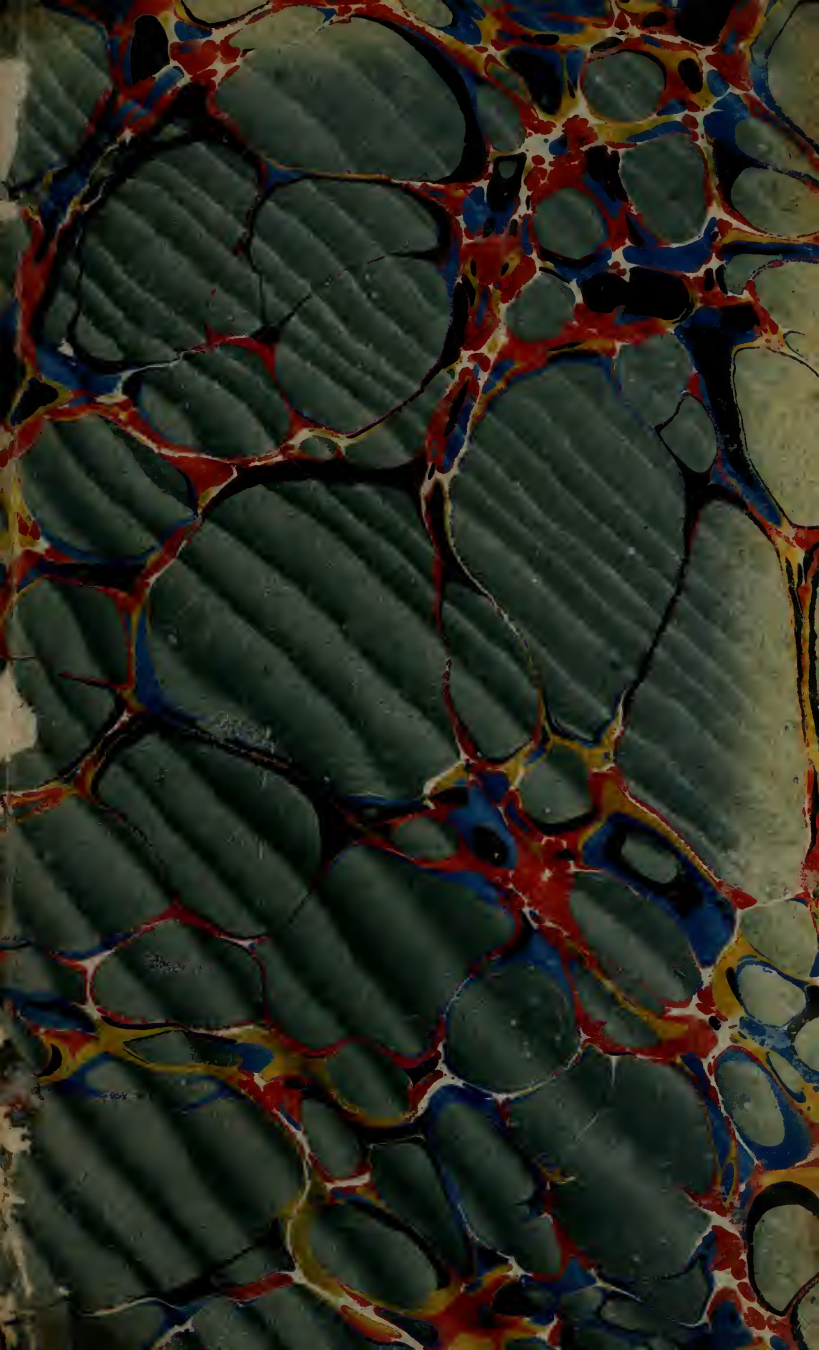






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THE
PERSIAN ADVENTURER:

BEING

THE SEQUEL

OF

“THE KUZZILBASH;”

BY J. B. FRAZER, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF A TOUR TO THE HIMÀLÀ MOUNTAINS;
TRAVELS IN PERSIA, &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

IN presenting the continuation and conclusion of these Memoirs to the public, and acknowledging with due gratitude the share of favour bestowed upon the first portion of the “ Kuzzilbash,”* the translator entreats the reader’s attention to a few observations.

In preparing the following pages for publica-

* Those who may be at a loss to comprehend the change of title in the following work, from that under which the first part was published, will cease to wonder at it when they are informed, that so little did that title serve to convey an idea of the work it announced, that a respectable bookseller informed the author he had actually been more than once asked whether the “ Kuzzilbash” was not a *cookery book*!

tion, it has been an object to avoid as much as possible the interminable prolixity of the original narration ; and the task of selection and abridgment from the mass of his materials required an unsparing and determined hand. In executing it, the details of many years, however replete with historical interest, have of necessity been passed over, or very slightly noticed ; and in some cases the translator has substituted his own words for the more diffuse style of the author, to connect portions of the narrative ; while in others the original has been unceremoniously pared down to suit the intended scope of the work.

The history of a soldier's career, principally in the service of a great conqueror, replete with military enterprise or hazardous adventure, must of necessity be in great measure made up of broil and battle, and can afford but little opportunity for descriptions of those milder and more peaceful scenes which may have given interest to an earlier period of his life ; and, perhaps, in spite of the translator's endeavours to vary the character of his work, in so far as his original enabled him to

do so, it may be the opinion of some, that its interest depends too much upon sources of stern excitement, and appeals too little to the softer and more grateful emotions of the soul. To such he can only reply, by adverting to the somewhat unmanageable nature of his materials, and pleading the difficulty of departing from an original design already far advanced towards its completion. His object was to bring before the English reader, in an amusing shape, some scenes and sketches of manners, in countries but little known in Europe, and descriptive of a period of considerable interest in Asiatic history. The memoirs from which he has selected the work in question appeared no bad vehicle for such a purpose, although from their very nature it must necessarily occupy a space of many years rather than describe the details of some single important event, and would present to the reader a great variety of actors, each but slightly sketched, instead of portraying a few characters in powerful colours.

It would be as impertinent as vain, to advert to

the various opinions and strictures which have reached the translator's ear from many and friendly quarters. Some have objected to the introduction of historic matter; others to the strong delineations of atrocity or immorality, both public and private. To the last, it might be replied, that the object of the work being to depict national character and manners, and truth being the most valuable ingredient in such delineations, it seemed better to hazard occasioning a little disgust by an uncompromising adherence to reality, than to fritter away their effect by an over nicety of terms, and by repressing the sterner or more revolting traits which obtrude themselves upon the eye of an observer as peculiarly characteristic of the people. To all readers, however, who object to this work, in part, but who honour it with their approbation on the whole, the translator, in eastern fashion, would beg leave to address the following apologue, which may be found in the writings of the moral Saadi.

One gloomy evening, a number of travellers

chanced to arrive at an old caravanserai, which was situated in a wide plain, at a distance from any village ; and the darkness setting in, together with the rising storm, they were forced to take up their quarters there for the night. The keen appetite created by a long day's journey soon made it a matter of interest to inquire what provisions each had brought with him, and whether the place itself afforded any means of supplying the deficiency.

The result of the inquiry was disheartening enough :—one had only a little salt ; another some grains of pepper ; a third, the remains of some indifferent butter ; and a fourth a few kish-mishes, or small raisins in a piece of bladder : not one had a morsel of any thing solid ; and though all these things might assist as seasoning, they were of little value as food. It appeared at length, that an old man who resided alone in the caravanserai had a tolerably substantial piece of meat, and a maun of rice in an earthen jar ; and this he proposed to dress for the good of the company, according to a receipt of his own, which he

assured them would turn the provision to the best account, and satisfy them all, provided each man contributed what he might have of spices and seasoning to improve its flavour.

The fire was accordingly prepared ; the dish was cooked ; and the company sat down with the eagerness of hungry men to the repast. For a while all was silence ; but as the stomachs filled the tastes grew nice, and they began to criticise the cookery. “Not a bad pillaw this,” said one ; “but the old fellow has overdosed it with pepper.”—“The pepper is well enough,” observed a sallow thin-faced man, “if he had not drowned the dish with that vile rancid butter:—whose stomach, in the name of Allah ! can digest such trash ?”—“Butter!—I would consent to all the butter and the pepper—ay, and half the spice of India, if the old fool had spared us that load of filthy kishmishes,” grumbled a stout important-looking person :—“who ever heard of kishmishes in a salt pillaw ?”—“Who would eat kishmishes ?” repeated a dapper little fellow, with an air of sprightly vivacity which bespoke the poetaster :

—“ what ! rob life of its sweets ?—rather banish that greasy load of animal obesity, and season the dish with your sweets and acids, your spices and your rich condiments, which exalt its flavour, and stimulate the senses without palling the appetite.”

There was among the party a dervish, who, during this dispute, had been sedulously and silently applying himself to the purpose for which the dish *was* made ; namely, satisfying his craving appetite. “ Brothers,” said he at length, “ abuse not the cloke which shelters you from the storm, although the wind may reach you through a hole in its skirt. An evil mind will turn blessings into curses, while the thankful heart rejoices over a crust and a cup of water. Ye have eaten, ye have drank, and are filled :—but had this old man withheld his pittance, from whence could ye have done so ? It is fitter therefore that ye acknowledge his services than that ye rail at his failings.”—Courteous reader ! may you be disposed to follow the example of this discreet dervish, and re-

ceive in good part the following humble efforts to instruct or to amuse you, and like him to visit with leniency the faults and failings of their author!

THE
PERSIAN ADVENTURER.

CHAPTER I.

A DEPARTURE.

THE conqueror of the Affghauns and deliverer of his country, determined to complete his arduous task of restoring the tarnished lustre of the Persian diadem, had once more quitted his native Khorasan ; and girding on the sword of resolution, advanced on the swift courser of vengeance to humble the pride of the haughty Ottomans, and to drive them from the rich and delicious plains of Irak and Azerbijaun, upon which they had audaciously seized.

No sooner had the august footsteps of his highness ceased to bless the soil of Khorasan, than the

spirit of disaffection burst forth again amongst the ever restless chiefs and tribes of that extensive province ; and while the fortunate banners in other quarters continued resplendent with the sunshine of victory, the Zoheir-u-doulut, Ibrahim Khan, who had been left as governor in the absence of his highness, experienced no small difficulty in maintaining peace and good order with the small military force which had been left at his disposal ; and it was only by dint of the most anxious and unceasing vigilance on the part of the governor, and the indefatigable zeal and activity of his officers and troops, in flying with a rapidity almost incredible to each point of danger as it was discovered, that the discordant materials of his charge were kept under controul, and tranquillity preserved for a season.

But this was a state of things which could not long endure. The prolonged absence of the master-spirit at length encouraged the more daring Koordish chiefs and tribes of the Attock to throw off the slight mask they had hitherto worn ; they gave no credit to the brilliant accounts of successes which fame brought from the west, while unaccompanied by any tangible proofs of increased power ; and they believed, because they wished it, that the enterprise which Nadir had embarked in was one beyond the power even of his mighty arm ; that the star of his fortune was declining,

and that he never would again return to punish their treachery. They broke out into open rebellion, and replied to the threats and remonstrances of Ibrahim with contemptuous indifference or stern defiance.

The Ghiljee Affghauns, too, at this crisis, forgetting their deplorable failures on former occasions, took courage, like cowards, at the supposed weakness of their old enemy, and uniting with the Abdallees, under their chief Zoolfecar Khan, commenced a system of predatory incursions upon the Persian territories.

To repress these aggressions, and to restore order in the province, required more powerful means than the governor possessed. But a vigorous exertion was absolutely necessary; and Ibrahim resolved to employ every effort of force or policy in his power, in the hope of intimidating his enemies and repressing their attacks; at all events until he should receive the aid he looked for from his brother. All the troops he could muster were sent under able and experienced leaders against the more bold and open rebels; even the garrison of the city of Mushed was dangerously reduced to strengthen those detachments; while other agents, not less confidential and resolute, were employed to negotiate with such chiefs as had not yet openly proclaimed their disaffection; to confirm their wavering loyalty, and to solicit or

demand, as might be expedient, from each, such aid as his means might afford, or his good-will be induced to grant.

It was a stirring and an anxious time; detachments were constantly issuing from the gates, or troops re-entering them, flushed with success, and loaded with plunder; or, as sometimes happened, mortified, crest-fallen, and with numbers diminished by repulse, if not defeat. Our lives, truly, were not spent in ease or indolence; and I among the rest had little time to enjoy the sweets which generally accompany successful love. The intervals of duty were short and precarious; and it often happened that upon arriving at the durkaneh,* to give in my report of some particular service, I was despatched to some other distant quarter, without the comfort of being permitted to enter my own house. Often and earnestly did we all pray to be blessed by the sound of the trumpets of Nadir; or to see the gleam of his banners appearing from the Passes of Toorgabeh; but though we longed for the aid of our comrades to lighten the severity of our toils, there was not a man of us who thought of flinching from his duty, or of murmuring at the hardships to which it might expose him.

