misery, hundreds daily and hourly flocked, glad, like himself, to relieve the tedium of idleness by the excitement of staking their property upon a chance, even though that chance should leave them destitute. But these were not its only visitants; it was the resort of others, who did not resemble him in heedless rashness, but who came like the tiger couching for his spring, to seize upon the unwary, and strip him of his property by any means, whether foul or fair. The unfortunate Fouje Allee, guiltless, at least, of this sort of

deceit, became the victim of villains, whose cooler passions gave them an advantage over his intemperate heat. He did not suffer alone; but I will not anticipate.

This was not the only evil practice into which I was led by my companion—but why should I single him out particularly? the vice of the place was by no means confined to a few. In a camp like ours, composed for the most part of men who, till they found permanent and profitable service with Nader, had been freebooters, plunderers, or persons of desperate lives; and who all were natives of a country where morals were by no means strictly attended to, a great degree of licentiousness might reasonably be expected to prevail; and, to say the truth, it existed very generally amongst all ranks. The officers were brave and devoted to their chief, but too often dissolute in their private lives; they loved plunder and money more for the means of enjoyment it afforded than for itself; and being little in the company of priests, they probably forgot those texts of the Koran, which interdict the faithful from those delicious potations prepared from the blood of the grape; while, dwelling on those parts which paint the joys of Paradise, they loved to anticipate them in the arms of such terrestrial houries as fortune threw in their way.

In the camp and in the field, the strict discipline enforced by Nader controlled, in some degree, this

tendency to excess; but when the army, comparatively idle, was quartered in the city, it broke out with an inveteracy which sometimes required the severest checks. Mushed was a friendly city; no plunder was therefore permitted; but nevertheless, the atrocities committed in taking possession of it were neither few nor trifling, and in spite of the severe punishments inflicted upon offenders, they continued very frequently to occur.

It is not to be believed that a youth like myself, however naturally well-disposed he might be, could witness daily so much vice and licentiousness, disguised as it too often was under the seducing cloak of gaiety and pleasure, without being in some degree infected; and though at first I joined the debauch, or mingled with the unprincipled of both sexes, with a dislike approaching to disgust, these better feelings by degrees gave way, and I gradually came to enjoy the sensual gratifications which these scenes afforded. I became a rake as well as a gambler.

My two companions and myself were lodged in a house situated in the street leading from the palace to the shrine and the great bazaar. Every morning we repaired to the Dur-khaneh* to report ourselves; but when it was not our turn of duty we soon left the palace, and Fouje Allee and I would sally forth in quest of adventures, while

* Palace gate.

Yar Mahomed, whose more sober disposition led him less to wandering, applied himself to our little household duties, and prepared good cheer for us on our return.

Our frequent absence from the palace, and our eternal love of idle dissipation, did not escape the observation of our commander, Caleb Allee Beg, who more than once remonstrated with me very gravely, and warned me against the course I was pursuing. Even Ibrahim Khan, who always continued his peculiar charge of me, though frequently absent on military expeditions, bluntly told me of the change he heard of in my conduct, and cautioned me in strong and earnest terms; while my faithful Cossim Allee was almost broken-hearted at the alteration he perceived both in my conduct and appearance; for the irregularity of my life had its effect upon my person, and I became thin and pale, in comparison with my former healthful condition.

CHAPTER II.

THE PRIEST'S HAREM.

THERE was within a short distance of our lodgings an old mosque, which, though once a handsome structure, had fallen into decay, and was at this time little frequented. A few ancient Khadums, however, were still attached to it, and its mimber* was sometimes occupied by an aged Moollah, who read a chapter or two from the Koran, or bestowed a Friday lecture upon some of the neighbours, who probably, lazy like myself, preferred performing their prayers at this place, to walking on a little farther to the holy shrine.

This mosque was adorned with two handsome minarets, from whence an old Muezzin echoed the call to prayers, which floated on the breeze from the loftier pinnacles of the Durgah†. They com-

* Pulpit.

† Place of worship, or adoration; applied emphatically to all places of pilgrimage, and in this place to the tomb of the Imaum Reza.

manded an extensive view over that quarter of the city in which we lived ; and although men* are not generally suffered to ascend such places, it so happened, that by making friends with the Muezzin, I was permitted frequently to enjoy the fresh air, and to see the rising or the setting of the sun from the top of these minarets.

The terraced roofs of the city lay at my feet, as I gazed from this elevated station, and in the mornings of the hot season, when the inhabitants are accustomed, for the sake of coolness, to repose in the open air on mattresses spread upon these terraces, they might, no doubt, have afforded many curious and edifying scenes. But at this time the season was too severe for such exposure, and the first signs of animation in the mornings were to be perceived in the areas belonging to the houses around.

The city of Mushed contains within its walls many inclosures and gardens of considerable extent, attached to the various palaces of the rich ; and though the quarter around this mosque was too much crowded with houses, whether inhabited or ruinous, to admit of so great an expense of surface, there still were to be seen several residences of large size, each of which comprehended a suitable number of courts within its bounds.

* In Asiatic cities, men are not permitted to ascend places which overlook the town, lest they should also overlook the harems of other people, and see their women.

One of these dwellings was close to the mosque, and my unhallowed eyes not only commanded the whole of its premises from the minaret, but could distinguish the arrangement of its several parts. There was the low, confined entrance, leading by various narrow and tortuous passages to a small court; at the end of this stood the public hall, or dewan-khneh, a neat, but unpretending room, lighted by two large windows of carved wooden-work, opening on the court, and spread with coarse mats instead of carpets. More than once I saw an old man of grave and forbidding aspect, dressed in a huge green turban and dark Arab cloak, sitting in the corner:—the number of people, all wearing the dress of the learned or the holy, that came and went to pay their homage to this person, declared sufficiently that this was the abode of some highly-revered Moollah.

Beyond this outer and public apartment, I could discern another suite; and though the distance prevented me from distinguishing minute particulars, I was satisfied that comfort had by no means been overlooked by the old gentleman in the arrangement and filling up of this khelwut, or private retreat.

But that which attracted me most, and riveted all my attention, was a court of larger dimensions than the first, more neatly laid out, with parterres better filled, and a cistern of water in the

centre. The small apartments disposed around this inclosure ; the handsome hall at one end, with its curtained windows ; the articles of female attire which might be seen hanging out from doors and windows ; and, above all, the buzz of tongues which frequently arose from the place, were sufficient of themselves to proclaim that this was the harem of the worthy doctor, even had living proofs of the fact been wanting ; but, secure as they believed themselves to be from all profane eyes within the lofty wall of their dwelling, many women were continually seen flitting about ; proving that the forbidden place did not want for inmates ; and I could in fancy distinguish the quick hurried step and less studied apparel of the slaves, from the more dignified mien of those whose furred and flowing garments proclaimed them as the mistresses of the mansion.

But though my eyes, at all times sufficiently sharp, were not certainly deficient upon such a service, they could distinguish no farther ; neither face nor feature could be made out, even of those who wore no veil ; and though I returned as frequently as I dared, to gaze from the minaret, it was but to increase my curiosity, without the hope of gratifying it.

One evening, while employed in watching the female figures who were running about, gaily chasing each other, chattering and clamouring

with unrestrained mirth, my eyes, in wandering over the building, chanced to rest upon an old house, close to the eastern wall of the harem. Like many others in the neighbourhood, it appeared to be a tenantless ruin; and the devil put it in my head, that if I could manage to get unperceived upon its roof, I might enjoy a nearer view of the houries contained in the old Moollah's paradise.

Accordingly, stealing out one day unobserved, I went prowling about in the direction of the old house; and after scrambling a good deal among muddy lanes, puddles of dirty water, rugged excavations and ruinous walls, I made my way into a very narrow passage, which, upon close examination, I became certain, communicated with the eastern side of the harem. High mud-walls bounded this passage on either side, from its commencement in a dirty lane, until, diving underground, it lost itself in a dark hole, beneath a row of houses.

Following this obscure path, I passed by a low door on the left hand: the sound of female voices occasionally heard from behind it, sufficiently declared that this communicated with the ladies' apartments. Excited by this success, I groped my way onward for several yards, until completely stopped by a wall, in which there was another door closely shut. This did not suit my

purpose, and I was cautiously retiring—for it was a dangerous spot for a man to be found in—when a faint ray of light falling on my eye from the left, induced me to examine the wall on that side more closely.

I found that the obscurity of the passage had at first made me overlook a doorway in this place, which had been partially closed with an old mat, the door itself having been taken away. After listening awhile, to discover if the building had any inhabitants, I ventured to put aside the mat, and entering, found myself in a dark, ruinous outer room, like the porch where servants wait at a nobleman's gate; a passage led from this to a small court in equal disrepair. As I stood gazing around me, a lofty building close by caught my attention, and in it I immediately recognized the object of my search.

It consisted of two stories, above which some former occupant had erected a *jehan-numah** of materials so slight, that little of it now remained except some crumbling walls. Cautiously I mounted the narrow and broken steps which led to this place, and peeping about, found myself just where I wished to be,—directly overlooking the old doctor's paradise. At this time, however, all was

* Literally, "shewing the world." A place from whence an extensive prospect is obtained. It is applied to lofty towers built for the purpose of commanding an extensive view.

still : a shrill voice, indeed, might now and then be heard, sharply screaming out the name of a slave ; but nothing was to be seen :—it was not an hour when the ladies were in motion ; so, delighted with my discovery, I retired cautiously as I had advanced, resolved to make an early use of the advantage it gave me.

On the following morning, as soon as possible after the inhabitants began to stir at this cold season, I flew to my post, and luckily gained it without interruption. In passing the little door I heard the hum of voices, and when I peeped down upon the court from a break in the ruins, I found it was all in a bustle. Half-a-dozen women, some with veils on and some without them, were running about, engaged, as it seemed, in a variety of domestic duties. Some were cleaning the callecoons ; some were teasing cotton to stuff cushions and mattresses ; others were spreading out dried fruits, the winter store, to freshen in the short-lived sun of December, or picking rice and kishmishes,* probably for the pillaw that was to form their evening repast. Trowsers, vests, silk handkerchiefs, and shawls were hung out to air ; and a general activity prevailed.

Of the women, those who wore no veils had, as

* A small raisin, prepared from the Sultana grape, entirely free of stones, and of fine flavour ; much in use as an ingredient in cookery.

might have been guessed, faces little worth concealing: two were blacks, one had the flat features of a Calmuck, and the two others had faces more wrinkled than a melon of Kesh; but the slender figures and graceful movements of three who were veiled, promised something better, and I fervently hoped that some accident might remove the envious screens, and bless me with a sight of the charms they concealed.

I was still eagerly gazing on all this, when my attention was attracted by another figure, who now came upon the scene. Her look, her air, her voice, at once declared her to be the mistress of the place. She was tall and elegantly formed; the cypress waist of the poets was well illustrated by her figure and her gait. A vest of green velvet, embroidered with gold, and lined with fur, was confined about her waist by an orange-coloured shawl; while another of rich crimson, and of ample dimensions, floated around her person, and fell in graceful folds almost to her feet. A black silk veil falling from her large turban, half-hid and half-displayed a face which left the gazer no power of dwelling on lesser beauties. The black pencilled brow rose over an eye full and dark as the antelope's, but piercing and commanding like the eagle's; while a cheek vying in its hue with the blossom of the pomegranate, gave earnest of all the loveliness which was yet concealed. Her voice, as

she called upon her women, was like soft majestic music, and her presence in a moment restored the silence and decorum which it was so well calculated to inspire.

She stood for a while overlooking the labours of her slaves, and at length withdrew along with them, leaving me transfixed with admiration. I was not, however, so wholly absorbed, but that power was left me to remark another veil wafted aside by the breeze, which revealed features less majestic, indeed, than those of the owner's splendid mistress, but so playfully sweet and arch; that they might well have robbed that lady of a part of that devotion which she seemed rather to demand than solicit.

From this time the ruined house became my daily resort; I discovered the hours at which the old gentleman's family were most frequently visible, and became acquainted with the persons of most of them. I afterwards found out that this ruin had formed part of a very large establishment, belonging in former times to some rich nobleman, but which its present master, the old doctor, not being able to occupy entirely, had divided into several dwellings, accommodating himself in the first place, and abandoning to decay such parts as were not rented out to others. The old building, which so conveniently served my purpose, had never been made use of by him, and was

totally neglected ; which may account for the inattention of leaving unguarded a point so dangerous to its master's honour. Every day I feasted my eyes upon the lovely rose-garden of living beauty, of which it commanded the view, without attempting to make any nearer approach, and deprived, as it seemed, of the hope of ever tasting its sweetness. But each visit to my hiding-place made me bolder ; I continued longer at my post, and became less attentive to scrupulous concealment. More than once had I remarked the eyes of the lovely Fati-mah—so it seemed was the dignified beauty named—wandering towards the broken walls that concealed me ; but as her looks seemed to be neither directed by curiosity nor suspicion, the circumstance rather tended to increase my rash security, than to teach me prudence.

One fine day, on reaching my station, I saw at a glance that there was a more than ordinary bustle in the harem ; that the preparations of a feast were carrying on. The curtains of the hall were drawn up ; the carpets, before lying folded in heaps, were spread upon its floor ; the pavement before it, and the pathways leading to it, were swept clean, and every thing was put into perfect order. The slave-girls, in their best attire, hurried to and fro, and bore in their hands all the different utensils requisite for laying out a superb entertainment.

Presently Fatimah, followed by two of her women, one of whom was the sweet-looking creature whom I had before remarked, crossed the court, and took her seat at one of the windows in the hall. She had not been there long before the shuffling of slippers, and the sound of laughter from many voices approaching, were followed by the entrance of several females; who, throwing off the blue checked veils which covered them from head to foot, appeared in the form of elegantly dressed ladies, and their attendants. It was now plain that this was an entertainment given by Fatimah to some of her female friends.

My heart was tumultuously filled with pleasure, mingled with no small share of apprehension, at this sight. There is something in the sanctity of the harem which appeals so strongly to the feelings of every faithful Mussulmaun, that the boldest of them shrink at the idea of violating it. The gradual approaches, and the long impunity with which I had contrived to pry into the privacy of the old doctor's family, had in great measure quieted my conscience, and blinded me to the fear of consequences: but in this manner to become a spy upon the persons of other women—the wives of men unknown to me, appeared a degree of impudence so unwarrantable, as to merit—I could not but acknowledge it—the severest punishment. Yet the delight which I experienced

at beholding so many lovely women, blazing in the fulness of their unveiled charms, intoxicated me so much, that I became heedless of consequences, and was fixed to the spot in unrestrained admiration !

As soon as all were seated, conversation commenced in the most sprightly tone : calleeoons were brought ; tea and sherbet were handed round ; and, after a while, the slave-girls brought in a plentiful banquet, to which the ladies did very sufficient honour : how fain would I have joined them !

No sooner were the dishes removed, and the company, after washing their hands, had settled themselves comfortably, leaning on their silken pillows, than dancing-girls were introduced, whose voluptuous movements appeared to give no small pleasure to their lovely spectators ; and I was so transported with the whole scene, that I forgot all caution, and pressing forward to enjoy it more fully, was quite unconscious that my person became exposed to view ; nor was it until I beheld the large eyes of Fatimah bent full upon me, that I awoke to a sense of my dangerous position :—I was fascinated—fixed to the spot ! My treason was clearly detected ! yet, though certain that the alarm must instantly be given, I could not fly ; those dark radiant orbs held me spell-bound. But the lightnings which they shot were not

those of anger; no alarm was given: and my wonder arose, with returning recollection, at the extraordinary forbearance which delayed the punishment due to my audacity.

I might have long continued gazing thus, and perhaps undisturbed, but there were other eyes as sharp, if not as beautiful, as those of Fatimah. An old attendant, following their direction, caught a glimpse of my figure as it projected from behind the wall, and screaming out "Treachery! treachery!—a man! a man!" she effectually alarmed the whole party.

All rose in confusion, and ran and squalled in concert.—"What means all this? what news are there? what is the matter?"—"A man? a man?—Oh, Mahomed! where is he? Yah Allee! what will become of us?" with fifty other like exclamations, echoed from all sides. The slave-girls ran about, not knowing which way to look; the ladies hid their faces with their hands, and sought for their veils, betraying more in their confusion than they yet had exposed to view. Had there been no dread of consequences to check my mirth, it was a scene for laughter. Fatimah herself shrieked louder than the rest; but an expressive glance declared to me that from her I had nothing to fear—told me, entreated me, to look to my safety.

It was full time, for the whole tribe was in

full commotion, and a confused enquiry had by this time arisen as to the grounds of the alarm. "Where was the intruder? who had seen him?" demanded several voices; and soon that of Fatimah was heard, laughing at the rest for their unfounded terror. But the old hag who had seen me was neither to be convinced nor silenced so easily; she exalted her cracked pipe, and swore, "Wollah, Billah!"* that she had seen a man half hid behind the broken walls of the Goombuz-e-Khan,† close by, and insisted on an examination of the place; adding, that her master, the Moojetehed,‡ should be informed of it, that proper chastisement might be inflicted on the intruder.

During this uproar, I had descended from my peeping station, and was cautiously looking out to see if the path was clear enough to let me effect my escape. The clamour was so high that I heard every thing that passed, and was sensible of a rush being made to the postern door of the harem, by which I had to pass, with the view, no doubt, of intercepting me in my flight. I was puzzled whether to take my chance of concealment among the chasms of the ruins, or to face the old doctor's servants, and escape by breaking my way through them. Fortunately for myself, I chose the last expedient. There was a bustle at the door as I

* An oath equivalent to "By God!" † The "Khan's tower."

‡ Moojetehed—a "high priest."

passed it, as if they were forcing it open; and as my retreating footsteps rung on their ears, I heard them cry, "There goes the haramzadeh!"* "There goes the miscreant!"—"He is off! he is off!" But in a moment I gained the lane; and although I recollected passing a female figure close to its entrance, I heard no more of my pursuers.

* Literally, "base-born"—a term of abuse very obnoxious to Persian ears, but nevertheless frequently used.

CHAPTER III.

THE INTERVIEW.

WHEN I reached my lodgings and began to reflect more calmly on all that had passed, I became satisfied that no inconvenient discovery could follow from my unguarded imprudence; but it vexed me deeply to think that I had in all probability deprived myself of an amusement which had occupied a part of my time so agreeably,—for it was certain that I must not think of revisiting the ruins:—and though I certainly had not at this time formed any plan for improving my acquaintance with the ladies of the doctor's harem, I felt that the deprivation of that degree of communion with them, which I had for some time past enjoyed, would be like losing the society of old and delightful friends.

I believe that the mortification and pain I suffered while this privation lasted, led me for the first time to form designs which I probably never

should have entertained if things had gone on as before; but the magnificent beauty of Fatimah, and the arch loveliness of her slave, haunted my imagination, now that I could no longer behold them, and I thought that, unless I could procure an interview with one or the other of them, my peace was gone for ever.

Where now, will it be said, was the love I once bore to the unfortunate Shireen—to her whom I had sworn to love for ever and alone—whose innocence I had betrayed, whom I had left in peril of her life on my account? Alas! I was changed; my own innocence was gone, and with it the simple tastes and better feelings of my early life. Since the commencement of my wild and reckless career in Mushed, if I thought of Shireen at all, it was with a mingled sensation of pain and shame, that made me glad to banish her image from my heart. It reproached me in her own sweet and gentle way for my thoughtless, my unfeeling conduct; and I could not bear it. I rushed into dissipation, and courted pleasure even in its most licentious form, to drown the bitter self-upbraidings which such recollections produced.

In the present instance, my impatience did not endure long, although it was not relieved by any effort of my own. Returning from the baths one morning, soon after the event I have just

related, a female figure closely veiled attracted my attention in passing, by coughing in that significant manner so well known to all youthful gallants, and then walking on, turning her head to see if I had caught the signal.

Ever ready for an adventure, I followed without scruple, and she proceeded, looking back at each turning, until by a succession of circuitous lanes we had reached a deserted and ruinous quarter of the town with which I was quite unacquainted. At length, uncertain whither, or for what purpose, she might be conducting me, I called several times to my guide, desiring her to stop and let me speak to her. But all the reply was another significant gesture, after which she continued her progress, until at last, diving into a dark alley, she disappeared from my view.

I now called out loudly without receiving any reply ; but resolved, if possible, to force an explanation of this unaccountable conduct, and to discover whither the adventure was likely to tend, I plunged into the alley where my conductress had disappeared, and groping my way in utter darkness, advanced with all the caution I could use.

For fifteen or twenty yards the path extended without interruption between walls of damp cold earth ; and I confess that some misgivings did cross my mind as to the designs of my guide in decoying me, as it seemed, into so suspicious a

place. I cared little for what might happen in daylight ; but against surprises in the dark, who could provide ? I was half-inclined to make good my retreat, while there was yet time.

My cogitations were interrupted by an accident ; I came unexpectedly upon a descent, and being quite unprepared for it, stumbled, and fell down several steps cut in the earth, just as a door at the bottom of them flew open, and my conductress appeared at it, holding a lamp in her hand.

The loud shout of female laughter which followed, dispelled my apprehensions, and my hitherto silent guide exclaimed with something of a sneer, " So ! here's a youth of mettle—neither darkness nor danger can check his progress in an intrigue ; let him but get sight of a woman, and away he follows the waft of her veil, if it lead him into the very bowels of the earth !—Well, he is young, and peril is the price of pleasure ; the joys of Paradise are only to be reached through the dark gates of death—but he may find the purchase a dear one ;—bring him along, slaves, bring him along !"

During this address I rose slowly from the ground, somewhat confounded, but luckily unhurt by my fall ; and musing a little on her concluding observation, I mechanically accompanied two veiled females, who, seizing each an arm, led me though the door. By the light of the lamp

we traversed a subterraneous passage, the mud-built walls of which were cold and green with damp. A door at the farther end opened upon another flight of steps, by which we ascended to a vaulted apartment like that of a bath, built of bricks, and sparingly ornamented with lackered tiles. "Stay here a little," said my guide, "and on your peril stir not till my return."

Stir! how was I to stir? or where was I to go, bewildered as I had been with the various windings of the way, and attended as I still was by my two female guards; who, though they quitted their hold, and retiring a pace or two, stood with hands respectfully crossed on their breasts, were still ready to give the alarm, should I attempt resistance or retreat. But, in truth, I had no intention of trying to elude their vigilance; I was too desirous to see the end of this singular adventure, to quit it on the very point of discovery. Silence, however, had not been enjoined me, and I made use of my tongue to question my fair attendants as to the object of my detention. I asked them where I was? who it might be that required my presence?—was it their mistress?—it must be so;—was she fair?—young?—beautiful?—I varied these questions in form and manner, but all in vain; not a word could I elicit; and for once, two women persevered in holding their tongues and keeping their counsel. One of them, for a mo-

ment, placed her finger on that part of her veil which concealed her mouth, and then returned to her motionless, respectful posture ;—but that was all—no farther sign nor word escaped them.

Like a fool, I besought them to take off their veils ; and when they would not answer, swore I would tear them off, and moved towards one of them, as if I was going to put my threat in execution. But shaking their heads significantly, they waved me back with an action so decided as to render me ashamed of my silly bravado ; and I gave up all hopes of learning any thing from them.

I continued nearly half an hour in this awkward and anxious condition, when the door re-opened, and my conductress making her appearance, beckoned me forward. My two guards once more seizing my arms, led me onwards through a short passage, which was closed at the opposite end by a thick quilted curtain. It rose as if self-lifted, as we approached, and a blaze of light burst upon me, so dazzling after the obscurity I had been kept in, that for some moments I could distinguish nothing.

As my eyes grew familiar with the light, I perceived that I was in a small apartment, exquisitely fitted up with all that could contribute to comfort and to luxury. The roof was painted with flowers of azure and gold ; richly flowered hangings of felt and silk covered the greater part

of the walls; and the shelves and recesses were filled with china and other ornamental toys. Carpets of the most brilliant colours covered the floor, and along the top and sides of the room were spread the thickest and softest numuds* of Kermaun. A brilliant fire of wood, blazing in a handsome recess, diffused at once a delightful fragrance and a genial heat through the apartment;—and several silver lamps, and candlesticks bearing waxen tapers, shed a light equal to that of noon-day.

But it was not immediately that these particulars could be observed, for my whole faculties were at first ingrossed by one object; and that was a lady of majestic mien and richly-dressed, who sat leaning upon a silken cushion, at the upper end of the apartment. Her face was closely veiled, but the first glimpse I had of her exquisite shape thrilled through my soul, as making a low obeisance I stood attentive to receive her commands.

The lady gazed at me for a while through the laced eyelets of her veil, and then making a signal with her hand, my guards and conductress withdrew, leaving us entirely alone. Her demeanour was so noble, and the whole scene was so imposing—so unlike the haunts of vice and folly which I had too much frequented of late—that I stood for a time irresolute and confused. At last, uncertain

* Thick carpets of felt, richly flowered, and used for sitting upon.

how to behave, I made a step forward, and prepared to address her, when the lady herself arose, and throwing aside her veil, discovered to me the well-known features of Fatimah !

“Stranger !” said she—“and yet can those be termed strangers who have watched each other’s looks as we have done ?—what canst thou think of a woman who, thus unsolicited, avows her love for one, with whom, till now, she has never spoken ? Yet, if thy looks, thy conduct, interpret rightly the feelings of thy heart, they have declared that she who now addresses thee, is neither an object of indifference or disgust. But let thy lips confirm the tale : instantly relieve me from all dread of a degradation I could not endure—the thought that I had humbled myself to one who never sought this meeting.”

She paused for a reply, while her eye shot fire at the idea which her fancy had conjured up.

Scarcely recovered from my surprise, I knew not how to address her—how to express my rapture at the interest she had expressed for me. “An object of indifference !” cried I ; “say rather, of the deepest admiration—the most devoted love ! Ah, lady ! you little know how I have watched your steps—your looks—your actions, even when I dared not hope for such an event as this.”—“I know more than you think,” replied the lady, with a heavenly smile ; “I know who you are, where you live, and

how long you have watched all that passes within the walls of my dwelling. That I was the object of your gaze, I ventured, perhaps too boldly, to believe: it is in that belief I have sought this interview, and I seek its confirmation from your own mouth. Ismael, let me feel that I am justified; let me not deem myself unworthily degraded!"

Eagerly did I assure the beautiful Fatimah of my entire devotion—of my enthusiastic adoration of her charms—and painted with all the ardour of passion, the earnestness with which I daily awaited her appearance, hung upon her steps, and watched every glimpse of her countenance; nor did I find it very difficult to persuade my mistress of my love, or reconcile her to the advances she had made to favour it.

As familiarity and confidence grew between us, I related to her the whole origin and progress of my passion, from the first distant view I had from the minaret, down to the day when I was driven from my post on the ruined house, by the alarm which was spread by the old woman. "Ah!" said she, laughing heartily, "that was truly a pretty affair; you nearly paid for your fool-hardiness that day, I can tell you: had I not stood your friend, you had been taken to a certainty, and then how would you have looked?—your life would certainly have been the sacrifice.

"When I found it impossible to silence the old

crone," continued Fatimah, "I contrived to get hold of the key of the small postern-door, from whence your retreat must have been intercepted, so that it could not be opened in time, and pursuit I knew would be in vain. For many days before, I had placed a servant in waiting, to give me notice of your arrival at your post, and with orders to take care that nothing might disturb you in your concealment, or, in case of discovery, to mislead your pursuers. You had not twice visited the ruined house, before I saw you, had you watched, and discovered who you were. I observed your attention fixed upon me: your appearance, the enterprise you displayed, interested me, and I resolved to learn whether you were worthy of my notice. Often have I myself, closely veiled in poor apparel, watched your steps, and dwelt upon your features and your person. I have traced your haunts; I have regretted your dissipation; and I resolved to make an effort to detach you from so dangerous a course. Whether my pains are to be rewarded, is now to be seen. Ismael, you must not disappoint me. For the present, let us amuse ourselves; we are here in a retreat secure from all interruption, and I shall endeavour to make the time pass agreeably; but it is now the hour of breakfast, and you must partake of some refreshment along with me."

She clapped her hands three times, upon which

a private door opened, and three or four female slaves entered, bearing trays, covered with the choicest dishes. Our appetites were courted by the most delicately-seasoned kabaubs and stews, omelettes, creams, and sweetmeats; and the richest sherbets of pomegranates, of limes, and of cinnamon, flavoured with rose-water, mantled in china basins, to quench our thirst.

Fatimah, with the sweetest smile, now invited me to sit by herself, and helped me with her own hand to the choicest morsels, first tasting them to give them an additional relish. I in my turn, when I found a dish of surpassing flavour, entreated her to accept of a portion from my hand, placing it myself upon the cake of bread* before her.

After we had spent some time in satisfying our hunger, she once more clapped her hands; upon which two of the slaves, who had all retired after placing the repast before us, returned bearing a flaggon and several drinking-vessels. "This," said she, "is the cordial which fools and fanatics forswear, as forbidden by the Prophet—(praised be his name!)—but which wise men love, and use as one of the choicest boons bestowed by Heaven

* The Persians at meals lay a large cake, or flap of bread, upon the cloth before them, which serves as a plate, to which they frequently transfer portions of the victuals which are in dishes before them, while tearing off morsels as required; it is also eaten along with their meat.

on man. It raises the sinking spirits—it is balm to the broken heart—it heightens the joys of love, and anticipates those of Paradise. This wine flowed from those delicious grapes which blush on the plains of Nishapore;—for the enjoyment of this, did the sweetest of poets* forsake the splendid court of the great Malek Shah, and the friendship of his vizier, the wise and magnificent Nizamool-Moolk;—receive then, my love, this inspiring draught from the hands of thy servant, and enjoy the delights it bestows.”

The wine, in truth, was excellent, and Fatimah and I drank several bumpers of it so rapidly, that we both began to feel its influence. After a while we became somewhat sobered, and Fatimah, turning to me, observed—“Ismael, my friend, I have heard something of your adventures; indeed, they are still in men’s mouths as a subject of conversation; but I desire much to hear all that has befallen you from your own lips. But first it is fit that you should know something of her to whom you are now bound, I trust, by willing ties—who has encountered no small danger for your sake, and who would brave death itself to do you good.

* Omar Keyoomée, a native of Nishapore, who, when offered honours, wealth, and titles, by his early friend, Nizamool-Moolk, preferred the calm repose and quiet enjoyments of his native country, the revenues of which were bestowed upon him accordingly by the liberal vizier.

“ My story is neither long nor eventful. I am by birth an Affghaun, of the noble tribe of Barukzei. My father, as well as I can remember, was a respected elder* of our village, which was situated in a remote mountain district, greatly exposed to the attacks of the Hazarahs. In one of these attacks, about twelve years ago, our village was surprised and plundered; the greater part of its men were put to death, and its women and children carried off. I fell to the lot of Sultaun Allee Hyder Beg, a Hazarah chief, who had been active in the assault; and in his family I remained until I was twelve years of age.

“ At this period Khorasan was governed by Ismael Khan, on the part of Shah Sultaun Hoossein; and though the royal power was then in its decay, and troubles were continually arising in the province, the authority of its governor, supported as it was by a large military force, was formidable enough to command the respect of the neighbouring predatory chiefs, who accordingly endeavoured to conciliate his good-will both by fair words and presents.

“ In some negotiation of this sort, I was made over to the Khan, along with sundry fine horses, and several dooshaukh† camels. I was then just

* Reish-suffeed—literally, “white-beard,”—an elder, or patriarch of a tribe or village.

† Having two humps.

rising into womanhood ; and the Khan, who was curious in the selection of his harem, was highly pleased with the promise of beauty which he was pleased to discover in my person. The Affghaun women of my tribe, like all those of the more northern districts, are fair, and possess a natural bloom not inferior to that of the loveliest Georgians, while their features, perhaps sometimes too strongly marked, are generally animated with an engaging expression of spirit and intelligence. In short, the Khan was delighted with his acquisition, and in due time I became his principal favourite.

“ But the Khan was too general an admirer to be constant in his attachments: he was, indeed, fickle in the extreme ; and perhaps his indifference to me was hastened by another circumstance—I did not appear likely to become a mother. Certain it is, that after enjoying his favour for three years, his attentions ceased, and my spirit was wounded by discovering too clearly that I had lost all power over him. Neglect I could not endure ; and though I had never loved the Khan much, I now hated him, and those for whom he had abandoned me.

“ About this time, the troubles of Khorasan increased, and the city of Mushed itself became a scene of intrigue and faction. Ismael Khan experienced sufficient difficulty in maintaining his authority, and had recourse to every means in his

power for strengthening his party in the city. Among other expedients, he did not omit to pay attentions to the priesthood, who at all times exercise a very important influence in the place.

“Among these holy demagogues, he who now calls himself my husband, the Moojeteched* Meerza Allee Mookuddus—(shame be on his beard !)—held a conspicuous place, and to him were the attentions of Ismael chiefly directed. This demure old hypocrite, profoundly skilled in the art of cajoling the world by appearances, had succeeded, by a long course of cant and dissimulation, in raising himself, in the opinion of the people, to the dignity of a saint. Every word he spoke, every maxim he uttered, was received as inspiration; riches poured in upon him from every quarter, and high and low crowded around him whenever he made his appearance in public, to crave his counsel, and receive his blessing.

“Oh! how little do they who put their faith in such venerable cheats—who exhaust their own coffers to enrich them—who place their necks under their feet, and confide their very souls to their keeping—little do such men know on what a rotten staff they lean! But who that sees them as they walk with sanctified air, their eyes cast upon the ground in holy abstraction, telling their large beads, and muttering incessantly as if in prayer—

* High-priest.

who that hears the sage precepts which drop from their mouths, and the deep religious intonation with which they lecture from the sacred volume; that watches their rigid observances of prayer, their frequent and scrupulous ablutions, their hatred, their intolerance of all heterodoxy and schism—who that hears and sees all this, and sees no more, can doubt the sincerity attested by so many external proofs? But were men to follow these candidates for canonization into their khelwuts and underoons,* and see them give loose to sensuality, intemperance, and vice, how soon would their opinions be changed! Then would their avarice and ambition stand detected; then might the meek benevolent priest be seen transformed into the cruel master or the tyrannical husband, vying in the caprice and inordinateness of his appetites with the most licentious prince; and the ascetic who would imprecate all the curses of the Koran upon the wretch detected in selling a flaggon of wine, might be found himself indulging in all the delicious intoxication produced by opium, by maafoon,† and by arrack.‡

“This very Meerza Allee Mookuddus, were you

* Private, and women's apartments.

† A narcotic preparation, generally from Bhang—that is, a substance extracted from the leaves of *hemp*, of a very intoxicating nature.

‡ Arrack, is ardent spirits of every kind.

to enter his public hall, and see him surrounded by his disciples—how simple, how meek, how pious would he appear! no sign of wealth to be seen—every thing about him plain as in the house of the poorest Moollah:—coarse mats cover the floor instead of carpets—the walls, formed of clay and chopped straw, are left in all their nakedness: his calleeoon is of plain black leather mounted with brass or pewter; and if he gives a dish of tea to a guest, it is handed to him in cups of the coarsest china.

“ But enter his khelwut, visit those parts of the underoon frequented by himself, and mark the difference. Richer carpets, softer numuds, are nowhere to be found than you will see in his apartments; and screens, curtains, and hangings of the finest velvets and silks of China; mattresses, pillows, and cushions stuffed with eider-down* from the Caspian sea; shawls of Cashmere; fur from Astrakan and Bockhara; china of the rarest quality in cups of silver—all in full profusion, administer to the comforts and the luxuries of this self-denying saint.

“ Instigated by the appeals of Ismael Khan to his avarice and ambition, this infamous old deceiver exerted himself—at least, so he professed to do—

* A down of the finest description for pillows and cushions is procured from a kind of duck which breeds in great numbers on the banks of the Caspian sea.

in appeasing the dissensions which had arisen in Mushed and its neighbourhood. If he was sincere in these exertions, the sequel showed how much his influence had been overrated:—but let that pass. Ismael had received intimation that the Meerza was no less devoted than himself to all the luxuries of the harem; and among other proofs of the favour which he showered upon his worthy ally, *I* was proposed for his acceptance, as a beautiful and accomplished slave, whom he would have made his wife, had not peculiar circumstances interfered to prohibit it. His wife! he never meant to wed me!—that was another of his insults. I, an Affghaun of no mean rank, well worthy of his hand,—he took advantage of my youth, of my condition; robbed me of all that was valuable, and when weary, passed me off as a vile slave to the next sensualist whose caprice was attracted by my rejected charms.” She paused in great agitation: her cheek glowed, and her eyes glistened with a demoniac fire: her look was terrific. “But he is gone!” said she; “he has dearly paid for his crimes! he has suffered for all his insults to me, though not by my hand!”

“To return to my story. He contrived that the Meerza should see me unobserved: it was enough; the old voluptuary was smitten with my beauty, and eagerly accepted of the Khan’s offer. Both were pleased; the one to get rid of a troublesome

burthen, the other to acquire on such easy terms what he considered as a valuable possession. I was informed of my fate without much ceremony ; but to sweeten the draught, it was added, that the Meerza had agreed to make me his wife. To me the transfer was a matter of indifference. I could be no worse off than in the Khan's zenanah ; and even had I been disposed to object, to what good purpose would it have been ?—the Khan, if he pleased, might have sold me as a slave in the bazaar ; or the cord, the knife, or the bowl, might easily have been applied to rid him of one who hung heavy on his hands.

“I had not been long introduced into the Meerza's harem, before I perceived that my condition was altered for the better. I was disgusted, indeed, with the looks, the age, and the infirmities of my new lord ; but the love he had so weakly conceived for me, gave me an obvious advantage, which I was resolved to improve.

“The Meerza had only one lawful wife, at this time an infirm old woman ; but he made up for it by filling his harem with a number of the handsomest slaves he could procure. They all hated him, and racked their inventions to deceive him ; the consequence of which was a succession of atrocious cruelties, not perhaps exceeded in any zenanah of equal extent in the empire.

“I set about conciliating this old wretch, and

succeeded so well that his dotage became complete. But though I encouraged his love, I would not grant him a single favour until he had duly and formally made me his wife. It was a difficult game to play, but so artfully did I manage the old man's temper, and inflame his passion, that he preferred to gain upon my own terms that which without this sacrifice he feared to lose entirely; for, whenever he threatened force, I declared that I would put myself to death, rather than yield to him otherwise than as his wife.

“That point once gained, the game was my own. He became more and more enamoured, and more and more fearful of losing what had infatuated him. By degrees, I forced him to get rid of many of his female slaves, and established myself supreme in the harem. A comparative calm has reigned there since I entered it, and the cruel consequences of his fury or his jealousy more rarely occur. I do not attempt entirely to control his inclinations, for the bonds by which I hold him might break if too tightly strained; and the knowledge that I wink occasionally at his irregularities, procures for myself a degree of freedom which I might not otherwise be able to command.

“It is now five years since I became his wife, and my dislike to his odious person and more odious character has rather increased than diminished. The state of continual restraint I have lived in,

has long become irksome beyond measure, and I have experienced an earnest longing to pour out my pent-up affections on some one capable of appreciating their value. I saw you, Ismael, and something whispered that you were the man: my good star seems to have bestowed you upon me, thwart not its beneficial influence. Ismael, I cannot brook a rival in the heart of him I love:—if mine at all, you must be wholly mine:—beware of betraying my confidence—draw not down ruin on the heads of both by rousing the jealousy or revenge of an injured woman!”

She ceased—lightnings once more shot from her eye as she uttered these words, and her contracted brow betrayed the keenness of her feelings, and the violence of her temper. It was not without a sentiment allied to disgust, that I marked the bitter spirit which frequently broke forth both in her looks and in her words:—such feelings or such threats were not, methought, fitting to accompany the expression of woman’s love. I remembered the mild tenderness of my own Shireen, and the recollection thrilled through me with a pang of anguish. But the frown of Fatimah vanished like a cloud from the mountain’s brow, and her face was once more radiant with smiles; my senses were fairly intoxicated with her dazzling beauty; the voice of reason and prudence was stifled in my

breast, and I vowed to her undivided and eternal love.

We continued to converse until late in the day. I told her my story, but could not bring myself to be explicit on the subject of Shireen; it would have seemed to me like polluting some holy shrine. But Fatimah saw enough to guess near the truth, and told me it was as well I had left my little mistress in the Desert, from whence there was no risk of her ever coming to claim me.

The hour at length warned us to separate. Embracing me with passion, and assuring me that I should speedily hear from her, my mistress committed me to the care of her old slave; who conducted me back by the same passages to a point whence I could regain my lodging. She threw aside her veil as she was about to leave me, and I recognised the malicious features of the old hag who had persisted in alarming the company in the Meerza's harem, when I was discovered on the house-top. "Well," said the crone, with a hideous grin, "are you satisfied with the end of your adventure—are you content with your reception? I hope you bear me no malice for the trick I played you? But I did not mean you to break your neck; I never dreamed you would have ventured so far as you did. But," added she significantly, "you will find, before all is ended,

that those who would enjoy the love of my mistress, require a good stock of boldness."

I interpreted the first part of this address into a hint for something in the shape of a present; so I proved my forgiveness to the old duenna, and my love for her mistress, by slipping a few pieces into her hand, and left her, musing a little on the obscure import of her last expressions, which I neither liked nor comprehended.

CHAPTER IV.

INTRIGUES. ZEEBAH.

FROM this time I passed but few days without seeing Fatimah, whose eminent beauty and inexhaustible variety of conversation and accomplishments, together with the devoted love she manifested for myself, fascinated me so completely, that in spite of the uneasiness, even alarm, which the sallies of her impetuous temper would sometimes occasion, I continued spell-bound by her charms; and though the thralldom was sometimes oppressive, I neither dared nor felt disposed to break it. It was not that I loved her,—my sentiments for Fatimah partook but little of so refined a passion; it was an intoxication of the senses—a tyranny of the imagination, in which vanity no doubt had its full share. But in truth my mistress, more than any woman I ever knew, possessed the power of turning the heads of those whom she

desired to attach : if not in love, I was at all events dazzled, bewitched, enslaved.

The haughty and overbearing spirit of my mistress was not the only quality which threatened her lovers with ruin ; other obliquities of character in time developed themselves. One day, on coming to the usual place of rendezvous, I found her in very low spirits ; and on looking at her face, I saw she had been in tears. For a long time she refused to tell me the cause ; but at last, when I complained of this want of confidence, she smiled faintly, and said it was a matter which I could not remedy, and therefore she had been unwilling to vex me by adverting to it. She had had a quarrel with her miserly old husband, who refused to give her money for certain clothes and ornaments which she required : “ And in truth,” added she, “ I wanted it for other purposes : I owe money where it is unpleasant to be in debt, and may suffer great inconvenience ; while the vile old Meerza thinks only of stuffing his strong boxes with tomauns* and sequins ! But come,” continued she, seeing that my feelings were fully interested in her distress—“ come, we need talk no more of this at present ; let us forget all care and be merry.” So saying she

* A golden coin, varying in its value ; being worth in some places only fifteen shillings sterling ; while in others, particularly in Khorasan, it rises as high as from thirty to thirty-five shillings.

cleared her brow, and nothing more passed at the time; but the circumstance dwelt on my mind, and I resolved to yield her such assistance as I could.

The next time I visited my mistress, I brought with me twenty tomauns, the greater part of all I had saved from the money I brought to Mushed.

Her eyes glistened with joy when I presented it to her, and entreated her acceptance of it, as a mark of my devotion to her ease and comfort. —“Ah! my dear Ismael!” cried she, “I cannot rob you in this manner; yet I own that the *loan* of this money would just now be extremely convenient. It might indeed save me from serious danger; nay, it may be necessary to the continuance of what it would kill me to lose—our future interviews! Oh! why am not I independent—free? why am I bound to that miserable wretch so fast that I cannot break the chain! But he cannot live for ever! and when he is gone, Ismael, I shall be at liberty—free to prove the fulness of my love for you! Yes! I will take your money: but as a loan—only as a loan will I accept it, to be repaid with full interest hereafter.”

This was the first trait that opened out a new point in my mistress's character. Highly improvident and prodigal, she was rapacious in a corresponding degree; and unable to procure from the

coffers of her husband sufficient funds for supplying her extravagance, she scrupled not at any means of obtaining them elsewhere. All this I discovered afterwards; for at this time I was blind. I only felt delight at finding it in my power to prove, in however small a degree, the devotion, the gratitude I entertained for her who had distinguished me so highly.

