

STORY READERS FOR INDIAN SCHOOLS.

A NOBLE QUEEN

BY

MEADOWS TAYLOR

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

ARNOLD & Co.,

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MADRAS.

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BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE CATARACT OF THE KRISHNA.

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

It was a fiery day in the end of the month of May 159-, when a small party of four horsemen, evidently weary from long travel, were passing over the plains which lie north of the Krishna river. They carefully avoided village and road tracks, and kept a steady course eastward across the cultivated and uncultivated ground which seemed well known to them.

Early that morning a small force of cavalry in the service of the King of Bijapur had started on its way to join one of the main bodies of the Royal army on its march to subdue the rebellion of the Prince Ismail, the King's younger brother. But the rebellion was, in fact, that of Eyn-ool-Moolk, the ex-Prime Minister, who in putting forward the young prince had trusted to regain his old influence and power.

It was necessary, therefore, for Bijapur to send all the troops at its disposal to quell the insurrection which had begun at Belgaum, and the party of cavalry under the young Abbas Khan, which had held a frontier outpost, being ordered to join a larger division, had been pushing on incautiously that morning before daylight, when it was attacked suddenly by an overwhelming force, and, after losing half its number on the field, was forced to fly. Many more were pursued, and captured or slain; many followed their brave young leader, occasionally showing front to their pursuers; but they gradually fell off, and only the four best mounted remained.

It was evident that two of them were wounded; and exhausted by the heat and loss of blood, could barely sit their horses. One of these was the young leader of the party, Abbas Khan, who occasionally reeled in his saddle as if about to faint from weakness, but again revived by a drink of water from a companion's leathern bottle, rallied bravely, and the march was resumed as before.

Abbas Khan, the nephew of Humeed Khan, and his adopted son, was, perhaps, twenty-five years old, or it might be less. His service had always been in frontier posts, and his daring character and athletic frame urged him to undertake perilous enterprises, with little heed as to the possible results; indeed, he seemed to have no perception of danger, nor thought but to strike a blow against an enemy whenever he might appear.

Those who had escaped with him from the skirmish at Kórla were his own retainers. There were only three left — one, by name Jumal, the Khan's standard-bearer. The second was Yasin, an attendant of his own the third Runga, a chief of the Beydurs of the country to the eastward, a tall grim-looking Hindu, who acted as guide. All were well mounted, but the hardy, active horse of the Beydur was perhaps the freshest.

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

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

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

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

"And what would ye do by the Chàya Bhugawati ?

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

Indeed the river was in flood, from bank to bank, rushing rapidly along.

“ Let us reach Narrainpoor first,” said Runga, quietly.

Away, some of ye, to Narrainpoor, and tell the fishermen to go on to the lower ferry with their gear.”

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

They were fleet of foot, and admirably equipped for tough frontier service. Among rocks and brushwood they were invisible, and as the aspect of the country had suddenly changed, there were now granite rocks and brushwood enough to conceal a host of such men as they.

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

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

It was well, indeed, that the refuge was near, for Abbas Khan was past speech. He was conscious of nothing but a dull booming sound in his ears, which increased every moment, yet he clung instinctively to the saddle, and his standard-bearer’s powerful arm alone had prevented him from falling to the ground for the last few miles. Runga Naik dashed forward and returned with a number of men and a low bedstead; the young Khan was placed upon it, and borne gently into the village.

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

The barber came and performed his duty skilfully and tenderly. The wound was long, extending from the left breast across the left arm, and had bled much, but

was not very deep. A few stitches were put into it to keep the lips together, a poultice of green herbs, carefully mashed, was placed over it, and a few bandages completed the simple dressing, which was borne, though it had been exquisitely painful, without a murmur.

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

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

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

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

The river was full from bank to bank, and about a quarter of a mile, perhaps indeed more, in breadth, and fell from point or step to step of the incline of four hundred feet with a fearful crash and clamour. The sun had become low in the heavens, and the slanting beams of his light played over the boiling water with exquisite effect.

Runga Naik had divested himself of his dress and arms, and placed only his sword upon the frail raft, where the Khan's dress and arms were also bestowed. And all was now ready.

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

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

The passage was not without extreme danger, for

the power of the current was immense. After a time that appeared interminable, the raft was urged into a backwater, and men on the bank flung ropes to them, by which the shore was soon gained.

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

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

“He is gone to Moodgul, alas !” said Osman Beg, the killadar or governor of the fort, who was usually termed Nawab. There is, however, the old Dervish, who hath a rare skill, and he can be taken there at once.”

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

the attendant whom the governor had nominated to wait upon his cousin should remain also to minister to him.

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

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

CHAPTER II.

“ A NIGHT’S VIGIL.”

The young Khan seemed to sleep for a while, but the fever prevailed again, and with bright glassy eyes he now stared vacantly about him, recognising no one, and relapsing into insensibility. From time to time the old Dervish felt his pulse and his head, but there were no signs of relief, and he sat down again anxiously. Sometimes the features would be distorted by pain, and again this would be changed to fierce excitement, and battle cries would be uttered with a fierce vigour as he partly rose and waved his right arm as if it held a sword ; but the girl Zora put it back gently, and patted him as she would a child. Zora was an experienced

nurse, for often she had attended the sick and wounded who were brought to her grandfather's humble dwelling for help. She had no timidity of men, she had never been secluded like other girls of her age, and her office was to lead her grandfather when he moved abroad, and to tend the sick who came for his advice.

Zora was apparently about fourteen years old, perhaps somewhat more; but she was tall for her age, and her figure was lithe and supple. She was fair in comparison with ordinary Mussulman women of her country, but not fairer than a light, clear, ruddy brown, betokening health and strength. Her head was small and perfectly shaped, sitting on a graceful neck; and her hair, a glossy black, escaped from under the scarf she wore in a profusion of soft curls, which seemed to wind lovingly about her neck and shoulders. Her forehead was wide and somewhat low, but smooth and glistening, the eyebrows gently arched and regular; but it was the eyes that involuntarily attracted every beholder, and with her mobile lips expressed every emotion of her mind. Now they would be fully and tenderly opened, and you would see the large soft dilated pupil of a velvety black, floating, as it were, on a ground of the tenderest violet and azure. A merry arch glance shot from them as they closed almost to a twinkling dot of light. They seemed incapable of anger or petulance, and, indeed, the child's life had as yet been one of little sorrow or excitement of any kind, and her natural disposition was gentle and submissive.

Her mother had died in 'her infancy, yet Zora's young life had been a happy one as she grew up. The old man had taught her the rudiments of Persian, and the meaning of words, at first parrotwise, ⁵but gradually, and with the aid of a village scribe, she had progressed easily and satisfactorily. Her grandfather usually spoke to her in that language, and she could now write a fair hand, and record what he dictated to her. She had only one attendant, an old woman named Mamoola, who swept the house and cooked their simple meals, and was assisted by Zora in all other household matters with unceasing skill and interest in her occupation. In all respects, the little maiden was ever busy, and any loneliness of life or care had, as yet, never reached her.

Zora sighed as she looked on the young Khan, so restless in his feverish sleep. The old man kept his prayerful vigil, and the cataract continued its monotonous, thundering roar, which seemed at times to fall into a sobbing moan.

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

"Not so, Abba!" which was her usual term of endearment for her grandfather; "not so. I am not weary. I cannot sleep; and he needs watching every moment. He will not bear the sheet over his chest, and is ever throwing it off; his lips are dry and parched; and he looks at me sometimes, and points to his throat and head, as if to ask for cool drink and wet cloths, and I

have to give them. O Abba! will he die? Surely the good God will spare him. Come and feel his pulse, for he seems hotter and more restless."

"It is as you say, my darling," replied the old man, who had risen and felt his patient all over. Bring me of the cooling powders we made a few days ago; they are from a formula of Aboo Sena, of blessed memory, and are potent to check fever like this. Go and bring one."

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

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

All gone," said Zora. But one man lies without who has sat there since the youth was brought in, looking wistful, like a dog which seeks his master. I asked him who he was, and he says he is Runga Naik Beydur, but that he may not come in as he is of low caste. May he come, Abba?"

"Surely, child, surely. True Islam knows no distinction of caste in mercy's service, and thou mayest admit him to watch with thee if thou wilt; and 'tis thus

my brave one," he added, tenderly passing his hands over her face; "'tis thus thou learnest the ways of mercy and pity."

So Runga Naik came in, sat down by the bed and watched with the girl. The intensity of anxiety with which both watched the young man cannot be described.

The world abroad was astir in the early morn, the birds twittered and chirped in the great tamarind trees, pigeons fluttered in the little mosque, cooed and greeted each other, ringdoves seemed to answer them, and noisy paroquets flew screaming abroad to get their early food. The only one stirring in the house was the old woman servant. She had milked the cow and the goats, and turned them loose to graze, and had sat down to pick rice for the morning meal.

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

And the girl and her attendant went and did their kindly office. The Naik's wound was not deep, but he

had narrowly escaped death, as he knew and as the cool dressing was applied, tears of relief and gratitude coursed down his rugged cheeks.

And the hot day passed, and they fanned the sleeper gently. The old Dervish, examined his patient carefully, and was satisfied. Nothing could induce Runga to leave his post, but having bathed hurriedly in the holy river, he ate a little of the dame's good mess, drank some of the cooling sherbet, and was refreshed.

The next day, the Nawab's physician arrived from Moodgul, and having visited the wounded man, declared that he might now be removed to the upper fort in a closed litter with safety, and that the comparative freshness of the air of the citadel would conduce to his recovery. Towards evening, therefore, the young Khan took his departure, promising to return to see them when he was able.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRIESTS OF MOODGUL.

It will be deemed strange, perhaps, that the shepherds and blanket weavers of Moodgul were Christians at the period of this tale. At what exact period they were converted, or by whom, is not precisely known, but a Jesuit monk belonging to the mission of St. Francis Xavier had penetrated to Moodgul, gathered the shepherds about him, and, preaching to them in their

own language—Canarese—had converted and baptised them, and they proved steadfast and obedient. In the town of Raichoor other conversions followed, chiefly among the potters, and there were, and still are, smaller congregations in other villages ; but the most numerous flock was that of Moodgul.

There were two priests in charge of the Moodgul church and mission. One, Dom Diego di Fonseca, had been for some time in the office of the Inquisition. He had already visited Bengal and China, and had, after the fashion of the time, made many converts, and examined the internal discipline of the missions with a notorious severity ; but his private character was infamous, and, but for his official zeal and services, he might, indeed, have been condemned to the horrible death to which he had assisted to devote so many. Dom Diego was of a noble family in Portugal, and had been intended for the Church there ; but his fiery disposition would not brook control, and he chose a missionary life in the Indies, where his peculiar qualifications would find full employment. In person Dom Diego was remarkable. His noble figure towered over all around him, and the haughty expression of his features was in accordance with his bodily power ; but though handsome, they were vicious and repellant. In complexion he was dark, and the sun of India had still more bronzed his face and hands, till they were darker than those of many of his Moodgul flock ; all soon feared him ; he was to their simple minds an incarnation of power and force which must be obeyed, and, knowing his official authority and rank,

the native Christians did not dare objection, much less disobedience.

Dom Diego's colleague was a very different person. Francis d'Almeida, a Franciscan friar, was a very personation of a devout and humble follower of his order. His flock adored him. His gentle teachings and admonitions attracted others besides his flock to the mission church, and his eloquent illustrations of true Christian life often moved his hearers to tears.

He was not alone. His sister Maria, whom he had left in Portugal a child, had grown up, and married Colonel Dom Philip de Pereira, who commanded a battalion of infantry not long arrived from Portugal ; but he had succumbed to the treacherous, deadly malaria of the forests. Dona Maria might have returned home, or, staying at Goa, might have re-married ; but she had seen her brother Francis, listened with wonder to tales of the manners and customs of his flock, and at once dedicating herself, as she said, to the Lord's work, she was sent up to Moodgul under an escort, and had joined her brother some three years before the 'time we write of. She visited the sick and afflicted, and could comfort them ; her sweet, persuasive tongue soothed many a sad death-bed. Her instruction to the children of her school was received by them as a joyful treat rather than in dull routine. So in peace and love with all around them the brother and sister had lived with great happiness.

We need not describe the progress of difference

between two such men as the priests of Moodgul — the one violent, overbearing, and unscrupulous, the other gentle and peaceful, but enduring, and, after the manner of such men, brave, and, in the service of the Church, undeterred by threats or persecution. Often had he remonstrated, as it became him to do, against his colleague's violence towards the congregation, against repeated instances of notorious immorality and irregularity in his ministry, but in vain. Dom Diego knew that the Inquisition at large were his friends. What more easy than to denounce him to the Inquisition for interference with his own measures?

Accusations might be made of improper intimacy with Mussulmans, the worst enemies of the Church, and constant visits to the Nawab of Moodgul paid by him and his sister, Dona Maria. From the first sight of her, so young, so lovely as she was, a guilty passion had absorbed any better feeling he possessed. No risk could be too great to run for her possession, and yet, to take any active part—to carry her away by force—would but be to ensure his own ruin, and perhaps death. No, the event must be gradual.

He had written his report to Goa. He had described Francis d'Almeida as a mere bookworm, absorbed in studies of heathen books; that his most intimate friends were Brahmin priests and Mussulmans; that his lectures in the Church to the shepherds were mere adaptations of heathen doctrine, and thus the Church, which had been built up with vast labour by

faithful missionaries in a foreign land, might be lost, and relapse into heathenism. Finally, Dom Diego advised that Francis d'Almeida should be at once sent for alone, admonished, and, if needs be, prosecuted for his laxity; and that his sister might remain for the present to await her brother's return, or to be forwarded to Goa, as the Council might decree.

There was no suspicion of sinister motives to be gathered from his document, no violence of expression. It led to the conclusion that an able but over-studious character had been gradually led into laxity of observance, and could only be recovered by admonition from his superiors, and it had been determined by the ecclesiastical authorities to order the priest to appear before the Council on as early a date as practicable.

Maria feared the priest. She could not conceal from herself that his foul, sensual admiration of her sometimes overpowered his discretion, and that his looks and demeanour were not those of a priest, but of a dissolute soldier. When he came to the house she invariably withdrew to her chamber, and left her brother and Dom Diego to consult together; but what virtuous woman could doubt the expression of those burning eyes? But for these secret fears, fears known only to herself and to God, she would have bid her brother Godspeed.

It was the Sabbath, she went to the church as usual for the service, which, on account of the great heat, had been deferred till evening.

Dom Diego performed the service as usual, and

apparently departed ; and Maria, begging of the ~~sexton~~ to allow her the altar lights for a while, led in a little troop of girls to the alter steps, and sat down there, tuned her instrument, and began the simple music of the hymn. Presently, after an interval and directions to the children, she began the air again line by line, and the shriller pitch of the girls' voices required much patient instruction to modulate. At last she was satisfied, and dismissed them. It was but a step to her house across the small enclosure of the church, and she had no fear of meeting anyone, although it was now quite dark.

Maria knew she was alone. "One more hymn," she said to herself, as she made a deep reverence to the picture of the Virgin, on which the light shone brightly and striking a chord on her instrument, and playing a simple prelude, her voice rose through the building with a power and effect of which she was not conscious.

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

"Forgive me for disturbing thee, lady," he said ; "and I dispense with thy salute to thy superior ; but as I sat alone, thy voice — so tender, so sweet — reached me, and I stood at the door till thy vesper hymns were finished. Would I could hear thee more frequently ; but thou art chary of thy voice, except to the children, and

to thy brother. Why am I excluded, and have to listen in stealth? Nay, I have a voice, too; and, I have heard it told me a good one. We might join together in some of the old duets of our land, even here among the heathen."

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

"Nay, be not hard on me, sweet lady, now that we shall have to spend so much of our time together till thy brother returns from Goa.

See, before the Virgin, to whom thou wert crying, I devote myself to thee; I am thine henceforth. If we may not stay here, there is the world before us. India, the Moghul, the Chinese, the sweet Spice Islands, where we may dream away our lives. Europe, if thou wilt, where many a priest like me hath his sweet leman, and no one unfrocks him. Come! I say," he urged tenderly; "come! Thou art young, thou art lovely, thou mightest be a queen. Come! the world is wide enough for us."

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

“Traitor!” she cried, as he ceased to speak; “perjured priest and liar. Thou hast insulted the Holy Mother; thou hast proposed infamy to her votary thou hast denied thy Christian faith. I defy thee!”

“Dost thou wish thy brother’s safety? Do as thou hast spoken, and he dies; listen to me, and he lives. Speak! the last chance resteth with thee.” And he drew up his tall figure, and folded his arms on his chest. “Not now,” he added hurriedly “not till he is gone, then thou wilt be alone and I with thee.”

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

Francis d’Almeida had sat musing over the events of the day, and wondering why his sister stayed so long, as the music had ceased. And as he was thus thinking, the shriek reached him. “’Tis Maria’s voice!” he cried, snatching down his sword from the wall. “What can have happened? And he ran out.

In the church the altar was still ablaze with light, but no one answered his anxious call. “Maria! Maria! Where art thou?” He dashed towards the altar, where, partly on the steps and partly on the floor, he saw his

sister lying insensible. Though at the first sight of her body he had thought her dead, as he gently raised her he felt a strong shudder pass through her, and a plaintive cry escaped her, in which he could only catch Dom Diego's name ; and had he appeared he might not have escaped.

"This, then, was that fiend's object," he muttered to himself, as he raised his sister's form and bore it out of the church. "Before God, and before men, I swear he shall answer for this outrage.

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

"Not by that, Francis," she murmured, "should he meet thy punishment. He hath insulted God and the Holy Mother, leave him to them, leave them to chasten his cowardly insult to me."

But Francis d'Almeida was not to be restrained : there had been an insult done to his sister, and his gentle nature was inflamed to desperation. Without answering her, he tore himself from her arms and rushed out of the house. He searched every part of the church and the enclosure ; he rushed impetuously into Dom Diego's dwelling, but he could not find him, and his servant told him that his master had dressed and gone

out some time ago, where, he knew not. Again Francis searched the grove and the adjacent bushes, but there was no one. It was no use searching farther, for Maria might need his aid, and he turned towards his house.

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

"Thy prayer was answered, sister," he said. "I searched for him everywhere, but I did not find him, else, for my blood was hot, I had not spared him. But what shall we do to-morrow if I obey the citation? I must depart to Goa; who can protect thee?"

They were both silent for some minutes. At last Maria said, "Let us go to the Nawab of Moodgul and ask his advice. He is kind and wise, and is our local governor, with all temporal powers. His wife, Zeenat Khanum, is my friend, whose kind heart I could not doubt. Come, now, we linger, we have not long to deliberate our choice must be decisive;" and throwing her usual scarf over her shoulders, and putting her feet into her sandals, she stood ready, and, with a smile, beckoned her brother on.

The gates of the Nawab's palace, as it was called by the people, were shut, but at the earnest entreaty of Francis they were opened; all knew the good Padrè, and the officer on guard saluted the brother and sister respectfully as they passed him.

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

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

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

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

"Nay, I mean no offence, Padré Sahib," said the Nawab, laughing ; "we all know what Portugal can do when she has a blow to strike. This morning only, as

the flood has subsided, I received despatches from the Court, written by the Queen's own hand, the King being absent in the field. You may not have heard of it, but the Prince Ismail rebelled against the King, and, aided by Eyn-ool-Moolk, raised the standard of revolt, and offered to your people at Goa any terms they liked to ask, even to half the kingdom, if they would give him aid in troops and arms, especially in guns. The Queen was much alarmed, and Humeed Khan had marched against the rebels; but it had transpired that intrigues with Eyn-ool-Moolk and the Prince had been carried on with the Church here, and I am ordered to watch it carefully.

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

Then he clapped his hands, and by an attendant sent for Peer Mahomed, his secretary and chief scribe.

“ Write to Jan Beg Risaldar to send fifty horsemen for service here, at the third watch of the night, with two closed litters. Write also to the Nawab Osman Beg of Juldroog to receive the Padré D’Almeida and his sister with honour, and afford them the best accommodation possible. The last Padré Sahib, I shall write myself to my old friend the Dervish, who lives there, to give ye what ye need freely.”

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

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

Then the Nawab embraced him, and as a priest of Jesus asked his blessing Maria, with one of the children, lay down to rest ; and, as the cool morning air began to blow, Francis d’Almeida was roused from his sleep, as he had laid down, and going to the gate was

saluted by the officer in command of the party, a grave old warrior : and on Maria's arrival, closely covered by a shawl the Khanum had insisted on her taking, they entered their litters, and the cortege moved on. It was not more than fourteen miles to the river fortress, and they would arrive before the sun was hot.

The good Padre and his sister, having been ferried over the river, and their litters removed from the boats, looked around in amazement at the wild and impressive scene before them.

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

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

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

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

"You are welcome, Sir, to my poor house, in the name of the God we both worship, and in the name of Jesus and His mother. Your friend, the Nawab, asks

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

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

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

Nor was Maria slow to express her confidence, and took Zora in her arms and held her to her heart in a warm embrace.

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

They passed through a room, which was used as a kitchen, and entered a small court, which had low cloisters all round, from which doors opened to apartments within. The whole was small, but exquisitely neat and pure.

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

“Oh, you will not depart,” said Zora, pitifully, “and leave me alone again! I have seen you only to love you, and without you all would be dark. I have had no world but this to live in, and I was happy; but now you are come from a far country, and brought with you a joy my heart has never known.

CHAPTER IV.

FAREWELLS.

Abbas Khan was in consultation with the old Dervish, to whom he had told his mental trouble, and the appearance that tormented him.

The Dervish had charms and amulets of many kinds, and knew where they were all kept by Zora; and he got up, went to a cupboard, and brought a paper divided into sixteen squares, in each of which there were Arabic figures.

“Wear this, in the name of Solomon, son of David,” he said; “it will be good for thee; and let me press thy head while I say the prayer over thee, my son.”

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

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

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

I am Syud Ahmud Ali,” replied the Dervish.

“ Then why art thou here ? ” asked Abbas Khan eagerly.

Because I am forgotten,” said the old man, with a deep sigh. All my contemporaries are dead, or have passed away elsewhere ; if any live they have forgotten me, and new men have sprung up who never heard of me. Listen ! When I was a youth I went on the pilgrimage to Mecca with my father, who was a noble of the Court of Ibrahim Adil Shah, of honoured memory, and our family had been nobles of the court from the time of the great Yoosuf Adil Khan. My father died of plague at Jedda, and, having ample means, I desired to see the world. I had been studious also, and had no desire for a military life, and wished to be a physician. I went to Cairo, where I studied deeply, and learnt the Arabic tongue to perfection. I then visited Constantinople and Morocco, where there were Western Syuds of great learning. I even crossed into Spain, where some devout Mussulmans still remained. I married one of their daughters, a Houri in person, and I returned to Beejapoor with her, where the King

Ibrahim Adil Shah received me with honour, gave me an estate - it was Almella, near the Bheeman - and all its dependencies; and I became known as the Syrd of Almella. The King attached me to himself, and I served him, not only as a physician, but as a counsellor, and often in the field also, with all the fidelity and ability I possessed; and I grew in station, in rank, and in wealth.

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

“You have heard of the King’s cruelties in his debaucheries during the latter days of his life; how he banished some of his physicians because they did not cure him, imprisoned others, and even had some put to death. What medicine could cure a man who, when he had obtained the least relief, disobeyed all directions and became infuriated with wine? I had obtained leave to visit Almella for a few days to arrange the cultivation of my estate for the season, and the King gave it willingly. I left medicines for him, and instructions to the physicians who were to take my place, and I thought all was secure. But, alas! it was a false trust. No sooner had I reached my home than dreadful rumours began to arrive of how the King had become more and more furious; how he had caused

several of the doctors to be trampled to death before him by elephants, and how he raved for me. Should I go or fly? I could have escaped easily into the dominions of the King of Golcondah, to Beeder, or to Ahmednugger; but I knew if I did that I should be followed by an army, and that the wars which had been happily ended would be renewed. But I had little time to think. The day after I had received the first message a large body of cavalry, with two of the eunuchs of the palace, came to fetch me. I was torn away from all I loved—my beautiful wife and my son—and hurried to Beejapoor.

“I expected no less than death; but when I arrived the King was calm, and his manner even affectionate. ‘I have missed you much,’ he said, ‘and you are the only attendant in whom I can trust. They are weary of me, and want to poison me. Even now my son Ali is plotting with Kishwur Khan; Sikundur Khan and others are raising armies to dethrone me. I have no peace. I have constant tormenting pain and agony, which only you can relieve. They told me you had fled, like many traitors, but I believed none of them, and sent an escort for you. O Syud Ahmud, forsake me not now! but bear with me, and relieve me;’ and he bowed his head into my arms as I sat beside his bed. And I wept, for I was much affected; and the dread I had felt passed away.

“But not the danger. I had sent for my wife from Almella; riches poured in on me, for the King, in gratitude for the relief I was affording him, was lavish

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

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

“He was lying on some cushions on the floor, almost naked, and as I approached him he rose up suddenly, and glaring at me with eyes that appeared starting from their sockets, cried, ‘O traitor! who left me to the devils, thou shalt not escape me now; I will kill thee!’ And the King was a powerful man, and I was never strong. He threw me down, and tried to strangle me, but I escaped and cried for help. Again and again he attacked me, but he was too much intoxicated to effect his purpose. At last he cried to the eunuchs who had clustered together at the curtain of the door, and were afraid to interfere, ‘Away with him, put out his eyes, send him to Juldroog that his name may be forgotten;’ and he sank back on his cushions exhausted. There was no delay; there, before him as I lay, one of the slaves, an Abyssinian armour-bearer, put out my eyes with his dagger, while others held me; and when it was done he said to the King, ‘It is accomplished,’ and I was led away.

“Not to my home, where I might have been soothed and tended in my agony, but to a cell, while preparations were made to send me away. Some pitying soul—who it was I never knew—gave me water and applied a dressing of cool herbs to my burning eyes; and at nightfall I was despatched hither. What had become of my wife and child I knew not. I remember nothing of the journey, except that I heard the sound of rushing waters, and was told I had reached Juldroog. My eyes healed gradually, but the beautiful world was gone for ever.

After some months, when the King was dead, and the Prince Ali Adil Khan had succeeded, my wife and child were sent to me. She said all my wealth had been taken away, but she had secreted some gold, and brought it with her. I sent petitions to the new King, to the Ministers, to every friend I thought I had, for release and for justice; but the seeming friends had only been the companions of prosperity, and not one stretched out a friendly hand. I was told by the Governor then here, Azim Khan, a worthy kind man, that he had been told to forward no further petitions from me, and he exhorted me to bear the will of God with submission.

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

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

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

"It is not for myself, for they give me all I need, and more," returned the old Syud, "but for the child that I would fain be free. Who is to tend her as she grows up? And if I died, who would shelter her? Wilt thou make one promise to me, Abbas Khan? Thy grandfather was a loved friend once, and Alla seems to have sent thee to me. If I should die, wilt thou rescue this poor child from want, if not from infamy?"

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

"Nay! it were better not," returned the ^{old man} ~~old Syud~~, gravely. "I will tell her as much as I need to; ^{and} ~~and~~ she will rely on thy truth and honour as I do. And now depart, for the evening is closing fast, and the road is not smooth. Rest peacefully to-night, and the Padre

shall attend thee early to-morrow. For the rest, fear not ; the talisman will keep thee from harm.

*

It will not be doubted that Maria and Zora had become fast friends. Maria did not feel the time pass wearily. She had copies to make of her brother's daily work ; she continued her embroidery and her lace-work, in which she was particularly skilful, and she taught it to Zora, as she in turn admired the girl's own industry and its effects. The illumination of her manuscripts was also a delightful occupation, at which Zora used to marvel greatly ; but it was Maria's music that was her greatest attraction. The chanting of their morning and evening services was listened to even by the old Syud with delight, and by Zora with positive rapture. Often, too, would Maria sing the sweet ballads of her country, and play on her guitar, and was surprised at Zora's quick ear, and the readiness with which she learned to play simple airs and accompaniments. So it was again a peaceful time to all and letters came from Moodgul bidding the Padre to be patient, and they were generally accompanied by baskets of ripe mangoes and sweetmeats from the Nawab's children.

Thus a month had passed at Juldroog. The inevitable day of separation came at last. A letter from the Nawab of Moodgul came to Francis d'Almeida, and with it other despatches to Osman Beg and the young Khan.

"The Queen desires to see you," wrote the Nawab to Francis, "and commands you to come in all confidence to her feet. A suitable escort will be sent for you, and you will be under the charge of Abbas Khan, who is directed to accompany you. I am sorry to lose you," he continued, in his own rough writing, "but before the orders of the Queen regrets are unavailing. I have only to trust that you may return to your friends here and your people, who grieve at your absence; but they hope, as your friend does, that you may return in peace to dwell among us. The Khanum Sahiba salutes your sister, and prays for her."

The priest took the letter to the palace, where he found Abbas Khan in the highest spirits and good humour. As to Zora, her misery was more than can be told. In one short month a new life had opened to her under Maria's influence which was now to cease. Who would teach her? Who would sing to her? Who would give her holy counsel? The communion with Maria's sweet pure spirit had raised the girl's ductile mind from many imperfections, which were the result of neglect and uncontrol, and till the day of parting she was inconsolable; but to Maria's surprise and gratification the girl rallied.

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

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

CHAPTER V.

TREACHERY.

In the lonely fortress its late visitors were sorely missed by all those with whom they had resided for nearly two months and by none more impatiently than by Osman Beg, its governor. By nature cruel, self-indulgent, and profligate, he was a man of all others most unlikely to endure a lonely life with ordinary firmness, or accommodate himself to banishment, or at least seclusion, of which he could see no means of enlivenment or termination.

Soon after his cousin left, he had ridden over to Moodgul, and in company with some of his old associates, who belonged to the force stationed there, had indulged in excesses with a zest augmented by long abstinence, so that he became more notorious than was good for his reputation. Not in any way abashed by this, Osman Beg determined, if possible, to gain the beautiful daughter of the Moodgul commander and

governor in marriage, and to this end he employed one of the professional female agents, who are well known among Mussulman communities, to make advances for him.

Mama Luteefa was a mistress of her art. In the course of a few days she had contrived to make a proposal for her employer in a manner suited to his rank and her own importance. But it was rejected peremptorily; and when the old dame returned a few days afterwards with some valuable offerings, she found herself warned never to enter the precincts of the harem again on a similar errand. Osman Beg also received an intimation that his presence in Moodgul was not desirable, and he had better withdraw. He therefore returned to his solitary life, but he took Mama Luteefa with him, in case, as she observed, there might be any one in the fort, or near it, who could be considered a fitting person for the distinction which would be the lot of Osman Beg's wife.

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

She wrote a letter to Maria, made it up carefully, and wrote the address. It was to go by a special messenger whom Abbas Khan had sent with a letter to his cousin, who was to depart in the afternoon, and who would reach Beejapoor in two or three days. He had promised

to deliver it to Maria herself, and as Ahmed had now called to her from without, she took her letter and gave it to him with many injunctions to be impressed upon the messenger about its delivery, and a rupee, which she had asked of her grandfather for the purpose. "And, oh, Ahmed!" she said, "return soon and take me to the bastion in the afternoon; I have been writing to the Lady Maria, and my heart is sad; and I would go and sit there a while, for I am always better when I do so. Wilt thou come, or shall I go alone?"

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

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

"Thou hast a brave heart, Zora," he returned; "but I pray Alla I may never see the day when thou hast to face the world alone. Ah, do not weep, child. I will take thee to the bastion presently, when I have got my gun; do not attempt to go alone."

Ahmed soon returned with his matchlock over his shoulder, and its match lighted; and they set out together, and were soon at the spot so dear to the girl. Ahmed saw that she was sad, and thought she would be better alone, and, telling her so, sat down on the lowest step of those which led up to the bastion and bidding her be

careful as she passed him and went on to her old place.

How long she would have sat there it is impossible to say; the place and its recollections were too precious to her to desert; the evening was so calm and balmy, the clouds in the west were becoming golden, and the ravine and the cataract were veiled with a thin, glowing vapour, mingled with spray.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No," she said, "I do not fear Johur, he is always good to me." And as she spoke, Ahmed laid his gun over his shoulder, and ran up the narrow pathway to the Nawab's palace.