One day, after returning from a rapid expedition to the neighbourhood of Dereguz, I was waiting

* Gate of the palace or of head-quarters.

at the durkhaneh with some other officers, when I received an order to repair immediately to the presence of the governor. He was seated in his khelwut,* attended by a confidential peishkhidmut,† who stood waiting his orders; a meerza or secretary was writing at the lower end of the room, and one or two furoshes, and a nassakchee,‡ stood at a distance in the court, before the chamber in which he was seated. He beckoned me to come up; and ascending the steps which led to the apartment, I stood before him. His frank and open brow was contracted with care. “Ismael,” said he, (after I had made my obeisance,) “there is a service of importance, and of danger, to be performed, for which I require a steady and faithful agent. I have selected you as one well qualified for the task: you will not, I am confident, disappoint my expectations of your sagacity and presence of mind; which, I warn you, may be put to a severe trial. Listen,” pursued he, (interrupting my assurances of devotion,) “we have no leisure for speeches. If I had not confidence in you, you would not have been called; for, upon this occasion, the service on which I am about to send you is one of negotiation, where the head will be more needed than the hand. You will be attended by an escort; but as it is our policy to invite con-

* Private apartment. † Body servant.

‡ Executioner.

fidence by appearing to repose it, and to lull all suspicion to rest by seeming to entertain none, your party must be small. On the other hand, as it is not less important to guard against treachery, in as far as in conformity with these principles may be practicable, it shall consist of tried and well-armed men. With these you must repair forthwith to the presence of Mouzuffer Khan, the Carawee chief of Toorbut Hyderee: we have good information that he is at this time in correspondence with the Abdallee dogs and the Ghiljees of Furrâh; negotiating, not only for immunity for himself and his territories, during their intended predatory attacks upon our eastern districts; but, for an extension of his boundaries, in case he shall afford facilities, and eventually more active assistance to them in their warlike operations against the dominions of the Persian crown.

“ I need not explain how important it is to the interests of Nadir, and of Persia, that this intelligence should be interrupted; and that it would be a consummation still more desirable, if the aid thus destined for our foes could not only be detached from strengthening their hands, but thrown into ours against them. To negotiate as far as practicable this arrangement is the principal object of the intended mission; and, knowing as you do, the present situation of affairs in this province, it is unnecessary to urge your exerting

every effort of your skill and judgment to render it effectual. It will also be proper that you take pains to ascertain the general temper of the district through which you have to pass; to confirm the well-disposed in their allegiance; caution the wavering or ill-advised, and use all the means of persuasion in your power to create a friendly disposition towards the cause and the authority of my august brother.

“It is moreover expedient that you depart on the instant. The noon-day sun must see you distant from Mushed: every thing is arranged: your attendants are in readiness, and your further instructions are contained in this paper. Go; may your journey be prosperous!—may God protect you!”—“Chushm!* your slave obeys. May your favour increase!” replied I; and taking the scroll he offered, I quitted the governor’s presence.

But in spite of the honourable and interesting nature of my mission I did not enter upon it with that alacrity which I was wont to feel when departing upon hazardous expeditions. The pacific, or at best equivocal nature of the duty appointed for me to perform, so far from rendering it welcome, rather inspired me with disgust and disquiet. My spirits sunk unaccountably, and a foreboding sense of evil hung like a weight upon my mind, as I hurried homewards to make the few

* On my eyes be it.

arrangements necessary for my journey, and to bid Shireen adieu for a season:—a season!—might it not be for ever?

The character of this Mouzuffer Khan was not unknown to me; and it was by no means such as to render the office of envoy, upon a mission of this nature, in any degree desirable. Chief of a powerful tribe, residing in a strongly fortified city, and in a remote district, surrounded by his kindred and his clan; however low he might rank abroad in the scale of independent nobles, he was both powerful and absolute at home, where he ruled with a very despotic authority.

Exposed by the local position of his territories to the incursions of the Affghauns of Furrâh and Herat, whose attacks he could not have singly withstood, he was forced into a system of craft and policy, which fostered, as it originated in, a disposition naturally treacherous and deceitful; and obliged, on the other hand, in self-defence to maintain a larger armed force than his private resources, or the revenues of his country could provide for, he supplied the deficiency and gratified his natural cupidity by plundering such caravans and travellers as came within his reach; and occasionally, by surprising some distant and unsuspecting village belonging to a neighbouring province, taking care that the blame and consequences of such outrages, when likely to be

overtaken by punishment, should light upon the predatory tribes, or marauding bands which he generally called to his aid upon occasions of this kind.

In truth, the connection which he maintained with his more powerful eastern neighbours rendered it a matter of no small difficulty for any of the authorities in his vicinity to demand satisfaction with effect, or to enforce the claims of justice. He was, in a word, notoriously treacherous, rapacious, and cruel; and to place oneself voluntarily in the power of such a chief was scarcely less hazardous and imprudent than it would be to enter the den of an angry and famished lion. Independent, therefore, of any superstitious foreboding, there was sufficient cause for contemplating the event with a feeling of doubt, if not of dread. But omens of evil were not wanting to depress me.

While pondering on these considerations, and lost in thought, I passed through the principal bazar on the way to my lodgings: I was roused from my reverie by a shrill voice close to my ear, which pronounced these words in a tone of malevolent imprecation that fixed all my attention: "Ay, let him go, in the devil's name; the way is open—let him set forth—see when he will return: but ye need not gaze so—he never will return!"

Startled by a denunciation, which seemed aimed especially at me, I looked round for the speaker. It was an old decrepid woman, who had been venting her displeasure, as it seemed, upon some absent person; for she was gazing upon vacancy, regardless of the spectators who had been attracted by her vehemence. This vehemence had nothing to do with me; and yet I felt as if the weight of her malediction had found its mark in my person.

A young man now hurried from a neighbouring shed, and taking the old woman's arm, "Come, come, mother," said he, "dream here no longer; here is no one to curse at: beware lest these evil wishes of yours fall on the head of some innocent person, and bring the wrath of Allah on your own family." "You are right, my son," rejoined the old hag, as her eye wandered over his person with its uncertain vision; "let not the innocent suffer for the guilty. God forbid!—but I must curse—I must curse *him*." The young man now led her away, and relieved me from the painful fascination of her disgusting countenance.

The impressions made by this accidental occurrence were fresh upon me when I entered my house; and the misery of my poor wife when I communicated to her the nature of my intended expedition did not contribute to raise my spirits. "Oh! go not on this journey, Ismael," said she;

“ it will surely be fatal to you. I have had such fearful dreams: I saw you wounded—wounded and dying.—I knew it was you, and I could not approach you. If you go on this journey, Ismael, I shall never see you more.”—“ Hush! hush! Shireen:—this weakness from you!—you, whose part it is rather to cheer me on any painful duty than to distress me by childish fears; and when going on a peaceful errand too! Surely I run less peril now than on those warlike expeditions upon which you have so often calmly seen me depart against the Koords and tribes of the desert.”—“ Ah! Ismael, the danger may in reality be less, but to me, at this moment, it is far more alarming, although I cannot tell the reason. Would to Allah it could be avoided!—Who are your companions?” I explained that a sufficient escort of tried gholaums was to attend me; and endeavoured to soothe the excessive terror which agitated her; and which, to confess the truth, united with other causes to deprive my own mind of the resolution and equanimity so essential to it. But it was in vain; her anticipations of evil were too fixed to be reasoned away, and she abandoned herself to uncontrollable despondency.

Deeply distressed as I was at her situation, it could not be permitted to interfere with the calls of duty. My preparations were quickly completed, and my faithful jeloodar, Cossim, who would not

be left behind, announced that the party appointed to accompany me were already in waiting at my gate. I joined them instantly, and felt a glow of returning confidence arise as I placed myself once more at the head of the small band, among whom were several veteran gholaums, my companions in many a severe action, along with Firoze Beg, a dehbashee* of approved courage and uncommon sagacity. There were others whom I did not remember to have seen before; and one in particular, whose singular and unpleasant expression of countenance attracted my notice so much, that I inquired his name. The man, with the usual military salute, replied that he was a servant lately engaged in the service of the governor—his name Goorbaun Allee, and specially directed to accompany the party, as his knowledge of the country, it was thought, would render his services useful.

Firoze Beg looked intently at the man, and asked him several questions, which he replied to in a satisfactory manner. “I do not know him, sir,” said he to me; “but he is a strong active-looking fellow, and may be useful: it is unnecessary, at this late hour, to refer to the palace on so frivolous a matter, and I see he wears the governor’s badge. If we don’t like him as we proceed,” added he with a significant nod, “we

* Commander of ten; a sergeant.

can easily get rid of him. As for the country, I know it better than he does." The man, who probably had overheard part of this address, cast a glance of strange expression at Firoze Beg ; but nothing more was said ; and we moved onward, in number twelve well-armed men, besides myself and old Cossim.

But the omens which attended the outset of the journey were not more cheering than those which had preceded it. No sooner had we left the house than three ravens were observed by Firoze Beg, sailing towards the south-west, in the very direction of our course ; and while commenting on this unpleasant incident, old Cossim, whose spirits, like those of his master, were more depressed than usual, whispered his neighbour, with a shake of his head, that his family had been tormented all night by the howling of a dog around his dwelling, and that his wife had warned him that some disaster was approaching : even I did not escape my share of the ill-luck ; for while musing on all that had passed, and holding my bridle with a careless hand, my horse, the surest footed animal in the world, stumbled almost to falling : he recovered himself indeed ; but the occurrence of a circumstance so notoriously portentous did not fail of contributing to the discomposure of myself and all my party. To add to these misfortunes, it happened that there was no

possibility of obtaining the opinion of any astrologer of acknowledged sagacity upon the aspect of the heavens at so short a notice; and consequently we set out without the smallest information on the subject of lucky and unlucky hours.

As we entered the principal street, on our way to the south-eastern gate, and slowly made our progress through the crowds collected in the bazars, we could hear the various remarks that were made upon our appearance and probable destination. "For Serrukhs and the Moorghaub, I warrant," said one.—"Ay, ay, that Moujood Koolee will never be at rest till he gets a pair of eyes the worse."—"Bah! that handful of men going to Serrukhs! Are you a fool, Hassan? They would be eaten up, arms and all, before they reached Kallah Teekree. No, no; its only a party sent on scout.—Hey! brother, how is your health? Whither are you bound? What! secret orders? Well, well, good luck to you!" &c. &c. But as we passed the Caravanserai Kandanharee, around the gates of which a newly arrived cafilah was clustered with its multitude of loaded camels, mules, asses, and horses, I do not know how it happened, but my attention was arrested by the appearance of three or four men, muleteers, as it seemed, who in the midst of all the bustle were lazily leaning against the wall of the building in total idleness. They eyed our array as it passed, I thought, with

a glance of greater interest than they bestowed on any other object; and in accidentally looking backwards, my own eye fell on the countenance of Goorbaun Allee, which was fixed on these very men with a degree of intelligence and recognition that surprised me at the moment, and which failed not to come to my recollection afterwards; but the bustle of the scene around me, and the difficulty of threading our way among the loaded camels and their drivers, divided my attention for the time, and the interest which had been excited was forgotten.

At length, about two hours after noon, we cleared the gates of Mushed, and took the way to Shereefabad, which place we reached before sunset. But as our business was urgent, I resolved to push onwards for another stage at least, to Robaut-e-Suffeid, where the resting-place was an old caravanserai, affording indeed few comforts, but so far out of the way of general travellers, that our arrival there was not likely either to be known or reported in the neighbourhood. It was in truth of no small consequence that we should proceed with the utmost secrecy as well as celerity, as by that means we should become less exposed to the attacks of the banditti with which the country swarmed; and the chance of alarming our enemies, and thereby affording them time or opportunity for counteracting our intended negotiations, would be proportionally diminished.

CHAPTER II.

THE JOURNEY.

THE night set in dark and dreary as we lost sight of Shereefabad; and as the twinkling lights of the last village of the Ballook* waxed faint in the increasing obscurity, the members of our party closed their files instinctively, gathered up their reins, and felt their horses' mouths, as if to raise their vigour and give them a hint of caution; undid the fastenings of their pistols, and loosened their swords in their scabbards. The fuses of their matchlocks remained unlit, for the fiery points would have betrayed them; a single match only was kept burning, but carefully concealed from view. Thus swiftly, but with caution and silence, did we proceed; myself along with Firoze Beg leading the small column along the broad and gravelly plain over which our road lay.