The ice once broken, however, her requests, or demands I may call them, came heavily and rapidly. One day she was in distress, because a merchant in the bazaar threatened to apply to her husband for payment of certain silks and brocades she had purchased. At another time she required the means of purchasing the silence and assistance of her own servants towards the continuation of our intrigue; and again she was drowned in tears and choaked with sighs, because a friend of her's had coaxed her husband out of a beautiful set of toorquoise ornaments; and she pined to have one that should outvie them!—the jewels were ready, but the money, the whole at least, was not; and the odious jeweller would neither abate of his price, nor give credit. What was to be done? who could withstand such arguments? Not I at least: so I sold clothes and arms sufficient to procure the sum required; and to restore to my capricious mistress her smiles and good humour.

But anxious as I was to please her, and all too ready to sacrifice every thing for her service, I could not disguise from myself that the course I was running led to destruction. All my money was gone—indeed, I could not have procured the sums which I expended, had not resources of an unexpected nature opened to supply me. In spite of these, however, I was forced to dispose of the greater part of my clothes and valuables, and to run in debt besides: ruin stared me in the face, and I became absent, melancholy, and desponding.

It was during this course of folly, that, wandering listlessly one evening near the scene of our rendezvous, a woman, closely shrouded in her veil, passed me at a rapid pace, and touched me gently with the back of her hand. I turned at the signal, and following so as to keep her in view, overtook her just as she entered a ruined building not far distant.

It was a roofless hovel: but a screen of mats and reeds hanging upon the farther wall, promised something better within. The female was in the act of lifting it when I made my appearance, and lingering a moment ere she let it drop, she invited me to follow.

I scrupled not to enter, and found myself in a small but neat apartment, constructed, like those of the peasantry, of mud, and carpeted only at one

end with coarse felts. A single lamp gave light enough to show all that was within ; and by it I discerned two females, one of whom was my unknown guide ; the other, a total stranger, withdrew immediately at a signal from her companion.

When we were alone I approached my fair conductress, who trembled much, as I begged her to inform me whom I might be addressing, and what commands she might have for a stranger like myself. “ Ah, my lord ! replied a low sweet voice which I thought I recognised ; “ how much I fear you will blame me for this step :—and yet I could not help it—I had such reasons for wishing to see you—to speak with you.—to—to” —She hesitated and stopped in great agitation, while doubting and dreading I knew not what ; I tried to soothe her, but entreated her to conceal herself no longer. “ Who are you then ?—speak again—I surely know that voice—remove that veil, I beseech you, and let me see these features.” Slowly was the veil removed, and disclosed the arch and lovely features of Fatimah’s beautiful slave, whom I had admired so much on the day when first I saw her mistress in the court of the Meerza’s harem. Ever since that moment her form had haunted my imagination,—even in the arms of Fatimah I often thought with a sigh on the milder though less dazzling charms of her slave. I sometimes suspected she might be of the number of the veiled

slaves who attended her mistress at our meetings ; and once I thought she sighed as she passed me ; but her face was always concealed, so I was left to my own conjectures, which, no doubt, served to keep alive an interest that otherwise might have died away.

At this unexpected appearance of Zeebah, all the love I had conceived for her awoke in full force. I flew to the beautiful slave, and clasping her in my arms, poured forth an incoherent torrent of thanks for the meeting she had so generously given me, and professions of the most ardent love. But she, gently disengaging herself, said, "No, no, my lord, these caresses belong to my mistress—it is not for her slave to rob her of them—it was not for this I brought you hither—we must not speak in such a strain."—"Ah, my charming Zeebah !" cried I, interrupting her, "what injustice is this to yourself and to me ! If you knew what I have felt for you ever since first I saw you, you never would treat me thus. I admire your mistress ; I should be ungrateful if I did not esteem her ; but you I loved from the moment I first saw you, nor has my passion ever suffered the smallest decay. Let me then improve the fortunate chance that has brought us together, and let no thought of your mistress intrude to give us uneasiness."

It were needless to detail the explanation I had

with Zeebah ; her heart pleaded for me more effectually than any thing I could have said. However smitten I had been with her beauty, she had conceived an equally favourable opinion of me during the times she had seen me with her mistress. We soon understood each other, and I passed some happier hours with the gentle Zeebah in this lowly dwelling, than had ever fallen to my lot with her more brilliant mistress in her more voluptuous retreat.

It was not immediately that Zeebah reverted to the cause which had led her to seek this meeting ; but after a while she did remember it, and the respect and terror she entertained for her lady resumed their accustomed sway. " Ah," exclaimed she, " how can I ever meet the eyes of my mistress after what has passed ! What indeed can you, my lord, think of one who has thus betrayed her trust ? Yet it was of my mistress that I meant to speak,—it is for your sake that I venture to do so. Take heed to yourself, my lord ;—beware of Fatimah ;—you do not know her :—she is animated by the most dreadful passions, and her resolution is equal to perpetrating the darkest crimes. She loves you fondly—madly ; but her love is ever dangerous, and may be fatal. Her devotion is only to be equalled by her jealousy, and the man who should slight her affection, or betray her con-

fidence, would be certain, on detection, to fall a victim to the deadliest revenge. If she but suspected what has passed this night, both you and I were lost ; go where we might, her agents would surely find us. But this shall not be,—whatever may in future take place between us, must be conducted so cautiously, that it can never become known to her.

“But you, my lord, stand in great peril on another account. I have not been long the attendant of Fatimah ; but her servants have hinted, for they dare not speak more plainly, that this is by no means the first infidelity she has been guilty of towards her lord. I can gather also that her lovers have paid dearly for her favours ; that the intrigue never failed to terminate in their ruin. You have already experienced her rapacity ; others have proved its effects yet more fatally. Perhaps she seduced these only to pillage them : she loves you, but does not pillage you the less. You best know your own resources ; but, however extensive they may be, beware of her continued and increasing demands, which will exhaust them sooner or later, and involve you in ruin.”

This discourse of Zeebah’s affected me powerfully, and the more so because it found an echo in my own experience. I saw the danger into which I was running, and resolved to stop ere

it was too late. I had already suffered severely, but my case was not yet past remedy. In conversing farther with the kind and affectionate slave, we both agreed that it would be a dangerous measure for me to break off at once with Fatimah; the effects of her disappointment would not fail some time or other to reach me in a fatal shape, and the life of Zeebah might likewise be involved in the same peril: it would be better, we judged, that I should trust to circumstances, and take advantage of all favourable opportunities to withdraw myself gradually from her society:—perhaps it might be prudent to retire for a while from the city; but this was a measure we were unwilling to resolve on, as it would grievously interrupt our own interviews; and these, however imprudent they might be, even with every possible precaution, we were resolved to continue.

With these laudable designs we separated, and, delighted with the soft endearments of the charming slave, I certainly at the time resolved to free myself from the chains of her imperious and rapacious mistress. But I was young and infirm of purpose—vanity got the better of prudence: how could a youth like me, so thoughtless and so ardent, resist the blandishments, the devotion, of so fascinating a creature as Fatimah! The next time I saw her she looked lovelier, if pos-

sible, and was kinder than ever:—perhaps a consciousness of my own unworthiness made me think so. Besides, no fresh demand was made upon me at the time, nor did any opening present itself for promoting in the least degree my plan of gradually detaching myself from her. The charm of Fatimah's beauty and wit wrought its usual effects: my resolution wavered, or at least became inactive; the force of Zeebah's warning was weakened, and I relapsed into the same dangerous state of reckless infatuation as before.

During these events my propensity to play had not slumbered; many hours both of the day and night were spent in the worst society and most nefarious practices of the gambling-houses in the bazaar. The turns of fortune were various; but, though I sometimes found myself in possession of considerable property, it was but for a moment: and it much more frequently happened that I was stripped of all I had, and forced to borrow, where I could, the means of paying for my daily expenses and carrying on my various intrigues. Like most of my acquaintances, I was deeply in debt; and when fortune favoured me, instead of applying my gains to the payment of these debts, the whole was squandered on my extravagant mistress, or staked on a vain attempt to increase my store.

From the painful and disgusting scenes which

occurred in these abodes of vice, I would fly to banish care in the presence of Fatimah, and to inebriate myself with the luxuries of her retreat and the beauty of its mistress. But when exhausted with such pernicious excitement, it was a rest and relief to my wearied soul to be soothed by the gentle Zeebah, who ever and anon, under various pretences, would steal from her duties, and meet me in the humble dwelling of a poor but devoted friend. The affection of Zeebah was purely disinterested; and its value was increased by a knowledge of the danger she braved to give me proofs of it. Often when the means of procuring money were in my power, I have pressed a present upon Zeebah, but it was always mildly but steadily refused. "No, Ismael," would she say, "I can receive nothing from you; there are too many claims upon your purse already—keep it to answer these:—I would rather assist your wants than consent to add to your embarrassments. I wish nothing from you but permission to love you still."—How could I resist such disinterested gentleness?—I still admired Fatimah perhaps, but I loved Zeebah with a tenderness which only yielded to that which once filled my heart for the unfortunate Shireen. Once did I say!—that heart in truth was still hers. The rays of beauty might play over its surface for a while,—the tenderness of a devoted being might warm it into

temporary fondness,—but the flame which glowed there for Shireen, had grown with it from childhood; and in spite of all the follies, all the infidelities of youth, it remained there in its centre unextinguished and unquenchable !

CHAPTER V.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT.

ONE night, as Fouje Allee Beg and myself were returning rather late from one of our nocturnal rambles, in passing through a narrow lane our attention was attracted by a noise of shouting and struggling in a dark passage close to us; and running up with the paper lanthorn which our servant usually carried before us at night, we found a well-dressed man, armed only with a stick, defending himself against two soldiers, who, having tried in vain to seize him, had attacked him with their swords. "Stop! stop!" cried Fouje Allee, holding me back, "let us see the fun! Let us see what play this pigeon will make against the hawks—we can take their prize from them, you know, when they strike it, if it prove worth our while." "Staffer-ullah! Fouje Allee," exclaimed I, shocked at his unfeeling levity, and breaking from him, "the man will be murdered! Hollah, you

ghorumsaug! let that man alone, or I will cleave you to the teeth. What is the matter? what has he done to you? speak, you ruffians!" My interference was just in time—another moment and the man, already slightly wounded in the arm, would have been cut down, when my shout made the miscreants desist, and, seeing my naked sword gleaming in their eyes, and recognising us by the lanthorn light for two of the General's household, they took to their heels and disappeared in a moment.

The person whose life we had thus fortunately saved, when after a moment he recollected himself, paid his compliments with so pleasing a voice, and expressed his thanks in terms so well-chosen, that my curiosity regarding him was much excited, and I readily accepted his pressing invitation to accompany him and partake of some refreshment at his lodgings, which he said were close by.

Fouje Allee, who now had changed his tone, was as willing as I to see the end of the adventure; and lending our new friend the support of my arm, we proceeded but a short way down the same dark passage, when we reached a small door in a high mud wall. Here our conductor stopping, whistled, and calling out "Yussuff!" in a low clear tone, the door opened and gave us access to a small but very neat area, in which there was a cistern of water, with parterres of rose, jasmine,

and pomegranate plants, mingled with flowers, all in the nicest order. At the lower end there was a small dewan-khaneh or hall, opening upon the court with three windows of carved wooden work, and covered in the inside with oiled paper.

Yussuff, a negro slave, opened the door of this hall, to which we ascended by a few steps; when our conductor bidding us welcome, begged us to enter and be seated, pointing at the same time to the highest seats, he himself taking one half way down the room. I objected to this arrangement, but the young man insisted—"You are men of rank, I am confident," said he; "you are my deliverers too—the highest seat is your due in every way—do not distress me by refusing it." Fouje Allee, whose impudence never stood in need of encouragement, took his seat accordingly; but I would not consent to occupy my own place until I had prevailed on our host to seat himself opposite and nearly as high as either of us.

While this point was arranging, Yussuff brought lights, and being dispatched again for callecons we had time to look about us. The room was small, but exquisitely neat. The walls, though built of mud, were plastered with polished stucco, and all the edges and corners adorned with borders of the same. There were several small recesses in the wall, the shelves and soles of which were covered with blue velvet, and filled with little elegancies of china, looking-glasses, ornamented

boxes and other knick-knacks. A fine Herat carpet covered the floor, and thick, soft, richly flowered numuds of the best Kermaun fabric were laid along three sides of the wall.

But our host himself soon occupied all my attention. He did not appear to be more than twenty-five years of age; he was tall and handsome; an oval face of a healthy olive complexion, with large dark eyes, a well-formed nose, and full red lips, were set off by a short but full black beard, which fringed his cheeks and chin from one temple to the other. His dress, which was scrupulously neat, denoted him to be either a man of letters or a merchant,—certainly not a soldier. A dark green kabba, closely fitted to his shape, and tied across his breast, was girt around his waist by a fawn-coloured shawl; and a cloth cloak, corresponding in colour with his kabba, and lined and trimmed with black Bockhara lambskin, defended him from the cold of the season.

“You are welcome, gentlemen, to the dwelling of your humble slave,” said the young man; “you have rendered me an essential service, and I wish it were in my power to show the sense I entertain of the obligation: I am wholly yours.”—“We esteem ourselves fortunate,” replied I, “in having come so luckily in the way, when these ruffians were abusing you so shamefully; but, if it be permitted, we would gladly learn who it is we have been so fortunate as to assist, and how you

came to be in such circumstances."—"Yes," echoed Fouje Allee Beg, casting a sly look at me, "we are quite delighted at the chance which brought us so opportunely to drive away the villains. By the head of the Prophet! though, they were light of foot! I wanted to seize hold of one of them as he darted off, but, tchick! he was out of sight before one could stretch out one's hand! I am happy that the Aga* has got so well off, but it appears to me that he is hurt nevertheless." And now we discovered for the first time, that the young man's arm was bleeding.

"It is nothing, gentlemen," said he; "if you will permit your servant to retire for a moment, after you shall have smoked a calleeoon, I shall have the trifling wound bound up, and shall get ready some refreshment, of which you will do me the honour to partake; and then, if you please, I shall inform you who the insignificant mortal is whose life you have this night saved."

We bowed;—two handsome youths in rich dresses entering, brought each of them a calleeoon, the bottom of which was of cut crystal, and the tobacco-holders of richly ornamented silver. They presented them to us upon one knee, with a great deal of grace, and we smoked in silence, our host

* "Aga" is equivalent to "Gentleman" in English, and is used when the person addressed is not noble—neither Khan, Beg, nor Meerza—neither in the civil nor military service of the court.

taking a single long whiff after we had done. He then rose, and entreating our excuse, begged us to remain where we were until his return.

“Well, Ismael,” said Fouje Allee, “what think you of all this? is it not a strange adventure? Afereen!* here is a choice dwelling in a place where one would little have dreamt of looking for it. And do you mark our host and his establishment? A rich fellow, I warrant!—what furniture!—what calleeoons! I have not smoked such a pipe for many a day—real Shirauz tobacco every bit of it!—And did you see the diamond on his finger? what a size! what brilliancy! By the holy Durgah! it is just as well that we rescued him from these blackguards—it may turn out well for our own account.”—“Yes, Fouje Allee, it is as well, and better too, though little is your claim to praise for it;—you know who would have left the pigeon to the hawks—a pretty title you have to look for any benefit at his hands! But hark you; the youth seems respectable and worthy; let us have none of your coarse jokes to disgust him—they may do among the rakes of the bazaar, but if our host is the man I take him for, they will be quite out of place here.”—“Oh, never fear; I will be as wise, and grave, and stupid, as old Moollah Nadan your friend, who looks like an owl surprised out of his first sleep. But we must try this fellow’s mettle; I am mistaken if he do not turn

* An expression of praise and surprise.

out a golden prize; and we are just the lads to melt him down."—"Come, come, Fouje Allee," this is no place for your blackguard or knavish tricks. Attempt the least liberty, and I shall take that of putting our host upon his guard, and let him a little into your character. I may play the fool, the rake, or even the bully with you occasionally, but I have not as yet quite discarded my good manners—I have still some character to lose." "Barick-illah! hear him!" scornfully retorted Fouje Allee, "he preaches and threatens like a Moojtehed:—but come, I am grave, good Moollah! your worship shall have no cause to blame my conduct."

Thus we prated, and I had resolved to restrain Fouje Allee who respected a certain steadiness of purpose he had observed in me, from breaking out into any gross impropriety, when the young man entered. "Gentlemen," said he, "the night is cold—there is a more private and more comfortable apartment within; take the trouble to walk so far, and we shall be more at ease for the evening." With these words he led the way through a narrow passage, into another court somewhat larger than the first, surrounded by a lofty wall, and adorned, as it appeared to us by the uncertain light, with all manner of trees and flowers, though they were at this time leafless.

Entering a lower hall similar to that we had left,

we passed through it into a smaller chamber, which was fitted up with a degree of luxury and comfort I had seldom seen. It was warmly carpeted, and covered all round the sides with thick rich numuds. The walls were hung with curtains of quilted silk and fine felt. At one end there was a fireplace, in which several logs of wood blazed with a cheerful light; the other end was occupied by a window of carved wood-work and oiled paper, now closed in for the night; and on the carpet burned two large candles of wax, which made the whole apartment as bright as day.

"You are welcome to my khelwut," said our host; "pray be seated near the fire—I will sit here—no excuses—I entreat." And we all took our seats with much less ceremony than at first. He clapped his hands, and Yussuff, with one of the youths, entered, bearing salvers with several china cups set in smaller ones of silver. "It is late," said the young man, "and the hour of your evening meal must be already passed; dinner will be served immediately, but in the mean time be pleased to refresh yourselves with a cup of tea, which I can assure you has just been brought by a cafilah* of Bockhara, all the way from Kitae."† Another calleeoon succeeded this refreshment; soon after which a cloth was spread, after the usual

* Caravan.

† China.

fashion, before us on the floor, and dinner was brought in.

I could hear the half-muttered exclamations of my companion, and observe his ill-suppressed delight and wonder, as one good thing after another was placed before him. "Yah Allee! what news is this? this is luck indeed! Oh my good fortune! Laillah-e-ilullah,* what fare!" and such-like. Indeed there was room for surprise, for the rich stews, the well-seasoned pillaws, the high-flavoured omelettes, and the savoury kabaubs, with all their train of sauces, sweetmeats, and pickles, betrayed a knowledge in the culinary art far surpassing any thing it was our luck to meet with in general; and amply did my friend Fouje Allee do them justice. He buried his knuckles, yea, his whole hand in the smoking dishes, dipping first into this and then into that sauce, tearing off this piece of meat, and breaking up that omelette; and continued to cram, with the most persevering activity, only stopping to quaff large spoonfuls of the delicious sherbets, for a long time after his host and I were finished. I saw that our young friend with difficulty suppressed a smile, and, ashamed of his gluttony, I would have

* "There is no God but God!" The first part of the Mahometan confession of faith; in constant colloquial use, as an exclamation of astonishment, grief, or pleasure—or even as an occasional ejaculation without any meaning at all.

tried to interfere; but the youth, who seemed to comprehend his character, stopped me with an expressive look: so I only sat back in my seat, resting my right hand over my left arm, in the attitude of one who waits to have water poured upon it, while our host still played with the dishes, to keep his guest in countenance.

At last Fouje Allee, with a deep sigh, as if vexed to the soul at his utter inability to continue the delicious employment, rose from his stooping posture, and muttering a low "Alhumdulillah," accompanied with sundry other unequivocal proofs of his hearty meal, sat back like the rest. Upon this the dishes were cleared away, an additional log was thrown on the fire, the calleeoons were brought, and each assuming his most easy attitude, prepared for a comfortable evening. But something appeared still to be wanting to the full and perfect bliss of my friend Fouje Allee. His eyes wandered to the door every time the youthful waiting-boys entered, as if in quest of some expected arrival. He was restless on his seat, and now and then drew rapid whiffs from his calleeoon. At last he could no longer contain himself, but muttered in an undertone, as if speaking to himself, "Laillah-e-ilullah!—God is great, and great are the blessings he bestows on men. Oh, Mahomed! thou indeed wast excellent in thy wisdom!—thou hast declared

that the good things of the earth were made for man!—why hast thou excepted that which is best of all? What are the choicest blessings without wine, which makes his soul glad and his heart strong!”—“By the head of the Prophet!” cried I, indignantly, yet hardly able to refrain from laughing at his impudence, “the Devil himself is no match for thee in presumption! What? hast thou no decency left? canst thou not conceal, if thou canst not restrain, thy profligate tastes for once.—But our good host,” continued I, bowing to him, “will, it is to be hoped, excuse the manners of a rude soldier, more accustomed to the tent, or the open plain, than the houses of polite people.”—“Be not uneasy on my account,” returned the young man with a smile; “I not only excuse thy friend, but am perfectly willing to gratify him. Although I do not myself make use of wine, I can make allowances for those whose health or whose habits have accustomed them to drink it; nor do I think that the denunciations of the Prophet (praise be to his name!) were meant to apply so much to the use as to the abuse of that cordial; although the danger and sin of intemperance appeared to his wisdom so great, that he deemed it best to avoid such risks by a total prohibition.”

“Now the blessing of Allah be on thee, young man, for thy wise and comfortable interpreta-

tion!" cried Fouje Allee, jumping half up, and seizing the hand of the youth in both of his; "the wisdom of Solymaun-ibn-Daoood could not have better decided the matter. Heed not what my friend Ismael there may say of me—soldier or not, rough or polite, I am at all events an honest fellow, who cannot conceal what he thinks, and dearly loves a flagon of wine after a hard day's work. Excuse my homely bluntness, and let us have the wine. If it be like thy dinner, by the cup of Jemsheed! it must be fit for Paradise!"

The mild grave features of our host relaxed into a laugh at this sally of my impudent companion: he made a signal to one of the servants, and they brought a large silver vessel, filled with wine, and some drinking cups, with so little delay, that I could not help thinking the broad hints of my friend had been foreseen and prepared for. Fouje Allee's satisfaction was complete; and many were the exclamations of delight with which he acknowledged the excellence of his favourite liquor. The wine mantled in the goblets—the fire blazed bright—our comfort was complete; and I now besought our host to perform his promise, and satisfy our curiosity.

"My friends and preservers," replied he with a sigh; "myself and all I have are yours—I am your slave, and you have a right to know the

unfortunate wretch you have preserved from death, although the narration of his sufferings may tear open wounds that are still unhealed.

“The name of your servant is Meerza Abou Talib ; and I drew my first breath in the celebrated and splendid city of Ispahan. My father, Hajjee Meer Hoossein Baba, was a merchant of great wealth and large dealings, who possessed several warehouses and shops in the extensive bazaars of that city, but who spent the greater part of his time in a Chamber of the Caravanserai Cashanee, one of the chief mercantile depots of the place, retiring at night to his own house in one of the more remote quarters of the city.

“I was his only son, born when he was already advanced in life ; for he was too thrifty to marry early. He had felt the want of a good education in his own person, and, desiring to train me up to his own lucrative business, he resolved that I should have every advantage in his power to bestow. Accordingly I was placed under the charge of an old Moollah, who rather exceeded than fell short of his intentions. In due time I had acquired a competent knowledge of the Koran, could read and repeat more than half the works of Hafiz, Saadi, Nizamee, and others of our best poets : I could write an excellent hand, and received many praises for my readiness at inditing the several forms of letters. I had acquired a competent

knowledge of arithmetic and mathematics, with the first principles of logic and metaphysics. In short, by the time I was seventeen I had entered so far into the gardens of science, that every thing else became distasteful to me. Instead of joining in the sports and pursuits of my companions, I was only happy when poring over my books, or meditating under the shade of the lofty chinars and cypresses in the garden of the Medressah, where my old Maalim resided. There I would give myself up to poetic visions, bewilder my imagination with the mystical effusions of Hafiz, or puzzle over a set of abstract metaphysical propositions until my brain became turned for the time.

“My father now became desirous that I should enter upon the course which he had marked out for me in his own mind, and which, as he hoped, was to lead me to riches and all their envied consequences. But though I gave him no positive refusal, I paid but little attention to his wishes. Instead of attending, as required, at his warehouse, I was still found loitering in the gardens of my Medressah, or poring over the philosophic pages of Aristhoo* or the sage of Toos.† Many an anxious thought did this wayward conduct of mine

* The Persian pronunciation of Aristotle, whose works are highly esteemed among the Orientals.

† Nasser-u-deen Toosee, one of the most celebrated of Eastern philosophers, who flourished in the reign of Hulakoo, grandson of Ghengiz Khan, and monarch of Persia, Syria, Asia Minor, &c.

give rise to in the mind of my poor father, who, too indulgent to be severe, beheld his favourite schemes blasted, and his only son running, as he believed, headlong to ruin.

“Chance, at length, among other books, threw some in my way which treated of geography—on the nature of the earth—of the seven climates—of places too hot or too cold to be inhabited by man. Others described particular countries:—there were accounts given of India, of Arabia, of Kitae or China, and the wonders to be seen or heard of in each. My curiosity was awakened by perusing these. I knew that great part of the merchandize in which my father traded came from these countries. Merchants therefore visited them, and must see these marvels: they witnessed, no doubt, the manners of their inhabitants, so curious and so different from ours;—might I not do the same? With such objects in view, the profession of a merchant began to appear less despicable in my eyes: but then the buying and selling commodities, measuring cloth, and weighing sugar—how low, compared with the pursuits of science! Still, to travel—to see and converse with the sages of other countries—if this might be attained without the degradation of trade, how desirable it would be! I entertained no small idea of my own talents, and in desiring to increase my store of knowledge I did not overlook the glory I might gain, Heaven

help me ! in disputing with the learned of foreign lands.

“ These reflections induced me to make enquiries of my father, as well as of other traders who had travelled ; and the accounts I received from some of them inflamed my curiosity still farther. In short, I was smitten with an insuperable longing to see the world—to travel ;—whether as a merchant or not, I cared but little ; for I thought that if once I got abroad, beyond control of my officious friends, I should soon be able to rid myself of the profession, if it should displease me. So I told my father, that provided he would but send me abroad with one of his *cafilahs*,* I cared not how soon I commenced my mercantile career ; but that to drudge at home at selling sugar and pepper, and chintz and indigo,—or sit upon a piece of moth-eaten felt, behind an iron-clasped chest, in the dark outaugh † of a dirty *caravanserai*—I would not, come of it what might.

“ ‘ *Laillah-e-ilullah ! God is great !* ’ ” exclaimed the old man : ‘ thou art a fool, my son. Here is a path of peace and comfort prepared for thee: thou hast nothing to do but to sit still and enjoy all that wealth can yield thee, without either danger or fatigue,—and lo ! in spite of thy good star, thou wilt run thy neck into difficulties ! But when

* *Caravans*.

† Chambers, or cells, in a *caravanserai*, are called *outaugh*s.

were youth and prudence companions? How can the experience of years be purchased by the beardless cheek? In the name of God, take thine own way. Insh-allah! thou shalt be satisfied. Thou shalt see this same world that has turned thy head, although thou mightst have been content with this city, which the saying well calls the half of it.* Far wilt thou go, ere thou seest any thing to compare with the bazaars and caravanserais of Ispahan. Thou wilt soon discover thy folly, and return to thy old father: yea, my son, thou wilt return to him, of whose eyes thou art the light, of whose age thou art the staff, whose head will be sprinkled with ashes, and whose bread will be bitter with sorrow, till thy returning footsteps bring peace back to his soul!

“My father, never having been a traveller himself, excepting on the memorable occasion when he became a Hajjee, by performing the pilgrimage to Mecca—and never having desired to see the world at the expense of his interest or his comfort, did not believe that a love of travelling could exist in any one so strongly as to survive the fatigues and dangers incident to a long journey. He, therefore, thought that in order to disgust me with a wandering life, it was only necessary to let me experience its inconveniences; and, rejoiced to have me

* “Ispahaun nisfeh jehan us!” (Ispahan is half the world,) is a common Persian saying.

become a merchant upon any terms, he not only consented to my wishes, but promoted their fulfilment with an energy which kept pace with my own impatience. He was about to consign a quantity of corn and other goods to Yezd, by a large caravan which was proceeding thither; these he determined to entrust to my charge. The proceeds were to be invested in such commodities as would answer for the markets of Bunder Abbassee,* whither I was to proceed; and after exchanging them for Indian produce, it was intended that I should return by the way of Sheerauz to Ispahan.

“The preparations for our journey were soon completed. A number of camels loaded with grain, with raw silk, fruits, cutlery, copper-ware, and many other articles of Ispahan manufacture, were placed under my care; or rather under that of an old confidential servant of my father’s; who had also directions to keep a sharp eye over me, lest I might go astray, either from the path of the caravan, or from those of safety and virtue. The whole concern, including myself, was consigned to a very rich and respectable Ghebre† merchant, in Yezd, whom I was enjoined to regard in every thing concerning trade, markets, lodging,

* Or Gomberoon, a sea-port of the Persian Gulf, opposite the island of Ormuz.

† The ancient Persians, who were worshippers of fire, as well as their descendants, are called by the Mahometans, „Ghebres.”

and living—in all which he enjoyed my father's entire confidence—as a man of perfect uprightness. But I was to abstain from all more intimate connexion with his family, for fear of contracting any of their abhorred idolatrous fire-worshipping principles; which my father, good man! believed might be of so subtle a nature, as to unsettle the wits and the faith of his hopeful son.

“My own share of the preparations were confined to packing up my clothes—to which some additions had been made by the care of my father—and a much larger selection of books than was consistent with the habits of my new profession, or the convenience of a traveller. Arms were provided, but I knew nothing of their use, and took little heed of them. The sword encumbered me, the matchlock was weighty, and the pistol, stuck in my belt, embarrassed the free use of my arms; but I was told we might meet with troublesome customers on the way, and so I submitted. My father provided me with a nice ambling mule, the old Nazir bestrode another, our servant was mounted on a third, which also carried a pair of yekdauns, or trunks, containing our clothes and bedding.

“It was near the end of October when we quitted Ispahan; the weather was delightful, neither too hot nor too cold; and I shall never forget the feelings of exultation with which I found myself

thus happily freed from the confinement of the city, and launched into the world, entirely, as I promised myself, my own master. The enlivening bustle of the large caravan, the elastic purity of the air, the extent of populous villages and fine gardens, which then environed the city,—all viewed by the mellow light of a golden autumnal evening, raised my spirits to so high a pitch, that I forgot the anxious farewell of my father, the tears and forebodings of my mother, and even the mournful farewell of my good old Malim.* ‘May God protect thee, my son,’ said he, ‘wherever thy footsteps may lead thee! Thy love for travelling may be worthy of praise, but it is hardly wise. I foresee that many dangers cross the path of thy star—these may be surmounted by thee, but I shall never see thee more! My days are few on earth, and I would fain have had the hand of my best beloved pupil to close my eyes. But God’s will be done! farewell once more, my dear son, and may God and the Prophet direct thy ways!’

“I wept on the old man’s neck, and my purpose was for a moment shaken by his aged grief. But now all was forgotten—the boundless plain and the unclouded sky were around and above me—my heart beat high with hope, and I rejoiced in my resolution of seeing the world, and carving out my own fortune.”

* Master.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY CONTINUED.—
MOOLLAH HURMOOZ.

“I NEED not tire you with an account of the journey to Yezd. I was delighted with our first day's march in the boundless Desert; there was something grand in its vast solitude, that elevated my soul. The numerous *cafilah* showed upon its surface like a collection of moving atoms:—it was as the life of man to eternity. But I became weary of it by degrees, and was glad when villages once more became our resting-places,—when upon the eighth day, the small town of Auk-deh broke the spell; and still better pleased when, entering the fertile district of Yezd, and passing through its numerous dependent villages, rising like islands in a sea of desert, we reached that city on the eleventh day after our departure from Ispahan.

“The caravan now separated, each party filing

off towards their respective destinations. For my part, the Nazir and I went and secured quarters in the caravanserai chiefly frequented by the merchants of Ispahan; where, having bestowed our goods in safety, we proceeded to the house of Moollah Hurmooz, the Ghebre merchant, to whose care my father had consigned us.

“The Moollah was a man advanced in years, but still unbroken in strength and constitution. Every feature of his fresh and open countenance was fraught with good-nature and benevolence; his grey piercing eye beamed with intelligence, his nose was long and elevated, and his ample beard, of a silver grey, flowed down to his girdle. A large turban of white muslin covered his head; his under vestments were also white; but the greater part of his person was enveloped in an ample cloak of yellow silk, lined with fur.

“We found him seated in a small chamber in front of one of his warehouses, and surrounded by a number of merchants from all parts of Asia: for Moollah Hurmooz was a universal, as well as an extensive trader. The Cashmirian brought his shawls: the men of Scind and of Moultoun their chintzes, their indigo, and other produce of India; the Affghaun sought a market for his drugs, his dried fruits, his carpets, and heavy-going horses,—as did the Arab for his steeds of high pedigree, his dates, and his cloaks. Turks

and Syrians, Oozbecks and Kashgaurees—all were to be seen in the outaugh* of Moollah Hurmooz.

“When the Moollah had glanced his eye over the letters I had brought, he rose from his seat, and bade me welcome with a kind and cheerful voice,—‘I know thy father well, young man,’ said he: ‘he is a good and an honest man, and prudent withal: thou needst but to resemble him. I owed much to his kindness when I visited thy city, which men are fond to say is half the world: this in which thy servant lives, is but as a village to Ispahan; nevertheless we will do our best to make thy abode here comfortable. I pray thee be seated, and let thy servant and his friends hear the news from the Daur-ul-Sultaunut?’†

“I seated myself in the assembly, but, somewhat bewildered by the presence of so many strangers, and the novelty of every thing around me, I found myself at a loss to reply suitably to the civilities of my host.—I taxed my recollection and invention for a set compliment, and was mortified to discover that all my fancied erudition was insufficient to set me at ease in a party of merchants.

“They, on their side, were not backward either in paying compliments or in asking questions. As soon as the Moollah had mentioned my father’s name, several persons in company claimed acquaintance

* Business chamber-office.

† Daur-ul-Sultaunut, “the abode of royalty”—i. e. the Capital.

with him, and sought to commence one with me. 'A fine youth he is,' observed one to another—'full of modesty too:—see how he blushes!' 'Ay, ay, and none of your vain coxcombs, who wear their fortune on their back in tinsel and embroidery,' said another; 'you see he dresses more like a Moollah, than a gay young fellow not twenty.'—'And so this is your first journey, your first commercial speculation?' enquired a third.—'Excuse thy servant,' interrupted a fourth, but what may be the price of indigo and black pepper in the bazaar at Ispahan?—'Laillah-e-ilullah!' cried a fifth; 'what questions they are putting!—What should such a youth know of these things?—Ask him the price of a young Georgian girl, and he'll answer easily enough,'—and he burst into a laugh at his own wit. Thus did they tease me, first on one side and then on the other, until quite stunned and confounded I could not utter a word. My host perceived my distress, and took pity on me.

"Gentlemen," said he, 'the young man is fatigued with his journey—allow him to rest for to-day,—to-morrow, he will, I dare say, give you all the information you require. Young gentleman,' continued he to me, 'I cannot ask you to my own house—the difference of our customs, as well as of our faiths, renders this inexpedient: but you shall occupy a house of mine, where ser-

vants and slaves of your own religion shall minister to your comforts;—and I, the most willing of them, shall be ready, as far as my power extends, to be of service to your father's son.'

"I retired, covered with confusion at the awkward exhibition I had made, and glad to be alone. The old Nazir observed my vexation, and endeavoured to comfort me. "Why should you be distressed, my honoured master, at a case that may happen to the best and wisest? You are very young; and a little custom and attention to the manners of the world will render you more than a match for the best of them. Your talents are superior to most of those you saw this day; but you have not been exercised, like them, in public conversation—in readiness of reply and repartee."

"Ah! Hassan Allee! how can you praise my talents? Of what use are talents if they cannot prevent their possessor from being trampled on by a set of Yaboos,* like these merchants? Oh, Allee! how was I tongue-tied! What spell was it that bound me? Not a single quotation in point—not an apothegm,—not a line of poetry—not a syllogism could I recollect!"

"Ah, my master!" said the Nazir, shaking his head, 'such tropes and figures are not the style

* Yaboo, a "pack-horse;" a term often used to denominate a stupid fellow, as we do that of "ass."

of conversation that suits mankind in general.—Such flowers of rhetoric may answer in your mosques and medressahs—in the mouths of saints and doctors; but if you are to live in the world you must do as others do:—whether you be a merchant, a soldier, or a simple traveller, common sense is the thing required to carry you through it. Not one quotation, not an illustration did you hear fall from any of the party to-day, yet they perplexed and confounded you, with all Hafiz and Saadi at your fingers' ends.”

“ In this way did we converse, as in low spirits and ill-humour I followed the servant of Moollah Hurmooz to the lodging prepared for me. When my first burst of vexation was over, I found myself constrained to admit the truth of the old Nazir's observations; and this admission led to very mortifying doubts regarding the value of my own acquirements. Here was I, enjoying the reputation of being one of the first scholars of the Medressah Meerza Abdoolla—who had burned to measure myself in talents and acquirements with the sages of other lands—silenced and put to shame by a few illiterate men, without an argument, before even a point of debate had been started. It was clear that the recluse life I had hitherto led, had deprived me of the confidence and self-command requisite to apply the very talents of which I fancied myself possessed, to any effectual pur-

pose. Such were the first of a train of reflections which forced themselves upon me, and which led to a change of conduct that has undoubtedly proved beneficial to me; but it was not till after many a painful struggle with my vanity, that I became humbled enough to gain instruction from others, who, though possibly my inferiors in learning, were far my superiors in useful knowledge.

“ Meantime we reached the lodgings appointed for us. They were not extensive, but very neat and convenient. A *dewan-khaneh*, or apartment for receiving company, opened on a neatly paved court, with a basin of water in the centre, and beds of flowers and shrubs around it. Beyond, there was a private room, within which was my sleeping-chamber; and from it there was a communication with a very convenient bath, fitted up with the painted tiles of Cashan, and supplied with water from a large reservoir. The whole of this suite of apartments was fitted up with the grèatest attention to comfort, furnished with carpets of Herat and *numuds* of Kermaun.

“ The Moollah’s servant, having showed us into the public hall, left us for a moment, but returned with half-a-dozen Mussulmauns, who, standing up before the window, made us low obeisances. These were servants of various descriptions. Two were *Peish-khidmuts* or body servants; one professed himself an excellent cook—anöther his no

less excellent scullion; there were two or three furoshes or carpet-sweepers, who likewise, knowing every part of the town, served as messengers; and there was a Jeloodar and under-groom, who announced that two capital horses, and an easy ambling mule, were in the stable, at my disposal during my stay in Yezd.

“There was a complete assortment of all kinds of utensils, and bed-clothes, pillows, and cushions of eider down, aštaubebs or ewers, with basins of bright brass, mujmooas, or large metal salvers, coffee and tea cups, sherbet bowls and spoons, not to speak of a complete culinary apparatus, and dishes of all descriptions; and the Moollah’s servant informed me that a certain provision was daily to be made of every article required for my maintenance, which he should take care, according to his master’s orders, to make ample and complete. ‘My lord has but to hint his wishes for any thing that may not have been already provided, through the chief Peish-khidmut;* and they shall be obeyed as if they were the orders of a prince.’

“I soon learned that this Moollah Hurmooz was a man of principal consequence in the city of Yezd, and not more celebrated for his immense wealth, than for the liberal manner in which he employed it. His attention to me was little more than that which he paid to all who were recom-

* Body-servant.

mended to him particularly, by his numerous correspondents; although I afterwards discovered, that having conceived a prejudice in my favour, partly in consequence of the very confusion which to others had appeared so stupid, he had taken unusual pains in the appointment of my servants, and in attention to my comforts. His charity was unbounded; and few strangers sojourned any time in Yezd, especially if they were in distress, without tasting of the bounty of Moollah Hurmooz.

“The Moollah was the chief of that cast of infidels which is the remnant of the race of ancient Persians, called ‘Atish-purwusts,’ (fire-worshippers,) or ‘Ghebres.’ You are, no doubt, aware, gentlemen, that the province of Yezd contains more of these unhappy people than any other district of Persia. It appears to have been the point where they concentrated themselves when overpowered, as we are informed of in history, under the reign of their last king, Yezdijherd, by the fortunate arms and prevailing truth of our blessed faith. Yet infidels though they be, I can say from my own observation, that, in point of industry, honesty, and many other good qualities, they merit great praise. I have travelled much, gentlemen, and although I am firmly attached to Islamism, (blessings be on its author—the Prophet!) I have learned to look on those of other faiths with an eye of diminished prejudice; and truth bids me speak in

terms of high praise of the industrious Ghebres of Yezd.

“ I shall not weary you with a detailed account of their manners and customs ; but some deserve notice. Within a secret recess of every house is maintained a never-dying flame, which they consider as sacred. They believe that it first came from the sun, and has been kept burning ever since. Woe to the family with whom this sacred fire becomes extinct !—misfortunes, they assert, are sure to follow, nor can the deserted altar be replenished with the holy flame without long and painful rites. To such a pitch does this superstitious adoration of fire arise, that none of them will extinguish a lighted lamp or candle. To blow it out with his breath, they think would be polluting this sacred symbol of the Most High ; nay I have heard it asserted, that were fire to break forth in their very dwellings, they would not attempt to stop its ravages, but suffer the flame to spread or sink as it might.

“ They adore the sun as the author of light and heat—as the immediate type of the divinity, if not the divinity himself : at morning and evening, as this glorious luminary rises or sinks in their cloudless horizon, you may see the Ghebres going forth in crowds to bid him ‘ All hail ! ’ or to utter their farewell to this great object of their worship.

“ But that which struck me as one of their most

extraordinary customs, was the singular manner in which they dispose of their dead. They conceive that the elements of nature are too sacred to be polluted by a corrupt and noisome dead body. They do not, therefore, bury their dead after the manner of the faithful—nor do they burn them like the natives of India—that, indeed, were in their eyes the worst of profanation;—but they expose the bodies in walled inclosures, where the birds of the air can have access to them, and feed upon their flesh, picking it from the bones, and thus destroying it piecemeal. How they can reconcile leaving a putrifying corpse to taint the air in such a fashion, with their reverential delicacy for the elements, I know not; but such is their custom. The chief people have particular places constructed for this exposure, in the shape of round towers with shelves on an inclined plane, from whence the bones, when disunited, drop into a hole below; and it is said, that the fate of the deceased, in the other world, is augured from the manner in which the body is attacked by the birds, and in particular by observing which eye is first picked out. The right eye, I believe, is esteemed to be the fortunate organ, the early destruction of which, sends the soul of its owner to Paradise.

“I remained in great comfort in my lodgings at Yezd. I daily attended the Moollah at his office, and visited the bazaars and caravanserais with an

eye of increasing curiosity. My shyness gradually wore off; every day I mingled in company with less effort; and though generally silent, I was not confounded, and listened attentively to all that passed. This was of much service to me: in the first place, my distrust in the sufficiency of mere abstract learning—in that knowledge of the world which is acquired only from books—was confirmed: and secondly, in listening to the discourse of others, often supremely silly and ignorant, I gained a due appreciation of the value of such learning, and the utility of exercising the mind, and filling it with the reflections and thoughts of wise men. Thirdly, I began to know my own place and value in society, and gained a degree of confidence which enabled me to take my share in conversation without pain, yet which prevented a recurrence of the arrogance I had once felt, but the folly of which I now clearly saw.

“The good Moollah contributed greatly towards this happy change. He would encourage me to visit him when he had but few guests, and then would draw me out, gradually feeling his way to select the subjects on which I was most at ease. One day he congratulated me upon my augmenting confidence and knowledge of the world, and told me how much he had been vexed at my distress on the first day of my arrival. ‘I saw,’ continued he, ‘that your confusion did not arise

from native stupidity, but from shyness, the consequence of secluded habits; I knew that with the talents you possessed, and the duties you had to perform, such uncomfortable sensations must soon abate in a place like this; and all that could be done to promote that object was to afford opportunities for gradually accustoming your mind to bear a mixed society. More than you are aware of has been done with this intention, and I rejoice to see the effects so apparent'.

"But whatever change had taken place in my manners or my feelings, there was none in the dislike I entertained for the mercantile profession. The theoretical part of it I admired. I loved the unlimited intercourse it opened between distant nations, and the gratifications it was the means of affording to curiosity and to science; but I could not help being disgusted with the operative part; the loading and unloading,—the measuring, and the counting, and the baling; the dust and the dirt; the porters, the muleteers, and camel-drivers. I was still bent on travel, and sought to make my commercial mission subservient to that alone.