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

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

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

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

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

"To him?" shrieked Zora; "to him, the merciless? O Alla, take me!" she cried, with an exceeding bitter cry of despair, as she rushed to the low parapet of the

bastion, with intent to throw herself over ; but Johur caught her in his arms in time to prevent her.

What could the girl do ? In Johur's powerful arms, strong and active as she was, she felt a very child. Her piteous cries had dwindled into low moans, of which "Alla ! Alla Alla !" was all that could be heard. At last she was sensible of having reached level ground, and saw that a door was opened, which, as the men carried her in, was shut behind her and bolted.

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

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

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

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

Mama Luteefa pointed to the corner, which was

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

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

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

The action of the Nawab had roused all Zora's dormant energy. "Let me go! let me go!" she cried, passionately. "Let me go! Abba is waiting for me. He will die if I do not go to him!"

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

it in the dust and fling it away. Dost thou hear? Who defies Osman Beg perishes; yet thou mightest live in honour, and have children about thy knees, and thy grandfather living in peace until he died. Choose, then, what thou wilt. Once thy grandfather rejected me with scorn, now my turn has come.

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

"Take her up," said Osman Beg and put her on a bed; bathe her and soothe her; put on any clothes ye will. To-morrow the Nika will be performed, and the old man will submit to what he cannot avert."

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

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

Zora had recovered from the faint, and had sat up, looking wildly about her. Her mouth was so parched

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

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

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

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

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

"Leave us alone, then," said Goolab. "I wish to hear all from her own lips;" and the others, thinking this but reasonable, left them alone.

And Zora told all—how she had been carried off by

the slaves; how the Nawab had threatened her, and how she feared the worst. "The two women are kind," she said, "but I cannot trust them. How can I escape, mother? he is merciless."

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

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

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

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

even the river is kinder than he is, for it will hide my shame."

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

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

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

And you will come to-morrow?"

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

CHAPTER VI

SAVED

The evening wore on, the golden sunset faded, and the stupendous mass of the fort became grey and dim. Then the night fell on all suddenly; and the old man was very restless. "Zóra! Zóra! Zóra!" he cried almost unremittingly, "where art thou? Come to me, come to me! I bid thee not delay. Oh, I shall die if thou comest not."

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

But the old man could not speak; he only rose and

tottered to the door. Are they come?" he asked, tremblingly. "Hooseinbee, who are they?"

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

When they entered the house it was no easy matter to break the tidings they brought to Zora's grandfather. He sat trembling and speechless at first. His darling gone, only to be returned to him dishonoured and impure.

"Let me go to him!" he cried passionately, as he rose up. "Give me my sword, I will cut him down on his own threshold — before his slaves. Let him kill me! Ah, that would be welcome, now honour is gone! Dishonoured!" he exclaimed, after a pause. "Dishonoured! Pain has come, blindness has come, and helplessness and poverty, but never dishonour. Yea, O merciful God, I would die, I would die! O friends take me to him that he may slay me."

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

"Huzrut," said Peeroo, speaking for the first time, "Listen, Zora is not harmed yet. I have thought over all my wife told me, and we must get the child away while she is safe. No one can help her but Runga Naik.

Kaloo is a true man, Huzrut ; and would go through fire and water to serve thee, Huzrut, and Zora, for ye saved his child. Well, he is gone to fetch Runga ; he will be far across the river by this time, and by daylight Runga will be here. That is what we have done, Huzrut, and here is Ahmed to speak for himself."

Hoosein-bee heard the door of the outer court opened gently, and the voice of Ahmed, who had been watching without, speaking to some others. After a few moments he entered the room, and said, Runga is here ! Is he to come in ? "

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

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

" When art thou going to the palace, Goolab-bee ? " he asked of her. " Come with me, and I will explain what is to be done ; " and he took her out into the court.

" Tell the child not to sleep, not to eat ; 'tis but a

day's fast. At the third watch of the night two great owls will hoot near the wall of the kitchen where it is broken. If she comes after the third hoot, well; if not, I will come for her.

Goolab-bee hastened away, took her bundle of pan on her head, filled her capacious pocket with parched rice, and hied up the hill with all the speed she could. She entered the kitchen court by the gap in the wall and saw Zóra sitting in the cloister of the court. The two women sat by her, and one of the eunuchs stood with his arms folded, at a short distance from them, idly leaning against the wall.

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

"Ah, poor darling!" said Máma Luteefa, "we brought her out here into the cool morning air, for she did not sleep we watched her by turns all the night, and offered her food and water, but she would not eat or drink. Now if she would take a mouthful of plain kicheri she would be better. Take her in, and speak to her; she knows you, and will tell you we have done all we could; and my lord sent early to know how she had slept, and is anxious about her, as the Nika is fixed for to-night," but she whispered "don't tell her."

She led Zora to the bed where she had been laid the night before, and they were alone.

"My treasure," said Goolab. "Runga Naik is come.

At the third hour of the night he will come and hoot like an owl, and at the third hoot thou art to go out to him by the gap near the kitchen wall. There is nothing to prevent thee. And if thou dost not go to him, he will come to thee. Fear not, and may Alla love thee and keep thee."

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

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

Meanwhile the day wore on.

The evening arrived and the lamps were lighted in the palace. Zora had been sensible that something was going on in the hall of audience, for the noise of men's voices and pattering feet came to her sometimes.

Presently the Nawab came in and took his seat in the usual place. He was gorgeously dressed in cloth of gold, as befitted a ceremonial; but all the usual preparations for a marriage were wanting.

"I beg to represent," said Janoo, who was a

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

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

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

"A marriage!" cried the old Moolla. "A marriage between thee, Osman Beg, and Zora, granddaughter of Huzrut Syud Ali? Impossible! I forbid it in the name of the Queen and the law. I have seen the Syud, who protests. I must hear from the girl's own mouth that she is willing, and all the ceremonies must be completed, ere I can perform my functions."

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

Meanwhile, as he spoke, many present gathered round the brave old priest, and escorted him out of the assembly.

With what horrible fears Zora had been filled we will not attempt to describe. She had heard indistinctly the commotion when the old Moolla departed, and she knew his voice well.

She lay down on the pillow, and covered herself up. She would eat nothing, though Goolab pressed her, for she was sick with apprehension. After awhile Mama Luteefa and Shireen lay down on their thin cushions, and drawing the heavy coverlets over them, for the night was chilly, were soon fast asleep and snoring.

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

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

gently into the shadow opposite, and in an instant more she had gained the door of the kitchen court, drawn aside the blanket curtain, and fled across to the gap. For an instant she paused to notice if any alarm had been given, but all was quiet; the silvery moonlight fell on every object around her, and revealed them.

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

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

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

"Look! said Runga, yonder is the mosque, and a light is burning; they are looking for us. We have

come by the panthers' den, and who dare follow? Come! we must cross the river ere the dawn rises, and the boats are ready."

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

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

They were all assembled now, and Runga led the way at a rapid pace. By the side of the river was a fire of thorns and sticks, and a group was standing around it, amongst it her grandfather, leaning on his staff; and running forward Zora fell at his feet, and clasped his knees. "He saved me, Abba! he saved me!" was all she could ejaculate. It seemed to her that her heart was bursting with ecstasy. As for her grandfather, he stood holding his child in his arms, casting his blind eyes up to the sky, and his lips moved gently in prayer. Our Hoosein-bee was already in the boat, sobbing for joy.

"Look!" cried Runga Naik, stretching out his

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

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I

A RETROSPECT.

(Chand Sooltana was the daughter of Hoossein Nizam Shah, the King of Ahmednugger.)

Ally Adil Shah of Beejapoor gave his sister to become the bride of Moortuza, the Prince Royal of Ahmednugger, while he took the beautiful daughter of the King of Ahmednugger to be his own bride.

Ally Adil Shah, died in 1580, or sixteen years after Chand's marriage. At this period she must have been twenty-five years old, or thereabouts. The King left no male heir, but by his will appointed his nephew Ibrahim, son of his brother Thamash, to succeed him, and the Queen Dowager as his guardian and Regent of the Beejapoor kingdom, then, except the Moghul Empire of Delhi, the largest Mussulman power in India ; and thus the Queen's independent political life began. She brought up her nephew Ibrahim, and the orphan Abbas Khan as her own sons.

Abbas Khan had sent on his own baggage and the priest's overnight, with a note to his aunt to announce his arrival ; he was met, therefore, at the gate by his trusty steward and a crowd of retainers.

And it was a warm welcome that the Lady Fatima accorded to her long absent nephew. She stroked his face fondly, took him in her arms and embraced him heartily, holding him from her from time to time as if to assure herself that he was in very truth her own son. Fatima Khanum had, however, no real son; one had been born years ago who had died young; her two daughters were married, and with their husbands in different parts of the country, and the good lady had adopted Abbas, the son of her husband's late brother, as her son; and the boy had grown up before her, the foster-brother of the King Ibrahim so long as his age permitted of his living at the Royal palace, and afterwards with herself, until the service of war and of the State called him into active life, since when she had seen him rarely, and till the present occasion it was months since he had been near enough to ride home to see her.

The return to his old luxuries was by no means unacceptable to the young man

How much he had to hear of old companions, of their fortunes and misfortunes, of political events, and the progress of public affairs! He expected, perhaps, some allusion to his own proceedings; but, beyond congratulation on his recovery from his wound, nothing was said of any moment, or that could excite the smallest suspicion; and, so far, he was assured. The Queen would return from Torweh in the evening, and had convened a full Court for to-morrow, in which some

business of importance was to be transacted, but what it was had not transpired.

The muezzins had barely proclaimed the evening call to prayer from the mosques around, when he was informed that one of the messengers of the Palace desired to see him. Abbas Khan returned to the house, and in his own private apartment awaited the Queen's message. The Mirdha, or Court usher, who delivered it, seemed as mysterious as everyone else. He looked right and left, then over his shoulder, to see if any one followed, made a profound obeisance, and stooping down and covering his mouth with his scarf, whispered, --

"The Queen Mother desires to see you, my lord, about the first watch of the night, when the night council is over ; but you are to come before that, and be in attendance in case you are wanted. Perhaps, added the man, "my lord had better come well armed, though not so as to excite suspicion, and with a few followers."

"I thank thee for thy caution, Meer Sahib," said the young Khan. "Surely thou wert ever careful of me, even when I was a wild boy.

As the time drew near, then, at which he must proceed to the palace, Abbas Khan dressed himself with unusual care.

From his house to the main gate of the citadel was only a short distance ; and though it was dark, the light from his two torches borne before him was ample. Within, the officers of the guard, whom he knew, greeted

him kindly and with a hearty welcome. Not far beyond the gate of the Royal treasury the old messenger who had brought the Queen's order advanced to direct him, and informed him that the Queen was in her private audience chamber with some of the Executive Ministers, and that he was to wait in the ante-chamber till he should be called; and bidding the groom in charge walk his horse about till he should require it, and his escort to keep together, Abbas Khan dismounted, and entered the door which led to the Queen's apartments.

Abbas Khan had not to wait long before the first watch of the night had sounded from the gongs of the citadel; the curtain of the Royal chamber was drawn aside by the eunuch in waiting, and he was directed to enter into "the presence. All the Ministerial officers had withdrawn, but the blind and venerable Ekhlās Khan, Hyat Khan, the head Kotwal of the city, who had first denounced Eyn-ool-Moolk's conspiracy, and had rendered service during the short rebellion, and Kureen-oo-dein Chishtee, the head of the orthodox religious party in Beejapoor, who was the Queen's spiritual adviser as well as the King's, and might be termed keeper of the Royal conscience—a man from his calling and position bigoted, but in the main just and reasonable as he was eminently charitable and benevolent. All these persons were seated near the cushion which formed the throne, and seemed to be in earnest conversation with the Queen as Abbas Khan entered, and with the necessary respectful salutation

kissed the foot of the throne thrice, and presenting the hilt of his sword to his Royal mistress, stood before her in an attitude of humble expectancy, as the Queen, with a gracious smile, bade him welcome.

"Be seated, Abbas Khan," said the Queen, in her soft, low voice. And with a courteous reverence to each of those present, which he was now at liberty to make, and which was kindly returned, the young Khan took his seat below the rest.

"Thou hast none but elders and friends to listen to thee," continued the Queen; "friends of thy father and uncle; tell them and me in what manner Elias Khan was slain, and why thou took refuge in Juldroog."

"Ye all know," he said, addressing Hyat Khan, the chief Kotwal, "how Elias Khan was surprised by our lord the King, and how, as he did to Eyn-ool-Moolk, in the generosity of his heart, Elias was released. Ye all know, too, how he fled to Eyn-ool-Moolk and the Prince Ismail. Then he became a declared rebel."

We need not, perhaps, follow the young Khan's narrative of the skirmish in which Elias Khan was slain by him, nor the subsequent events which have already been detailed; nor how he declared he had been sick unto death, while he was living with his cousin, Osman Beg, till relieved by a holy Dervish, and afterwards a Portuguese padre, who had been sent to Juldroog by Dilawer Khan, of Moodgul, and whom he had brought with him under the order of the Queen herself. The

young man's narrative was clear and distinct, and the frank manner in which it was given carried with it conviction of its truth to all who heard it.

And," added the priest, with a scornful sniff, "that thou hast been consorting with the Nazarene woman, who is a reputed witch and sorceress."

Abbas Khan looked from one to another of the speakers by turns, with amazement, his fair face flushing with excitement. "Who are my accusers?" he asked. "I can reply only to them on these points, and I pray the Royal justice that I may be confronted with them, and then let Alla judge. As to the Christian lady, let my Queen-mother examine herself; to me she is as a mother or a sister—a holy woman devoted to the service of God by her vows, as her brother is by his."

As-tagh-fur-oolla! may God forbid!" exclaimed the priest, contemptuously "as if a Nazarene infidel could devote herself to God! Touba! Touba!"

"While she was in Juldroog," retorted Abbas Khan, with some bitterness, "she was the guest of the holy Syud and his grand-daughter, who lived below the fort, while I, weak as I was, resided on the top of the mountain, with my cousin. Till she had been sent for and welcomed by my aunt, the Lady Fatima, I had never seen her face, for she was always closely veiled."

And she is in thy house still," cried the priest, with a sneer.

"Not so, holy father," was the quiet reply; "as

soon as accommodation could be provided for them they went to the house of Miguel Furtado, the painter ; and they are there now, waiting the Queen's pleasure."

"They say, too," said Ekhlās Khan, "that thou left thy people to be slain by rebels, and fled like a coward !"

"A coward ! Nay, there are few living who dare use that word before me ; but I respect their age and infirmity, noble Khan, and am silent. Nay, think ; had I been a coward could I have slain Elias Khan ? He was no puny antagonist ; and could I have borne the wound I bear here," and he pointed to his breast, "had I been a coward ?"

"Did he speak to thee ?" asked Hyat Khan.

"He cursed me as he struck at me," replied Abbas Khan. And it was a fair blow, sirs, as one would give in fight to another ; but he spoke no more, for I clove him to the breast, and he fell dead from his horse. For many days I could not sleep, for he seemed ever present, with his dying look of hate ; but the Syud Dervish gave me an exorcism which I wear, and that has delivered me from him. I have yet ceremonies to perform, as I vowed, at thy holy shrine, Huzrut," he continued to the priest, "and I will not delay them."

An exorcism ! " exclaimed the priest, "and from a poor Dervish ; may I see it ?"

"It hath never seen the light since he gave it to me, Huzrut," said the young man, respectfully ; "but

one so reverend and so learned as thou art may see it," and he unloosed it from a cord by which it was suspended round his neck. The paper was enclosed in a thin sheet of silver, which was easily opened, and the priest looked at the diagram and figures with wonder and admiration.

"No novice hath written this, but the writing is that of age. Happy is the possessor of it, for unto him can come no evil of man's device," said the priest, reverently placing the paper to his lips, his forehead, and his breast. "And a Dervish wrote it? Who is he, living in so lonely a place unknown?"

"He told me who he was, Huzrut, and I have no concealment to make. He is a State prisoner since the time of the first King, Ibrahim, by whom he was blinded, and has lived——"

"Protection of God!" interrupted the priest and Ekhlas Khan, in a breath. "Can it be the learned Syud Ahmed Ali, the physician?"

"Even so," replied Abbas Khan. "I was to speak of him to the Queen, and interest her in his fate; and I do so, most gracious mother, now;" and the young man rose, kissed the foot of the throne, and stood with his hand folded in an attitude of supplication.

"He is forgiven," she said, firmly, "since, under the help of Alla, he saved thee, my son. There will be many who remember him."

"Yes, many," said Ekhlas Khan. "I am one of

his contemporaries who well remember how he was most trusted of all save the King, who, after he had banished the blind Syud, was never sane again."

"And he is blind, too, Abbas Khan! Merciful God! and hath passed forty years in that prison," said the Queen, from whose eyes tears of pity were stealing.

"Quite blind, mother; but he can write, as the priest has seen; and he hath a child, a granddaughter, who leads him about, as he doeth works of charity."

"We will send for them, Inshalla! to-morrow, and Osman Beg shall be directed to forward them with all honour. As far as can be, the sin of my house to him shall be redeemed. You will see to this, Hyat Khan?"

"Your orders are on my head and eyes," he returned, respectfully; "nothing shall be left undone. But will your Majesty, refuge of the world, pass orders on the Khan's case?"

"I see no order to pass, Hyat Khan," returned the Queen; "surely ye are satisfied?"

"We may be, but the people will not be," said the Kotwal, decidedly. "There is a blood feud now between the people of Elias Khan and Abbas Khan. Put thought of him aside, O noble lady, and prevent bloodshed, a renewal of the old scenes which brought the kingdom to the verge of ruin. There is a public durbar to-morrow, let the case be decided; I have force enough to prevent riot."

“ I beg to represent,” humbly said the fiery young Khan, who could hardly restrain himself as he bowed reverently before the throne, “ let there be no doubt so far as I am concerned. I claim the ancient privilege of all accused persons, that, to clear my honour from stain, I shall be allowed the trial of ordeal. I am alone, except my poor stupid standard-bearer, Yasin. One follower, Jumal, died of his wounds at Narrainpoor, and one, Runga Naik, the Bèydur, is far away in his own country ; and as he is a Hindoo,” he added, turning to the priest, “ he might not be believed. I am alone before God, and to Him I commit myself. Do not hinder me, friends and elders ; ye know I am right.

“ No ! no ! no ! ” cried the Queen, stretching out her hands in turns to all around her ; “ let there be no duel, let not blood be shed. As ye love me, as ye love the King, let there be no duel ; it will but increase the feud ! ”

“ It cannot be avoided, lady,” said the priest and Ekhlās Khan, speaking almost together. “ This will be no brawling duel, but a solemn appeal to the All Just to decide the truth. It is a custom of the State which no one, not even the King himself, would dare to infringe. If I know his brave uncle’s heart, he will be the first to rejoice that Abbas Khan offered of himself to undertake the risk.”

“ And now, friends,” she said, after a while, and as Abbas Khan took his seat once more, “ we thank ye for your aid tonight, for your aid and your direction, and ye have liberty to depart. Bring the pan and ḡatar,” she

called to the eunuch without, and in a few moments all had received their dismissal, and rose to depart.

There was no one near Abbas Khan but his groom, who was holding the horse's head, and an attendant, who held out the stirrup for him to mount ; his old friend the Mirdha and two or three of the eunuchs were looking on. Suddenly a man of tall and powerful frame appeared to leap from behind a buttress of the building, and exclaiming, " Elias sends you this ! " struck at the young Khan with all his force. The blow was so powerfully dealt that his intended victim, helpless from his position, staggered, and, as his horse plunged, fell to the ground. Many who saw the transaction thought he had been slain, and for an instant the assassin was in the grasp of several of the eunuchs and others, but he shook them off with ease, and fled into the dark recesses of the citadel, where concealment was easy, or whence he might leap from the wall and swim the ditch, and so escape into the city. A few men with torches followed him, but returned after a vain search.

Had it not been for the shirt of mail, Abbas Khan had never spoken more, for the assassin's dagger would have reached his heart. As it was, except feeling a severe bruise, the young man was unhurt ; but the shock had caused his old wound to bleed in some degree, and the warm blood, trickling down his chest, warned him to obtain assistance as soon as possible, and the good Padre was close at hand. As he was about to mount, his horse one of Hyat Khan's attendants, looking on the

ground had found the assassin's dagger, and it was at once recognised by all. The point had broken off with the force of the blow, and was found where Abbas Khan had stood. As Hyat Khan examined the weapon, he declared it to be that of Yacoot, the chief retainer of Elias Khan, and commander of his body guard, who was a native Abyssinian, and had brought the weapon from his own country.

"He cannot elude me," said the Kotwal to Abbas Khan. "Ruffian as he is he hath long been notorious for his crimes and violence. But thou hast had a narrow escape, my friend, and mayest thank the Lord and thy good mail for thy life; but, hark! the Queen calls; go, I will wait for thee, and, ushered in by the eunuch, Abbas Khan was again in the Royal presence.

There was no formality now. The Queen stood in the centre of the hall, before the throne, with her arms outstretched. She had cast away her veil, and an agonised sob broke from her, while her slight frame still trembled with the horror she had endured when the first cry of "Abbas Khan is dead!" fell upon her ears.

"Thou art safe, Meeah!" she murmured, stretching out her hands, while he stooped and touched her feet; "tell me thou art safe!"

"I am unhurt, mother," he said, "though it was a fierce blow. I am always safe with thy blessing on my head; and see, is not that proved to-night? Inshalla! to-morrow will pass as safely, for I fear not, O my

Queen ! my heart is true and my cause just ; but suffer me to depart, mother, for Hyat Khan is waiting for me."

"It is well," she replied, "else I should have ordered the Palace guard to escort thee home. Khoda Hafiz, may God have thee in his keeping ! Ere morning breaks my thank-offerings will be at every shrine and mosque in the city."

"Thou wilt need to be well armed to-morrow," said Hyat Khan, as he parted from his young friend at the gate of Humeed Khan's mansion. "Make no show of preparation, but, I say, be ready. But for this vile attempt on thy life, I had thought all might pass off quietly, but Yacoot will have his faction at his back, and he is not a temperate one. Sleep and rest, for the events of the day have been exciting, and so may the Lord keep thee !"

Abbas Khan did not disturb his aunt, but retired to his private apartment ; sending word that he was tired and needed rest, and would see her in the morning ; and he at once sent for his good friend the Padre, writing him a line to bring remedies, for his wound had broken out afresh. Meanwhile he used what precautions he knew, and before the priest arrived the bleeding had nearly ceased. Francis d'Almeida, and the household of his worthy host, had long been asleep, but as the Khan's note was brought to him, he took some strong adhesive plaister and other remedies, dressed himself, and went at once.

"Have I understood thy writing?" he said as he

entered the quiet chamber where the young man was reclining on his cushions, bathing his wound. Ah ! I have always feared this ; the bandages were loosed too soon ; but let me see . . . Ah, well, 'tis none so bad ; only the old part which had been mismanaged. So lie down straight, and I will see what I can do."

"Thou art a good fellow," said the Khan, pressing his hand, "and I owe, next to life, the use of my arm to thee. I have been careless, and must take the consequences."

"Nay, there is more than carelessness, here" said the priest, as he examined his friend's body "there is a bad bruise under the shoulder which has been the cause of this. Why dost thou conceal it ?"

Then Abbas Khan told him of the blow he had received, and of the dagger having been recognised. "All will be settled to-morrow, Padre, and in the afternoon thou and Maria will be sent for by my noble Queen. Ah ! yes, that is easy now, and I shall rest. It must not bleed again, Padre, for these are stirring times, and I may be needed 'for duty, perhaps—who knows?—ere to-morrow passes."

"I will come at the first watch of the day to-morrow, and see if the bandages hold well ; till then, sleep if you can, Khan Sahib, for there are some nervous symptoms about thee which may hinder thy recovery if they continue. May God keep thee ! Thou wilt not sleep the less soundly for a priest's blessing." "Let him sleep till he wakes of his own accord," he continued

to the head eunuch of the chamber, "and do not wake him. I will be here ere the first watch close."

Abbas Khan slept soundly. All anxiety as to the future was past; his way was clear before him, and it must be death or life, as the Lord willed, which is the true solace and comfort of every devout Mussulman. In his dreams, too, once more came the memory of the Dervish and her who had watched over him that memorable night, and who again seemed to be near him as an angel of Paradise, and ministering to him tenderly.

CHAPTER II

THE ORDEAL

The Queen Regent's slight figure was seen to issue from one of the archways on the basement, and, accompanied by a crowd of eunuchs and Royal slaves, seat herself upon the Royal throne. The whole assembly to a man rose to greet her, and the hearty shouts of the troops outside proclaimed the presence of the honoured and beloved lady.

Then the business of the day commenced. Some accounts were signed and audited, some messengers from foreign States bearing despatches were introduced by the Mirdhas, or ushers. Some officers, who had been on service and had returned, arose, and, their names and style being proclaimed, went forward, kissed the steps of the dais, and presented the hilts of their swords to the Regent.

As Abbas Khan advanced and passed close to the ranks of the Abyssinians, he was greeted by a scowl of fierce eyes, and murmurs which could hardly be repressed. But he took no notice, and resumed his seat without interruption.

“ They will not be quiet long,” said his friend, in a whisper ; “ they have vowed to be avenged on thee to-day for the murder, as they call it, of Elias Khan ; but thou hast many friends, Abbas Khan, and should have no fear.”

“ Fear ! ” cried the young man ; “ I know no fear in this matter. Wait and see ; but let there be no violence before the Queen.”

Then the ushers called for petitions, and many were delivered to them to be read before the Queen ; but, as one approached the Abyssinians, Yacoot arose, and in a loud, harsh voice, and broken Persian, mixed with his own uncouth speech, demanded permission to lay his petition at the foot of the throne.

“ Let him approach and speak,” said the Regent, in her sweet, clear voice, which was heard through the hall like a silver bell ; and, indeed, at that moment a breathless silence had fallen on the whole assembly.

“ He cannot speak so that the fountain of justice can understand,” said a secretary, “ but the paper can be read. Lay it there,” he continued to Yacoot.

“ She will not get it, someone will take it away ; I

will give it to herself only," was his rude reply, as he drew his bulky figure to its full height, and twisted up his moustachios with a fierce gesture.

"Let him give it," said the Queen Regent, stretching out her hand; and, apparently satisfied, Yacoot knelt on a step of the dais and delivered it into her hand.

"Now I have seen you receive it," he said surlily; "and we look to you for justice, and I will take it if not given."

At any other time such a threat would have had short shrift and a bloody ending under the great Adansonian trees, where traitors and other criminals were beheaded, and several persons advanced to arrest the speaker; but again the Queen's voice was heard.

"He means me no evil," she said; "he is only rude and unmannerly; do not molest him; let him go to his place, and he will hear his paper read."

But Yacoot seemed to have no intention of moving, and might have created a disturbance, but that two or three of his brotherhood dragged him away and forced him to sit down. The petition was then read, and purported to be from the whole of the Abyssinians, claiming justice from the State for the murder of Elias Khan, and charging Abbas Khan with rebellion and cowardice in having acted on behalf of the rebel forces.

"Let Abbas Khan reply," was the Queen's answer. "Let him come before the throne and speak freely and

truly ;” and the young man came forward, with the same easy, graceful step which all knew, and not least his noble mistress.

We know what he told the assembly, addressing them as his friends and fellow-soldiers, praying them not to spare him if he were guilty. “The headsmen are near,” he said, “and if God wills it I am ready to meet my fate. What matter how I die for my Queen !” and he said this with so smiling a face and so frank a manner that a murmur of applause ran through the assembly. But the Abyssinians rose to their feet as one man, and their swords, as if by one action, flashed from their scabbards.

“He hath a cunning tongue !” cried one. “We will cut it out of his mouth !” shouted Yacoot.

“Your Majesty had better quit the hall,” said Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, joining his hands, “and leave these brawlers to me. Whatever happens, Yacoot must be arrested for last night’s work, and I have force enough.”

Ah ! Khan,” returned the Queen, “that would be the sure way to begin bloodshed. No, I will remain as I am ; I have no fear.”

Meanwhile Abbas Khan stood where he had taken post as he addressed the assembly. He was exactly in front of the Abyssinians ; but their action had no effect on him. Calm and unmoved, he felt secure though a hundred flashing swords were threatening his instant annihilation ; but no one struck at him.

“Listen, all of ye, friends and brother soldiers,” he cried in his manly voice, which echoed through the hall. “I am accused of murder, of which I am innocent ; and of cowardice, which is worse. With my honour I can live, but without it I must die under your contempt. I appeal, therefore, to our time-honoured custom of ordeal, to be decided before our noble mother and Queen. Who of my enemies will meet me now ? Even now, in the field yonder, and let Him who knows all hearts decide between my enemies and me. Behold, I am ready ! ”

Then arose from all parts of the hall cries of “ We believe thee, noble Khan ; thou hast no enemies among us.”

“ But I have enemies, nevertheless,” he continued ; “ and, but for an accident, I had not been alive before ye to-day and even in the precincts of the Palace I was not safe last night from attempted assassination. I see the man before me who struck the blow ; he is the champion of the Abyssinians, and it is he I would meet in fair combat unto the death.”

“ I will not fight him,” said Yacoot to his friends ; “ he bears a charmed life, else —— ”

“ Thou art named Yacoot ; and he means that thou wert the would-be assassin. Behold ! ” cried Hyat Khan, taking the remarkable Abyssinian dagger from his waistband. “ Ye all know to whom this belonged ; and, look, the point is broken, yet Abbas Khan is safe ! ”

“He is a coward; I will not forget him,” murmured the Abyssinian.

“Thou art accused of attempt at murder, Yacoot,” said one of his companions; “’tis thou who art the coward, if thou refuse to fight Abbas Khan. Either to him and to God or to us thou must answer, for we tolerate no assassins.”

CHAPTER III

THE COMBAT

Abbas Khan walked slowly out of the hall to the steps where his horse awaited him. There he removed his court drawers and pulled on his boots, which had been fastened to his saddle. “Thou must be steady and sure, good Sooltan, to-day,” he said, stroking the head of his beautiful charger, who rubbed his nose against his master’s breast, and answered by a low, loving whinny; and the young man, vaulting lightly into the saddle, loosed his shield from the saddle-bow, drew his sword, and paced gently round the front of the vast assembly, welcomed by shouts of generous greeting, and cries of “God keep thee safe!” His adversary did not delay to follow. He had replaced his turban with a steel morion, which flashed in the sun, but otherwise nothing relieved the dull black of the heavy chain mail by which he was protected. Many remarked that he looked livid as he mounted his horse, and that he impatiently jerked the

bit of his fine Kattywar charger till it became violent and unmanageable; and he rode at full speed, as if it were his intention to overwhelm his antagonist. But Abbas Khan was too good a horseman to be suddenly surprised, and he evaded the charge by a dexterous turn of his horse, which required that the Abyssinian should follow him into the centre of the field, where now the combat commenced in earnest. The Abyssinian had armed himself with a short, very heavy, and much curved sabre, his favourite weapon, which was known by the epithet of "Kussab," the butcher, from the deadly wounds it inflicted; and he had also a large shield, which nearly covered his person, and with his armour rendered him almost impenetrable. But Abbas Khan now felt the advantage of his longer weapon, by which and his skilful horsemanship he was able to keep his enemy at bay.

Who can describe the changing nature of the combat? Each now charging, now retreating, wheeling round, again closing, while blows enough to have beaten down the guard of a stronger man than Abbas Khan were showered upon his shield. The Queen saw the whole from her seat, and her lips were moving in silent prayer as she looked towards the whirling figures, and clasped her hands; and the faint shrieks and cries from the balcony above proved that excitement existed there also. But the combat was of no long duration. Abbas Khan had tried his antagonist again and again, and almost despaired of finding a vulnerable point, when in

a fierce charge by the Abyssinian he saw that a portion of his helmet at the side under his ear was open, and as the encounter continued he drove his long narrow sword through it with all his force. There was a gush of blood ; and after reeling in his saddle, the huge champion fell to the ground heavily, and did not rise.

“ He falls ! he falls ! ” cried hundreds in the hall
 “ Look, noble lady,” said Hyat Khan to the Queen, “ he has fallen ! ”

“ Who has fallen ? ” asked the Queen, faintly. She had been unable to look on to the end, for to her perception Abbas Khan seemed to have no chance before his enemy.

“ Yacoot, the Abyssinian,” replied the Kotwal.
 “ Such is the wisdom and justice of the Lord. Ameen ! Ameen ! ” and he hastened away to the spot. Yacoot was not dead, and was trying to speak ; but he was too weak to rise.