The moon, early in her first quarter, had long

* District, or knot of villages.

set behind a dense mass of clouds, that rose above the hills on our right, and gradually spread themselves over the face of the heavens. The few stars which had hitherto shed a dubious light upon our path, were thus, one by one, obscured; until the darkness became so complete, that we had to trust to the safety and correctness of our progress more to the instinct of our horses than to our own sagacity or powers of vision.

For three hours at least we travelled on, and had got over about five fursungs of ground, when, as we were crossing one of the numerous water-courses which abound in these mountains, and overspread the plain at their feet with a desolating tract of rocks and gravel, the quick ear of Firoze Beg caught a distant sound, which he insisted was caused by the trampling of horses. A halt was instantly called, and the clatter of our own horses having ceased, we all could distinguish the sound of hoofs upon the side of the mountain, galloping as it seemed, and mustering together.

Strangers, as the most of our party were to this part of the country, we should have been at a loss how to proceed, so as to avoid the danger of an attack on unknown and dubious ground, and our situation would have been embarrassing enough, had not Firoze Beg stepped forward, and declared that he was well acquainted with every path and pass, both of the mountains and

the desert among which we were travelling. "I served as a boy," said he, "with Fyze-Oolah Khan, who was master in these wild districts. His followers never eat the salt of idleness ; and there is not a dell nor ravine of these mountains—ay, nor a yard of the plain on which we stand, over which I have not marched or ridden at the heels of some of his bold sowars.* The torrent which in winter covers the plain with these hills of gravel, and floods a great portion of the clayey flat on our left, has torn its course through as wild a ravine as any which the Elburz can show in all their long extent ; and though its inhospitable and precipitous sides mock at every attempt at cultivation, it contains many a strong-hold known of old to the daring robbers that haunted these districts. I cannot doubt that the horse we have this moment heard, and which are still near us, have issued from the dark jaws of the Karagour. We must prepare for a stout resistance ; for, if they venture to attack us at all, it will be no child's play. If it seems good to Ismael Khan, let the party proceed straight along this open plain ; while his slave will ride in flank, a little more to the right, along the broken ground at the mountain foot, and endeavour to discover something of the force and intentions of these unknown riders."

* Troopers—horsemen.

I approved of this advice. Forming my people into a compact body, I took the lead ; Goorbaun Allee offered to attend, and point out the path ; and I accepted his services ; while Firoze Beg, taking advantage of a hollow that crossed the road, darted off towards the foot of the mountains. We held our course in perfect silence, and no small anxiety, for more than half an hour, the quick irregular tramp of our horses drowning all lesser and more remote sounds, when a shrill but distant whistle rose on the breeze of night, and was quickly followed by the rapid beat of a horse at full gallop.

All instantly and simultaneously halted ; and in another moment the horseman himself was seen emerging from the gloom, his arms and harness rattling with his rapid motion. " They come ! they come ! " cried Firoze Beg, for he it was. " Clap stirrups to your horses' flanks ;—lose not a moment :—follow me for your lives :—follow to a spot better suited for a stand : " and dashing into the path, and springing forwards, he vanished in the darkness from our sight, as he had broke upon it. But the jingling of his arms gave token of his course, and ere another second had elapsed the whole party were at full speed at his heels.

" Alhumdul-illah ! " ejaculated he, as after a short but rapid burst he drew up a little, to bring us within hearing. " Thanks be to Allah ! here

is the place;" pointing to a dark mound, that rose a short bowshot on the right of the path, and properly commanded it. "This tuppeh* has more than once before now done a good office for poor fellows beset as we are like to be;—and now, if the dogs are not before us, it will help us again at our need. Follow me quick; I am your guide." He pushed his horse up the stony side of the hillock, followed by the whole party, helter-skelter, unheeding of the darkness or any other obstacle. But our course was suddenly arrested;—the flash of three or four matchlocks, with the hissing of the balls over our heads, caused the greater number to rein up.—Not so Firoze Beg. "On! on! heed them not," cried the gallant fellow, "they'll never stand our charge!" and followed by myself and four or five others, we cleared the short space above us at a bound, and stood upon the level ground on the summit; just in time to see three or four men running down the other side. "All is safe," shouted I to the rest, and immediately our little party was collected around me.

The post we had thus gained, so far as the darkness permitted us to observe, was a small elevated platform, which overlooked the black expanse around. A few irregular and broken mounds indicated that it had at one time been more effi-

* Hillock.

ciently occupied by buildings, probably of a defensive description ; and it was, as our guide had declared, calculated in every point of view for enabling a small force to make good their defence against superior numbers. Dismounting therefore from our horses, and placing them in the centre of the level space, we prepared for a severe and probably a protracted struggle, with foes of whose numbers and quality we were as yet entirely ignorant.

The deep and anxious silence which reigned among us for the next half hour was interrupted only by the occasional scream of a horse as he lashed out his heels at his neighbour ; but then a sullen hollow sound was borne upon the breeze, and soon recognised as the distant trampling of many horse, approaching from the quarter we had left. Each man now prepared his arms, drew in his breath, and mustered up his strength and resolution for the impending assault. It came not however ; and the sounds, after increasing upon the ear for a while, began to wax faint, and divide, as if those whose movements produced them were dispersing, and pursuing various directions : a few shrill whistles were heard, like signals repeating one another, and all became gradually still as before.

“ What can be the meaning of this ? ” whispered I to Firoze Beg, when the last sounds had

ceased. "Who may these mysterious riders be? They cannot be friends; and yet, how should foes so superior in numbers as they must be (aware, too, no doubt, of our position and our strength), suffer us to remain so long without an attempt to attack us? Our march was not so noiseless but they must have traced us."—"Yes, yes! no doubt we are traced," replied he, "and we shall hear of it time enough. Their conduct may be strange; but this apparent backwardness is, in my opinion, more to be dreaded than instant attack; the tiger only dallies with his prey when surest of his spring. In these plains none are likely to be met with but the robbers who harbour in the neighbouring mountains, or the riders of Mouzuffer Khan of Toorbut: the first, had they scented booty, and thought themselves able for a blow, would have tried our strength before now. I cannot say I like it; there is treachery in the wind, be sure of it, sir."—"Treachery!" repeated I; "and from whom—who have we to fear?"—"Hush!" returned Firoze Beg; "be cautious, or there may be too many in our councils. I fear it from the very chief you go to visit; a chief, cruel, unprincipled, and deceitful—at once to be hated and dreaded."—"But what can I have to dread from his evil dispositions? There is no blood between us: I don't even know him; and now I go as a peaceful negotiator."—"All that

is true, and yet there may be danger; you know not Mouzuffer Khan. Should he be aware of your mission, and that is far from impossible, (for he has zealous and well paid agents,) and should its object be displeasing to him, be assured that he will scruple at no means to arrest or counteract it. Were your slave to suggest—" added he, musing—" but no! that cannot be."—" What cannot be?"—" Nothing, nothing! let us consider what is best to be done."—" Firoze Beg, I must know what you mean: you know this dangerous chief: you are a man of experience, and I value your advice;—what is it, then? speak openly."—" My advice, sir, is not much worth, I fear: certainly I do not admire our present service, and I wish it had fallen into other hands; for I anticipate little advantage or credit from it, but much danger, perhaps the loss of liberty and life. But it is in vain to regret this now; we must face the danger which cannot be shunned."—" We must do so," replied I, rather coldly, as the hint which seemed to be implied in these observations jarred somewhat unpleasantly upon my sense of duty: " the orders of the governor of course must be obeyed. I only desire to know what you consider the best means for doing so effectually."—" Good sir," replied Firoze Beg, " your slave comprehends, nor will you find him among the least forward to sacrifice his life, if

required, in the cause ; and now that the enemy, if such they prove to be, have left us at liberty for a time, though I cannot believe them to be far distant, it would be best, I think, to push forward as fast as prudence will permit. Once within the acknowledged territories of Mouzuffer Khan, we become his guests and under his protection, and shall be safe, at least from open assault: it is only in these wild contested border districts, where violence and rapine prevail, that recourse would be had to such underhand attempts, where the banditti of the mountains would have the credit of a dark deed, if successful; and the khan might, if he pleased, lament in public the fate of those who fell by his own private orders.”—“ And whither would you have us now retreat to ? ”—“ Scarcely two fursungs hence there stands an old caravan-serai : it is not in the best repair, but will afford us the means of spending the night in more comfort than we could do here ; and it is capable of being better defended in case of an attack.”—“ And where does it lie ? ”—“ You see yon streak of lurid light ?—that is the direction : let us mount silently and at once ; the less noise we make the better ; perhaps even at this moment we are watched.”—“ That is not unlikely ; but surely you have no suspicion of any one among ourselves ? What did you mean by that caution just now ? Speak frankly out to me : that is but my due as

your commander." — "Well, sir, I may be wrong; but be cautious of that man," pointing to Goorbaun Allee; who, during the time of our conversation, had more than once approached, as if he wished to listen. "Mouzuffer Khan has many agents. Let an eye be kept on him; and see that he quits us not." — "I understand,—you may be right. I too have seen what I neither comprehended nor liked in his demeanour. But let us away." — "Follow me, then," said he; "follow closely and confidently. I know the path blindfold."

The word was quickly passed: in one moment each hand was on the bridle rein—the next, each man was in his saddle; and following the swift action of our guide, we slid and scrambled down the steep side of the hillock, and launched fearlessly over the dark plain at its foot. Neither whip nor stirrup* were spared, and the fire flew from the heels of our horses, as they spurned the flinty ground, or struck and scrambled over the large stones that lay thickly strewed over its surface. Keenly did every eye strive to penetrate the darkness around us, while our ears were in vain on the stretch to catch some sound besides the incessant clattering of our horses' hoofs; but

* The stirrups of most eastern nations have broad shovel-like irons for the feet to rest in. The edges of them are sharp, and are used as spurs. They often cut and gore the horse severely.

nothing certain could be detected: a faint cry indeed was heard in the direction of the mountains on our right; but it might have been the howl of a wolf or a jackall, many of which we surprised in our rapid course; and one of the party caught the sudden glimpse of a spark of light, but it was gone before he could point it out to his companions, and appeared no more. We swept onwards like the blast of the desert: our progress was to be measured by minutes, not by hours; and no long time elapsed before our guide suddenly checked his speed, and pointing to a faint red gleam which issued from an obscure mass at some distance, "Yonder is our mark," said he; "but see, it is already occupied. We must approach it cautiously: let me go forward and reconnoitre."—"Stop," said I. "I will accompany you;" and immediately halting the party, we dismounted, and crept on in wary silence.

As we approached, the form of the building rose gradually to view, dimly portrayed upon the lesser darkness of the sky; but the light which had attracted our notice was seen no more, until turning an angle of the building we discovered it still faintly gleaming from the huge portal, and reddening with its reflection a part of the projecting tower.

Still maintaining a cautious distance, we exa-

mined the niche from whence it issued, and beheld two men seated by a fire, in one of the small cells of the gateway itself. They were armed; for their matchlocks leaned against the wall behind them: other warlike accoutrements were also distinguishable on their persons. They were busily discussing some victuals which had probably been just cooked at their fire, while every now and then they conversed together with an air of great interest.

Desirous to ascertain whether others might not be concealed within call, we drew near, purposely making some noise to attract their attention; upon which the men, starting to their feet and seizing their arms, demanded in military phrase, "Who approached?" accompanying the query with an order to stand, on peril of being saluted with a matchlock ball. "Two travellers," was the reply, "benighted and weary, on their way to Toorbut. We seek the shelter of this old caravanserai, and are glad to find that it contains others with whom we may join for mutual protection."—"Hum!" muttered one, "travellers to Toorbut? Its a good way from hence to Toorbut; and what may be your business there?"—"Why, what is that to any but ourselves? We have business perhaps with the Khan,—what then?"—"Oh! nothing certainly; but for our parts, we join companies with none. You will find plenty of accommo-

dation within;—plenty of empty chambers. So, bismillah! pass on, and leave us in peace where we are.”—“Churlish enough by the Prophet! What are you afraid of, friends? why refuse us part of your fire and fare? You shall partake of ours; and conversation will make the time pass pleasantly.”—“Excuse us; we are just retiring to rest, and don’t want to be disturbed; and as to fear, we may surely say, without confessing ourselves to be cowards, that this is neither a time nor a place for trusting every stranger who makes his appearance. There are too many rogues about for such easy confidence. So peace be with you; leave us to ourselves.”—“Very good. God protect you! It matters not to us: our companions without are sufficient for us.”—“Companions! To-kodah! there are more of you then?” exclaimed the man with a startled air, and throwing forward his matchlock, as if to prepare against instant danger. “Yes, yes,” rejoined we; “but fear not. We meddle with no one if we are let alone.”—“Alone! oh to be sure. We trouble no one. You are all very welcome.” Upon this, making the signal agreed on to our comrades, the whole party cantered forwards, and rode at once into the court-yard of the caravanserai.