"Meantime, through the exertions of Moollah Hurmooz, and of the old Nazir, my father's goods were sold, and their proceeds turned into money, or, by barter, into goods suitable to be carried to Bunder. Abbassee, for sale to the European fac-

tories there. We purchased assafoetida, gum-ammoniac, dried fruits, silks, and other article. A caravan began to collect. The roads were dangerous,—parties of Affghauns, Ballouches, or Me-kranees, savages of the most murderous description, infested them, and attacked caravans even of a considerable size: several merchants, therefore, joined together, and we at length collected about four hundred mules and camels, attended by two hundred and fifty men, merchants, muleteers, camel-drivers, and servants, with a party of armed men, who, going towards that quarter for service, accepted of a trifle to accompany and protect the caravan.

“A considerable portion of my funds were vested in goods, but at least an equal share was converted into gold, and secured about my own person, and that of the Nazir. The balance was to be paid to me by the Moollah’s correspondent at Bunder Abbassee, as signified by a letter, which also authorized the advance of a farther sum in case of need. This document was secured within the lining of my cap, beneath my turban, which was likewise heavy with concealed gold.

“When the day of departure arrived, and when I had thanked the Moollah for the noble and hospitable manner in which he had entertained me, he replied, ‘If thy residence as my guest in

Yezd has been pleasant or useful to thee, my young friend, I rejoice at it most heartily. I would do much for thy father's son, but more for thyself; for, in truth, the mild gravity and sweetness of thy disposition has awakened a strong interest in my heart. But thou hast propensities which for thy own sake I dread. Thou art adventurous; thy love for travelling exceeds thy prudence, and I would have thee curb it as an unruly courser. Travel, if prudently undertaken, is useful and praiseworthy; but if thoughtlessly commenced and rashly pursued, like precious medicine in the hands of an ignorant empiric, it may destroy what it was meant to benefit. Thy knowledge of the world and its snares is yet but scanty: I cannot secure thee from the dangers that may beset thy path; but what I can do I will. Take this paper, it is written in the character peculiar to my brethren,—many of them are rich, and riches are power: if thou shouldst be in distress where one of these is to be found, he will relieve thee to the extent of his means—the name of Moollah Hurmooz shall ensure thee a welcome. I do not offer thee gold, for thou hast sufficient both of that and the means of procuring it; but the horses and equipage thou hast used while here, thou wilt accept as a poor mark of Hurmooz's affection. Fare thee well! and may the God of the Ghebre, as well

as of the Mussulmaun, keep thy steps, and be a light to thy path !'

"These words passed as I was quitting his door, and I felt my cheeks wet with the tear of gratitude and affection, when I bade adieu to this worthy and hospitable man."

CHAPTER VII.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY CONTINUED. —
THE ROBAUT-E-DEEVE.

“ WE now commenced a longer and more toilsome journey. The distance from Yezd to Bunder Abbassee, through Kermaun, which town we were to visit on our way, is not less than two hundred and fifty fursungs.* The greater part of the country through which the road to Kermaun passes, is sandy and arid, very ill supplied with water, and sparingly sprinkled with villages. To one accustomed to the rich environs of Ispahan, it appeared wretched in the extreme.

“ Kermaun itself lies in a well-peopled country, abounding in villages and gardens, but still sandy and scantily watered. A scattered population, and some small miserable towns, are met with between Kermaun and Bunder Abbassee: the first part

* One thousand miles.

of the country through which the road passes, is sandy; the latter, rocky, and affording rather more pasture, but the whole is dreary, brown, and barren. This dreariness increased as we approached Bunder, and descended the mountains into the Gurmaseer, or hot country, rightly so called from its parched and burnt appearance, where dark rocky ridges, or hills of sand without either water or verdure, reflect the sun's rays, and scorch up the vitals of unfortunate travellers.

"Our progress, though slow, was for a long time prosperous. We reached Kermaun in eighteen days, halting once or twice to refresh our cattle; and after remaining six days in that town, to give time for the transaction of business, and the arrival of persons to join the cafilah, we pursued our way steadily for more than twenty days, in which time we had arrived within thirty fursungs of Bunder.

"It was here that we were taught more particularly to dread the attacks of robbers; and here, accordingly, we found the villages in great alarm, as intelligence was said to have reached them of several large and desperate bands having come down from the mountains, and infesting the roads, so that great danger was to be apprehended for the cafilah.

"But what could we do? one of these wretched villages might, by great exertion, supply our

numbers with food for a day or two, but certainly would not be able to continue such provision for any length of time; besides, remaining in one place was but giving time to the thieves for concentrating their forces, while there were no well-founded hopes of increasing our own. An oracular answer from the pages of the Koraun,* which was consulted on the occasion, decided our movements, as it was interpreted by our Moollahs into an order to proceed; and in obedience to this, or rather to necessity, we armed ourselves, girding on our swords and pistols, and slinging our loaded matchlocks across our backs; and trembling far more from fear than eagerness, we took our departure from the village of Hussunabad.

“We had proceeded in no small trepidation and anxiety for about ten miles, when our alarm was justified by the appearance of a cloud of dust issuing from a valley on our right; and as the wind drove it to one side, we could see near two hundred savage-looking horsemen, armed with spears and swords, bows and arrows, and a few matchlocks. The caravan had not kept in very good order, and the greater part of its drivers and defenders, appalled at this sight, cut the ropes

* This species of augury, resembling the “Sortes Virgilianæ,” is very common in the East. In Persia, the works of Hafiz, Saadee, and others, are made use of, as well as the Koraun.

of the baggage, and throwing down the loads, urged away their beasts with all the speed they could make. The party of armed men, not more than twenty in number, when they saw this rout, retired in good order to a little eminence on one side, where they formed into a circle, and began firing their matchlocks with so much effect, and kept so good a face, that the robbers, seeing plenty of plunder already on the field, left them alone, to secure it, and to put the stragglers to death.

“This was done in a twinkling. All who were mounted on indifferent beasts were overtaken and massacred, and the animals were loaded with the very bales perhaps they bore before. Those who could gain the little eminence, of whom I was one, remained safe: it seemed to be a fair compromise between the thieves and us—no interruption to our plunder, no molestation to you! At last, after a very anxious while, the robbers collected all they could carry off; cut to pieces what they could not, in order to discover the most valuable booty, and moved off with it; upon which the survivors descended to see what friends were killed, and who had got away. Among the first, I recognised the body of my poor Nazir! who, remaining too long with his master's camels and goods, had fallen a victim to his zeal. It was but the body, for they had stripped it as naked

as he was born, and my gold was gone with his clothes. I lamented the poor faithful creature much; but was not a little thankful to my defenders for their courage, and to the thieves for their prudent backwardness, which saved my life, my valuable papers, and no small sum of money.

“We now agreed that it would be best to proceed without delay to the next stage, where we could better decide on our future operations. We mustered only about fifty men out of six times that number; but ere we had gone far, so many stragglers and runaways joined us, that, before night closed in, our number was trebled; probably the number of dead and of prisoners together, might have amounted to a hundred and fifty.

“We were but in poor plight after all: hardly a morsel of provisions was to be found among us; and some having abandoned their horses or mules upon the first alarm, in hopes of hiding themselves more easily from their pursuers, were without animals to carry them.

“The regular halting-place of the caravan was an old ruin of great magnitude, which some said was a fort built by the Deeves, in times of old; others affirmed, that it was a large caravanseraï, erected in the days of Nousheervan the Just. It still had many vaults which served to shelter travellers, but they were scattered through different parts of the building, so that no large party could

be accommodated within easy hearing of each other; a circumstance which was the more disagreeable, because there was no method of securing any part of these vaults against attacks from without. To remedy this evil, it was customary for caravans to post sentinels, who might give notice of approaching danger.

“It was late before we reached the ruin, which rose like a black craggy hill out of the plain, in the moonless darkness of a winter night. We were cold, comfortless, and hungry, without the means of satisfying any of our wants. Prudence suggested the necessity of appointing some of our party to watch, but no one chose to take the duty on himself; each was occupied in accommodating himself as best he could, and too much exhausted with the fatigue of the day to think of any thing but seeking to lose recollection of his hunger and discomfort in repose. Accordingly, having driven our horses into one or two of the most spacious vaults, we were all soon buried in sleep.

“It chanced that many of the larger vaults being thus occupied, an old merchant and I, with one or two others, had taken possession of a smaller chamber, close to what appeared to have been a gate of the building; and there, gathering ourselves up in a corner from the cold, we slept in comparative comfort.

“ Towards morning, happening to awake, I went forth for a moment to view the night, and had advanced a few steps along the broken overhanging wall, when voices struck my ear. It might be some of my comrades, who, like me, had arisen from their uneasy bed, and I stopped to listen. They came round an abrupt angle, and I was just about to address them, when the strange low whispering tones in which they spoke, alarmed me, and I drew back close to the wall.

“ The fabric was in so shattered a condition, and there were so many projecting masses overgrown with dry grass, that numerous clefts and chasms were to be found in every part of it. One of these happened to be close beside me, and, retiring to it, I ensconced myself in such a manner that I could hear and see, without being discovered.

“ As the people advanced, I saw that they were three in number. It was too dark to distinguish their garb or their countenances, but my newly awakened suspicion was increased by observing, relieved against the sky, a spear across the shoulder of one of them. At first I could only hear the suppressed murmurs of their voices; words became distinguishable as they approached, but they were in a strange dialect, of which I could not comprehend the full import.

“ At length I made out the following dialogue; ‘ I tell you, they must all be here; they could get no

farther after dark, and Sheer Allee and I watched them till then; besides, I am certain I heard the neighing of a horse.'—'Well, if they are here,' replied another, 'they cannot escape us again:—may their fathers be burned, the dogs! we should have lost half our prize had it not been for that lucky discovery. Why the old man says that there is a young fellow whose coat and belt are worth two thousand sequins, and there is some talk of an old merchant with rubies and emeralds enough in his turban to buy the whole caravan.'—'Well, let us take care, not one must escape.'—'Oh, no fear! Meer Hussun is gone round to the other vaults with forty men, and the twenty with Sooltaun will take care of these here; the rest must act as occasion requires, and catch the flyers: when we light the torches, every one must be put to death as he rushes out; we must not make too many prisoners, or we shall be embarrassed in our retreat.'

"While this was going on, the three men passed me slowly, pausing at times as if looking for some one. 'The curse of Shytaun* on that stupid dog, Dilawur Sooltaun! what can be keeping him?' cried one of the party, peevishly; 'there's never a job to do but he lags behind: why will Meer Hussun always employ him?'—'Hush!' whispered the other; 'not so loud—you may awaken some of these sleeping dogs:—Sooltaun is a blood

* Satan, the Devil.

relation of Meer Hussun, you know, and though he may be slow, when he does perform a job, he does it completely, and so you will see him do now: but go you back to the north angle while I advance and see what they are about.' So saying the three separated, and I remained in an agony of fear and doubt as to what I should do. There were all my unfortunate companions sleeping soundly within a few yards of me, void of all suspicion,—just on the point of being murdered by a merciless banditti, and I, who knew their danger, had not the means of putting them on their guard; for discovery and instant death must inevitably follow any attempt at alarming them, without the smallest chance of succeeding in the effort.

"Trusting to the obscurity, I looked out, and seeing no one, resolved to attempt reaching the cell where my companion the merchant was sleeping. In this I fortunately succeeded without interruption, and cautiously wakening him, could hardly stifle his cry of affright, while I told him the dreadful reality. I had just determined on making an effort to find the vaults that were occupied by our armed companions, when voices were again heard close to the mouth of our cell. Oh, how my blood curdled at the sound!—it was the signal of death, and I thought my hour was come.

"Suddenly the air was illuminated by bright continued flashes, succeeded by loud and horrible

shouts; and these again were soon mingled with cries and groans, the clash of weapons, and the knell of matchlock and pistol-shots. I cast a glance around me for the means of defence; but what were matchlock and sword in the hands of an old man and a raw stripling against a host of armed ruffians? Our cell, till now, had fortunately escaped their notice, but there was small chance of its remaining long undiscovered; and I cast my eyes around in despair, unwilling to die without a struggle, yet uncertain what to do: when, by the light of the flashes which penetrated our cell, I observed a rent in the deepest recess, which the darkness had hitherto concealed from our view. ‘Here, here!’ cried I to the merchant, who, stupified with terror, allowed me to lead him as I chose; ‘this is our only chance for safety—let us try to mount here, the hollow may conceal us.’ I clambered up to the aperture; it was a rent in the wall, beyond which nothing could be seen for the darkness: it was very narrow, but I squeezed myself through, and feeling for footing on the other side, lent my hand to the old man, who instinctively followed. Alas! the aperture was too small for his greater bulk; he stuck half way, and I was in despair. The shouts and the cries continued—they approached—all seemed lost:—I pulled by the head and shoulders of my companion, but in vain. At last my exer-

tions loosened a stone, and it fell; I redoubled my efforts, and tore away a part of his girdle which had caught the projecting stones, upon which the whole person followed: he fell in upon me headlong, followed by a quantity of stones and rubbish, and we rolled together into a deep hole, where for a minute or more I lay half-stunned by the fall.

“When I recollected myself, we were in utter darkness, and the noise of the fray came more faintly to my ears. At length it approached, and the trampling of feet as if immediately overhead, mingled with many cries and imprecations, shook the place. ‘Allah! Allah!’ cried one or two voices, which I recognised for those of the men who had shared our cell, and who, now discovered by the ruffians, vainly prayed for mercy:—one or two heavy blows, accompanied by bitter execrations, told us the result. The torches flashed, and one or two crevices admitted a faint ray of their light. Expecting to see the faces of our murderers gazing in upon us through the chasm, I looked up in helpless horror. Had it been so, we were gone without resource, and for a few moments the agony of suspense was almost insufferable; but the trampling and the tumult receded after a while, the lights vanished, and silence as well as darkness prevailed.

“Oh, what ages of agony did the next two hours appear! My faculties and apprehension were as

perfect as ever; I was keenly alive to the full misery of my situation. There could be no doubt of the event of this miserable fray, and I knew that the morning light must decide our fate; for faint and famished as we were, it would be impossible for us to survive long in our concealment, and we should be forced to come forth and take our chance of discovery, rather than die like vermin starved to death in our holes. If you ask me whether this severe lesson did not cure me, for the time, of my itch for travelling, I answer, no,—it never occurred to me to tax my favourite pursuit with being the cause of my misfortune; and though I heartily wished myself any where in safety, I never repented of my departure from home, or felt the smallest wish for returning to its insipid security.

“My companion, I believe, felt the horror of his situation less than I;—his faculties were stupefied. His fall, although it had in no wise materially injured him, had stunned his senses: he lay groaning now and then, ejaculating the name of Allah, but never addressed a word to me.

“At length morning broke. A dim grey light mingled almost imperceptibly with the palpable darkness of our dungeon, and the twitter of a bird proclaimed that nature was once more awake. No hostile sound was to be heard, and I resolved to ascertain the state of things above.

“Stiff and sore, I rose with difficulty from the rough hard stones, and looking round with eyes now accustomed to the obscurity of the place, I discovered that we were at the bottom of a large vault, the greater part of which had fallen in and choked up the entrance. A flight of steps had probably once led to it, for we were at least twelve feet under the surface of the ground. One or two small chinks in the roof admitted a faint ray of light, but the greater part of the whole remained in impenetrable darkness.

“Turning towards the side of the pit, near which we had lain, it was not without much difficulty that I succeeded in clambering up the steep slope of fragments down which we had fallen, and reached one of the chinks through which the torches had flashed the night before. I found the aperture completely filled up with rubbish, and it was with great labour I removed so much of it as enabled me to look down into the cell where we had slept. There, indeed, lay a ghastly proof of the tragedy that had been acted. The three men, who with us had occupied the place, lay stark dead, bloody, and naked, as they had fallen and been stripped by the miscreants. It now also became obvious by what means the aperture had escaped their view: the efforts made in dragging my friend the merchant after me, and the displacing of a few stones, had shaken the crazy

fabric so much, that a quantity of rubbish had fallen from the old arched roof, and effectually concealed our hiding-place; it cost me a good deal more toil before I widened the rent sufficiently to let myself out.

“Stepping over the dead bodies, I ventured to peep forth. All was still, and the pure morning air revived me. I went cautiously round to the vaults where most of my friends had been disposed of for the night; and I shall never forget the scene of horror which presented itself to me there. Death—violent death at least—had been a stranger to me till the day before, when our caravan was dispersed; and then the excitement of my mind had kept me from dwelling upon its victims; but now, when all nature was renewed in its freshness, in the quiet light of morning, I saw with sickening heart all the companions of my journey lying mangled with ghastly wounds, their stiff and naked corpses steeped in the chilling dews of night. Each lay, as issuing forth on the first alarm he received his death-blow, or dreading to leave his retreat had awaited his murderers in the vault. Some, however, had sold their lives dearly, for several of the banditti lay pierced with matchlock balls which had been fired from within.

“Heart-struck, and shuddering at this dismal spectacle, I longed to fly; but first I mounted

the summit of the ruin to look if any thing was to be seen that boded danger. All, however, was still. The place stood in a plain, surrounded at various distances by craggy hills; but so far as the eye could reach, no living thing was to be seen. I now returned to my fellow-sufferer, the sole survivor yet at liberty, besides myself, of all our company.

“It was not without difficulty I roused him to any degree of exertion; terror had still possession of his faculties, and it was some time before I could persuade him that he was safe for the moment, but that he could not too soon quit so dangerous a spot. He was bruised, though not severely hurt, and I had great difficulty in getting him out of the vault.

“When he found himself once more in daylight, he exclaimed, ‘Allah Akbar! Allah Kereem!’ several times in a bewildered tone; nor was his alarm diminished, when his eyes lighted upon the murdered men in the cell. It did not, however, prevent him from observing the disorder of his dress; and missing his girdle, he exclaimed, ‘Staffer-ullah! it is gone; what dust has fallen on my head! Alas, it is gone, and I am a miserable old man!’—‘If it is your girdle,’ said I, ‘that you lament so piteously, you need not be much distressed about it: it has fallen into the pit which preserved us last night, and I will fetch

it for you : only endeavour to recollect your scattered senses ; you will need them all, I fear.'— 'Allah !' exclaimed he, 'is this true, young man ? is it indeed there ? how shall I reward thee ? thou art indeed my good angel ; what recompense shall I bestow on thee ?'— 'Lose no farther time,' rejoined I ; 'recover your presence of mind, and be ready quickly to accompany me from hence ; that is all the reward I require.' So saying I descended into the pit, and soon found the shawl, torn and tattered as it was, which formed the old man's girdle. He received it with trembling hands, and feeling it all over with a degree of interest that surprised me, cast up his eyes to Heaven, muttering 'Praise be to Allah ! praise to the Prophet ! all is safe, all is secure :' With that he fixed it carefully around him, and I led him from the place, avoiding the spots where our dead friends were lying ; for I feared that his mind, already sorely shaken, would never withstand the sight.

"At this moment I was alarmed by the faint braying of an ass. I hurried the old man into a recess, and cautiously stole out to spy who the stranger might be who thus announced himself. Following the sound, I discovered that it proceeded from the vault where our cattle had been inclosed the night before. They had not escaped the robbers' search, and probably had served to

carry off the prisoners; but an ass, of rather sorry appearance, belonging to a servant of the caravan, had either been overlooked or despised: and it proved a truly providential gift to us; for without it the old merchant could never have left the place; and as I could not have brought myself to abandon him, his fate would have most probably involved mine.

“At last the old man was mounted, and leading the ass, we departed in the direction of our intended course. As we increased our distance from the ominous Robaut-e-Deeve,* my companion recovered some portion of his mental energy; and declaring that he knew the road, I followed his directions. We had found a few fragments of bread scattered about, either by some of our friends or the robbers; and these, with a little water from a well close to the Robaut, was all the refreshment on which we had to depend, perhaps for several days.

“Long and dreary were the hours, as we slowly wound through one barren and burning valley after another. The merchant’s strength at length began to fail. He complained of severe pains all over his body; and before the sun had reached his height, he laboured under an ardent fever and a burning thirst. I was greatly fatigued

* Caravanseraï of the Deeves, or evil spirits—Robaut signifies a caravanseraï.

myself; the mental and bodily suffering of the last two days, coupled with want of food and rest, had nearly exhausted my frame: my throat was also parched, and it was with difficulty that I continued to drag my limbs along.

"It was about two hours after noon, as we travelled through a valley where some overhanging rocks threw their shadow over a recess near the road, that the merchant, whose feebleness had rapidly increased, exclaimed, 'My son, I can support it no longer! my hour is come; the tree must lie where it falls; lay me yonder in the shade, and sit a little while with me to close my eyes; you will not be long detained.' He was, in fact, falling from the ass, and I saw with despair that my last remaining companion was about to be taken from me.

"I carried him to the shady spot he had indicated, and clearing a space from the stones which encumbered it, laid him down as much at his ease as possible. 'Thanks,' said he, 'my son; thou hast done a charitable deed—and thy endeavour to prolong the life of an old man will not be without its reward. But that which is written must be accomplished! Allah has decreed it, and I perish a victim to my own restless spirit and insatiable love of gain!—My son, beware thou of such madness!'

"The man who is dying before thee, was Hadjee

Abdoollah, of Sheerauz; whose name, as a trader of no small eminence, must have reached thine ear. Long did I toil after riches; to amass them I sacrificed personal comfort, the welfare of my family, and mental repose; and now life itself is added to the rest. My constant absence produced dissensions in my household; my women were faithless, my eldest son became a debauchee; my daughters were married to worthless spend-thrifts—for I was not near them to hinder it. I lost my best and most affectionate wife; her heart was broken by my stubborn and wayward conduct: I saw it all, but still could not refrain. Tempted by the prospect of extraordinary gains, I visited the court of Ispahan, with some rich and costly jewels; but found there only those who desired to possess, but had not the means to purchase them. It was dangerous to be known as the possessor of such treasures; so, hearing that an advantageous market was likely to be found in India, I joined thy caravan, intending to dispose of them to some speculator at Bunder, or to carry them myself to Bombay—nay, rather to visit the court of the luxurious Mahmood, at Shah Jehanabad,* than lose the gains I sought. It was to have been my last adventure; I promised myself ease and comfort in my age, after that should have been concluded. But God has willed it

* Or Dehlee.

otherwise, and I die in a distant land the victim of my own avarice—Allah-hu-Akber!—Allah Ke-reem!—his will be done!

“ ‘But thou, my son, art still young—take warning by my fate, content thyself with moderate gains, and be not too ambitious of wealth. And now I will put thee in possession of that which has proved my bane, but which, wisely used, may bless thee and all thy house.—Seest thou this girdle? It contains rubies and emeralds of great value. In the lining of the cap beneath my turban, thou wilt find two necklaces of pearls, of the finest that Bahrein ever produced, and fit to adorn the person of a king. But the lining of my under-vest contains the choicest gems: I have not breath to tell them—and, oh, it is hard to part with them! Take them not, my son, till I am dead! I could not, while I live, endure the pang of seeing them in other hands than mine;—and yet they have ruined me!—but thou mayest safely use them, for they are the fruit of honest gains, and those I leave behind me will be well provided for by my death. But I grow fainter, my son—and this thirst! this thirst! O God, for a drop of water!’

“ These were almost the last words of the unhappy Hadjee Abdoollah. It was with much difficulty and many pauses he uttered what I have related; and now the fever and thirst together parched his tongue, so that he could no longer speak. I

continued to support his head for an hour, but at last even his groans ceased, and he remained insensible, drawing his breath heavily and painfully. At length there was a slight convulsion—a choaking in the throat,—and all was over: the spirit passed to taste the mercy of God, and the body lay lifeless in my arms.

“I closed the eyes, turned the feet to Mecca, and discharged the last solemn duties with a heavy heart. I was alone in the wide desert, and had little prospect of a better fate than that of Hadjee Abdoolah. As for burying the body, I had neither strength nor means for it; so obeying his directions in possessing myself of the jewels and money that were sewed up in different parts of his dress, and transferring them safely to my own person, I covered the body with its own garments, and mounting the ass, which had been browsing on the dried herbage around, I pursued my way in the faint hope of reaching a village before night should close in.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY CONTINUED.—
THE FRANK HAKEEM.

“ I PROCEEDED but slowly : the famished animal I rode could make but little progress, and I began to feel the effects of my own fatigue and exertions, in a very painful manner. The thirst which had oppressed me for many hours was now almost intolerable ; and pains in the back and loins, with burning eyes and skin, announced too certainly the approach of illness. I saw nothing for it but lying down to die on the road side, like my poor companion. Indeed, I did not know my way, and was forced at last to let my ass choose for itself ; which after all was the best thing I could do, for the instinct of these animals enables them in many cases to find the road to a village when the rider would seek it in vain.

“ Left to itself, the ass moved on at a quicker pace, picking its steps over the stony plain in the

now fast-declining light of day ; and all I could do was to keep myself from falling, when suddenly it pricked up its long ears and broke out into a long continued bray. I looked on all sides, but could see nothing for a while ; at last the bark of a dog came upon my ear, and rousing myself to closer observation, I descried upon the stony surface of the right-hand hill a few sheep and goats, distinguished only by their motion from the rocks on which they picked their scanty food. It was a cheering sight ; sheep require a shepherd, and at this time of day could not be very far from a village or encampment. The very idea revived my fainting spirits, and I looked around with still more intentness, till at last, sitting on a rock near the summit of the crag, I perceived a human figure.

“ The moment I was near enough, I beckoned and called with all my might ; but the figure would not stir. Again I exerted my voice, and seconded it by getting off the ass : this movement appeared to alarm the man ; for giving a loud whistle, he got up and disappeared. Vexed and disappointed, I slowly mounted, and was pursuing my path, when at the next turning of the rock I observed two persons standing above me with lances in their hands, as if prepared either to make or repulse an attack.

“ ‘ In the name of God ! ’ said I, ‘ approach and

assist a distressed Mussulmaun, who has with difficulty escaped from the hands of robbers.'—'Who art thou, and whither goest thou?' cried one of the youths, (for both were young men,) in a strange wild dialect; 'what assistance dost thou seek?—art thou not rather thyself a robber, armed as thou art?'—'No,' replied I, 'I am a traveller and a true believer, poor and distressed; I seek a little drink to slake my intolerable thirst, and the way to the next village; if ye be charitable enough to conduct me there, ye shall not want reward. Approach, and fear nothing—by the holy Caaba! by the head of the prophet! I speak the truth!'

"On this, the youths conversed a little together, and then cautiously approached; my haggard and worn-out appearance was not indeed calculated to keep up their alarm; and after a little farther parley, they told me that they belonged to a party of shepherds sent from the village of Zenjaun, to watch the sheep and goats of its inhabitants while they pastured on the neighbouring hills. 'The village,' they said, 'was still six miles distant; but one of them, stipulating for a reward, which I willingly promised him, engaged to conduct me there. They now brought a vessel containing aub-e-doogh,* to quench my thirst. Oh! never shall I forget that delicious draught! its refreshing coolness pervaded my burning frame, and

* Butter-milk and water.

imparted to it a vigour, which, compared with my former exhausted state, seemed like perfect strength.

“The shepherd-boy now girt his loins, and leading the way conducted my ass by the bridle, along paths so intricate, and over ground so rocky and dangerous, that it would have been impossible to find the road without a guide. Indeed, so suspicious did the path appear, that more than once I felt inclined to tax my conductor with perfidy, and endeavour to rid myself of his dangerous presence. But my weakness, and the certainty of perishing, if left to myself, were so perfectly apparent, and so reckless of consequences had my sufferings made me, that I determined to take my chance and trust to the fidelity of my guide.

“It was well that I did so; for after a most fatiguing hour, my eyes were gladdened by the lights of Zenjaun twinkling at a distance in the plain below. Our descent occupied the greater part of another hour; and I could not have held out much longer, when, after passing through some fields and inclosures, we found ourselves before the gate of the place. The voice of my conductor soon procured us admittance, and he led me to the house of the Ketkhodah,* as the best, he assured me, in the village; where, half dead

* Chief magistrate.

with my sufferings, I dismounted, and sought shelter for the night.

“ My appearance caused no small stir in the village; no sooner was it known that a stranger had arrived at the Ketkhodah's, after being plundered by the Ballooches, than the people flocked to the house, and pestered me with questions. But I was in no plight to answer them; so I shortly told my host that I had escaped with difficulty from the attack which had destroyed the expected caravan; but was still able to pay for any trouble I might give, and for the accommodations I should require, until sufficiently recovered to resume my journey.

“ The Ketkhodah, a gloomy-looking and very dark man, with a most sinister cast of the eye, and an ominous scar on one cheek, was by no means hasty in acceding to my request. His house was small, he said; he was not fond of admitting strangers; there was a Mehman-khaneh* for the reception of travellers: in bad repair, it was true, but still good enough, he dared to say, to serve my turn. I repeated, that though I had been plundered of my property, I still had enough to remunerate him handsomely for all I required, and to obtain the means of transporting myself to Bunder, where I had friends who would

* A house for the reception of travellers, smaller than a caravanserai.

assist me." I began to search for the purse which contained money for my daily expenses, intending to tempt him by the sight of some silver, when all at once his manner changed; his doubts and gloom disappeared, and a surly smile stole over his ill-favoured countenance.— 'There was no need,' he said, 'of another word; the best accommodation he had was at my service: no need of money or reward! What! he was a Mussulmaun! did not the blessed Prophet command men to be charitable? and was he not bound then to assist a brother of the faithful in distress?'

"My ass profited by this favourable revolution in my host's mind, and was immediately taken care off; lights were procured; numuds* were spread in the best apartment; a cotton mattress, with a quilted coverlit, was laid there for my use; and, after indulging in another long draught of butter-milk and water, I undressed, stowed my valuable apparel under my head, and retired to sleep.

"But the excessive fatigue I had undergone, conspired with the growing fever in my blood to render my frame restless and irritable. It was long ere I sank into a troubled doze, from which I was roused by that intuitive perception which one has of the close presence of another, when darkness prevents the intruder from being seen. I was con-

* Felt carpets.

fidant that I had felt the air of some one leaning over me; I even thought my person had been touched, and that a hand had cautiously felt about as if searching for something in the bed. If such were the case, it was withdrawn too quickly for detection; my quick start might have alarmed the intruder, for, when I stretched out my arms, they met in vacancy, and no sound struck upon my ear.

"I slept again, but it was a restless watchful sleep, disturbed by horrid dreams and often broken by a start; indeed an indefinite sense of danger hung over me, and would of itself have prevented any continued repose. But morning came without any farther cause of alarm, and gaining confidence from the daylight, I gathered closely together such parts of my dress as contained my valuables, and sank into a more refreshing slumber than I had yet enjoyed.

"My sleep might have lasted about three hours, when a slight noise in the apartment awoke me. I looked up and saw my host the Ketkhodah bending over me with eyes of dark enquiry. It happened that I lay with one arm thrown across my face; perhaps cast there instinctively, to shade my eyes from the glare of an opposite window. Weakness and sleepiness prevented me from moving at the moment, and the suspicious appearance of my host awakened a desire to learn what he wanted,

and induced me to continue the semblance of slumber.

“The man approached more closely, and looked about my person and among the bedclothes, with the earnestness of one who expects some interesting discovery : a slight movement, however, which I could not control, made him start back and turn to leave the room, first casting a rapid glance where I lay, to see if my sleep still continued. Such conduct, coupled with the indistinct occurrences of the night, awakened considerable alarm in my mind ; and I was ruminating on what had passed, when the voices of my host, and another person, whom I found to be my guide of the night before, and the Ketkhodah’s son, conversing in whispers, attracted my attention :—alarm sharpened my senses, and with horror and dismay, I made out the following dialogue :—

“ ‘Well,’ said the lad, ‘what do you mean to do, father ? you are surely not going to let this fellow pass, after the pains I took to bring him to the house ?’ ‘No, no,’ growled the father, ‘no fear of that ; but you would not have me cut his throat in open day ?’ ‘Why did you let the night pass then ?’—‘Why, I did make half an attempt, but the wretch did nothing but moan and groan all night, and hardly shut an eye ; so when I went near him, just to feel where his clothes were put, he started up and almost caught hold of me. I

did get my fingers on his girdle, I believe, and there is money in it, no doubt.'—'I was sure of it, father—I told you so last night, but you would not believe me.'—'Why, to be sure, I did think at first that he was some poor wretch; but his readiness at offering money made me look sharp, and then I observed how heavy his girdle was. I wonder you did not knock him off his ass last night.'—'May his father be burned, the dog! I did think of it more than once, but then he had been seen with me by others of the villagers, and his cries might have been heard:—you know, the shepherds are scattered everywhere among the hills just now:—besides, he had a gun and a sword, and had I missed my blow in the dark, he might have defended himself better than I should have liked. I thought it safer to carry him home, where there need be no fear of his escaping. Remember that Armenian from Sheerauz—how cleverly that business was managed—no one ever guessed how he came by his end.'—'And that Moollah going to Yezd with his Indian gold,' rejoined the surly voice of the father, warmed with the recollection of his murderous exploits, 'the old Yaboo's death appeared quite natural; yes, yes! it must be in that way we go to work with this young dog, and I doubt not he will prove a good prize. There is a fever in his eyes already: you may know it by his sleep; he can't quit the village to-day.'—'By

the beard of Omer ! he shall not.’—‘ Hush, hush ! take care—don’t speak so loud, you may waken him, or others may hear you.’—‘ Oh, never fear, he is sound enough, and all the rest are gone to water the corn.’—‘ Well ; to-night a little of the poison we got from the Dervish will do his business. He is ill already—he has been beaten and wounded by the Ballooches—all this is known ; what so natural as that he should die ? Don’t let any one come near him ; and be sure you mention to all you see, how ill our poor guest is.’—‘ Bechushm !’ * replied the son ; and they separated.

“ You may imagine my feelings, gentlemen, on hearing this dialogue :—my situation was, if possible, yet more appalling than it was when surrounded by robbers in the Robaut-e-deeve ; for I was now sick and exhausted, hardly able to stand, and quite unable either to defend myself or to fly, even if I knew whither to bend my steps. I was absolutely in the power of remorseless villains, who, by their own confession, traded in blood. My mind was too much unnerved by illness and terror to think of the best steps to be taken, and I lay in a wretched state of perturbation, until roused by the entrance of my host, who, observing that I lay with my eyes open, started, and eyed me with a piercing glance, as if he read suspicion in my countenance.

“ ‘ You have slept late, Sir,’ said he, ‘ you are

* By my eyes !

refreshed, I hope.'—'I cannot say I am much better,' replied I; 'I passed a restless night, I was feverish, and had very unpleasant dreams. This morning I fell into a sleep from which I have but now awaked. But I still feel too unwell to rise; so, with your permission, I shall remain for a while where I am.'—'Very good,' replied my host, 'I doubt not that you will soon be better. I shall have some food prepared for you—will you have some aub-e-gosht?* or pillaw with some sour milk?'—'Neither, I thank you; I could not eat at present—I feel already sick. Perhaps in the evening I may taste something, but not now; I will try to sleep again.'—'Inshallah,' said my host, 'you will be better by to-morrow!' and he left me to myself, to devise what means I might for extricating myself from the horrible dilemma into which I had fallen.

"Meantime my thirst had returned, but I dared not ask for drink. All wholesome food was denied me. Poison was to be the means of my death, and I might be sure of finding it in every thing that should be administered to me. While racked with these despairing thoughts, my eyes rested on a corner near me, where stood the vessel from which I had drunk the night before. This, at least, was not poisoned: I knew that from the words of my murderers themselves, as well as from my own ex-

* Water of meat—soup.

perience. I rose reeling with giddiness, and reached the cup: the remains of the butter-milk and water was still there; and I drained it to the dregs, as the last wholesome beverage I might ever taste, but determined that nothing short of absolute force should prevail on me to taste of food in the Ketkhodah's house.

“As to the possibility of escape, it appeared almost hopeless. From the conversation I had overheard, it was to be inferred, indeed, that my host designed to keep his fellow-villagers in ignorance of my fate; but could I rely on receiving protection from any of them, provided I should succeed in effecting my escape from the Ketkhodah's house? Was it not probable that the villagers, one and all, might be a gang of plunderers, and that, if they suspected the value of their prize they would rather assist their chief in his murderous intentions, on condition of sharing in the spoil, than aid a stranger in escaping from his clutches? At all events, I saw that my motions were watched for the present, and resolved to wait at least until twilight before attempting any thing decided; and if no better way should appear, to remain on my guard with my arms prepared till morning, and then endeavour to sally forth and sell my life, if attacked, as dearly as possible.

“Meantime my fever rather increased than diminished, from the agitation of my mind. To sleep

under present circumstances was impossible, and the day elapsed in miserable anxiety. Towards evening, the Ketkhodah again visited me, and proposed to bring me food. I once more told him that my stomach loathed it, and refused to taste a morsel. 'Then take a draft of this sherbet,' said he: 'my wife has prepared it for you, of the best sugar from Bunder, and the freshest limes from Meenaub.* See, it is cool as the streams which flow from the snows of these distant mountains! Oh! how tantalizing was this offer! and how I loathed the miscreant that made it!—it was death veiled with flowers. My feverish thirst impelled me to brave the poison which I knew he had mingled with the beverage: but, by an effort, I subdued the spasm in my throat, and declined it also.

"A cloud gathered on the brow of my host. 'How is this?' said he; 'what is it you dread?'—'Dread!' repeated I trembling; 'What should I dread here?—am I not with ussulmauns? with friends?—But I loathe all food and drink at present, and only seek for rest.'—'But this will make you better,' insisted my host, resenting the bowl; 'here, take a little.'—'No,' said I, 'not now; but leave it by me: in a little, perhaps, my thirst may return.' I said this as easily as I could, and the Ketkhodah, casting another suspi-

* A large village not far from Bunder—abbassee, or Gomberoon.

cious glance at me, set down the bowl of sherbet and retired.

“In two hours after, when twilight was settling over the earth, and I was musing, in a sort of torpor produced by mental and bodily misery, the Ketkhodah returned. My heart sank at the sound of his loathed footsteps. He was accompanied by another person, not more prepossessing than himself in appearance, dressed in an Arab cloak, and a huge green turban.

“‘Well,’ enquired my host gloomily, ‘have you drunk any of the sherbet I brought you?’ I had taken the precaution to spill some of it upon the ground beneath my bed, so that the bowl was half empty, and I replied, ‘Yes, I have drunk of it, and it was excellent; I hope I may sleep well to-night, and be able to-morrow to proceed on my journey.’—‘Oh, no doubt!’ said the villain, his face brightening as he looked at the emptied cup; ‘no doubt you will be the better for this—you will, I dare say, be on your journey by to-morrow: meantime, I have brought you a learned hakeem from Bunder, who possesses the art of healing his patients in one night, and by a single dose. Mashallah! Galenoos and Allee-Aboosennah* themselves were less certain in their cures than Hakeem Hyatoollah;—you are in luck that he came this way; and, lo! he is ready to prescribe for you.’

* The Eastern names for Galen and Avicenna.

“I east my eyes inquisitively upon the man, who, seizing one of my hands, and pretending to feel my pulse, exclaimed, ‘Allah! Allah! here is danger—here is fever—not a moment must be lost! Youth, it is truly fortunate for thee that I came this way, for else thy life was gone. I have here a medicine, which thou must take, and that instantly.’ He pulled out a small glass bottle containing a dark-coloured liquid. ‘Here,’ continued he, ‘is a specific which kings might offer their crowns for in vain—swallow it at once, and I answer for thy life.’—‘Nay, what means all this?’ said I: ‘who sought for a physician?—I want neither thee nor thy medicines; nor will I take any thing from one whom I do not know.’—‘Not take it!’ cried the Ketkhodah, losing patience; ‘by the beard of the Prophet! but thou shalt. What wilfulness is this? Thou art ill, and it is the duty of all good Mussulmauns to minister to a sick brother, even against his will.’—‘What means this rudeness?’ exclaimed I, starting up—‘what insolence is this?—who dares to force me in this manner? nothing shall pass my throat without my own good will.’—‘He is mad! he is mad!’ cried the Ketkhodah: ‘his head is disordered by the fever; how can he judge what is for his good?—he must be bound! enter and hold him: enter, my son—he must be cured whether he will or no—enter and hold him while I give him the

dose !' The son, who was in waiting, now entered, and all three set upon me violently. I saw that my doom was now fixed—they were resolved to consider me delirious—to force medicine down my throat under such circumstances, if known, would seem a charitable act, and my death would be attributed to the violence of my disorder. I resolved to resist to the last, and started from the bed to seize my arms. The Ketkhodah rushed upon me, and the son grappled with my legs to throw me down, when a noise was heard at the door of the house, and a very authoritative voice called aloud for the Ketkhodah. Confounded and alarmed in his turn, he quitted his hold and ran to the door, while the others, seized with the same panic, fled and left me to recover myself as I could.

“Exhausted with the struggle, I lay breathless and panting for a while; and when able to move, I began slowly to dress myself, in order to go and discover the cause of so opportune an interruption, which I anticipated to be favourable to me; but before I had finished, the noise again approached, the light of many torches flashed on the twilight, and several people burst into the house, uttering a number of imprecations, while the Ketkhodah appeared to be excusing himself in very humble terms, and entreating their forbearance.

“ I was considering what this new event might portend, when two or three furoshes with torches and sticks in their hands, entered the room, and looking around them, cried, ‘ Ay, ay, this will do, this is the place !—down with your furshes ;* spread your numuds ; get every thing swept and neat ; the gentlemen will be here in a moment ;—but who have we here ? ’—‘ I beg to represent that this is a poor sick traveller, a little wrong in the head,’ said the Ketkhodah, in a very humble tone, and pointing to his own head. ‘ I have taken him in for charity ; but we shall provide for him elsewhere.’—‘ Ay, good, good,’ said the furosh ; ‘ come, bundle off, friend, you can’t stay here.’ I attempted to remonstrate, but in vain ; and they were about to apply their sticks, when I begged leave to remove my bed, and they assisted me to spread it in a corner of the outer room, when I again fell down giddy and sick with the exertion.

“ I comprehended, however, from what had passed, that some person of consequence was arriving at the village, and clearly saw that my safety must depend upon obtaining his protection. During the bustle, I was overlooked in my corner, and I resolved, when this person should reach the house, to throw myself at his feet, and tell my story, which I doubted not would meet with attention.

“ In about a quarter of an hour the trampling of

* Carpets.

horses announced the expected guests; and after a good many servants and loaded mules had passed the door, several persons alighted and entered. The Ketkhodah now made his appearance, humbly bowing, and ushering in a Persian seemingly of rank, and along with him, a man of handsome mien, who wore the dress of the Franks, such as I had seen in the commercial establishments of that people at Ispahan. These were followed by several Meerzas and servants, who all entered; and while the Frank, who seemed to be the principal person of the company, and the Persian Khan, were seated at the upper end, the rest stood on either side, or sat themselves down at the foot of the apartment.

“I never had spoken to a Frank; but they enjoyed a good character in Ispahan for liberality and charity; the officers of the Shah showed them favour; and though they were infidels, it was said that they were sincere and honest in their dealings. My case was a desperate one:—I could not be worse off than I was; so I resolved to make a powerful effort, and seizing a moment when no one was attending, I stepped quickly past the furoshes, and darting up to the spot where the Frank was seated, exclaimed, ‘May your prosperity increase! your servant has a petition.’

“Instantly a dozen of people rushed forward to seize me; among the foremost was the Ketkho-

dah, who, catching hold of my collar, was tearing me out of the room, when the voice of the Frank was heard, desiring them to let me alone—to let me speak. Slowly and sullenly they released me; and the Ketkhodah, bending on me a furious look, retired to his station at the lower end of the room.

“‘Who are you, and what do you want with me?’ said the Frank in good Persian.—‘I am a native of Ispahan, the son of a merchant there. I have been robbed, and narrowly escaped being murdered by the Ballooches of these districts, and would now solicit thy protection, and liberty to accompany thee in thy march.’

“‘I beg humbly to represent,’ said the Ketkhodah, coming forward, ‘that this poor wretch is disordered in his intellects, and is no fit person to journey with my lord.’—‘Sir,’ interrupted I in return, ‘I am ill indeed in body, but my mind is sound and unhurt: I have papers about me which vouch for the truth of what I have said; and I can explain why that man, who has been my host for the last night, wishes to deprive me of the protection I require.’—‘I beg,’—interrupted the Ketkhodah, running forward, and directing a threatening gesture towards me; but the Persian, whose name I now learned was Lootf Allee Beg, called out, ‘Stand back, fellow! if the young man has papers, let him produce

them; the Hakeem Saheb * will judge of his intellects better than thou.'