“ Some of ye tie a bandage round his neck, said Abbas Khan, “ else he will die.”

“ Let him die,” returned Hyat Khan. Wouldst thou interfere with the sentence of the All Just and Powerful, Abbas Khan ? Leave him in His hands. He hath met a soldier’s fate, and that is more than he deserved. But what is that he is trying to get at behind, and clutches at though his fingers are stiffening ? Take off his mail, some of ye, and untie his waistband. See, he is dead even now, noble Khan, and this is no indignity.”

The searchers were well skilled in their work, and soon produced two humeeanas, or long narrow bags of soft leather, which appeared heavy with gold and silver coins, and which Hyat Khan himself took charge of ; but there was another, broader bag, which appeared to contain a great number of papers and letters, some of which seemed to be in Portuguese writing and some in Persian.

“Give them to our Lady Mother yourself, Abbas Khan ; they may be Elias Khan’s, and, if so, we need no more,” said the Kotwal, who handed the bag to Abbas Khan. “Come, we delay ; and, by Alla ! ’twas well we found them. Take that away,” he continued to his men ; “lay it on the grass without the gate ; some of his people will get it buried.”

The shouts, the cries of joy and congratulation, the peculiar yells of his friends the Beydurs, had been overpowering ; and as Abbas Khan rode past, making his horse caracole and prance at every step, and giving his graceful salutations to all, the enthusiasm was unbounded. As he was preparing to dismount at the steps of the corridor, his old retainer, Runga Naik, rushed through the crowd to embrace his feet. “I saw him die ! I saw him die, Meeah !” he cried, “and I have brought in the rest. Do as thou wilt with them, for thou art safe, O my lord, and my prayers have been accepted.”

“All of them, Runga ? All of whom ? ”

“The men that were with us at Korla. One by one I have tracked them down, even to Belgaum. Look ! ”

As a space was cleared, loud cries of "Aman ! Aman! Mercy ! mercy !" broke from a crowd of captives tied together ; and one of them, who had been Abbas Khan's duffadar, cried out piteously, "Let me speak ; let me speak before the assembly. I am a traitor and a rebel, and deserve death, but not before I have spoken, O my lord."

"Let me and my people take charge from thee, Runga Naik," said the Kotwal. "Thy men are weary and footsore."

"I thought to have been here yesterday, noble Khan, but it could not be done. Yet I am not too late, and the duffadar should speak before the Queen."

"Let him follow me," said Abbas Khan ; "this alone was needful to complete all." And as he advanced into the hall, hundreds poured forward to greet him. Nor was the Abyssinian party less demonstrative than any of the others. Then the duffadar, humbly prostrating himself before the throne, gave a clear account of the skirmish at the first onset by Elias Khan. He, and his men whom he had gained over, deserted to the rebels, and, but for the confusion which followed Elias Khan's death, Abbas Khan could not have escaped. Yacoot had followed them for some miles, but eventually lost them in the dust storm.

"God has judged the right," said a venerable officer of the Abyssinian party, making a low obeisance to the Queen with tears in his eyes as he presented the hilt of his sword to Abbas Khan ; "and we pray the Queen's and

your own forgiveness, noble soldier, that you were falsely accused, and some day in battle we may prove our devotion to you."

But who can describe the thankful joy of the noble Queen, who, impatient to greet her adopted son, Abbas Khan and with her eyes streaming with tears, and in a broken voice, blessed him as he advanced, kissed the step of the Royal dais, and bowed his head before her "Again I bless thee, O true and faithful," she said ; "and the Lord hath done justice openly and before all men. My son, may thy years be long and honoured."

"Ameen ! Ameen !" said the chief priest, devoutly ; "he is worthy."

"Let no one leave," cried the Queen, in her clear, sweet voice, which all heard. "Keep silence till your lord the King's letter is read."

It was very brief, but he wrote that all the army of Ahmednugger, headed by the violent young King who had just ascended the throne, was advancing upon him ; that his own troops were suffering from sickness ; and that all the men available in Beejapoor, that could be spared, should be sent under any leader selected by herself ; and, at its conclusion, the Queen Regent rose, her slight figure appearing almost visionary among the crowds of warriors who rose with her.

"Nobles and warriors," she said, gracefully, "when I name Abbas Khan for this service, can I choose better ? Bismilla ! let it be so." And as Abbas Khan took the

leaf of pan which was handed to him, and turned to the groups behind him and cried, "O friends, will ye accept me?" a shout arose through the vast building, and was taken up by the masses without with an enthusiasm beyond description. But what is there in life so fickle as the breath of popular favour?

"I must ask permission to return home for a while, mother," said the young man in a low voice as he stood by the throne; "but take this packet of papers which were found on him who died. My wound is uneasy, and needs my good physician's care. And as I saw there were Portuguese letters among them, I will bring the good Padre with me to the evening council. Do not allow them to go out of your own possession, they may be important."

"I will not," she replied. "Go, refresh yourself; I shall expect you and the Padre at the evening council."

CHAPTER IV

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL

At the loud cries of the Mirdhas and silver-stick bearers of "Burkhast, Durbar Burkhast!" "The durbar is dissolved!" the various masses of troops filed out of the square before the Hall of Audience in the same gorgeous array as they had entered.

Abbas Khan was the popular hero of the day; women stretched out their arms from the housetops and

blessed him, and wished him a hundred years of life and joy. Stalwart veterans would not be kept off ; and some kissed his feet, others put portions of his garment to their lips, and with a blessing turned away. It was almost too much to bear.

At his gate he was met by the whole household, and the usual ceremonies of welcome were performed ere he crossed the threshold. When these were finished, and suitable rewards ordered, Abbas Khan, excused himself to the rest of the company, and went at once to his aunt, who had already sent several messages to him to come as quickly as he could ; and truly it was grateful to him to find himself once more encircled by the arms of one so revered by him and so dear.

“Oh ! thou art safe, thou art safe, my son ! ” she cried, as she clung sobbing to his neck. “I feared for thee ; I wept for thee ; I prayed for thee to the Lord and His saints, and I was heard ; and as soon as the news was brought to me that thou hadst won the combat, I sent Fatehas to all the mosques and shrines ; and to-morrow, Inshalla ! I will feed a thousand poor people in the name of the Imams. And thou art not hurt, my son ? ”

“Not hurt, mother ; but the old wound needs looking to by the Padre Sahib ; it is sore and stiff. It is he alone that can give me rest and ease.”

Abbas Khan found the priest in his own apartment, who, after very sincere congratulations, helped him to

divest himself of the mail shirt he wore, when he fell to an examination of the wound.

“No doubt, my lord, it is sore and smarting from the weight and strain of the armour; but it is sound, and there hath been no more bleeding. I will change all these dressings now, and put on lighter ones, and in a few days there will be no more danger of relapse.”

The new, cool dressings were a delicious relief, and left his arm at full liberty for action of any kind.

As the Padre left him, Abbas Khan threw a light sheet over himself, and slept profoundly.

His good aunt tended him as she had done when he was a child. And the time flew rapidly, and the muezzin from the minaret of the garden mosque began to chant invitation to the evening prayer, “Allah-hu-Akbar! Allah-hu-Akbar!” and then Abbas Khan woke, and found his aunt sitting beside him, watching.

“My sleep was sweet,” he said, “because thou watchedst over me, mother. Ah, so sweet! may God reward thee. But I must go to the prayer now.”

“There are many who wish to speak with thee, my son,” she said; “and one is very urgent, Runga Naik, a Beydur.”

Calling to an attendant, he bade him bring in Runga Naik, and awaited his coming alone. Presently he saw the Beydur chief enter.

“I was not in time, Meeah,” he said, as soon as h

emotion had subsided, "to see thee slay that villain. Would I had been! But I could not travel faster with the prisoners; and it was only at the last stage that I heard thou hadst reached this the day before, when the Lady Queen was hunting.

You have heard nothing, my lord, of the old Dervish and his child? Are they with thee?"

"No!" replied Abbas Khan, starting at the question. "Not with me. I have never even heard of them. By your soul, tell me what you know."

"I had been absent from home tracing our men who had deserted us at Korla, and had three hundred of my best men with me. I was suddenly sent for by the Dervish, and I delivered Zora from the palace of Osman Beg, where she was confined under the charge of two procuresses from Moodgul. Yes, Burma Naik and Bheema and I did it; and to this day I regret that I did not slay thy profligate cousin as he slept."

"But, but!" cried Abbas Khan, horrible thoughts rising in his mind, "she was safe, she had not been dishonoured?"

"Thanks be to the gods, she was safe, Meeah. There had been an attempt at a marriage that afternoon; but the stout old Moolla refused to perform it, and the ceremony was deferred till the morrow. I saw there was time for me to do what was needed, and we three brought her away, through the panthers' cave. Who dared to follow us?"

“And then?” cried the Khan, breathlessly and anxiously.

“Only this,” continued the simple fellow; “I had a boat ready, and the old man’s property was placed in it as evening fell; and when we three brought the girl away safely, we crossed the river, and I took them to Kukeyra, where I have a house, and where I bestowed them safely, with six hundred of my people there to guard them.”

“And they are there now, Runga?”

“No,” he replied, “they are not there; and that is what troubles me. One of the Kukeyra men met me here to-day, and told me that the old man had grown restless; and though Zora had entreated him to remain, yet he had left Kukeyra and gone to our Rajah at Wakin Keyra, who was protecting him; and that Osman Beg had sent spies across to trace them, and even attempted to follow with his retainers; but who can cross the river, mother, if the Beydurs say nay?”

“Now may God be praised, Runga, for this protection of them! Oh, think, if that child had come to harm! And it was a foul plot and outrage of Osman Beg’s, for which he shall answer to me as surely as the sun shines or as the Abyssinian died. But art thou sure it was a forcible abduction of the child?”

“There is no doubt of that. Jooma and another carried Zora from the bastion, as she sat looking at Chaya Bhugwuti; and only that the good old Moolla

refused, Zora would have been married by Nika, and would have now been in thy cousin's zenana. Yes, that is true, Meeah; I heard it from Zora, and others have told me since."

"He shall answer this before the King and his mother, said Abbas Khan fiercely. Ever treacherous! who can trust him?"

"He has other things to answer for besides this, Meeah," was the reply. "Look! here are more papers, more letters;" and he took a packet from his waistband; "and I have secured all Elias Khan's Duftur, and his scribe. There are plenty of Osman Beg's letters in it—and other people's too, for the matter of that—quite enough to give him a seat under the Goruk Imlee trees, and to find the executioner making him a last salaam."

CHAPTER V

THE NIGHT COUNCIL

Abbas Khan arrived at the entrance to the council chamber at the usual hour, accompanied by Francis d'Almeida. Abbas Khan had given him some general instruction as to his demeanour in approaching the throne, and the worthy priest appeared by no means flurried or anxious as to the result. As he knelt down on one knee, doffed his hat gracefully, and bowed his head as he would have done to his own King, the Royal lady was satisfied that the priest had seen Courts, and was well born and bred; and her surprise was not a little enhanced by the

excellent Persian in which he replied to her inquiries after the health of his sister and himself.

It was a busy scene. Orders for the pay of the troops about to march had to be signed by the Queen and by the heads of departments present, to be paid from the treasury next morning; orders also to district authorities on the road to provide supplies and forage at each stage, and to have the roads made practicable for the artillery. Public carriage cattle out at graze had been recalled; but more were necessary, and Hyat Khan's requisitions were heavy on the city. These, with the usual revenue and district papers to be signed and made up, correspondence to be written, and drafts of letters to be read, occupied a long time, and was watched by the Padre with the utmost interest.

At last the long sitting was concluded, and the Queen, rising, excused herself for a while, and went into an inner chamber for refreshment, while the courtiers chatted freely among themselves.

When the Queen re-entered and took her seat, all present rising to receive her, Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, produced a list of those persons who had been tracked and apprehended by Runga Naik Beydur, who, he said, was without, and could give a clear account of them. He was, certainly, only a Beydur, but might be allowed to stand before the dais.

The Kotwal, at a sign from the Queen, ordered Runga to be admitted, and, as he entered, was shown

where to make his obeisance. And he finally stood after his own fashion on one leg, pressing the sole of the other foot against the calf, and with his hands joined in supplication.

“Let there be entire silence,” cried one of the Court ushers by order of the Queen, and Runga Naik began his history. We know most of it already; but the latter portion, relating his rescue of Zora, his tracking of the rebel members of Elias Khan’s band, the escape of the Abyssinian after a close pursuit, gave a new interest to the narrative. Runga himself, though dazed at first by the beauty of the room and the presence of the Queen, of whom he had heard so much, was now assured; and the story was told with a simple modesty and confidence which, to every hearer present, conveyed an assurance of truth and reality. Elias Khan had endeavoured to tempt him into disloyalty; he had promised him money and an estate if he would cut off all the Royal outposts on the north bank of the Krishnah. “But I did not do that, mother,” he cried to the Queen in his homely speech, and stretching forth his hands; “my people have been faithful to Beejapoor since it was a kingdom, and was I to turn traitor for villains like Eyn-ool-Moolk and Elias? Meeah, there, and I were old friends, and he was my superior. I went to him as fast as I could, and three hundred of my people were to follow on foot, but they were too late; for the day after I reached him was that of the fight in which he slew Elias, and was well nigh slain himself. I have heard it

whispered he was a coward, but who dare say that now I could not bear it, and hunted down most of the men who deserted him, but some have escaped. Let the Kotwal Sahib tell what they have said to him."

"I humbly represent to the throne," said the Kotwal, "that one and all have confessed to having been seduced by messengers, from Elias Khan, and humbly beg their lives. They have shed no blood."

Abbas Khan," said the Queen, in reply, "if it please thee, I give their lives into thy hands; do with them as it is good unto thee; unless, indeed, the Kazee demands them for trial."

"They have committed no murder, noble lady, that they should come before me," returned the Kazee. "If they have offended, it is against the State, and the State has power over all traitors."

"Then I accept them as our Queen-Mother's gift," said the young Khan, rising and making three obeisances at the foot of the throne; "Hyat Khan will help me to arrange about them. I have no fear of them, and they have been with me in many a fair fight. But we delay, lady; wilt thou not order the papers to be examined which were found this morning?"

"They are here, my lords," said the Queen, "and first we should hear those in the Frangi character, and the Padre Sahib can translate them for us. Approach, sir," she continued to Francis d'Almeida, "sit at the foot of the throne."

“I will translate them into Persian,” was the priest’s reply. He took up one of the letters and began to read it. It was of no consequence. After several others of trivial import, came one with an elaborate refusal of the Government of Goa to assist the designs of Eyn-ool-Moolk and Elias Khan on behalf of Prince Ismail, which it gave the Padre much satisfaction to expound. He had heard of the refusal of his Government to countenance the rebellion, but here was ample confirmation under the signature of the Governor, Don Mathias de Albuquerque, and his councillors ; and threats of denouncing the conspirators to the King of Beejapoor in case the correspondence was renewed.

Prince Ismail’s party, then, appear to have begun an intrigue with Dom Diego, superior of the Moodgul Mission, imploring his advocacy with the Viceroy, and offering not only increased powers to the Mission, but large perquisites to himself ; and these terms being recapitulated from the original Persian letter, Dom Diego’s own requests followed, which the Padre read with astonishment, mingled with terror ; for he had demanded not only the large province of Dharwar as his own perquisite, but four lakhs of hoons to maintain it and the European troops he should need. He undertook to obtain presently two thousand Europeans from Goa, and two thousand more from Portugal as soon as possible, and with this force and those of the Prince he undertook to deliver Beejapoor, with all its treasures, into the possession of Eyn-ool-Moolk and the Prince. It was

a cunningly devised scheme, and inside the letter was found a copy of the Persian reply from Elias Khan on behalf of his master, Eyn-ool-Moolk, agreeing to the whole, and urging Dom Diego not to delay, and sending him a thousand hoonas as earnest money by the hands of Yakoob Khan, Abyssinian. Again the correspondence was continued up to the time when the rebels were attacked by Humeed Khan, and the death of Eyn-ool-Moolk; and when the translator had finished, there was a general murmur of approbation and congratulation to the Queen Dowager on the danger which the State had escaped, and of thanks for the important services rendered by so able an explanation of the letters; and the Queen herself was profuse in her acknowledgments, given with the charming yet dignified manner of which she was so admirable a mistress.

Meanwhile the secretaries had been separating the Persian correspondence, and arranging it by names and dates, and the Queen now desired it to be read. All that related to those who no longer existed were put aside, but that of Osman Beg contained painful revelations. He had offered to give up his fort to the rebel troops; he had furnished them with information in regard to movements of troops from Beejapoor to the westward, and had advised Elias Khan to attack his cousin's party, which guarded the main fords of the river, and cut it off before the floods came, and when the road to the capital would be opened.

The question most important to be decided was,

what to do with Osman Beg? Was he to be recalled at once, or sent to some distant fortress, or to Moodgul, for detention? or was he to be brought to the capital, and imprisoned till the King's pleasure was known? There was no question that he should be arrested without delay, and his successor, Meer Kasim Ali, an officer who could be entirely depended upon, was at once named by several in the council as the fittest person, and Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, vouched for his leaving the city before dawn. He was at once sent for, and arrived as the reading of the correspondence was concluded, and was ushered into the presence, a fine soldier-like young man, somewhat older than Abbas Khan, but with equally bold and frank features. He was immediately made acquainted with the duty assigned to him, and a grateful smile passed over his features as he felt that his success would involve promotion to the grade held by Osman Beg, and he received the Royal commission, putting it to his forehead and eyes, and making a profound reverence.

“And now,” said the Queen, “we give our opinion and instructions at once. We would not have Osman Beg, whose father is honoured among us, and honoured by the King, imprisoned in a fortress, or sent to Dilawer Ali Khan, at Moodgul, where intrigue may take place. We would have him kept in Juldroog, under watchful care, till the King's return, when, in full durbar, he may plead what he can in extenuation. You will, also, Meer Sahib, inquire, and report to me, as soon as

possible, under what circumstances the venerable Syud, long known as the Dervish, and his granddaughter left Juldroog, and where they are at present. Should their place of residence be known, you are to despatch them to the presence without delay."

"I would also ask you," continued the Queen, "to ascertain whether one Dom Diego, the head priest at Moodgul, is still there."

"I think I can answer that question, noble Queen," said the Padre, joining his hands. "I heard that Dom Diego had left Moodgul for Goa, being succeeded by two humble priests who had taken charge of the mission and this was confirmed by some of my flock who came to the fair at Talikota, who told me they were satisfied with the new comers until I could return to them."

Meanwhile Abbas Khan was completing his business with the Minister of Finance and various other officers, and the affairs of the sitting seemed well nigh concluded.

"Let all the officers of the army about to march appear at early durbar to-morrow," said the Queen.

And directing the usual complimentary dismissal gifts to be brought she rose after they had been distributed, and left the throne.

As D'Almeida made his acknowledgments, Runga Naik, who had been busy writing in a corner, in a large, sprawling hand, approached the new Governor of Juldroog, and gave the letter to him.

"Take my advice," he said, "do not attempt to

cross by the western ferry above the fall ; turn off the main road at Talikota, make for Korikul, which belongs to me ; ask for one Burma Naik, or if he be away, for Kesama, my wife ; give either of them this letter, and they will give thee men and boats to cross the town ferry to the fort ; this will save thee more than day's march. Thou wilt be landed privately, close to the village, and the rest is in thine own hand, with three hundred of my people to help thee."

"If thou wouldst only go thyself, Runga," said Abbas Khan.

"No, no, Meeah !" was the reply, the tears springing to his eyes ; "where thou goest I follow. If the Meer Sahib follows my advice, he will secure Osman Beg ere he rises from his bed the day after to-morrow. The people there will rejoice to be delivered from his insolence and tyranny. By Krishna ! do not send me, I should slay him ; and his life—well, it is in the Lord's hands, worthless as it is. No, not with thee, Meeah ; I must go to my people ; I shall meet thee at the early durbar."

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I

ZUFFOORA-BEE

ZUFFOORA-BEE, Osman Beg's cook, whom he had brought with him when he came, an old slave of his father's house, was a practical woman, well used to camp life, sudden alarms, and long marches, and in any emergency was ready to prepare food for considerable numbers.

She was very strict in the observances of her faith, also regular in the performance of stated prayers five times a day. And no Moolla could have possessed a more perfect knowledge of the details to be observed at festivals, the ablutions and purifications of women at such seasons, and also of the needful fasts; or, on the other hand, the cooking necessary on such occasions. As to strong liquors or palm wine, she held them in the utmost abhorrence, and would as soon have cooked and eaten a piece of the abhorred animal as taken a drop of spirit into her mouth.

The proceedings and mode of life and temper of her master had long been distressing to her; and if, by any possibility, she could have escaped from him and returned to Beejapoor, she would have done so.

When poor little Zora was brought up to the palace

by force, the grief and indignation of the worthy dame knew no bounds.

During the whole of the day Zora had been confined to the palace she had prayed and wept by turns, but, when the pan-seller's wife came to her in the evening, she gave Zuffoora-bee a hint, though others were by, that Zora was not without friends; and when the alarm that she had escaped was given, Zuffoora fell on her knees and thanked God that it had been so, and that her master's wicked designs had been foiled.

When the party under the new Governor and Burma Naik, with the Jemadar of the fort, was passing the wall which bounded her own court, she was preparing to rise and perform her ablutions previous to the early morning prayer, and the shuffling tramp of the men sounded ominous to her. What can it all mean she thought! She was not afraid, and got up, went through the high-arched kitchen to the door, unbarred it, and looked out into the yard, where several Beydurs whom she knew, and Mussulmans of the Governor, were standing, the latter of whom saluted her civilly as she asked them what had happened.

"Nothing," said one of the men in reply "nothing, but that the new Governor is come, and we have a new master. The new Nawab came from Beejapoor, and has taken possession, and the old Nawab is a prisoner — that's all."

The old dame gathered all the information she needed, and retired to her own private room, where she

dressed herself in an entirely choice suit of clothes, braided her hair, and put on her small stock of ornaments ; and, thus prepared, crossed the court, and entered the women's apartments of the palace.

Now, 'if there had been one subject more than another on which Zuffoorah desired to open her heart fully to the new Governor, it was that of poor little Zora and the old man, her grandfather ; and if her account were prolix, it was interesting to her hearer, and the details were given with tears and sobs which attested their sincerity and truth.

"Send me, my lord ; send me ; I will find her wherever she may be hidden away. God knows," she continued, sobbing, "she was so beautiful and so helpless that anyone might have seized her ; and as to the old man, he is not only blind but hopelessly simple, and yet very obstinate. Ah, my lord ! the more I think the more I fear."

Meanwhile Osman Beg had awakened from his drunken sleep with confused intellects, and seeing strange faces beside his bed and none of his own attendants, had risen, suddenly pushed away his guards, and rushed, half naked as he was, towards his usual seat in the hall ; but he was held fast by many of the new and old garrison, and the new Governor advancing, bade him sternly return to his apartment. Osman Beg, who was a very powerful man, still resisted violently, and could he but have possessed himself of any weapon, would have done serious injury. It was in vain that the new

Governor explained who he was, and even showed him the Queen's warrant. Osman Beg was in no humour to hear or to understand, and the struggle was renewed. After several warnings, therefore, and being obliged to listen to all the vile abuse poured out against him, to being called a coward, and a Kafir, a traitor, and a slave, the Governor directed the attendants to tie Osman Beg's arms behind him easily with a soft turban, and to take him back to the room whence he had come. It was the act of being tied, perhaps, which first really awakened him to a clear sense of his position, and after a time he began to weep. No one came to him, none of his slaves or servants, and he was parched with thirst, with a craving for food. Now, therefore, the services of Zuffoorabee were called into requisition; she had food and some cool sherbet ready for him, and when he became more reasonable the Governor went to him. They had been old acquaintances, and knew each other perfectly well; and Osman Beg, promising to be quiet, was relieved from his bonds, which had only been loosened when he ate.

"So long as it is not my virtuous cousin, Abbas Khan, who has been sent to relieve me, I do not care," he said. "The Queen has a right to appoint whom she will, and to recall whom she will, and you, sir, are welcome, though you have come in a rough fashion. I think you will find all the records correct, and I now give you the key of the treasury;" and he felt in his waistband for it, but neither was it there nor that of his private papers, and his countenance fell.

"I have possession of all your private papers also, my lord," said the Governor. "It was for them that the surprise was made, and I already see that they are important. Nay," he continued, "may even imperil your life, my lord, and tally sadly with those which were read before the Queen in council the night that Abbas Khan slew Yacoot, the champion of Elias Khan, in the combat of ordeal. Hyat Khan, the Kotwal, found them, and I was present at their examination."

"When did this happen?" asked Osman Beg.

"Three days ago, my lord; I was present on duty at the palace that night, and I left the city before daylight next morning."

"Then give me my papers, Meer Sahib, and let me depart to justify myself, and seek my wife, whom Abbas Khan has spirited away."

"Your wife, my lord; who is she?"

"She is Zora," he replied, "who lived here. Oh, Zora!" he cried in bitter pain, "this comes of thy sorcery. Let me go, sir!" he shouted fiercely. "Let me go! by what right do you detain me?"

"By this, the Queen's warrant," replied the Governor, "which my secretary will read to you. You will see that your person is to be kept securely; your papers sealed up and sent to Court, where you will be summoned when the King's pleasure is known. I am not in the habit of exceeding my orders, or of using hardly men of rank superior to my own. Your papers

are even now being fastened up, and two of my own men, with a party of the garrison and some Beydurs, will escort them to the city."

"From that time Osman Beg gave up hope, and fell back on his bed with a groan, covering his face. Had he possessed a dagger he might, perhaps, in his despair have stabbed himself, but as the first excitement was blunted, he grew sullen, would speak to no one, and refused for several days the food which Zuffoora brought herself, and vainly tried to persuade him to eat.

Meanwhile, Zuffoora and Johur were impatient to be gone. Johur had discovered that Zora and the old man had left Korikul, and Burma Naik had even traced them beyond Kukera, on the way to Suggest. It was most likely that they were there; and the old dame, provided with a comfortable litter, a strong pony for an attendant, and her little baggage, and Johur, and ten stout fellows of the garrison, were despatched one day to their great joy with the almost certainty of recovering the child and her grandfather. They followed them easily for several days by slow marches. They heard of them at the shrine of Sofee Surmurt at Suggest, but beyond that there was no trace. A worthy weaver's wife told Zuffoora that a good matron of Gulburgah, when on her pilgrimage to the shrine, had taken charge of Zora and her grandfather; but as she belonged to a city beyond Gulburgah, who could tell where she might be? And thus it was that Zuffoora-bee and the Abyssinian returned to Juldroog weary and disappointed.

Had Abbas Khan spirited away the girl on any pretence? The Governor could not believe what Osman Beg repeatedly asserted; but still it might be so, and he doubted. Otherwise the affairs of the fort went on regularly and comfortably. The Governor received deputations from the Nawab of Moodgul and the Beydur Naik of Wakin Kera, and all respectable neighbours round; but the only thing in which he had failed was not being able to trace Zora. We, however, who have much interest in the child and her old grandfather must endeavour to do so.

CHAPTER II.

▲ NEW HOME

No sooner was the escape of Zora known to the two women who had charge of her, than their shrill cries aroused the eunuchs, who were supposed to be keeping watch outside, and instant search was made for her among the rocks in the vicinity of the palace, but in vain. They then in turn raised an alarm, and Osman Beg himself, it being now daylight, was roused by his attendant, and a new search was begun, which, as we know, ended in disappointment. The two eunuchs who had already been pinioned, and were expecting no less punishment than death, were put into heavy chains, and flogged till they could bear no more, and thrust into a dungeon.

After the two eunuchs had been disposed of, Osman

Beg, attended by his Abyssinian slaves and some of his retainers, descended from the palace to the village, where every one with whom Zora or her grandfather was known to have associated was flogged, or otherwise tortured, to disclose the place of their concealment. The old house was ransacked in vain, and every hiding place among the rocks that was in any way accessible searched for the fugitives. It was soon known, however, that they had crossed the river, and that Runga Naik and Burma had carried them off; and the Nawab would willingly have seized the Beydurs of the fort if he had dared; but they set him at defiance, and he was too weak to attempt interference with more than a hundred stout, well-armed men. Zora's friends contented themselves with drawing up an account of the whole transaction, and transmitting it to Beejapoor, but not at once.

There was, however, one point on which Osman Beg seemed to be inflexible. He declared that though the Moolla and Kazee of the fort had refused their offices in regard to Zora's marriage to him — and those present on the occasion gave equally clear and convincing testimony as to the non-performance of the ceremony, and the indignity put upon all by being asked to partake in such a mockery — in spite of all this, Osman Beg steadily persisted in asserting that Zora was his wedded wife; that he had had means in private of having the ceremony performed, to which Zora had consented; and that wherever, and howsoever, he might meet her or

find her, he would claim her as his wife before the King, the Queen, and all the ecclesiastical or other courts of law in Beejapoor.

On the night, or rather the morning, of Zora's escape, she and her grandfather had been taken from the bank of the river direct first to Jumalpoor, and afterwards to Korikul.

For some days Zora and her grandfather were very comfortably established by their friend in an empty house, but their troubles were not yet over. From the first glance at her, the Lady Keysama had taken a prejudice against poor Zora, who appeared to her like a young dancing girl.

She felt jealous of poor Zora when she arrived and was led in by Runga Naik, preceded by two Beydur slave girls. She told her husband that she doubted the whole story of the abduction, and that it was evident he had brought her for his own purposes.

She perpetually, threw out hints to her husband that "that great girl Zora ought to be married; that she was ashamed of seeing her come to the house (for Zora did pay a visit sometimes to the Beydur lady, though her castle was an unclean place to her), and that he ought to insist upon her grandfather's settling her in life.

But Runga Naik had no such intention. I think he remembered that Abbas Khan desired no better blessing in life than to gain Zora for his own. Before

he attempted to bring that about, it was necessary to follow up the scattered parties of Eyn-ool-Moolk's rebellion, especially the members of Abbas Khan's troop who had deserted him ; and he set out for the western districts in the direction of Belgaum ; and yet at that very time, within a distance of thirty miles, Abbas Khan was lying in a small village on his way back to Beejapoor grievously ill with the return of his fever and the reopening of his wound. But so it is in life, when a blessing, above all things precious, lies at our very doors, we often fail to know of it, or even of its very existence. Runga had no time to lose, he thought, and his desire was to hasten to Beejapoor direct, should he have any success in his expedition. Should he have none, he could return and take on Zora and her grandfather to Beejapoor, that the old man might lay his complaint of ill usage before the Queen, or the King if he returned.

Before he left Korikul, however, Runga Naik and his wife had come to extremities about poor little Zora. Now he was going away (she put the matter in that light), who would be responsible for the girl? She herself — and she put her hands to her ears, and called all the gods to witness — would not, and could not. He might be very fond of the girl, there was no doubt of that ; but an unmarried girl of her age and appearance, with nobody near her but a feeble old servant — well, she would say nothing herself, but let him ask the neighbours and hear what they said about Zora, who, she thought, was only fit now to become a public dancing girl, and if

she took to that profession she would be welcome. Had she not been heard singing words that no one understood to unknown tunes? Where did she learn them? Such was the excitement the lady worked herself up into, that Runga, who had never been subjected to the like before from his wife, got fairly-alarmed. "They must go," he said; "but how to tell the old man and Zora!"

Yet it must be done. With Zora and his old friend he must part; but with his wife, the mother of his children, the admirable mistress of his house, the respected and beloved of all, he could not part; and she had distinctly said that if the girl were not sent away, she herself would go to her father's house at Wakin-Keyra, and tell the story so that all should hear. Her father was the brother of the Rajah of the clan, whose enmity Runga Naik dare neither risk nor provoke; and he knew enough of his wife's determined spirit to believe she would do exactly as she threatened if he did not do as she requested. No; on those hard conditions he could not afford to protect Zora; her grandfather, whom all, even his wife, loved and honoured, could not be separated from her, and, therefore, they must go.

The old Syud was inexpressibly shocked and grieved to hear this.

CHAPTER III

AMONG FRIENDS

The next day being Friday, or the Sabbath, there was a larger attendance than usual in the mosque, for all God-fearing men, and some women with them, did no work, and attended the stated prayers. After the noontide devotions, there gathered round the old Syud a great number of people, and he thought it a good opportunity to take leave of them.