A total change in the behaviour of our two friends was the immediate result of this display of our force. They descended with alacrity to bid

us welcome ; offered calleeoons to Firoze Beg and myself ; supplied us with fire ; shared their stock of fuel with us ; pointed out what they assured us were the best chambers in the place, and offered to assist in sweeping them clear of the cattle-dung and dust with which they were incumbered. But Firoze Beg, giving me a sign to follow, led the way to a detached part of the building, where a narrow staircase gave access to certain upper cells.

These had been separated from the rest of the structure by the fall of intermediate parts, and being thus insulated, were more susceptible of defence in case of attack, than any other part of the building. Of them we took possession, notwithstanding the persuasions of our new friends, who advised us to occupy the lower and more spacious vaults. We lighted fires, and made every arrangement calculated for spending the night in tolerable comfort. Strict watch was set, and the rest of our people stretching themselves on the hard floor, were soon fast asleep.

For my part I could not rest. The suddenness and singular nature of this journey ; the untoward omens which had accompanied its commencement, and the mysterious alarm which had already attracted our notice, had so excited and agitated my mind, that to sleep, or even to remain inactive, was impossible. After long vainly attempting

to compose myself to rest, I started up at length, and sought the open air upon the platform of the roof, where in a few minutes I was joined by Firoze Beg; who, equally wakeful with myself, had observed me leave the chamber.

“So, Ismael Khan is sleepless,” observed he in a subdued voice—“This is not well: a long journey lies before us;—perhaps severer duty; and rest is needful to fit us for its toils.”—“True,” replied I; “and wherefore does not Firoze Beg take that needful refreshment?”—“I cannot, sir. The events of this night are enough to make me watchful; for they indicate treachery and danger. You know not, as I do, the people amongst whom we go. They are crafty, unprincipled, and blood-thirsty. We are watched beyond all doubt; and well may we be jealous of their object in so doing: besides, I feel as if all were not right. Forgive me! I am half ashamed to confess it; but there is a load,—a sense of evil, weighing on my breast, which assures me of imminent misfortune.”—“How? This from you, Firoze Beg? I thought you a bolder fellow:—you are unwell, or fatigued—that is all. Go, take your rest. I will watch in the mean time, and you know that I may be depended on.”

I said these words with a cheerful tone, although by no means free from the depressing presages of my companion; but my attempt to

laugh away his anxiety was in vain. "A bold fellow!" repeated he, with a serious shake of his head, "it is not Ismael Khan who should doubt the courage of Firoze Beg; nor shall he find him backward in the hour of trial, be its nature what it may. But mark his words; our utmost resolution and coolest judgment will be required to meet it when it comes."—"But what precisely do you dread?" demanded I: "we are messengers of peace; we go not to Toorbut as enemies."—"True! the conduct of Mouzuffer Khan has been equivocal of late; but even were he treacherously inclined against our master, why should his ill-will be directed against servants such as we?"—"What can I know?" replied he: "how can I tell what may lurk in the dark and crooked mind of Mouzuffer Khan? Perhaps he may not choose that an officer of Nadir's may view his country, and judge of his resources, or attempt to detect the extent of his connection with the Affghauns. Perhaps he may wish to have it hereafter in his power to declare that no mission from the governor of Khorassan ever reached him; and impute to him as a slight so palpable a piece of neglect, should circumstances render such exculpation expedient. Were such his object it would be no doubt very convenient to have such envoys as us all spirited away, while yet at a distance from the acknowledged sphere of his influence, as

the robbers who notoriously infest this desert tract would in that case bear the blame of the misfortune ; and I have too good cause to know that a hint to these plunderers from so powerful a quarter would have all due effect. Had those who have dogged us to-night been acting for themselves, we would have felt their strength before now."

" I see it ; I see you may be right. Our situation is a puzzling one. We cannot, if we would, retreat : courage and caution are our only resources ;—we must now decide on how to act. What do you advise ?"—" What can I say ? Circumstances must guide us ; the very movements of our enemies may afford us hints. If our suspicions are well founded, the direct road to Toorbut is surely to be avoided ; for it has many dangerous passes, where we should find ourselves at the mercy of an assailant. There is another path, difficult indeed, and intricate, but well known to me. It leads through the mountains high above the more frequented route, and is not without its own peculiar dangers ; but the chance of freedom from molestation which it offers renders it better than any other in our choice ; and if you approve of it, sir, I am ready to guide you. What are your orders ?"

I mused for a while. For the first time a shade of suspicion crossed my mind. Could Firoze Beg

himself be a traitor? But the painful and unworthy feeling was but momentary; his frank and earnest bearing had nothing of treachery about it. I had seen him fight too, and shed his blood too, as no traitor ever did: it was impossible. His words, moreover, bore all the stamp of reason and of truth. That danger was in our path could not be doubted; perhaps we were already in the toils; but all that could now be done was to encounter treachery, should it be among us, with vigilance and caution, and to meet open danger with the promptness and resolution of men long accustomed to perils of every kind. These reflections occupied but a few seconds.

“I believe your advice is good,” said I: “let the plan be adopted. When should we start?” “I would fain enter the mountains by the light of dawn,” rejoined Firoze Beg; for the path is intricate. Where is Goorbaun Allee? He is a native of these parts, and whether true or false to us, his experience may aid mine.” We returned to the cells of our party, and shaking together the dying embers of our fire, looked around for Goorbaun Allee; but he was nowhere to be found among the sleepers; and the space he had occupied was vacant. “Strange this!” whispered I. “It is worse than strange,” returned Firoze Beg, in the same cautious tone: “this goes far to confirm your slave’s suspicions.”

Then after musing for a moment, "He must be found; I will go myself and seek him. See, here are his matchlock and joals; * he has not left us altogether."—"I will accompany you," said I, with a slight revival of my recent suspicion; and immediately descending the narrow staircase, we entered the court of the caravanserai.

All there was silent and deserted. With one impulse we crossed to the gateway, in which was the resting-place of our friends of the evening before. A faint flickering gleam still shot up from some embers that had lately been raked together; but the light fell on nothing within. We ascended cautiously to the entrance of the cell, and threw an eager glance around it. It was empty,—deserted. "Hah!" exclaimed Firoze Beg, after a moment's examination, "all is plain enough now. Oh! fools that we are! that the truth should never have crossed our minds!" "What do you mean, what is the truth?" inquired I impatiently. "What, sir! are your eyes still shut? do you not perceive it? See you not that those two men who occupied this cell were spies upon our path? that they have now gone to join their comrades, with an account of our position and plans?"—"Punah be Khodah! † you are right;—it is plain, too plain; and Goorbaun Allee has assuredly left us to join them."

* Travelling bags.

† God protect me.

“Whether that be the case or not,” said he, “our course is clear—not a moment must be lost; no waiting for dawn now; it is but too near at hand: we must rouse the men, and mount immediately. They think us quiet enough till day-light: this false security may prove to us the means of eluding their vigilance; and by taking a different path, we may escape them altogether.” “Right! be it so,” answered I; “and now to awaken the men.” But just as we were entering our cell a footstep behind us caught our attention, and retiring into the deep shadow thrown by the wall, we watched for the intruder.

It was Goorbaun Allee, who stealing cautiously towards the cell, prepared to resume his place. “Who is that?” exclaimed I, as if suddenly awakened from sleep. “It is I,” said the fellow, starting at the question. “Where have you been?” “I heard the horses kicking at each other,” replied he, with evident confusion, “and went to see if all was secure.” “Well, they may spare their strength for the road,” returned I, “they will soon be wanted; we march immediately.”—“Immediately, sir!” re-echoed he; “what, without any more rest?—neither men nor horses are fit for it.” “We must try,” said I coolly; “and no fear but they will make out the day’s journey.” “Will not your lordship wait till day?” “By no means; we have lost too much time already in

such indifferent quarters, and the sooner we quit them the better. Halloo! men, up—up and be ready!”—“ If that be the case I will go and have the horses harnessed below ;” and he was making off without waiting my reply, when, before I had time to speak, Firoze Beg, interposing his person, prevented Goorbaun Allee from leaving the cell. “ I would humbly suggest to Ismael Khan,” said he, “ that Goorbaun Allee, as an experienced guide, will be required near his own person; it is not expedient for him to quit the presence.” “ Quite right,” replied I; “ Goorbaun Allee shall be my jeloodar for this night. I wish to have his advice, and the use of his practised eyes on the march.” No reply was made to this arrangement. The people, awakened by my voice, were stretching themselves, and slowly rising to their feet; the embers of the smouldering fire, shaken together, suddenly emitted a blaze, by which I perceived Goorbaun Allee silently stealing from the cell. “ Stop!” cried I, in an angry tone, “ did you not hear my orders? whither do you go?—Have a care; this pistol in my belt has done its duty before now at my bidding.—Beware!” Muttering some unintelligible excuse, the fellow returned, and busied himself with collecting his arms and accoutrements in readiness to attend me.

All was soon prepared; our horses had scarcely

time to swallow the scanty allowance of corn which their tobras* contained, when the saddles were replaced, and the men once more in their seats. Placing Goorbaun Allee between Firoze Beg and myself, we left the caravanserai, and striking across the plain to the left of our former road, we soon quitted the hard and solid gravel, and became aware that our horses were treading upon clay, in some places hard and dry, in others moist.

“ How comes this, sir?—where have we got to?” exclaimed Goorbaun Allee, who till then had proceeded in sullen silence, and probably without paying much attention to the course we kept. “ This is not the right road ; we are all astray !” “ By no means,” replied Firoze Beg, calmly ; “ we intend to proceed by the Koh-e-sheergoola path : we have good reason for avoiding that of Soorkmoolla.” “ You are mad !” exclaimed Goorbaun Allee. “ You speak of a path that is not practicable ! Well as I know this country, and often as I have travelled both ways, I would not engage to keep the track which leads to Koh-e-sheergoola for a single mile, without broad day-light. It would be impossible even to find the way across this kubeer, † which contains so many dangerous quicksands and morasses ; and still more so to hit the opening of the little

* Nose-bags.

† Salt desert ; often moist.

trodden and dangerous ascent, in a night so dark as this." "We shall have broad day-light soon enough for our purpose," coolly responded Firoze Beg; "and meantime it is the Khan's orders that you sharpen your wits, and assist me in picking out this blind road." "Wullah! it is madness, I tell you. You will all perish; and as for me, in truth I have seldom passed this kuber: listen to reason and return." "Miscreant! I would I had an hundred tomauns for every dark night you have passed in this track. I might be Khan, and a mimbashee then, instead of a poor soldier as I am. Come, have a care! no words! but do your duty." "How am I to do my duty, as you call it, when I can't see a yard before me? and you watch me as if I were a prisoner; so that I can't feel for the path." "Listen, friend," interrupted I, "once more I warn you to look to yourself; your conduct has already awakened suspicion; you are watched, and the smallest act of an equivocal character will make your brain acquainted with a bullet. We know your ability as a guide, and if you value your head, beware that we have no further cause to doubt your honesty."