"With eagerness now I groped in my repository, and produced the letters of my father, and of Moollah Hurmooz, to Hajjee Mahomed Hassan, at Bunder Abbasee. When the Frank Hakeem, as I now understood him to be, saw the superscription, he exclaimed, 'For Hajjee Mahomed Hassan! for my good friend the Hajjee! why, what is thy name, young man?—But stay, the seals are all sound, they cannot have been opened; knowest thou aught of their contents? Let me but have proof that thou art the proper bearer of these letters, and I will protect thee, and see thee safe to Bunder.'

"To this I replied, that though I had not read the letters, yet that I could mention so much of their contents as would convince him of my identity; and accordingly, when he opened that of my father, it corresponded so exactly with what I had stated, that he became perfectly satisfied. 'Thy countenance is not that of a knave,' said he, 'and I have no doubt of thy tale.'—'Ah, my lord,' interrupted the pertinacious Ketkhodab, enraged at seeing his prey thus wrested from his grasp, 'do not trust his face or his

* *Hakeem* signifies "physician." *Saheb*—"gentleman—sir"—is always added in addressing or speaking of Europeans, as *Elchee Saheb*, "Ambassador," *Colonel Saheb*—"Colonel," &c.

story; he is an impostor—here is my son who can prove him to be so.’—‘Be silent, shameless!’ cried Lootf Allee Beg; ‘what can thy son know of this young merchant? But let him be called, and state what he has to tell.’

“My rascal of a guide now came forward, and uttered a farrago of falsehoods, so gross and so inconsistent, that the Frank quickly detected and exposed them by a few cross questions, and the Ketkhodah and his son were ordered from the room in disgrace.

“The moment they were gone, I approached the Frank Hakeem and Lootf Allee Beg; and entreated a few moments’ private conversation. After a few questions, the room was cleared; and leaning forward towards them, in a low voice, that I might not be overheard, I related to them shortly all that had occurred from the plundering of the caravan, but dwelling more minutely on the conduct of the Ketkhodah since I had entered his house.

“They were struck with amazement. ‘I knew the Ketkhodah to be a slippery rogue,’ observed Lootf Allee Beg; ‘but I had no suspicion that he was so double-dyed a scoundrel as this: it must be matter of enquiry to-morrow.’—‘Gentlemen,’ said I, ‘my illness at present renders me almost incapable to act or to think; but I would exert myself to the utmost to detect so great a

villain, and if I might offer advice, there are two modes of proceeding which may lead to proof of the facts I have stated. In yonder little recess I see the bowl of sherbet which my host endeavoured to prevail on me to drink; in the hurry of your arrival, probably, it has not been removed. Let it be kept till morning, when you may prove the truth of my suspicions, by giving it to some animal. Again, if the physician, such as I have described him, can be found, perhaps the medicine may still be in his possession—let it be offered to himself, or the Ketkhodah;—if they dare to take it, such a step will go far to prove their innocence; but if they refuse, it may be reasonably presumed that they are guilty. To-morrow, probably, a little activity among your Highness's servants may discover something regarding the Armenian and the Moollah, who have both, as I am convinced, been murdered by this villain, and the words of your servant will be confirmed.

“‘Barik-illah! the plan is a good one—it will do, never fear,’ exclaimed Lootf Allee; ‘but say nothing about it to-night. It is easy now to understand our friend the Ketkhodah’s reluctance to permit your accompanying us. I have little doubt that the whole place is a nest of thieves, and the Governor must have intimation of their doings.’

“‘As for you,’ said the Frank Hakeem, ‘you

shall be my care: business will detain us in this village for to-morrow; and by the next day, provided you will follow my directions, I think you may also be got into travelling order. I will give you medicine, and,' added he, smiling, 'you need not dread poison from me.' I made a low obeisance, and returned to the bottom of the room.

"The bowl of sherbet was secured, and orders were given by Lootf Allee Beg, to one of his confidential servants, to make a quiet search in the village for the pretended physician. Nothing transpired to give the Ketkhodah alarm. The Frank Hakeem, calling for a small wooden chest, took from it a powder, which, being mingled with some other preparation, he gave me, directing me to be kept warm; and I retired to sleep in a chamber occupied by some others of the party. Oh, how different were now my feelings from those of only a few hours back; and with what sincerity were my prayers and thanks addressed this night to Allah!

"In the morning the effects of the medicine had left me weak, but the pains in my bones and the burning heat were gone. A servant of the Hakeem came early to me with a draught, which he assured me would complete my cure; and, though it was extremely nauseous, I took it instantly, that my gratitude and confidence in his skill might be proved by my readiness.

"I learned this morning, that the pretended Hakeem, who turned out to be a relative and dependent of the Ketkhodah, as ill-favoured and ill-disposed as himself, had been taken hold of. A furosh had received some hints of the truth in conversing with one of the villagers, who was no friend to his chief; and the infamous impostor was found in his own house. He still retained the huge green turban, as described by me, and several small phials were found in his girdle and pockets, among which was that containing the dark-coloured liquid which he had endeavoured to administer to me.

"Upon being interrogated as to the nature of these things, he declared that they were medicines obtained from a travelling fakeer, and which were said to be very efficacious in removing disorders. 'I believe it,' said the Frank, 'and have you any objection to take a little yourself?'—'I do not stand in need of it;' returned the man; 'and in such case it would only do me harm.'—'You are right indeed,' rejoined the Hakeem; 'I can answer for this doing any one harm, but good to none.' The sherbet was now produced, and the Ketkhodah, who had been seized at the same time as the other, was brought forward; 'What say you to this sherbet?' said Lootf Allee Beg: 'have you any objection to drink of it? You know, I suppose, of

what choice ingredients it is composed—it is the same you had prepared for your sick guest—to do him good, to make him well, you know!’ The wretch started when he saw the bowl; he took it trembling, and raised it towards his mouth, but his hands refused to convey it farther: he dashed it from him, and uttering a loud shriek, ‘Bebuxsheed! Bebuxsheed!’* cried he, ‘forgive my wickedness! I am a sinner, I am a sinner!’—‘Yes, you villain, you are a sinner, and a murderer too.’ ‘No, no!’ cried the man, ‘I am not a murderer; the youth is still alive—he did not take the poison!’—‘But the Armenian did, you wretch!’ exclaimed Lootf Allee, in a thundering voice, and suddenly rising with a furious look to give force to his words and intimidate the criminal.—‘Allah!’ cried the conscience-struck wretch, staggering back. ‘But, no!’ continued he, recovering a little, ‘no one can say that—no one saw. No, no,—I am safe there.’—‘You are not safe,’ said Lootf Allee; ‘there was one by when you did it.’—‘No, no, I was alone,’ insisted the bewildered man,—‘not even my son was there.’—‘But God was!’ rejoined Lootf Allee, in a deep solemn tone;—‘your confession is complete. Secure both him and the infamous poisoning dog of a Hakeem; get hold of the Ketkhodah’s son too—they must

* “Pardon me! pardon me!”

go with us to Bunder—Akber Allee Khan shall learn their crimes, and deal with them as he thinks fit.

“I now discovered that the Frank physician was one of the gentlemen residing at the English factory at Bunder Abbassee. He was a man of great science, and very curious in all that regarded the antiquities of the country. He was a favourite with Akber Allee Khan, the Governor of Bunder, whose son he had saved from death by his skill, when labouring under one of the fevers that depopulate that unhealthy spot; and he had readily granted him a Mehmandar and guard, to attend him in a journey into the provinces of Fars and Kermaun, with permission to examine certain curious antiquities in both. Lootf Allee Beg, who accompanied the Hakeem, was a personal friend of his, and although of greater rank than required as Mehmandar on such an occasion, he was well pleased, on several accounts, to accompany the Hakeem. They were at this time on their return; and proposed setting off for Bunder, after a short excursion in the neighbourhood of Zenjaun; and Lootf Allee Beg, as an officer of the Governor's, though not especially sent for the purpose, deemed himself to be but performing his duty in arresting and carrying before his superior, criminals so atrocious as our host and his colleagues.

“The scene was thus changed—instead of being

a prisoner, sick, and the object of a deadly plot, I found myself carefully attended by kind and charitable people, while my intended murderers, securely bound, were soon to pay the forfeit of their crimes.

"The Hakeem and his companion returned from their intended excursion in the afternoon; and found me sufficiently recovered to partake, with great relish, of their evening meal. I then related my adventures more at large; and the Frank was interested with the account I gave of myself, and pleased with the replies I made to his numerous enquiries. But I did not at this time think fit to mention the extent of my property, or the means by which it had come into my possession."

CHAPTER IX.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY—

BUNDER-ABBASSEE.

“EARLY next morning we left Zenjaun, and halting one night on the road, we reached Bunder-Abbassee on the afternoon of the following day. On reaching the summit of the pass, which commands a view of the level country below, we could distinguish the city standing on the edge of a boundless plain of deep blue colour, which faded away till it mingled with the distant sky. It was the sea—it was the Gulf of Ormuz—and I shall never forget the sensations I experienced in thus first beholding the mighty deep. The ocean is at all times, and to all men, an object of great interest ;—what must it have been to me then, who had never seen a piece of water larger than the Zeinderood* in flood, or the cisterns and canals in the palace of the Shah?

“The Hakeem was pleased and amused with the

* The river which flows past Ispahan.

delight I expressed ; and keeping me close to himself, he described to me some of the wonders connected with this vast reservoir of the waters of the world. All this tended to excite still more the desire for travelling, which had in some degree been suspended by late occurrences.

“As we approached the margin of the sea, my curiosity was still farther attracted by the great vessels which rode in silent pride upon the bosom of the waters. ‘Are these,’ said I, ‘the ships of which I have read and heard so much? Are these the floating habitations which waft men and merchandize from one shore to another?’ A new source of interest to me, and of amusement to my protector, was thus every moment opened ; and he took pleasure in gratifying my curiosity. Presently we reached the town, and riding through the bazaars, all gay with the richest merchandize, we came to the factory of England, distinguished by the angularly crossed flag peculiar to that nation. Here we halted, and the Hakeem was welcomed by several of his countrymen, while I remained for a while uncertain how to act,—unwilling on the one hand to quit my new protector, with whose manners I was greatly delighted, yet, on the other, afraid to intrude myself into the house of himself and his friends.

“He did not keep me long in suspense,—‘Aboo Taleb,’ said he, ‘if you are content to receive

the hospitality of a Frank, you are welcome to remain here with us; which, at least until you have made your arrangements, I think you had better do; and in truth, if appearances are to be trusted, I fear you are likely to require my aid, which I shall willingly afford. My servants, who are of your faith, will prepare you a place of rest; meantime, enter with me.

“I was now introduced to five or six Frank gentlemen, to whom my protector, speaking in his own language, shortly related my story, and who all received me with perfect kindness and civility. It was a scene of the most perfect novelty to me. I now felt that I was a traveller; that I had already met with some of those extraordinary sights and wonders of which I had heard so much. But I was soon disabled from observation, and the prognostics of my friend the Hakeem were justified sooner than he had himself expected. A certain creeping shiver, which I had felt for some time, but which I had attributed to the fatigue of the journey, now very sensibly increased, and was succeeded by deadly sickness and pains through all my limbs. There was no need of explaining to my friend what his experienced eye at once detected—he conducted me to a small but comfortable apartment, furnished with a carpet and bedding, where, after administering to me such medicine as he saw fit, he left me to repose.

“ I had sufficient recollection to make up such portions of my clothes as contained my valuables, into a parcel, which I deposited carefully under my pillow. The precaution was prudent and fortunate; for the fever which now came on, rendered me insensible for three days, during which time it would have been dangerous to leave my property scattered about.

“ I recovered my senses at the end of that time, but it was some weeks before I was restored to health, and during that period the Hakeem attended me with the care of a father and the skill of a sage. He had communicated my arrival to Hadjee Mahomed Hussun, to whom my letters were addressed, and who came to see me: but he, considering me to be in excellent hands, had not thought it expedient to interfere with the arrangements that had been made for my comfort.

“ The tedious course of my recovery need not be detailed. The unwearied kindness of my friend the Hakeem, and his evident partiality for me, so greatly increased the esteem and attachment which I felt for him, that I resolved, if permitted, to remain with him as long as I should continue at Bunder, and was delighted to receive from him an invitation to that effect. It is to this visit, to the effects of my intercourse with this worthy man and some of his companions, that I attribute whatever may be upright or liberal, firm or judicious

in my character and conduct. Principles of virtue may have been implanted there by nature, but they lay dormant under a mass of ignorance and conceit. It was by comparing myself with men of real acquirements, that I discovered my own ignorance and mortified my vanity, and by assiduous attention to their instructions, that I acquired the little real knowledge I possess.

“As soon as I became convalescent, the Hakeem, whose duty occupied but a small portion of his time, would come and sit for hours with me, conversing on various subjects. His acquaintance with the Persian tongue was so perfect, that he talked in it almost as fluently as in his own, so that there was nothing to impede the free interchange of sentiment. He never wearied of hearing my accounts of Ispahan : of its palaces and wonders, of the court and its ceremonies, of its endless bazaars and numerous colleges, of its inhabitants and their manners and customs. In return, he would tell me of the different nations of Frank-estan—their governments, their wars, and political relations. He enquired into the state of learning, of the sciences and useful inventions of Persia ; and astonished me, in return, with accounts of the wonderful discoveries and arts of Europe.

“He saw that I was enamoured of science, but was led astray by delusive views on every subject that had employed my attention ; and he en-

deavoured to convince me of my errors, and point out to me the true paths to knowledge. At first the wilful blindness of my vanity and pride rejected his proffered guidance; I turned a deaf ear to his arguments, and refused assent to his conclusions. But truth is all-powerful: the Hakeem was an able reasoner, and peculiarly happy in his illustrations; the light began to dawn upon my errors, and showed their magnitude and absurdity. I now listened more attentively, and by degrees acquired a knowledge of many fundamental principles in general science, which served as points from whence to start—as a basis on which to reason. But, above all, he taught me to scorn and fling away the jargon of mock science; to bring every proposition to the test of reason and judgment, before acquiescing in the opinions or adopting the systems of others, however specious, however venerable. ‘Providence,’ would he say, ‘has gifted you with observation and judgment:—you are qualified to decide for yourself;—divest yourself of prejudice—examine carefully, consider deliberately; but act for yourself—and do not accept of assistance from others, in matters which only require the exercise of your own good-sense and discernment.’

“The conversation not unfrequently turned on the subject of our respective religious persuasions; and my Frank friend would try to convince me

of the inconsistency and absurdity of the doctrines of Islamism. He did not hold forth against its tenets with vehemence, but rather sought to reason them calmly one by one, arming his arguments at times with the keen edge of ridicule. But here I was firm—my faith, the faith of my fathers, the true religion of Mahomet, I never would abandon. However much his arguments might perplex, or his sneers provoke me, they never shook my religious principles—*La-illah-e-ilullah ! Mahummud rusool-ullah !**

“Nevertheless his conversation on this subject had one—and whatever bigots or enthusiasts may say, I presume to think, a salutary effect. My mind became more liberal in such matters ;—I saw, that though Islamism must be the only true path to Paradise, the followers of Issaw,† have many powerful arguments to support their creed ; and that opinions professed by so many and such able men, are neither lightly to be despised, nor rashly to be condemned. It produced in me a spirit of toleration, a desire for liberty of conscience to all men ;‡ and a persuasion that he who acts up to his own standard of rectitude, and who guides

* “There is no God but God, and Mahomet is his Prophet.”—The Mahometan creed.

† Jesus Christ.

‡ That this effect has been sometimes produced upon the minds of Mahometans, by such means as those related in the text, the translator can himself testify.

himself by the rules which are taught him by his conscience and the religion he may profess, becomes acceptable in the eyes of his Maker, and has reason to look for his reward in a future state of existence.

“I shall not enlarge any farther upon these conversations; I only desired to give you some idea of their nature, and of their effect upon my mind, which, combined with the events at Yezd, and the exertions called forth on my journey from thence to Bunder, were such as changed the whole colour of my character. From a raw, ignorant, and conceited stripling, come abroad into the world to gaze and stare at its every-day occurrences as wonders, I became a grave, reflective, silent youth, fond of listening to others, but neither ashamed nor unable to take a share in conversation; and, above all, fond of exercising my reasoning powers on every thing that came before me. I became a favourite with all the Franks, and, as I have already observed, associated principally with them.

“Meanwhile, I did not neglect my worldly affairs. I found Hadjee Mahomed Hussun, a shrewd, intelligent merchant, of great reputed wealth, enjoying a good character for honesty and fair dealing in the place, and the native merchant with whom my English friends transacted all their business. He consoled me for my losses—observed that such accidents were too frequently the fate of travellers

to be thought of after they were passed, and that I might deem myself fortunate in escaping with life and the money I had about my person. He professed a great regard for my father; but spoke of Moollah Hurmooz as something almost superhuman; as a wealthy, and a good man, in spite of his detestable religion; whose agents were to be found in every part of Asia, and whose power was like that of kings. Moreover, he professed himself ready to supply me with goods, money, or advice, and, lowering his voice, advised me to be cautious as to my English friends. They were honest and good people, he admitted; but then they were Kaffers,* and that in his eyes was sufficient to damn them, root and branch. He appeared to dread their influence over my religious principles, and I found it impossible to quiet his fears entirely: he ended by shrugging his shoulders, and saying 'You are the best judge, perhaps; but I wash my hands of consequences, if you are resolved to reside here any longer.'

"I placed my money to the best advantage in the Hadjee's hands; but did not venture to speak of my jewels; and it was not until after a residence of more than two months in the Hakeem's house, during which time my admiration and esteem were excited by a course of upright and liberal conduct, and hearing the character which I

* Infidels.

had drawn from this behaviour confirmed by all men in the place, I thought myself justified in entrusting him with my secret. The possession of so many valuable things so loosely kept about me was uncomfortable, and I very much desired to dispose of them more securely ;—to effect this I craved his advice.

“The story I related interested the Hakeem, and he was now too well acquainted with me to entertain any doubts of my veracity, when I explained the manner in which I had become possessor of the jewels. It was a romantic adventure, he said, but so was the whole of my journey and story. He confessed, that though Hadjee Mahomed Hussun enjoyed a good reputation for honesty, he thought the temptation too great to be wisely placed in his way ; times looked gloomy, and in times of trouble, changes were often so great and so frequent, that property might very easily be lost.—I might deposit my valuables in the treasury of the factory, if I thought fit ; but, admitting it even to be secure there against political changes, the danger to human life in so unhealthy a climate was so great, and the change of hands might be so sudden in the factory, that he hardly could advise me to run the risk of it.

“ ‘ But what,’ continued he, ‘ are your own views ? Do you mean to follow up the commercial adventure projected by your father, and return to

Ispahan by the way of Sheerauz? Or are you still bent upon travelling?—if so, whither do you mean to go?’ I paused a little; I had given the subject long consideration, and, whatever ought to have been the decision of prudence, the desire I felt of seeing the world prevailed over every other motive; and I resolved to gratify it, cost what it might.

“I was now an independent individual; the goods which had been entrusted to me had been lost, and the adventure brought to a close, by no fault of mine. My responsibility to my father was at an end; I had been exonerated by events over which I had no control. Money and means were in my hands, and I resolved to employ a share of them in pursuit of my favourite object. I signified this decision to the Hakeem, and farther stated, that I had thoughts of bending my course towards India, a country of which the reputed wonders, magnificence, and wealth had excited in me a strong desire to know something from personal observation.

“My friend observed that although he could not entirely defend my prudence in thus giving up a life of comparative ease and security for the hazards of travel in a country but little known, yet the enterprise my resolution implied, corresponded so much with his own disposition, that he felt rather inclined to applaud than to condemn

me for it. 'You will, of course,' continued he, 'acquaint your father with the circumstances which have led you to determine on this course, so that he may be spared the misery of believing that his son is dead or lost to him.'

"This it was my full intention to do; and after a full consultation upon my affairs, it was resolved, that I should proceed as soon as an opportunity occurred, to the Frank settlement of Bombay, to which my friends at Bunder could give me useful introductions, and from whence it would be easy to bend my steps to any part of India.

"My wishes naturally led me to visit the court of the Emperor Mahomed Shah, who then occupied the throne of Dehlee, and whose luxury and magnificence were the theme of every traveller; and I resolved to carry with me a few of my valuable jewels, both as a resource in case of accident, and with the view of disposing of them to better advantage than was likely to be the case elsewhere. With regard to the rest, I came to the resolution of leaving them in the hands of my English friends, desiring that a portion of them should be turned into money, as occasion might offer, and be remitted either in goods or in bills to my father at Ispahan, as property deposited in his hands until the owner should claim it by virtue of certain documents agreed upon. The remaining portion was to be sealed up and kept for me

in the treasury of the factory; but in case of any political occurrences that might affect the property of the English, the packet concealed in a bale of goods was to be given in charge for me to Hadjee Mahomed Hussun.

“My arrangements were at length completed. To provide as far as possible against the risks of the road, I carried but little money about me, trusting for supplies to letters of credit on Bombay; and I secured my jewels with great care about my person. These precautions proved fortunate in the end, as I shall soon have occasion to show you.

“As no European vessels chanced to be sailing at this time, I was forced to put up with the wretched accommodations of an Arab Dow,* which had come from the port of Muscat, and was engaged in a trading voyage which was to terminate at Bombay. It was neither a very comfortable, nor a very safe conveyance; but being the only one likely to occur for some time, I thought it better to submit to these defects, than to so great a probable delay.

“It was not without a painful emotion that I quitted my good friends at Bunder. I presented those to whom I had been most attached, with small tokens of my regard, and forced upon my friend, the Hakeem, a ruby ring of the purest

* A particular kind of vessel used in these seas.

water; while he, in return, gave me an English watch and a packet of medicines, accompanied with directions for their use. Valuable as these were to me, I prized still more the esteem and friendship of the donor; nor can I ever cease to remember with gratitude the incalculable advantage which my character undoubtedly received, in feeling and in principle, from my intercourse with these kind Franks.

CHAPTER X.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S ADVENTURES CONTINUED.—THE SHIPWRECK.

THE young merchant paused at this part of his narrative. "It is late, gentlemen," he observed, "and you may wish for repose. If you can put up with such accommodations as you see, I shall be happy to make you as comfortable as I can in my house, till business may call you abroad in the morning; if not, my servants shall attend you home, and I shall hope for your company some other evening, when the remainder of your servant's story shall be at your command."

Fouje Allee, who for some time past had been nodding in his seat, and who was now leaning back against the wall sound asleep, started up and began to rub his eyes, when the voice of our host ceased. After muttering a few incoherent words, he rose, saying he must go home; and as I feared that our companion in the house might now be-

come alarmed at our absence, I thought it best to accompany him.

As we took leave of our host, he beckoned to a servant, who brought in two purses, one of which he laid before Fouje Allee, the other before me. "I know not," said the young man, "how to express the gratitude I feel for the service you have rendered me, gentlemen; but I entreat you to accept of these purses, as a small mark of its sincerity; and be assured, that if I can be useful to you on any future occasion, you may freely command me, and all that I have."

Great as were my pecuniary necessities, I could not help feeling a strong reluctance at receiving, in so open a manner, so considerable a sum of money from a stranger, on whom I had no claim, save that of having rendered him an accidental service; and I involuntarily drew back and excused myself from accepting it; but the young man appeared to be so greatly hurt at this refusal, that remembering the declared largeness of his fortune, and convinced of his sincerity in desiring to give us a proof of his gratitude, I at length agreed to receive it;* and taking our leave, but

* It is to be remembered, that presents of money from inferiors to superiors, and *vice versa*, are very common in Eastern countries; that obligations, or services, are frequently requited, or favour expressed in this way, so that the Kuzzilbash's acceptance of money on this occasion involved even less of degradation in the eyes of his countrymen, than he seems to have conceived himself.

declining the attendance of his servants, we walked homewards.

I saw the eyes of my companion, Fouje Allee, who had by no means sympathized with my reluctance at availing ourselves of the young merchant's bounty, open wide with delight when he felt the weight of the purse which fell to his share, and he could scarcely contain his joy within decent bounds until he reached the street. 'Shukur Allee! Shuker Khodah! thanks be to thee, O Allee! for this good gift!—A fortunate day! a most happy day! Why, Ismael, if this be gold, there is half a maun* of it at least! That lad must be made of tomauns, to scatter them after this fashion. Did I not tell you he would prove a golden prize? Ah! by the might of Solymaun, we shall make a fortune of him.'—"Rapacious wolf!" cried I, indignant at his sordid greediness; "is that stomach of thine never to be satisfied? Is not such a princely gift as this sufficient to content even thy ever-craving maw? And from a man too whose throat you would have allowed to be cut before your eyes! One word more of such an intent, one demonstration at imposing on the generous nature of our noble young acquaintance, and I will expose you to him. Yes! and all the interest I have with our commander and the General

* A Persian measure of about 7½lbs. weight.

shall be exerted to punish and confound thee for thy disgraceful extortion."

"Whoo! whoo!—here is an uproar, here is a passion! and all for hinting at giving just a gentle squeeze to a rich Ryot.* You will never make any thing of a Gholaum, my lad; you'll never do for a collector of tribute;—the merest ass of a Ketkhodah in the country would laugh at your beard! But I suppose you want to have the plucking of the pigeon to yourself:—well, I care not! Fouje Allee can strike game for himself; he scorns to tear it from the talons of another."

"I squeeze? I pluck the pigeon?" exclaimed I, in great indignation; "by the head of my father! you little know me; you judge of me by yourself, Fouje Allee. I would he were as safe from others as he is from me! But I will not stand by and see a noble animal torn to pieces by jackals."

"Jackals!—take care you do not find them to be lions," muttered Fouje Allee! "Well, well, be it so; look to your own affairs, cook your own mess, and I will see to mine, and let no more of this be between us."

When we reached home and examined our presents, we found that each purse contained fifty

* Ryot, a peasant, a tiller of the ground, one of the lower ranks: used here contemptuously, and in opposition to the nobles and court dependents, to whom they pay rent or tribute.

tomauns in gold, a sum that to one who was sufficiently embarrassed, proved a most acceptable relief, and which appeared to satisfy Fouje Allee himself.

When I proposed, next evening, that he should accompany me to the young merchant's house, and listen to the continuation of his story, he shook his head, "No, no! I love his gold well; but as to his story, I am wearied of it already, and there is no chance of such another sequel as this to his dinner," said he, chucking some of the tomauns; "Do you go and listen to his sermons—I am better engaged—I mean to make use of some of these pretty playthings to-night."

The young man received me with the same courtesy as formerly; and though he civilly regretted the absence of my friend, it was yet easy to see that he reconciled himself to it without difficulty. We partook of an excellent dinner as before, and after smoking a calleeoon, and settling ourselves comfortably for the evening, he resumed his narrative as follows.

"We quitted the roads of Bunder, and after taking in some salt at the barren rock of Ormuz, sailed straight down the Gulf. It would be difficult for me to describe my feelings on thus, for the first time, committing myself to the mercy of the ocean, and in so frail a machine as that which now bore me from Bunder. Astonishment at the

power of man, who thus renders the winds and the waves subservient to his purposes, was mingled with awe at the seeming helplessness of our condition, as the breeze wafted us from shore and from our friends. Confidence, however, arose by degrees, as we skimmed in safety over the gentle undulations of the water; and I felt a strange exultation as the vessel rose upon each wave, and dashed the foam from its long prow. But soon my head became uneasy; my eyes began to reel; giddiness and sickness succeeded, and I was forced to retire to the miserable bed prepared for me below, and to yield to that death-like disorder of the frame, which almost every one experiences on first going to sea, and which prostrates the weak and the strong alike.

“It was several days before I could again bear the vessel’s motion upon deck, and by that time we were in sight of the black and arid rocks of Muscat, where the commander of the vessel, having business to transact, remained for a week. I shall not detain you by any attempt to describe this miserable place, which is the only harbour in a long tract of rocky, inhospitable coast, but which, in spite of its desert appearance, is by no means deficient in the means of sustaining life. We feasted on its dates and its fish, and laid in fruit and other refreshments for the rest of our voyage.

“An Arab vessel, unlike those belonging to the

Franks, whatever be her ultimate destination, is accustomed to coast along shore as much as possible. This enables the crew to trade as they go, and to take advantage of any creek or harbour that may offer shelter upon the approach of bad weather. But, besides the inconvenient delay attendant on this mode of navigation, it is liable to many serious dangers, of which we were fated to experience a most distressing proof: for when, after a tedious voyage, which, with all its frequent stops, had produced little either to gratify curiosity or promote comfort, we reached the Gulf of Cutch, a severe tempest blowing directly on shore, arose so suddenly that we could not escape it by running into any place of safety; and we were unfortunately so near the land, that all the efforts of her unskilful crew to keep her out to sea were unavailing. The consequence was, that she drove on shore, and the waves broke over her so violently, that several men were instantly washed overboard and perished.

“In truth, there seemed but small likelihood at first that any of our lives would be saved; for so violent was the surf, that in less than two hours the vessel parted and broke in pieces. Most of the seamen got hold of fragments of the wreck, which carried such as could retain their grasp fast towards the shore; but many were washed off,

and drowned before they reached it. For my part, I was fortunate enough to fasten upon a large beam, along with three or four others of the crew, and after floating about for several hours, until night had closed in, we were thrown upon a sandy beach, where the sea still broke with a force that threatened to dash us to pieces.

“Our night was a dreary one: it was not cold indeed, for the warm season had now set in; but we had lost every thing; we were wet, hungry, and wounded, and could not exactly tell where we were. We knew, however, that the whole of this coast was infested by hordes of pirates; that the inhabitants were inhospitable to strangers, and accustomed to plunder every one whom chance or misfortune threw helpless on their shores.

“When morning broke, we were joined by some others of the crew; and we were consulting together on what was best to be done, when one or two horsemen made their appearance over a sandy ridge not far from where we stood. Upon discovering us, they set up a shout, which quickly brought up a party of thirty or forty armed men on foot, who immediately rushed forward to seize us.

“We were totally unarmed, and resistance against such odds would have been madness; so we submitted to have our arms bound—an operation which they performed rather roughly, but

without offering us any other ill treatment; and then they led us towards the horsemen, one of whom we soon discovered to be their chief.

“The dress of my companions sufficiently betokened their country; and one of the party, a negro, came forward, and enquired in tolerable Arabic, who we were, and whence we had come. Being satisfied on these points, and convinced, by the quantity of wreck which had floated on shore, that our vessel had indeed gone to pieces; a party was left to collect such articles as might be washed up by the sea, while the rest, along with the chief, led us, still bound, towards the interior of the country.

“After a march of two hours over barren, sandy ground, we reached a village of miserable appearance: the houses being constructed of mud or date-tree leaves, and surrounded by some groves of the trees themselves. Here we halted, and were welcomed in a very discordant manner by the clamour of a multitude of ragged, dark-coloured women and filthy children, who sallied out to see the prisoners, and congratulate the men upon their prize.

“We were now again questioned more particularly regarding our several countries and ranks; and here such of us as had any clothes worth the taking were forced to give them up. Among the rest they took my turban, my kabba, ulcaluc, and

girdle. In the former of these were my letters of introduction, which were totally destroyed by salt-water; and the latter contained the little money I carried with me. But the precautions I had taken in concealing my valuables in a worthless pair of old drawers, and fastened in a curious manner beneath my arms, were happily successful: neither my drawers nor shirt were thought worth their taking; so they were left upon me, and my appearance altogether was too mean to create a suspicion of my possessing any thing more valuable than the money which had been found in my girdle.

“We now were separated, and distributed among different masters. As for me, it appeared that I was to be sent still farther into the country; and after receiving a very scanty meal of fish with a few grains of rice, two of my companions and myself were once more forced to accompany our guard, and set off. The heat was dreadful, and I suffered greatly from that and from fatigue, nor was it till near nightfall that we came in sight of a village, rather superior to the last in appearance, which I found was to be the termination of our journey.

“A chief of superior rank resided here, and to him, it appeared, I was to belong. Half-dead with fatigue, I was glad to be permitted to creep into a corner, and repose my weary limbs upon a mat, which, together with a dirty cotton cloth to cover

me, were given me by an old man, who pitied my youth and miserable condition.

“ Next day, my two companions were sent, as I understood, to labour in a garden at some distance, and of them I saw no more. My fate would have been the same; but the chief, who was pleased with my appearance, resolved to keep me near his person. He was a worshipper of images, like all the Hindoos, and of that caste which they call Rajepoots, who are all soldiers and chiefs, and who pride themselves on a fancied descent from certain ancient fabulous heroes. He was what is called a Zemindar, or landholder, in that country, possessing a considerable tract of country, with a good many villages and several strong-holds, to garrison which he retained a considerable number of soldiers. By means of these he maintained himself as an independent lord, although he acknowledged a degree of nominal obedience to the chief of Bhooj, and, in common with most of his neighbours, was owner of certain piratical boats, which committed depredations upon the coast for their master's behoof. Among his retainers were several Arabs and other Mahometans; and he intended to enroll me in the troop which was more particularly attached to his person.

“ The honour thus intended me, was in no other wise to my taste, than as it exempted me from more unpleasant duties. I was better fed and

clothed than my fellow-sufferers, and not ill used, as I had reason to believe some of them were: but you may suppose, Sir, that whatever might be the comparative mildness with which my misfortune had visited me, I still felt it heavily, particularly as it interfered with all my plans of travel. My thoughts, therefore, became wholly bent on endeavouring to extricate myself from bondage.

“I will not enlarge on the many disappointments I suffered, and the despair to which I was sometimes reduced by the hopelessness of my situation. My distress was augmented by finding no one in the family of my master with whom I could freely converse in my own language. I picked up enough, indeed, of theirs to make my wants known; but Persian or Arabic were lost to me.

“About two months after my shipwreck, a party of soldiers, the garrison of a fort at some distance, came to the village of our chief. Among them were some Arabs, and it was delightful to meet with men in whose language I could converse with ease. One of them was a young man, a native, as he told me, of Bahrein, and connected with some respectable families there. By degrees an intimacy grew up, and we communicated to one another such parts of our respective stories as each deemed it prudent to disclose. He had been taken by a pirate vessel about two years before, and, though anxious to get rid of his chains, had

hitherto found no means of effecting his escape, and still less of procuring a sufficient sum for his ransom. 'Ransom?' demanded I; 'and would they give you your freedom for a sum of money?'—'Certainly!' replied the young Arab; 'it is only because this cannot be done, that I or any of us are detained here;—they will sell any of us for money. If my friends could be informed of my situation, they would doubtless negotiate for my release; but I have tried to effect this for these two years past in vain.'

"'And suppose that any of us could make offer of the money, or its value, here?' enquired I, 'would they accept it, and liberate him?'—'Liberate him!' echoed the Arab, with a scornful laugh; 'do you believe they are such fools? Did they leave a single piece of money to one of us when we were taken? or even a decent piece of clothes? No,—if such could be the case, they would seize the money without ceremony, and keep the captive as before. But I fancy none of us are in condition to make the experiment;—at least, if they met with the same kind of usage that I did—stripped stark naked, and soundly beaten for resisting them into the bargain!'

"It was the first time that the idea of ransom had entered my head. Willingly would I have given the best of my hidden treasures—ay, or the whole of them, for my liberty; but the Arab's hint of the danger to be apprehended from any

indiscreet offer of the sort was not lost upon me ; and I saw but slender chance of receiving any benefit from the valuables I had preserved from plunder. Nevertheless, the matter dwelt in my mind, and gave birth to a hope which I had not before experienced.

“ Not many days after this conversation, a party of strangers came to our village. They were the agents, as I understood, of merchants residing at Surat and Bombay, who were returning from a journey through certain districts, which they made annually for commercial purposes. Being struck with the peculiar garb worn by some of their number, I enquired of what class or nation they might be ; and was informed they were Parsees, or worshippers of fire—a race of foreigners who, both at Surat and Bombay, had grown into vast importance, from the wealth they had acquired in commerce.

“ Parsees ?—Fire-worshippers ?—my mind was carried back to Yezd, and I thought with a sigh of my kind and hospitable friend Moollah Hurmooz. Suddenly a thought flashed across me, which brought all the blood to my face. The paper !—the paper given me by the Moollah !—if ever it was to be of service to me, now was the time ! The Moollah had enjoined me, if ever I were in want or distress, to show it to any of his nation whom I should meet, and to depend upon his aid.—I resolved to try its efficacy ; it could but be

one more disappointment: the experiment could not make me worse off than I was.

“I had secured this valuable document, apart from my other papers, with great care, along with my jewels. The other letters were destroyed by the water; this remained, as I believed, unhurt, but forgotten, until brought to my recollection by the circumstances just related. I got it prepared; hope would not be repressed—I tried to be calm, but was agitated beyond control. I felt that my fate was at stake, and, in spite of all my philosophy, I experienced the most painful anxiety.

“The principal Parsee was a portly man of cheerful countenance, with large intelligent eyes. My hopes and confidence grew as I watched the good-humoured expression of his face. The only difficulty was to obtain an interview unnoticed. The merchants had business with my master, who received them in his hall of audience, while his servants, among whom I remained, attended in the court below. When they retired, I contrived to mingle in their retinue, along with some others, whose curiosity led them to accompany them to their tents. It was not until they were turning to dismiss their attendants, that I summoned resolution to linger behind my companions, and advancing a step or two nearer the Parsee, in a low voice, and in the Persian tongue, I said, ‘My lord,

your servant has a petition !"—The Parsee looked surprised, but readily replied in the same language, ' Are you a Persian, then ? What do you require of me ?'—" That you would grant me a moment's private conversation. I have a matter of some importance to communicate.'

" He spoke for a moment aside to one of his companions ; and then beckoning me to follow, led the way to one of the tents.—' What do you require then ?' said he ; ' speak confidently, we are alone.'—" May it please you to look at this paper,' replied I, holding out to him the note of Moollah Hurmooz. I observed that he started as he looked at it ; but when he had unfolded it, and cast his eye over the writing, his whole countenance changed from the quiet good-humour it had exhibited but the moment before, to an expression of the utmost surprise and joyful animation. He hastily raised the paper to his forehead, and after muttering to himself a few passionate exclamations, which I could not understand,—' Good heavens ! young man ! cried he, ' who are you, and how came you possessed of this paper ? Know you what it is ? know you the writer of it ?'—" ' The writer of it,' replied I, delighted at these favourable symptoms, ' is the excellent and respected Moollah Hurmooz of Yezd, under whose hospitable roof I lived a guest for more than two months ; and who, when I quitted it to pursue

my journey, presented me with that paper, assuring me, that, if ever I were in distress, upon presenting it to any of his race, he would not fail to serve me at my need, be it ever so great.'

" 'And well does the respected Moollah know his brethren!—and truly shalt thou find that he has spoken, young man,' returned the Parsee, with animation;—'for there is not one of the poorest or meanest of our race who would not risk his last rupee to serve the bearer of this paper. You have already said enough to convince me that you are the person it describes: fortunate, indeed, you are, to have gained such a friend; and all I require now, is to know how I may serve you.'

" 'There is not time at present,' said I, 'to tell you all my story; it is sufficient just now to say that I am a prisoner to the chief of this village, wrecked upon his coast, plundered and detained by his people. I am informed he will give liberty to me or to any of his captives on receiving such ransom as he may fix. I am his prisoner, and cannot negotiate this matter with him. But you are at liberty, and doubtless in safety; procure my freedom, promise him the sum he may require, carry me with you to Bombay, and you shall be repaid, be it what it may.'

" 'Receive it back, young man?' rejoined the Parsee; 'little know you those to whose agent

you are now speaking, Be the ransom demanded what it will—be it ten times your weight in gold, Nosovanjee Bomajee will deem it as the dust beneath his feet, to the gratification of proving his regard for Moollah Hurmooz, by giving his aid to the man whom he has honoured with this high proof of his confidence. But let us deal cautiously; there needs not to lavish wealth unnecessarily—let me manage the matter; rest contented, you shall be free to accompany us to Bombay, and on easy terms too. But now you had better retire; we must avoid doing prejudice to our cause by arousing suspicion.’

“I need not tell you, Sir, with how light a heart I left my friend the Parsee, and how I longed to know the result of his negotiation. But there was no need for anxiety. Cowasjee—so was the Parsee named,—was an agent of the well-known Nosovanjee Bomajee, whose dealings and whose riches were unbounded as his liberality, and whose commercial transactions, extending even into these remote and rude districts, gave his agents an influence with its petty chiefs, which even their acknowledged superior did not possess. So great was the benefit derived from the purchases they made of its produce, and the speculations they carried on in different quarters, that wild as were its inhabitants, these merchants travelled through it in perfect security. The request

of Cowasjee for permission to carry me along with him, was immediately agreed to, upon payment of a moderate sum; and I even prevailed on him to extend the favour to my Arab friend, who had been the first to suggest to me the expedient of a ransom.

“In the course of a few days, I once more embarked along with my new friends; and after a short and prosperous voyage, arrived safely at Bombay.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY CONTINUED.—

THE PARSEE.

“IF the first view of Bunder Abbassee, with its factories, its open road, and shipping, had struck me with pleasure and surprise, how much greater was my amazement and delight, when, after a night of violent rain, the sun arose in his brightness, the clouds retired, resting in dense masses on the distant mountains, and the green, palm-crowned island of Bombay, with its frowning castle and crowded harbour, presented itself full in our view !

“When first I came upon deck, the eyes of the Parsees were still fixed in mute adoration on their guiding luminary, as bursting through the huge mass of clouds, which still lowered over the land, he threw a broad flood of radiance over every object around us. The dark bastions of the fort were gilded by his beams ; the white buildings,

the sails and masts of the vessels glittered in the distance, and every wave, as it rippled by, sparkled like liquid gold.

“Even though abhorring, as a faithful Mussulmaun is bound to do, the idolatry of my benefactors, and lamenting, as I did, their errors, there was yet something in the glorious scene before me that half excused their idolatry; and the horror and contempt which I felt at their profane adoration, was lost in contemplating its splendid object.

“The beauty and variety of the scene increased as we approached the land. Multitudes of little vessels were skimming in every direction upon the face of the waters. The light morning-breeze was courted by a thousand sails. A bustle might be discerned on board the huge dark ships as we passed by them: the sailors were busy aloft, loosening the sails to dry, or working among the rigging of the tall masts. Already had the business of the day commenced, and boats loaded with merchandize were to be seen slowly towed along, or lying alongside the ships, while their contents were hoisted on board to the song of the crew.

“Nor did the shore exhibit a less animated spectacle: the wharfs and beach were crowded with people and with cattle; the country beyond them was studded with handsome habitations; white buildings peeped through groves of tall cocoa-nut and palm-trees; and here and there the cupola of a

mosque, or the spire of a pagoda, sparkled in the sun : a spirit of life and animation pervaded every thing around us, which, after the dreary captivity and uncomfortable voyage I had just endured, was exhilarating and delightful beyond expression.

“ I shall not attempt to describe to you the endless objects of curiosity and admiration, which at this time, and for long afterwards, continued to arrest my attention ; it would draw out my narrative to a tedious length, and it never would be in my power to do them justice. When we had landed, my friend Cowasjee led me, wondering and gazing around me, to the house of his kinsman and principal, Nosovanjee Bomajee, who, as I have before-mentioned, was the chief Parsee merchant in Bombay—a man of enormous wealth, and equal magnificence of spirit.

“ I found this gentleman, like a true merchant, seated in a small interior apartment, attended by three or four of his people, and engaged in listening to some dispatches read by a secretary. The room was fitted up simply : it was not in the decoration of his office or person, that Nosovanjee Bomajee displayed his magnificence. The walls were plastered white, and the floor was covered with fine mats, over which at one end, where sat the master and his secretaries, was spread a white cloth. Green blinds at every window mellowed the glare of light, which was farther tempered by the

shade of a verandah, or arcaded gallery, which surrounded the whole building. Two or three larger apartments, similarly fitted up, were filled with secretaries, or clerks, who sat in a row near the walls, with boxes before them to contain their books and papers. Several menials, in different parts of the rooms, refreshed both their master and his assistants, by agitating the air with large fans made of palm-leaves:—a number of Hircarrahs,* ready to receive orders, stood ranged in the verandah without, and three or four Palankeens were in readiness, with their Hamauls, or bearers, who, with their characteristic listlessness, were slumbering in the shade, or smoking from a cocoa-nut water-pipe in every corner. The building was surrounded by warehouses and offices of different kinds, for the reception of goods; and the whole, inclosed by a wall, formed a large area, where merchandize of all sorts lay in heaps, either preparatory to embarkation, or covered up from the weather under temporary awnings.