Then the whole congregation burst into passionate weeping, and many cries arose of "Stay, stay with us, and fear not, for thou art holy and aged, and the Lord will have mercy on thy infirmity ! Thou art leading us as no one ever led us before. May the Lord reward thee !"

But the old recluse had prepared himself for all this. If it were necessary for him to leave the town on Zora's account, and that seemed to him imperative, he had for some years past meditated the assumption of the order of a Fakeer leading to that of a Mushaekh. He had applied for permission to visit some holy shrine and make his public profession, but in vain ; no one had had the authority in Juldroog to grant such permission to a State prisoner, even though his name and rank were unknown ; and the Nawab Osman Beg's denial, on his application, had been peculiarly offensive and discourteous. Now, however, he was free ; and, although that might have been matter of accident, the old man had come to

the conclusion in his own mind that it had been appointed by the Lord, and he reproached himself bitterly that he had ever murmured against the seeming violence, and, indeed, dishonour, which he had had to undergo on his sweet child's account.

On his return home he found Runga and Burma without, sitting under the tree in the court-yard, who came forward and touched his feet with a lowly reverence.

They could only weep, for the old recluse was dear to them both, notwithstanding their difference of faith. And the old man continued—

“To you, Runga Naik, I commit what worldly property I possess, which is all in the box we have sealed up; and I pray you to keep it, to be reclaimed by Zora if ever she is in a condition to do so. Keep it in your own treasury. And you spoke of a temporary resting-place at Kukeyra, is it ready for us?”

“Burma has been arranging it, and it is now ready for you, Huzrut; but it is a poor place, only a thatched dwelling. It is in a little garden by itself, just outside the village gate; but my men there have orders to watch it day and night, and no harm can come to you. Ha! who are these? Some visitors to ask your blessing, Huzrut; are they to be admitted? By the gods! I see men from Juldroog, and one of the Nawab's slaves, what can it mean?”

Zora saw that the arrivals were Mama Luteefa and

Shireenbee, her servant, who saluted the old man with respect.

“We have a letter from the Nawab,” said Mama Luttefa, “and he has sent us to deliver it and to plead for him.”

The epistle was from Osman Beg himself, informing that he would come to Korikul, with his body servants only, to celebrate the marriage at any time, or by any person, that might be approved of.

Zora’s face flushed, and her eyes glowed at the remembrance of the insult and indignity which had been put upon her; and when she had read it and put it down she burst into a violent flood of tears.

“Begone!” shouted Runga. “Up, and begone! Else beware!” And seizing the women by the shoulders, he pushed them out of the door into the street; and in a few minutes more, they had passed the gates under an escort of Beydurs, and were on their way. We need not detail their reception in the fort; suffice it to say that two days after Osman Beg directed their hair to be shorn, and, riding on asses, they were expelled the fort.

Early on Monday Zora and her grandfather left Korikul, soon after daylight. Burma Naik, with an escort, accompanied them, the old Syud and Zora riding easy ponies with saddle bags, which Runga had procured for them, with Mamoola mounted on another, which carried their small amount of cooking utensils, while the simple Ahmed drove another pony laden with their

worldly goods. So the little procession was formed, which went out of the gate of the town eastwards to Kukeyra, and which was followed with dim, tearful eyes by Runga. "When shall I see them again?" he murmured. "Whither may not the old man's new projects lead him? Free, after years of seclusion, he will not now readily settle down, even for Zora's sake, and in respect to her is as simple as a child. May the gods protect them, and lead them safely."

They travelled on their first stage of a few miles, chatting with each other, while the old man every now and then recited portions of the Koran, or from Persian poets that he remembered, and even passages in Arabic of the Turreequt.

As they neared the village of Kokeyra, Zora saw how prosperous it looked.

They passed out of the eastern gate of the village and almost close to it, a little withdrawn, was the Tukeea, or "Pillow of residence," which was to be their abode.

It was a low, long thatched cabin, whitewashed without, standing in a small piece of ground by itself, and shaded by a noble banyan tree and others about its precincts.

Zora's grandfather was led into the house by the Moolla and the Patell, and Zora and old Mamoola followed, and found the place neat and clean and very commodious. It was very quiet, fitted for religious meditation, and, as Zora thought, the very place for her grandfather in his present frame of mind. And when

all had retired, and the beds they had found ready for them were covered with their thin mattresses and quilts, and the old man lay down to take rest after his unaccustomed exercise, he called Zora to him, and she went and put her head into his lap, and he said, with a quivering voice, "The Lord has been good to us, my child, forget not this in thy thoughts;" and he lay down and slept peacefully.

CHAPTER IV

A DARING ATTACK

The time passed pleasantly and quietly in the new home, and there was no jealous wife to disturb it.

Nor was the derwish idle; and though he was evidently becoming more and more absorbed in his religious meditations, he had not given up the concerns of the world. There were only a few families of ignorant Mussulmans in the village, most of the members of which could not even repeat the Belief; but these were gathered together on Friday (the Sabbath) for instruction such as they could comprehend; and as Friday was the weekly market-day of the little town, many Mussulmans came with their field and garden produce, and weavers with their manufactures; and then the old man had larger gatherings and regular prayer services, and preached to them on simple subjects, most especially against drinking palm wine, which, not being wine or spirits, was held to be excusable and allowable. So the

residence of the Syud and his granddaughter at Kukeyra was not devoid of usefulness ; and, in spite of its being a Beydur town, and therefore held to be generally unclean, their lives were peaceful and undisturbed. But this was not to be of long continuance.

Huleema, the eldest daughter of the Moolla, handsome and intelligent girl, and Zora's most advanced pupil, had long been betrothed to the son of the Moolla of a town some miles to the north, where resided the only Kazee of the province, and where a number of Mussulman weavers lived. Now, the period of marriage was fixed, the Kazee had consented to perform the ceremony, and had appointed the day. Invitations had been issued to all friends, but that to the old Syud was brought by the girl's father and mother, who besought of him to come to their house and pronounce the final blessing.

The old man demurred at first, but Zora pleaded that he should go.

The day arrived, and in the afternoon Zora, casting a sheet about her, led her grandfather through the village gate and small Bazar up to the Moolla's house.

Some other intelligent guests were present, and the evening passed pleasantly enough. Then the Shubgusht, or marriage procession, formed before the house, and the bride being seated in a palanquin, her husband followed on a stout pony, both being dressed in red muslin garments as gaily as possible. It was a public procession,

the gates of the village were open, and ~~strangers from~~ other localities mixed freely with the crowd ~~that~~ thronged the streets. Burma Naik, who, being a Beydur, could not take a part in the ceremony, nor sit among the chief guests in the house, had nevertheless held a court of his own in the outer portion of it, now headed the procession on his fine horse, and was accompanied by a number of his men, who fired their matchlocks and cheered the bride with those strange shrieks and yells in which the Beydur youth delight. Thus, what with these, the blasts of many horn-blowers, the pipes and drums of several villages, and the general noise and clatter, nothing could be distinctly heard, and all was merry confusion.

As the procession had reached the western gate, a sudden shouting of "Thieves! Thieves! Dacoits!" was heard, and several shots were fired. There had been strong guards posted at both entrances, and some of the armed men ran up the Bazar to reinforce the eastern gate, while Burma and about fifty of his men dashed through the western gate, and guided by the shots and shouts, passed down a lane which ran round the south side of the village among the gardens. Here was a point at which several roads separated, and here he stationed some of the men, posting himself opposite, so that no one could escape. It was evidently an attack by Dacoits, under cover of the noise and merry-making of the marriage procession, but against whom? And he set his teeth, drew his sword, and awaited the approach of

the fugitives and their prisoners, and in a few moments they had arrived, some twenty men, a strong band, who might have overpowered by their sudden rush any weaker persons than those who now met them face to face. Crying to his men to spare none, he attacked the strange party, and in a few moments several were wounded, two killed outright, and six taken prisoners. The rest, many or few they knew not, escaped through the hedges which lined the road into the thick gardens and sugar-cane fields, and were beyond pursuit. But Burma had as many as he wanted, and the men's hands being tied with turbans, they were escorted to the village gate, where the Chaoree, or town hall, was situated. This was common ground, and Beydurs, as well as others of all castes, crowded into it. Among those who had come down from the Moolla's house were the Kazee of Kembavee, some respectable Moollas and weavers, with Brahmins, and generally most of those who had not joined the procession. A few, however, remained with the old Syud.

“ I was about to send for you, Kazee Sahib,” said Burma Naik, “ and you must help me to inquire into this. And do ye all, sirs,” he continued to others, “ assist me to do justice. One of my men, a fine young fellow, first in the pursuit, has been speared by one of the Dacoits and is already dead ; another, I fear, is dying. This is murder, and justice must be done. Were I alone, indeed, I should dispose of them at once without mercy ; but as the representative of the King is present,

I shall do nothing till he has spoken. Bring up the prisoners. Ha!" he continued, as one was led forward, "thou, Kalloo! Methought thou wouldst not have tried thy hand here."

"Be quick," said the man, a tall, powerful fellow, who still held a spear shaft in his hand, from which the blade had been removed, "be quick; hear what I have to say for I am dying. Give me a drink of water;" and someone handed a vessel full to him, from whence he drank greedily. "Enough!" he said, as he gave it back. "Listen, Burma Naik, you know me, Kalloo Jutt, and I deny it not. I have done my last deed. There, read that, and you will see why I did it, and what it was to have been. Ah! I was a fool to disobey the omens, but there was no time to delay. I can speak no more."

Then the Kazee opened the paper in which a letter was wrapped, and which the robber had taken from his waistbelt. It was in the Mahrathi character, and the village accountant was called upon to read it. Twice he cast his eyes over it, and seemed as if afraid to do so, when Burma Naik snatched it from him, and said, "Now come and read it, while I look over it with thee. But, Kazee Sahib, it bears the seal and the signature of Osman Beg, the Governor of Juldroog, and I can guess what its purport may be." And the document ran thus:—

"To Kalloo Naik Jutt, from Nawab Osman Beg,

Bahadoor, greeting, and health and grace from Alla attend you.

“Whereas Zora, the granddaughter of the Syud Dervish who lived here, has escaped, and is now at Kukeyra, under the protection of the rebel Burma Naik, and lives in a house outside the entrance gate of the village, you are therefore to go there with your men and take her up and bring her to me, without hurting even a hair of her head. I do not want the old man, he is useless to me; but if he resist he can be slain. These are my orders; and if this service is well done, and without hurt to Zora-bee, who will belong to my harem, I will hold you free from all question by the Government in case any trouble shall arise; and I will give you, on recovering Zora-bee aforesaid from your hands, the sum of five hundred hoons of gold.

“You are to believe this fully, and act on it fully, and without fear.



“The seal and signature of Osman Beg, son of Heidur Beg, Toorcoman.”

“How strange! cried the Kazee; “I received a letter from him only yesterday, asking me to come to Juldroog to-morrow, and having rested here to-night, should have gone to him.”

“Yes!” said the dying man, faintly, “Mother Bheemee, from Raichore, was to have received her; and I sent my aunt Chimee to find out about the marriage here.”

“I thought I had seen the old witch once in the Bazar, and only that it is not safe to cross her, would have had her head shaved.”

It was a narrow escape,” said the Kazee; “the Lord be praised for it, and that I am delivered from seeming connection with this sin.”

And I say,” continued the robber, who sat up, with staring eyes, as if making a supreme effort, “I say, and bear ye all witness, that the Nawab told me to get the child to him before morning, and he would dishonour her. That the Kazee was only a sham, and would not be allowed to cross the river;” and then, with a violent effort, he tore away the bandage which had for the time restrained the bleeding from the wound in his neck; the blood rushed forth, and with a shrill scream he fell back and died.

A sad event for a merry marriage,” said the Kazee; “but it is evident to us that the innocent are protected by the Almighty. Let no one tell the lady or her grandfather; let them sleep in peace. As to the rest of the prisoners, deal with them according to the usual custom. There is no law in the case.”

“Yes,” said Burma, grimly, “I will deal with them; and see, this has been brought from beneath the banian tree.”

It was a common rough bedstead, with bamboos at each corner tied together. Underneath the place where they joined one large thick pole had been

introduced to carry it by, and over all a thick black blanket was cast, which would have at once concealed and secured the inmate ; and had anything occurred to prevent Zora going to the marriage, the expedition of the Jutts might have been successful.

The old Syud had heard nothing of the alarm of the previous night, which had been carefully concealed from him and also from Zora ; and after early morning prayer, they took their leave and returned home with Ahmed and their old servant, Mamoola : but as soon as they arrived, Mamoola's tongue was at once loosened when she saw that the chain and padlock of the door had been cut in two, and two of the Beydur guard at the gate followed them to ask if anything were missing.

“ Oh, Zora-bee ! ” cried the old woman, who seldom spoke except on small domestic matters, “ only to think that robbers attacked the house last night, and have carried off my two best cooking pots that were tinned newly last Bazar day, and were as bright as silver. How shall I cook your breakfasts ? Oh, child ! ask Abba to return thanks for our deliverance, for had we been here we should all have been murdered. What would have become of thee, my child ? ” And the old dame flung her arms about Zora and wept plentifully ; nor was Zora herself less affected. She saw at a glance that violence had been done ; but the door of her own chamber, which had been locked also, had not been disturbed, and all her grandfather's books, papers, and medicines were safe.

Just then there was a sound of many footsteps near the door, and Burma Naik cried in a cheery voice, "Is all well with thee, Huzrut?" and the Kazeer of Kembavee and others cried out, "Is all well with thee, Huzrut, and the child? Arise, and come to us, for we have much to say to thee.

Burma proceeded to relate how, when the bridal procession had passed out by the west gate, some men had been observed by the guard on the east gate bastion moving about the trunks of the great banian tree, but were not noticed at first; but when the door of the house was broken in, and a torch lighted, it was certain they were dacoits, and the whole of the guard rushed upon the robbers, firing their matchlocks at them to give an alarm. Then one Beydur related how the gang had fled, and were pursued and overtaken, on which a combat, hand to hand, took place, and one of the Beydurs had been speared to death and another badly wounded, and several of the robbers were wounded and two killed. How, then, the gang, which consisted of about thirty men, again fled, and was met by the Naik himself, and all was soon over.

The old Syud turned from one to another of his informants with wonder and thankfulness expressed in his aged features, and the tears were coursing down his cheeks as he listened to the details of the affair as given to him by the speakers.

"But now, what shall we do for thee and Zora, whom all love here, as she is loved everywhere?"

asked Burma Naik. "What dost thou think, O Kazee?"

"If I may speak, and advise one so superior to me in wisdom and learning, I should counsel thee, O Syud, to proceed at once to Beejapoor; lay-thy complaint, and Zora-bee herself, at the foot of the throne, and cry for justice. Our noble Queen Chand Beebee would not, could not deny justice to an old man, and a holy Mushaekh like thyself, O Syud! Consider this, and go. To remain here is only to run a fearful risk; and worse than that, to endanger strife between the Juldroog troops and the Beydurs, and so lead to reprisals and blood feuds. It would be well to prevent any chance of bloodshed, Huzrut."

Had not the worthy Kazee used the title Mushaekh it is most probable perhaps that the Syud, thoroughly alarmed, might have proceeded at once to Beejapoor, where he knew Zora desired to go—if only to meet Maria once again; and he felt sure of justice whenever he might appeal for it. But the mention of the title sent his thoughts on their old errand.

"Sir," he said, "for many years I have been preparing myself for the Turreequt, and without that I can be neither a poor Fakeer or rise to the dignity of one of God's divines, a Mushaekh. The Lord has directed my path hitherto by wonderful events, and I follow the Eastern way; but I see the need of changing it; and you, Kazee Sahib, to whom such mysteries are known, can direct me to the proper course."

“I see but one,” he replied. “There is no saint in all these provinces, but the descendant of Syud Geesoo Duraz of Gulburgah, to whom thou couldst go for reception into the Divine order. All other shrines are inaccessible to thee, Huzrut, on account of their distance and thy venerable age. Within a short time is the oorus (anniversary) of the holy saint, Syud Sofee Surmust, at Suggest; and there thousands of Fakeers assemble, of whom many go on to Gulburgah. I can direct thee to Suggest, where I have many friends and some humble disciples; and they will guide thee, and further thee on thy way.

“I have been thinking,” said Burma, “how we can best convey the holy Syud to Suggest; and I have a plan in my mind which, if it is approved of, I will put in execution. Syud Moostafa, the Persian secretary of the Rajah, is my friend, and Daood Khan Bhylmee, the leader of the Bhylmee division of horse, is a chief to whom my force is attached. I will write to them now, if I may, and beg that an escort of horse may be sent to meet Huzrut at Hoonsigee, where he should sleep, and, rising early, go on to Wakin-Keyra; and this could be done without any fatigue. From hence I can send my own palkee, and a litter for the child, and my people as escort.”

“A good thought,” said the Kazee; “I do not think Huzrut will make any objection.”

“Indeed, no,” returned the old man; “ye are only too kind to one who has been a trouble to you both.”

Although they had been in Kukeyra less than two months, yet they left the place with regret.

They had not to walk. During the night before the day of proposed departure, a small party of horse arrived from Wakin-Keyra, and informed Burma that two litters with bearers would meet them at Hoonsigee. So Burma provided his own palanquin for the old man, and a light litter for Zora, and the ponies were driven on by Ahmed, and the little baggage was distributed as before. Finally, before noon of Wednesday they set out and travelled to the end of their stage comfortably.

When they had passed through a small range of rocky hills and over the embankment of the pretty irrigation lake of Bohnal, with the wide-spread waters to the west sparkling in the sun and the green rice fields to the east, the fortifications of Wakin-Keyra at the termination of a high and rugged mass of mountains fell on Zora's sight; and one of the horsemen, dashing up to the Syud's palanquin, told him that he was 'going on, and that if he would remain for about an hour under the shade of one of the great banian trees of the embankment, and then follow, he would find all prepared to receive him. So the litters being placed together, they got out of them and sat down, while the waves of the lake dashed among the stones which formed the facing of the earthen bank, with a pleasant refreshing murmur.

CHAPTER V

THE SYUD TAKES TWO DEGREES IN HIS TURREEQUT

It was but a short distance, barely more than a mile, to the entrance to the strange fortress in which Pam Naik, the Beydur Prince, held his Court. At the barrier itself the friend of Burma Naik, Syud Moostafa, the Naik's Persian secretary, with others, were in attendance, who received the old man with profound salutations, while some respectable-looking mamans in like manner saluted Zora, and bid both welcome. They were to remain in the Syud's house, where apartments had been prepared for them; and while her grandfather was carried off, much against his wish, to visit the great Naik himself, Zora was conducted to the house in which they were to stay.

By and by the fame of the old Dervish's charms and exorcisms spread not only through the town but through the country, and applicants for relief thronged upon him, making offerings which were sometimes considerable; but from most people he would take nothing; yet to Zora's perception they were growing rich, and, as Abba said, with a look of satisfaction, there was enough to make the Turreequt easy; and after that, to settle in some pleasant place and to become a Wallee, or saint, at whose tomb people should come and pray.

Finally, the day arrived on which they must depart.

The Turreequt awaited them at Suggest, and they must go; and Wednesday being the proper day for proceeding northwards, according to the Rujub-ool-Ghyb,

and a fortunate conjunction of planets to boot, they departed. The day before, when they had gone to pay their respects to the Rajah, he said he had provided two palanquins for the old Dervish and Zora. So with Ahmed and Mamoola mounted on their ponies, the baggage animals loaded and led behind, a guard sent by the Rajah, and the secretary mounted on a palfrey of his own, the little procession passed out of the gate of Wakin-Keyra amid the blessings and prayers of a crowd which had assembled there.

The road to Suggest lay through some low rocky hills for a while, and, passing through a natural gap in them, the valley and town of Suggest came in sight, at the distance of a few miles ; a pretty scene, for the town seemed embosomed in trees ; several considerable tanks for irrigation lay blue and still in the hollow, and the bright green rice-fields below them formed a pleasant and remarkable feature in the landscape.

The Bazar, and indeed the whole of the town, was full of people and the sight of the venerable old man, led by his beautiful grandchild, created no little excitement.

Presently the call to afternoon prayer was sung from the roof of the mosque, and crowds began to assemble, Fakeers, weavers, soldiers, and many strangers. The Kazee had requested the old Dervish to give a discourse, such as might suit the people assembled, and he had consented ; and after prayer was ended, he recited a verse of the Koran, and began his sermon on

the Turreequt, or path of salvation. Never had such a discourse been heard in that mosque. It seemed as if, translated by his enthusiasm above the ordinary life and occupations of men, as indeed by his blindness and reverential spirit he had been for so many years, the Dervish was like one inspired, and his eloquence, so pathetic, so practical, and so truly fitting his subject, powerfully affected his audience, and many groaned, many wept; and at the close of the address all his hearers crowded round him to interchange the salutation of peace which is exchanged among Mussulman worshippers.

And so no one molested them as they sang their invocations; and Zora carried her wallet on her arm, receiving alms from those who heard her sweet thrilling voice, whether they were Mussulmans or Hindoos.

But it was necessary to choose which association of Fakeers the old man should belong to.

Our old Dervish, by his first and subsequent discourses, had given proof of his fitness for any grade, even the highest one of Mushaekh, beyond which only remained that of Wallee, or saint, and, in concert with his friends, a whole day was spent in deliberation on the subject. At Suggest were assembled representatives of all the hundreds of sects of Fakeers existing in the country to which we spare the reader the enumeration of, to him or her unpronounceable names. There were some who sung odes and hymns, some who danced, some who played instruments; many who led lewd, riotous

lives, and pretended to do miracles ; others who walked through thorns and danced on hot embers, or took red-hot chains or ploughshares in their hands, and dipping them in powdered resin, wiped off the blaze with naked hands. Some kept bears, or tigers, or monkeys, which they had tamed and taught to perform ingenious tricks ; others had tame snakes living in their sleeves or in the breasts of their tunics. Again, there were others who seared their tongues with hot wires, or scored their arms or breasts till the blood flowed, or put live scorpions into their mouths.

He therefore said to his friends,—

“ All these divisions of Fakeers are delusions, my brothers, and many of them are delusions of Satan, and work for the ruin of souls. My own faith is simple, and my course of life is also simple. Whatever I have been able to do, either in the relief of the sick or the casting out of evil spirits, I have effected under the invocation of the noble Saint Peer-i-Dustugeer, the Prince Syud Abd-ool-Qadir, on whom be peace ! Should there be any professors of his doctrine or ceremonies in this great assemblage, I pray ye, friends, bring him or them to me, that I may make a public profession, and be received into the sect as a Moorsheed (scholar, or novice). I shall henceforward be a Fakeer, and fight for the faith under the banners of my chosen Lord.”

A professor of the Qadirea doctrines was soon found, who was a respectable and learned man from Golconda, who had taken the degree already, and, in conjunction

with our old friend, a fitting day was soon named and fixed.

The Mushaekh from Golconda, who was a learned and wealthy man, who lived in an ancient saint's garden and shrine near that fort, and was much respected by the King, had been one of the audience when the first of the Dervish's sermons was preached, and he had continued his visits to the mosque every day, and after the last he was brought into the old man's apartments, and introduced to him. He had believed that the venerable preacher was already a Mushaekh of high degree, and was considerably surprised by his request to be now allowed to enter the order, and fixed the second day afterwards for the ceremony, giving a detail of what would be needful.

Strictly speaking it would have been advisable to have had all the hair shaved from the old man's head; beard, eyebrows, and chest; but because of his age this was dispensed with, and a few hairs were cut from each with a pair of scissors, and his nails pared. Then he was bathed carefully, and his new garments, carried before him, accompanied by chaunts from the Fakeers, were given to him one by one, and certain texts of the Koran repeated. Lastly, his crown, or cap, which had been beautifully embroidered by Zora, was placed on his head. It was of green velvet, and his new tunic was of green muslin, with a green scarf over all. After that he had to recite the four forms of belief. He was asked three times whether he acknowledged the Mushaekh his

spiritual leader and guide, and the whole of the assembly as brethren, and he replied he did. Whereupon a loud shout arose that he was welcome in the name of all the saints, each man calling out that of his own.

After that the crown, which had been removed, was solemnly put on his head again; his grave cloth was hung about his neck with spices and perfumes; a new loongee, or waist cloth, was put on, and a round piece of mother-of-pearl tied round his neck. When all this was completed, the Mushaekh took several sips out of a cup of sherbet, handing it to the old man, who drank it all, while the Mushaekh at the same time bestowed the new name which he was to bear hereafter. This was Luteef Shah, or King, every properly-elected Fakeer bearing that title; and when the new name was pronounced, every one greeted it with a joyous shout. Then the feast began, which had been so liberally provided, that hundreds of the poor of the town were satisfied as well as the Fakeers, and the installation of Luteef Shah was long remembered.

A few gold pieces, as part of the ceremony, were presented to the Moorsheed, for the old Dervish was still rich; and the sale of Zora's pretty caps, drawers-strings, bodices, and other articles, had produced much more than she anticipated, and the evening collection more than sufficed for their maintenance. In any case they had still enough to bear the heavier expenses at Gulburgah, for the highest order of all, which the old Dervish, under his new title of Luteef Shah, was

determined to attain from the descendant of the most celebrated saint in the Dekhan, Syud Geesco Duraz, the lineal descendant of the original Wallee, who had come from Northern India years ago, and become the spiritual leader of the Moslems' Bahmuny Kings.

"I am going there myself," said his new friend, "for the Syud is a great man, and what is more, a truly devout man, which some of his race have not been. He will welcome you warmly, I know, for he is, besides being my superior in a religious sense, my truly loved and intimate friend. I think he will not object, and I have met none so worthy of the highest honour as yourself. You had better therefore come with me, for my hareem is with me, and your child may need both society and protection. We are well guarded, too, for your kind Sovereign sent soldiers with me, who are enough to protect us both."

The proposal was a welcome one, and our old friend finally agreed.

Gulburgah lay to the north, and, therefore, the day of the Rujub-ool-Ghyb was again Wednesday.

CHAPTER VI

SAINTLY HONOURS

Nothing could persuade our old friend that Gulburgah should be treated like an ordinary town. His heart was full of reverence and thankfulness when he reached the end of his pilgrimage in safety and honour,

and his new friend was equally reverential. So within a mile of the entrance gate they dismounted from their litters and performed a prostration ceremony by the wayside, and walked on together, Zora, as was her wont, dressed in her pilgrim's dress, leading her grandfather.

I will not describe the ceremonies as the travellers paid their devotions at the mausoleum of the departed saints, or their respects to the present reigning incumbent. These were no places for our old friend to display his genius, his eloquence, and his learning. These and the doctrines of his teaching, only shone forth in addressing crowds in mosques, and on special occasions, when, as it seemed, inspiration came on him ; but one day, when he was in the large mosque for prayer — it was some minor festival day—and there was a crowd of worshippers, and the Prince was present, he asked leave to deliver the sermon, and the service was thankfully accepted.

As the old man took his place on the upper step of the pulpit, clad in his green dress, and, leaning on his staff, stretched out his arms, a murmur came from the assembly which cheered and excited him; and with a short text on the love of God, his words poured forth in a stream, which became a torrent of alternate entreaty, reproach, and assurance, the like of which had never been heard before then by any. There were no sophisms, no mysteries, no display of profound erudition, incomprehensible except to a few but there was instead instruction on the true Turreequt, the true path of salvation. He pleaded humility before God ; charity, pity, and love to God and

man ; absence of any spiritual arrogance, which was but too prevalent, and of self-conceit and display.

When he concluded, and the blessing was delivered those present did not form into knots, to shake hands and give the salutation of blessing one to another as usual, but, as if by inspiration, shouted, A saint ! a saint ! a miracle hath been done, for such words were never heard ! ” and the Prince was as much excited as any one else, and joined with the rest. Then he called for his own conveyance which was a nalkee, or sedan chair, with two poles and eight bearers, and our old friend was put into it, and accompanied by the multitude, with torches and blue lights and firing of guns, for it was now dark, the procession passed on to the palace of the Prince, with cries of “A saint ! a Wallee ! A miracle, a miracle ! Deen, Deen ! ” burning clouds of incense, throwing handfuls of perfume powder over him, and in every way possible testifying their respect and admiration. Then the Prince took his seat, and called up the dear old man and in a voice full of emotion said to him, “ Come hither, for I salute you in the title of Wallee. Thou hast done a miracle, and the people have seen and acknowledge it, and, the Lord accepts it. Listen while I repeat the sacred words of the order. And now drink of this cup of sherbet, which, sipped and breathed on by me, becomes to thee the sherbet of salvation. Verily, the Lord hath brought thee to the end of the Turreequt, and all ye who are present are witness to this. Ameen ! Ameen ! It is the Lord’s will.”

And all cried aloud, with a hoarse shout, ‘Ameen ! Ameen ! So be it !’

During this time our old friend had been in a state of which he remembered very little. He was weary of the excitement; and after attempting to utter his thanks he seemed to waver to and fro as he sat, and while the Mushaekh and others supported him he stooped heavily forward and fell to the ground. Then a palanquin was brought, and they carried him to the house where he lodged ; and, revived by the fresh air, he was able to alight and walk slowly to his chamber, where Zora, already made anxious by the sudden rumour that her grandfather had fainted in the great assembly, received him in her arms and laid him down on his cushions. As he had been carried out of the assembly the Prince rose, and cried with uplifted hands before all—

“Pray God that He do not take the saint from us in this his present ecstasy !” And all present cried “Ameen !”

But all these alarms of that strange night disappeared by the early morning. For the latter part of it the old man had slept peacefully, like a child ; and as the muezzin was crying the invocation to early prayer, he woke, and, to Zora’s infinite joy, sat up with a gentle, smiling face, such as she had not seen for a long time, reminding her of earlier days. Then she assisted him to rise and to perform his devotions ; and as he again sat down, she crept to him, and very timidly congratulated him on his new dignity, and the honour he had received.

"Then it was not a dream, child ?" he said."

"No, Abba ; it was a blessed reality.

There was, indeed, no doubt on that score. All the day, the highest in holy rank, the Wallees, the Owleas, the Mushaekhs, doctors learned in the law, and private persons in crowds thronged about the house and its courtyards, and would be content only by the assurance that the new saint would once more preach to them in the mosque, and return thanks to Alla the Most High. And on the third day the old man went in company of the Prince, and took his place, after prayers, on the upper step of the pulpit. To those present it appeared that he was taller and more dignified than before ; but the Wallee's sermon was not the less passionate that day. It affected him less, though it seemed to affect his hearers more ; and after it was over, his friend, the Mushaekh, led him about, and he shook hands with many and gave them the blessing. Then the great procession of the Prince's anniversary followed ; and though on the grandest scale, accompanied by the troops, and midst the firing of cannon and matchlocks, and blare of sonorous trumpets and horns, with rockets and blue lights continually discharged, yet it had not the excitement of the sudden frenzied rush of the Wallee's recognition, nor the spontaneous enthusiasm of the crowds that had accompanied him ; and their journey to the mosque, and subsequent return, were of the same majestic but monotonous character.

As they were all sitting together quietly after they

had returned home, Ahmed entered somewhat abruptly, and cried out, "I have heard news. Our King has won a victory, and the King of Ahmednugger was killed." And on being further interrogated, he said he had heard it from some soldiers of Beejapoor, who had a vow to be present at the Prince's procession, and had obtained leave to come the day after the battle, and the dead were being buried.

"Go early," said the old man ; " see those men, and bring any that will come to me ;" and before mid-day several men came and gave a circumstantial account of the whole action. Abbas Khan and some Beydurs had been foremost in carrying the guns. The young King of Ahmednugger had charged madly to recover them, but had been shot dead, and the whole army fled to Puraindah and sent ambassadors for peace ; and when all was completed, the King would return to Beejapoor—he might even now be on the way.

"This decides me at once, Zora," said her grandfather. " Thy proper home is with Queen Chand, and till I give thee to her my mind will not rest. After that let it be with us as God willeth. Let us prepare to go."

They took leave of all with much emotion ; and, after paying for what they had used, the balance was invested in an order by a local banker on Beejapoor, for they had been warned of robbers, gangs of whom frequented large assemblies like that at Gulburgah, and dogged the footsteps of the returning pilgrims.