No more was said for a while; but, as we proceeded, we became alarmed at finding the clay beneath us yielding under the horses' feet, and occasionally covered with water, which flowed over their fetlocks. Firoze Beg at length became un-

easy at the continuance and even the increase of these appearances. "There are, I know, in this kuber," said he to me apart, "many spots where the sand is quick, and the mud dangerously deep and soft, as that scoundrel has truly said; and the worst of it is, that the quicksands sometimes shift their place. I am certain that the right track is not far from hence; but, to hit it exactly in this gloomy starless night, may prove too much for my penetration. This Goorbaun Allee here, I have little doubt, could lead us if he chose; but there is no trusting him beyond eye-shot.—Hear you, friend, will you engage to guide us faithfully, and so prove your honesty?" "How can I find my way," once more grumbled Goorbaun Allee, "unless you permit me to seek it freely? you watch and check me like a prisoner. Give me free scope, and I will answer for finding the track." "Ay, friend, I believe you," replied I; "and we might keep our own for you. No, fellow! whether we remain here but till morning, or never quit this spot, you shall stay with us, and share our fate;—that I promise you. You shall carry no news of our mishap, either to friends or foes; so, if you value your own life, you must point out the way to preserve ours." Just as I uttered these words the horse he rode moving on a pace or two in advance of mine, plunged up to the shoulder in a hole, covering

the rider with mud and water. "Ai, Khodah Buzoorg! Ah! great God!" exclaimed he, thrown off his guard by the accident, "if you want to clear these terrible morasses, gallop to the right for your lives. If you choose to spread your carpets, and take up your abode here for ever, for God's sake send me about my business!" "Shooker Khodah!* he is right;" exclaimed Firoze Beg: "behold yon star; our good angel has made it visible among these thick clouds; and yonder is the point where it sets. Now do I know my way; follow me, and we shall do well enough; and keep a good look-out upon that slippery haramzadeh."†

Retracing our way for about fifty yards, Firoze Beg then inclined to the right; where, although we still had the water splashing under foot, our horses trod upon a firm bottom; and we proceeded safely and swiftly, until in no long time we found ourselves once more upon a hard gravelly plain. By and by the dark shadowy form of a hill rose in front, increasing in blackness and distinctness, until we felt, as it were, oppressed by its close vicinity. "Here is the point of difficulty," whispered Firoze Beg. "If we fail here, the consequence may be fatal; for even a short delay may undo us. Keep an eye on Goorbaun Allee, while I examine the ground and

* Thank God.

† Base-born villain.

seek for the path." He sprung from his horse, and addressed himself with earnestness, and for some time ineffectually, to discover the object of his search. It was an anxious and painful space; but it did not continue very long. The night had been far spent before we reached the caravanserai; it was now an hour and a half since we had quitted it. Morning was at hand, and the grey dawn stealing on, was almost imperceptibly throwing its cold light over the face of the landscape; peaks and ridges became gradually visible, and Firoze Beg began to recognise the well-known land-marks of the pass. "Shookher! shookher!" at last exclaimed he, "all is right; here we have it, and now you have only to follow me.—Move with caution, and one at a time: this is not a path for riding pell-mell in."

He told the truth; the path, difficult from the first, became soon almost impracticable. After riding for nearly two miles, among bare earthy hillocks, our guide struck right up the face of an enormous bed of rock, upon which were scattered plentifully huge fragments, which time and the fury of the elements had shattered from its surface. Entering a shallow cleft in this rocky mass, which deepened as it slanted upwards, we found ourselves at length in a chasm of the mountain; the steep sides and bottom of which were covered with shivered blocks of stone, sharp, and bare,

and fresh, as if they had just been scattered by the thunderbolt from the parent cliffs above. Here there was no path, and we could only urge along our struggling and panting horses, wherever footing could be found, or keeping the top of the ravine in view, permit them to choose for themselves; whether crawling along the brink of a yawning abyss, from which they shrank with instinctive dread, and leaned towards the mountain side above them; or, in scrambling across steep banks of loose stones, which would occasionally give way in great masses, clattering downwards with fearful din, and carrying the terrified animals along with them for many yards. The danger and the toil was so great, that each man found sufficient occupation in the care of himself and horse, and consequently paid but little attention to the movements of his neighbour. Of this the crafty Goorbaun Allee was perfectly aware, and prepared, as it turned out, to avail himself. Just as we had reached within a few yards of the gorge above us, the slope of which, as often is the case, was even more precipitous than that of the lower parts of the pass, he suddenly fixed himself in the saddle, and leaning forward, dashed his stirrups against the side of his panting horse, forcing him to bound up the space of the ascent which remained: in a moment he gained the top; and before we, who were

behind, confounded at the boldness of the act, could stir in the pursuit, disappeared on the other side. In another instant Firoze Beg and myself, with a simultaneous effort, sprung after him, and reached the top of the pass just in time to see the fellow gain a precipitous part of the descent beyond—throw himself from his horse, and darting with fearful velocity down a cleft of giddy steepness, disappear from our sight.

Each of us, as we caught the first glimpse of his retreating figure, instinctively drew a pistol from our belts and fired: at the same time we charged forward, till the precipice brought us up; and the accelerated speed of his downward progress gave me reason to exclaim, “He has it: it is over with him. See he has fallen.”—“No, no! I fear not,” replied Firoze Beg, shaking his head with an air of disappointment, “Goorbaun Allee is too old a fox to miss the way to his own hole. Well does he know this ground: be assured it is not his first exploit here. But hit or missed, he is off for this time; for we cannot follow him there without quitting our horses; and ten to one we should fall into some ambuscade. No! let us on the contrary lose no precious time, but push forward. If he is safe we may hear of him but too soon. If he has met the fate he merits, we may escape unquestioned.”

The gorge opened upon a more elevated track,

varied with peaks and ridges of rock, or hill-sides covered with shapeless masses of dark-grey stone, scantily interspersed with short, dry, prickly shrubs. As we advanced, almost as it seemed at random amongst this confusion, the prospect opened wider: glimpses might be caught between the gloomy brows of the retreating mountains, and far, far below, of the plain beneath us, so distant, that it resembled a dark and troubled sea; and after advancing a mile or two further, we could distinguish the deep valley through which the regular road wound along, with its passes and gorges of far inferior elevation. "Yonder," observed Firoze Beg, "is a promising chain of cothuls and dehinehs (passes and gorges) for poor beset fellows like us to thread. By the sword of Allee there was not a chance of our getting through them! Not Secunder Roomee,* nor Shah Ismael, your namesake, khan; no; nor our old master himself, who is as much of a leader as the best of them, could have taken that road with a hope of living through it in the face of the fellows who are after us. But here we have fair play: the devil himself could get no higher; and these fellows have no notion we are so far out of their reach, as they shall find us to be, inshallah!"

We still maintained this desirable elevation, passing over much difficult and toilsome, but com-

* Alexander the Great.

paratively open ground, until at length, having traversed almost the whole breadth of the range, the track, if track it might be called, entering the superior part of a narrow chasm, began to descend as abruptly as it had before ascended. The dell soon increased in width and depth: formidable avalanches had left their scarred traces on the sides of the mountains; and here and there it sunk into a gulf, of which the eye could not fathom the depth. The path, a mere goat track, was perilous in the extreme; but the very difficulty was in itself a security against attack, for no foe could approach us unawares.

Plunging thus at times by a zig-zag downward path into a deep and shadowy hollow, and thence perhaps rising with sore toil over the sharp ridge of a protruding spur, or slanting along the steep and stony side of the mountain, with beetling cliffs on the one hand, and fearful sheer descent on the other, we pursued our route cautiously, but with all the speed we dared to exert. Ever and anon we cast a jealous eye both above and below; and such progress had we made, that the load of anxiety and doubt which had hitherto oppressed us, began to wear off, as we saw ourselves approaching the less inhospitable districts at our feet; and some words of congratulation at our escape were interchanged among us; but Firoze Beg still shook his head. "I hope all this may

prove true," said he; "but it is too soon yet to talk of security. You see that great projecting rock there, where the dark shadow rests; it is still a full fursung distant; and the first village we pass lies scarcely so far beyond it. Were we once past that point, I too should talk of safety; for I should think that we had outwitted our foes, and baffled their pursuit: but many a prey has been struck, and many a merchant's store rifled, and many a throat cut, in the pass of Kothul-e-zaug; ay, and by them who lay lurking in the very crags around us."

Scarcely had he uttered these words when one of our party who had for some time been gazing around and above him with suspicious glances, exclaimed:—"Hark! what noise is that? surely it is not thunder:—listen." The horse of Firoze Beg was checked in a moment. "Halt! halt! all of you men! By the might of Allee, Meer Cassim is right. Thunder? no! it is themselves: it is the villains who have been dogging us all night. This way, noble Ismael! this way: not a foot of the hill must be lost! By your own souls, and in the Prophet's name, trust to me, and follow me!"

At this time we were pursuing our course along the indenting of a chasm, which furrowed the side of the principal glen; and the path wound downwards rapidly, until turning an angle formed by

the opposite lip of the hollow, it emerged again upon the open face of the mountain. During the momentary halt, when the earnest appeal of Firoze Beg had silenced every sound among us, the trampling of horses had been distinctly audible; and it was no longer dubious that the sound proceeded from a considerable body in rapid motion. Quitting the obvious path, Firoze Beg pushed his horse sharply up the bare side of the cleft, slanting along a scarcely perceptible track, formed by the goats which feed in the summer months among the mountains; and following him as closely as the perilous nature of the ground would permit, we soon reached the open hill-side, far above the lower and regular path.

No sooner had the foremost of our party appeared above the ridge than they were saluted by a yell, which arose from the mouths of full fifty mounted armed men below us; and instantly we saw them all quitting the path, which till then they had kept, and spurring furiously up the steep mountain side in full charge against us.—“Quick, men! quick; form on this little terrace; unsling your matchlocks: mark the foremost of these fellows,” shouted Firoze Beg.—“Be cool, men; be steady,” added I, casting a rapid glance around, and comprehending at once the full peril of our situation;—“throw not a shot away: remember the gholauts of Nadir never miss their mark:

take the first that come; they will sweep others along with them in their fall.”

It was fortunate for us that we had maintained, even to this moment, the precaution of carrying the fuses of our fire-arms a-light; the matchlocks were ready in a moment; and, before my caution had been fully uttered, a dozen shots rang in quick succession, veiling all in front of us in a wreath of light-blue smoke. But as the faint morning air wafted this temporary veil away, the scene was changed. A moment before, the steep shingly side of the mountain had been covered with horsemen, who scattering from the continuous line in which they had hitherto marched, were pressing upwards, each with the best speed he could exert, regardless of the danger or the consequences of a failure:—it now was strewed with men and horses who, struck by our balls, or startled by our fire, had fallen, and were rolling rapidly over and over into the deep hollow below. Many of the jaded horses, unable to second the keenness of those who urged them on, stumbled, or reared and fell backwards, head over heels, carrying with them their unfortunate riders; or sliding downwards with the loose stones through which they were floundering, carried with them an accumulating mass which involved others in its descent.

Terrible cries arose: cries of wounded men, and the despairing shrieks of those who were swept

downwards to their fate, mingled with the curses of our assailants, and our own shouts of triumph at their confusion. But though severely checked they were not by any means discouraged; and the disparity of numbers against our small band was still almost hopelessly great. Our position was a good one, it is true; but we lay exposed to the fire of those who, while others pushed forward to the attack, esconced themselves behind rocks and bushes, and commenced a discharge which would speedily have thinned our party had we stood to receive it.—“Disperse, men! disperse!” said I—“Shelter yourselves;—there is plenty of cover around us;—our fire will be more certain, our loss less.” In a moment our people were intrenched behind fragments of rock, or lay in hollows, from which their shot flew sharp and deadly. Of those who had pressed foremost up the ascent scarce ten or a dozen continued the desperate attempt, and our fire was rapidly reducing their number. One of them, no doubt a leader of the party, a portly man, conspicuous for a powerful grey charger and handsome accoutrements, not only persevered, but seconded by the vigour and activity of his horse, succeeded in spite of the numerous shots that were aimed at him in making good his way, till within a few yards of the spot where we were posted. We not only could mark every action, but could hear him through the uproar,

calling and encouraging his people to the assault ; “ Hah ! Meer Mustapha ! come on ! Ahi ! Allee Beg ! drive the stirrups into that jade of yours :— hoh ! Cossim Allee, scoundrel ! do you flinch ?— On, brothers ! on, my men ! another bold push and we have them ! Yah Hyder ! yah Allee ! for Feridoom Beg and plunder.”

“ What ! will you suffer this fellow to ride up to your very beards ?” exclaimed Firoze Beg, out of all patience, and incautiously springing to his feet ; “ is there not one gholaum who can strike his mark, or has the ghoraunsaug a musket-proof talisman ? Here is to try ;” and taking a deliberate aim, he fired with such true effect, that the ball striking the horse in the very brain, it made one last bound upwards, then fell, and rolled with his rider, until both, like others of their comrades, were lost in the chasm below.

Intent upon the destruction of his enemy, Firoze Beg forgot that his own person stood exposed ; but there was one who noted and seized the advantage. Scarcely had the shout which followed the leader’s fate escaped his lips, when the report of a matchlock rang from behind a rock not twenty yards distant, and I saw my unfortunate companion shrink : his eyes gazed idly on vacancy ; he tottered for a moment, and fell dead at my side.