“The master of this establishment was somewhat past the prime of life, tall, and rather inclined to corpulency—the effect, perhaps, of a sedentary life. His complexion was dark olive; his features, which were on a large scale, expressed the habitual gravity of much thought, which

* Couriers, messengers.

was heightened by the deep-set eye, the large overhanging brow, and high-spread forehead. But the gracious smile which illuminated his countenance, and which played in a peculiar manner about his mouth when he spoke, expressed the benevolence and liberality of his character.

“The dress worn by the Parsees of India may not, perhaps, be considered to display the figure to advantage. A turban, formed of dark-spotted muslin, rises in a formal shape, increasing in breadth, but flat and receding backwards in front, to a height of twelve or fourteen inches, where it terminates in a broad flat top. A white cotton vest, shorter than the Persian kabba, but somewhat resembling it in shape, covers their person from the neck to a little below the knee. A shirt of silk or cotton, with loose drawers of the same, completes the costume: but the plainness of its appearance is often relieved by throwing a large Cashmere shawl around the person. Like the greater part of the natives of India, they shave the beard, retaining only the moustachios on the upper-lip. The excision of this natural ornament appears to those nations, who, like us, preserve it with care, a wanton mutilation, which occasions a disagreeable appearance of effeminacy. But such was not the case with Nosovanjee Bomajee;—a manlier or more noble figure I have not often seen; but it was the

nobility of spirit, quite as much as that of person, which beamed around him, and threw all minor defects into the shade.

“After Cowasjee, who entered first, had told him of my arrival, and the circumstances under which he had found and released me from captivity, I was immediately sent for, and found him seated as I have described. He rose at my approach, and saluting me after the manner of his nation, with one of his most gracious smiles seated me near himself. ‘My kinsman and agent, Cowasjee,’ said he, ‘could not have brought me a more acceptable offering, young man, nor done me a more valuable piece of service, than relieving from so uncomfortable a situation, and thus introducing to me, one who has had the merit and good fortune to interest my friend and countryman, the Moollah Hurmooz of Yezd. His favour and friendship are not lightly to be gained, my young friend; and that testimonial of his confidence, which you showed to my agent, speaks better for you in my esteem, than if you had brought me the command of a king, or the firmaun of an emperor. I deem it no small good fortune, that my agent or myself should have been the instrument of your deliverance; and whatever the fortune or the credit of your servant Nosovanjee can command, is sincerely at your service.’

“I find, Sir, that it would lengthen my tale too

much, were I to relate all that I saw in this interesting place. I must hasten toward a period of my story which more particularly refers to my present situation.

“By the favour of the good Nosovanjee, I was placed in an excellent habitation, supplied with every thing that could add to my comfort and pleasure. I soon found out the Englishmen, to whom my letters from Bunder had been addressed, and who in vain had sought for me by every vessel that came from that quarter. The more I associated with these Franks, the more did I admire their learning, their integrity, their industry, and their many other good qualities: and though time and more extensive experience showed me that there are indifferent or vicious characters among them, as well as good and worthy ones, candour obliges me to own that I have nowhere met with so much honesty, uprightness, and integrity, as among these Nazarenes of the West.

“As continued intercourse begot mutual confidence, I related to them all my adventures, and communicated also my instructions for the future. I was rejoiced to learn, that the country between Dehlee and Bombay, although not absolutely in a tranquil state, yet was not in a condition to render my journey a matter of any serious risk; and that by patience and proper precautions, united with the introductions which could be furnished

by my friends, there could be no reasonable doubt of travelling in comfort and security.

“By the advice of both natives and Europeans, I turned into money at this place, or left with Nosovanjee Bomajee for that purpose, the greater part of the jewels I had brought from Bunder, reserving only a very few to take with me to the court of Mahomed Shah. I was provided with barauts, or letters of credit, to the merchants of various towns through which I purposed to travel; and having completed all the necessary arrangements, I bade adieu to my kind friends of Bombay, and left it, by my own desire, with a very moderate equipage, instead of the far more complete establishment which they at first proposed for me.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY CONTINUED.—
THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL.

“WERE I to attempt an account of my adventures in India, of the countries I saw, of the courts I visited, and the variety of manners and customs I became acquainted with, it would occupy months to relate, and, if written, would fill a large volume. Perhaps, at a future period, you may be amused with some of them, but at present I shall only say, that after a long and interesting journey, during which I spent a considerable time in each place of importance through which we passed, I reached the splendid and venerable capital of Hindostan, and saw the lineal descendant of the great Timour, seated on the richest and most magnificent throne in the world. The grandeur and beauty of the buildings, the opulence of the merchants, and the splendour of the bazaars; the number of the

pageants, and glitter of the nobles and their attendance, surpassed any thing I have ever seen, or have power to describe.

“But the calm unprejudiced observer might trace the finger of destruction at work through it all: the luxury, the brilliancy, and the show, veiled the rankest injustice and oppression; the Emperor, a weak, vain man, was ruled by his proud, discontented nobles, in the midst of all this state; the Rajahs and Omrahs were rich, the Ryots* poor and wretched: the Soubahdars of provinces were rebels in their hearts, and waited but a fitting moment to shake off their master’s yoke, and render themselves independent. Young and inexperienced as I was, I could not help thinking at that time, that the throne of Dehlee would soon be shaken to its centre.

“From Dehlee I travelled through the Punjab, to Caubul and Candahar. This part of my journey was more dangerous and difficult than the last, for the country was less settled, and disorders were more frequent.

“The latter province was still agitated by the events consequent upon the rebellion and death of Meer Vais; and although his son and eventual successor, Meer Mahmood, was still too much disconcerted by his failure before Kermaun, to show any open hostility to Persia, it could plainly

* Peasants.

be perceived that a storm was brewing in that quarter, which, from the supine and enervated condition of the Persian court, could hardly fail of producing most serious effects. Alas! little did I, or any man foresee, how fatal it was destined to be!

“I was glad to quit the neighbourhood of this slumbering danger, and being desirous to see the celebrated city of Herat, I proceeded thither. But I had not remained there long, before the general aspect of the times took so alarming an appearance, that I resolved on promptly returning to Ispahan by the way of Yezd.

“At Yezd I once more saw my invaluable friend Moollah Hurmooz, who received me, after my long absence, with all the frank affection of his nature. He had heard of the destruction of our caravan, and was, as he assured me, more than ordinarily shocked and distressed at the fate which he believed to have befallen one, for whom he had conceived a sincere attachment; nor was it until some time afterwards, that his sorrow was relieved by letters from his correspondent Hadjee Mahomed Hussun at Bunder. He had subsequently received accounts of me from Nosovanjee Bomajee, and rejoiced to learn the singular service his letter had done me. ‘Did I not guard you, my young friend,’ said he, ‘against your rash propensity to adventure? did I not warn you of the dangers into which it would lead you?’

—I know how little such admonitions are attended to by the young and ardent; but you now have had some severe lessons, and I doubt not you will acknowledge, upon your own experience, what you discredited, or smiled at, when given you on that of your friend.'

"I smiled, indeed, at the good Moollah's observations, for the love of travelling had rather been increased than allayed by all I had seen; and I had resolved, after visiting my father, and arranging my own affairs, to depart again on a longer and still more interesting enterprise. The Moollah was amused by my various adventures, and highly pleased with the observations and reflections I made on all I had seen. 'This,' said he, 'is travelling to purpose; of what use is it to journey on the back of a camel or a horse, from one place to another, with shut eyes, and closed ears, like most of our young folk, who think but of the comforts they may look for at their next evening's resting-place, the pleasures of the next town they are to reach, or the profits they hope for from the goods they carry with them. You, on the contrary, have looked at men and things, and have laid up a treasure of useful observation that will remain after pleasures have become tasteless, and riches may have fled away.

"My impatience to learn the situation of my family did not permit me to remain long with the

Moollah. I quitted Yezd, after being his guest a week, and joined a small caravan which was then starting for Ispahan. My heart melted within me, with mingled fondness and apprehension, when I saw the lofty domes and minarets of the great city rising at a distance. It is an anxious thing returning to one's home after an absence of many years, unconscious of, but dreading, the changes which these may have brought!—My mother!—my fond and affectionate father! did they yet live? Had the parting presentiments of my kind old Maalim been realized? had he gone to receive his reward in Paradise? In the six years of my absence what might not have happened!—should I again meet with the kind familiar faces that I remembered in boyhood, or had strangers taken up their abode in the house of my fathers?

“It was on a rich autumnal evening, near the end of October, that I quitted Ispahan. It was on a like evening, in the same month, but with somewhat altered feelings, that six years afterwards I again approached it. I left it wild with expectation, and burning to be free from the constraint—mild though it was—of a kind, indulgent father. A few years of closer intercourse with the world, and experience of its folly and its baseness, had somewhat quenched the spirit of romance, and taught me the value of sincere affection. I returned, trembling for the fate, and yearning for

the fondness of those whose gentle control had formerly been so irksome. The sickly hue of the fading leaf, yellow with the light of departing day, struck a melancholy on my heart; even the distant lowing of the cattle, and the song of the muleteers, sounded mournfully in my ears:—did it not forebode the heavy evils that impended, not over me alone, but over all this devoted city?

“ Traversing the long bazaars, we at length approached the caravanserai where my father’s warehouse was situated. In my uncertainty regarding the situation of his family, I was reluctant to expose myself openly or abruptly to any shock, or to run the risk of unguardedly alarming my father by a rash disclosure of my arrival. I wished to make enquiries secretly, and to be guided by circumstances as to the course fittest to be pursued. I therefore wrapped myself up in an Arab cloak, and shaded my face with a shawl thrown over the head.

“ Thus disguised, I alighted at the gate of the caravanserai, and was a little re-assured by seeing my old friend, the fat capidjee,* rise from his little niche to receive us: it was like a promise of good tidings. ‘ Welcome ! welcome ! Agas,’ exclaimed he, as several of our party crossed the threshold along with me; ‘ enter in,—here are capital accommodations, here are choice of cham-

* Capidjee—doorkeeper, porter.

bers. Trade is not so brisk as it has been, and that keeps caravanserais empty—heaven help their poor capidjees! But whence come you, Agas? from the East, I see, and from Yezd too, by your cattle.’ By the time we had alighted, and satisfied our friend, I mustered courage to ask whether Hadjee Meer Hoossein was still alive, and whether he still occupied his place in the caravanserai. ‘Ah! the poor Hadjee,’ replied the capidjee; ‘yes, poor man! he is still alive, thank God! and that is all; times have changed with him—he is an altered man; and it is all, they say, the fault of a graceless son he had, who would go abroad to see the world, and has left his old father to shift for himself. He does little business now: people say he has met with losses in trade too. I can’t say as to that; but this I know, that he has lost his wife, and though this might be no bad riddance to some,’ continued the capidjee, with a significant nod, ‘it was a real and serious calamity to a poor old childless man, like Hadjee Meer Hoossein.’

“A cold shudder came over me—my mother dead! Although from the time I became a boy, I had been much less with my mother than my father or my master, yet I dearly loved her. I remembered her devoted attention to my childish wants, her constant solicitude for my comfort, her affectionate care of me when sick, and all

those nameless tendernesses which only a mother can bestow ; and my heart died within me, when I thought I should never now receive her delighted welcome. I felt sick as death, my limbs trembled under me, and, drawing the shawl closer over my face, I leaned against a pile of goods, to recover myself, and string my nerves before I should go into my father's presence.

“ After a little while I approached the well-known old chamber. A few faded articles were still displayed about the door, and a dusty package or two stood on one side ; but the piles of goods, the bags, and the bales, and the chests, which used to incumber the entrance, ranged in heaps upon the terrace before the wareroom, were all gone ;—even that part of the court-yard of the caravanserai which in former times was filled with my father's merchandize, and crowded with his attendants, was empty and deserted. An old man, one of his confidential agents, was descending the steps that led to the door, as I approached ; but, instead of the bustling air which used to characterize his manner, it was sluggish and listless, as if his occupation was gone ; his face was now furrowed with wrinkles, and bore an expression of chagrin that sympathized with all the rest.

“ He did not recognize my voice, purposely disguised, and indistinct from agitation, as I en-

quired for the Hadjee ; but, turning back with an air of indifference, he preceded me into the chamber, and announced that a stranger desired to speak with Hadjee Meer Hoossein. I followed him. In that chamber which, when I remembered it, was always crowded with people on business, and resounding with the eternal buzz of their conversation, there now were but two persons, and these sat silent. One of them I recognized as an old merchant, a friend of my father's ; the other was my father himself. He sat in his accustomed corner, behind the old chest, on which used to lie his account-books and inkstand, his money scales, and other implements of trade ; but the books were gone, and the chest was shut ; and the dust that had settled on the piece of carpet which was spread over it, showed that it was now seldom disturbed.

“ The change upon his own person was not less striking than that in his establishment. He was, it is true, an old man when I left him, but his person was tolerably erect, his eye was bright, and his countenance, though not full, was yet by no means remarkably meagre. I now saw an aged man, bent almost double with infirmity ; whose sunken cheek, and hollow, quenched eye, declared that his last hour was at hand.

“ I cannot, Sir, express to you the anguish of that moment : my heart was oppressed to suffoca-

tion ; my brain seemed to burn ;—I felt myself a parrieide !

“ He was listlessly smoking his calleeoon when I entered, but a heavy groan which I could not suppress, made him quit his occupation, and, setting it down beside him, he raised his glassy eyeballs towards me, as with a tremulous voice he asked me who I was, whence I had come, and what I wanted with him ?—‘ I am from Yezd,’ replied I, with a voice more unsteady than his own ; ‘ I am a merchant of Caubul.’—He started, and looked at me more fixedly ; but after a few moments, shaking his head, he said, ‘ Ah, I want nothing from Caubul—I do not trade now : I am a feeble old man, just dropping into the grave—what have I to do with trade ? It has cost me all I had !—Alas ! what could the treasures of Khos-roo do for me now ?—go in peace—go—God protect you !’—‘ What if I have news for you ?’ said I.—‘ I want no news,’ replied he ; ‘ thy news can have nothing to do with me,—they cannot interest me : go, in the name of God !—I have no reward for thee—if thou wantest alms, here are some dinars, but leave me in peace.’—‘ Thou hadst a son,’ said I, struggling for composure.—‘ Punah-be-khodah !’* exclaimed the old man, raising his eyes once more with a feeble cry, ‘ what knowest thou of him ?’—‘ I am he !’ cried I, unable any

* May God protect us !

longer to contain myself; and falling on my knees beside him, I hid my face in his lap, and gave way to a passion of tears.

“But the shock was too much for the old man: uttering a faint groan, he spread his arms to clasp me, and fell forward upon my body. We thought for some time that the spirit had quite departed; but by chafing his hands and temples, and using some stimulating applications, after a while he opened his eyes and recovered his senses.

“It was some time ere he could recollect what had passed; but when he saw me hanging over him, with the tears still running down my cheeks, in spite of the dimness of his sight he recognized my features. —‘Ah, my son!’ exclaimed he faintly, ‘the merciful Allah has sent thee here to receive my blessing before Azrael claims my spirit. I am dying, my son; I have long been dying:—the belief of thy death has been fatal to thy mother and to me. But, oh, my son, where hast thou tarried so long, leaving thy miserable father in the dark shadow of affliction?’—‘And is it possible, my father?’ cried I, ‘did the letters I sent thee from Bunder and from Bombay never reach thee?’—‘Never, my son: never from the time thou didst quit Yezd, have tidings of thy welfare, or accounts of thy path, reached thy father’s ears. Accounts, indeed, we received, that the caravan with which thou didst leave Yezd, was destroyed by the

Ballooches ; but no word of thee came to satisfy our longings, and we thought thee dead, my son ; and we mourned—yea, these tidings cost the life of thy mother, and I am about to follow her.’

“ It is painful as well as needless for me to dwell longer on this scene. The letters on which I had relied to reconcile my father to my long absence, had never reached him. My friends, both at Bunder and Bombay, had remitted the money they had obtained for my jewels, according to our agreement, in the name of a feigned correspondent, so that my father derived no sort of information through those means ; and every thing had unfortunately combined to keep him in ignorance of my fate.

“ From the moment my father received, as he supposed, the tidings of my death, he seemed himself to be stricken by the hand of fate. He believed himself the cause of it : he thought,—the good old man,—that the constant and earnest wish he had expressed for me to enter the mercantile profession, had driven me to the resolution which had ended so fatally ; his grief was unassuageable ; he refused consolation, and abandoned all his usual pursuits. Commerce itself, as the cause of his loss, now became hateful, and he commanded his agents to sell off his goods and close his mercantile concerns. The violence of his grief at length gave way to a settled melancholy,

which gradually, but effectually, wasted his strength.

“The effects were still more fatal to my mother. At no period of her life had she been strong, and the untimely loss of her only son and hope, struck her to the heart. She lingered on for three years, and then sank exhausted with weakness and suffering. Her death bore hard upon my father: although never a support, she had been at least an object to him. When she was gone, he had no one to care for, and the gloom of his spirit deepened still more. His old servants still attended on him with the care of customary attachment, and, having nothing to interest him at home, he was induced at times to go and sit in the chamber of his old warehouse; where, though he did not attempt any business, a few of his old friends would sometimes come out of charity to sit with him. This was his only amusement; and it had regularly gone on for two years after my mother’s death;—and thus it was I found him.

“How my heart was racked with remorse at seeing this deplorable wreck of my family—the helpless, hopeless condition of my beloved father! How did I curse my indiscreet passion for travelling, the indulgence of which had led to so much misery! Never, never, I resolved, would I again quit him for a moment;—however long his spirit

might yet linger on earth, I swore to tend him with the love and the duty of a son, and to atone, as far as possible, for the wretchedness I had so thoughtlessly occasioned to him.

“Alas! the call upon my affection did not continue long. As if he had but lived to see his son—to know that he had not been a wilful, heartless delinquent, and to bless him before he died,—my father, from the time of my arrival, grew gradually weaker, and in less than two months afterwards expired in my arms. Thanks be to Allah! I received his blessing with his parting breath.

“I was now almost alone in the world. My old master had died two years after I left Ispahan, and most of my contemporary students were dispersed in search of employment and of livelihood. I found myself possessed of a fortune as far above my expectations as beyond my wants. When my father gave up trade, the belief in Ispahan was, that his retirement had been caused by losses in business; but this was by no means the case. Sometime before his death he told me this, and strongly advised me to take advantage of the public error. ‘Trust the advice of an old man, my son,’ said he:—‘unless the foresight gained by many years experience be false, a storm is brewing which may shake the whole of Persia; the power of the Sooffies is on the decline.

Luxury and weakness have overwhelmed the court: oppression, extortion, and injustice are in the provinces, and in every department of the state. Such things cannot long continue without reform; and revolution at least, be assured, is at hand. We are supposed to be poor,—let the belief continue. Thou knowest the secret repositories of my wealth, and I believe, my son, that thou hast sense to use it discreetly.'

"Besides my father's wealth, which was great, as a life of patient and persevering prudence had been spent in accumulating it, the sums which had been remitted for the sale of my jewels was immense,—far beyond all that I could have conceived possible; and still there were many of them remaining undisposed of. Thus I found myself perhaps one of the richest individuals in Ispahan, without the disadvantage of expensive habits, and exempt from the danger of being supposed a man of wealth.

"After I had performed the last duties to my father, and had somewhat recovered from the grief which I felt at his loss, I began to think of arranging my worldly affairs. Convinced from my own observations, as well as by the advice of my father, that danger was truly impending over the country, I took such precautions as seemed prudent against its effects. A large portion of my treasure was allowed to remain in the safe repositories where it

lay; but some was disposed of in an equally secure, and more profitable manner, transmitting it by the hands of confidential agents to Moollah Hurmooz, and to my friends at Bombay, for the purpose of being employed in such speculations as they might think most safe and expedient. They have been faithful agents, and my wealth has been greatly increased by their means. Those who have to struggle against poverty and embarrassment, find money hard to be procured; while, on the rich and frugal it pours abundantly, and almost without an effort. I lived retiredly, my expenses were a trifle, and the greater part of that was employed in relieving the wants of the distressed.

“I might now once more have been disposed to travel; there was no parental tie to withhold me from my favourite pursuit. But there was an attraction of another character, which had lately arisen, and which, in spite of my better judgment, held me with a power surpassing that of duty.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY CONTINUED.—
ZOLFAH.

“ DURING the illness of my father, I was in the habit of repairing at times to a terrace upon the top of the underoon; a quiet, retired spot, secluded from view by walls and parapets, where I could meditate in peace, and relieve that constriction of the heart, produced by the constant contemplation of a beloved, but dying object, by breathing the fresh air, and looking abroad upon the cheerful face of nature.

“ This terrace was adjoining to another large residence; and although I did not mean to pry upon the privacy of its inmates, I could not avoid occasionally observing some of them. At first, indeed, I carefully abstained from approaching the side that overlooked a part of their court, and where the parapet of sun-dried bricks would have in great measure concealed me from observation;

but curiosity, excited by various trifling incidents, at last prevailed. The cheerful noise of singing-birds often attracted my attention; and once or twice I heard the tones of a very melodious voice, singing, as it were to encourage the little creatures. One day I heard the same sweet voice accompanying a sitarra;* and my curiosity to obtain a view of the songstress, induced me to commit an indiscretion, the consequences of which I still smart under, and, too probably, must continue for ever to deplore.

“ On reaching the parapet of the terrace, and cautiously looking over, I gained a partial view of the little court below, the rest being still hid by a projecting wall. At one end of this court there was an apartment, such as is usually found in the harems of wealthy people, and which partly fell under my observation. The lower part of it was curtained in front; but the Ballakhaneh† above was open. Several cages of singing-birds were hung around the walls, and a young girl, who held a stringed instrument in her hand, was seated, supported by silken cushions, upon a carpet at the upper end. It was she whose voice had delighted me so much; and the first glimpse I obtained of

* A sort of guitar, with only three strings.

† An upper-room, open in front, and generally overlooking another and lower apartment. Hence, no doubt, our English word balcony.

her face, completed my enchantment. I became her devoted slave.

“The weather being cold, her figure was so enveloped in rich furs and shawls, that, however I might anticipate, I could not at first distinguish all its graces: but her countenance resembled those which we imagine to belong to the *Peris* who hover round the throne of *Gian-bin-Gian*.^{*} Her features were small and delicate; the bright glances of her full black languishing eyes were softened by the long silken lashes through which they shone. The dark pencilled arches of her brows set off the polish of her white forehead, and the soft bloom of her complexion. But I should in vain attempt to describe to you the charm that played about her mouth: its slightest smile—and it seldom was without one—awoke the most bewitching dimples, and displayed a row of teeth like the pearls of *Bahrein*. I could not distinguish all these beauties at once; but there was no want of time and opportunity in the sequel to fix them in my memory, from whence they can never be erased.

“I remained entranced at the sight of this lovely creature; who sometimes singing to her *sitara*, and sometimes springing up to play with and caress her birds, seemed like an angel of innocent and happy sportiveness. Her only attendant, an old woman like a nurse, tried to restrain her

^{*} The eastern sovereign of the *Genii* and Fairies.

spirits, and inspire her with greater gravity and decorum. ‘My dear child,’ I could hear her say, ‘these gambols might answer in former days with your old nurse, but you must now learn more discretion; you are no longer a child,—you are past fourteen years of age, and soon, Allah be good unto thee! you are to be a married woman; and what would a husband say to see his wife running about like a young kitten? you must learn to be more dignified, my dear child—you must indeed—you must control these high spirits. But alas! poor dear, the cares of the world will soon render my lessons unnecessary!’

“‘Ah! dear Ayesbah,’ replied a voice sweet as that of Israfil, ‘why will you remind me of my only misfortune?—you know that I detest the thoughts of marriage; you know I cannot bear to hear of this hateful match which my father has made up for me. I never saw the wretch, but I know he is old and ugly: and if he should be cross and take my birds from me, what shall I do?’—‘Hush, dear child,’ rejoined the nurse, ‘do not give your father reason to suppose you hate the advantageous marriage he has provided for you. You know he swears he is not rich; that he has had enough to do with furnishing the dowers of your sisters, and establishing your brothers in their professions; and this offer of Meerza Guffoor’s, to take you without a sequin, is too good to be rejected; for, be-

sides saving so much money, the connexion which the Meerza has at court is necessary to supporting his credit when that may be required. At all events, my dear child, there is nothing for you but to obey.—Alas ! we women must always be victims to the tyranny of the stronger sex. But come, it is time to meet your father in his chamber ; so clear your countenance, and do it with cheerfulness, for he does not wish to see his little Zoolfah sad.’ So saying, they both quitted the ballakhaneh, and the light of my soul was clouded as they disappeared.

“ From this time, when not in positive attendance upon my father, the terrace became my constant resort. Many times in every day did I repair to listen for the voice of the enchantress who had enslaved me, and to catch a glimpse of her in the ballakhaneh. Sometimes I was successful, and every view of the adored object strengthened my passion and confirmed the spell that bound me. I reflected with alarm on what the nurse had said, and was terrified at the possibility of having this lovely creature snatched from me by a marriage which she so greatly detested. I would fain have sought an interview, but the very horror she expressed at men and marriage, deterred me from attempting what I feared might inspire her with disgust, and deprive me of the satisfaction which I had in beholding her, even at a distance.

“Wearied out at length with the pain of unrequited and concealed love, I sought for relief in exertion, and resolved upon making an effort to know something farther regarding my mistress and her family. For this purpose I sought out one of those convenient females, whose age and ostensible occupations procure them free entrance into all harems, and who are often useful in promoting the union of young people who love each other. But an occurrence took place before my plans were ripe which gave me unlooked for facilities, and flattered me into better hopes of success than I could otherwise have possibly entertained.

“Returning from the caravanserai, and passing by a lane, which led to one of the public baths of our quarter, on a day when it was appropriated exclusively to the use of the women, I heard a cry of alarm, and looking for its cause, I saw two men, apparently intoxicated, assaulting three or four veiled females, who were returning from the bath. Shocked at so scandalous, as well as so unusual an occurrence, I ran forward, and shouting aloud, forced them to quit their prey;—indeed, they hardly stayed to dispute the point, but, alarmed perhaps at their own audacity, took to their heels and fled.

“Turning from them to the trembling females, who were endeavouring to repair the derangement of their dress, what was my astonishment to re-

cognize in one of them the lovely creature whose image was so deeply imprinted on my heart ! In attempting to replace her disordered veil, it fell off her head entirely, and exposed her beautiful countenance in all its charms. Her eyes rested for a moment on me, but were almost instantly withdrawn, while a crimson blush over all her face declared her painful confusion. I hastily withdrew my glance, and the old nurse stepping forward, assisted to arrange the screen which shrouded her entirely from my view.

“ ‘ We thank you, young man,’ said she, while I stood transfixed with surprise and delight ;— ‘ we thank you for your timely succour, and not less so for your polite delicacy : and be assured, that though this unlucky event has been the means of discovering to you the face of this dear child unveiled, her father, the Cazee Meerza Mootalib, will not be the less grateful for the service you have rendered to his daughter ; while we, on our parts, feel secure that you are too much a man of honour to take any undue advantage of the accident.’

“ ‘ Ah ! respectable Ayeshah,’ cried I, entirely off my guard, ‘ be assured that from me the lovely Zoolfah can never meet with any thing inconsistent with the highest respect and the most devoted attachment.’

“ ‘ How is this?’ cried the nurse, starting with

surprise;—‘Ayeshah!—Zoolfah! You know us, then, young man?—Who are you then, and how?—But what am I doing?—Let us return home; it would be a fine thing indeed for us to be seen talking with a man!—but this business must be enquired into.’—‘Ah, excellent Ayeshah! May your servant find favour in your eyes—all shall be explained to you, but allow me to guard you home, these insolent fellows may yet return.’

“The old nurse made no reply; but taking the arm of Zoolfah she hurried forward, and I heard her mutter to herself, ‘Insolent said he!—Yes, indeed; there may be more insolent fellows than one knows of!—and yet the youth is handsome,—yes, and modest too. Laillah-e-ilullah! respect! attachment! Why, this is like love, I protest! Allah preserve us!’

“I followed at a respectful distance, until they entered their own door, from which, as soon as I had turned my back, I observed a slave steal out and follow, keeping me in view. To this I had no sort of objection; I rather courted the old lady’s enquiry, and purposely walked slowly, until I reached the door of my father’s house, when the slave, having made her remarks, passed on without appearing to heed me. ‘The good gentlewoman shall be satisfied,’ said I to myself; ‘and this is no bad introduction: prudence and discretion may now bring matters to a fair issue.’

"I now directed my female agent to seek the nurse's acquaintance, and try to gain some information respecting the circumstances of my mistress's family; nor did she fail in her commission. It was not long ere she let me know that the lovely Zoolfah was the daughter of an old judge, the Cazee Meerza Mootalib, with whose name I was perfectly acquainted, and who had the reputation of being very stubborn and ill-tempered; very miserly, and by no means incorruptible:—that he had three sons, one of whom was studying the law, with the intention of following his father's steps; another was already employed as a Meerza about the court; while the third, the youngest, and the favourite, was a young debauchee, who alone could wheedle his father out of as much money as would support him, though not by a great deal as much as he spent by getting into debt wherever he could obtain credit. He had several daughters already married, and my mistress was the only one remaining on his hands. The man to whom he had promised her in marriage was an old sensualist, a dependant on Mahomed Koollee Khan, the Aitemad-u-Doulut,* and said to be possessed of great influence with his master, which

* "The hope," or "dependence of the state," a title bestowed on officers high in the confidence of the king—generally on the Prime Minister, or Vizier.

was the Cazee's chief object in promoting the match.

“ My agent had endeavoured to discover what opinion was entertained of me both by the young and the old lady ; and her report was very flattering to me. The nurse, upon discovering that she was acquainted with me, had questioned her very particularly respecting my family and character ; but all the mystery was solved as soon as she heard I was so near a neighbour. The steadiness and sobriety which were attributed to me by my emissary, did not fail of engaging her esteem ; particularly as she had also taken upon her to correct the mistake which they, as well as the public in general, had fallen into, of supposing my father to have been a ruined man. This she not only contradicted, but offered to prove the fact, by procuring from me, for the respectable Ayesbah, such presents as should convince her that I was no poor wretch. But this the old lady would not listen to at present ; nor was it until after a long negotiation,—till she discovered that the sight which her charge had obtained of me on the eventful day close to the baths, had produced a very powerful impression in my favour, and had increased the horror with which she contemplated her intended marriage,—till she saw that the health of her dear child was suffering from apprehension,—and until some well-timed and

handsome presents had convinced her that I was not only a prudent, but a wealthy lover, that she consented to yield her aid in breaking off the odious engagement, and forwarding the object of my ardent desire. An interview was contrived, and I was introduced, confused and agitated myself, to the trembling Zoolfah, who received me still closely veiled : and it was not till after the most earnest entreaty, accompanied by the most solemn assurances of my honourable intentions, and supported by the desire, nay almost by the manual exertions of her nurse, that she half discovered those blushing charms which I had so often gazed upon from a distance.

“I now discovered to Ayesshah so much of my situation as was sufficient to secure her full confidence, and urged the timid Zoolfah to consent to become my wife. But the difficulties in our way were extremely great, nor could we see any probable mode of removing them. My riches, no doubt, far exceeded those of the intended bridegroom, but his influence and power at court were the great objects with the Cazee, and with them I could not, at present at least, by any means compete. A bare allusion to the subject might be enough to put the old gentleman on his guard, and prevent all future intercourse between us.

“Meerza Guffoor, his intended son-in-law, had been sent to one of the northern provinces, on

business of importance ; but so soon as he returned, it was intended that the marriage should take place. The interim was ours to act in,—and to prevent it, if we could ; but no expedient occurred to us better than that of carrying the lady off ; a plan full of hazard in every way, as it would be almost impossible to conceal ourselves long in the city, while the difficulty of travelling along the public road with sufficient rapidity to elude pursuit, even if we should be so fortunate as to pass the Rahdar* stations unsuspected, was so great as to leave us little hope of success.

“ We continued to meet each other for some time after my father’s death, contenting ourselves with the imperfect satisfaction which these interviews afforded us, in the hope of something more favourable occurring to assist our invention. But circumstances which we could never have anticipated, occurred at this time, and changed the complexion of our affairs, along with the circumstances of the whole country.”

* Rahdars are guards or keepers of the road ; a sort of police established at particular stations for the purposes of collecting duties, preserving the peace, and protecting travellers against thieves and robbers. The latter duties they give themselves but little trouble about ; they are strict enough as to the former,—whether for the behoof of themselves or government, may be a questionable point.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY CONTINUED.—

THE SIEGE.

“THE late extraordinary revolution which has broken the power of the Suffavean kings, and almost extinguished their race, was at this time neither commenced nor contemplated. The extreme weakness of Shah Sultaun Hoossein, and the profligacy as well as inefficiency of his officers, had for a long time given reason to all thinking men to dread some great public calamity; and the revolt of the Lesghees on the west, with the attacks of the Abdallees and other Affghauns upon the east, had in great measure justified their apprehensions. But the submission of Vactanga, Wullee of Georgia, and the check received by Meer Mahmood Ghiljee at Kermaun, which, for the time at least, had put an end to his hostile intentions against Persia, had quieted our rulers' minds, and lulled them into a fatal security, from which they

were only roused by the thunder of the coming storm,—too late to provide against its fury.

“Early in January 1722, a certain degree of alarm was excited at court, by tidings that Meer Mahmood, chief of the Ghiljee Affghauns of Candahar, had at length thrown off the mask, assembled an army of full thirty thousand men, and crossed the Desert towards Kermaun, intending to lay siege a second time to that city.

“The city itself soon fell, but the citadel held out so firmly that Meer Mahmood, fearing to discourage his troops by the loss and delay he must sustain from a protracted siege, was glad to negotiate with the garrison, and to accept of a sum of money, upon condition of leaving the city and its inhabitants unmolested.

“The news of this repulse—for it could be called nothing else—in some degree abated the weak and helpless terrors of the government; and though these were again revived by hearing of Meer Mahmood’s march against Yezd, the serious check which his arms sustained from the courageous opposition of its inhabitants, again allayed their alarm.

“What, then, was the dismay of the weak monarch, and the supine, improvident minions of his government, when they heard that the Affghauns, raising the siege of Yezd, were in full and rapid march towards Ispahan! So quick were their move-

ments, that no intelligence reached the city till the whole divan was thrown into terror and confusion by learning that their enemies were within a few days' march of it.

“So bold a measure as that adopted by Meer Mahmood, of marching directly on the capital, without heeding the prodigious tract of Desert, and several unconquered strongholds in his rear, never entered the imagination of any of the King's counsellors, and they were totally unprepared to oppose them. The few troops within reach were collected, it is true, and a levy was instantly ordered of all that were able to bear arms, so that in a very short time upwards of 50,000 armed men, with a formidable artillery, were collected to oppose the enemy. But panic had already spread itself among their ranks, and the major part of them had little courage, and no discipline.

“The worst part of the business was, that from a council composed of pusillanimous, corrupt, or treacherous men, no measure of sound or effective policy was to be expected. The principal officers were divided in opinion and opposed to each other in their private interests. The Aitemad-u-doulut proposed to act entirely on the defensive until the troops should have become somewhat familiar with the presence of their enemy, and until that enemy, wearied and dispirited with a protracted, unprofitable warfare, would be glad to secure a retreat

instead of dreaming of farther conquests. Abdoolla Khan, the Wullee of Arabia, on the other hand, gave it as his opinion, that it was beneath the dignity of the empire to temporize with rebels, and that the troops should be led against them the moment they approached. It was unfortunate that, the Wullee possessing powerful interest at court, his advice was followed; the consequences you probably are well acquainted with.

“Never shall I forget the ferment which reigned in the city, when the Affghauns arrived at the village of Goolnabad, only three fursungs distant, and there took up their position. But the inhabitants were almost as much agitated by indignation as by alarm, for they had not yet entirely lost confidence in the power of the government, and in the valour of its armies. The astrologers, too, having consulted the stars on the occasion, fixed on the eighth of March as the fortunate day on which the Lion of Persia should revel in the blood of its enemies; and in truth, at first, there did appear some grounds for entertaining hopes of a favourable result.

“Meer Mahmood, not without uneasiness at the possible consequences of the bold step he had taken, and anxious, in particular, for the event of a day which, in all probability, would either totally annihilate his power or lay the foundation of his future fortune; ignorant also of the

number or quality of the troops that might be brought to oppose him, resolved to act cautiously, and, intrenching his camp, awaited the attack. Our leaders, on their side, taking courage from a conduct which betrayed irresolution, if not timidity, and which had also its effect upon their troops, led them forth from the walls on the seventh of March, and took post in front of the enemy.

“ In truth, it was a noble and an interesting sight to see these troops—our countrymen—our friends—our defenders, pouring in multitudes from the gates, glittering in their best array, mounted on the finest horses, all gay and ardent to fight for their homes and their property, for their wives and children, many of whom, mounting the wall, cheered them with their voices, praying to Allah for success upon their arms, and confusion and defeat upon their enemies.

“ The Affghauns, on the other hand, who did not amount to half the number of their opponents, made but a sorry appearance, with their worn-out clothes, their soiled armour and jaded horses ;— nothing glittered among them but their arms. But an old officer, who stood near me as we viewed them, shook his head :—‘ Ay, ay,’ muttered he, ‘ the bare back makes a stout heart ! the best to fight are those who have steel behind, and gold before them ! God grant we do not change coats with these fellows before long !’

“The doubt was, alas! prophetic. After much debating, the attack was unfortunately resolved on. Our countrymen charged the enemy with an impetuosity that gave the most sanguine hopes of a happy issue, and, for a while, the victory was so little dubious, that Meer Mahmood, who thought that all was lost, at one time had ordered his swiftest dromedary, to fly from the field. But valour was vain against treachery. Abandoned by the infamous Wullee of Arabia, who of all the leaders had been the one most eager to fight; and surprised by a masterly manœuvre of Amaun Oollah, one of the enemy’s generals, by which the whole of the artillery was taken and turned against ourselves, our troops were forced back in confusion, and fled, leaving the field covered with those who, but an hour before, were exulting in the pride of manhood and the confidence of victory.

“It is impossible to describe the horror and consternation which seized on all the inhabitants of that great city, when they beheld this utter ruin of their hopes. As the beaten and panic-struck troops poured back through the gates they had issued from but the day before with so much confidence and splendour, you would have thought that all hope was past, and the enemy already in possession of the walls:—the merchants shut up the bazaars, the trades-people ran and hid themselves,

and the women, shrieking with affright, fled wildly here and there, believing that the terrible Affghauns were at their heels, ready to perpetrate any sort of atrocity. So great was the confusion, that the gates were left totally unguarded; and had the Affghauns possessed as much judgment and determination in their councils, as they evinced courage in the field, there is no doubt that they might that day have made themselves masters of the capital. The abject prostration of mind that reigned through all ranks of men is not to be conceived; the countenances of every one you met betrayed the extreme of terror, and the smallest shout or noise at a distance made every one run as if the enemy were upon them.

“It is a curious, though a mortifying fact, that the enemy were hardly in less alarm than ourselves. Confounded at the magnitude of their victory, and almost doubting its reality, they kept close within their camp to guard against a surprise. The very guns which they had so gallantly won, they did not attempt to secure; and certain spies who were sent from the city towards the Affghaun camp, found every thing there so quiet, that our leaders were encouraged to send out some troops, for the purpose of carrying off these cannon, which was effected without the smallest opposition from the Affghauns. Nay, to so unaccountable a degree did this irresolution of Mah-

mood, and the alarm among his troops, extend, that on the very day which brought to the Meer proposals for negotiation on the part of the Shah, with the offer of a large sum of money, provided he would instantly quit the country and retire,—they, on their part, were just about to mount their horses, in order to commence their retreat, and would have thought themselves too happy if permitted to retire unmolested : but this unlucky proof of weakness and terror opened the Affghaun's eyes ; he saw his advantage, and resolved to avail himself of it, by marching up to invest and assault the city,

“ I do not mean to describe to you the operations of the Affghauns, nor to detail the disgusting tissue of feebleness and treachery, by which, far more than by the sword of Mahmood, the city of Ispahan fell into his hands. I shall only mention such occurrences as more particularly affected myself.

“ From the period when danger began seriously to threaten the country, although I continued occasionally to see my mistress as usual, the obstacles to making her my wife appeared to augment rather than diminish. Her father's anxiety to obtain Meerza Guffoor for his son-in-law increased with the danger of the times, and his impatience for his arrival from Casveen, where he was still detained by business, became excessive.

“The confusion consequent upon the battle of Goolnabad affected every individual family of the city. A time of so much public calamity was ill suited to promote a lover’s views. I sometimes enjoyed an interview with Zoolfah, and endeavoured to quiet the alarm which she, in common with every female, experienced at the terrible situation in which the city was placed; but her father, trembling for his treasures and his life, passed the greater part of his day within his harem, and insisted on his daughter’s company; so that our opportunities of meeting were greatly diminished.

“Occurrences calculated to keep our alarm awake took place almost every day. Within the first week after the enemy advanced to invest the city, the Armenian suburb of Julfah was carried by the Affghauns; and the dreadful terms* upon which it was spared the horrors of an assault,

* Father Kruzinski, in his History of this Revolution, informs us that these terms were a payment of about four hundred thousand pounds sterling in money, and fifty of the noblest and most beautiful young girls of the Armenian families in the place. The fulfilment of the last article he describes as giving rise to scenes of the most heart-rending distress. The girls were chosen by lot, and torn shrieking from the arms of their mothers! Many of them died of mere fright and grief before they reached the Affghaun camp; and the despair of the survivors was so great, that it worked even on the feelings of their savage conquerors, who sent many of them back at once, and the rest were restored to their parents after the capture of Ispahan.

sounded as a knell of despair, not only to the daughters of Ispahan, but to the parents, the brothers, and the lovers of every maiden within its walls. The towns and villages of the neighbourhood, one after another, were pillaged and destroyed by the enemy, who murdered the men, and carried off all the young women: daily did some of these poor wretches arrive, after having suffered the most horrid abuse, to seek protection from us, who trembled for ourselves.

“Time wore on: the bridge of Abbasabad was seized, and the city, completely invested, was cut off from all supplies. No one had imagined that the enemy would ever have the audacity to lay regular siege to a capital containing six hundred thousand souls, with an army not exceeding twenty thousand men,—and consequently no provision had been made for such a contingency. We now paid dearly for this neglect, for scarcity began to make its appearance in the place, and all who thought at all about the matter, looked forward with dismay to the horrors of a famine.

“Neither the king nor his counsellors were of this considerate number. Indeed, the weak and infatuated Shah Hoossein, foredoomed, as it should seem, to destruction, rejected the advice of all his most honest servants, even when so clearly correct that it was seconded by his own judgment, and suffered himself to be cajoled by

the artful machinations of the infamous Wullee of Arabia; who, though now in full correspondence with Mahmood, still held a principal command in the place, and, strangely favoured by fortune, succeeded in thwarting every attempt that was made to succour the unhappy monarch and his devoted capital.

“The scarcity, which now began to be severely felt, roused even the populace, as well as the higher ranks, to a fuller view of their situation: they compared their own numbers with those of the Affghauns, and, ashamed of the disgrace they were suffering under, as well as irritated at the distress they began to feel, demanded of the Shah to be led against the enemy. A sally, headed by the brave Ahmed Aga,* was made, and was successful, until directly opposed by the watchful villainy of the traitorous Wullee.

“The cruel and calculating policy of Meer

* This brave officer was an eunuch, and had others followed the example he set, Ispahan would never have fallen; but the infamous Wullee of Arabia, resolved, as it would seem, to effect the ruin of his master, not only thwarted him in every gallant attempt he made to repulse the enemy, but denounced him to the Shah as a forward person, who interfered with the business of his superiors. Ahmed Aga, indignant at the rebuke which this complaint occasioned, replied with spirit, and declared boldly to the Shah what were the Wullee's designs; but, finding no attention paid to his remonstrances, he disdained any longer to serve so weak a Prince; he took poison, and was found the next day dead in his bed.

Mahmood increased the misery of this disastrous siege. Aware of the multitudes that were contained within its walls, and fearful that, in case of capitulation, there might be danger of revolt when the inhabitants should learn the scanty number of their conquerors, he resolved to reduce these inhabitants by the miseries and disease attendant upon a famine; he therefore purposely protracted the negotiations, and withheld his troops from any attack, confining them merely to intercepting all convoys, and carefully cutting off every source of supply from the city. Another reason which induced him to refrain from assaulting the place, was his desire to save from general pillage the mighty spoil which he promised himself in the Shah's treasury, and the riches of the nobles and the merchants. But when his chiefs urged him to put an end to so irksome a siege by an assault that must succeed, he professed that the regard he had for the lives of his soldiers, and the wish also to prevent the utter desolation of a city which he hoped to rule over as prince, were his motives for a delay that so greatly distressed and irritated his followers.