Nothing was wanting on the part of the local authorities to do honour to "Luteef Shah Wallee," the humble Syud and Dervish of Juldroog, now the new and accepted saint of the faithful, to be worshipped whenever he might give up his spirit to the angels of death, and henceforth to live in Dekhan history, as many as humble as he had done before. With all his yearning for Beejapoor, he had yet longings after Golconda, and should his petition be rejected, there was at least that refuge to be looked to for Zora as well as himself. Well! they would soon see, and it could not be many days before he knew his fate. As before, the four baggage ponies were laden by Ahmed; and as the "Geesoo Duraz" insisted on supplying one palanquin and the Governor of the town another, besides a few horse and foot soldiers as far as Almella, where there was a station of Beejapoor troops, they were to travel in comfort and security.

CHAPTER VII

DANGER

The journey from Gulburgah to Afzulpoor was altogether a pleasant one to the travellers. The plain was rich and fertile, lying on a gentle slope towards the river Bheema, which ran through its broad valley in a tortuous course. With the husbandmen it was the busiest time of the year, and to travellers almost the pleasantest, for the rains had given place to occasional light showery weather, which did not affect the roads, while the fleecy clouds tempered the sun's rays, and the

climate was hardly warmer than that of an English summer day. Larks were singing in the air, birds were chirping in every tree, flocks of mynas and paroquets flew cheerily about, and the whole face of nature was joyful. Our old friend was very happy.

"They say, Huzrut," said the leader of the little party of horsemen, "that the ferry-boat at Afzulpoor makes only two trips across the river on each day; one from this side, when travellers arrive about the third watch, and the other from the further side before noon. Now as we cannot reach the town in time to-day, I have, therefore, sent on two of the horsemen to arrange that the boat should wait till you arrive to-morrow, and to send word by the first basket boat crossing that you are coming, and that lodgings are to be prepared for you in Sinnoor, a considerable village, where you will be very comfortable."

So it was arranged, and they proceeded next day to Afzulpoor. The people came out in crowds to see the new saint, whose fame had preceded him, for there were many Mussulman weavers and husbandmen at the little town, and some of them had heard the Syud preach, and been witness to the wondrous excitement when he was taken up and carried in procession. They would fain have had him stay with them and preach, for the next day was Friday, the Sabbath; but he could not be persuaded to break his journey, and must go on as had been arranged. When he came to the river side, and his sheet was spread on the green turfy bank, he

addressed the people for awhile in his own homely way, and the sheet was rapidly covered with small contributions. Then he took a kind leave of all, and landed on the other side.

The men who had been sent forward had been able to make arrangements for our friends, and they were soon comfortable. They had arrived before the time for evening prayer, and their dwelling-place adjoined the mosque, where most of the men and some women of the village had assembled ; and now, too, came an opportunity of saying a few kind words to them all, and the lights were being lighted in the village before they got up, and Zora led her grandfather back to their apartments.

Our readers will not have forgotten, perhaps, the attack on the old Syud's house at Kukeyra, with the intent to carry away Zora ; and some of that gang who had escaped, and who lived in small villages somewhat to the south of Almella, were pursuing their usual avocations in the festival ; by day selling small prayer-mats to pious Mussulmans, or their women worked bodices, new and old, or made winnowing fans for cleaning rice and other grain ; but both by night and by day pursuing their hereditary avocation of thieving. Among these was a boy who had been released by Burma Naik and sent back to his people with the grim notice. He had seen the old Syud at the public mosque on several occasions ; and had dogged them to their lodging. There nothing could be done, for they were well guarded ; but the determination to exact a heavy

revenge for their leader's death and the execution of their comrades had not lessened; the only point undecided being how it was to be carried out. Some of the gang were in favour of a sudden attack in a village where the Syud should rest for the night; but when they found out that the old man was proceeding to Beejapoor, their plan was formed rapidly. They would not rob the holy man; that would be a sin, and bring misfortune on them; but they could carry off Zora, and give her up to Osman Beg, whom they believed still to be at Juldroog, and demand from him the reward he had promised. The village where Zora and the old man had arrived had one large gate to the south, that which opened on the Almella road, and was in a direct line with the centre street. Two men had usually charge of this gate, who could be easily overpowered. It would be impossible to make a rush through it so long as the village cattle were coming home; but, after that, there would be no obstacle, and it was with secret satisfaction that the scouts watched the old man and Zora, dressed in the Fakeers' garb, leave their lodging alone, and wander about the streets, singing their appeals for alms, receiving such as they were given, and so passing on. At first they had walked through side streets, Zora always leading her grandfather, and warning him of stones and other obstacles; and at last they emerged into the broad way, not far from the gate, where there was a space without houses, which appeared to Zora very lonely and desolate, and there were no person moving about as in other parts of the village.

I do not like this, Abba," said Zora; "it is so lonely, and you would not let me bring Ahmed with us. Let us turn back towards our home. The wallet is already heavy with meal and rice."

"Why fear, child?" returned the old man, gaily. "Who ever molests the Fakeer?"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when about twenty men, some of them carrying a small litter, emerged from behind a wall which concealed a narrow lane, and came running towards them, crying out, "Clear the way for the bride!" Zora thought they were part of a village marriage procession, especially as there were two torches lighted; and drew her grandfather aside to let the people pass; but almost before she could think, she found herself seized, a gag thrust into her mouth, and her grandfather prostrated by a severe blow from a staff. She was then swathed in a saree and lifted into the litter, the bearers of which hurried on at their utmost speed. No noise had been heard of the slight scuffle; no alarm was given. The two door-keepers were in the act of shutting to the ponderous gates, which required their utmost strength, and were taken completely unawares. One of them tried in vain to stop the foremost of the robbers, and was pierced by a spear before he could cry out; the other, who attempted to gain the bastion, was struck down on the first step, and there died. Then the whole gang extinguished their torches, rushed on down the main road till they came to a side path which turned

more to the east, among the tall fields of jowaree, pursuing their way in utter silence for the most part, only interrupted by occasional whispers among the gang.

Poor Zora was utterly helpless.

Daylight broke ; and the fields of corn and cotton, through which they held their way, grew muddy and soft, and the men could proceed with difficulty.

“We must seek for some shelter,” said a voice, which appeared to have authority among the gang. “We are now on the lands of Kohutnoor, and we may find a shepherd’s hut somewhere ; and two of you run to Hippurgah and see if some of our people will come, for we must go on again at nightfall.”

After this speech Zora found her litter put down, and the opening of the covering was untied ; then she was taken out, and carried into a rude field hut and laid on the ground, but the bandages were not loosened. There we must leave her for the present, and relate what had befallen her grandfather.

CHAPTER VIII

DELIVERANCE

Ahmed and old Mamoclla were now anxious about their master and Zora, and Ahmed went to the village Chaoree to ask if they had passed that way. “Yes,” said the watchmen on duty for the night ; “we heard them singing a long time ago, and supposed they had gone home, as the singing ceased all at once ; but we will

come and look, some one has doubtless asked them to remain." But they could not be found or heard of, and all were in much fear and perplexity. At last a cry was heard near the gate, and then someone, who had wished to go out to his field, gave the alarm that murder had been done; and Ahmed and the rest ran with lighted torches, saw the two bodies of the watchers, and looking about, found the old Syud, lying where they supposed he had fallen, near the wall. At first, as blood had issued from his head, they all thought he had died, and they took him up reverently and carried him to his lodgings, where they discovered signs of life.

The night passed, and the whole of the village was disquieted and alarmed. Several parties of the villagers accompanied by the Gulburgah escort, went out to search in the fields, but returned.

Meanwhile the old man raved, and called on Zora without intermission. At times he even became frantic, and with difficulty could be restrained from attempting to proceed on foot. "Take me to Zora! Take me to the child! Take me to Almella! Lay me at the feet of Chand Beebee, she will give me justice for my child. Oh, Abbas Khan! she watched by thy side; go to her, save her, and give her into my arms. Am I not Luteef Shah Wallee now? and my blessing or my curse are at least powerful. Yea, I will bless thee!"

"It is no use keeping him here," said the barber; "his case is beyond my skill. They have a surgeon and a doctor with the soldiers at Almella, take him thither;"

and the litter was soon made ready, and the sad procession departed. It was nearly evening when it reached Almella, where it was met by a crowd of people who had heard of the outrage ; and a comfortable lodging had been prepared, where the old man was reverently deposited.

Just as day was breaking he sat up suddenly, but with vigour, and putting his hands to his ear, said, in a strong voice, "I hear a Beydur's horn ; I hear the Beydurs' drums ; and they bring me my Zora ! Oh, my child, come quickly, lest I die of joy ! At first those who heard him — the kind doctor, Ahmed, old Mamoola, and others — thought what he had said was part of his delirium ; but Ahmed rushed out, ran to the top of the house, and looking southwards, saw the blaze of torches, and about fifty dusky forms approaching at a rapid pace, while the creaking of the gate of the town showed that it was being opened. As the procession approached nearer, the sonorous drums of the Beydurs beat a joyful march, their horns blew a victorious blast ; and Ahmed ran down again to the apartment, and cried out, "It is true ! it is true ! Rejoice !" and fled forth to meet the lost girl, weeping like a child. And onwards came the body of men encircling a good palanquin, and the town musicians had mingled with the Beydurs, and the din and clamour were deafening. Then, as they put down the litter at the steps of the house, Zora stepped from it and standing erect on the highest, cried out, "The Lord bless ye all, friends, for I am safe. By your aid ye have saved me from dishonour and from death. But she

could hardly speak, and her cheeks were wet with tears, which glistened in the torchlight. In an instant more she had crossed the little courtyard, reached her grandfather's bed, and exclaiming, "Abba! Abba! God has saved me, and brought me to you again when I had no hope left!" But the old man could not speak coherently; indeed, the revulsion from a dim hope to a blessed reality had almost cost him his life.

They sat together the whole day, Zora scarcely stirring from his side. Zora's story was not a long one. When she was put into the hut with only two men to guard her, the rest of the gang dispersed into the corn-fields to hide themselves, as the husbandmen would soon be abroad. Now the hut was nearer to Kokutnoor than Hippurgah, and a shepherd boy who had been watching sheep all night had seen the procession, and saw where something, he could not tell what, had been deposited. Over night a large body of Beydurs, on their road from the King's camp by Sholapoor to their homes, had put up at Kokutnoor, and the lad, well knowing their habits, went to the leader and told him that Dacoits had halted in the fields and hidden their booty in a solitary hut. "They are Kaikarees and Jutts," said the lad, "and the brother of Kulloo Naik, who was killed at Kukeyra, is their leader."

The Beydur chief who was in command of the party was soon aroused, and among his men were some of Runga's and some of Burma Naik's people, and it was at once determined that the Dacoits should be

surprised and their booty captured. So, through the cover of the tall grain fields, they were guided by the lad until they came close to the hut. The two men who guarded it were speared without mercy, and, said Zora, "I expected no less than death, when several of the men who had served at Juldroog found me, bound as I was, and were distraught with joy. They took me into the air, unbound me, and chafed my arms and my legs. They carried me into Kokutnoor; then bearers were sent for from Hippurgah, and I was fed, and had milk to drink, and I am quite well, and it is like a new birth to see your dear face once more."

The next day, the Beydurs having remained as their guests, and enjoyed a great feast, all those that belonged to Runga and Burma's divisions declared they would attend the Syud to Beejapoor. Runga would never forgive them if they did not; and there was no hurry about moving, as the King was yet detained north of the river.

When the time came they moved from Almella, and reached Allapoor the day before the King was to enter the city. Thousands were passing on horseback, thousands were going to meet friends long absent, and no one noticed the blind old man and a girl, dressed in pilgrims' clothes, who, as they entered the gate of the great city, kneeled down, and gave thanks to God. The old Syud's face beamed with gratitude and joy. As to Zora, the splendour of what she saw almost overpowered her; but she led her grandfather forward in the direction

of the citadel, and on a piece of close green sward, near the open road by which the King would pass, they spread their sheet, and began at intervals to sing the best of their holy chants; and passers-by threw alms to them liberally and freely, begging the old man's blessing. Gradually the booming sound of the King's kettledrums, and the huge pair which were carried by the standard elephant, were heard, and the old man remembered them, and said to Zora, "They are near now; let Ahmed keep the sheet, dear, and you will see the King." Not long afterwards the people on the towers of the gates, the bastions, and in every available place they could get to, began to shout and wave scarves; and every house within sight hung out costly shawls, cloth of gold, and rich garments out of windows and over the parapets of their houses, till the city was like a garden of tulips. Following the procession were hundreds of war elephants, dressed in their richest caparisons, their bells jangling with a strange clamour, and the music of the nobat playing a march of victory.

These, however, were of little interest in comparison with the King's own circle, which occupied nearly the centre of the procession, and having entered the gate, advanced more slowly. In the midst rode the young King, wearing, like the Queen, a tunic of dazzling white cloth of gold, and a morion with a crown of flashing jewels. He was smiling, as he greeted the people with constant waves of his hand, while his beautiful horse caracoled beneath him. Near him rode Abbas Khan,

and other officers of rank ; and Zora could see Runga Naik in his new uniform of cloth of gold. The horses pranced and curvetted, tossing their heads and neighing ; and the King, drawing rein for a moment, pointed out the Syud and Zora, asking apparently who they were, when Abbas Khan, who now saw them also, dashed up to the King, and said, " It is Syud Ahmed Ali, of whom I spoke." At the same moment the old man, who had been standing, rushed forward over the sheet, and with a loud cry of " Daad ! Daad ! " tottered and fell on his face, nearly across the Royal path.

" Bring him on with you, Abbas," cried the King ; and the young man turned at once to his old friend, throwing a glance at Zora, which rested on flashing eyes bedewed with tears of joy, and cheeks burning with excitement, as he cried to her, " Zora ! is it thus we meet ? Fear not now, for all will be well ! "

BOOK IV

CHAPTER I

PARDON

The triumphal entry of King Ibrahim II. into his capital was not only a glorious sight to its people; but an assurance that the long and disastrous wars between the rival States of Beejapoor and Ahmednugger were at an end. King Ibrahim had kept the field against the conspiracy of his cousin, the Prince Ismail, who was supported by a large portion of his own army under Eyn-ool-Moolk, and by his uncle, Boorhan Nizam, Shah of Ahmednugger; and against the possible advance of the Portuguese of Goa, whose skill in war was well known in the Dekhan. The King of Ahmednugger, however, could make no impression on the Beejapoor troops, who defended the frontier stoutly, and, falling ill, died in his camp at Puraindah. His son Ibrahim, a youth, was placed upon the throne, and soon after again pressed the war against Beejapoor, which brought on the general action in which Humeed Khan, the uncle of Abbas Khan, had proved victorious; and as the troops of Ahmednugger fled from the field with the loss of the whole of their artillery and war elephants, the long continued struggle came to an end, and the Royal army returned to Beejapoor, escorting their King in triumph.

As we already know, the force under Abbas Khan

had marched northwards to the aid of the King; but as the rainy season was at its height, King Ibrahim had taken up his position at the fort of Shahdroog, or Nuldroog, and had left Humeed Khan with the main body of the army to watch the frontier and repel incursion should it take place. Abbas Khan, therefore, on receiving orders from the King, had marched to join his uncle, and arrived in time to take part in the finally victorious battle.

In a few days the King's forces joined those under Humeed Khan near Sholapoor, where public thanksgiving was made for the close of the war, and some rewards and honours were publicly bestowed. But the grand ceremony of all was to take place at Beejapoor on the day of entry into the capital; and the King, carrying with him the whole of his army, with the trophies in artillery and elephants, Royal camp equipage and treasure that had been won, crossed the Bheema river slowly, and, as we know, safely reached his destination.

As the King's procession went on towards the city, outside the walls, for he had to receive the blessing of the Chishtee priest it was easy for Abbas Khan to turn off with his charge into the gate of the citadel, while Runga Naik brought up the baggage ponies behind. All was comparatively clear in the citadel, and would be till the King arrived; so that Abbas Khan had no difficulty in speaking to one of the chief eunuchs of the private apartments, whom he knew, and putting his old friend and Zora under his charge. He could not stay; and

galloping after the procession soon overtook it, and resumed his place by his uncle's side.

Meanwhile Zora and her grandfather had been conducted by the eunuchs through the entrance corridor into a suite of small but elegant apartments, which opened into a court and garden behind the palace. Here Zora and old Mamoola soon spread her grandfather's carpets, and they found cushions and bedsteads already provided. Presently, when all was arranged, Zora led the old man to the cushions, and he sat down with a sigh of thankfulness.

Just then, the curtain, which was drawn across the entrance, was partly raised, and a man's voice said hurriedly to a companion, "The rooms are occupied by strangers, Maria; we must retire."

Zora started to her feet, and rushed hastily forward. She saw two figures she at once recognised retreating into the corridor, and cried, "Maria! Maria! it is only your little Zora; and Abba is here. Oh, come to us, we are alone."

In their turn Maria and her brother started. There was no doubt left when they saw the slight figure stretching out its arms with a low cry of joy, and the soft, flushed cheeks wet with tears; and a moment after they were locked in each other's arms, and approached the old man's seat, who was crying out joyfully, "Come! come to me, my friends; we are, indeed, with you at last. O Padre Sahib, thank the

Lord with me that we are here safely, and in honour, for of a truth we have endured much."

Zora seated Maria beside her on the cushions, but she could not give vent to her feelings of delight. Her loving brown eyes looked up like those of a dog to her friend; she threw her arms round her, and kissed her forehead, her eyes, her lips, passionately, hardly able to speak, except to say, "Thou art here, Maria, and restored to me. Oh, yes, to me, who in all my troubles and tears have never forgotten thee; and this which thou gavest me," and she drew the little silver cross from her bosom, "has never left me, and has been my charm and deliverer of my honour when all hope of my deliverance seemed gone. And thou hast been happy, Maria?"

And thou art with the Queen, she continued.

"I am with both of the Queens, Zora; but chiefly, by desire of Queen Chand, with King Ibrahim's spouse the Queen Taj-ool-Nissa, whom my brother hath restored to health, and she is now strong and well. It is such a change, Zora, and we laugh, and say the King will not know the miserable wife he left. And she has grown very dear to me, and loves to talk of you, who, she says, must be her sister. Come, shall we go to Queen Chand, she will be vexed with me if I take you not?"

What idea Zora had previously entertained of a real Queen it is difficult to say: something very awe-inspiring, no doubt, and magnificent; but at the sight of the slight girlish figure and plain muslin dress of the great

Queen whose praises were in every one's mouth, and who had held the power of the whole kingdom, Zora became assured, and advanced to kiss the Royal lady's feet, and embrace her as she desired.


"Power of God!" cried the Queen as, having embraced Zora, she took both her cheeks in her hands and turned them alternately to the light, and looked into her soft glowing eyes; "Power of God! she is lovely, indeed, even in this poor dress."

Zora sat down and told her what had befallen her since the time that Osman Beg carried her off, and the escapes she had had, particularly the last. How her grandfather attained the rank of Wallee; and, in short, all the story we know up to the events of the morning.

"Remember that thou art my guest," said the Queen, as she dismissed Zora; "and thou shalt want for nothing. Perhaps, she added, "thou mayest be required to-morrow at the durbar, for Osman Beg hath arrived in custody, and there may be need of thy evidence, should he deny what is alleged against him."

Zora and Maria went down to the old man and his friend. Zora changed her tunic for one of her simple woman's dresses, and they sat enjoying pleasant converse in regard to the past, while the salvos of cannon, braying of trumpets, and loud nobat music playing on the terrace above, announced to them the arrival of the King.

Nor had they to wait long. Another salute from a battery of cannon before the Hall of Audience announced that he had taken his seat ; and two of the gold mace-bearers in waiting arrived to request the attendance of His Holiness Luteef Shah Wallee as soon as possible. And then the old man rose, and, led by Zora, whom he declared must guide him, passed by the lower corridors into the great hall.

When the tumult had subsided, the King, standing on the step of the throne, cried again with a loud voice, and said : “ Know all men, and brothers in Islam present, that before food or water hath passed our lips to-day, we freely and entirely revoke the cruel sentence passed on the illustrious Syud Ahmed Ali, now Syud Luteef Shah Wallee. We implore, in the name of our ancestor, forgiveness for the shame and pain he hath endured for forty years, and pray him to intercede with Alla the Most High, and His holy messenger, to wipe out this sin, and remove it for ever from us and our people. We further establish this our illustrious saint in all the possessions and estates which were granted before ; and we give, in addition to these, the pergunna of Kokutnoor, the scene of his child’s delivery from violence. So let it be. Ameen ! Ameen ! ” Nor was a soul present who did not cry “ Ameen ! Ameen ! ”

Then the old man stretched forth his hands and blessed the King, and the Queen who sat above, and all the people.

Then the King ordered the ushers to bring a robe

of honour, and he put it on the old man with his own hands, and hung a valuable string of pearls round his neck, to serve as prayer beads, while the people around the hall still cried blessings on them.

CHAPTER II

THE TRIAL

The King entered the great hall of audience, and, due proclamation having been made within and without, he took his seat on the Royal throne, which had now been properly arranged. Queen Chand sat by her nephew, on her usual seat or cushion of velvet, and dressed in her usual simple fashion; but the King, though he wore white muslin only, had a precious jewel in his turban, and a necklace of large diamonds and emeralds, which flashed brightly whenever he moved. Before him lay a light Court sword, in a purple velvet sheath. He looked younger, as indeed he was by three years, than Abbas Khan, who, with other officers of the private Court, stood rather behind and to one side of the Royal dais, but he was of slighter make, while his features, though delicate, were of darker colour than those of Abbas Khan, whose complexion was almost ruddy.

The King, having had silence proclaimed, spoke with a firm voice, and said, "Listen, O ye nobles and Ministers of the State! Sunday accusations have been made against Osman Beg, son of the brave Sooltan Beg, and we have caused him to be present here, before us,

before the law officers of the State, and before his equals and superiors in rank. Let no one, therefore, say that this investigation was held secretly, or otherwise than in the sight of the Lord on high, and the day-beams of justice. Let, therefore, Osman Beg be brought hither, and let him reply to these accusations.”

Proclamation was made by the Mohur that Osman Beg, Turcoman, stood before the throne.

The chief Kazee spoke from his seat, and said, “This is a case of treachery, O King, against thee, and thy person, kingdom, and security. These letters were found on the person of the Abyssinian slain in the combat of ordeal, and are addressed to Elias Khan, who died in battle. Osman Beg, in the name of the King, I ask thee if these are truly thine own ; look at them.”

Osman Beg was not allowed to touch them, but they were held near his face and turned in every possible direction. There were many of them, the date and purport of each being read aloud by a scribe present.

The Kazee selected one and read it so that all could hear. It was to Elias Khan, stating that the Padre at Moodgul, Dom Diego, had agreed to all conditions ; that three thousand Europeans were ready at Goa ; and that when Eyn-ool-Moolk was prepared he should deliver over the fort to any officers they might send, when he would join them ; and, having overpowered Abbas Khan’s detachment, they would march rapidly upon Beejapoor, put Chand Beebee to death, and take possession of the

treasury and the capital ; while another party, led by himself or Elias Khan, should pursue the King and bring him to Beejapoor, or execute him in camp, as might be most expedient.

The Kazee could read no more, for there arose a shout in the assembly of "Let the traitor die ! Send for the executioner ! Away with him !"

"He confesses before the King, and before God and men, that he was prepared to do all that is written in these letters by his own hand ; and the law is that the punishment is death," cried the Kazee.

"My lord ! my King !" cried Abbas Khan, as he saw the King was about to speak ; and had he declared judgment, there would have been no delay in execution "I cry for mercy and pardon. When I was ill and near to death in Juldroog he was kind to me ; he not only gave me protection, but attended me as a brother. My King, he is my cousin, and we have played together when we were children ; nor was my King absent. For the sake of his noble father, spare his life !"

Osman Beg answered not a word. He stood, as he had done hitherto, with his arms crossed defiantly, looking now to the Kazee, now to the King, and now to his cousin, apparently defying all.

"Of a truth thou deservest death, Osman Beg. But for the sake of thine aged father, who fought beside Humeed Khan in the last desperate fight, we, in the name of the Most High, whose Regent we are over this people, give thee thy life. But thou art disgraced ; thy

rank and thy estates are confiscated ; and thou canst stay here no longer. If thou, Osman Beg, returnest under any pretence, remember, the Kazee's just sentence shall at once be carried out. Hyat Khan, see that he be removed and banished, conducted ten coss beyond the frontier, and let to go whither he will."

Osman Beg did not move. He glared around him with defiance still, and, looking at the King, cried out, "I go, as thou wilt have it, King Ibrahim ; nor will I return to disgrace and dishonour. But, before I depart, I claim justice at thy hands, justice which thy meanest subjects may claim from thee. Give me my wife. There!" he shouted, as he pointed his finger at Zora ; "there ! she is mine by the law, and I claim her under the law. Give her to me and I depart, and leave only my curse behind me."

Then arose another shout, more fierce, more prolonged than the first. "He has forfeited clemency he has insulted the holy saint. Let him die !"

Zora had trembled with shame and indignation as Osman Beg made his demand, at once so appalling and disgraceful to her. Her breast heaved with sobs, her eyes grew hot, and scalding tears fell from them over her burning cheeks. She felt as though she would have choked and died.

As she cast her eyes around, she saw that men's faces were averted from her, and many heads bowed down; but opposite to her stood Abbas Khan, his features

quivering with excitement, and his eyes as if striving to catch hers and give her strength.

“Before the Lord God, and ye who hear me,” she said, slowly, “I am not his wife; and I have witnesses that I am not. I see the Moolla of Juldroog, who has known me from my birth, sitting yonder. Let him speak, if he be allowed.” And as the King assented and signed to him, the old man rose.

“It is the truth, O King and brethren. There was no marriage, and he lies before God who says there was.”

“He lies!” cried Osman Beg, furiously; “he lies. She, standing there shamelessly, had come to me before, and what I did was to save her shame — the shame of a holy Syud, whom I respected.”

This pitiless speech affected the assembly deeply. But her faculties were now strung to the highest tension, and her spirit seemed to rise with the increasing danger of her situation, as she cried,—

“He says I am shameless, and that I came to him of my own will. Let his slave Jooma, who stands yonder, say what happened.”

Jooma, who with other witnesses had been brought from Juldroog, stepped forward, and spoke what had actually happened.

It was well for Zora, that Osman Beg’s cook had also been brought. She now stepped forward, and said, simply, “Jooma speaks the truth. She was as much

married to him as I was ; and she is as pure now as when she was born. Does the Nawab think any one could have come to him without my knowledge ? Ask Goolab-bee, the pan woman ; she was with Zora and the two Mamas of Moodgul all the night Zora was carried off by Runga Naik, and kept her safely as her own child."

We need hear no more, my friends," said the King. "For my own part I am satisfied. Yet I ask her once more if she hath aught to adduce ?"

"Only these papers," she said, timidly, "which my grandfather told me to preserve. This is the letter he wrote, and sent by Mama Luteefa to Korikul. And he says he will come to us and have the marriage done. The second is the deed he gave to the robber who had instructions to carry me off from Kukeyra, and who was killed ; and with it is also the letter he wrote to the Kazee of Kembavee, asking him to come and marry me to him. If I had been guilty and shameless, as he declares I was, would the Lord have helped me ? If I had been married to him, as he declares, why ask for me again ? Why ask the good Kazee of Kembavee to marry him to me ? I am ashamed to speak so much," she continued, timidly, "but her honour is dearer to a Syud's child than her life. I have no father, no mother, my lord, but you and the Queen. I am but a poor orphan crying to you both for justice before the Lord."

The reading of the several papers produced had, to all appearance, silenced Osman Beg, and his head drooped on his chest despairingly.

An aged man, whose figure was still firm and erect, now advanced to the foot of the throne. It was Adam Khan, Turcoman, the father of Osman, who thus spoke in broken accents,—

“Say no more, my lord and my King. Spare me, the aged servant of thy house, one who was serving Ibrahim Adil Shah when the venerable Syud suffered. I speak not for him, my unworthy son; but I admit his guilt against you, my lord, and my Queen, and against that poor orphan, whose father served under me, and died in battle. I have no tie to life, nor children, nor wife, nor any one. Let us go, then, to Mecca, where he may pray for pardon to the Messenger, who will accept his penitence.”

“Peace, father!” said his son; “humble thyself no more. One more chance of justice is open to all. Hath this girl any champion to undertake her defence? Men’s tongues are swayed by a breath of opinion, but sharp steel is the true arbiter. Again, therefore, I claim her as my wife, let who will be her champion.”

Then a number of fiery young men started up; but among them all Abbas Khan was the calmest, stateliest, and most remarkable. “I owe my life to that poor orphan,” he said, “and I should be unworthy if I refused her aid in her need. Listen, Osman Beg; though I have partaken of thy hospitality, thou must accept me in the ordeal if thou persist in claiming her.”

“I accept!” cried Osman Beg. “On foot or horseback, with armour or without, I claim thee, and thee

only. The day is yet young, the field where the Abyssinian died is open. Come ! thou art welcome ; and if thou refuse, thou art a coward and a liar ! ”

“ Silence ! ” cried the King, angrily ; “ an honourable man can only fight with one of equal honour. Thou, Osman Beg, art one whose life hath been far-famed for treachery ; whose honour hath yielded before falsehood, and become a thing for honest men to spit on. Away ! go to the holy Kibleh with thine honoured father ; haply the Lord may give thee grace to repent. Champion ! nay, she needeth none ; hath not the Lord been her champion in preserving her from thee ? Hyat Khan, remove him ; see that he is guarded and escorted with his father to the ship for Mecca.”

“ It is my destiny,” murmured Osman Beg, as he retreated. “ Must I go ? But I will not cease to pursue her while I have life ; and my revenge will only sleep, only sleep.”

“ And now, sirs, we have detained you long,” said the King ; “ but we dismiss ye with our thanks, and grateful to the Lord, also, that He hath manifested His justice in the protection of an orphan child.”

Till the Queen rose, Zora had been sitting beside her, but her mind was in a strange condition. What she had said, how the people had clapped their hands and shouted for her ; how she had escaped from the deadly danger, worse than death, which had threatened her ; what the King and Queen Chand had said to her, of all this she knew very little ; but when Meeah, as she

loved to think of him, rose up, and before all the assembled people declared he was her champion, her heart swelled almost to bursting, and she could only look at him with wistful eyes, while her cheeks burned painfully and her breath came in gasps. Meeah! he was true; he had not forgotten the night watch. Meeah! he would have risked his life for her honour. Oh that she could throw herself at his feet and clasp his knees, and say—Ah! what could she have said, but that she loved him, that she would die for him, if needs be.

CHAPTER III

CHANGES IN SOME POSITIONS

The Queen Dowager gradually withdrew herself from public duties, for she found that her nephew, the King, had developed strong talent both for political affairs and internal civil administration. Rewards and dignities had been freely distributed by him; and the troops, satisfied with his liberally granted donations, were serving loyally and steadily throughout the kingdom.

Zora remained most of her time with the Queen, as has been previously explained, who grew more and more attached to her day by day. Who, indeed, could resist her cheerful, winning disposition, her genial kindness, and her entire unselfishness and devotion? while every little accomplishment she possessed improved by quiet exercise and study, under one of the Persian secretaries

who, in days past, had been the King's, as well as Abbas Khan's, instructor.

The Lady Fatima was perhaps more constantly with the Queen than any other lady of the city. They had been intimate friends for years, for the Queen's care of Abbas Khan after his parent's death, and while the Lady Fatima was unavoidably absent, was a strong bond between them. Thus the good lady had many, almost daily, opportunities of seeing Zora, and observing her disposition in all respects. Her husband and her nephew had enrolled themselves as disciples of the aged Syud, and thus there were already strong bonds of mutual attachment growing up between the families. Her husband had seen Zora. He returned from the durbar of the trial full of Zora's bravery — her indomitable spirit, and yet of her modesty. "Any other girl," he declared, "would have lost heart, would have sat down and wept, would have flinched from the sore ordeal to which Zora had been subjected, and out of which she had come forth so triumphantly." ' Yes, she was satisfied that her nephew had yielded to no unworthy passion, and that his love was as pure as her utmost hope could desire.

And one day, which had been chosen by the family astrologer, the Lady Fatima urged by her husband, went to the Queen to ascertain whether Zora loved Abbas Khan, and to ask advice as to how she was to proceed. She did not even mention her intention to her nephew it would be time enough to speak to him

should all be favourable to her design, for she felt certain that his heart had not changed.