Instinctively I cast a glance at the spot from

whence the unlucky ball had come. The marksman, probably satisfied with his exploit, was stealing back from his concealment, when my eye fell upon his person;—that cap! that cloak!—could I be mistaken? A second glance assured me I was right:—it was Goorbaun Allee, the detected traitor. Stung with rage, and thoughtless of consequences, I dashed forward, and in a moment reached the rock: the miscreant saw me, and exerted all his speed to escape me. But it was not written that his treachery should pass unpunished: in his haste and alarm, his foot got entangled among the loose stones; he stumbled and fell, and in another moment saw my scimitar gleaming above his head. “Ai Khodah Buzoorg! amaun! amaun!” screamed the terror-struck wretch, and a horrid expression of malice and despair convulsed his features, while nevertheless he drew his kunjur,* prepared to stab me to the heart, if I should be fool enough to listen to his appeal for mercy. But I was in no mood for mercy; the sword fell on the neck of the shrinking miscreant, and cut short his prayer and his life.

The fire drawn forth by the exposure of my person was rapid for some moments, and my clothes were cut in several places by the balls; but the brunt of the skirmish was past; the superiority of our position gave such effect to a fire kept up

* Dagger.

by practised marksmen, that not a man of our assailants could expose himself with impunity. Dispirited as they were by the ill success of their violent exertions, the moment the fate of their leader was known they withdrew from the contest. A scattering and ineffectual fire was maintained for some minutes, as if to cover their retreat : this also ceased, and we were left to enjoy as we might our barren gloomy victory.

Our loss, it is true, was numerically small, considering the odds to which we had been opposed. Two of our party were killed, and three wounded ; but in Firoze Beg we had sustained a loss which in our situation was irreparable ; as a guide, a counsellor, and champion, his worth was beyond price. My heart smote me when I remembered the half-formed suspicions I had admitted of him who had now proved his loyalty with his blood ; and I could willingly have indulged in a tear for the fate of the brave companion thus snatched away, at the moment perhaps when his advice and courage might be most required.

But it was no time for melancholy musing. Our situation continued sufficiently critical ; the enemy, although repulsed, might, and in all probability would return with reinforcements to complete his work ; and it was high time to push forward to a place which might promise something like security.

Our guide was gone, and not one of our party knew the intricate path we had to travel. Firoze Beg had, it is true, indicated its direction, and showed us the point at which we might consider ourselves as safe from open assault; but what is the knowledge of mere direction in the midst of a chaos of mountains, so devious and rugged as those among which we had become involved? All we had for it was to push forwards, and trust to our good stars for success; so, binding up the hurts of the wounded as we best could, and casting a melancholy look at the poor fellows whom we were forced to leave to the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, we mounted our horses, and scrambled down to regain the path we had left before the skirmish.

Our progress was painful and perilous as well as slow. Often were the faint traces of the pathway lost among masses of freshly-fallen fragments; and every now and then our course was arrested by precipices or impassable ridges of rock. Much as most of us were accustomed to mountainous paths, our experience served us here in little stead; and we wandered for several hours, bewildered among the intricate hollows and cliffs of the range; leading our horses with extreme hazard over ground never before traversed by such animals; and it was surely good fortune, rather than any skill of ours, which led us at length, weary

and jaded, down a narrow dell into the regular route of caravans to Toorbut.

The road now became comparatively easy ; and although our horses as well as ourselves were well nigh exhausted by incessant toil, they recovered a portion of their vigour as soon as they found themselves upon a regularly travelled road ; and we speedily made our way to the village of Nujjuffdeh, where it was determined to remain for the night.

CHAPTER III.

THE RECEPTION.

OUR arrival did not by any means appear to be a matter of satisfaction to the inhabitants of Nujjuffdeh. Instead of flocking towards us, with expressions of welcome, as we entered the village, they gathered in little groups, and gazed at us from a distance, as we approached, with looks of doubt and suspicion. Surprised in my turn at so inhospitable a reception, I rode forward towards them :—they retreated. “What is the meaning of this ?” demanded I. “Is it thus you receive strangers, travellers in your country? Is this the welcome which the usages of civilised people and the ordinances of the holy Prophet, (blessed be his name!) prescribe for guests who claim your hospitality? We are Musselmauns as you are; what then do you fear? Speak! let your reish sufficeid* appear and answer me.”

* Elder; literally, white beard.

On this an aged man with a long white beard stepped forward. "From whence are you?" said he. "What is your business? and how is it that, armed as you are, you have entered the country of Mouzuffer Khan Karooee without either mehmandar or guide?"—"We come from Mushed," returned I, "officers and soldiers of the great Nadir Koolee, the light of the state! the sun of Iraun! the conqueror of nations! Sent by him, we come in amity to Toorbut, on a mission of consequence to the welfare of your chief, and the prosperity of the kingdom of which he is a worthy pillar."

"If this be so, how are you without a guide? and where are your perwannahs (passports)?"—"We were not without a guide; but we have been attacked by robbers among these wild mountains, and driven from our road. Our guide has been slain, and several of our people wounded. It is with difficulty that we have escaped to claim the protection of your chief, at this, the first of his villages: and for perwannahs, behold, if you can read; behold the ruckum of the governor of this province, the Zoheir-u-doulut Ibrahim Khan." Still the old man hesitated to approach, and only shook his head when the papers were offered to him. But, by this time, one or two other men, of grave and decent mien, had joined him, and now took a part in the discourse. "Attacked by

robbers, say you? were they numerous?"—"Ay, numerous enough for that matter."—"How many might there be, think ye?"—"Oh, perhaps fifty or sixty in number." They looked at one another in silence. "And how, in the name of Allah, did you escape their hands? They must have been absolute cowards, or you must be all pehlewans*—perfect Roostums!"—"Oh, hard enough beset we were, doubtless; but we did the villains' business handsomely. We deserve well of Mouzuffer Khan for ridding his borders of so many thievish rascals!"—"Strange!" muttered one; "no band of that force has been heard of since."—But another interfering, took him aside, and they talked together for some time with earnest gesticulation.

"Permit us to look at the ruckum of your governor," said one of them, again advancing towards me, as I still sat on horseback. I showed it to him. They took it and examined it narrowly, holding it in every position to the light; and then they consulted together again. At length the most respectable-looking person of the party, who was in truth the ketkhodah of the village, returning the papers, addressed me with a respectful salute:—"Forgive," said he, "our seeming inhospitality: the country, sir, is in a state of much

* Heroes, champions.

alarm. We have been perplexed by contradictory orders, and frightened into caution by a variety of unaccountable occurrences. The quarter whence you came, and the circumstances under which you arrive, are calculated to raise our suspicions ; but you are an elchee,* and a traveller, and you have claimed our hospitality : you have a right to do so, and shall receive it accordingly. You are welcome : dismount, and refresh yourselves. To-day you shall have such fare and accommodation as we can give you ; to-morrow a guide shall accompany you to Toorbut. Once more, you are welcome ; enter our village in peace."

They led the way to a large mehmankhaneh ; where, spreading carpets of felt in an open apartment raised above the rest, they conducted me to the highest seat. A part of my attendants ranged themselves at the bottom ; while some stood in waiting without ; and the ketkhodah and principal villagers entering after me, took their seats at the lower and opposite end ; but I invited the ketkhodah himself, and the old man who had first accosted me, to come higher up and sit near myself. Pipes were then brought, and two bowls of sherbet, one of vinegar, sugar, and water, and the other of buttermilk and water, were duly handed round ; the welcome was repeated, and

* Ambassador, envoy.

many mutual inquiries respecting the health and spirits of each other were made, according to custom.

When these ceremonies were over, the conversation turned once more upon our adventures in the mountains; and I gave them a more detailed account of our march and encounter. Questions without number were put to me, and I remarked that my answers frequently excited much surprise: they exchanged significant looks; and the nods and winks which passed between the questions did not escape my notice.

An hour might have thus passed, when one of the villagers, entering in haste, whispered something in the ear of the ketkhodah, who immediately rose, and with a few words of apology, quitted the mehmankhaneh. No sooner had he left the room than an air of restraint spread itself over the village party; an embarrassing silence ensued; and I was meditating upon means for getting rid of my entertainers, when the ketkhodah re-entered, followed by a man in the dress of a soldier much soiled and disordered. His countenance seemed disturbed; but, with a slight inclination of his head, he took his seat in a dark corner, and contented himself with silently observing what passed. Perhaps I should have paid but little regard to the presence or appearance of this person, had I not remarked, that

upon some allusion being made to our adventure, he leaned forward in his seat, with an air of great earnestness; and while in this position, a gleam of light falling upon his countenance, displayed it so flushed and agitated, as if by rage and indignation, that it instantly fixed my attention, and stopping in the middle of a sentence, I remained gazing on him in silence. The moment he observed this he shrunk back out of view, and very soon after rose and left the room; but my excited senses caught some half-smothered words, which corresponded with the expression of his face; curses they were on the miscreants!—" Might their fathers be burned!—Might the curse of the Prophet light on them, but he would—." Again my hosts interchanged looks; but soon after, much to my relief, they rose to take leave; upon which occasion the ketkhodah once more coming forward, bid me rest in peace; and he satisfied me that I was secure under his roof. He then quitted the apartment, and I was left with my own attendants.

" Bareekillah! thanks be to God! a right hearty welcome this;—a welcome of the proper sort for weary men.—And so readily proffered by our noble hosts too! Pah! shame upon their beards!" Thus muttered my trusty jeloodar Cossim, as soon as the village party was out of hearing. " And so condescending a promise of

peace and security!" continued he; "by the head of the khan, I doubt we shall have to owe it to our own good hands, if we even make it good on these terms! Peace and security, indeed!"—"What is all this about, friend Cossim?" said I, roused from a fit of musing by the conversation which had commenced among my servants. "What ails you at our hosts, and why should you doubt of our safety?"—"In obedience to your lordship's commands," replied Cossim with his usual obeisance, "I beg humbly to observe, that if your lordship is pleased with your hosts, your slave has no fault to find; but a churlish welcome makes a watchful guest. It seemed to your slave as if these ryuts and their ketkhodah scarce knew whether to greet us with the calleoon or the scimitar, when we entered their village; and then such gazings, and whisperings, and nods, and shrugs; and such sending off of messengers at speed, and horsemen coming in; it looked more like the preparations to repulse an enemy than to welcome a guest:—but your lordship surely knows best."—"It is true, indeed," said I, hastily, in reply to his observations, partly following up the train of my own reflections; "it is true the welcome was tardy; still it may be sincere, notwithstanding the strange symptoms of distrust we seem to have inspired at first. The countenance and bearing of the ketkhodah are not those

of a rogue. Well, vigilance is a soldier's duty.—Do you hear, men?—Let your ears be open, and sleep but with one eye closed. Let Hassan Mehter and Kara Mahomed keep watch in the outer apartment; the others may repose themselves; they require it after this day's work. You have all behaved like men, and your conduct shall be duly reported to the governor. But, stay!—where are the horses?”—“In the yard behind this meh-mankhaneh.”—“Are there two gates to it?”—“No;—only one; that by which we entered.”—“Good!—Let Hassan Mehter be so posted that he may command a view of the entrance.—Enough!—you have leave: go to rest.”

In truth I was by no means without apprehension. The mysterious appearances which had alarmed my servants, added to those which it was my lot alone to observe, had their full weight with me: but, distant as we were from all external aid, I knew that vigilance and firmness were all we had to trust to; and I derived no small comfort and confidence from the honest appearance and frank assurances of the ketkhodah. No doubt he was responsible to his chief for whatever might befall a guest under his roof. Should the intentions of that chief be hostile, we were fully in his power, and could not evade them: should they be friendly, we could have no just cause for alarm. At all events, rest was absolutely neces-

sary; and I resolved to enjoy it while I could do so.

The grey light of the morning had just begun to render objects visible, when a bustle at the entrance of the mehmankhaneh announced the approach of visitors. The gate was opened after a short parley, and admitted the ketkhodah with five or six other persons; one of whom, in a military garb, of respectable appearance, and well armed and appointed, was introduced to me as Roostum Beg, an officer in the service of his highness Mouzuffer Khan of Toorbut, intended to act as my mehmandar,* and to guide me to the presence of that chief.

Thus far then my apprehensions were, for the present, removed. No violence could be intended us while protected by such an escort; and I found it obviously the wish of this officer, on the part of his master, to efface any suspicion injurious to that chief which might be lurking in my mind: he expressed the deepest mortification and regret at the inconvenience we had suffered; and assured me that a party had already been sent out to apprehend or disperse the insolent robbers who had dared to molest travellers of our description so near the territories of the khan. He

* A person appointed in Persia to provide for the wants of guests travelling through the country.

then suggested that, as the journey before us was still a long one, no time should be lost in commencing it; so, after smoking a single calleeoon, and partaking of a slight refreshment, we took leave of our friend the ketkhodah, and proceeded on our way.