"Thus month after month came on, bringing want and misery along with it. By the beginning of July, the usual market-meats were exhausted, and the flesh of camels, horses, mules, and asses was publicly sold in the bazaars. In the month of

August even these failed, and the carcase of a horse, lean as it was, would sell for five hundred sequins.*

"As the pangs of hunger increased, the people were forced to satisfy their cravings with the flesh even of unclean animals; dogs and cats† were eaten and sold at extravagant prices; even mice and rats were devoured, and happy was he who could get hold of them. But the worst was not yet come: corn had failed as well as animal food, and roots of herbs, the leaves and bark of trees, were pounded into meal and sold instead of bread. Hides and leather, even old shoes, belts, and water-skins—every thing of the sort that could be found, was boiled down for the purpose of sustaining life.

"At length the tortures they endured forced many to the last horrible means of assuaging their pangs, and human flesh was plentifully devoured. No sooner was the example set, than men appeared at once to reconcile themselves to this outrage on human nature. They even seemed to dread lest the resource should fail them, and made hoards

* More than 200*l.* sterling.

† Father Kruzinski relates, that he saw a woman herself struggling with a cat in order to strangle it, until her hands and arms were all bloody with the scratches inflicted by the animal; she would not, however, let go her hold, but at every fresh scratch or bite, she exclaimed, "Strive thy fill, it is in vain—I will eat thee for all that!"

of this disgusting food. Persons were seen cutting limbs from the carcases in the streets, and children were stolen and put to death, to serve for future repasts. To complete the horrors engendered by this dreadful visitation, it was too certain that the ties of kindred were no protection to the dead,—that to avoid a more public violation of decency, brothers and sisters had devoured each other; and that mothers were found to have subsisted on the bodies of their own infants!

“The mortality which ensued was commensurate with the calamity that produced it. At first, some attention was paid to the remains of those who died, and their bodies were removed, and decently interred. But by degrees, the number increased so much, that those who were appointed for the purpose, were not equal to the duty, and the corpses remained unnoticed in the street, or the house, where they had lain down to die. But when the quantity of these increased so much, that the air became tainted by them, another effort was made by the living to remove the dead from among them. The bodies were thrown over the wall, into the bed of the Zeinderood river, in such numbers, that the waters became putrid, and continued undrinkable for a year after. Even this compendious method at last became a task too fatiguing for the worn-out and emaciated survivors, and the corpses were left to rot where they fell.

“ Never can that awful period be forgotten by me, or by any of those who survived it. The long bazaars of Ispahan, silent and deserted, resembled a city of the dead. In walking along, you stepped continually on carcases ; and often a ghastly figure, with sunken cheeks and withered lips, would try to raise itself from among them, and fix its glassy eyes on you as you passed. The sights of horror were innumerable—not to be described. Old men, emaciated to skeletons, had quietly yielded up the ghost beside their grand-children, whose fair, smooth cheeks scarcely showed the hand of the destroying angel. And men, who had resisted almost to death the dreadful expedients which had preserved the lives of others, had sunk exhausted, or died in the act of commencing their last horrid meal. In spite of all this misery, pillage and rapacity did not slumber ; thieves and robbers plied their trade unappalled : the dead were stripped in the streets ; and the wolves, the jackals, and the hungry dogs, which had escaped the general slaughter of their kind, entering the city by night, disputed for their share, and helped to mangle the dead.

“ Whole quarters of the city were totally depopulated, and in their silent habitations might be found the families that had dwelt in them, lying just as death or weakness had seized on them. But these were chiefly women ; the men had wan-

dered out to die. The women, when all sustenance had failed, and every hope of relief had passed away, often laid themselves calmly down to wait for death; and there you might see the wives of one man who never loved each other in life, forced by mutual misery into a fellowship in their last agonies—or the sisters, who had never been asunder from their birth, still united in death—or the mother whose infant had expired in the vain effort to draw nourishment from the breast which had long ceased to yield it. Some families there were, who, shrinking from the protracted misery endured by others, took means to hasten the catastrophe. The father prepared his last meal, and mingled it with poison; and wives, children, slaves, and servants, found a speedy end to their sufferings. It was dreadful, in wandering among these deserted habitations, to see them all, the old, the young, and the infant, alike stiffened in death;—but the mind grows familiar with horrors as with other strong excitements: we became accustomed, if not reconciled to them, and reckless of the future.

“It was full time for these scenes to have an end. From the best accounts that could be kept under such circumstances, it appeared, that out of the population of six hundred thousand souls, which the city contained when the Affghauns appeared before it, not quite one hundred thousand remained alive when it surrendered to them. Per-

haps an equal number might have fled before it was closely invested, and something under thirty thousand men might have fallen by the sword of the enemy; the rest, in number nearly four hundred thousand souls, of every age and sex, perished by the lingering death of famine.

“On the twenty-first day of October, the Shah, attended by all his court, clad in deep mourning, walked on foot through the streets of Ispahan, and addressing the remaining people, bewailed the misery they had endured from his unfortunate reign; endeavoured to comfort them with hopes of greater happiness under another ruler, and took an affectionate leave of them as his children. No eye was dry while the meek and gentle king, the last of his noble race, thus bowed his head to destiny, and bade farewell to his people. They knew that in all they had suffered at his hand, his head was more to be blamed than his heart; that though his ministers were evil and oppressive, the king himself was just and humane; they felt that his misfortunes were greater than his faults. Gaunt with famine and haggard as they were with misery, they forgot their own wretchedness for the time, and bitterly lamented the fate of a monarch who had been their ruler for eight-and-twenty years.

“Next day, the melancholy procession left Ispahan for the Affghaun camp, where the monarch resigned his crown and dignity to the con-

queror, who, rendered insolent by success, would receive it from no hand but that of the unfortunate king. 'Son,' said the humbled monarch, as he placed the royal plume in the turban of the Affghaun, 'the sovereign of the universe has willed that I shall reign no longer, and has chosen thee to succeed me on the throne of Persia. I willingly resign to thee the crown, and may thy reign be prosperous!' Thus ended the reign of the Sooffees,—an era the most brilliant in the history of Iran,—after they had swayed its sceptre for more than two hundred years.

"During the earlier period of the siege, and the commencement of the scarcity, I had watched with the most tender anxiety over the safety of my mistress; and apprehending to a certain extent what was likely to happen—for once in India I had witnessed somewhat of the horrors of a famine—I secretly laid in stores of grain, and such other provisions as were likely to be useful during a long blockade; for I never anticipated the fall of the city, although I did think it probable that the siege might continue for many months to come. By these means, when food became scarce and bad, I was enabled to send supplies of better quality for the use of Zoolfah and her father.

"I discovered about this time, by means of the nurse, that doubts were now entertained of the safety of my mistress's intended husband; no-

thing had been heard of him for many months; and besides, his patron, the Aitemad-u-Doulut had lost something of his power, and the value of the match was thus greatly diminished in the Cazee's eyes. These circumstances induced me to open a negotiation with the old gentleman, who, now in miserable health, and worn out with anxiety of mind, as well as bodily disease, was less unwilling to listen, when he found that I was rich, and willing to take his daughter on the same favourable terms as her former suitor.

"In short, I was introduced to the old man as his son-in-law, and, before the famine became so fatal as it afterwards did, I had the delight of receiving the lovely Zoolfah as my wife. They were disastrous times to marry in!—the pomp and ceremonies observed on such occasions were necessarily much curtailed. It would not, indeed, have been decent to express our joy by mirth and feasting, when many were already starving around us.

"It now became my duty, as it had before been my delight, to provide in every possible way for the comfort of my dear Zoolfah. I spared, you may believe, no expense in procuring delicacies for her while these were to be had; and the precautions I had taken secured a moderate supply of wholesome food, when others were forced to support themselves on all that was loathsome. Such

was the misery I saw around me, that I think no motive less powerful than that of preserving my wife and her father could have given me resolution to withhold my stores from the general need. Even to his family I was forced to deal them out sparingly; but the aid was important, and the old man felt it to be so, for, as his illness increased and his end approached, he assured me that I should not lose by it. When he died, which was more than a month before the termination of the siege, he discovered to me the secret repositories of his money; telling me that I, of all his children or sons-in-law, had behaved to him as to a father, and mine therefore should be his wealth. It was of little use to me; I had far more than I wanted already; but to guard against contingencies, I made such arrangements as seemed expedient for regulating his affairs. His establishment was broken up, and the house shut; such women as still remained in his apartments—and he was much too frugal to keep more than were required for his domestic duties—were transferred to my own house.

“The bulk of his fortune was divided into shares, corresponding with the number of his family, to whom, after the perils of the times should be passed, I meant to communicate the event. But few were ever claimed; famine, misery, or accident,

had probably cut the greater number of them off.

“But now arrived the most painful period of all. Careful and economical as I had been of my provisions, they fell short of the demands upon them; and it was no longer possible to support my household. Some of my servants knew of my concealed stores, and furious, poor wretches! that they could no longer be supplied from them, they noised the matter abroad; the ravenous crowd broke into my house, and seized on all they could find.

“Fortunately, a small portion still escaped their search, and this I determined to preserve at every hazard for the support of my wife. It was a dreadful scene; my house, which till then had been blessed with comparative plenty, became, like others, the abode of famine and of death; those hitherto accustomed to wholesome nourishment, felt the change to want or noxious food more sensibly and fatally than they who had been gradually broken in from the first. The women drooped and died; the men left the house to seek for food, and supported themselves on the carcases in the streets, or were added to their number. For my part, trembling for the fate of that object in which my soul was bound up, I seldom dared to quit her presence, but watched over her health and comfort with a tenderness and anxiety proportioned to the

peril and the love I bore her. But at times I was forced to steal out, to seek, if possible, some better food than I had left, and which, by bribing high the servants of the Shah, I now and then was happy enough to procure. I scarcely ventured myself to touch the scanty pittance that was left me, but, sensible how much the life of Zoolfah depended upon mine, I supported myself on the coarsest things I could get, resisting all her entreaties to share her wretched meals, or seeming to share them with her, only to reserve a portion for herself, when it might not otherwise be had.

“ But in spite of all my care and all my efforts, health could not be preserved in such circumstances. The beauty and plumpness of my wife soon gave way ; the very air, salubrious as that of Ispahan is proverbially said to be, became noisome and tainted by the putrifying corpses ; and the horrid stillness of our house, where now at length we two alone remained alive, oppressed her spirits and destroyed her health. She became languid and emaciated ;—the apprehension of seeing the only being I cared for in the universe, perish before my eyes like the multitudes around me, haunted me day and night. My own health at last gave way. I was reduced to a walking skeleton, and my strength failed so much that it was with difficulty I could rise from the floor, to per-

form such services as were indispensable for Zool-fah and myself.

“You, my kind preserver, may have seen the horrors of war and rapine in their most dreadful shapes—you may have lost friends and companions by the sword, and seen mothers and their infants murdered by the same blow:—but, believe me, if you have not witnessed the effects of famine; if you have not seen the slow consuming hand of want, wasting thousands, one by one, around you;—if you have not seen—as I have—the streets strewed with their ghastly corpses, and marked the living preying on the dead;—if you have not watched the lingering decay, the painful, protracted dissolution of all you loved and cherished upon earth;—then be assured you are yet unacquainted with the fulness of misery which the ambition or the wickedness of man can pour upon his brethren!

“Thanks be to Allah! the worst misfortune did not then overwhelm me. At the very moment when we could have held out no longer, the Shah resigned his diadem; the Affghauns took possession of the city, and with them, for a time, once more entered plenty and peace.*

* Father Kruzinski says that on the very day that Sul-taan Meer Mahmood entered the city, bread became so plentiful that the same quantity which the day before would have cost two hundred crowns, might then have been had for one.

“That same day, food became abundant; and the miserable remains of the population were more in danger of suffering from abundance than from want. The streets by degrees were cleansed from their pollution, and the dead were interred; but the heaps of carcases that choked the stream, and incumbered the banks of the Zeinderood, could not so easily be disposed of, and long tainted the air and the waters of that river.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE YOUNG MERCHANT'S STORY CONCLUDED.

"THE early conduct of the conqueror was marked by so much justice and wisdom, that the people, wearied out with horrors, began to hope for some repose; and many augured highly of a monarch who had commenced his reign so well. Desirous, in all probability, to gain the confidence of his new subjects, he retained in their respective employments most of the principal officers of state, and functionaries who had enjoyed a fair character; but, resolved likewise to secure their fidelity, he joined with each individual, a confidential servant of his own nation. One principal office alone—that of Dewanbeggee—the head of the judicial department, he bestowed upon an Affghaun, and this honest foreigner discharged the duties of his office so well that the Persians themselves were astonished at his ability and disinterested integrity.

"One act, and that among the first of his reign,

was highly popular. The nest of traitors who had betrayed their late sovereign, were seized and executed with all possible indignity, as guilty of high treason. 'He never could place confidence,' observed the conqueror, 'in men who had betrayed their master in his hour of need.' The Wullee of Arabia was not put to death, it is true—perhaps some oath or promise was the cause of this singular reserve in his favour. But his property was confiscated, and he himself condemned to perpetual imprisonment.

"Thus peacefully and happily passed on the two first months of Meer Mahmood's reign;—the joy of the people knew no bounds; they returned to their usual occupations, the long deserted bazaars were once more frequented, and the city began to be re-peopled. But it was a deceitful calm, the precursor of an awful storm.

"Meer Mahmood, naturally of a jealous, suspicious nature, had viewed with great alarm the flight of Prince Tahmaseb Meerza, the only son of Shah Hoossein's family who had not fallen into his power. He resolved to spare no pains to get hold of him also, and sent a force for this purpose to surprise Casveen, the former capital of the empire, where at this time the Prince resided. Tahmaseb escaped, but the place surrendered to Amaun Oollah, the Affghaun general.

"A month, however, had scarcely passed, when,

driven to desperation by the avarice and severe exactions of Amaun Oollah, a conspiracy was formed, which terminated in a revolt, so successful that the greater part of the Affghauns were cut to pieces before the rest were aware of any disturbance, and their general, severely wounded, along with the remains of his troops, fled back in terror to Ispahan.

“This event produced a dreadful revolution in the disposition of Mahmood. Although he was brave and enterprising in the field, it is certain he possessed but little firmness of mind in political difficulties. When he looked around him and observed the immense disproportion that existed between his own troops and the number of Persians in Ispahan alone, he was seized with uncontrollable terror, and, as the only means of removing its cause, he adopted the horrid resolution of lessening the numbers of those he dreaded, by a general massacre.

“With this intention, he took the precaution of lulling suspicion to rest by announcing publicly a pretended victory, and the capture of Prince Tahmaseb. Illuminations and other public rejoicings were directed to be prepared, and these served as a pretext for doubling the guards at each gate, preventing the entrance of all strangers, and taking other precautions of a similar nature. Selecting then his victims, and deeming it matter

of policy to deprive the people of their chiefs, he invited to a public entertainment which he had announced, all the ministers, khans, and public functionaries then in Ispahan. They all readily obeyed the call, and, not having the slightest suspicion of treachery, brought along with them several of their children, assembling to the number of three hundred. Meer Mahmood received these unfortunate victims with every appearance of cordiality, and they sat down among the Affghaun chiefs to partake of the feast that was set before them. But no sooner were they thus engaged, than a number of the usurper's guards, who were concealed within the palace, rushed out, and falling upon them, hewed them in pieces.

"It was a horrible sight!—The wretched men, astonished at the tumult and the violence, sat thunderstruck for a moment; but when they saw the scymetars flashing over their heads, and their companions falling fast around them, they attempted to escape; the gates, however, were secured, and one after another they were butchered, even when pleading at the feet of the tyrant.

"I had gone as a spectator to see the feast; and, familiar with horrid sights as I had been, I never shall forget the shrieks that rose from the miserable creatures. Some beautiful youths among them were slaughtered as they clung about their murderers' knees;—but even the very Affghauns

themselves sickened at the fate of one lovely boy, a son of the Prince of Georgia:—relying on the protection of an Affghaun lord who had adopted him as his son, the child flew to him at the first commencement of the uproar; but the perpetrators of this infernal massacre, tearing him from the knees of his adopted father, and from the chiefs of their own nation who wished to save him, butchered him while screaming for mercy and convulsively grasping a tree which he clung to as they dragged him along the ground.

“Still more barbarous, if possible, were the means which the tyrant employed to secure himself from the consequences of his perfidy. Many of the sons of the murdered nobles were educated along with those of other Persian and Georgian chiefs, in one of the principal medressahs* of the place. Seizing these youths, whose tender age and beauty might have pleaded for them with any one but a tyrant like Mahmood,—he ordered them to be turned loose in the open plain, and permitted them to run for their lives, while his armed Affghauns chased them like beasts of game, and slaughtered them as they overtook them. The bodies of all his victims were then thrown into the Maidaun Shahee,† where they lay naked and exposed to public view.

* Colleges.

† A large and magnificent square in front of the palace gate.

“ If the design of Meer Mahmood was to break the spirit of the people, and to terrify them into abject submission by those atrocities, as seems most probable, he succeeded to his fullest wish. Horror-struck with what they had witnessed, and totally without a leader, they never dreamt of resistance, but ran and hid themselves, not knowing where the slaughter was to end.

“ It might be supposed that suspicion would be fully aroused in the mind of every Persian by so black an act of treachery; yet this was not the case. After the abdication of Shah Hoossein, the usurper had received into his pay three thousand picked men of the late king's guards, who, along with others of the Persian soldiers, had taken an oath of fidelity, and were incorporated with his army. These men saw no cause to dread any hostile act on the part of their new employer. They could not be aware that he mistrusted them, and that therefore they were standing on the brink of a precipice. On the contrary, they were sensible that he had bestowed additional marks of favour upon them, as if he had been desirous to secure their attachment to his person; and they received with satisfaction an intimation that their new sovereign intended to present them with a bounty, and to feast them on pillaw, in one of the large squares of the palace. They assembled there accordingly, and, as it is not

customary for any one except the guards on duty, to retain their arms in this part of the royal residence, the order to pile their weapons in a corner of the square excited no suspicion. But no sooner were they seated, than a large body of armed Affghauns poured in from all quarters, secured the arms, and unrelentingly cut to pieces the whole of these unfortunate and unsuspecting men.

“ The tyrant now threw off the mask, and a slaughter was begun among the inhabitants of Ispahan, that rivalled in the number of its victims the effects of the famine from which the city had but just recovered. He pretended to have received information of a conspiracy similar to that which had broken out at Casveen, and he sent forth his soldiers in troops, with orders to put to death every one whom they should discover to be in any wise concerned in it. This was, in other words, commanding a general massacre, and well were his orders fulfilled ;—these ruffians, once let loose, spared neither age nor sex ; they entered every house at will, tortured such persons as they believed to be possessed of money, and put to death every one who made the least resistance, or who had ever been known to bear arms. Again the streets were heaped with carcases, and the houses were once more deserted : for fifteen days the only sounds to be heard in the city were the

shouts and the halloos of the murderers, the peal of muskets, the blows of swords, and the shrieks of the dying wretches that were slain. Such was the abject despondency of the people, that they offered not the smallest resistance to their executioners, and single Affghauns might be seen leading a string of three or four Persians to slaughter like beasts to the shambles. Thousands fled from the place, and after a while the tyrant did not seek to retain them, for he thought that in weakening the strength of the capital lay his only safety.

“And now I come to relate my own heavy share in this general calamity: and but that faint hopes are still left me of recovering my loss, I should curse the unwelcome lenity of my fate, that preserved my life when thousands were falling around me.

“During the greater part of this tragedy I confined myself with my wife to a retired part of our house, which hitherto had escaped unobserved by the ruffians; but, driven at last by want, I ventured out one night in quest of food to support us. Clad in poor apparel, I stole towards the bazaars, but they were all deserted, and many of the shops were broken open and plundered. I then bethought me of an obscure person whom I had assisted to set up a small shop in a distant quarter of the city, where he sold a little corn, parched peas, greens, and such articles as the poorer

classes make use of. It was a far way off, and my mind misgave me sorely: but how could I return home without food?

“I crept along the most unfrequented by-lanes, and often heard at a distance the shouts of those who pursued, and the cries of them who fell; but I succeeded at length in reaching the shop unmolested. It was long before I could ascertain whether or not its owner was within, and still longer ere, reassured by my name and my voice, he ventured to admit me. At length, cautiously opening the door, he re-fastened it, and retreating by a little passage to the back part of the house, hid himself and me behind a curtain before he would enquire what I wanted.

“He readily supplied me with what he had, and I was returning with all the speed I could; when, passing through a narrow lane, I heard a bustle and shouting, the glare of several torches flashed on my eye, and a number of men who bore them, suddenly turning the corner, came rapidly towards me. They were a party of Affghauns, who were dragging and driving along a string of a dozen or fourteen Persians, with their arms tied behind them, and whose dress showed many symptoms of violence.

“Appalled at this ill-timed rencounter, I would fain have shrunk back and retreated, but it was too late; the lane through which I had come had

no side openings to escape by ; I was observed, and a shot whistling past my ear, told me what fate I had to expect if I did not obey their order to stand.

“ My assurances that I was a poor man returning with a little food to his family, were treated with contempt, but they did not appear to be in the mood for murder. They stripped off my girdle, bound my arms with it like the rest, and pushing at me with the point of a sword, urged me forward. ‘ In the name of God ! ’ cried I, ‘ let me carry these victuals to my starving wife, and then I will go with you to death if you will. ’ ‘ Hoh ! hoh ! your wife, ’ cried they, ‘ what ! is she young and handsome ? Come, let us see her ; though, women are so plenty with us now, she must be a rare one to be worth our pains—come, where is your house ? ’ This unfeeling answer restored me to recollection : ‘ Better leave poor Zoolfah to the care of Providence, starving though she be, ’ said I internally, ‘ than expose her to the outrage of such villains. ’—‘ Lead on, ’ cried I, ‘ where you please ; I am prepared for death, if death it is to be. ’

“ With another savage laugh they again hurried us forward. When we reached the bazaars and larger streets, we met several parties who were bound, as it seemed, on a like errand with ours ; they cheered each other as they passed,—‘ Hah !

hah ! Eussufzey !—Hah ! hah ! Ghoree !—Hoh, Poyundeh !—Good luck to the Affghauns !’ and such like exclamations were interchanged as we met, and the watch-words of the guards were given and returned. At length they led us to the palace, and thrust us still bound into a sort of guard-room, where we were left to our meditations.

“ I now felt assured the morrow would see us led to execution : indeed, the only wonder was why we had not been put to death upon the spot :—but this was soon explained ; for when we began to talk with one another, and inquire into the circumstances of our several apprehensions, I discovered that the whole of my fellow-prisoners were persons, by repute, among the richest inhabitants that yet remained in Ispahan, and it was sufficiently obvious that they had been selected to be tortured in the presence of Mahmood, for the purpose of extorting from them their secret treasure.

“ As this conviction forced itself upon our minds, we already might be said to suffer the tortures which were preparing for us. The anticipations of this night were fearful, but the human mind, like the human frame, can only take in a certain portion of suffering ;—by degrees this fever of misery and apprehension subsided, with some into sullen calmness, with others into pious resignation. For my part, I resolved to suffer and to die in

silence, rather than utter a word that might expose my helpless wife to the tender mercies of such savages.

“We passed a heavy night, in truth; but long and dreary as it was, we had no cause to wish for a dawn which was to light us to tortures and to death. To me, however, a ray of hope came with the light of morning; for, among the soldiers who then entered our prison, I beheld the face of one whom I instantly recognized. It was a Dehbashee* in one of the bands about the tyrant’s person, whose conduct on a certain occasion, immediately after the entrance of the Affghauns into the city, had strongly excited my admiration.

“In passing on that occasion through a street that led towards my dwelling, I overtook two veiled females, who were picking their way with trembling steps among the bodies, just as two Affghauns came up and accosted them,—‘Women, by the mother of Omar!’ cried one. ‘And young and pretty, no doubt,’ added the other with an oath, seizing hold of the lesser female, and endeavouring to tear off her veil.—‘Gentlemen,’ exclaimed the elder woman, at once removing her veil, and displaying her fine though aged features, ‘for the love of God! for the sake of the blessed Prophet, harm not my child! I am a widow; my husband and two sons lie among these bodies!’

* An officer commanding ten men.

—there is no one left me but this helpless girl. I seek but a morsel of food to sustain life, and did not dare to leave her unprotected in my lonely dwelling. Do not snatch from me what famine and misery have spared ! By the chaste mother who bore you, do not deprive me of my innocent child !' The ruffian, unmoved, would have still persisted, but Sheer Oollah, so was the Dehbashee named, pulled him away from the girl. 'Let the woman alone, Poordil,' said he ; 'do not put a finger on her daughter ! Go, mother—go, in God's name ! we are not all savages ; and here, take this : here are some dinars to help you.' My heart swelled at this sight, with a pleasure to which it had long been a stranger. I went up to the man—I could not help it—'You shall be no loser by your humanity, my friend,' said I ; 'take this for your kindness to that unfortunate.' And I put into his hands ten sequins, which I had taken out with me to purchase provision. He looked hard at the money, and then at me :—'Persian,' said he, 'you are generous—may God send you increase of wealth ! the day may come when a friend may be of use, and if Sheer Oollah be near, you shall not want one.'

"This was the man who now entered our prison. I had never seen him since, but I remembered his features well. While the soldiers were roughly preparing to lead us away, I took an opportunity,

as he passed me, gently to utter his name.—‘Who the devil calls?’ demanded he somewhat roughly. But no sooner had he got a full view of my face than, starting back a step, ‘Allah-il-ullah!’ exclaimed he in an under-voice, ‘is it then so!—is the time come then?—I thought it would—I thought as much!’—and calling to his comrades, ‘Hollah, Obeid Oollah! whom have we got here? Why, this is none of those we want! This is a poor devil not worth a tomaun, as you may see by his clothes: I know him well; he once gave me a drink of buttermilk when I was much in want of it, and I will not have him hurt. I take it on myself to let him go.’—‘Let him go?’ grumbled Obeid Oollah, ‘you had better let that alone; our master does not let many Persians go, when he has once got them in his gripe. The man may be as little worth as you say, but when his head is off, it is one dog the less—Come, carry him along, do.’—‘By the head of Mahomed! and by the beard of Omar!—and that is two good oaths—I swear that not a hair of his head shall be touched!’ cried Sheer Oollah; ‘what, man! is blood so scarce that you can’t let me have the life of one poor devil who did me a service? Come, come, comrade! leave him to me; no blame shall rest on you, even if you will insist on the chief’s being told of it; but you need not, unless you like: there are enough here to keep him busy for this morning.’

“No more was said; Sheer Oollah unbound my

arms, and leading me himself through all the gates of the palace, said, ‘ God be with thee, Persian ! quit this place speedily ; and if thou meetest any of our tribe, show them this dagger, cry Shooker Oollah Mahmood Ghiljee ! and they will let thee pass. Keep quiet in thy house—these days of terror cannot last much longer ; the lion is nearly glutted : I thank Allah that I was in the way to succour thee, for thou hast a kind heart. No more passed ; I pressed his hand to my breast ; took the dagger, which I still preserve, and hurried homeward.

“ I reached my house unquestioned, but was startled to find the door standing open ; and my heart sank within me as I traversed its silent chambers. No sound met my ear as I passed through the underoon ; and, on reaching the door which led to my secret apartment, I found its curtain torn violently from its fastenings, and the room itself empty. I was thunderstruck—a cold dew stood upon my brow, and my limbs trembled so that I could hardly stand !—I called upon Zoolfah, but no answer was returned—I repeated the call again and again, but no reply was given. ‘ Merciful Allah !’ cried I almost distracted, ‘ what can have happened !—what can have become of her ?’—but the echo of my own words was the only sound I heard.

“ I ran through all the apartments, but they were empty ; and I now perceived that some of

the furniture had been carried off, and some private keeping places and chests of clothes broken open. Some of my wife's clothes were scattered about in the private room, and a bracelet she used to wear, lay broken in a corner: these were fatal proofs that violence had been used—she had been forcibly carried off, beyond all doubt! I threw myself upon the ground, and wept in bitter anguish.

“ I did not long indulge this unprofitable mood—it was not the way to regain my lost Zoolfah.—Quitting the house, I once more roamed about the streets, gazing on the few females that were to be seen there, with the vague hope of finding her among them. How I escaped the bloodhounds that still prowled about, I can scarce tell; unless it was that the misery which they traced in my appearance, gave them no reason to believe me worth their attention; for murders and arrests were by this time confined to the wealthy—the poor had all been put to death or had fled.

“ Still I had laid no plan;—what indeed was to be done?—how in this vast and desolate city, where none but ravishers and murderers could walk abroad in safety, could I hope to recover the treasure I had lost?—what chance was there of her being safe?—how was I to discover the slightest trace of her ravishers? Not a friend had I to consult—not a creature whose assistance I could im-

plore:—I knew not where to find the kind Sheer-oollah—to seek him at the palace would be to run my head into the lion's mouth; and what after all could he have done for me? For three days I wandered thus about, haggard and forlorn, retiring each night to my desolate home, when darkness and absolute exhaustion put an end to my bootless wanderings; and I devoured whatever food came in my way, although I loathed its very sight, that my strength might not fail me in the pursuit of my wretched wife.

“As I was leaving the house on the fourth morning, I observed a man in the outer passage advancing cautiously towards me:—it was Yussuff, one of the oldest and most faithful of my slaves, the same that is now with me here. He alone, of all my people, had survived the famine, and remained with me after it had ceased. He started at seeing me, but it was a start of pleasure as well as of surprise: for he thought that I had been murdered like the thousands around us.

“‘Yussuff,’ demanded I, interrupting his passionate exclamations, ‘where is your mistress? where is my wife? Have you seen her? Speak, for Heaven’s sake!’—‘Alas! Sir,’ replied he, ‘I have little good to tell:—would to God it were otherwise; but I fear your lady is lost to you for ever!’

“To shorten my tale,—I found from Yussuff,

that on the night when I went out to seek provisions, he, who was our only servant, but who being pursued to a hiding-place in a distant quarter by a party of Affghauns, had not been with us for many days before, had returned to the house, just in time to see it entered by certain soldiers in quest of its master. The noise they made in entering, had attracted the notice of my wife; who, only thinking of my return, had lifted the curtain of the secret door to welcome me: the ruffians caught a glimpse of her as they unceremoniously traversed the underoon, and giving chase caught her, and carried her off in spite of her tears and cries, leaving the house in the condition in which I found it.

“Yussuff, who unobserved had witnessed this scene, followed the party at a distance, until they met with an officer, who, observing my wife, desired them to carry her immediately to a house which had once belonged to a noble of Persia, but which now was inhabited by Nasser Oollah, one of Mahmood’s generals. Having seen them enter here, Yussuff thought only of seeking and acquainting me with all that had happened; but, not finding me returned, he concluded that I had undergone the common fate, and had been murdered by command of Mahmood or his officers.

“Still anxious about the fate of his mistress, although quite uncertain how to pursue any farther

enquiries, he watched the gates of the house in which she was confined; and the very next day was delighted at being accosted by an old female slave, who recognized him, and who belonged at this time to the family of Nasser Oollah. From her he learned, that her master, unwilling to risk the loss of his new acquisition, upon whom he set a high value, had lost no time in sending her away from Ispahan, escorted by a small party of his own followers. This was all the old woman could tell; and Yussuff, now quite at fault, had returned to the house, in order to put things in a better state of security, and then to make another effort to ascertain my fate.

“ I listened to his narrative without offering once to interrupt him; I could not speak. Exhausted as I had been with previous suffering, the shock which so completely destroyed all my hopes, now quite overwhelmed me; my head reeled, and I fell to the ground insensible to all about me. On recovering my senses, I found myself in my private apartment, watched over only by Yussuff, who having conveyed me to my couch, and exhausted his skill to bring me to myself, took advantage of my stupor to shut up the house, and take precautions against any more surprises from without.

“ I continued many days in a state verging upon death, watched by this faithful creature, to whose

care on this occasion my life is entirely due. When I recovered my scattered senses, the recollection of my irreparable loss flashed on my mind like a horrid dream that had oppressed me in sleep:—and it was not until returning health had restored to me the full powers of my mind, that I comprehended all the bitterness of my misfortune. But even then it came over me with moderated violence—I could think and reason; and though no course of conduct occurred to me that afforded the least probability of success, the extreme of despondency had passed away, and I no longer suffered myself to relapse into a supine extravagance of grief.

“ By the time I was able to move about again, the city, once more depopulated, was left in comparative tranquillity. The executions had ceased, and Mahmood, satiated with blood, reigned in sullen security over the solitude he had created. It would have been worse than useless to appeal to the justice or mercy of such remorseless tyrants as our conquerors; so I resolved to trust to other means for discovering and regaining my unfortunate Zoolfah. I lavished money on agents both male and female, whom I sent into every part of Persia to search among the various harems, particularly in those of the Affghauins, and to learn whether any female resembling my wife was to be heard of among them. I continued my re-

searches in the town, and remained there for some months, in order to receive accounts from my various emissaries. But all was in vain;—my hopes were often raised, but as often disappointed; and I had begun totally to despair, when one day a paper, rolled up in the form of a letter, but without either seal or superscription, was handed to a servant for me by a porter, who merely said that it required no answer, and went his way. It contained but these words—"Your wife is safe—her honour is unsullied; and it will depend upon yourself to have her soon restored to you."

"You may conceive with what transport I read these lines—how hope was revived by them; but it was only the prelude to more bitter disappointment; for, after waiting in vain for a repetition of the intelligence, my most active enquiries, supported with all the sums which I lavished for intelligence, failed to discover the writer of the billet, or the porter who brought it to me; so that, although I was somewhat reassured respecting the fate of my unfortunate Zoolfah, she remained as much lost to me as ever.

"A circumstance, too trivial to mention, led me to think that I might be more fortunate in my enquiries at Casveen; and thither I removed for a while. But I met with no better success there, and the hope which led me to this place, was perhaps as vain. One day, while walking

pensively along, in front of the great mosque at Casveen, a wandering Dervish of singular appearance, besought me to give him alms in a tone of voice that fixed my attention. Struck with his manner, I gave him a few pieces of silver, intreating him to pray that I might find what I sought. 'My son,' replied he, 'the life of man is a journey of misery and woe;—the decrees of Allah are fulfilled, though puny mortals wound themselves in resisting them: but a charitable deed never loses its reward. If thou wouldst have tidings of that which is lost, repair to the holiest shrine of the East; let thy prayers ascend to Allah from before it, let its true servants be comforted by thy alms, and await the will of the Most High!'

"A falling man will catch at shadows, and he who lingers under a tedious malady will seek relief in changing his physician. The Dervish's reply might not be very distinct or consolatory, but I sought to wrest it into a dark promise of success. The tomb of Imaum Reza was the holiest shrine of the East,—Mushed was a new scene, the reports of my emissaries might come to me there as well as at Casveen or Ispahan,—I was sick of both these places, so I resolved on a visit to Mushed, where I arrived six months ago. I procured this house, which is retired and little subject to observation, and fitted it up as you see. The troubles around

did not affect me much ;—so that I had enough to support life in peaceable retirement, I cared little who might possess the city ; and here I resolved to continue until something might occur to renew the faint hopes of recovering my beloved Zoolfah, or to extinguish them entirely.

“ I have been regular in offering up prayers at the holy shrine, and not, as I think, deficient in relieving the wants of the servants who attend, or the pilgrims who flock to it from every quarter of Persia ; but as yet no light has broken in upon my darkness, no oil has been poured upon the lamp of my hopes. It was on my return from my customary service in the Durgah, that I was assaulted by the ruffians from whose violence your opportune and prompt assistance so fortunately delivered me ; and I shall ever remain your grateful debtor for so essential a service.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE JEW.

THE young merchant here ended his story ; and after thanking him for the pleasure which his narration of it had given me, I remained for a while absorbed in the reflections it gave rise to. That spirit of enterprize which was always alive within me, had been powerfully excited by it ; and, overlooking all the inconveniences and perils of a traveller's life, I felt for the time as if happiness was only to be found in wandering from one place to another in search of adventures. Fancy took the reins, and pictured the delight of roaming uncontrolled from country to country, and from clime to clime, as inclination might prompt. But the momentary intoxication passed off—I remembered my actual situation ;—the enlisted soldier of a great leader had surely scope sufficient for his enterprize—the favoured lover of two beautiful women had little cause to sigh for farther hap-

piness,—at least so thought I at this time. The career before me was fair and fortunate, or it lay with myself to make it so.—“Yes,” said I mentally, “I will imitate the prudence of my new friend, and seek to make the best of opportunity, as he has done!”

Meerza Aboo Talib watched me as I sat absorbed in these reflections, and smiled at the expression of enthusiasm which flitted over my countenance, as if he read the thoughts which had excited it:—we conversed for some time longer about his adventures,—on the various dangers he had encountered, on the strange turns of fortune he had experienced, and on the mysterious fate of his unhappy Zoolfah,—until it was full time to retire; and when I rose to do so, he presented me with another purse, equal in value to the former. I sought to excuse myself from accepting this fresh mark of his liberality; but, addressing me with an air of respectful affection,—“Do not, my dear friend—if you will permit me to call you by that name—do not refuse me this gratification. From all you have learned of my story you must be quite aware, that money can be of little value to me except in as far as it enables me to indulge my inclination, and assist the few friends I may meet with in my journey through life. Permit me to say that I have conceived a great affection and

esteem for you :—a soldier is seldom overburthened with riches ; promise me then, that whenever you may require a supply, you will frankly apply to me for it. By doing this, you will gratify me much, and enable me to express in some degree the gratitude I feel towards you as my deliverer.”

The arguments of Aboo Talib were persuasive in themselves, and I am ashamed to say that my necessities rendered his generous offers a temptation not easily to be resisted. I eyed the heavy purse with a longing look ; but the recollection of my reproaches on this subject to Fouje Allee, flashed on my mind, and, with an effort of returning virtue, I refused the proffered gift. But the mortification of my friend at my refusal, and the repeated demands of Fatimah, together with the career of folly which I still pursued in other quarters, combined to overwhelm my fortitude ; and though I could not stoop to take advantage of my friend's liberality, I compromised the matter with my conscience, by accepting as a loan what I had rejected as a gift ; trusting that some happy turn of fortune might some day enable me to repay him. The generous Aboo Talib unhesitatingly furnished me with whatever I required, and often exceeded my demands ; but his prudent spirit could not remark the extravagance of mine with-

out alarm, and he took occasion gently to caution me upon the subject:—"I would not seek to thrust myself into your confidence, dear Ismael, and still less would I have you suppose for a moment that I lay claim to the smallest control over your actions, in consequence of the trifling assistance you may have received from me; but I fear—for your own sake I fear—that you are hampered by some serious entanglement; or that you have made some connexion with persons who prey upon you, and who, sooner or later, will drag you into some distressing or dangerous predicament. If this be the case—if I can in any way assist you—I beseech you do not conceal it from me; and rely on my best services."

How strange and inconsistent is the human heart!—I felt and acknowledged the friendly intention of this judicious remonstrance; but it hurt my pride, and chafed a spirit already galled by self-reproach: nor had I courage to encounter advice which I felt that I could not obey,—for I was yet too weak to break the chains of vice and folly which had so long and so fatally bound me. "Fear not for me," said I at length, with some confusion; "I may have been heedless and foolish, but I stand in no danger: nay, I mean to be more considerate in future, and wisdom will come with experience. Be assured, that if in need of assistance,

I shall not scruple to apply for it to you, my friend. Meantime, I pray you be satisfied, and let the subject rest." He urged the point no farther; and whatever might be his opinion of my conduct, it never was expressed by any diminution of kindness towards me.

But though I succeeded in shutting the mouth of my friend, it was not so easy to stifle the reproaches of my own heart. However I might disguise it to others, I could not but feel the unworthiness, the wickedness, the disgrace, of the idle and dissipated career I was pursuing; nor was my conscience easily to be set at rest on the subject of my pecuniary transactions with my friend. I had indignantly repulsed the proposal of Fouje Allee, to turn to account the young merchant's liberality; yet had I not been led step by step to practice something scarcely better than that meanness myself? The idea of working on his gratitude for our own advantage had shocked me when suggested by another; yet, what less than this had I in reality been guilty of myself?—for my restless and troublesome internal monitor would not be satisfied, for a moment, with the specious salvo of a *loan*, with which I sought to blind it. No!—I perceived and was shocked at the disgraceful course I was pursuing; but the period of repentance and reform had not yet arrived.

It was about this time that an incident occurred, which, while it left a strong and lasting impression of horror on my mind, became the means of interesting my better feelings, and diverting it in some measure from the unworthy and debasing gratifications, by which it had for some time past been so much engrossed.

In Mushed, as in many other cities of Persia, the Jews occupy a certain limited division of the city; and though they are permitted to pursue their customary occupations in most of the other quarters, unmolested except by the usual proportion of insults and abuse bestowed upon them by the people, there are some places, and those in particular which are connected with the sacred shrine, into which they may not enter. The Sahn, a great square before the mausoleum, is held especially sacred; and it would be death for any Jew or Christian to put his foot within its gates, although the long street and bazaar which leads from either end, is free to them as to others.

But these wretched infidels are seldom left in peaceable possession of their privileges, scanty though they are, and purchased by a heavy rate of duties and tributes, as well as by a still more oppressive system of arbitrary extortion. The jealousy, insolence, or rapacity of their rulers is constantly making fresh encroachments, and

forcing them to submit to fresh sacrifices. The Moollahs are their principal oppressors: they hate and are hated by the Jews; but want of money on the one hand, and of protection on the other, often produces an intercourse which neither party would otherwise endure.

The Moollahs are, in truth, the most numerous, and by far the most powerful class of the inhabitants of Mushed;—a host of priests and doctors, Khadums* and teachers, flock from all quarters to its shrines and its colleges, and these again are supported by a number of disciples, pupils, and followers. But even the blind zeal and mistaken piety of the people, united to the large revenues which belong to these establishments, are insufficient to maintain these holy men, far less to support their extravagance; for the larger proportion of them are notoriously debauched, vicious, and extravagant in their habits. To obtain the means of indulging these propensities, therefore, they have recourse without scruple to such means of extortion as fall in their way, and the Jews come in for no small share of it. Under colour of protecting these unfortunate wretches from the displeasure of the chief priests and rulers of the place, loans are exacted, which sometimes are of trifling amount, and are then gene-

* Servants of the shrine.

rally considered in the light of premiums; but which sometimes are carried to the length of a true mercantile transaction, in which the lender expects to be repaid at least a portion of his advance, in consideration of the favourable terms on which he has been induced to deal. It is true these transactions are considered as very hazardous, and are seldom entered into by the Jews, unless from necessity, or some very powerful temptation.

A transaction of this nature had taken place between a certain Meerza Jaffier, and a well-known Jew, called Yacoob Yahooodee. The Meerza was a person of worse than dubious character in every way; known among his companions as one addicted to the worst species of debauchery, and who lavished the large sums which he contrived to procure, upon persons of the most infamous description, his companions: but he was a relation of the Mootwullee, or superior of the Durgah, and this was a sufficient protection had he been ten times as vicious.

Yacoob Yahooodee was one of a considerable and well-known family of that nation, supposed to be wealthy, but therefore so often squeezed by the needy nobles and priests, that they bitterly complained they were reduced to beggary. Still Yacoob hung about the palace and the Medres-

sahs, lent his coin, and took with patient forbearance the scurrilous jests and insults that were heaped upon him by the faithful and the holy; and the knowing ones said, that Yacoob would never have submitted to all this, if he did not find profitable amends in a manner that did not appear to the public.

Yacoob had lent to Meerza Jaffier a larger sum than he chose to lose, and had frequently and humbly intreated for payment in whole or in part, as the Meerza pleased. But it did not please the Meerza to pay it at all; so he warned Yacoob to come no more to seek him in his haunts, to pester him no longer—he would pay when he chose, or not at all: but if the Jew was impertinent enough to dun him again, he swore by the beard of Abraham to make him repent of it.

This was a threat that had been so often held out to Yacoob, that unhappily for himself he made light of it:—he could not believe that the Meerza meant to cheat him out of all his money, or he thought that by importunity he should succeed in obtaining at least a part of it.