Long before the good lady's visit, Queen Chand had discovered as much as she needed to know of the condition of Zora's heart.

The Lady Fatima's visit was, therefore, a joyful one to the Queen as soon as she understood its purport ; and being a woman of practical mind, she did not use any circumlocution. Would there be any objection on behalf of Zora's grandfather, or would there be any from the girl herself? Had Her Majesty any other arrangement in view for Zora, or had the King? These formed the pith of the good lady's communication. To the latter, Queen Chand was enabled to give a decided and favourable answer.

The day Abbas Khan and his uncle came to the Dervish, the Queen, to whom Zora was reading, bid her put down the book and come to her ; and, wondering, she rose and knelt by her mistress. The suddenness of the request had called up blushes to the lovely face, and the eyes of the girl were cast down. Had she offended in aught?

"No, child," said the Royal lady "but I have been thinking it is time thou wert married. Hast thou any preference for any one of the youths thou hast seen or heard of? If thou hast, tell it to me, thy mother. Lay thy head on my breast, and tell it to me. Thou canst trust me, Zora." And she held out her arms.

The child was too truthful to be a coquette, and she could not resist the appeal. Lying in the Queen's arms, and sobbing with excitement, she told all, from the night of the watch to the scene of the trial, and how she thought Meeah would never leave her. And many have asked Abba to give me away" (and she thought of the Rajah's poor secretary with a smile) "even the great and rich; but I refused, and Abba did not press me. O, mother, I love Meeah! I do love him! Is it unmaidenly? Is it wrong? Often I have thought it was, and longed to put on the green dress and take its vows, but Abba always prevented me. Now do as thou wilt with me.

"It is enough, child," returned the Queen, stroking her soft round cheek and kissing her forehead. "Enough for thee, and for those who love thee; and may the Lord bless thee, my darling! I would retire now, and thou wilt go to Abba and Maria." And Zora rose and went to them. Entering her own apartment, she found Maria there; and, falling on her neck, told her with many a choking sob, what the Queen had said. Nor was her suspense continued. The Lady Fatima had followed her husband, and being announced, at once opened the subject of her visit. But Zora could not reply till she had seen her grandfather; and as Huneed Khan and his nephew had departed, and Abba had taken his noonday sleep, there was no one to interrupt them.

Under their mutual explanations, and there was no needless reticence, Zora confessed her love, and was

blessed by her grandfather, whom she soothed by the assurance that she would not leave him while he lived. As to the Lady Fatima, she filled Zora's mouth with sugar-candy, half-smothered her in flowers, rubbed her hands, feet, and neck with fragrant paste of sandal-wood ; and finally cast over Zora a rich sheet of brocaded gold tissue, and hung round her neck a costly necklace, as she whispered, " From Meeah."

There are nearly as many ceremonies to complete a Mussulman betrothal as there are in a marriage ; but I do not think my readers, even my lady readers, would care to follow them through perhaps two whole chapters, and will rest content in being assured that Zora's happiness and state in life have been secured as far as human foresight could provide, and that there were no more hearty or more loving wishes for her than those of Sister Maria and her brother Francis. We, therefore, can leave our old friends the Syud and Zora, now familiar with new positions and new hopes, full of contentment and joyful anticipation to both — more especially to Zora, whose mingled feelings of love, gratitude, and faith could perhaps have been hardly definable.

Among the various letters of congratulation which reached the King Ibrahim was one from the Viceroy and Captain-General of Goa, Dom Matthias de Albuquerque.

When the Viceroy's letter was read aloud by the priest, after congratulations upon peace and prosperity

of Beejapoor since the detection and destruction of the conspiracy and insurrection of the Prince Ismail, a passage followed which related to Francis d'Almeida and his sister, which may be quoted :—“ And furthermore, it hath been represented to us that a certain priest, Francis d'Almeida, and his sister Dona Maria, were detected in intrigues with the rebels, and received from them sundry large sums of money for the supply of European troops and cannon, which would have been an act beyond the bounds of good-will and peace between us, and for which they have, very justly, been detained by the Government of our friend and ally, yet, as subjects of the kingdom of Portugal, and as Francis d'Almeida and his sister belong to religious orders of the Church of Christ, they should be permitted to answer the charges that have been made against them ; and we, in the name of the King, our master, request that they may be sent to us in company with our envoy.”

When they returned home, Francis learned from his sister that she had heard all from the Queen's balcony. She was weeping but was not cast down. “ I knew it would come upon us sooner or later. The Church never sleeps, and we cannot delay compliance with this order,” for a fresh citation had been delivered to them requiring instant obedience. “ We must go, brother, even to the stake, if it be the Lord's will.

The Queen Dowager and the King's wife, as well as Zora and the good Lady Fatima, were sincerely grieved by the necessity of the absence of their friends,

and the old Syud, Meeah and his uncle, no less so. "I shall see thee no more, O friend," said the Syud, grasping the priest's hand. "Christian and Moslem we have lived together in amity; and I am thankful. If God will, and thou return hither, we may meet again; if not, the blessing of Allah be with thee and thine."

And Maria, though her fortitude and her faith supported her in the trial, yet was sorely pained to leave her friends. Taj-ool-Nissa, who had become deeply attached to her, and also Zora, were in despair; but Maria had her own sources of comfort which never failed her, and a few days after, with the tears and blessings of all, she and her brother, well provided with palanquins and tents, and under the charge of an officer of the Court, who spoke Portuguese, though after a rude fashion, departed from the Royal city in peace.

CHAPTER IV

PROCEEDINGS AT GOA

Supplied with comfortable palanquins, and well provided with horses from the Royal stables, Maria, her brother, and their friend the envoy, rode together in the cool morning air.

And they sped on from day to day, quitting the great city of the Moors, and beholding once more their beautiful and beloved Goa.

A few days after their arrival at Goa, the Beejapoor envoy and Francis d'Almeida received their summons

from the Viceroy to attend his Council and the Court, and they went together.

The Viceroy, receiving the King's letter, said, As this contains matter for political consideration, we will adjourn, Sir Envoy, to our Council Hall, where it shall be read before all my councillors of State and dignitaries of the Church, who are our advisers." Then, rising and taking the envoy's hand, he led him into the adjoining apartment, which was the Council Chamber.

Then the letter of King Ibrahim was read, and the Viceroy remarked that it was written in excellent Portuguese.

"But," continued the Viceroy, "in the latter portion of this document grave charges are made against Dom Diego di Fonseca, an eminent servant of the Church, who is now the accuser of Francis d'Almeida and his sister Maria, and we ought not to enter into this subject without his presence. Let, therefore, Dom Diego be summoned instantly; and till he arrives we call upon Francis d'Almeida to give an account of his apparent flight from Moodgul, and his evasion of the summons of the Inquisition."

"I was not a free agent, may it please your Excellency and the members of this Council," said Francis d'Almeida. "I was preparing to leave Moodgul after the citation was publicly read by my colleague when I was arrested, by order of the Queen Regent of Beejapoor, and forwarded by Dilawar Khan, the Governor of Moodgul, to the fort of Juldroog, where we were

confined for more than a month on charges of having conspired against the State in assisting the conspiracy of the Prince Ismail and Eynool-Moolk, and obtaining large sums of money for the purpose of engaging European soldiers and cannon. Finally, we were sent to Beejapoor, where we remained under surveillance until the King should return, as the Queen Regent did not consider she had authority to try so momentous a question herself. Then suddenly, and as by special Providence, certain papers fell into the hands of the Queen's Government, by which it appeared that my colleague, and not I, had been in correspondence with the rebels, partly independently, and partly by means of Osman Beg, the Killadar or Governor of the fort of Juldroog, who was arrested, tried on the evidence of papers found in his possession, convicted of treason, and sentenced to death."

At this moment Dom Diego was ushered in. He wore the religious dress of his order, but he at once threw back his cowl, and his eyes and those of Francis d'Almeida met once more. In the one was a scowl of bitter hate, and the brows were almost knit together; but those of Francis wore their usual mild expression, and betrayed no emotion; nay, their look of innocence seemed to make a favourable impression upon all present.

And now, my lords, said the Viceroy, rising, "the most important part of our sitting is to commence; and I have to beg, in the name of justice, that your

utmost vigilance may be employed to clear up what has been alleged. The papers alluded to in the letter are in possession of the envoy from Beejapoor. Let him produce them."

"They are here, my lord," returned the envoy, producing two small bundles tied up in waxed cloth, which was sealed with the King's seal.

"I protest," cried Dom Diego, rising suddenly, "against any examination of those papers here. Let them be given over to the custody of the Holy Office, which will examine and authenticate them, and produce such as it considers necessary for the elucidation of the truth."

But the pretence was too shallow to escape the detection of many of the experienced men who heard the protest, and the majority at once declared that they should be opened, and publicly read and registered.

Diego did not reply. He rose, and those who were watching him saw that his lips were white, and his dark complexion had assumed an ashy hue, and that he spoke as if he were choked by thirst. Yet he drew himself up bravely, and said with an assumed air of unconcern and bravado, "I am not on my trial, most illustrious Senor, else my reply would be sharp and certain. In these letters, which purport to be mine, I only see the cunning toils with which Francis d'Almeida strove to entangle me, and failed ; and when they had nothing to fall back upon they fled. Their being arrested is a mere mockery. As to the handwriting of the letters," and he took up one

before the Inquisitor, "they are all like this, forgeries. The fair Maria is an accomplished scribe, and can copy any style of writing, even that of heathen characters; and I do not at all marvel at her excellent imitation of mine. But, my lords, as I said, I am not on my trial; and no opinion can be given on the subject either till I am, or till that shameless priest and his sister are pronounced guilty of heresy and conspiracy by the Holy Inquisition, and perish for their heresies at the stake."

"Let that be as the good God wills," said the Viceroy, calmly. "Meanwhile, these papers are so strong against thee, that we, in virtue of our authority, declare thee to be a prisoner, and arrest thee in the name of our gracious King. Thou shalt have honourable treatment as a gentleman, and thou shalt be lodged in this palace, till the time when the trial of Francis d'Almeida and his sister comes on. When may it be, Holy Father?"

"It is fixed for Friday," answered the Inquisitor, calmly; "that the guilty may be ready for the *auto-da-fé* on the Sabbath.

Dom Diego was consigned to the care of the men-at-arms, who conducted him to an upper chamber luxuriously furnished, and told him that his servants would be sent when they could be found to attend to his comfort.

What were the thoughts of this man as he heard the door of his large airy apartment locked after him and bolted outside.

The grim trial, the horrible torture, the death by fire, like that he had witnessed of hapless victims writhing in agony at the stake——

Escape ! was it possible ? He went to one of the windows and looked through the jalousies, for he could not open one of them. Impossible ! his room was over fifty feet from the ground, and the wall was smooth, without a projection ; and he turned away with a shudder.

Presently his servant came. “ Have you seen Pedro di Diaz ? ” he asked.

“ I have, Senor,” was the reply ; “ and he is now waiting for me at the quay. He wants to know whether he is to stand out to sea or remain.”

“ Tell him,” replied Dom Diego, “ that he is to leave the ship’s boat with six of the best of the men in it, and to take the brigantine to the mouth of the harbour, without exciting suspicion. I will be with him on Friday night ; but if I do not come by Sunday, I shall be dead.”

CHAPTER V

THE INQUISITION

The appointed day arrived.

After the proceedings had been opened by a prayer and a solemn chant, Diego stood erect, and with all the energy and musical tone of his fine voice, he spoke to the following effect.

I think, however, that I do right in refusing an attempt to detail all. In the outset of his oration, he

referred to his services in China, in the Spice Islands, in Bengal, among the savage tribes of Malays and Moors; of perils by land and sea, and of the many human souls he had rescued from everlasting destruction.

“I was a humble follower of St. Francis Xavier,” he continued, “and strove to follow his example. Then, worn out and weary, I came to Goa, and would have returned to Portugal for a season, but new work at Moodgul was opened to me, and in my zeal I accepted it.

“Holy fathers, when I arrived there I found a mockery of a Church. My coadjutor, more a heathen than a Christian, had suffered the most ordinary offices of the Church to be utterly neglected. He was incessantly employed in the study of Pagan languages, mythology, and Scripture, and of Moorish languages, and infidel books.

The books in Francis d’Almeida’s and his sister’s handwriting will satisfy you of the character of their work, and I have brought such as I could find; the rest were concealed before their departure.”

“Have you any witnesses to the truth of the accusation?” asked the Grand Inquisitor.

“I have none,” he replied, “but God, and one of the deacons who accompanied me, who has charge of the books. How was I to confide to anyone the misery I endured?”

“Dost thou object to these being produced, Francis d’Almeida?”

“No,” he said, mildly. “If they are in my own or my sister’s writing, they are homilies of the Church, the Vulgate as allowed to the people even here in Goa, and some extracts from the Scriptures such as are given to children.”

“Look at these,” said the Archbishop. “Are these the same as thou sentest to us for approval?”

D’Almeida opened the books one by one, and looked over the contents. “These are the rough drafts in my own handwriting of the translations as I made them, and here and there I find a small portion of my sister’s manuscript. These are the drafts from which she made the fair copies, which in her beautiful characters and ornamented with initial letters are now at Moodgul, in the keeping of one Ramana and other deacons of the mission, and have the illustrious Archbishop’s inprimatur on them.”

“They are here, fathers,” cried a venerable old man, with long white hair streaming over his shoulders, who, with several others, now made their way into the room, and prostrated themselves on the floor. “Listen to our cry for justice! When our beloved Padre was threatened, and when the pure Senora Maria was insulted, and the Governor of Moodgul sent them away as prisoners, the books were given to us, and we hid them; but when the great Padre was going to Goa, to accuse our beloved friends, I and these with me followed him, and we arrived this morning, O holy fathers, that we may be in time yet to speak the truth before ye! Day and night

we have travelled, and we have had no fear save of delay."

Then he related what he knew of the priest's plot. How he had engaged Beydurs and other lawless ruffians to carry off Maria; how he heard Maria scream as she was alone singing vespers, and, looking in, saw her lying on the steps of the altar, and gave the alarm. We need not recapitulate all we already know; but the firmness and boldness of the narrator carried conviction with it to those who heard him. And not only did I hear and see it all, he continued, "but these, my companions know of it too, and will confirm it."

"We had not heard of this alleged insult before, daughter," said the Inquisitor; "and thou must speak to it, however painful, on pain of torture, to extort the truth, for this is a point which cannot be overlooked."

"My lords and illustrious fathers," said Maria, modestly, "if this truth had not transpired through the deacon I would have been silent, for I have innocence and my trust in the blessed Queen of Heaven to rely on; and whatever shame may appear in the narration belongs to him who caused it, not to me. We had never been intimate, as servants of the Church should be. My brother did not like what he heard, things he would not tell me of. I was pained by Dom Diego's licentious looks, and even, when in the Church, always sat near the children of my school. But one Sabbath evening he found me alone, teaching the children a hymn; and when they had gone he advanced towards me, and

offered me such insult as no virtuous woman could endure, pressing his vile intentions with proposals to fly. And I sank down and fainted. I know not who rescued me, but when I was aroused I was at home again, and my brother, seizing his sword, rushed out to seek revenge, and was brought back ; and I lay at the foot of my cross, praying that his hand should be withheld ; and that was granted mercifully."

Bravely and calmly had Maria upheld her dignity and composure up to this period ; but now she failed, and burst into hysterical sobs and tears, upheld by the abbess of her lay order, who had, with other sisters, accompanied her. But presently, and while all awaited her recovery, she rose, and holding out her pleading hands, cried—

" O fathers of the Church, as her child I come to you ; as a woman who has been wounded in her honour I plead to you ! There is not one spot of shame to my own perception upon my heart, and she can deliver me if I am true. If not, let the flame purge me, and may I be accepted ! But leave me not to that vile man's machinations in after years."

She was not immediately replied to, and the tribunal took up the examination of Francis d'Almeida with new interest. He described their happy life at Moodgul, the affection and docility of the people, the progress he was making in Canarese with learned scholars of the place, and his first essays in translation, which he had sent for confirmation ; and lastly, the insult to his sister. " If I

could then and there have proceeded to you, holy fathers, I would have come; but a long journey needs several days' preparation, and I was without any notice considered a prisoner and sent to Beejapoor, where my innocence was proved to the satisfaction of its noble Queen by these letters of my coadjutor, which she and her nephew, the King, have forwarded by their envoy. They are before ye, O fathers, and ye will judge whether the writing is mine or not."

The Inquisitors rose as one man, while their Chief cried with a loud voice, "Ye, Francis d'Almeida and Maria de Pereira, we acquit and expurge ye from all accusation of heresy, sorcery, contempt, and other crimes with which ye have been charged; and ye go forth without shame or reproach to continue your labours as ye have done among the heathen.

"You, Dom Diego, member of the holy Society of Jesus, are found guilty, under your own handwriting, of falsehood and profligacy. You have insulted a virtuous and worthy daughter of the Church with infamous proposals. You have entered, as appears by your agreements, into an unholy and corrupt alliance with Moorish rebels to this kingdom; and you, by these papers, have acknowledged the receipt of vast sums of money. We condemn you, therefore, unless you make confession previously, to trial by the rack; and afterwards, on Sunday next, to death by fire, in order that the holy Church may be purged from your iniquity.

Familiars, lead him forth ; till the morrow he will have time to repent.

Dom Diego replied nothing. He well knew it was of no avail to appeal to those stony hearts which, whether just or unjust, never changed. He only bowed his head, muttered something that could not be distinguished, and was led into the great corridor whence the cells opened.

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And thou wilt come at last, Balthasar," said Dom Diego, as, having arrived at the end of the corridor, he turned into a door which was open, and revealed a small bed, with a loaf of bread and a jar of water. "Thou wilt not be long." Balthasar was Dom Diego's cousin, who had been with him when he was formerly an officer of the Ajuba, and had taken charge of him.

"I will come," he said, "though I risk my life and brave the fire. I will come, and bring the rope for thee. If thou art strong and brave, as thou used to be, yon miserable window will have little terror for thee."

But Dom Diego had a surer plan in his mind than that.

"Oh, you need not bring a rope," he said ; "I can manage without it, and it would betray you."

As his cousin entered shortly before midnight, and all the building was still, except for the wailings of wretches who sat alone in their misery, he closed the door, locking it inside. "Perhaps I can help you," he said, cheerfully.

“Yes,” said Dom Diego. “No one can move those iron bars. You dare not leave the door open, but you can submit to be bound, and I will do it gently. Lie down there. Ha ! thou wilt not,” he said, from between his teeth. “Thou, too, a traitor !” And he then threw him down on the bed, and stuffed a large portion of his dress into his cousin’s mouth. “Dare to stir, and I will kill thee. See, here is my old weapon !” and he drew a keen poignard from his breast. “Nay, that would be the surest way,” and he seized the familiar by the throat.

“Mercy ! Mercy ! Diego !” gasped Balthasar. “Spare my life ! Oh, spare my life ! Unshriven and unrepented, wouldst thou murder me ?”

“Be still, then. If thou stir hand or foot, I will slay thee, Balthasar, as thou liest there ; but be still, and I will not harm thee.” Then Diego took off his cousin’s robe, swathed the upper part of his person in the coarse sheet of the bed, and tearing his shirt into strips, with them and two handkerchiefs tied his legs together, so that they could not be moved. “There !” he cried, “that is the way we used to tie up the captives whom we carried off for ransom. Rest quietly there, my son, till some one finds thee in the morning ; and thou must tell them they did not make so much of me as they might when I was here ; they may find it hard to take me now. When thou wakest, tell Francis d’Almeida and his sister that I go to pursue them. Not till he is dead at my feet, and she grovels there in a shame worse than death will I cease to dog them, hide

where they may. Forget not!" and taking up the small lanthorn, he locked the door behind him, delivering a solemn benediction as he entered the corridor. '

He knew his way perfectly. In years long before he had been one of the familiars, and knew every secret dungeon and torture chamber of the great building, every secret sign and password; and he made his way to the gate without opposition. The men on guard rallied him on going out so late; but he declared his vow of midnight mass, and passed on into the open air, unchallenged and unsuspected by his voice, for he had kept his cowl over his face, and his height corresponded so exactly with that of his cousin, that the detection of the imposture was impossible.

There was no one else in the square before the Ajuba but a few stragglers, and Diego quietly found himself on the quay. One sailor was lying in the stern of the ship's boat, who was at once aroused, and slipped over the priest's shoulder a rough sailor's dress, and for a few moments was absent seeking his associates. One by one they emerged from their hiding place, gained the boat unobserved, and lay down in its bottom; and when the last one came he loosed the painter, took one of the oars, and sculled off leisurely towards the opposite shore. Near that, the men started up, took the oars, which were muffled, and rowed with all their power, and with a strong ebb tide made rapid way down to the sea, passing the forts without observation. The brigantine was not at anchor, but cruising to and fro, as if about to enter the

river with the flood ; but Dom Diego was soon on board, and before the fresh land wind the beautiful little vessel heeled over to the breeze and sped swiftly northwards.

CHAPTER VI

A DEATH, A MARRIAGE, AND A DEPARTURE

The Archbishop, having consulted privately with his council, considered it very advisable to extend the mission, and to consolidate its several points under one head. At present there were but four churches, two under Moodgul, and two under Raichore ; but there was a good chance of the establishment of one at Beejapoor, and perhaps another at Ahmednugger, under the auspices of Queen Chand Beebee. It was advisable, therefore, that Francis d'Almeida should be created bishop, with permission to travel and preach wherever he thought most advisable.

At first, the worthy priest was overwhelmed, and requested time for consideration ; but it appeared both to him and to Maria, and to their best friends, that the honour and the responsibility could not be evaded. He therefore, submitted himself to the Archbishop's will, with earnest and sincere feelings of gratitude ; and as soon as the ceremony could be arranged, he was consecrated in the cathedral at high mass, before all the ecclesiastical, civil, and military authorities of the city, and his patent made out and delivered to him.

Francis and Maria were pressed much to remain for the great Church festival of Christmas. But this was impossible ; time was precious ; the Beejapoor envoy and his people were anxious to return, and the journey back was commenced. And the reception they had at Beejapoor, when Humeed Khan and his nephew, with a host of other friends, one of the King's nobles of the court, ushers and others, were sent out to meet them and conduct them into the city, was almost overwhelming ; but they were grieved to hear that their dear old friend the Syud was rapidly sinking to his rest, and that the physicians had no longer hope of his life.

“ I have received my warning, he said, “ and do but wait the angel's coming — be that when it may.” He made his will, bequeathing to Zora all his worldly goods and such of his estates as the King might permit. He also made provision for the religious ceremonies at his tomb. To the last he preserved his faculties entire ; and after hearing portions of the Koran read one night, he repeated the two creeds with a firm voice, and lay down quietly. But his breath came heavily, and Abbas Khan saw that the end was near ; and Zora came to him with Maria, who was sitting with her. The physicians and Francis felt his pulse, but it was fluttering ; and one of the Moollas raising him up, poured a little sherbet into his mouth, which he swallowed and lay down again, saying, “ It is enough,” and seemed to sleep ; nor could those who watched by him tell when the humble, loving spirit left its earthly tenement.

There was no struggle, or even a sigh ; and again and again during the day he had said he had no pain, and could see the flowers of Paradise and the river flowing among them. Finally the chant of the Moollas without ceased, and those who perform offices for the dead came in and did their ministering. Crowds followed him to his last resting place. Nothing that love or respect could suggest was wanting to the end ; and as the Moollas chanted the peace of God to the thousands who had gathered round, they separated sadly, many weeping, and with a conviction that a faithful disciple of their faith had gone to rest in Paradise.

Zora had now many friends ; and the grief at her loss, which at first lay heavy on her, gradually gave place to brighter thoughts. Often and humbly did she think on the few months that had passed, on the hopelessness which must have been her lot if her grandfather had died at Juldroog or during her wanderings. Yes, she had been mercifully protected, and was grateful to her heart's core ; and as she wept out her grief on Maria's breast or that of the Queen, who had adopted her, there was ever present the secret hope and trust that she had found a true refuge, which was not far distant. For as the forty days of ceremonial were about to conclude, the Lady Fatima, urged by her nephew and husband, again protested against further delay. Zora should have one who had a right to protect her, and in whose love a new life would open to her, and she put herself unreservedly into her friends' hands. She had pledged

her faith, and had she needed to do so a hundred times over, or under any trial, she would have only been more confirmed in it. Enough that the time was come; and with all the pomp that her Royal patrons and the wealthy house of her husband could furnish, all the dressing, feasting, merry-making, processions, and distributions of charity practised on such occasions, the marriage ceremonies were at last concluded. Are not the loves of this happy pair sung by bards and dancing-women to this day? For the poets of the Court poured forth their amatory lays and epithalamiums without stint, sure of ample largesse. Many of these were set to music, and linger still to charm others, though even the traditions of the nobles of Beejapoor have passed away.

Meanwhile the Queen's letters from Ahmednugger grew more and more uneasy; and she received a petition, which was signed by all the principal nobles and officers of the State, asking her to come to them and assume the administration during the minority of the young and rightful Sovereign, who as yet was little more than an infant. This was necessarily a much more serious subject for contemplation than the heretofore task of assuaging national disquietude, and uniting the power of the State under one regency, not her own, which should have the goodwill of the people. But this was put before her as a solemn and patriotic duty, which could be effected by no one but herself. At her name, they wrote in her native city, every well affected person would unite to support her; the few malcontents

would disappear or fly the kingdom, and peace and prosperity would reign once more. Day by day, by special messengers, and by every other possible means, the frequency of these communications, as well as their urgency, increased. They had commenced before Francis and his sister had returned from Goa, and were much more frequent and more urgent now.

It was a perilous time for the whole Dekhan ; and the Queen, with her habitual fortitude, determined to meet it, as she had done every political and public danger of her life. She would devote herself to her native State, for her presence was no longer needful at Beejapoor, and her Regency had closed in thankful peace. Nay, there was no time to be lost, and it was at once known by the preparations ordered, that Queen Chand was about to proceed to her native place. We need not say that Abbas Khan and Zora were to accompany her. They would take no denial, and Abbas Khan, in public durbar, claimed, the command of her escort, as a point of right and duty. Could he leave his adopted mother, and idle away his time in inaction at the capital? Even that he had endured since the King's return had been in the last degree irksome. The Bishop and his sister desired to go too ; for the Queen had become alarmed, and she viewed with pain a revelation the King had made to her that he loved Maria.

BOOK V

CHAPTER I

A SKETCH OF LOCAL HISTORY

OUT of the disruption of the great Bahmuny dynasty of the Dekhan, in A. D. 1489, four independent kingdoms arose. The first secession was that of Yousaf Adil Khan, who founded the Adil Shahy dynasty of Beejapoor in that year; the second, that of Niam-ool-Moolk Bheiry, in the same year, and Berar had even preceded them. Golconda followed in 1512, thus completing the alienation of the four largest and most important provinces of the Bahmuny kingdom, and leaving only a comparatively insignificant portion in the hands of the remaining representative of the Bahmunies.

The marriage of Chand Beebee, daughter of Hussein Nizam Shah, of Ahmednugger, in 1564, to Ally Adil Shah, of Beejapoor, cemented the political alliance between the States. Yet the peace of the two kingdoms was by no means assured; and we have already had to trace the cause of wars which ended in the death in action of King Ibrahim Nizam Shah, the seventh King, in the field of battle near Puraindah. After this event the affairs of the unfortunate kingdom fell gradually into greater and greater confusion. There was no successor of mature age to succeed; and a boy, said to

have been of Royal birth, was sent for from Dowlutabad and placed on the throne under the auspices of the Dekhany party and their chieftain. But this was opposed by the foreign faction, who claimed that the infant son of the late King should succeed. As usual, both parties betook themselves to arms, and many lamentable and bloody engagements took place, not only in and near the Royal city itself, but also in other parts of the Ahmednugger dominions ; the result of which was the general appeal to the Dowager Queen, Chand Beebee, to come to Ahmednugger, assume the Regency, and govern the kingdom with her well-tried ability and sagacity on behalf of the minor Prince ; and, as we know, she had, after many deep considerations, consented to do so.

There was, however, a more pressing, and, to the Queen's perception, more dangerous crisis at hand. The Emperor Akhbar, of Dèhli, who 'was gradually annexing all smaller independent dominions to his own empire, had already shown a desire for interference in Dekhan affairs. He had despatched a large army under his son the Prince Moorad to Guzerat and Malwa, to watch the course of Dekhan events, and to invade the country should he find pretext or opportunity for doing so ; and of this invasion the Queen was in dread. Domestic broils and disagreements had before on many occasions been adjusted, but the presence of so powerful a force as the Great Moghul's army, in the distracted state of local politics, was an evil which could not be overrated.

Already the leader of the Dekhany party was known to have addressed letters to the Prince Moorad, imploring his intervention to uphold the claims of the boy whom he had placed on the throne; and it was impossible to conceive that the astute Prince would neglect the very opportunity he had so long waited for. True, afterwards the Dekhany leader perceived and bitterly regretted the false step he had taken, more especially when the boy whom he supported had been discovered to be spurious. But the mischief done was irreparable, and the Queen Regent now knew that she should not only have to subdue local disaffection, but oppose the progress of the Imperial Prince with all the force and all the energy she could command. She had undertaken the duty, however, and cast ease and other personal considerations unselfishly aside. She had done what she could for Beejapoor, and was wanted there no longer, except to make part of her nephew's happiness and share in his prosperity. And now, if in days of advancing age she was again to be thrown into those scenes of war which had accompanied her early life, it was, she said, the will of God and her duty; and she bowed to both with a submission and fortitude which never deserted her to the last.

† The leader of the Dekhany party, Mean Munjoo, who had set up the spurious prince, was not at Ahmednugger. He had taken the boy with him, and gone beyond Owsa, towards Golconda, to urge the necessity of supporting Ahmednugger; and he was bitterly

repentant that he had invited the Prince Moorad. He wrote to the Queen for forgiveness, and declared he would not return except with troops from Golconda and Beejapoor, to drive the Moghuls back. The Queen, too, wrote to her nephew, King Ibrahim, to send a heavy force of cavalry, in which the Moghuls were said to be weak, and to watch affairs from Nuldroog; and subsequently as many as twenty-six thousand of the best cavalry of Beejapoor, with six thousand from Golconda, assembled there, and occupied the crests of the plateau which stretched northwards.

The Queen had received answers to all her despatches. The Dekhany leader had not returned, but remained with the Golconda troops, who were to take up their position at Owsa, while those of Beejapoor occupied Nuldroog. Although some pretenders to support the party of the spurious new King were known to exist, yet for the most part the succession in the right direct line, by causing the child Prince Bahadur to be crowned, and appointing the Queen Chand formally to be Regent during the boy's minority, as she had been at Beejapoor, was the desire of the majority. There was no doubt of the purity of the boy's descent, who, with his mother, had been confined in the fort of Chawund; and when he arrived he was welcomed with joy, and on a given day was crowned King in the great audience hall of the fort, with every demonstration of satisfaction.

There is no doubt, however, that this bloodless revolution gave secret umbrage to many, and some

severe measures had to be taken. Ansar Khan, the governor of the fort, was detected in active correspondence with the Prince Moorad, representing the Queen as an abandoned woman; the boy she had adopted as the son of a minion of her own; and that the people, though they dare not complain, were in the last state of discontent; and Ansar Khan being arraigned before the chiefs and nobles, was convicted and suffered death. Secure in her position, the Queen wrote to the Prince Moorad, recapitulating the past, quoting the recantation of the Dekhany leader who had invited him. As a noble and an honoured guest of the son of the great Emperor, whom it behoved to protect an infant minor — he would be welcome, most welcome, and a friendly embassy and escort would be sent to meet him; but if hostile intentions still filled his mind, and force were resorted to, she was well supported by her neighbours, and had made every preparation to repel what she could not avert by conciliation.

But the cloud afar off only thickened, and became more and more threatening week by week, and the Queen strained every nerve to preserve the fort to the utmost, and prepare for what could not be much longer averted.

CHAPTER II

THE PROGRESS OF THE SIEGE

Prince Moorad had with him thirty thousand of the flower of the Moghul cavalry, a large body of Rajpoot

infantry and artillery, and several of the most celebrated generals of his father's army led different portions of the troops; and the prospect of a campaign in a new country, and with the celebrated cavaliers of the Dekhan, infused the highest spirits into all classes.

Two men had joined the Prince, in whom he had now much confidence.