It was past noon when, ascending a hill of considerable height, we first came in view of the wall and towers of Toorbut in the plain beneath us; but it was not until three hours more had elapsed that we entered its gates. A courier had been early despatched to acquaint the khan with our approach; and I employed the interval in trying to obtain from the mehmandar some idea of the chief with whom I was about to deal, and in whose power I might now consider myself to be. But if concealment were intended, the officer, blunt though his bearing was, had learnt his lesson well, and I could gain from him little or no information. I could not even discover in what light his master was likely to consider an envoy from the governor of Khorasan; still less could I make out how far negotiations with the Abdallee Affghauns might have proceeded. His master he said was generous and noble to his servants and followers: but he was very absolute; liked to be obeyed at a word, as most masters do; could not endure contradiction:—what great man can? his anger was terrible: from some expres-

sions of the mehmandars I inferred that he was cruel. But it might be part of this agent's instructions to intimidate; so, upon the whole, I set less store by his intelligence than if it had come from the mouth of an indifferent person.

But though my ears were not permitted to be of much service, my eyes remained open; and as we proceeded, I could not be blind to the various precautions which denoted a country prepared for invasion, and resolved on repelling it; the fresh repairs on the walls of the different villages; the new towers and safety keeps, erected for the protection of the cattle and labourers, in case of sudden attack, while out of reach of the villages themselves; few men in the fields of cultivation; centinels on the heights and towers.

No very unusual guard was to be observed on entering the gates; but there were indications of extraordinary precaution, which could not escape a practised eye. The heads of many centinels might be seen above the parapets of the walls; the men on guard at the gates were picked, and rigorous in the discharge of their duty; and the muster of armed men within the walls was such as one looks not to see, unless in a place engaged in war or preparations for war. No Affghans, it is true, were observable in the streets; but yet there were horses and arms in various corners, and articles of dress and of convenience scattered

through the bazars, which I well knew were peculiar to the Abdallees.

After traversing the principal bazar, the mehmandar led me down a short narrow street to a door which opened in a lofty mud wall: "Is this the ark?" inquired I. "Is this the residence of Mouzuffer Khan?"—"Pardon me," replied the mehmandar, "this is not the fort; this is the lodging assigned by the khan for his honoured guests. His highness will not be able to receive you before to-morrow; but every comfort shall be provided for your use: so be pleased to repose yourself, and set your mind at rest for the night."

The door led to a short passage, after traversing which we entered a small court surrounded by a lofty brick wall: a small dewan-khaneh stood at one end, and in the front of it was the bed of a water-reservoir, now half filled with dust and rubbish. The weeds were growing freely among the stones of the pavement, and overrunning the small earthen plat which might once have produced a few flowers. The whole place wore an air of desolation and gloom, so depressing, that I could not help observing to the mehmandar, with a smile somewhat forced, "This abode has more the resemblance of a prison than a palace, my friend! I hope the mission I am charged with may meet with a welcome from your master more cheerful than the abode he assigns to its bearer:

it will be cold enough else.”—“Oh! have no doubt on that score, sir; you cannot fail of receiving all possible satisfaction from his highness;—but with this I have nothing to do. I quit you for a while, sir, to provide for your comforts.”

And in truth never were the usual appliances to comfort more required; for a more dismal dwelling, short of an acknowledged prison, I never yet had seen. The damp clay floor, but little elevated above the ground, was worn and burrowed into holes by vermin and decay. The windows, which once had boasted of a frame of carved wooden work, covered with oiled paper, were now dropping to pieces, and rattling with every blast, that whistled through, instead of being excluded by them. The plaster was falling in large masses from the green moulded walls; and a nauseous smell of bats betokened how long it was since it had been last made the abode of human beings.

In about an hour and a half, during which my followers were engaged in surveying these comfortless premises with blank looks and forboding hearts, the mehmandar arrived, bringing with him some old moth-eaten carpets, a few cooking utensils, with rice, flour, butter, bread, a few dried fruits, a little meat, and some coarse provisions of other sorts, for the use of the party; besides a small supply of sweetmeats and sherbets

for myself ; intimating at the same time that, at the usual dinner hour, provisions for my own use should be sent from the khan's kitchen. The evening soon closed in, and we covered the naked floor with our horse-cloths and prayer carpets, joined to the old furshes that had been brought for our use ; and while two large brass lamps full of melted tallow burning, in the middle, threw a cheerful light around, we tried to hope for better things than appearances might warrant at the moment.

The customary hour for the evening meal had passed away without any message from the khan. Three hours after evening prayer had elapsed, but still neither the promised meal, nor the usual compliment of welcome, had made their appearance. To the former I was sufficiently indifferent. I made my dinner along with the rest of the party, and was meditating on the comfort of a sound sleep, when, scarce two hours before midnight, a furosh entered with the bustling insolence of a great man's servant, bearing upon a white metal tray a small dish of rice, with a saucer of stewed meat and some sweetmeats, all wretchedly cold and scanty ; and loudly desired that I should acknowledge the attentive hospitality of his master, in providing me from his own repast with these choice viands !

Every one knows that in Persia the degree of

respect and ceremony observed in trifles, is the index by which the disposition of those who treat of important affairs is to be discovered. The neglect and insult we had met with on this occasion was ominous of the fate which awaited us. I felt this at the moment; but resolved that no undue intemperance on my part should be permitted to give emphasis to the intended slight. Paying therefore not the slightest attention to the messenger, who had insolently seated himself at the bottom of the room, I motioned to Cossim to remove the tray he had set before me; observing only, that it was a pity the hospitable attentions of the khan had reached their destination so late, and by so rude a messenger: adding, that the person who brought them need not wait, as no further answer was needed. This cool reply appeared considerably to perplex the messenger, who immediately rose and retired in great wrath, muttering imprecations on our heads. Of this, however, no notice was taken; but I resolved to make this shameless conduct the subject of a strong remonstrance in my first interview with his master.

The indignation of my attendants at this insulting behaviour was extreme; a strong disposition was manifested by the more privileged among them to comment upon it, and offer their own opinions upon our situation; but, as this would

only have tended to increase an already growing alarm, I was not disposed to indulge it; so calling for my bed-carpet and lahoff,* and appointing the customary watch, I betook myself to sleep.

Three hours of the next day had elapsed before our mehmandar made his appearance; and when he came, he was gloomy and reserved. The tardiness of this visit was, in our situation, of itself sufficient cause for remonstrance; yet I said but little, and only pressed him to state at what time my interview with the khan was intended to take place. His answer was evasive; but he quickly changed his tone and the subject, by observing, that my conduct of the previous evening was but little calculated to promote the favourable termination of my business.

“ Explain yourself,” said I, with some surprise. “ How, sir, could you think of rejecting with scorn the khan’s civility, and of treating his messenger with so much rudeness ?”—“ Roostum Beg,” replied I, “ as I am informed you are my mehmandar, on the part of Mouzuffer Khan of this city, and it is your business, as it may be your interest, to promote an amicable understanding between your master and his guest—mark, then, what I have to reply to your most

* Quilt used as a blanket in Persia.

strange and unjust charge. I rejected no civility of the khan, your master. Last night, after the lapse of a period, which in itself argued but little respect, and at an hour when weary and half-famished travellers might be expected to have already sought repose, a pitiful portion of cold victuals certainly did arrive at the splendid apartments appointed as lodgings for the envoy of the governor of this province ;—sent, as it was said, from the table of Mouzuffer Khan, by the hands of a surly furosh. If it was the fault of servants that such an affront was offered to that envoy, let them bear the blame, and suffer fitting punishment. If on the other hand it were possible (which I am most unwilling to believe) that this occurred with the knowledge and consent of their master, I cannot in that case, whatever be the consequences, regret or repent of the manner in which that affront was repelled ; for no friend of Nadir would countenance such conduct to his officer ; and the servants of that mighty chief know well how to die in his service ; but not to yield one point which may affect his honour. But once more I ask, when am I to be admitted to the presence of your master ?—Am I to consider myself as his friend and guest, or his enemy and prisoner ?—for, to judge by the nature of my reception and entertainment, as well as by certain precautions

which have not escaped my observation, one might well be held excused in suspecting the latter."

The mehmandar stood confounded at this direct appeal. "No, no, no!" exclaimed he at length, with uplifted hands.—"God forbid!—a prisoner, indeed!—far from it; my master's honoured guest, as you will find; but do not, for God sake! be so hasty;" and he muttered something about the khan's abstemious habits and late hours; bestowing some hearty curses on the scoundrel servants, as he called them, who had affronted me, and deceived their master. "The khan," continued he, "has been engrossed ever since morning-prayers with business of the first importance, which is not yet concluded; so that I cannot reply to your inquiries concerning the hour of audience; but, depend upon it, you will soon hear from his highness. At all events, I am ever your most humble slave." He was retiring:—"Stay," said I, "let us understand each other. My master, the governor, expects my speedy return; a protracted residence at Toorbut consists with neither my duty nor inclination:—unless therefore my introduction to your master shall take place within four-and-twenty hours from this time, I quit Toorbut; or only remain as your prisoner; in which case, let the khan tremble; for Nadir does not abandon his

servants ; and his wrath is terrible and swift :—so now you comprehend me.”—“ Be chushm !” * said the mehmandar in no small confusion, and obviously desirous to escape from the conference—“ I shall report what you have ordered ;—doubt not of a favourable result.”

Hour after hour now passed on without an event to mark its lapse ; and we remained within our assigned quarters as solitary and neglected as if we had encamped in a desert, instead of occupying a dwelling in a populous city. Etiquette did not permit me to go abroad myself before my interview with the khan ; and a hint had been received that my followers, in like manner, had better keep their quarters. Nevertheless one or two of them did venture forth, both to the bazars, and to the maidaun in front of the kallah (or fortified residence) of the khan. They were aware of a general though subdued bustle, indicating some event or intended movement of consequence, and saw several Affghaun chiefs admitted within the walls of the kallah ; but fearful of awakening suspicion, they did not risk any inquiries regarding what was going on.

The day passed in restless weariness and very uncomfortable suspense, and night closed in without any new event, except a hurried visit

* By my eyes.

from the mehmandar, who came to say that the khan had continued too closely occupied during the whole day to receive me as he wished to do; but that he had resolved on giving me audience on the morrow, soon after morning prayers. "If he does," said I, "it is well: if not, at noon I march for Mushed; whether with a reply to my dispatches, and a mehmandar, or without either."

CHAPTER IV.

THE AUDIENCE.

THE morrow came, and with it the appointed time; but hours elapsed before any message was received from the kallah. At nine o'clock the same furosh who had behaved with so much insolence before, made his appearance to desire that we should hold ourselves in readiness, as his master would speedily require our presence. The appearance of this man boded in nowise favourably for the character of the impending interview; but there was some comfort in knowing that the result, be it what it might, would now soon be known.

In about an hour the mehmandar arrived, clad in his dress of ceremony, and hurriedly intimated that we should prepare ourselves to accompany him to the kallah; yet, after all, another hour elapsed ere the order to mount was given.

On casting a look around me at the persons who made up our escort, and who appeared to me intended rather for purposes of constraint than of compliment, I started with surprise and disgust at observing among them the scowling countenance of the soldier whom I had so particularly remarked in the mehmankhaneh of Nujjuffdeh, bending upon me once more the same malignant glance : his eye was withdrawn, however, as soon as it encountered mine, and we proceeded to the kallah.

As we entered the massive gateway, furnished with its two ponderous iron-studded folding-doors, I shuddered involuntarily at the gloomy strength of the place ; and it flashed across my brain, “ how hopeless would escape be, if once immured within such walls ! ” The guards were numerous and well appointed ; and all that met the eye denoted much energy of preparation.

Quitting our horses at the gate, we traversed several courts and passages to a square of larger dimensions, the lower end of which was formed by a handsome dewankhaneh and its usual appendages. A number of attendants were ranged in front of its windows ; and at the upper of these appeared seated a portly figure, who occasionally addressed a few words to those around him : it was Mouzuffer Khan Karaoee.

Disregarding the precise instructions of the

yessawul* in waiting as to the number of bows and salutes expected, I paid the same respect, and made the same obeisance to the khan that I was in the habit of doing to my own master; and then walked deliberately forward to the entrance of the dewankhaneh. Here I was stopped by the guards and servants, who would not admit me until special orders for that purpose should be given. By no means disposed to prejudice my cause by any petty wrangling with servants, I turned calmly round to the mehmandar, who with the yessawul had followed me close behind: "My message," said I, "is to the khan in person; and only to him in person, face to face, shall I deliver it: into no hands but his own may the dispatches of his excellency the governor of Khorasan be given by his servant Ismael. Such is my resolution: act as ye please." This declaration produced an earnest consultation among the officers in waiting, which, after they had communicated with their master, terminated in an order to admit me. Leaving my slippers at the door where I observed those of the persons in attendance, I advanced to the carpet on which the khan was seated; produced the letters, and lifting them to my head, laid them with the customary form on the cushion before him: then

* A species of master of ceremonies.

stepped back to my proper place, and remained closely watching his countenance.