The next time he chanced to meet the Meerza, was close to the south-western gateway of the Sahn, which he was entering at the time along with five or six of his friends. Forgetting in the eagerness of business his dangerous vicinity to the forbidden place, Yacoob, in his usual humble but

persevering tone, made repeated application to the Meerza for his money. "Hear you the dog of a Jew!" cried he, turning to his friends and to those who had begun to collect around them,—“must a faithful, pious Mussulmaun, a descendant of the holy Prophet, submit to be insulted by a hated carrion like this? will you all suffer this?—See if he be not entering the holy Sahn! will not the gate fall and crush him to atoms?” The fatal hint was not lost on those around—the poor Jew was forcibly hustled past the forbidden barriers, and in a moment the hue and cry was raised, “Yahooodee! Yahooodee! a Jew!—a Jew in the Sahn!—sacrilege! pollution! put the accursed wretch to death! kill him! stone him!”

I was passing through the Sahn at the time, and the tumult which had attracted my attention from a distance, increased so much, that I went to ascertain its cause. The Moollahs and Khadums poured from the shrine and from the Medressahs around, like angry wasps from their nests:—before I could come up, the unfortunate Jew was down;—stones, sticks, and feet rained blows upon his carcase, he was rolled in the mud and beat upon the flags, so that before half a minute had elapsed, he had lost the form of man, and was reduced to a bloody mass of flesh and rags.

So rapidly did all this pass, that I could not have interfered had I been ever so much disposed,

and it would have been totally useless if I had. But when the deed was done, and the bleeding mass before them no longer presented an object for them to vent their fury on, they drew back all panting with exertion, and looked at one another as though somewhat ashamed of their conduct. But their slumbering wrath was almost revived by a rumour at the gate of the Sahn, which reported that Abisham, the brother of Yacoob, had arrived, in terror and distress, to fetch off the body. "Hah, hah!" cried some, "he seeks the same fate—let him come and try how he likes it—the more the better—down with the Jews! and true believers will get their money!"—"Let the carcase rot upon the dung-hill," cried another; "he shall not have a rag of it." During the gathering of this cloud of wrath I had gone to the gateway, attracted by the cries of the unfortunate Abisham, and was completely overpowered at witnessing the extremity of his distress—he tore his beard, and dashed himself upon the ground, uttering piercing shrieks, interrupted only by curses on his brother's murderers; several of his family and tribe had also accompanied him, and all were uttering the most doleful wailings. "Take courage," said I to him softly, "cease these useless cries, and I will protect you: if possible, too, you shall have your brother's body; but be silent—be all of you quiet while I go to appease yonder tumult." The man hearing me lifted up his hands

and eyes with an emphatic action; their lamentations ceased, and all were still.

I now went to the crowd in the square; "Excellent, pious, and learned men!" said I, "you have done a worthy deed to-day, and the holy Imaum will, no doubt, reward you for your zeal; but remember, vengeance goes not farther than death—even Haroon* sleeps in yonder shrine, beside the holy Imaum. The wretched Jew has received his punishment: ye have his brother left to squeeze while he lives; but if ye slay him now, ye lose his wealth and your prize. Besides," added I, suddenly drawing my sword and bestriding the carcase, "I have taken a fancy to this carrion, and am resolved to have it; and if ye ask who says so, seek him in the household of Nader, who may not be disposed to enlist the Moollahs of the holy shrine among his nassackjees."†

At first they stood irresolute; but all drew back when they saw the bright weapon flash, and heard my concluding words. One by one they slunk away, and I was left with the few whom curiosity still detained about me. Persons were soon procured to remove the shapeless carcase, which the wretched brother received with the most touching

* Alluding to the circumstance of Haroon-al-Rasheed, the celebrated Caliph, and bitter enemy of the Sheahs, being laid in the tomb at the feet of Imaum Reza, one of their principal saints.

† Executioners.

bewailments, and, wrapping it up in his own cloak, he and his sons bore it away between them.

A day or two after this event, while it still dwelt freshly and painfully in my memory, I chanced to be passing near the Jewish quarter of the city, and bethought me of enquiring for Abisham and his family, whose grief had so powerfully affected me. It was some time before I found it, for suspecting the business of one whose dress declared him to belong to the palace, no creature of their nation was willing to direct me to the place. At length, a man who had witnessed the scene in the Sahn, recognized me, and pointed out the house.

Nothing could exceed the wretchedness of its exterior; crumbling walls of mud and raw bricks, propped and supported with lumps of earth and pieces of wood—a miserable low-browed entrance, closed by a door of black worm-eaten planks—was all that met the eye of a passer-by; indeed the squalid wretchedness of the whole quarter was equally striking, but much of it was, no doubt, assumed for purposes of security:—the appearance of comfort would have led to suspicion of riches, and consequent exactions; and notwithstanding their wretched exterior, many of these dwellings were, doubtless, like that of my friend Abisham, decent and well ordered within.

After many precautions I was admitted within

the dwelling. When the Jew understood who his visitor was, he rushed from an inner apartment, and bursting into tears threw himself at my feet, and struggled to embrace my knees; but dislike to receiving so abject a mark of humility, united to an instinctive shudder which every faithful Mussulmaun is apt to feel at the touch of an unclean thing, caused me to start back. The Jew felt it, and kissing the dust where I had stood, before he rose again to his knees, "Ah, pardon a miserable man, my Lord," said he, "a wretched Jew, whose desire to express the gratitude he feels has led him to exceed the respect he owes to one like you. But my heart was full, my Lord; I fain would have touched that hand which preserved me, and restored to me those remains which I would have risked my worthless life to protect from farther insult."

His tears flowed afresh, and he was almost choked with the struggles he made to suppress his sobs. I could not withstand the appeal:—stretching forth both my hands, I sought to raise him, but he, seizing hold of them, carried them to his forehead, and his breast, and his lips; and, after kissing them repeatedly and convulsively, he covered his face with both his hands, and burying them on his knees, gave way to the bitterness of his grief. I was profoundly touched. In spite of my dislike to his race, there was something so

different in all this from the low degrading meanness and deceit which is so universally attributed to the Jewish character, that I could not avoid regarding the individual before me with compassion and with kindness, whatever might be the faults of his nation.

“Ah! my Lord,” said Abisham, after he had a little recovered himself, “you cannot know the value of the benefit you have rendered to your unfortunate servant; you cannot know the love I bore to him who is gone: persecuted, degraded as our nation is, we have little left us but the love of kindred—and he was more than kindred to me! In all the calamities and trials that have fallen upon our house, he was my comfort and support: his cheerful mind and unfailing love was my stay, when without it I must have sunk in my grief—he was my only brother—and now, miserable man! how can I live without him!”

Tears and extreme agitation interrupted his voice as he spoke. I tried to offer a few words of consolation, but it would not do; my own voice was troubled, and I knew not what to say. I asked him if there was any thing in which I could still serve him; but he shook his head. “My Lord must see the orphans, whose father——” He stopped abruptly, and rushed into the inner room, from whence in a little time he returned, leading four beautiful children. My heart warmed to

them all, as I kissed them. One, a little girl, of six years old, was lovely as a daughter of the Peris; her innocent beauty brought visions of my own childhood, and of those I loved then, to my mind. I could have taken the little creature to my heart, and kept her there for ever. The Jew, now convulsively embracing them, turned to me, and spake with a still troubled voice:—"These are the children of my brother—they are now mine, and while I live, they will not be entirely destitute of protection—but I may die;—alas! what but death in all its horrid shapes awaits us wretched Jews!—would that some one, more powerful than I, could be induced to look upon them with a favourable eye—one whose influence might avail against the power of the wicked and unfeeling, when I may be at rest in the tomb of my fathers! Oh, noble Sir, if the humane consideration you showed to the dust of the parent, might but be continued to his offspring, his brother would die in peace!"—The appeal was powerful, though it was made to one possessed of small ability. I dared not charge myself directly with the care of this unhappy family, but I could not withhold from the miserable man a promise of such support as I could render in case of need. "Jew," said I, "I am young, and a soldier; subject entirely to the authority of others; I have nothing in my own power, and my stay in Mushed may not be

long. I dare not promise that which I may never be enabled to perform ; but if Ismael, the servant of Nader, should hear that thou, or any of these children, were in distress, such aid as he can bring shall never be wanting to their deliverance : seek him, when such may be required, at the Palace, among the Gholaulms of Nader."

"May the blessing of Allah increase your prosperity for ever, my Lord !—you have bound up the broken heart of your slave !—And now, noble Ismael, you will not refuse one more request from a poor Jew :—see this emerald signet, it is of the purest lustre, and without flaw or stain ; a richer was never taken from the mines of India ;—and see ! mysterious characters engraved upon it—the name of Allah, the God of the Mussulmaun as well as of the Jew, was written there before the coming of thy Prophet, for it is an ancient gem : valuable in itself, it is esteemed by us a talisman of rare virtue, and powerful to protect its wearer from many dangers. It is known to many of our race, and, if your fate should lead you into distant countries, and you should meet with any of my kindred who are scattered abroad, this may do you service—it will insure such aid as they can give ; and if you inform them of the means by which it came into your possession, there is none of them who will not gratefully acknowledge the good deed you have done to Abisham of Mushed.

“Behold, too, here is gold ; of it we have enough : —alas ! of what value are riches, when life is not secure from hour to hour ! To amass them is the Jew’s trade ; but dear does he pay, and little does he enjoy them. Accept from the hands of thy servant that which may assist in procuring the pleasures or indulgences suited to your age and rank ; and should you require a farther supply, do not scruple to seek it from Abisham the Jew.”

The degrading consequences of my wasteful extravagance, I fear, would at another time have gone far to silence what scruples I might have entertained at relieving the Jew of a part of his wealth ; but, fortunately for my credit, my feelings had been too highly excited to relapse so immediately into a mean and grovelling strain. “Jew,” said I, “the aid which it has been my lot to render thee, thou art heartily welcome to :—I rejoice in having been at hand to lend it ; but I cannot sell my services, nor receive a recompense for that which was voluntarily given. Keep thy gold,—I cannot take it : but for thy sake, for that of this lovely child, and in pledge that I will protect her so far as I am able, I receive thy signet ring. Some future day I may challenge the remembrance of thee, or of thy family, in virtue of this token.”

The Jew, surprised, no doubt, at a circumstance

so unusual as that of a soldier and a gholaum refusing money, remained silent for a while, looking at me with an air of amazement. When he recovered his speech, he urged me with all his eloquence to satisfy his feelings in some degree by accepting his proffered purse ; but I was firm in my refusal, and in order, if possible, to divert the poor man's mind from the immediate subject of his distress, I made some enquiry regarding his family. " Ah, my Lord," replied he, " ours is a short but melancholy tale ; but it is one to which most Jewish houses could furnish a parallel ; for misery and persecution has been the portion of our race since the time when we were driven from the land of our fathers.

" For several ages, my ancestors, who were well known for their riches and respectability, inhabited the city of Herât. In spite of the various revolutions which that city has experienced, they still held their ground ; and although, like the rest of their brethren, they were not unfrequently subjected to extortion, the Lord favoured their industry, and blessed their dealings with much gain.

" During the glorious days of the first Abbas, who encouraged and protected every thing that promoted the interests of commerce, the Jews as well as the Armenians enjoyed comparative security, and flourished accordingly. Nor, in truth, had our people much reason to complain until the

reign of Solymaun, who abandoned the care of the provinces to governors, and they, seeking only to amass riches for themselves, harassed and persecuted all ranks and conditions of men, and especially the Jews and Christians.

“The governor of Herat, about forty years ago, was a cruel, unprincipled man, whose avarice was equalled only by the atrocities he committed to gratify it: Jews, Christians, or Mahometans, if suspected of being rich, were all equal sufferers. Among others, my grandfather, who then was the head of our family, in spite of the care which was taken to conceal the state of our circumstances, was taken up upon some frivolous pretence, and carried before the Khan. My ancestor was a man of firm mind and determined resolution; he saw the peril of the times, and took his measures accordingly.

“Like most of our nation, he had been a general dealer; but his principal and most profitable traffic was in jewels, which the central situation of Herat, between India and Persia, enabled him to carry on to great advantage. In these and such other precious things, therefore, was invested a large share of the family property; the bulk of his cash was disposed of in his most secret repositories; but certain sums were reserved to satisfy such demands as might be made either in the way of trade, to purchase indemnity in case of need,

or to produce, under such circumstances as those he had now fallen into, to satisfy the rapacity of his superiors.

“When taken before the Khan, he was at once given to understand that his life was held forfeited, but should be spared upon payment of a prodigious sum, which was mentioned; in default of which he should certainly be permitted to expire under the tortures that would be applied.

“The terms of this intimation were sufficient to convince him that his fate was determined on; and he resolved to suffer the worst extremities, and save the fortune of his family, rather than yield it to his persecutors, upon the precarious chance of prolonging his own life for a few years more. He declared his inability to produce any thing like the sum required: the tortures were immediately applied, and he then, according to the plan he had laid down, produced gradually such sums as might lead the tyrant to believe that he had actually given up all the ready money in his possession. But the bloodhounds were not to be baffled thus: the tortures were continued; and my grandfather resolutely persisted in asserting that no more was to be had from him.

“Dreadful were the torments which these savages inflicted on the poor old man: his feet had already been beat into a shapeless mass of blood and bones. Molten lead was poured drop by drop upon his bare head; pieces of lighted candles

were inserted in holes made in his flesh, until the flames were extinguished by the blood which flowed from the wounds. His fingers were crushed by heavy hammers, and not a part of his whole frame was left uninjured by his tormentors. But all was in vain; he would not speak; he even suppressed his groans.

“My father, then a young man, was present during great part of this dreadful scene. Wild with horror at the sufferings of his parent, gladly would he have given the whole treasure to end his torments. But the firm old man was absolute in his refusal to purchase his life on such terms. My father himself did not escape uninjured. The bastinado was applied till the nails of his toes fell off, and frantic with his sufferings and those of his parent, he turned an imploring look upon him. But the stern frown of the aged sufferer gave a positive denial, which he enforced in the language of our tribe, unintelligible to his persecutors. ‘Is my life worth preserving *now*?’ said he, ‘or canst thou not bear what I have borne?’—These were his last words—he expired in their hands; and his mangled corpse was yielded to my father by the baffled tyrant, who now became convinced that no more was to be extorted from the family.

“Herat was now no place for our people;—most of the principal Jews quitted the city as opportunity offered; and my father, having in various ways conveyed his treasures to places of security

beyond the walls, resolved to seek refuge in Mushed with his own branch of the family, while the rest of its members tried their fortune in other quarters.

“Thus, forty years ago, we reached this city, and from that time till now have inhabited this house, where we have suffered many losses, and endured great misfortunes, but none—none to compare in bitterness with that which I now deplore. Oh Yacoob! thou wast the companion of my youth, my support in misfortune, my comfort in affliction! thy wisdom and thy prudence was the light that guided our feet; thy kindness and affection sweetened the cup of life; and now thou art gone, the fortunes and prosperity of our house are departed!—Cursed be they who slew thee, my brother!—thrice cursed be thy murderers!”

I sought not to interfere with this burst of anguish, but soon after left the house, promising to visit it again; nor did I fail to do so frequently during the short time I remained in Mushed. I remarked, however, that the spirits of the wretched man never recovered their tone: his mind had received a shock which appeared likely to be fatal, not only to itself, but to the body which it animated; and I anticipated, with no small pain, the period at which I might be called upon to fulfil the pledge I had given, and protect the orphans of his murdered brother.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CATASTROPHE.

It was some time after this, that, going one evening to visit Meerza Aboo Talib, after a few days' absence, I was surprised to find the house occupied only by a slave, who put into my hands a letter and a sealed packet. The letter contained these words:—"Praise be to the one God of Heaven, and to his Prophet Mahomed, and Allee his lawful successor upon earth!—The clouds begin to break, my friend, and the light of hope has beamed upon my darkness! The tidings I have received oblige me to repair to Ispahan without delay; and thither, unless I am much deceived, you will ere long follow me. Allah grant that it be so! and may the hour and the journey be propitious, as I trust will be that of your servant, who will not cease to cherish the hope of seeing you again. If you come to Ispahan before I return to Mushed, enquire for the merchant Aboo Talib, at the caravanserai Cashanee,—there you will hear

news of me. Accept a parting testimony of regard from your friend, and may God have thee in his holy remembrance!" The packet was also directed to me, and contained a purse of two hundred tomauns.

I was thunderstruck at this intelligence. "He is gone then!" thought I,—“my best, my only real friend!—he is gone; and there is none left to whom I can apply for advice or for assistance!—Alas! how often have I neglected the one, and abused the other!”—My conscience,—my heart smote me, as I remembered how ill I had too often requited his friendly admonitions, and his disinterested kindness. My eyes filled with tears: an instinctive dread of evil came over me, like the mysterious whisperings of some spirit of darkness, and I felt as one abandoned to an irresistible and terrible fate.

The supply left me by my friend was, in truth, as opportune as unlooked for; for I was reduced to my last dinar, and had been forced to part piecemeal with my arms and other valuables to provide for my wants. But what was even this supply to one whose mad extravagance increased with the means of gratifying it?—my loose and dissolute companions were the gainers by it,—not I. Happy had it been for me, if this career of vice and folly had been earlier checked by want and distress; but it was written that I must suffer

for my weakness, —that my experience should be full dearly purchased. The course I was pursuing could not long continue without some catastrophe, and mine was a terrible one.

My connexion with Fatimah, as well as that with her slave, had been regularly maintained during all this time; and the former had absorbed a large proportion of the money I had squandered; while the latter could scarcely be prevailed upon to accept the smallest gift. Every interview with the gentle Zeebah increased my affection for her, while the admiration I at first felt for her imperious mistress, began to give way to a disgust, occasioned by her insatiable rapacity and capricious temper.

It was not, perhaps, in the nature of things, that this double connexion should continue undiscovered, or even unsuspected; and suspicion in this case was fatal. A believer in presentiments and auguries might have derived arguments in abundance for supporting his opinions, and for predicting the coming storm, from the symptoms and indications observable for several days before it burst. The health of Zeebah declined without apparent cause; her cheerfulness failed, and she sighed frequently and heavily, as if to throw off the load that hung upon her heart. My own spirits were as unaccountably affected: an unspeakable anxiety preyed upon my mind. Even the manner and be-

haviour of Fatimah was altered: more than once I remarked in her an air of abstraction, which I could not account for, and she would not acknowledge.

On the morning of that fatal day, which never can be forgotten by me, I rose oppressed with an ominous gloom, which I strove in vain to dispel. I had promised to visit Fatimah in the afternoon; and until then, I found myself wandering restlessly about, like a man under the influence of an evil spirit. As I repaired to the place of rendezvous, and traversed the lanes and passages that led to it, my heart sank with a foreboding of misfortune, which no effort of reason or resolution could shake off.

When I entered the apartment of Fatimah, there was a hurry and confusion in her manner, as she received me, which, in spite of my own depression of spirits, did not fail to strike me; and though she made an effort to compose her features, and welcome me with a smile as she took her usual seat, I could not refrain from enquiring whether any thing had happened to disturb her? "Nothing whatever," replied she: "I should rather put that question to you, Ismael; for you look as grave and dull as if you had come to consult with a doctor of laws, not to meet your mistress: what is the matter?"—"I cannot tell, Fatimah: it is true, however, my spirits are unusually low, and I

come to you to cheer them: will you exert your powers upon me?"

She cast a penetrating look at me; but there was nothing in my countenance to awaken her suspicion. Resuming her smile, she said, "Well, my dear Ismael, we both require some cordial to restore us; a little refreshment will do neither of us harm; and as we seem likely to be poor company to each other, you will not, perhaps, object to some addition to our party. Nay, look not strange: I have invited some guests to-night; for I begin to think Fatimah alone, for ever, might be tiresome. Ismael likes variety, does he not?"

In truth, I did look at her with surprise.—Never, in the whole course of our intimacy, had such a thing been suggested, and I knew not what to think of the strange terms in which it was now proposed: there was a wild, unsettled expression in her eye, which ought to have roused my alarm; but my mind was too absent to heed it much. "It is one of her caprices," said I, mentally, "we shall soon see to what it tends."

Sherbet and other refreshments were now brought in; and Fatimah, taking a bowl, offered it to me, after putting her own lips to it. I observed that not a drop had passed them, and was surprised: perhaps, unknown to myself, a shade of suspicion now crossed my mind. "Here, Ismael," said she, "drink of this beverage; it

was prepared by Fatimah ; and trust me, its cool refreshing influence will soon dispel this melancholy mood." The tremulous agitation of her voice, and the unsteady keenness of her eye, increased the alarm I had just begun to feel. "Excuse me, Fatimah, I cannot taste it ! I know not why ; but my soul turns with loathing from this draught ! I am oppressed—I am ill !" — "What ! Ismael loathe the cup presented by the hand of Fatimah ? nay, then, I have rightly deemed thee changed ! The day has been when even poison from her hands would have seemed sweet to Ismael ;—but it is well : it matters not !" The fleeting colour and the suppressed sigh which accompanied these words, smote upon my heart ; for I ascribed them to an emotion far other than the true one. "Upbraid me not, Fatimah," said I ; "I meant not to slight your kindness : the meanest gift from your hands must ever be sweet to me !—give me the cup ?" Slowly I raised it to my lips : but ere a drop had passed them, a piercing scream arrested my hand, and the liquor fell untasted on the floor. "Great God ! whose voice was that ? Fatimah ! what meant that shriek ?" She answered me not ;—pale as ashes, and with her large dark eyes strained forward, her whole soul seemed bent to catch the next sound. Just then, a noise at the inner door struck her ear : "They are come !" cried she, a fierce

joy lighting up her countenance,—“they are come ! You who scorn the food I have prepared, see if you better like the guests I have bidden !” She clapped her hands, the door opened, and four female slaves appeared, leading in a woman veiled and bound ; but while gazing at this ominous sight, I was myself seized from behind, and my arms were pinioned by several armed slaves, before I could rise to defend myself.

The face of Fatimah was now burning with the uncontrolled expression of the rage which filled her breast. Her large eye kindled, and her form dilated majestically as she addressed me with a bitter smile : “How say you, Ismael?—no word of welcome to my guests ? Are they not such as you would have chosen ? Are they all strangers to you ? But stay, he has not seen them all : unveil the lady ! You know not yet the kindness of Fatimah !”

Confounded with doubt and amazement, I stood listening to her words, almost unconscious of their meaning ; but her manner froze my blood. I turned my eyes at her bidding, and fixed them in silent dread upon the veiled female : the veil slowly rose, and a wild cry of horror escaped my lips as it discovered the features of the unfortunate Zeebah !

“Zeebah ! oh God ! thou in her power ! then all is discovered, and you are lost !”—“Hah ! you

know her then? you acknowledge your acquaintance? Nay, start not with such horror!—am I not generous thus to bring lovers together? Yes, wretch! it is Zeebah, your paramour, your minion!—the slave whom your exquisite taste and discernment have preferred to her faded and insipid mistress!—for whose sake alone the noble Ismael still deigns to devote to that mistress a few of his idle hours!—Discovered? yes, you are discovered! Vile slave! perjured traitor! your treason is known, and your punishment is certain.”

“Hear me, Fatimah!” cried I; “I beseech you to hear me. If you ever loved me, listen now one moment.”—“Loved *thee*?” repeated she, with a laugh of scorn, so wild that it sounded like a shriek: “Vain slave! thinkest thou that the love of Fatimah is to be won by such as thee? Thou wert my toy—my tool—my dupe! Love *thee*! I spit at thee, vile dog!”

“Well, then,” said I, anxious to soothe her by any means, “I was deceived indeed,—you loved me not, and I did not deserve thy love; but if the hours of delight we have spent together, when I was thine wholly and in truth, have any place in thy remembrance, I beseech thee hear me now. Zeebah is innocent!—I alone am guilty, I was the seducer: thoughtless folly, infatuation, madness, drove me on; but it is only I that am to blame: on me, then, let all thy vengeance fall, but spare the

innocent,—I conjure thee in the name of Allah and of Mahomet, and of the holy Fatimah, do no harm to Zeebah !”

“Hah ! well said ;—a most excellent advocate thou art, indeed ; and thy minion shall find her account in it. Who, indeed, can doubt the innocence of these secret meetings—in truth, she looks like innocence itself. Slaves ! bring her forward, and expose to her lover’s view these chaste and innocent charms.” The unhappy Zeebah, who hitherto had stood trembling in mute despair, was now dragged forward by the slaves. In a moment they tore off her upper garments, and her whole person, from the waist upwards, became exposed to view. “See !” cried Fatimah, “see these beauties—look once more upon the charms which thou hast preferred to mine, for which I have been despised, deceived, insulted ! Me—an Affghaun, thou hast dared to slight, to betray ; and hoped, it seems, to elude my revenge ! Even now thinkest thou, weak fool ! to blind me ?—to pacify my wrath by a few smooth words ? Wretched, contemptible slave ! did I not warn thee ? Might not my tale have told thee that Fatimah was never to be duped or insulted with impunity ? And now to the proof—Slaves, do your duty.”

At this order the shrieking Zeebah was thrown upon the floor and held by two of the female mutes, while others beat her mercilessly with rods

upon the back and shoulders. "Ismael! Ismael! can you suffer this? Oh! do not let them kill me! Allah, Allah! help me for God's sake!" shrieked Zeebah; and the sound of her voice, and the sight of this dreadful outrage, inspired me with a strength so furious, that I burst my bonds and freed my arms. It was but for a moment,—my guards threw themselves upon me, and overpowered all my frantic efforts. Zeebah's screams and groans were all in vain, and I was forced to watch the laceration of her lovely form, until she, almost insensible, had ceased to cry, and her tormentors stopped from absolute weariness.

"How say you of this specimen of Fatimah's vengeance?" demanded she, with a countenance still flushed with fiendish triumph at the sufferings of her helpless rival. "What think you of these beauties now? Where now is that soft and downy skin?" continued she, pointing to her back and sides all black and blue with the blows, and covered with bloody stripes. "You now, perhaps, begin to see how easily Fatimah is to be pacified."

"Ah, Fatimah," cried I, in the vain hope that her vengeance was now glutted with the terrible sufferings of her slave—"if you have one spark of the pity that belongs to your sex, spare that unfortunate; be content with the punishment she has received, and turn to me; take my life freely,

but spare that miserable creature, who never can offend you more !”

“What ! vile miscreant !” replied she, “seek you to aggravate my anger, that you venture to plead for her again ?—do you not know me yet ? Your life for hers indeed !—the reason, I pray, why either should be spared ?—what are they both compared with the insult you have dared to offer me !—But he doats still—undeceive him, slaves ; proceed with your work !”

The wretches now drawing knives from their girdles, held fast the miserable Zeebah, while they gashed her lovely bosom and her cheeks, till the blood flowed in streams from the gaping wounds. Almost totally lifeless, and deprived of sensation, the hapless slave seemed scarcely to heed her executioners ; betokening her existence only by low moanings, she neither struggled nor stirred as they proceeded with their bloody task ; while I, sickening at this horrid spectacle—which, firmly holding me, they forced me to behold—was equally deprived of power to move.

“Tigress ! devil ! unwomanly fiend !” cried I, when able to articulate ; “finish thy barbarous act !—put an end to her tortures—take her life at once ; and begin the bloody work with me !—let me no longer witness her sufferings !”—“There is a time for all things,” answered Fatimah, with

cool derision; "and thine is come. Take thy last look of thy minion, for never shalt thou see her more! Now, slaves, for him; see that you bind him fast, and do your duty."

The slaves obeyed—I was seized and thrown down:—the emergency of the moment gave me strength to struggle violently with my executioners for a while, but it was in vain; bound as I was, my efforts were useless. I was overpowered and thrown upon my back—the dagger that was to number me with the blind, gleamed in my eyes;—when a sudden noise, and the rush of many people from without, caused the ruffians to start up in sudden fear, and Fatimah herself to pause and listen in alarm. They were not long in suspense—the door flew open, and the Moollah himself entered the room, followed by a number of armed servants.

No sooner did Fatimah perceive her husband, than, uttering a short ejaculation of astonishment, she drew a small dagger from her waist, and flying to the helpless Zeebah, who lay half supported in my view, that none of her tortures might be lost upon me, she plunged it twice in her breast. A faint groan from her victim, as she sank heavily on the floor, told that all her sufferings were past. Swift as lightning then did Fatimah rush towards me; and the fate of Zeebah would have been mine also, but some of the Mool-

lah's servants interposed, and, seizing her arms, secured her from committing farther violence.

The scene which now presented itself in the small apartment, appeared to strike the Meerza himself with horror. In one place lay the murdered Zeebah, weltering in blood, which also covered the persons of her executioners, and flowed in streams along the floor. With arms still bound, and garments all torn by my struggles, I lay in another corner, just where my guards had thrown and left me ; and near me stood Fatimah, held by the Meerza's servants, who had wrested from her the bloody knife ;—her clothes all sprinkled with the blood of her slave ; her frame panting with exertion, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes glaring furiously around. The numerous attendants stood looking at us, mute with astonishment, and waiting their master's commands.

Fatimah was the first to recover herself. She instantly decided on the part she had to take, and, composing her features, addressed her husband in a gentle persuasive tone. "Ah, my lord ! you have come in time to witness a signal act of justice. Behold this wretched slave, and her infamous accomplice—they have been plotting against your life as well as mine. She has already paid the forfeit of her crimes ; the other, too, must die."—"Vile traitress !" replied the Meerza, "think not to deceive me any longer ! I have been too long blind to thy

profligacy—but every thing is now discovered, and thy life, as well as theirs, is forfeit to my justice.”

“You are deceived, my lord, you are deceived; but not by me,” she calmly replied. “I can give you proof of it—I will convince you;—let but my slave Massooah approach.—Here, Massooah!” continued she, as one of the female mutes came forward, “my arms are bound—my worthy husband dreads my violence too much to leave them at liberty—but he need not—here, seek for the paper which is in my bosom—let him see and be satisfied.” As the slave leaned forward to search in the robe of her mistress, it was observed that Fatimah bent her head and whispered a few words in her servant’s ear. After which the latter drew back among the other attendants. “What wouldst thou say?” cried the Meerza, impatiently. “What paper is that?—speak, woman!” The form of Fatimah once more dilated into its utmost expression of majesty; her eye once more shot glances so fierce, that the Meerza quailed and shrank back.

“What would I say?” cried she, with a loud and scornful laugh; “I would tell thee, Moolah, that thou art a fool! a weak, contemptible idiot! as well as a mean unprincipled hypocrite! Fatimah *thy* victim!—*thou* control her destiny!—wretched, sensual, malignant worm!—*thou* pass sentence on her, and determine how she is to live,

and when to die?—Vile, despicable slave, she scorns thy power. Fatimah alone disposes of her destiny—her hour is come indeed, but not at thy command—she laughs at all thy threats;—bring forth thy whips, thy knives, thy tortures, she heeds them not—she is beyond thy reach!”

“For thee, slave!” continued she turning to me, “dearly shalt thou answer for thy insults and thy perjuries to me—my vengeance is secure—I leave it in the hands of one who knows not how to pardon or to spare!—Moollah! he has wronged thee deeply—he has polluted the untainted purity of thy harem, and stained thy hitherto unsullied honour. Spare not the traitor who has robbed thee of that inestimable jewel, the love of Fatimah! hah! hah! hah!”—and she laughed fearfully:—“But Moollah, thou shalt not long exult in the fate of my victim,—mine I say, for it is I who give him to thy vengeance;—the toils of death are weaving around thee, and soon both thou and he shall be alike:—it is Fatimah who tells thee this, and with her dying breath. And now, slaves! lead on whither your lord desires:—my moments are numbered—the dungeon or the palace—the bed of down or the dunghill, are alike to me!”

It seemed as if in truth her fate was in her own hands, for as she uttered these words her colour fled, her lips became livid, and staggering backward a pace or two, she fell into the arms of

those who held her. The activity of the poison she had received from the mute, was increased by her previous agitation, and the effects were awfully violent and sudden.

Dismayed and appalled with the scene that had passed, and with the last words of Fatimah, the Meerza had only power to direct that the body of the unfortunate Zeebah should be removed—that I should be guarded securely in a dungeon close by, and that Fatimah should be removed from this bloody apartment to one which her women usually occupied within; and thither he himself followed her.

As for me, his attendants, perhaps to gratify their master's brutal disposition, roused me with a shower of blows from the place where I still lay, overwhelmed with horror at all that had just passed; and as they forced me through the well-known passages I had so often traversed under feelings and circumstances so different, they vied with each other in the number and severity of their strokes. At last, opening a door which had before escaped my observation, they dragged me down a few steps, into a small, damp vault, without either furniture or opening except that by which we entered; where, roughly throwing me on the ground, they left me, bound and in darkness, to my own meditations.

CHAPTER XVIII.

REMORSE.

IN vain should I attempt to describe the utter desolation and misery into which I was plunged by the scenes I had just witnessed. For a while I was sensible of nothing but a fearful mingling of mental and bodily suffering; all was tumultuous, horrible, dark. The mind reflected no definite image; it resembled the bed of a mountain torrent after a storm, choked with the ruins of all that the furious flood has destroyed in its course. Recovering by degrees from this painful stupor, I began slowly to retrace the terrible events of the last few hours; and oh! with what anguish did I recall the murder of the unfortunate Zeebah in all its fearful truth. "Gone! for ever gone!" cried I mentally; "murdered! and in so terrible a way!—And Fatimah!"—I shuddered involuntarily—"by this time she too is dead! Savage, ruthless fiend! Oh, what a change from

the fascinating lovely creature, who once dazzled and seduced my senses ! But she loved me once ! say what she might, she truly, fondly loved me ; though not with the love of Zeebah ;—and I —oh Zeebah, thou wert indeed dear to me ! and yet I was thy murderer ! And they are gone ! both passed away—the gentle, warm affections of the one, and the fierce and dangerous passions of the other, alike quenched in the cold silence of death :—and this is the end of love so ardent ! Allah ! Allah ! it is indeed dreadful !” My heart was full to bursting, but I had no tears to shed ; my eyes were dry, and my brain was burning. For my own condition, as yet I thought not of it :—so painfully occupied had I been in pondering over the cruel fate of these two hapless women, that I did not even recollect I was a prisoner.

But the mind, though it may be supported by excitement for a time, must at last sympathize with the sufferings of its frailer tenement. The pain of the blows I had received, and the constraint of my bonds, at length forced themselves on my attention ; and calling to mind all that had happened, I began to consider what my own fate might be. I had fallen into the hands of a cruel man, whom I had most deeply injured and insulted ; there was no reason to hope that he would permit me to escape unpunished ; and what punishment short of death could I expect, or could

he inflict on me with safety to himself? There were few who would ever think of searching for me if I should be missed, so that he ran but little risk in case of putting me to death; but if, satisfied with a less fatal though more humiliating revenge, he should permit me to escape with life, he could never hope to be secure against my vengeance:—death then was, no doubt, at hand; the next morning's light would, in all human probability, see me a mangled corpse. But, appalling as such a prospect might have been some few hours before, it now had lost its terrors; for my heart was almost broken, and I was reckless of life. I had been witness of a deed, the horror of which must for ever dwell in my memory and blast my happiness. The light of my soul was darkened for ever; I knew not till now how much I had loved the unhappy Zeebah, and her bleeding mangled bosom was ever before me, even in the darkness of my dungeon, while her piercing shrieks still rang in my ears, till I tried in horror to stop them.

The admiration I had once entertained for Fatimah, had long since given way to the baneful effects of her haughty and capricious temper; and her atrocious cruelty had completed my disgust while it roused my indignation. But she had once truly loved me: many an hour of bliss had I tasted with her, and what man can ever

hate the woman who has once lavished all her tenderness upon him? In spite of all that had passed, my wayward fancy still strayed back to the days of our early love: it painted her beauty, her smiles, her blandishments; and then pointed to her noble form as sinking into the cold embrace of death. In the morning of this day, these fair creatures were both alive, in the pride of their beauty; before night they were livid, mangled corpses:—how great a share had I in that catastrophe! My heart was sick with anguish; I rather welcomed, than dreaded the thought of death.

The misery which can reconcile a buoyant youthful mind to death, must be poignant indeed: and though a gloomy calm may succeed the storm which settles into so desponding a mood, the sufferings that produced it, will continue long unabated. Wretched, indeed, were the hours that elapsed in this dungeon, until weariness of body and exhaustion of mind at length combined to throw me into a state of insensibility, which scarcely could be termed sleep. My visions were as disturbed as my mind. The horrid scenes of the evening were again before me; sometimes it was Zeebah, sometimes Shireen that shrieked for help. Selim and Aboo Talib flitted by in the distance, and I called on them to aid me. I felt myself still in bonds, and struggled to get free, while

Fatimah, with her clayey face and livid lips, pressed me to the earth, and I shuddered with horror at the deathlike kiss she endeavoured to imprint upon mine. Torrents of blood seemed to foam around me, and the ghastly countenances of those I had known or loved, reared themselves above the waves, and glared upon me with their glazed and sightless eyes. Every scene of horror I had ever heard of, or witnessed, seemed to be passing around me in fearful confusion. On a sudden, all faded away,—a light flashed on the darkness, and the form of the Dervish, the same who had warned me of my future fortune, and saved me from the dangers of the Desert, appeared hovering over me in a radiant cloud. At this sight all the trouble of my visions vanished, and the suffocating load which oppressed my heart, gave way to a feeling of peace and hope. I tried to stretch my hands towards him, to seek his aid and counsel; and awoke to find this part of my vision realized: for, bending over me, by the light of a lamp in his hand, that shone upon the same striking countenance which was so strongly impressed on my memory, I saw the Dervish himself.

For some moments I believed that my senses were still mocked with an empty dream, and in order to rouse myself, I tried to rub my eyes; but the pain of my bonds, the tightness of which had now swelled and chafed my arms, not only convinced

me that I was awake, but recalled me to a remembrance of my situation.

The calm which, in my vision, succeeded the Dervish's appearance, was surely the foreshadowing of that hope and comfort which was shed over my soul by his real presence. But yet I dared not to address him. There was a reproving spirit in the grave solemnity of his mien, which, joined to the silent but painful reproaches of my own conscience, overwhelmed me with confusion, and quite deprived me of all power to speak. He bent his keen eyes upon me for a while ; and then stooping down, he loosed the cords which bound my arms. " Arise, young man ! " said he, in his customary solemnity of tone ; " arise, and quit this place, unless you desire to abide the fate you but too well deserve."

It was not without a painful effort that I raised myself from the ground, and I fell more than once in the attempt. A piercing look from the Dervish, accompanied with the words " Be firm, young man ! exert yourself, for much depends upon this hour," restored me to self-possession ; and mustering up my strength, I left the dungeon. The dawn was just appearing, and by its grey and dubious light I observed two of my guards asleep beside the door ; but they did not stir, as with a light and noiseless step we passed by them, and soon gained the lane beyond.

Stiff with the pain of my bruises, and giddy with incipient fever, it was with great difficulty and with tottering steps that I followed my deliverer through several streets into an obscure part of the city, with which I was unacquainted. Entering a mean and mud-built house, and threading one or two narrow passages, we found a small but comfortable apartment, plainly furnished, with a bed ready spread upon the floor. "Rest thee here, young man, and fear nothing," said the Dervish; "here thou art secure from every thing, except the reproaches of that inward monitor which never suffers guilt to slumber:—but the body must be relieved from pain, that the mind may be restored to soundness: behold, the next apartment contains a bath; use it to refresh thy bruised limbs; I will revisit thee again."

The bath had evidently been prepared for an expected guest; no sooner had I undressed and stepped into the smoking cistern; than an attendant entered and offered his services as *dullauck*,* which I was glad to accept, being unable to assist myself. The effect of this bath, aided by the skill of my attendant, produced a wonderful effect; the pains of my bruises and the stiffness of my joints abated, as if by magic, and so well did the *dullauck* understand the niceties of his trade in kneading the

* Or barber, who attends at the Hummaums upon those who take the bath.

muscles and pulling the joints, that I came out, as I believed, almost free from any kind of illness, and took possession of the bed prepared for me, in full hope of rising quite recovered. But I was mistaken; the shock which had been sustained both by mind and body was too severe to fail of producing serious effects; the fever, which had been mitigated for a time by the salutary effects of the bath, quickly returned; my head became confused, wild dreams once more harassed my rest;—delirium soon came on, and rendered me insensible to all around me for several days.

On my return to consciousness I found myself lying in a place of which I had no recollection, attended by a single person, who, seated at a little distance on the ground with his head resting on both his hands, was watching me attentively:—it was Cossim Allee, my old Jeloodar, whom not immediately recognizing, I addressed as a stranger. The old man started at the sound of my voice—“Allah Kereem!”* cried he, after looking earnestly at me for a few moments—“he speaks!—he speaks sensibly—he is better!—he will be well again! Alhumdulillah! Alhumdulillah.”†

“Is it you, Cossim Allee?” said I faintly. “Where am I? what is the matter? what means all this? where is Fouje Allee?—where”——I stopped abruptly:—dire and fearful recollections

* God is merciful!

† Thanks be to God!

began to revive.—“For God’s sake, my dear master! be composed,” said Cossim Allee earnestly;—“you are in safety—you are with friends;—only be calm, be tranquil, and every thing will be well. Oh! what joy is it to me to see you better,—I have watched you with such anxiety!”

“I have been ill then? Stay!—yes,—I think—poison, was it not?—No, no,—I remember now—oh! was it all reality?” I shuddered and groaned so deeply, as the late fearful images arose in my mind, that my servant began to fear I was wandering again. But this was not the case: my heart was indeed smitten with that sickening dismay which the sudden consciousness of some terrible misfortune often produces; but my bodily complaints had left me. Though exceedingly weak, I was free from disease; and as all emotions, whether of joy or sorrow, can act but feebly on a mind enervated by disease, the misery I still endured from a retrospect of what had passed, was not sufficient to retard my discovery.

It was a few days after the restoration of my senses, while lying on my couch, and musing mournfully on the past, that the Dervish entered the room. His countenance wore the same character of calm penetration, which had rendered it so remarkable on other occasions; but a shade of grave severity darkened its expression, as, standing by the couch on which I lay, he fixed his

keen eyes on my face. His look entered my soul, and, labouring as I was with conscious guilt, I could not articulate a word.

“It has pleased the Giver of Life,” said he at last, “to snatch thee, young man! from the brink of that gulph to which thy folly and thy crimes had led thee, and to extend the span of thy mortal career. The ills of thy body are removed, and the power of thy mind is restored. It becomes thee at such a crisis to look back upon the time that is past, and think of that which is to come. Hast thou satisfaction in the review? or doth thy conscience declare that thy sins and thy follies have been many, that the stream of thy life hath been darkened by repeated transgressions? and dost thou feel that now, when rising by the mercy of God from the bed of danger and of pain, it is meet for thee to repent of thy misdeeds, and resolve upon amendment? How sayest thou, youth?—is it then otherwise with thee?—doth the tenor of thy conduct hitherto receive the approbation of thy conscience?—hath thy past life been blameless in thy own regard? Then is a monitor useless to thee, and thou hast but to proceed in the path thou hast chosen. Pursue then thy excesses, be still the minion of a wanton, the seducer of innocence, the heartless spendthrift, the unblushing abuser of generous friendship;—continue to desert thy chief, to abandon those who

cherished thee when friendless and unknown, and to stray from the path of honour and of fortune which the bounty of Providence had spread before thee:—declare, is this thy resolution? Thinkest thou it was for this thou wert saved from the sword of the murderer, and the blasts of the Desert, when others perished around thee?—Was it but to become what now thou art, that thou wert spared when thy parents fell by the hand of the destroyer, and the blood of thy kindred was poured to the wolves of the Desert? What is thy reply? Is thy heart still hardened to the truth?—is repentance still far from thee?”

He paused:—but, overwhelmed with bitter thoughts, I could not speak. His words, with a force like that of magic, had conjured up the whole dark tissue of my crimes in their true and dreadful colours, and I saw with despair the gulph into which I had fallen. Enervated as I was by bodily weakness and mental suffering, I scarce could feel another pang; yet the thoughts of my innocent childhood, the remembrance of my unhappy parents, and the wishes and prayers of my dying mother, came like a dagger to my soul: I hid my face with my hands, and groaned aloud.

The Dervish, stern and immovable, with his searching eye fixed upon me, stood still, awaiting a reply. “Father,” faltered I at length, “if, as I think, thou canst read the heart thou hast so

keenly probed, it were needless for me to speak. Thy words, though harsh, are true; and thy reproaches just, though poignant. But well thou mayest know, that their sharpness can never equal the pangs I feel within me. Whatever of farther sufferings thou hast to announce, I am ready to endure, though death itself should terminate them: no punishment can exceed the anguish of that remorse which gnaws my heart at this moment."