One of them Osman Beg — laid before the Prince and some of his most esteemed councillors the condition of the whole of the Dekhan, that of its armies and parties, and the position of the Queen Dowager at Ahmednugger, which he did not undervalue. He told them that they should not despise the power of a woman like her, whom no danger could appal, nor ordinary resistance overcome; and that in the Dekhan there was no commander to equal her in the field; while the people loved her, and would, most of them, support her to the last. The great object, therefore, should be to shut her up in Ahmednugger before she could withdraw the infant King to the protection of Beejapoor, which had ample means for defence.

So Osman Beg was attached to the division of Khan Jehan, and accompanied the army in the capacity of guide and director of the marches towards Ahmednugger.

Meanwhile Dom Diego had not been idle. Acting under the advice of his banker at Surat, he had written a petition to the Prince, representing himself as a soldier of fortune, recently arrived from Europe, who had

knowledge of the attack and defence of fortified places, and the direction of artillery in the field ; and, anxious for employment, offered his services to the Royal army. While at Surat he had heard from his cousin at Goa of the appointment of Francis d'Almeida as Bishop of Ahmednugger, and subsequently, that he and his sister had accompanied Queen Chand to her destination. What better opportunity could be afforded for carrying off Maria than the turmoil of a siege and assault. He had seen much service as a soldier in the East. Personally he was brave, and in his own land had studied for the profession of artillery and fortifications.

And after a short interview he found himself not only much more at his ease than he had expected to be, but appointed to a lucrative post, as inspector and regulator of the artillery.

There continued one permanent source of disquietude and anxiety to the Queen, which was the inactivity of the Beejapoor and Golconda forces, for as yet they had made no forward movement ; and as the weather was now open, they ought to have taken up the positions she had suggested. Once, indeed, when she wrote to Soheil Khan, the Beejapoor officer in command, that the Moghul cavalry were about to make a movement to turn the flank of the general defences of the kingdom, twelve thousand cavalry were despatched from Nuldroog, by way of Bheer, to hold them in check ; but the movement proved futile, the Beejapoor force was defeated and routed by six thousand Moghuls, under Khan Jehan Lody, one

of the best generals of the army, and the Beejapoor troops fled back from the Godavery in confusion, to tell tales of Moghul prowess, which considerably added to the existing alarm. In truth, Osman Beg had rendered essential service in this movement. Thenceforth the Queen knew she had no one from whom she could expect aid, but she did not relax her preparations or her vigilance. She knew her nephew could not leave Beejapoor, for without one or other of them the capital could not be trusted.

On December 12, according to the local history, the leading troops of the Moghuls advanced within sight of the fortress.

Early next morning they watched the great army form in line—a magnificent though terrible spectacle—and the Royal Prince, accompanied by some officers, rode round the fort, out of reach of shots, pointing out to the leaders of each division the ground it was to occupy.

The enemy's operations were conducted with skill and military science. No other measures would have been available against such a place as Ahmednugger. Dom Diego, after several feints, established his headquarters and trenches on the south-west side of the fort, and thence continued his approaches by regular parallels to the crest of the glacis, or as near as possible to the point, whence, eventually, the breaching batteries were established; but the defenders' artillery was infinitely superior to his own, and the operations had been slow and difficult. Not only did the artillerists of the fort

maintain their ancient reputation, but the practice of the Arabs in the garrison was very fatal. With their excellent matchlocks nothing could show itself in the Moghul trenches without being hit, and the real terror they inspired was very great. Then the garrison became more and more confident, and their courage rose in proportion. Day and night the Queen herself patrolled the fort, watching the terrible game with a kind of fascination.

The beginning of February had now arrived, and progress in the siege was as dilatory as ever. All seemed to depend upon the success of mining, which Dom Diego had counselled from the first, but which the native excavators declared to be impossible on account of the firm, stony nature of the soil. If mines could be carried under even one of the central bastions, and a breach made, there would, it was considered, be no doubt of success.

Just then the Queen wrote in the most urgent terms she could to the Beejapoor officers. If they advanced at once, and operated against the rear of the Moghul lines, nothing could save the enemy from defeat, and most likely destruction; the fort was still intact, and there had been but few casualties; in short, that victory was within their grasp if they would but take it. These letters were intercepted by Osman Beg, who took them to the Prince, who added a few lines of his own in a chivalrous spirit, to the effect that he had marched from Delhi on purpose to cross swords with the cavaliers

of the Dekhan, and was waiting for them, and trusted they would not delay the opportunity he had so long desired.

But no result followed on these letters, and the Queen almost began to despair of the good faith of Beejapoor. Why should they allow such an opportunity to escape ?

CHAPTER III

THE ASSAULT

For several days the fire of the besiegers had much slackened, and the spirits of the besieged rose in proportion to the highest pitch. Were the Moghuls in reality preparing to abandon the attack and retire ? It might be so, indeed, for a considerable body of Beejapoor cavalry had at last moved forwards and taken post in the Manikdown Hills, from whence their operations against the Moghul supplies and distant outposts were beginning to be seriously felt ; but they were by no means strong enough to effect any considerable diversion, and, up to the night of Feb. 20, affairs continued in the same position. But the inactivity of the enemy appeared unaccountable to the Queen and her council. The suspense only lasted till the night of the day we have named, when, as all were watching on the walls, a loud manly voice was heard from the opposite side of the ditch, which cried out—

“O ye brave friends and brothers in the faith, no longer make a vain resistance. Ye have fought well for your honour, and may save the shedding of more blood.

Under the five bastions whereon ye stand five mines have been silently driven. They are loaded and ready, and they will be fired to admit the army of the King of kings. Beware, then, for I have warned ye ; and your fate cannot be averted but by surrender."

Then, amidst the profoundest silence, the voice ceased.

At first there was some little confusion, but gangs were speedily organised, and with a hearty good will they set to work, led by the Queen, who, with a pickaxe in her hand, descended into the shaft, and, with those dearest to her about her, worked like the rest ; going from shaft to shaft, distributing draughts of cool water and sherbet to those who suffered thirst. It was impossible to exceed the enthusiasm which her heroism inspired.

Nihung Khan, Abbas Khan, and even the pacific Bishop, excited by the turmoil, ran from place to place and encouraged all. Nor was the result disappointing. While they were thus employed, another voice called to them from the bottom of the wall to surrender, for that at daylight the mines would be sprung. But the warning passed unheeded ; two mines had been laid bare, and the charges of powder removed after sharp contests under ground ; and the Queen was in the act of distributing rewards for the removal of the charge of a third, when, with a fearful report and crash, a fourth mine, as yet undiscovered, was sprung just as day dawned on the scene, and a few yards of the wall fell.

Two thin columns of smoke issued from the fort wall, and from that part of the counterscarp which was opposite. These places heaved slightly upwards, and earth and stones arose with a muffled sound, casting into the air the bodies of a number of men who had been walking on the fort wall. The effect of these explosions was a clear road into the ditch from the counterscarps and an apparently practicable though steep breach in the rampart of the fort.

"It is done !" cried Don Diego, with a wave of his plumed hat to the Prince. "If your Highness will send for the stormers I will lead them at once, if they will follow me."

In the fort, as the smoke and dust of the explosion cleared away, some of the garrison seemed to have given up hope, and were girding their loins for flight; but the Queen was equal to the emergency. While she called to those about her to remember their oath to her, to rally their men, for the gates were closed, and there was no egress for flight, she cried, "And whither would ye fly, O sons and brothers? To the plain yonder, to perish by the swords of your enemies? Nay, for your honour's sake, desert me not now; and to the latest day of the Dekhan your deeds shall be sung by bards and minstrels. See, we women blench not from the storm; and she who brings my armour and my sword, a holy Syud's daughter, will die here with me, and her husband, my children both, rather than yield while we have life." Then, as Zora, clad in the old green dress of the

Turreequt, approached, the Queen withdrew for an instant, and putting on her morion and a suit of light chain mail, with gauntlets, and waving a naked sword, came forward among them, crying the old battle cry of her husband. Over her face, as it was becoming light, she had cast a transparent veil, but every feature was visible, glowing with a rapt enthusiasm and confidence.

“To the breach, my friends, with me!” she cried. “Who will follow my veil? Behold it will lead you to honour, if to death; never to infamy. If we die, we shall sip the nectar of Paradise ere night.”

No one attempted to resist this appeal. With passionate cries of devotion, with tears and sobs, the leaders and men, with her beloved Abbas Khan, pressed forward to do their best in her defence. The rough veteran, Nihung Khan, with tears flowing down his cheeks, besought her to retire to a place of safety, but she cried the more that she would remain; and in her own Battle of the Veil it behoved her to lead, and no other.

(But it was yet some time before the Moghuls advanced to storm, and the delay enabled the besiegers to make some defence for the breach available. A double row of gabions was placed over the crest, and filled with earth; the best marksmen among the Arabs and the garrison were posted on the wall above its sides; wall pieces were brought from other parts of the fort; rocket-men plied their rockets on the crest of the glacis opposite, through which a road had been sloped from

above. Behind the gabions, and sheltered by them, dense bodies of spearmen stood in serried ranks. In short, no precaution that Abbas Khan and his companions could bethink themselves of was neglected. Even the Bishop, who the whole night through had been at work, ran from his post on the large bastion to see that all was in proper order, and his few directions were practical and useful.

Every preparation had been made that could be contrived. Every gun that the fortifications allowed of had been trained on the breach and the enemy's road thither. The garrison had been divided into bodies, so as to relieve each other as quickly as possible without crowding; and though the enemy fired occasionally from the trenches against the breach and the parapets of wall, the precautions which had been taken of covering the men with gabions and sand-bags almost entirely prevented casualties. As to the breach itself, though the enemy fired continually at it, they produced no effect, as their shot, knocking up a cloud of dust, only sank into the earth harmlessly. Presently, also, Abbas Khan and some of the boldest Arabs contrived to let down some gabions below the crest of the breach, where they established themselves, thus affording increased match-lock fire of a fatal character, besides opposing an additional obstacle to the stormers.

At last the signal for assault was given from the enemy's camp. First, the huge imperial kettle-drums sounded a march in their deep booming notes, and a

general discharge of all their artillery in the trenches followed ; while, in the bastion of the fort, the Portuguese and Hindoo native gunners stood or lounged among their piles of shot and bags of copper coin

Can we, even in imagination, realise in any degree that fearful maddening scene — the discharges of the great guns at intervals carrying destruction to hundreds of the stormers at every shot, assisted by the rockets, the musketry, and the fire-balls from the walls ? Even these were little in comparison with the frantic struggles of the masses as they were urged on by the Prince in person and his generals — the shouts, the screams, and cries of wounded and dying men, the fierce thirst which consumed all ! The ditch, from the first almost covered by the dead and dying, was now rising under the heaps beneath, which every moment augmented.

At last night began to fall, and here and there a star peeped out from the pure ether through the thick, heated vapour from the combatants which filled the air ; and the baffled Moghuls, leaving their heaps of slain as they were, retired beyond the crest of the counterscarp into their own lines. They had lost thousands, for the ditch was a mass of carcasses, which no one could reckon ; they had lost arms, standards, officers, and, above all, reputation. That the hosts of the King of kings should have been repulsed from a Dekhan fortress commanded by a woman was a result which none had anticipated, much less the haughty Imperial Prince who had urged on his devoted troops to destruction. Gradually, those

that remained of the invaders retreated up the slope, harassed to the last by the rain of copper hail with which they had been tormented; and the Queen and Zora, with some of the bravest of the women and eunuchs, watched the last retreating figures which staggered up the slope beyond; or a man here and there extricating himself from the horrible masses like one rising from the dead, followed them alone, or sank down and perished with the rest. And then, as if seeing each other for the first time during the fearful day, they cast themselves upon each other's neck and wept for joy.

And now, said the Queen to Abbas Khan and those near him, "let us leave nothing undone. The breach has, indeed, been saved; but it must be made sure. I, for one, will not leave it till it is built up against any chance of surprise, or even of attack. Do not talk to me of sleep or rest. My best sleep would be here beside the workers. My best rest can only come with security." "See and get Zora some food and rest," she whispered to Abbas Khan, "she will need it.

"Not while thou art here, O Mother," was the reply. "She is young and strong, and can bear it better than thou. But why remain? Canst thou not trust Nihung Khan and myself to do all?"

"No!" she replied, firmly "it is my work and I will do it. Nor shall Zora leave me; she will be better for seeing Maria. But my turn has not yet come. Hark! there is a cry from the heap of dead. 'For the love of God! for the love of God! water! it cries.

Does no one hear? It is some Feringi."

"It may be the cavalier who led the assault," said Abbas Khan. "I saw him sink down, but he may have survived."

A gallant fellow," said the Queen. "I, too, watched him. Go, one of ye, for the Padre Sahib; tell him to come with his bandages and medicine. Quick! Quick!"

Abbas Khan, and some men with blankets, descended the breach to the foot, but among the dead on the slope they could find no one living. They dare not take a torch for fear of drawing upon them fire from the counterscarp. They listened, and at last the faint cry of *Aqua! Aqua!*" was repeated, but in a fainter tone.

"He is here," cried one of the men, "lying under others, and he is warm. I see his face now; it is the Feringi."

The Queen was right. Her quick ears had heard a low cry in a strange accent, which had escaped all others around her. It was from Dom Diego. When the mines had been sprung, he would have advanced at once under the cover of the smoke and dust which hung over the wall and ditch, but he found to his vexation that the men were not ready. The hour was not propitious, and the Court astrologer could not discover a fitting time till the afternoon. No one would follow him till the signal was given from the Royal pavilion. And though Dom Diego cursed the delay, he had no alternative but to await the general order, which came at length.

Dom Diego had done his part bravely, but in one of his desperate rushes up the breach, he fell from a match-lock shot but for a moment only. He rose to his feet, and strove to rally those with him, when his leg was shattered by a round shot, and in the discharge of copper hail which came with it, his left arm was broken, and he fell insensible among the heap of dying and dead, and was trampled down with the rest. Présently however, his consciousness returned; but it only revealed to him more certainly the hopelessness of his situation. Extrication from the mass of dead and dying was impossible, and he must die — unshriven, and without hope.

Abbas Khan, and the rest who had gone down the breach, lifted away the dead from above him and raised him up, placing him in a blanket, and carried him up into the fort. At the top they laid him down at the foot of the Bishop, who anxiously looked at the face of the sufferer, who was now insensible.

“Merciful God!” he cried, lifting up his hands to heaven; “it is Dom Diego, and he still lives! Bring him to the rest of the wounded. Quick, quick!” he continued, to Abbas Khan, “or he may die without help.”

CHAPTER IV

DIEGO'S DEATH

They carried the wounded man gently in the blanket as he lay. His pulse had somewhat rallied, and he was

even endeavouring to speak, but was forbidden. "Maria! forgive!" were the only words he could utter. Thus they took him on, nor was it far to the place. There were lamps lighted inside, and wounded men lying on mattresses on the floor; and some, which were the worst cases, upon small truckle beds; and on one of these they placed the dying man, supporting him by pillows. Then they carefully unfastened the morion and steel corselet, took off the heavy boots, and the coat of buff leather soaked in blood; and the Bishop supplied some soft underlinen from his own stock with which to dress the wounds. But this seemed hopeless, for several were fatal in their nature, and the loss of blood had been enormous.

Francis d'Almeida was bandaging one of the wounds, which was bleeding afresh, and Dom Diego recognised him, and, with a wan smile, put away his hand and said faintly,—

"It is of no use, brother Francis, I bleed within me, and I am dying. Hear my confession, which I will make to thee truly as long as I can speak, and then let me die."

"It is, indeed, needful, my poor brother," said the Bishop, gently, "for no man living could help thee now, and a brief time must close all thy earthly sufferings. Take this cordial, and it will revive thee. Is there aught that should be written?"

"Something," he said; "that my wealth may be secured to the Church. But write quickly, or I faint.

Can masses be said for my soul, that I may be forgiven ? The writing should be in Persian, for the banker at Surat to read."

"Write," he said, "to Hemchund Premchund, banker of Surat, " I am dying, my friend, and I will that all my effects in your charge be made over to the illustrious Archbishop of Goa, or whoever he may depute to receive them. Five thousand rupees are to be remitted to my brother, Francis d'Almeida, of this place, for the use of his Church I am in my full senses, and have this written in Persian that thou mayest comprehend. Be faithful, and discharge thy trust honestly.' "

Zora's rapid pen soon traced these words, and it was put into Dom Diego's hand by the Bishop. "It is complete," he said ; "sign it."

For an instant the dying man rallied, passed his hands across his eyes, and then, taking the pen, wrote in his bold hand,

"D. DIEGO DI FONSECA, S. J.

"My own writing.

"Written at Ahmednugger by Zora, the wife of Abbas Khan.

"Witness, Francis d'Almeida, Bishop of Ahmednugger, &c. Before us, 3rd Rujub, A. H. 1004, 22nd February, 1596."

Then Francis sent for his sister, and whispered, "It is he. Dost thou forgive him, Maria ?"

"Freely and truly," she said, firmly, "as I may be forgiven."

Dom Diego could not speak now, but he could hear the words which fell from the woman he had loved so madly, and with so sinful a purpose. He tried to raise his hands, but they fell back on the sheet helpless ; and his large bright eyes were glazing fast, and becoming dim. "Maria ! Maria ! forgive — pardon ! they heard him say in a whisper scarcely audible. And while the Bishop was holding up the cross before him, and preparing to recite the Beaticum, she could not resist the impulse, but took the cold hand of the dying man, and said, "I forgive ; fear not." Then a soft smile of peace and resignation seemed to pass over his features. "Forgiven," he murmured, and as the words of "Depart, Christian soul, in the name of God the Father Almighty who created thee," were spoken, the spirit passed away with a slight shivering convulsion, and the body lay still in death.

Zora found the Queen where she had left her, but she was more at rest. Her attendants had brought her a small carpet and a pillow, but she had not laid aside her morion and shirt of mail, and she was sitting close to the breach, where the relays of masons were working by the now bright starlight ; and the broken wall was rising rapidly course by course. Fortunately the old wall had not been shaken to its foundation, and on clearing away the rubbish the firm portion was soon struck. All through the night the work proceeded steadily ; and as day broke about twelve feet in height of the wall had been filled in, and the breach was secure

against all chances of sudden attack and surprise. The trenches were not even manned by the enemy; and as day dawned messengers came from the Prince Moorad with a flag of truce, congratulating the Queen on the heroic defence she had made, and informing her that she would hereafter be addressed by the Emperor as Chand Sooltana, the Queen Chand, instead of, as before, the Beebee, or Lady Chand, and begging her permission for the dead to be removed without molestation. And this was granted at once without hesitation. It had, indeed, become necessary to do so, for a sickening stench had already begun to arise from the festering mass, which would have become insupportable had the operation been delayed. But it was a heavy labour. Large gangs of men came by relays; but it was not till the day after, though they worked unremittingly, that the ghastly contents of the ditch were cleared away.

At last, as day was breaking, and a cold fresh wind arose refreshingly from the north, the Queen was persuaded to retire and take rest. What she had gone through, both in body and in mind, during the last two days and nights of the siege and assault, was almost superhuman; but the heroic spirit had never quailed and she appeared to have no sense of fatigue or want. There was no exultation in her manner, but to Nihung Khan, to Abbas Khan, and the crowd of officers who poured forth their congratulations, she simply said, "I thank the Lord, on whom I depended, and who, by the bravery of ye all, has given us the victory. Be ye as

humbly grateful as I am."

The Queen was soon in her accustomed seat in the hall of audience, doing her usual work; and she again wrote to the Beejapoor commanders, informing them of the repulse of the attack, the safety of the fort, and the perilous position of the Moghuls. She urged and entreated her friends to advance at once, when she should be able to make a sally to meet them; and she sent these letters by bold, careful messengers, who, dropping from the fort wall, mingled with the crowds who were removing the dead from the trench, and gained the Moghul lines. Here, however, they were intercepted, and taken to the Prince, who read the letters, adding what he had done on a former occasion, and inviting the reinforcements to hasten to their destination, as he was most anxious to meet them. "The sooner the better." And they did march at last.

But so slowly. The impetuous Queen, who knew they were near enough to be with them in three days at most, would fain have had them arrive even sooner, and would have helped them to drive the enemy ignominiously from their position. But they scarcely moved at all.

The good Bishop set out to the camp of Prince Moorad. The Prince, a fair young man of pleasing appearance, but plainly dressed in white muslin, was seated on a pile of cushions, accompanied by three elderly officers, who were evidently of high rank. He partly rose as the Bishop bowed low before him, returned

the salute, and bidding him be seated, said, "You speak Persian, sir?"

"Imperfectly," was the reply; "but I am used to speak it to my Queen and in the Court of Beejapoor. I can write it also as I speak it."

"Good," said the Prince. Wilt thou proceed to tell thy business? Is it secret or political?"

"Neither, my Prince," was the reply; "but personal only as regards the effect of one Dom Diego di Fonseca, who was a priest of the Christian Church, and who died of wounds received in the assault yesterday."

"Dead!" cried those present. "Dead! and thou knowest this of a certainty?"

"I dressed his wounds during the night, my lord; but it was hopeless; and I buried him this morning before the sun rose."

"And thy business, Senor Padre?" asked the Prince.

"The effects of the deceased; his horses, arms, pay. These are for masses, which he willed should be said; and to give peace to his soul, it is necessary they should be performed."

"Yes," said the Prince, smiling; but what effects had he, Senor Padre?"

"I know not, your Highness; but, he said, though only a humble priest, he had attained rank. He had not speech to tell me what he had, and was too weak to be questioned."

"It is against the law, your Highness," observed

one of the secretaries present, "to surrender the effects of one who has died in the State service ; but it is competent to you to give any gift in recognition of his death as a gallant soldier, and that will be more acceptable to the good Padre than horses, arms, tents, or elephants, all of which have been appropriated to the Government use."

"I demand nothing," said the Bishop ; "but whatever His Highness's generosity may dictate I will take thankfully, be it the smallest sum."

"Nay ! the son of Akbar Padshah knows how to be generous," said the man who had just spoken. "Permit your slave to send for two hundred mohurs, which will be equal to the value of the Christian's effects ;" and, writing a few lines on a slip of paper, the Prince's seal was affixed to it, and calling an attendant it was sent to the treasury.

Most profuse were the Bishop's thanks for, in his estimation, the princely liberality with which he had been treated.

And now," said the Prince, "as thou art a discreet and well-spoken person, and accustomed, no doubt, to the political affairs of Courts, we have a proposition to send, through thee, to the heroic Chand Sooltana, whose fame is spread over Hind, to which we invite her serious consideration." Then he paused for awhile, and resumed—

"Although," he continued, "by the fortune of war we have suffered a repulse from the fort with heavy

loss, which has deprived us of many brave comrades and soldiers, yet the might of this army is unimpaired ; and I am prepared to resume the siege as soon as the present truce is expired. The Sooltana, we know, is relying upon succour from Beejapoor ; but we have read her letters, written only this morning, and forwarded them to their destination. But she will see that it is impossible for the friends she expects to arrive in time to save her. They do not exceed six thousand horse, without artillery ; and we have with us thirty thousand of the Imperial cavalry. But we are without cause of war with Beejapoor ; and those who watch us we have respected, as they have respected us. If we attack the fort again ; which we have determined to do if our proposal is refused, the consequences will be deplorable ; for our soldiers, remembering the events of yesterday, will allow none to escape from it, and all must inevitably perish, including the Queen herself and the boy King. The consequences, therefore, rest with her alone ; and as a humane and merciful woman she will not provoke them by a false estimate of her own power.

“ Listen, therefore, Senor Padre ; and you, a man of God and of peace, will not refuse to exert your powers of persuasion with her, too. My generals and myself, that is the Khan Khanan and Khan Jehan Lody—and he introduced them—have this morning, with the aid of my learned secretary, drawn up the draft of a treaty between the kingdom of Ahmednugger and the Imperial Government of Hind, which, if

executed, will not only perpetuate the mutual good will of both States, but cement their attachment to each other, as long as the Sun and Moon shall endure. This is it," he continued, taking a roll of paper from the secretary's hand; "and I will briefly explain its purport to you."

"We demand no expenses of the war. All the treasures and jewels of Ahmednugger remain in the young King's possession.

"Our Royal army will quit its present position, and retire to its own territories, on guarantee by the Queen of no molestation, and orders for grain and forage to be paid for on delivery.

"In return we demand cession of the province of Berar, which Ahmednugger cannot defend, and which is a scene of disorder and rapine, and a cause of suffering to the country at large. It is not an ancient possession of Ahmednugger, whose proper hereditary dominions are guaranteed, it is a province retaken by treachery from Duria Inad Shah, who asked for aid against an usurping Minister, was imprisoned, and foully murdered. No one can deny this, Senor Padre, for it is as notorious as the Sun at noonday, and has long cried for justice at the hands of the Asylum of the World, my father.

"And now, Senor Padre, you have permission to depart. Take these in memory of the son of Akbar Padshah, who presents them to you;" and, taking a small rosary of pearls from his neck, he hung them round that

of the Bishop, while a mirdha in attendance threw a light Cashmere shawl over his shoulders. "And my good wishes for your success with the Sultana, to whom I forward by you my sincere admiration and respects. The sum on account of the Christian cavalier you will find in your palanquin."

Then the Bishop rose, and took leave. "I will do my best to stay further carnage. O Prince, he said, "but the question must rest with Her Majesty the Queen and her advisers." Then he was conducted to his palanquin, and passed out of the camp as he had come.

CHAPTER V

PEACE FOR AWHILE

It was yet day when Francis d'Almeida again reached the fort; and, after giving an account to Maria of the result of his embassy, and the liberal conduct of the Prince Moorad, he looked round his patients, and sent word to the Queen that he had been entrusted by the Prince with a political message which he could deliver to no one but herself.

Except for an expression of impatience now and again with her hands, the Royal lady heard the document to the end. "Some of it is fair, and some unfair," she said at length.

"Nevertheless, I will lay all before my council in durbar this evening, and will not delay an answer."

The evening "durbar" was numerously attended; all the principal officers and Ministers were present, and brought forward their recommendations for rewards to those who had distinguished themselves by acts of valour; and these having been granted, the general assembly was dissolved, and those only remained whom the Queen specified.

"First, my lords," said the Queen, "I desire to know from you all, unreservedly, in what condition you find the fort to be after the siege, up to the present time. My reasons for the question are urgent, and I will state them presently."

Then every department was reviewed.

The general result of the report was unsatisfactory. The condition of the wall was a peril which could not be remedied, and in regard to it there was not one dissentient voice. Then the Queen produced the draft she had received from Prince Moorad. "If," she said, "our condition for defence had been what I hoped it would be, I would have destroyed this paper, and allowed affairs to go on as they have begun; but as it is, ye, my lords, should know of it, and bear me witness that I have concealed nothing from you. Had my unworthy people of Beejapoor behaved as I expected they would, we should not have been reduced to these straits; but as they are, they are of no use to us, and the few that watch the Manikdown Hills are too weak to advance against thirty thousand Moghuls."

"They are clever men, these Moghul engineers,"

said the engineer officer who had before spoken. " We found, this morning, as we examined the counterscarp, that five other places had been mined to be blown in. There was not time apparently to complete or load the mines, else we should have been attacked in several points at once. They depended upon the effect of the five mines, which, but for the humane man who proclaimed them, would have been fired at once, and the side of the fort blown completely open; and they can do the same again."

The Queen then laid before all assembled the question of Berar. For her own part, she desired not to retain it. Ever since the kingdom had possessed it, misfortune and war had come with it, as was known to all. It need never have been taken; and cruel murder had been necessary to its retention.

Thus the subject was debated for some hours with animation. And after a further brief consultation, the proposal was accepted, with some slight modification, and despatched by the hands of Abbas Khan and Nihung Khan the next day. And no further objections being made, the treaties were mutually exchanged the day following, when a great portion of the Moghul army had already marched.

What a relief their departure was to all! How quiet the fort was now! No discharge of cannon night and day; no danger from missiles; no distress for water, which had before become serious, and for which there was no remedy. The people of the city, who for the most part had all retired to the villages at some distance,

flocked back, opened their shops and secret stores of grain, and all was once more as it had been ; while the public rejoicings at the victory of the assault and the departure of their bitter enemies were splendid, and attended by munificent distributions of charity in every portion of the kingdom.

The Queen's first care was for the wall, which was found, as the engineer officer of the fort had declared, in a perilous condition, and was taken down with difficulty, and not without risk to life. It was rebuilt, wherever necessary, from the very foundation. All the mined galleries of the Moghuls were traced, and inspected by the Queen in person, who could the more perfectly understand, with gratitude for the escape, the danger that the fort and all within it had escaped. She caused the young King Bahadur to be crowned again, and his further residence at the fort of Chawund was no longer necessary, the Queen herself taking charge of him.

It was wonderful to see, too, how rapidly and surely the internal administration was reformed, in fact, re-created. The revenue survey and assessments that Mullek Umber's great genius had suggested were carried on, as fast as possible, to the satisfaction of the people and the revenues were collected without unequal pressure, and were ample for all expenses of the State, affording, indeed, a large surplus. Outwardly, therefore, and to all appearance, the kingdom was at peace.

Retaining Nihung Khan as commander of the

forces, as he lacked administrative ability, she had appointed Mahomed Khan, an hereditary officer of much experience, to the general direction of affairs, and for a time all went prosperously. But the ambition of Mahomed Khan was not proof against the temptation to increase his power, and he confined Nihung Khan, aspiring himself to become Regent; and to deprive the Queen of all authority whatever. This the Royal lady resisted, and wrote urgently to her nephew, King Ibrahim, to send her such a force as would keep the rebellious Minister in check. To no one better than Abbas Khan, whose friendship for Nihung Khan was sincere, could she entrust this delicate negotiation. He was successful in the object of his mission. Soheil Khan was despatched with a sufficient force, which arrived at Ahmednugger in safety; but the Beejapoor troops found that their entry was opposed by the usurper, but the garrison, being faithful, seized him and made him over to the Queen. Meanwhile, however, Mahomed Khan had despatched letters to Khan Khanan, the Moghul general then in Berar, praying for assistance, as he was holding the country in trust for the Emperor of Delhi. Had this been discovered at the time, it is hardly possible that the usurper would have escaped with his life; but he was spared, Nihung Khan was released and appointed to the chief authority, and the Queen's power being re-established, the troops from Beejapoor were dismissed with handsome presents and grateful thanks.

The Moghuls, however, as Soheil Khan learned on his way back, had occupied districts much to the south of Berar, and he wrote to the King of Beejapoor for instructions. The King ordered him to stand fast on the Godavery river, and sent a large reinforcement aided by troops from Golconda. These allied troops advanced against the Moghuls ; but after a bloody general engagement which lasted for two days, victory remained with the Moghuls. Now the Queen Chand had sent to the assistance of the Beejapoor troops a number of her own for defence against aggression, and it is possible this was considered a cause for the new war which had commenced so inauspiciously.

These continued disturbances naturally attracted the attention of the Emperor Akbar. His son, the Prince Moorad, had died during their continuance, not long, indeed, after the victory over the combined forces of Beejapoor ; and the Emperor, now determined to prosecute the war in person, marched to the south, captured the important fortress of Asseergurh, and directed his second son, Prince Daniel Mirza, with Khan Khanan, his chief general, to undertake operations against the fort and kingdom of Ahmednugger.

CHAPTER VI

THE SECOND SIEGE OPENS

As the monsoon of 1598 broke up, the Emperor Akbar ordered the forces under his son Daniel and Khan

Khanan to advance without delay. With Queen Chand no commander of note remained in the field. All the troops on which she could have relied to check the enemy's advance were broken and much separated, and to bring them together would be a work of labour for which there was no time, and neither Beejapoor nor Golconda were in the humour to risk further collisions with the Imperial army by an advance. What troops it was possible to collect and organise, Abbas Khan, ever steady and faithful, collected about the city, and the fort was put in as complete order as possible, and provisioned liberally for six months.

To the command of the garrison Humeed Khan was appointed, originally a Beejapoor eunuch attached to the Queen's palace for many years. She had brought him with her on the last occasion; and, as he had been well educated and displayed soldier-like qualities, he had been employed in the field, and had on all occasions distinguished himself by valour and sagacity. In the first siege of the fort he had been selected both by Nihung Khan and Abbas Khan for command of a large portion of the garrison; and his valour on the repulse of the attack and in the general defence was as valuable as it was remarkable. Nor with these antecedents was it at all strange that he should be selected for the post he now held, with the approval of all, for he was popular with the soldiery; and had succeeded in uniting all in a determination to stand by the young King to the last, and defend their fortress to the utmost.