"Remorse," rejoined the Dervish, "like the aloes and myrrh of Arabia, is bitter but salutary to the soul; and thou hast merited to feel its pangs, for great have been thy faults, and fatal their consequences. But search thy heart, young man; examine, and declare whether the pain thou feelest be in truth the offspring of repentance for thy crimes, or of despair for that which thou hast lost;—anguish for the dreadful fate of her thou lovedst, and of which, too surely, thou wert the cause, or contrition for the sin which led to her destruction. Could those, the blossoms of whose lives have been gathered by the Angel of Death, be again permitted to bloom in the garden of existence, wouldst thou not greedily seek to renew those guilty ties, transgressing thus again the law of God and man? Has the bitter lesson of the past brought wisdom on its wings? Would life, if life be spared thee, be better used in future? and would thy course be henceforth pursued with

zeal and blamelessness of heart? If this be thy resolution, then have thy sufferings and thy remorse not been in vain; thy sins may be blotted from the book of retribution, and Allah, in his mercy, may seal thy pardon."

"Alas! holy Dervish," returned I, "it is Allah alone that can tell the sincerity of my repentance, or judge how much of the agony which distracts me springs from so laudable a source; but I can truly declare, that I so loathe my errors, that I would willingly purchase deliverance from them and from their consequences, at the price of life itself! Alas! what has life now for me!—the cup of happiness is for ever poisoned, the weight of blood is on my soul, and the forms of those who were the victims of my crimes, haunt me unceasingly with their ghastly looks, scaring peace and rest from my weary soul. Would to Heaven that I were dead indeed! for the rose of life is withered, and the sun of my destiny has set for ever!"

"Is this thy penitence?" replied the Dervish with severity; "is it thus that thou dost bow before the rod which chasteneth thee in mercy?—Is it for thee to scan the purposes of the Most High, and to murmur because one worm is spared and another gathered to the dust from whence it sprang? Well hast thou said that the Omniscient alone can read the heart of man—hast thou forgot

that the murmurings of thine are all before his penetrating eye? and dost thou not tremble to provoke his wrath by thy rebellious complaints?—My son," continued he, his sternness softening into a grave solemnity as he watched the powerful effect of his reproaches, "seek thou to know thyself; search thy heart for its secret sins, curb and mortify thy passions; guard against vanity, presumption, and inordinate love of pleasure; from these, aided by idleness and evil company, have all thy faults and all thy misfortunes sprung. The merciful Sovereign of the universe grants thee time and opportunity to redeem thy errors,—beware of slighting his gracious bounty. Tarry no longer in the haunts of temptation. Thy strength will soon be restored: delay not then, quit this place and return to thy duty. Rejoin the Chief to whose fortune thou art linked, and who requires the present aid of all his faithful servants.—And now, my son, farewell! A mighty arm has dispersed the clouds which gathered round thy path, and threatened to obscure thy destiny; pursue under its guidance the course of virtue and of honour once more open before thee, and forget not that the more gracious the warnings, the more signal the deliverances thou hast experienced, the deeper will be thy guilt and the heavier thy punishment shouldst thou again relapse into error. May the Omnipotent

protect thee with his might, and ever have thee in his keeping !”

With these words the Dervish withdrew, leaving me more than ever perplexed at the singular influence he exercised over my fate. But the effect of his visit and admonition was infinitely salutary; a sense of hope and confidence arose in my breast, and gradually put to flight the despondency and recklessness of life which even from the moment of my restoration to consciousness and memory had settled on my spirits, and seemed to be fast weighing me down to the grave.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CLOSE OF A TALE OF GUILT.

DURING the continuance of my infatuation at Mushed, no event of consequence took place in Khorasan. The attention of Nader and his officers was fully occupied in compelling the obedience of the turbulent and inconstant tribes which occupied the northern part of the province. Not only did the Koords continue their usual rebellions, and the Toorkomans their customary inroads; but even some divisions of the Affshars and other well-disposed tribes around Dereguz and Kelaat, were by some means seduced from the path of their duty, and joined the insurgents.

These disturbances were not a little encouraged by the intrigues of the weak Shah Tahmaseb and his ministers, who were jealous of the rising power of Nader, and who, little caring what injury the public might sustain, sought by every means in their power to effect his ruin. The rebels at

length appeared in so formidable a shape, that Ibrahim Khan, who was dispatched with orders to reduce the district, became unable to oppose them in the field, and was forced to take shelter within the fortress of Dereguz, where he was vigorously besieged by the chief of Diroom and several of the Zafferanloos. Nader, whose arms had been crowned by their usual success in the more southern parts of the province, on receiving these unpleasant tidings, turned his steps towards Dereguz, carrying along with him the person of the weak Shah Tahmaseb.

It was at this time that, rising from the bed of sickness, I prepared to rejoin the standard of my chief. It was unfortunate for me that every one who was interested in my welfare should happen to be absent from Mushed at a period when I became more particularly exposed to the snares of vicious pleasure. The activity of Ibrahim Khan was so useful to the service of his brother, that his duty seldom permitted him to visit the capital; and Caleb Allee Beg, my more immediate commanding officer, had left it in attendance upon his master. Consideration for my health, still at that time weak from the consequences of my wounds,—perhaps, too, an ill-judged indulgence,—had permitted me to remain behind in Mushed, from whence, had I acted rightly, I should have rejoined the General in camp as soon as my strength

permitted me to do so. But there was no friendly voice to warn me of my danger, no kind monitor to urge me on in the path of duty :—I yielded to the temptations around me, and now suffered for my weakness. But the delusion was past; every thing I saw around me was pregnant with painful recollections, and I longed to quit the hateful scene, with all the disgust of a sickened, desolated, blighted heart.

The arrangements for my departure were neither tedious nor complicated. Of all the property I had accumulated, there now only remained the arms which were the gift of Selim,—these I never put in jeopardy, even when my pecuniary resources were at the lowest,—and the suit I had received from the General after my first introduction. These, with my gallant steed Boorrauk, had been secured by Caleb Allee, when, in obedience to the orders of the Dervish, he quitted my former quarters, and came to attend upon me in the retreat to which I had been removed. It did not take much time to pack up these things; and as soon as I could sit a horse with safety I bade adieu to Mushed.

Before I proceed with my story, I must return for a moment to the melancholy catastrophe which has so lately been described, and shortly relate the sequel, which came to my knowledge on a subsequent visit to the city. One day as I was passing,

deeply absorbed in thought, by the steps in front of an old mosque, my reflections were interrupted by an aged and squalid-looking female, who besought my charity.—“A few dinars to buy me food, in the name of the holy Imaum! for the sake of the blessed Fatimah!” exclaimed she in a cracked and trembling voice, the tones of which startled me. “Fatimah!” echoed I, instinctively taking out a piece of money, while a sigh of painful recollection rose in my breast; “what unlucky demon could induce you to plead to me in such a name?—and in such a spot too!” added I, looking up and shuddering as I recognized the old mosque, from the minarets of which I had first pried into the old Meerza’s harem.

“Strange and unlucky indeed! if my eyes and my ears, old and weakened as they are, do not deceive me,” muttered the miserable object with a groan:—“that voice should be the voice of Ismael Beg, who truly knew *one* Fatimah but too well! But how can he be among the living? How could he have escaped from the fate to which he was doomed?”—“And who are you that know this Ismael?” exclaimed I; “who is it that can thus allude to the secrets of that terrible night?”—“I cannot dispose of my secrets for nothing!” replied the old woman; “nor can I on any terms tell what you desire, where we now are. If you would know me, if you would listen to all

I am in possession of regarding these same very creditable transactions, give me a piece of gold—my tidings are worth so much, I promise you—and follow me: you shall learn what I know, and judge how far it may concern thee!” The name of Fatimah,—the allusion to that fatal tragedy, the remembrance of which no time could erase from my mind, had awakened so much painful curiosity, that I did not hesitate to comply with the old woman’s request, and followed her tottering steps from the mosque to a wretched and retired hovel at a little distance.

“A very different sort of apartment this,” said the crone, “from that which you may remember of old, and not far from hence, to which I once conducted you, friend Ismael! nor can it boast of an inhabitant so young and so fair as her who charmed your hours of dalliance in a humbler dwelling. But youth flies and beauty fades; time and sorrow blight the flowers, if death should even spare the plant.”—“Trifle no longer,” interrupted I, impatiently; “my part of the agreement is performed—let yours be so likewise:—who are you? speak!”

“Little pleasure will the knowledge give you,” replied the hag, with a malicious laugh; “but, Allah! we must be honest; we must tell the truth, though it break our hearts! Learn then, young man, that I am she who destroyed your

paradise ! who dispelled all your blissful visions ! and sent your houris to await their lover—in heaven or in hell ! I am she who wrought the death of Fatimah,—of Zeebah,—of the Meerza himself ! ay, and who little cared if Ismael had been added to her victims ! Do you not remember me ? Were you not warned, that he who sought the love of my mistress, required a stout heart and a firm mind ? yet, boy as you were, you hoped to enjoy her smiles, and bask unharmed in the glare of her dangerous charms !”

I now recollected the voice : it was the old woman who had given the alarm when I was gazing from the house-top ;—it was my guide to the private apartments of Fatimah ! “ I know thee now,” exclaimed I ; and well do I recollect thy scorn and thy warning, though I knew not how I had incurred thy contempt. I never harmed thee,—why then dost thou boast of having planned my ruin ?”—“ Thy ruin ! vain worm ! I never planned it ; I sought but to secure my own ends ; and what did Kharabeh care how many insects might be scorched by the blaze that consumed her foes ?”

“ Listen ! I was once the favoured slave of Fatimah ; a creature, as she thought, devoted to her interest. She found me in the harem of her lord ; and well could I tell the fate of its numerous and often changed inmates. I was kind, con-

venient, faithful to them, while they made it my interest so to be; but an insult, or an injury, I never forgot or forgave. So often had I become the instrument of detecting the intrigues of those I hated, and of exposing them to the indignation and vengeance of my master, that he reposed a degree of confidence in me which was denied to all his other servants.

When Fatimah entered the Zenanah, I discovered very soon that we were to be rivals in influence; and that unless we could come to a mutual understanding, one or other of us must fall. The infatuation of my old master was at first so great, that any attempt on my part to injure Fatimah in his opinion, would have recoiled upon myself. My only resource was to offer her terms of alliance, and these she accepted;—but neither was deceived: we knew the grounds we respectively stood upon, and kept a jealous eye upon each other.

“You believe, perhaps, that you were the first with whom she strayed from the paths of duty—deluded boy! many were the dupes and toys of whom she made such use as she did of you!—but when their time was come, when all their substance was exhausted, and they became poor and wretched, they were easily got rid of without involving others in their ruin:—the insects were brushed off when they grew troublesome, and they

teazed no more ; and so it would have been with you, had no interest but yours been at stake. But Fatimah could not be wise : she provoked the wrath of Kharabeh, and by her means became involved in the ruin which she designed for you and for your paramour alone !”

“Woman !” interrupted I, “I have sufficient cause to know myself the dupe of Fatimah, and I do not doubt thy words ; but what could have occasioned the fatal change in thy conduct to thy mistress ? What made thee so deeply her enemy ? What could induce thee to aim so terrible a blow at others whom thou hadst no cause to hate.”—“No cause !—but you shall hear ; you have bought my information, and it shall all be yours, should the hearing of it strike thee dead !

“The understanding which subsisted between Fatimah and me was hollow as the truce which binds two mortal foes,—only while they have cause to dread each other’s arms. *She* felt that she had power, and presumed too much upon it ; *I* watched my opportunity to destroy it. This might have soon been effected, had she not found it convenient to purchase my services. She hated her husband ; she loved gaiety and variety, and these she could not enjoy without my assistance. To secure this, she lavished magnificent promises, part of which she found it necessary to fulfil, and she never could have satisfied my increasing de-

mands if she had not possessed such sources of supply as you are now aware of.

“Thus largely bribed, I devoted myself to the will and pleasure of Fatimah;—not only did I conceal my knowledge of her irregularities, I gave them all possible assistance, and became, as you have cause to know, the active agent of her intrigues. But even the powerful motives of interest and preservation of character, added to the necessity she felt of satisfying those appetites and tastes to which she was so much a slave, were insufficient to restrain the proud imperious spirit of Fatimah: she could not always repress the taunts and insults which rose to her lips; and the jealous hatred she bore to me in secret would occasionally burst forth in spite of her better judgment. Fresh presents and ample promises, it is true, were always ready to repair these errors; but the gall which tipped these arrows of her spite, would continue to smart even after the wounds were, to all appearance, healed. My spirit became embittered towards her, and nothing but the extravagant rewards with which she held my interest in check, restrained me from exacting a desperate revenge.

“Such was the state of feeling between my mistress and myself, when her intrigue with you commenced. You proved a better prize than I expected, and the closing scene was consequently

deferred longer than in most cases. Your own imprudence in commencing another intrigue, and with her own slave too, was the means of throwing you both more in my power. Fools! to believe that ye could deceive the lynx eyes which surrounded you. It was impossible that the frequent absence of Zeebah from her domestic duties could long remain unnoticed—she was watched, and your secret was discovered. I knew it all, but treasured up the knowledge as a powerful hold upon my mistress. I now had it in my power to alarm her with the assurance that she had a rival, and I knew well that she would purchase the secret at whatever rate I might choose to fix. In truth, the youth, and—I may confess it now—the beauty of Zeebah had always been hateful to me: she had dared to laugh at the age and peculiarities of Kharabeh,—she had mocked and insulted me in her own way, and I owed her a suitable return.

“It were vain to waste time in repeating the trifles which gradually led to a disclosure of my secret; nor need I try to describe the rage of my mistress when she became acquainted with the truth. With clenched hands and sparkling eyes, and lips all pale with anger, she muttered through her set-teeth an oath of bloody vengeance,—while the promises of recompense she heaped upon me exceeded all moderate, or probable bounds. They

were barren promises. My mistress was too extravagant to be prepared for unexpected demands upon her purse; she had no means of satisfying mine, and I was unwilling to wait her convenience, perhaps her necessity. Importunate, and perhaps exorbitant, from the knowledge of my power, I urged my claims, until her indignant spirit was chafed;—we both lost temper;—high words arose; I threatened her with vengeance for all her insults; and she defied me to do my worst, in terms of contempt and abuse that stung me to the quick:—I was privy to her whole plan of bloody revenge upon Zeebah and you, and in the frenzy of the moment I vowed that the victims should be yet more abundant than she looked for.

“Greatly as the Meerza had been dazzled by the charms of Fatimah, and ardent as his love for her had once been, her fierce imperious temper had gradually weakened the hold she at first possessed on his affections, until a certain dread of her violence became the only remaining source of her influence with him. That Fatimah exercised a freedom exceeding what is generally permitted to women, the Meerza was not ignorant; but whether he entertained a suspicion of the lengths to which she went, I never could discover. He did not watch her conduct, nor seek for matter of accusation against her; and until this time none

of his household had ever dreamt of awakening a prejudice in his mind against his favourite wife.

“ But the hour of her destiny was come, her ruin was decided on. Furious with passion I went to the Meerza, and without stipulating for any terms for myself, or thinking of the smallest reservation, I told him all I knew concerning his wife’s intrigues. The man was thunderstruck ;— for some minutes he sat muttering to himself, twisting his mustachios, stroking his beard, and knitting his heavy brows the while, so fiercely as almost to conceal his eyes from view. ‘ Woman, take heed to thy words !’ said he at last. ‘ Something of this I have suspected ; but,—if thou speakest truth, thy reward is sure—if otherwise, beware !’ — ‘ My lord may satisfy himself that his slave hath spoken truth,’ replied I, ‘ and be himself the witness of his wife’s baseness.’—I then detailed to him the whole particulars of Fatimah’s projected plan concerning thee and Zeebah, to which he listened with unmoved gravity, but with a dark and ominous scowl upon his brow that almost made me tremble. Perhaps, when my anger had a little cooled, I half repented of the desperate and irretrievable step which I had taken, and wished I had been less precipitate. But the deed was done, and no retreat remained ; for the only question now was, whether I should be the victim, or Fatimah. The only method of

saving her was to sacrifice myself; and for that, had I been fool enough to resolve upon it, there was now no time. The hour of action approached; the preparations of Fatimah were complete,—so were those of the Meerza. Zeebah was within her toils, but little did my mistress dream that her own fate was involved in that of her victim. The result you are acquainted with; I need not remind you of each circumstance.

“My unfortunate mistress gave no sign of consciousness after she was conveyed from the apartment where the catastrophe took place. Strong convulsions and a continued low moaning led those about her to believe that the hour during which she yet lingered was one of great agony: but if such was the case, her habitual pride and self-command enabled her to suppress all more positive complaints; and she yielded up her last breath without uttering a word.

“The harsh countenance of the Meerza retained a strong expression of horror and distress while he watched her dying agonies, and he continued gazing on the body long after life was fled. He was only roused from this torpor by a sense of racking pains throughout his frame, which, increasing in intensity, speedily affected his senses, and deprived him of reason. He raved of Fatimah and Zeebah, and others of his household who had fallen victims

at various times to his jealousy or cruelty: he called on them to take their burning eyes from off his heart, and to bring the snows of Kaf to cool his liver. He continued in this dreadful condition for six or seven hours, when death put an end to his sufferings. His blackened face and starting eye-balls, his body swollen to bursting of the skin, proclaimed that poison must have caused his death; but how or when it was administered remains undiscovered. His heirs, distant kinsmen, were too well pleased with the unexpected acquisition of his property, to investigate very strictly the causes of his death; a few presents hushed up every mouth, and they divided his wealth. The household was dispersed; the young and useful slaves fell to other masters, while the aged and faded females were turned loose to shift for themselves. I was among the number of the last. The presents and the money I had saved were sufficient to have supported me a long time, had I known how to take care of them; but I had learned extravagance from my unfortunate mistress, and all my property was soon dissipated. Beggary stared me in the face; I was shunned by all my acquaintances from the moment they discovered I had nothing more to give them; and my soul, embittered by misery, often wanders back to the days that are gone, and is haunted by the

memory of those I have destroyed, but, above all, by the image of the generous and unfortunate, though proud and haughty Fatimah.

“Such is my story; from you I can expect nothing but hatred and injury. Be it so.—I am wretched and destitute, often to the want of a morsel of bread; but want and misery are less terrible than the tortures of a despairing mind, and the kindest deed that friend or enemy could do me now, would be to bury his dagger in this withered breast, and let me sleep the sleep of death.”

Heartstruck at this recital, and overwhelmed with the flood of painful recollections which it had excited, I hurried from the place. I could not harm the miserable wretch, already a prey to sufficient ills, but neither could I bring myself to administer assistance to one who had so wantonly trifled with the lives and happiness of those around her; who had so basely betrayed her mistress, and sacrificed with such unfeeling selfishness, persons who had never done her injury. The frightful events of that fatal night were again recalled to memory, and the shades of Zeebah and Fatimah haunted my imagination for a long time after.

CHAPTER XX.

FRESH HOPES.

It was early on a morning about the middle of March, that, weak and emaciated as I still was, I mounted my trusty Boorrauk, and accompanied by Cossim Allee on a stout yaboo, which also served to carry the whole of my baggage, I quitted Mushed to join the General at his camp near Radcan.

Though scarcely yet able to travel, I so loathed the city, and panted so to breathe the free air beyond its walls, as if that alone could relieve my heart from its load, that I would no longer delay my departure; and in reality, the moment I passed the north-western gate, through which my road lay, I felt my spirits rise. The air was fresh and balmy; the snow, though still lying plentifully in spots and stripes upon the distant mountains, had left the plains, which were tinged with an emerald hue by the sprouting of the young grass. Innumerable little flowers of every colour

were springing on the brown, gravelly banks; thousands of birds were making the heavens resound with their cheerful notes, and clouds of insects fluttered in the sunshine. On every side the peasants, encouraged by the comparative security they now enjoyed, were plying their agricultural labours, and the plain around the city was alive with groups of men, women, and animals of every description. A change from the dreary confinement of a sick chamber, where the mind had no other occupation than to brood over its own gloomy reflections, to a scene like this—where all nature appeared rejoicing, was exhilarating beyond expression; but the wounds I had received were yet too green to enable me fully to enjoy it; and a chill would ever and anon strike upon my heart, as the thought of those who were gone came over it,—as I remembered that spring did not now smile for them, that joy would return to them no more: nevertheless, the healthful elasticity of the air, and the consciousness that I had abandoned my evil ways, and was once more likely to be actively and honourably employed, had a salutary effect upon my spirits; every day increased my strength, and by the time I reached the General's camp, I was fit to take a part in the duty that was going on.

Conscious of the room my conduct had given for censure, I looked forward with no small uneasi-

ness to my first interview with the stern and rigid Nader, and appeared before him with a downcast countenance and humbled air : it was fortunate for me that his attention was too much engrossed with matters of greater moment, to admit of his expending much of his anger upon me.

He was seated in his tent of audience, busily engaged in listening to reports of service, and issuing orders to several officers who stood before him. The tidings he had received were probably unsatisfactory, for displeasure loured in his countenance, and his brows were contracted by their peculiar and ominous frown. I should willingly have deferred the interview until a more auspicious moment ; but I was already standing with others waiting their turn to be introduced, and the Yes-sawul* on duty, perhaps intending me a kindness, called me forward, and announced my name as "Ismael Beg Keerkloo, Gholaum, and officer of the guard, returned from sick leave at Mushed, to kiss the dust of his Highness's footsteps." "Ismael Beg Keerkloo," repeated Nader in an under-tone, as if uncertain to whom the name applied, while his brows were brought yet closer by his deepening frown, "we had almost forgotten him, as he seems to have done his duty. Let him go to his commanding officer ; we shall, no doubt, receive a report concerning him in due time ;—we seek not

* Usher.

his attendance here. Yet, stay," added he, with a softening look, as he remarked my pale and sickly appearance; "it seems that you have in truth been ill, young man; be the cause what it may, these enervated limbs will do but feeble service against an enemy: go,—you have leave; report yourself to your commander, receive his orders, and return, if you can, to your duty." Humbled and distressed, though glad to have come off so well upon the whole, I was not sorry to withdraw, and went to the tent of Caleb Allee Beg.

This officer received me with a coldness and severity the more painful to me, because I esteemed and desired to be well thought of by him. His words were few, but the tone in which they were uttered was expressive of a contempt and disappointment almost approaching to disgust, which stung me to the quick. When I solicited his orders, he coolly observed, that the men, nominally under my command, were at the time engaged on distant and somewhat arduous service, "for which," added he, casting his eyes over my emaciated frame, "I think you are hardly fit. A worn-out rake can never fill the place of the bold soldier; he who sacrifices his health in dissipation, and his time on folly, will look in vain for honour or fortune in the field; nor need the slave of a 'dark eye' presume to hope for the approving glance of his commander. It will be some time,

young man, ere you can look to enjoy the confidence that was at first rashly reposed in you—at present remain where you are, and watch, if you are wise, an opportunity for regaining the character you have too lightly lost.” To such remarks, or sarcasms, however cutting, I could make no reply; for I had deserved them all; but they chafed me sorely, and increased the impatience I felt for the time when I should be able to prove that Ismael was as brave, as zealous, and as active as ever, and that though the star of his destiny had suffered an eclipse, it was but to shine out with redoubled lustre.

Next day the troops marched towards Khaboo-shan, and I once more saw the face of an enemy. Parties of Koords and Toorkomans were seen upon the heights, but they scoured off as we approached, sometimes leaving a single horseman to observe our advance, and carry the latest information of our movements to their host. No opposition was offered to our progress, and we unceremoniously possessed ourselves of such fodder and provision as the villages around the town afforded, in spite of the outcry of the ryots, and their protestations of being totally unconnected with the rebels, whose souls they gave to perdition, and their fathers to be burned.

A large body of Koords, having heard of the General's approach, endeavoured to make good

their way into the town of Khabooshan, where their families, as they thought, might be safe, while they themselves should be absent with the main body of the rebels, near Dereguz. But Nader, who had exact intelligence of all their movements, resolved to cut them off; and with that intention dispatched fifteen hundred men to post themselves in a hollow near which the Koords must necessarily pass; while, with a still larger force, he should wait until they were fairly on the march, and then make his appearance threatening their rear.

Eager to wipe off the blemish which my character had sustained, I obtained permission to accompany Caleb Allee, with part of the guard, on this ambush, which we reached an hour or more before day-break, and waited with extreme impatience for the approach of the enemy.

The Koords gave us time enough to make all possible calculations on the probable event of the enterprize, and even to exhaust the patience of some, who swore that our plan must have miscarried—that the enemy must have obtained information of our movement, and taken another path in order to avoid falling in with us. These doubts and speculations were at last terminated; for about an hour before noon our advanced sentinels and scouting parties gave notice that they heard the low heavy tramp of

horses at a distance, which doubtless proceeded from the march of our expected antagonists.

I was on duty with one of these reconnoitring parties, and had pushed forward with a few others to the foot of a little eminence scantily covered with prickly herbs, when our ears were arrested by the sullen sound: no dust arose to mark the quarter from whence it came, and our party was divided in opinion regarding the nature and intentions of the approaching column. "The sound is from the east," said one, "I hear it swell on the faint breeze."—"No; from the west," replied another, "it clearly comes from yonder; it cannot be the Koords whom we expect, for it comes from the direction of the town itself—they have heard of our ambush, and intend to aid their friends, and discomfit us if they can by a sally."—"Ye are wrong," observed an old Affshar—"it is undoubtedly the Koords; the sound comes from that direction—from the north-west; but it is changed by the current of the air in this hollow:—hark! they approach: these are not the regular bounds of galloping horse, it is the baggage cattle and the herds that make the confused noise ye hear."—"I will climb this hill," said I; "I can creep upon my breast, without fear of being seen—the colour of my dress will conceal me."—"Insh-allah!" replied they, "try it, but take care; these Koords have eyes as sharp as

yours of the Desert—beware of alarming the prey, and have on, in the name of Allah !”

Cautiously, and winding like a snake among the prickly shrubs, I crawled up the hillock and cast a rapid glance around. Then indeed I became aware of the truth, and witnessed an inspiring sight. The Koords with their wives and families, cattle and baggage, had quietly proceeded on their march until they found themselves pursued and threatened in rear by the General’s troops. The men then faced about, and showed front to protect the weaker portion of their party, but evinced no disposition to engage ; while our friends, seeing them running directly into the jaws of our ambush, pressed closely upon them. I saw the old people and women urging on their flocks and herds ;—camels, mules, horses, and asses, loaded with baggage, were rapidly approaching, mingled with herds of cattle and sheep, mares and their foals, human creatures and dogs, in all the confusion of hurry and terror ;—behind clustered a confused and dusky mass of men, forth from which the gleam of arms would frequently break, and, distant as they were, the tumult of the battle might be heard : a glance told me how things were, and I speedily glided down and rejoined the main party with the rest of my companions.

The scouts now came in from all quarters, and the whole force, concentrated, held itself in rea-

diness to pour upon the unsuspecting and devoted Koords. The thunder of the trampling approached, and at length we could distinguish that the foremost of the crowd were already passing the hollow which concealed us. The country on their right was divided into numberless hillocks, behind some of which we were posted; while a plain of a mile in breadth, inclined gently on their left to a small stream that ran along it in a deep clayey bed; along this plain they were marching, avoiding the broken ground on their right.

When the troops became aware that a part of the retreating Koords had passed, their impatience became excessive, and it was with no small difficulty that their officers could restrain them until the proper moment for the attack.—“Fools!” cried the cool and experienced Caleb Allee, “do you forget that the cattle and the baggage are driven before the principal body of their young men and warriors?—see you not that if you once get among them, you will get entangled and bewildered, and may lose your prize and the day by your foolish impatience?—Wait till their guards come up—strike the shepherds, the sheep are yours of course.”—At length the shouting and the tumult rose closer on the ear; our troops were plainly pressing upon their prey, and Caleb Allee no longer delayed the eagerly expected word. “Bismillah! set on!” cried he, and the whole thundered

forward with a tremendous shout. The effect was decisive; the Koords attacked thus unexpectedly in rear as well as in front, were confounded, and fell into utter confusion. Still they fought well; a powerful troop in particular, which succeeded in forming under a Shadloo chief, offered a very formidable resistance, and threatened to break through the circle with which they were surrounded. Stimulated by the presence of my commander, I joined in a sharp charge upon this body, who, like lions at bay, made every one who approached pay dear for his temerity. Forgetful of my weakness I rushed blindly on, until I found myself opposed to a Koord of gigantic stature mounted on a powerful horse. However good my will might be, my strength was insufficient to second it, or even to manage my horse and weapons with effect;—even Boorrauk appeared to be infected by his master's debility; he stumbled and was borne backward in the shock, and both overthrown, but unwounded, we rolled on the plain among the dead and the dying.

For a few minutes I lay stunned under the trampling feet of a hundred horses, but quite insensible to my danger: perhaps this proved my safety, for, when I recollected myself and arose, the battle had rolled past, and I was assisted by two men of the guard, who had orders, they said, to take care of me. I did not however require

their farther aid, the fresh air restored my senses ; and though mortified at the weakness which had led to my overthrow, and which was by no means decreased by the fall, I mounted again, and held forward to join the pursuit and witness the full success of our well-concerted measures.

It was complete enough ; a great proportion of the enemy's armed men were cut to pieces, and the little plain on the rivulet's bank was strewn with their dead and wounded. Some chiefs of importance were made prisoners, along with several women belonging to families of note ; and there was a host of inferior captives, with a great quantity of cattle, sheep, and baggage. A small portion only of the whole made good their way into Kha-booshan, whither they carried with them terror and dismay. Had Nader been anxious to follow up his success and reduce the town, it would hardly have resisted him for a single day ; but considerations of a more pressing nature called him to the north-eastward, and he deferred to a more convenient season the punishment due to its turbulent inhabitants.

While slowly and painfully I joined my corps, now retiring from pursuit and reuniting under Caleb Allee Beg, that officer observed and addressed me.—“ Behold, young man, the enervating effects, the mortifying consequences of debauchery ! Would Ismael have suffered so egre-

gious a defeat, had not vice and folly destroyed his strength and robbed him of the skill and activity he once possessed? Strive, young man, to efface the recollection of your guilty madness, and to regain your lost vigour, if you would shun still greater disgrace in the face of the foe." I felt the bitter justice of the words; but the compliment implied in them blunted the sarcasm, and made me half forget the discomfiture I had sustained. I resolved, however, to be more cautious until returning strength should enable me to follow the dictates of courage without the hazard of defeat.

The policy of Nader was now clear, and eminently successful. The defeat of these Koords depressed the spirits of the whole rebel party, and opened an easy way to Dereguz, where his brother Ibrahim was still closely beleagured. A few of the fugitives had found their way to the camp of the combined troops before that place and spread no small consternation among them by an exaggerated account of the power which had overthrown themselves, and which was now in full march to fall upon the rest of their foes. The General did not lose much time in taking advantage of this impression; for on the very evening of this action he marched four fursungs on the road to Dereguz.

Early next morning the army was again in motion, and its strength was increased during its

progress by the junction of several detachments ; but after all, in point of numbers, it was inferior to that of the rebels. It was the intention of Nader to surprise his enemy, if possible, by the rapidity of his movements ; but on approaching Dereguz, we learned by our scouts that their alarm was already complete, and that they were quite prepared to give us a warm reception. We therefore halted about half a fursung distant from their camp, and waited for the light of morning to attack them. As night came on, picquets and scouts were posted in advance to watch the enemy's motions ; a careful guard was kept in every quarter ; and the soldiers lay down to rest upon their arms, ready to start up on the least alarm.

The importance of such precautions, which never were neglected by the wary and experienced Nader, was sufficiently demonstrated upon this occasion ; for the rebels, who had often experienced the might of his arm and the valour of his troops when fighting under their General's eye, began to lose confidence in their superior numbers, and resolved to try what might be effected by stratagem. They hoped that our soldiers, fatigued by a long march, might be found less upon the alert than usual ; that, therefore, they should be able to steal upon us undiscovered, and cripple the strength of the whole army, if not utterly destroy it.—They were miserably deceived. Our men

had received orders to muster in arms an hour before daylight; but long before that time a sentinel from the rear came hastily in to say, that he was confident there was a body of horse approaching in that quarter, for that he had heard the heavy though distant trampling of hoofs, as he watched at his post. The tale appeared so improbable to the officer whom he had roused, that he was dismissing the man to his post with a sharp reprimand for leaving it, when the hum of voices rising in many parts of the line announced that a similar alarm had been communicated to others. Doubt and hesitation began to prevail, when Nader, who was invariably apprised of even the smallest causes of alarm, and who, no doubt, had kept on the alert himself this night, approached hastily, attended only by one or two of his guard, and issued orders for the whole army to prepare for receiving the enemy without a moment's delay. Seconding his words, he rode himself to the several quarters of the camp, rousing the commanders of the different troops, and enjoining the preservation of perfect silence; while the men were formed without the loss of a moment. With so much alertness was this effected, that in a quarter of an hour the greater number of the troops were under arms, and waited but the order to move; by that time, too, all doubt as to the cause of the sentinel's alarm

was at an end : it was plain to the senses of all, that a strong body of armed men, both horse and foot, were approaching us in rear, and dispositions were silently made to receive them. A good quantity of baggage, tents, and other lumber, which had been deposited in the rear of our position, was hastily placed in such a manner as to embarrass the enemy's advance, should they attempt to charge in upon the camp ; and the troops intended to check them were withdrawn behind this barricado, ready, upon a given signal, to assail them with their matchlocks and arrows.

Presently we could distinguish through the gloom small groups of figures on foot, who appeared to be exploring the way ; and beyond these a dark and confused mass rose gradually to view, from whence the faint clash of arms, or the ringing of a bridle-chain, might now and then be heard to issue—the only interruption to the deep silence which was preserved on either side.

The dense and moving mass now spread out before us, so as to occupy an extensive space, and advanced, but still with caution,—for their guides, or precursors, did not appear to be confident of their ground ; perhaps they distrusted the perfect stillness which reigned throughout our camp. But probably the impatience of the main body was not to be longer controlled ; for after a little wavering, we could see an universal movement among them,

which was succeeded by the thunder of innumerable hoofs, and down they all came upon us. At this moment the flash of a single zumbooruk* issued from the centre of our line; it was the signal of assault, and its report was succeeded by a volley from the whole camel artillery, which, crouched on their knees behind some rubbish, opened their masked battery upon the advancing foe. A roar of matchlocks instantly succeeded, the flashes of which illuminated the darkness, and, accompanied with thick flights of arrows, poured destruction on the assailants. Confounded at a reception they had not expected, they reined up their horses, and halted; but not until they had got entangled among our tents and baggage, in which condition a part of our troops sallied out upon them, sword in hand, and cut a great many to pieces. But although they were surprised and greatly disconcerted, there were among them too many chiefs of note, and too many brave soldiers, to yield us so easy a victory; Shahverdee Khan Shadloo, and Mahomed Hoossein Khan Zafferanloo, cutting their way through those of our soldiers who opposed them, called their gholaums and followers around them, and animated their troops by shouting out their warcries with a loud voice. Having disengaged themselves from the confusion in our front, they retreated a short way to recover and re-form their

* A swivel gun mounted on the back of a camel.

array under cover of the darkness; but our troops, flushed with success, were unwilling to allow them to perform this manœuvre in quietness, and several corps, regardless of the orders of their commanders, unheeding even the voice of Nader in their madness, rushed forward upon their retreating enemy.

Their ill-judged zeal met with a speedy punishment; for no sooner had they advanced beyond the line and shelter of the encampment, than a strong body of Koords and Toorkomans, who had not suffered in their first miscarriage, galloped up from behind, and taking our people in flank, handled them very roughly. It became expedient to send succour to these rash men; and this again called forth an additional effort on the other side: so that, instead of the enemy being permitted to retire with their first loss, to renew the assault, if they chose, with broken spirits by daylight, a desultory action took place between the armies, which was maintained with considerable loss, but with no decisive effect, on either side.

Before the break of day, we discovered that the attack upon our rear had by no means been made with the whole of the rebel force; for just as objects began to be distinguishable, a loud shouting in front announced an assault in that quarter; and a part of the troops who had not hitherto been engaged were sent to repel it. The inde-

fatigable Nader, near whose person I had continued from the time when his arrangements were complete, flew instantly to face the danger and support the onset; and we arrived just in time to rally a corps of Beyauts, who, sorely pressed by a powerful body of the Diroom Toorkomans, were beginning to give way. Hope and courage came to them with the shout of Nader, and in a moment his terrible battle-axe was gleaming in the face of their assailants. There were not twenty people along with us, but the impression we produced was worth ten times the number. Still, however, fresh succours poured in to their assistance, and our situation became critical. I forgot my weakness, and kept my place, fighting by the General's side, until I saw that his glance, which hitherto had passed me over with mortifying indifference, rested on me at length, more than once, with a gleam of approbation. But the enemy pressing us still more closely, he called to me, "Ismael, stand firm,—to you and to Saadut Allee Nassack-chee* I commit this post; maintain it with your lives until I return, as I shall do immediately with assistance." With these words he struck his stirrups into his horse's sides, and galloped away, while Saadut Allee and I, excited to the utmost by the confidence reposed in us, redoubled our

* Executioner—always an attendant on a chief; often an officer of no small rank.

efforts, and fought like Zal and Roostun.* But the odds against us were too great; the Toorkomans came on in swarms, like very devils, and our men, who were falling thickly, began to give way. "Hoh, friends!" cried I, in despair at the thought of losing the post that was so emphatically entrusted to me, "is this the way you strike for the great Nader?—come on, Saadut Allee, and let us show these cowards how to cleave a rebel to the girdle." On this, goring our horses with our stirrups, and waving our swords aloft, we both threw ourselves upon the foremost of the enemy, and I was lucky enough to overthrow and cut down a chief who was encouraging them in front, while my companion laid about him so manfully, that they gave back a little. Twenty or thirty men now followed us, but the rest still hesitated, and we thus were almost separated from our friends. Just then a spear, from the hand of a Toorkoman, struck Saadut Allee in the side, and while turning to revenge the blow, he received an arrow in the temple. Springing upwards from his horse, he fell forward in the throng, and I saw him no more; and beyond all doubt, myself and the remains of my party would soon have shared his fate, had not very unexpected succour appeared at this critical moment.

* Two famous heroes, celebrated in the *Shahnameh* of Ferdousee.

A loud shout at a little distance in our front was followed by confusion and irresolution among our opponents:—the violence of their assault diminished,—they wavered and gradually gave way, for they were themselves attacked in rear. Ibrahim Khan, when by the light of morning he could see how matters stood, and distinguish friend from foe, sallied from the fort, and, attacking in his turn, caused a diversion which at once changed the face of affairs; and however the fortune of the day might have turned without his interference, this well-judged measure at once secured it in our favour.

The enemy in our front now broke and fled in great confusion, so that, breathing for a while from the mortal struggle, we had time to look around and attend to the state of the field, and I was so fortunate as to cut off the retreat of a considerable number which our charge in advance had partly intercepted: among the rest we secured the person of Solymaun Khan, a chief of the first consequence, and one of the principal leaders of the rebels. Scarcely had this been effected, when the General, not yet aware of his brother's successful sally, came spurring up to our assistance with a party of his guards, just as the impetuous Ibrahim, cutting a path with his bloody sword, and scattering the fugitives to right and left, charged up to our very breasts, and checked his powerful

horse till its haunches almost touched the ground, in surprise at finding himself among his friends.

Busily occupied in securing my prisoners, I knew not who was near me until roused by the loud and cheerful voice of Ibrahim shouting his thanks and congratulations to his brother. "Ho! by the head of your Highness and the holy Caaba! this is as it should be!—By the blessing of God and the power of your own good star, my brother, you have done a worthy deed this day! and well is it my part to thank you for it,—for the Ghorumsaug^s* held me sore at bay, and long have I looked for the glancing of your conquering banners, and welcome was the sound of your zumbooruks this morning!—But whom have we here? That idle rake Ismael? and once more employed as he should be—and his dress of the right colour too! Barikillah! my boy, I rejoice to see it," casting his eyes significantly on my clothes which were covered with blood.

"Thrice welcome he who comes in season!" replied Nader:—"My brother, you have done your duty—that was a well-timed sally—it did us excellent service. But, Bismillah!—lose no time—pursue, exterminate the rebellious slaves; let them find what it is to be ever thus in arms against their sovereign, ever disturbing the peace and tranquillity of the country!"

* Rascals.

“Bechushm !” said Ibrahim, putting his hand to his eyes ; and, dashing his stirrups into his horse’s flanks, he thundered after the flying foe. “For you, young man, you have this time done your duty well, if you never had neglected it—for lost confidence is not soon regained.—But pursue your present course, and be assured my eye is upon you. Conduct your prisoners now to the fortress, secure them under a fitting guard, and let no one have access to them without our especial order.”

Exhausted as I was with the continued exertion of three days’ active duty, this order was by no means unwelcome, and the few words that accompanied it were more gratifying to me than the highest praise from any other quarter. The day was far advanced before pursuit was over ; many hundreds of the rebels were destroyed, and several villages in the neighbourhood pillaged and burnt, as a warning to others against disaffection for the future. It was evening before the army was fully collected, and his Highness took possession of the quarters prepared for his reception.

Brightly next morning did the lord of day shed his rays over hill and valley ; but the eyes of many a rebel, which hailed his early beams, were quenched in darkness or in death before he set. The first light of dawn shone upon the so-

lemn pomp of Nader's military court of justice. The same ominous array of guards and executioners, the like groups of wretched prisoners and their stern attendants, brought forcibly to my remembrance the striking circumstances of my first introduction to the hero, whose fortunes I had from that time followed. Nader, at all times strict and severe, on this occasion exercised a degree of harshness, amounting, as some might think, to cruelty, towards the captive rebels. Eager to engage in enterprizes of more importance, from which the unceasing disturbances of these districts alone detained him, he resolved to strike a lasting terror into the turbulent tribes, and to cripple their power, so as to secure himself from any annoyance in this quarter, when he should be engaged at a distance. A certain number of the chiefs, and the choice of their followers, were incorporated with the various bodies of his troops; but many were given up to the sword of the executioner. Some were deprived of their eyes, and others, yet more shockingly maimed, were suffered to linger out their lives in misery.

Among those who were numbered with the blind, was my unhappy prisoner Solymaun Khan: his appeals for mercy were vain. To me, as his conqueror, he turned with an earnestness of entreaty that wrung my heart; but the pleading look which I directed to the General, was replied

to by a glance of stern denial. The fatal signal was given, and when he rose from the earth, the light of his countenance was gone for ever, and two bleeding, eyeless sockets, alone remained.—“ Oh, kill me! put me to death at once!” gasped the wretched man; “ what have I to do with life, when all that made it sweet is gone? Pitiless tyrant!” added he, turning his sightless face towards the tent of Nader, “ take heed to thyself! thy course is prosperous now, but the guilt of blood is on thee, and the mercy thou hast this day denied, may be refused to thyself at thy need! Many a light hast thou quenched; but the day will come when thy own soul shall be darkened, and the misery thou hast poured on others shall flow back upon thyself.” The Furoshes in waiting would not suffer him to proceed; they struck him on the mouth with their iron-heeled slippers, till the blood flowed from his lips, and hurried him from the presence;—but all who heard him shuddered at his words: even Nader was moved, and sought in vain to conceal the trouble of his mind under a frown of more than wonted gloom.

When matters at Dereguz were duly arranged, the General proceeded to reduce the town of Khabooshan, and punish the rebellious tribes of Koordistan and the Attock, while his brother Ibrahim was dispatched to chastise the tribes who had taken possession of Merve and raised the

standard of rebellion in the name of Melek Mahmood Seistanee, the late usurper of Mushed. After no small trouble, and in spite of repeated instances of treachery on the part of the enemy, this object was at last effected, and another victim delivered to the sword of justice, in the person of Melek; who, although he had been spared by the clemency of his Highness, after the capture of Mushed, had given sufficient proof, by engaging in a succession of dangerous intrigues, that his death was essential to the tranquillity of the country. On this expedition, which I knew was likely to be attended with much fatigue and danger, I sought and obtained permission to accompany Ibrahim Khan. I was desirous to prove to him that my late follies and habits of self-indulgence had not destroyed the energies of my mind, nor the hardihood of my body; and I was so fortunate as to recover the place which I had well nigh lost in the regard of my frank and warm-hearted patron, who made such report of me to his brother, for renewed steadiness and zeal, that I began once more to feel myself in the enjoyment of that esteem and consideration, which for a time I had deservedly forfeited.