But it was seen and observed by all that a tone and manner of despondency possessed the Queen which was new to her character. Her only solace seemed to be the boy Bahadur, who, now about five years old, returned her affection with tenderness and a child's loving consideration ; and as she often strained him passionately to her breast, would cry, " Weep not, O grandmother ; when I am a man I will make all bad men thy slaves ; and we will be so happy, and no tears shall come again." Yes, the little fellow seemed to be a great solace and comfort to her. Not that she put Zora aside, or Mariña, for they were her daily companions as before.

The Emperor had sent a large body of the famous miners of the northern provinces, who in their peculiar vocation were unsurpassed in skill and daring. Khan Khanan, who knew the ground perfectly, had determined to risk as few of his own troops' lives as possible, and he had already seen proved how comparatively easy and how certain it would be to destroy the fort with gunpowder.

Osman Beg was in his place as general leader and director of the marches, and he had gained the confidence of the commander-in-chief with singular adroitness and plausibility. All these intervening years the mad craving of his heart for Zora had never diminished, nay, it had fed on its own imaginings. What would she not be now in the full possession of her matured beauty ? How different to the poor Fakeer's daughter of Juldroog, whom he had so madly loved. No one, he believed, knew

that he belonged to the Moghul forces at all.

The last march was made. The people of the city and its environs, warned by previous experience, had deserted their homes for some days, and nothing was left in the streets but starving, homeless dogs, who howled piteously night and day. Trees all around had been cut down; the defences of the parapets had been newly topped with clay; loopholes had been narrowed, and embrasures protected by sandbags and gabions. Even the covered way at the crest of the counterscarp had been cleared out and fitted for musketeers, and larger guns than before mounted in many places on the broad rampart and the bastions. So far as human means and the science of the time could ensure security, Ahmednugger was safe.

And the Moghul commander felt that it was so, and that all the skill of his own engineers would be needed to meet the preparations. After the first reconnaissance, in which he lost many men from the combined fire of the fort and the garrison of the covered way, the trenches were carried on by sap as before. But the defenders of the covered way, led by brave and enterprising officers, attacked the trenches at night, cut off the workmen, and vexed the whole operation until it made very slow progress in comparison with what it had done on the first occasion. These skirmishes, too, cost the defenders little in comparison with the terror they inflicted. The bardy Mahratta Mawalees, from the western ghauts, who afterwards became so famous under

Sivagee, fell on the enemy with their national shouts of "Hur ! Hur ! Mahadeo !" sword in hand, and seemed insensible to danger. The siege did not progress, and the young Prince Daniel and Khan Khanan grew impatient, for they well knew if there were the least sign of failure the Beejapoor and Golconda armies would be again in motion.

One of the chief leaders of these daring night attacks was a young Mahratta chief, one of the Sirkay family, who, with his cousin Peelagee, were hereditary officers of the Nizam Shahy kingdom, and had brought their own retainers to the defence of the fort. Both were famed for personal valour of no ordinary kind, and the Sirkay Mawalees had established a reputation for boldness in their peculiar manner of attack, which had gained them, deserved fame. Their post was in the covered way in the south-east angle of the ditch, which enabled them to make flank attacks which were most annoying to the enemy; and this being part of the particular command of Humeed Khan, he had several times brought them to the Queen's notice, and had them rewarded by rings and anklets of gold, and other valuable gifts. As if to vex Abbas Khan, with whom he had had some slight difference, he said to Sirkay one evening, "Let me come with ye to-night, and witness what ye let Abbas Khan share in, but not me." So it was arranged, and taking as few of his followers as possible, Humeed Khan went to the post at night, and, led by Sirkay, the Mawalees were soon on the crest of

the glacis, crouching like wild animals, to watch their opportunity. That night, however, the breaches seemed deserted. The men had been withdrawn, probably expecting an attack ; and Sirkay would have returned, but Humeed said, laughing, " As we are here, we may as well see for ourselves what is doing, and whether the general is mining, as I shrewdly suspect he is."

So they proceeded warily and cautiously, leaving the men behind ; but, on turning the angle of a trench, a party of men burst upon them and secured them. Both gave themselves up for lost, for under such circumstances life was little worth ; but, instead of putting them to death, they were taken roughly to an officer who sat near a covered way, which some men by the light of torches were driving on. It had been Osman Beg's turn of duty that night in the trenches, and he had taken up as secure a position as possible ; and he recognised Humeed Khan in an instant, who at once saluted him wonderingly.

"Dost thou know that I could behead thee at once as a spy ?" said Osman Beg.

"I know it," returned the other ; "and there would be one man in Ahmednugger the less, that is all. Nor would Abbas Khan, perhaps, be sorry to lose me."

"Then ye are enemies ?"

"Not so, openly ; but he hates me. He it is who hath vexed ye with sallies ; and as I would not be sent on one by him, I have come myself to-night."

"And the Queen ?"

"She is much what you remember her, but, methinks, weary of the war. She would like to get safe to Joonair, and give up the place. She does not say this openly, but that is in her heart."

"We shall take it from her, brother."

"Never," replied Humeed Khan. "She will perish in the ruins, but she will never yield."

"And Abbas Khan?"

"You know what he is, Meeah, only prouder and haughtier than he was; and he will never leave the Queen."

"And his wife, Zora? Dost thou see her?"

"I see her, Meeah! She is more beautiful than ever she was; and he dotes on her like a fool."

"I owe him revenge for what happened at Juldroog, and for what happened in the Palace."

And thou sayest she is thy wife. What wouldst thou give me for her?"

"I have little to give; but hark! ere we part. Give me the fort by any means thou wilt, and we may both be rich and free. Canst thou come again?"

"Not as I have done to-night; but I may be able to send a message. Now let me escape, and pretend to pursue me;" and Humeed Khan dashed on at his utmost speed, striking down one of the men who had held Sirkay apart. Sirkay shook himself free of the other, narrowly escaping a sword cut, and they soon rejoined the men they had left behind, who fired a volley of arrows to check the pursuers, and made their way into the fort.

"That was a narrow chance, my friend," said Humeed Khan, when he had regained his breath ; " but the fellow was too busy asking me questions to see that his men held me fast. But they seemed half asleep, and I watched my opportunity to shake myself free.

" I had given up hope, my lord," was Sirkay's reply ; "and I have to thank you for your part in my escape. We must be more cautious in future."

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST TRAGEDY

The eunuch reflected deeply on the strange adventures of the night. He had known Osman Beg from boyhood, when he was the companion of Abbas Khan. He had been jealous of Abbas Khan from the first, and he was now compelled to bear his authority and submit to his directions ; and such jealousy soon turns to hate. He might make his own terms, perhaps, through Osman Beg, with the Moghul general about the fort. Its possession would be an immense assistance to the Emperor's plans, and its betrayal would be richly rewarded. As to the Queen, he hated her because she had placed him in a subordinate position under her minion ; and what would it signify what became of her ? She was out of place now. There would be no great difficulty in communicating with Osman Beg, and he trusted to his good luck to carry on the intercourse that had been so strangely begun.

During this period Osman Beg had not been idle. He had contrived to see the eunuch many times at night; and, after the first chance interview with him, he had gone boldly to Khan Khanan, and had privately communicated to him that he had an old Beejapoor friend in the fort, who was, in fact, its commander, and that, if he were authorised, he could enter into negotiations with him for its betrayal, or its capture by surprise. Khan Khanan felt no scruple as to the means of attaining possession of a place which had already cost him so dear, and the capture of which by siege would probably extend so long; and the miners were already complaining of the hardness of the ground in the mines on which they most relied, which were to be sprung inside the walls, and not without much risk and difficulty. Humeed Khan was brought to him once, at night. Khan Khanan was then assured of the perfect condition of the fort, the high spirits of the garrison, and the inflexible determination of Abbas Khan to defend the place to the last extremity. "He is searching for mines daily," said the eunuch, "and should one be discovered, your whole work would be checked indefinitely."

"The difficulty, then, lies with the Queen and Abbas Khan," said the general.

"It does" replied the eunuch; "but it is not insurmountable; and I know for certain that if they are offered honourable terms of capitulation, and permission to remove all property from the fort, except guns and arms, they would agree to them."

“That would be impossible,” said the general; “we have the game in our own hands and we are ready to play it out. What is a month, or even more, to us? To them it is life or death. Were they to propose terms, indeed, it would be very different; but I know nothing less than unconditional surrender would satisfy the Emperor and I am not prepared to modify that. I suppose,” he added with a sneer, “your valiant Dekhanies would not give up their arms.”

“They would not,” said the eunuch; “and no one dare propose that to them.”

“Not even the Queen?”

“Not even she. Her life would be the instant forfeit.”

“Now,” continued the general, grimly, “suppose that such a report were spread as would raise a tumult among your Dekhanies, we might take advantage of it.”

“You might, my lord.”

“And we should be successful?”

“That I cannot answer for. It would depend upon yourselves.”

“Not entirely, sir. You who command the Dekhanies might persuade them to be neutral; to—to—in fact to throw themselves on the Royal clemency. And suppose I assured you personally two lakhs of rupees for the service, and through you all arrears of pay to your party, would that suffice?”

“Take it, friend,” said Osman Beg. “My lord will

give the amount in bills on Dehly or Guzerat, unless thou wait the issue and receive it here in cash. Thou canst not carry away the coin, and we cannot send it."

"I am content," said the eunuch, "for the service I shall render to the Emperor, whose name be honoured, to receive whatever may be given of his own gracious bounty."

"And remember," said the general, "that I have nothing to do with the results if the Dekhanies rise in mutiny. All that rests with them and you."

"I take the responsibility, my lord. I wish only for peace."

"You have forgotten me, Humeed Khan, said Osman Beg angrily, as they left the tent.

"Not so, friend," said the eunuch. "What I purpose will cause much confusion. The gallery of the counterscarp will be deserted, and thou knowest the way into the sally ports. Who will distinguish friends from enemies? Thou must do thy part, and I shall be able to aid thee. Fear not, one who desires a fair woman must needs do something to get her. More I cannot say; be ready on my signal, and join me. There will be enough of screaming women, and who will heed if one among them is carried away in a blanket? Surely thou hast some of thy old dare devils to help thee. If not, give up the girl."

"I cannot, and will not; she is my fate," returned Osman Beg, moodily; and for the time they separated.

For several days Abbas Khan had been diligent in his search for mines. Shafts had been sunk, and one was at last discovered which led directly under the palace. It was not loaded, and no one was guarding it ; but the chamber was ready, and it could have been charged at any time. Abbas Khan, and some others with him, explored it ; and, covered with dust and dirt as he was, he went direct to the Queen to tell her of it. " It will be destroyed," he said ; " and even now the masons are at work building up the gallery with stones. But who can say, Mother, how many more there may be, or where they are ? I have ordered cross cuttings to be carried on ; but the ground is nearly rock, and the Moghul miners have skilfully followed a soft vein which they discovered, and have [never quitted. Mother ! mother ! hear my last prayer to thee. Arise, and flee the place with the boy. When night falls, I will be with ye and guide ye forth."

" And leave ye all behind to perish ? I cannot do it ! " said the noble Queen, with a calm, serene expression on her countenance ; " but if all could be saved, I should be grateful. I have thought over the subject night and day since it was broken between us, and this is my final determination. I am prepared for death if it should come, but not for flight, and, to my perception, dishonour. Go, see to the mine ; trace others if it be possible, and to-morrow I will save all if I can.

The Queen was alone in her private chamber, musing over what she purported to do. She would address the

Prince Daniel himself, laying before him her desire to prevent the sacrifice of life, and offering him possession of the fort and all public property, on the condition that the garrison should march 'out with the honours of war.

Zora entered as the Queen had reviewed all this in her mind, and her mistress could not help being struck with her unusual beauty and brightness. Her hair had escaped, and hung in massive waves about her shoulders ; her cheeks were glowing, and her eyes sparkling with excitement.

" Oh, we have had such fun, mother ; the children have been romping together, and I and some of the girls were as mad as any of them. I would thou hadst been there. But why art thou so grave there is no bad news ? "

" I have a grave task to do, daughter," she replied. " Get thy writing materials, and I will dictate. Thou canst be trusted ; but I fear the secretaries, and what I tell thee must be secret till all know it." And Zora wrote.

" And now read it all over to me again, child. While it was in my mind the purport seemed uncertain ; but now that it is on paper," methinks it is clear enough." And when Zora had read the paper, which was only a few short paragraphs, the Queen bade her make a fair copy.

" What should I do without thee, darling ? " she said. " Now go and play with the children again ; but be within call."

“Is Humeed Khan without?” asked the Queen of an attendant eunuch. “If so, tell him I wish to speak with him;” and he entered soon after, and sat down, making his usual salutation.

“And the mine hath been discovered,” said the Queen, “under the very palace. Hast thou heard of it?”

“I have,” he said. “It was dangerous; but Abbas Khan has already prevented mischief, and is searching for others.

And the garrison; what said they?”

“There was some excitement at first, but it has subsided. All they cried was that they would defend the fort to the last, and you should lead them to victory, as you did when they followed the Standard of the Veil.”

“Ah!” said the Queen, with a sigh, “those were different times. Many were with me then who have since become traitors, and done to State irreparable injury. I have, I know, many faithful about me, but can I trust all?”

For an instant Humeed Khan thought that the remark was made for him, and the blood rushed to his dark face, almost causing it to glow. But the Queen continued—

As I was musing upon this, Khan, it occurred to me to write a draft of a proposal to the Prince, to allow all here to pass free with their effects, and to give up the fort, which appears no longer tenable, to him, on

behalf of his father. And we would fain have your opinion, as that of one of the most faithful of our officers, wise in counsel and brave in action. Read this draft, which no one but myself knows of, except her who wrote it fairly for me, and give thy opinion freely. I would save life if I can, and this appears to me the only course to pursue. Those who know me, even my enemies, will not charge me with any other motive."

Humeed Khan took the paper with a reverential gesture, and carefully perused it. As he read it he could hardly conceal his exultation and agitation. What it would have taken me days, nay weeks, to effect, he thought, she has done with her own hand, and of her own device. Surely now her time is come. Let her perish.

"It will be dangerous, lady," he said, with an affected calmness. "In their present temper the Dekhanies are not safe, and the last thing they think of is surrender. If they were to mutiny, who could stay them?"

But the Queen shook her head. "They know me and have trusted me, and I know them and trust them now. Believe me, when they know all, they will be satisfied I have done the best; but if——"

"I hear some voices without," he said, hurriedly, interrupting her. "Perhaps another mine has been discovered; perhaps——, but your slave will return immediately." And he hastily quitted the room.

The Queen could hear no voices then without, and

she sat thinking on what she had heard. There was danger, then, even from within; and those on whom she most relied might indeed, excited, be her worst enemies. "If it be so," she said to herself "I need not send this letter; but meet death here, or do as Meeah wishes me. And yet, no. Not that—not that; better death than flight!"

Suddenly a loud tumult of voices arose, and seemed to be approaching the palace by the plain in front. "It is this he heard," she said, and waited, with her heart throbbing. "They come close now."

It was Humeed Khan who had rushed out, as he left the Queen, into the great square where soldiers were exercising, and casting his turban on the ground, took up handfuls of dust, flinging it into the air, and crying, "Ye are betrayed! ye are betrayed, brothers! The Queen Chand is in treaty for the surrender of the fort! Deen, deen! She is not fit to live. Deen, deen! Follow me to her presence!" And he fired the rocket which was always ready for signals at the entrance.

There was no hesitation. At once, and with infuriated cries of "Treachery! treachery!" the mass surged into the great hall of audience with drawn swords, crying, "Where is the Queen? Cut her to pieces!"

The Queen had not moved except to rise from her seat, and she stood with her lips parted and her eyes distended with an absent fascination. How often in her life had a word from her quelled the wildest tumult

—how often had her excitable people calmed down ; but now ? And yet for a moment the foremost were awed by the presence all had loved and venerated but only for a moment. Humeed Khan, with a vile oath, rushed on and cut furiously at her with his sword, and others followed his example.

The noble woman fell covered with desperate wounds, but she still breathed ; and Zora, who had been at first appalled by the tumult, caught up her child in her arms, gave him to his nurse, and rushed to her beloved mistress's side. One ruffian would have struck her ; but another said, It is Abbas Khan's wife ; let her be."

She raised the Queen's head and tried to give her water from the vessel which always stood at her side, but the Queen put her hand aside gently, and smiled. " This is death, my child. I hear—I hear—the angel—call," she gasped. " Lord !—I come ; " and murmuring the Belief her head sank, and with a last sigh she breathed no more. The noble Queen's spirit was gone for ever.

Just then a number of other men rushed into the small apartment with their faces tied up, and in a moment Zora found herself covered by a blanket and borne away among the crowd which was roaming through the palace, plundering all that could be found. She screamed, but what voice could be heard in that tumult ? For there were thousands there, and still others swarmed into the great hall ; but rescue was at hand.

Abbas Khan, when he had left the Queen, went back to the shaft of the mine ; but as the workmen told him there was nothing more to be done at present but to continue the work that had been begun, he sat there encouraging the miners, and a number of his own guards, his faithful Beejapoor men, gathered about him. He heard the first shouts of the tumult, and all ran to the wall thinking there might be a sudden assault, but a man ran up, and cried, " To the palace ! To the palace ! The Queen is attacked ! " and, led by their master, the whole body ran thither at their utmost speed. It needed but a glance to see what had taken place.

" Who did this ? " cried Abbas Khan. " What vile traitor did this foul deed ? "

" Humeed Khan," said a eunuch boy, who was sitting by the body of the Queen, weeping ; " I saw him strike her first. And they have taken away Zora-bee, and little Meeah thy son is crying. Bring her back."

It hardly needed these words to urge the Khan on. Near the entrance of the audience hall he saw something covered with black carried along, and the mass of his powerful men charging through the crowd soon came up with it. Osman Beg's covering had fallen from his face, but he did not see his cousin at first, nor till he was suddenly pulled back did he think he would be recognised ; but he immediately attacked Abbas Khan with his sword. Neither spoke a word, but the ruffian had no chance of life, and lay dead at his cousin's feet almost before he had realised his presence.

“ My poor darling,” said the Khan, as he released Zora from her bonds, “ this is no place for thee. Go to Meeah. But thou art safe — blessed be Alla, thou art safe !” Truly it was no place for her. The floor around was a pool of blood; and the bodies of some strangers, among whom were several negro slaves, lay there in ghastly death with their master. Zora cast one shuddering glance on the horrible group, and, covering her face, hurried back to her child, trembling and terror-stricken.

Meanwhile Yasin, with another body of the guard, had found Humeed Khan hiding in an ante-room, and brought him, with his arms tied together at his back, to the spot where Abbas Khan stood. “ He did it ! he did it !” cried a thousand voices. “ Let him die !”

“ Thou art not worthy of a soldier’s death,” said Abbas Khan, “ but of a felon’s. Yet, if thou wilt, say why thou didst this foul crime ? What had she done to thee, who was thy benefactress for years ? ”

“ It matters not why I did it,” was the sullen reply. “ I did it, and rid the world of one who had vexed it too long ;” and he spoke no more. Then some men, taking him up, put a noose round his neck, and, throwing the end of the rope over the branch of a tree, left him to wrestle out his life in the air.

By this time the rest of the Abyssinians, the Arabs, and other foreigners, had assembled in the square, and the majority of the Dekhanies, who were deploring the Queen’s murder with passionate weeping, separated

quietly, crying to Abbas Khan to lead them against the Moghuls, for they were true to their King, of whom he was now the only protector.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Satisfied that all was tranquil, and that the fort and garrison had subsided into their usual calm, Abbas Khan returned to the palace and reverently visited the remains of his beloved mistress and mother, for he had always looked on her in the place of one; and as such, and his Queen, paid her reverence. Outside, in the hall of audience, and in the ante-chamber of the room in which she lay, were Moollas, reading and chanting the stated portions of the Koran. Incense was burning, and its smoke hung about the clustered pillars, niches, and fretted ceilings; and within, the women and eunuchs of the household were wailing, moaning, and occasionally breaking into passionate cries and adjurations. Zora and the young mother of the boy King were sitting at the head of the Queen, with their faces covered, and heads bowed down, wailing like the rest; and as Zora looked up, her husband saw her face and eyes swollen with weeping, and full of unutterable woe. She could not speak, and longed to throw herself into his arms. But that was not the place for such an action, and she remained kneeling.

Nor could Abbas Khan say more than the usual

salutation to the dead. "Peace be with thee, and the blessing of the Lord," and burst into an almost uncontrollable passion of weeping. All the majesty, all the heroism, all the benevolence, all the political ability of the noble woman lying there, in the last sleep of death, surged up to his memory, mingled with tender thoughts of her loving kindness, her bearing with all his waywardness from boyhood; and now a traitor's sword had closed that noble life, without a warning or a suspicion.

The Queen's face was not changed, except to wear the expression of a glorious death. A soft smile, as if of peace in the last supreme moment, lingered on her lips; and though her poor slight body was covered with wounds, the face had escaped mutilation, and had become more beautiful, if possible, in death than in life. Who could forget it? And long they gazed and watched. Who ever would forget it? Zora would fain have had him stay, for she needed comfort; but with a few soothing words he said, "I must not sleep to-night, darling; but watch, too, over ye all, as is my duty. It may be that the enemy may be unquiet, and the people need all my vigilance." Then he took up his boy and kissed him, and blessed them both.

At the earliest dawn he was with the mourners again, and what remained of the Noble Queen was reverently taken up and carried to a little private cemetery in an angle of the fort, and there laid in the earth. Abbas Khan had sent a flag of truce to the

Moghul trenches to say that unshotted guns would be fired for the Queen ; and the salvoes of artillery which mingled with the chants of the Moollas and the wailings of the people, who crowded every point from which the last procession could be seen, were not noticed ; while during the day a letter of condolence, in the name of the young King, was sent by the Prince Daniel, an act of unexpected courtesy.

We cannot linger on the sadness that fell over all. Under such circumstances a public calamity has greater effect than at any other ; and sadly were the noble lady's cheering smile and hearty words of encouragement missed by all to whom they had become familiar. What was Abbas Khan to do ? Who was to undertake the Regency on behalf of the young King ? Zora entreated her husband not to do so. Then, too, Ahmednugger was severed, and she longed for a peaceful existence at Beejapoor. Her life had been one of continual alarm, danger, treachery, and war, and still danger most imminent surrounded them ; and yet she could not counsel flight.

The suspense was not of long duration, and after consultation with the officers of the fort, it had been determined to send a flag of truce into the Royal camp — not to write — to ascertain what terms would be given for the surrender of the fort, and the conveyance of the young King to Joonair. But the proposal was never made. Encouraged by the death of the Queen, and convinced that the garrison had lost heart, Khan Khanan

redoubled his exertions, and though the great mine was disabled, yet those in the counterscarp and under the ramparts, five in all, were ready, and were loaded during that day and the next.

On the day following, masses of the Moghul troops were seen from the cavalier to be marching upon the fort, and taking up new positions during the morning. It seemed as though new ground was to be broken to the east and north ; or a feint made to cover some operation outside. A few shots were fired at them, but they were too distant to have any effect. The movement was, however, a feint, and a successful one, for under cover of it the enemy had lodged a heavy mass of infantry as a storming party in the trenches, and soon after midday, at the hottest period, the mines in the counterscarp and rampart were fired simultaneously ; and the effect was so sudden and so unlooked for, that the enemy made his way into the ditch and up the breach, now a wide and easy one, without much loss and without check, and a scene of massacre ensued which we have no need to describe.

Abbas Khan had been sitting on the rampart, watching with several of his men, when the mine nearest them was sprung, hurling the guard of one of the smaller bastions into the air, when he felt himself struck with a large piece of stone, and remembered no more. Some of his men took him up at once, and led by the faithful Yasin, carried him to his apartments in the palace, and aid him down. But he still breathed, and Zora, who

knelt by him, could see no blood ; and through the terror of assault, and the shouts and shrieks of the combat at the breach, she continued to bathe his face and hands with water, and to rouse him to consciousness. But nearer and nearer grew the tumult, spreading on all sides ; and, expecting momentary death, she knelt with her boy beside his father's body and said the last prayers of the dying. While she was thus employed a Rajpoot officer of rank, accompanied by a crowd of men, rushed in pellmell with uplifted swords, but their commander restrained them ; and Zora, seeing his action, fell at his feet, beseeching her husband's life.

"My name is Bennee Singh," he said, "and I have led the assault. To me and my Rajpoots is committed the charge of all the treasure of the fort and the command of the palace, and we have orders to spare those we find and to protect the young King. Direct us to him, and I will leave some men to guard you and yours. Do not fear, you are safe ; and we bear no enmity to wounded and helpless men. See to him, Hurpul Singh," he continued to a sub-officer ; "let him not be disturbed, or the lady ; and keep people out — perhaps he is dying."

But Abbas Khan was not dying. He had only been struck senseless by the blow of the stone ; and after a while, to the infinite joy and thankfulness of his wife, he opened his eyes, and would have stretched out his arms to her, but one — his left — was powerless.

"What has happened, Zora ?" he said. "Why

am I here and who are these men ? ”

“ Be still,” she said, gently. “ Thou art safe, and the child is safe ; but the fort is taken by the mines. Dost thou not hear the tumult without ? ”

“ And I was not with them to strike a blow in our defence ! O cruel fate ! ” And he tried to raise his arm again, but it fell back.

“ Be content, my lord,” said the man called Hurpul. “ It was your luck the first time, it is ours now ; and we have won. Even now the gates are wide open, and masses of men are entering. Presently the Prince and Khan Khanan will come, and a salute will be fired. But is thy arm broken ? Let me see. No,” he continued, “ it is sound, but the bruise is a bad one ; and thou art as helpless as a child. Thank God for thy life as thy lady doth. Get her to make a fomentation of meem leaves and turmeric and thou wilt be relieved. When the Khan Khanan comes I will bring him hither.”

Zora hid herself when the great general came in soon afterwards, and spoke kindly to her husband. “ I have not forgotten thee, Abbas Khan. From the time the treaty was executed I have wished thou wert among us, as friends of Beejapoor, rather than these faithless, fickle murderers ; and thou might be so yet.

That evening, in closed palanquins, Abbas Khan and his wife, the boy King and his mother, were removed to the convenient and elegant structure we have mentioned, which has been converted now into an English residence. The cool, pure, untainted air, and

the pleasant shady garden, soon effected Abbas Khan's recovery from the dangerous and painful contusions he had received, and all he now desired and besought from the Prince and his general, who came frequently to converse with him, was permission to depart with his effects to Beejapoor. Both the Prince and Khan Khanan had been greatly struck by his ability and intelligence, and would fain have had him enter the Moghul army, and assume a high command; but he respectfully declined the honour. His estates in Beejapoor, with Zora's, were very considerable. The Queen had much enriched him, and all the contents of his private treasury in the fort had been scrupulously made over to him. He had afforded all the information possible as regarded the State affairs, and he and Zora had visited the humble grave of their beloved mistress to perform some necessary ceremonies there; but Zora could never enter the palace.

So, when a suitable opportunity offered, Abbas Khan and his family, accompanied by all his retainers who had escaped the siege, set out for Beejapoor, travelling by the route by which they had come, past Nuldroog and Almella, where they were welcomed with joy. We may imagine, too, with what hearty rejoicing his Uncle and the Lady Fatima welcomed their long absent ones, and with what profuse entertainments the little Meeah, now a sturdy little fellow, was inducted into the general heirship of the house. But Abbas Khan's most impressive reception was from his King, who grateful for his devotion to Queen Chand, received

him in a grand durbar, and raised him to the highest rank of nobility, and conferred upon him other substantial proofs of his gratitude. Not long afterwards, Dilawar Khan, Viceroy of Moodgul, whose health had failed, gave up his viceroyalty and military command, and, to his wife's infinite delight, Abbas Khan accepted both with gratitude.

Before Abbas Khan had been allowed to leave Ahmednugger, the boy King, Bahadur Nizam Shah, with his mother and other female relatives, had been taken away as prisoners, and were confined in the fortress of Gwalior. All the treasures and regalia of the kingdom were confiscated and removed thither with him. Thenceforth the greatest portion of the kingdom was annexed to the Moghul empire; but for some years after, the remainder, up to the frontiers of Golconda and Beejapoor was ruled over by Mullek Umber, on behalf of a descendant of the Royal family, who was crowned under the title of Moortuza Nizam Shah, but the family finally became extinct about the year 1607.

The Bishop and Maria were miserable until they heard the real facts of the capture of Ahmednugger. "We are safe," Zora wrote to Maria, "and are going to Beejapoor. You must come too, and live together again." But the country was hardly safe yet for travelling, and they were detained till Mullek Umber could send them to Nuldroog by the way they had come. At Beejapoor they found that Abbas Khan and Zora were already established at Moodgul, and after a short

stay at the capital, they proceeded to their destination. The Bishop had applied to the King for a letter to Goa, in relation to the wealth of Dom Diego, and it was satisfactory to the worthy man that the affair had been arranged by the banker, and that the Church was the richer by several lakhs of rupees.

How thankful and how happy they all were. Nor was it long before Maria and Zora revisited the scene of their first meeting. The old house was cleaned out for them and purified, and their first excursion from Moodgul was to that well-remembered place. Even the Lady Keysama was not above meeting the Lady Zora Khanum, and they talked over bygone events with interest. As to Runga Naik and Burma, they were beside themselves with joy; insisting that the ladies should see the cataract from the palace at the top of the fort; that Zora should revisit the fearful scene of her abduction and escape; and she pointed out, with eyes swimming in tears, where she had been confined, and how delivered. "Your slave only regretted that he did not go in and slay that vile ruffian in his sleep," said Burma Naik; "but the Lord reserved him for your hand, Meeah, and we rejoice that he died at your feet like a dog." This, however, was a subject which the Khan rarely alluded to, and the Beydur saw that it had better be avoided.

They revisited the place many a time afterwards, but on the first day, neither too full to be frightful, or too empty to be meagre, the noble cataract was in its

full beauty ; and they decended from the palace by the small path by which Zora had been carried by Jooma, the slave, and sat down on the gun in the bastion, as they had done before. In the distance the giant fall sparkled with rainbows, and the spray at times was full of golden light, which, from the evening sun, spread itself over the rugged sides of the ravine, over the feathery foliage which clothed the crags, and the plashing water which fretted against the rocks at their feet far below. While the little Meeah, in his father's arms, pulled handfuls of flowers from the creepers which hung everywhere around, Zora and Maria sat hand in hand without speaking ; and perhaps their hearts were too full for aught else than loving and reverent memories of the past. Nor was the place ever left unvisited by Zora in after days, when the little mosque was repaired, and prayers were said by an old Syud whom she placed in it ; and she came there with her children on the sacred anniversaries of her grandfather's death. But he is forgotten now ; and of the "Peer," who receives a traditional anniversary worship to this day, no name has been preserved. We may be sure that on these anniversaries no more delightful subjects for stories for the children arose, than their mother's accounts of her early perils and escapes. Once little Meeah said, looking earnestly in her face, "Mother, how didst thou escape from all these troubles ?" And Zora answered, gently, "I trusted in the Lord, my child."

Reader, who hast followed us in the course of this

old world tale, we need hardly tell you that all are forgotten now ; and there are traces of none except the two Beydurs, whose descendants still inhabit Korikul and Kukeyra, and are unchanged from what they used to be in the times of which I have written. For the rest, Beejapoor is a magnificent ruin, but Ahmednugger flourishes as an English station and cantonment, and the stout old fort is in perfect preservation. In both, and in the country round, nay, in all Dekhan, the memory of Chand Beebee, who defended the fort, and was murdered by her ungrateful people, and her heroic deeds and devotion in the battle of the "Standard of the Veil," are still sung and recited as the fittest memorials of

" A NOBLE QUEEN.

NOTE

There are no records traceable at Moodgul of the worthy Bishop and his devoted sister, but they are believed to have remained there some years, and to have eventually returned to Portugal. But the small Christian Churches so strangely preserved under the continuous Mussulman Governments of the Dekhan still survive, and are steadfast to their faith. They are still as they existed at the period of this tale—Moodgul and Raichore, with their dependencies, Chittapoor on the Bheema, and Aurungabad, and they are ministered to by priests under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Goa.