Mouzuffer Khan, at this time full sixty years of age, was a man of lofty and commanding presence. His high features, dark expressive eyes, and well-formed mouth, half buried in its thick black beard, might have betokened a generous frankness by no means belonging to his nature, had not the quick restless glances which shot in all directions from beneath a pair of dark over-arching brows, and the rapid and peculiar working of the muscles of his forehead, changing its expression alternately from frowns to smiles, betrayed to the beholder the truly uncertain and dissembling character of their owner. Crafty and deceitful himself, he was ever mistrustful of others; and though, fitted as he was by constitutional boldness and unwearied perseverance, for the turbulent and lawless career in which he had embarked, his talents as a leader had secured to him the services of many a stout follower; he was not the less aware that his cupidity and frequent breach of faith had created much disgust among his retainers; and his quick eye was ever on the watch for a look or a gesture that might betray the plots he dreaded.

Even as he sat in his own dewankhaneh, surrounded by his personal guards, the khan was armed after a fashion which would have suited

better with the field of battle ; and I remarked that but few, and these beyond a doubt the most trusty of his gholaums, were permitted to bear arms in his presence.

I felt the keen glance of his eye flitting over my person as I stood before him, like the play of a lightning flash ; and, as it rested for a moment on my face, it seemed as if the very thoughts of my soul could not be concealed from its piercing influence : but I cared not if he read them all ; for there was little to be found beyond a steady purpose to do my duty, and something of defiance against himself and his lawless power. Perhaps he read this in my own unshrinking eye ; for after a pause of some length, during which his brow contracted and dilated by turns, as if he balanced whether to begin the conference in anger or in amity, he thus addressed me :

“ So, young man, you come from Ibrahim Khan, governor of Mushed, the brother of Nadir Koolee, who leads the armies of Persia :—is it not so ?”—“ The khan has said it : let him behold the credentials of his servant.”—“ Ay ! in good truth he has chosen a gallant envoy ; one too who seems well disposed to assert the dignity of his principal. I hear you have expressed yourself as but ill satisfied with your reception here ;—but let that pass, (preventing me from speaking,)—that may be rectified. I hear too that violence was of-

ferred you upon the road :—hah! and by whom?—can you tell?”—“By robbers, please your highness, we presume.”—“Ay! robbers.—Robbers to be sure!—You presume right, no doubt: who else?—who else?—We must see to this: this is an insult, a gross insult :—attack a guest of mine! and in my own country too! ah! the rogues must be laid hold of. Would ye know them again, think you?” added he, casting another piercing glance upon me. “I would represent to your highness that, excepting those who were killed, few showed their faces except at a cautious distance.”—“And many were killed?”—“Many, your highness, else we had not been here to tell the tale.” A dark shade flitted across his countenance, and ruffled his brow; but the cloud was momentary: it passed away, and all was smooth again. “Well, you are welcome,” resumed he; and the words seemed forced from him, as if the muscles of his throat would have choked their utterance. “I congratulate you on your escape. We have at this time much pressing business on our hands; but we shall examine the communication of your master, the governor of Mushed; and after giving them such consideration as their tenor may require, we shall summon you again to our presence.” He prepared to give the signal for withdrawing, but I interrupted him:—“I beg to represent to your highness that Zoheir-u-doulut

Ibrahim Khan, governor not only of Mushed, but of all Khorasan, has sent me to your presence, in all respect and amity. His wishes, his proposals are simple and reasonable, and require but little deliberation; for they point at nothing beyond what consists, on the one hand, with the regard due to your highness, and the duty which every loyal subject owes to the throne, on the other. Your servant would humbly express his hope that no long period may elapse—.” The glow of impatient fury which flushed the khan’s swarthy brow, and the fire which shot from his eye, as he suddenly motioned to rise, cut short my speech in my turn: his hand grasped the hilt of his khunjar, and his lips moved convulsively, as if about to give instant and effectual vent to his displeasure; but, by a powerful effort, he restrained himself; and not until his cheek had regained its usual hue, and his features their composed expression, did he think fit to reply.—“Certainly, the envoy is a person of much experience, and knows his duty: we thank him for thus publicly instructing us in ours; although, deeming ourselves sufficient to decide on what concerns our own conduct, we regret that so much good advice should have been unnecessarily wasted. He has our leave for the present: more important concerns demand our attention.”

However indignant I might feel at this haughty

and arbitrary dismissal, there was neither time nor opportunity for remonstrance; for the yessawul in waiting immediately came forward, and with little ceremony prepared to execute his master's commands. So, with a slight obeisance, I quitted the room and the palace, and we returned as we came to our comfortless quarters.

No sooner had we been left to ourselves than Cossim approached me with an air of mystery:—“May the great God grant, sir, that we all get safe from this abominable place!” said he; “but I much fear that there is foul play going on towards us.” Although my own suspicions of the same fact were becoming stronger every hour, it was neither politic nor prudent to communicate these surmises either to my entertainers or my followers. Assuming therefore a tone of surprise, I desired him to explain himself.—“Foul play! what do you mean? What have you seen or heard to give rise to such an idea?”—“I beg to state in the first place,” said he, “that the suspicion which Firoze Beg entertained from the first has now turned out to be the fact:—it was the khan's own people, and no robbers, who attacked us in the pass of Cothul-e-zaug, and who had hovered about us all the way from the Karagour glen.”—“And pray, Cossim, how is this known to be the fact?”—“Why, sir, you remember the soldier who made his appearance

among us at Nujjuffdeh, in the mehmankhaneh ? the same you remarked to-day among our escort to the kallah. Well, that man was also recognised by Hassan Mehter as one of the very fellows who fought us at the pass of Cothul-e-zaug ; and another of our people overheard him this morning alluding to the death of their leader, Feridoon Sudeval,* swearing that every one of us owed him the price of blood, which he would have at our hands ; and expressing his joy that the game was now in the snare."

"This is suspicious certainly, Cossim ; but may not Hassan Mehter have been mistaken ? and this soldier,—what quarrel can he have with us ? even supposing he was one of our assailants in the pass of Cothul-e-zaug, every death in battle is not to cause a blood-feud."—"How can I tell, sir ? I know no more than you have heard. But as for the khan, his object is plain : his negotiation with the Abdallees is publicly spoken of ; and—:" his countenance grew troubled, and he hesitated :—"What more ? Speak out, man !" In a low mysterious tone, he continued—"A report—a strange report, sir, has reached the city : I overheard it at the durkhaneh ; but could learn no particulars :—a report that his highness, our master, the general, has not enjoyed

* Sudeval ; commander of an hundred.

his usual good fortune of late : that he has met with a serious reverse in the south : they spoke of a great battle lost against the Turks, somewhere about Kermanshah.”—“ What, Cossim ! what !—a battle lost !—Nadir defeated !—and by the Turks ! I would not believe a word of it if they swore it on their fathers’ souls ! The thing is impossible.—Nadir beaten by the Turks ! Hah ! by the holy Mahomed that is too much ! Even this miscreant khan could not believe it.”—“ May God grant that it be so !” responded Cossim fervently. “ May the banners that overshadow the world float ever triumphant !—But such is the report, you may depend upon it, sir ; and truly the behaviour of Mouzuffer Khan to us, the servants of his highness, would argue his own belief in it at least.”

“ By the might of Allah it is true ! This indeed would account for his rudeness with a vengeance,” cried I, boiling with indignation. “ This is the true explanation of all his coldness, his insulting neglect, and supercilious haughtiness ; all the strange and equivocal appearances which have perplexed me since we set foot in this accursed country. By the head of Allee, the khan’s game is plain enough now ;—the mean, time-serving scoundrel looks upon the Abdallees as future masters of Khorasan, and he shapes his course accordingly. The object of our mission is blown up

beyond a doubt; but my duty is still plain. An audience must be craved for the morrow:—if granted, I trust still that I may succeed in showing the khan that his duty and his interest go together:—if not, we must prepare for other steps.”

Such were the thoughts which, half uttered, half suppressed, passed quickly through my brain, while Cossim was proceeding to detail some further observations of his own:—“Hark ye,” said I at length, “it may be as you think: our situation may be critical; and we must act with corresponding caution: let some of my followers endeavour to escape from the town—Beder Allee Gholaum, Kara Mahomed, and any other whose persons are least known;—let them steal out one by one, mingle with the crowd, and so slip out from the gates: let my horses, if possible, be likewise withdrawn from the town. You yourself, Cossim, must attempt this also.”—“I!” said he, starting back amazed:—“never, sir; whatever happens, I quit you not.”—“But, my friend, if you desire to aid me, this will be your only efficient way. Your single arm could be of no avail to me here: a zealous messenger is required to carry the account of my detention to the governor; by escaping while it is yet time, you may effect this most important service: I can trust to none so implicitly as you.”—But it was no easy

matter to convince old Cossim that the surest way to save his master's life was to abandon him amongst those who might be thirsting for his blood ; nor was it till I laid my positive commands upon this attached servant that he at last consented to escape, if possible, for the purpose of afterwards assisting in my liberation.

That very day Cossim and three other men quitted our quarters on this enterprise ; and as they did not return, I flattered myself that they had eluded our guards, and gained their liberty. It was well they did so, for they would have had no other opportunity.

Next morning, while waiting impatiently for the customary visit of my mehmandar, I was startled by a bustle and shouting at the entrance of the court, succeeded by the trampling of many feet. I rose hastily, to discover the cause of the uproar ; but was stopped at the door of my apartment by two fierce-looking men with drawn swords, who, rushing upon me, assisted by numerous armed followers, seized and pinioned my arms behind me before I had time to think of resistance. " What is this for ?—what means this violence ?" exclaimed I, in amazement, yet instantly guessing the truth. " Silence !—shut his mouth :—bring him along :—no struggling :—stop his mouth with the shoe, Caleb Allee :—knock him down if he won't go peaceably."—" But tell me,

in the name of God—”—“ What ! he will jabber, will he ?—take that then, and that ;” and they struck me on the mouth with their iron-heeled slippers, till the blood sprung from my lips : others of the furoshes showered blows upon me with their heavy sticks, and hustled me till I fell ; then they dragged me along the pavement, kicking and trampling upon me, until I became convinced that it was their intention to put me to death on the spot.

I cannot define my emotions on becoming so unexpectedly the object of this cowardly and savage assault ; but I had recollection enough to perceive that any appeal to their justice or mercy would be vain ; so I held my breath, resolved to die without affording them the satisfaction of a groan : but, after continuing these insults for a minute or two, they set me rudely upon my feet, and once more dragged me along.

As I regained my legs and looked about me, the scowling visage of the soldier who had already twice attracted my attention met my glance, and explained the cause of such extraordinary ill-treatment. I had little doubt that my companions and followers underwent similar discipline ; but I saw it not ; for a large Arab cloak being wrapped round my person, I was hurried away to the kallah ; and I saw myself a prisoner within the massy gates, which had in-

spired me with a feeling nearly allied to presentiment of ill to come when first I passed their gloomy barrier.

On entering the precincts of the *kallah* I saw that they hurried me in a different direction from that of the *khan's dewankhaneh* ; but all speculations regarding my destination were speedily terminated ; for, after traversing several gloomy passages, we reached a strongly-fashioned door ; which opening, admitted us to another arched passage. Another massy door was now unlocked ; and my brutal conductor thrusting me down several steps into a vault-like cell, left me with my hands still bound, and in total darkness.

It was some time ere my senses grew composed enough, or my eyes became sufficiently accustomed to the obscurity, to enable me to examine my prison chamber with attention ; and the examination when made was any thing but consolatory. The cell or dungeon in which I was immured was about twelve feet long, and not more than eight in width. A single small opening, close to the roof, admitted air and a very faint ray of light through iron bars and thick walls. My feet slipped in the mud of its moist, clammy floor, and I fancied that I could see the writhing motions of the reptiles, which were probably the customary occupants of so disgusting a den. A scanty litter of wet and rotten straw lay spread in one corner,

doubtless the bed of the last tenant of the dungeon. Its damp, mouldy walls contained no object that I could discern.

“Here, then,” thought I, as I leaned, still panting from the effects of my late discipline, against the wall of my cell,—“here terminate the hopes of a mission, which was to have crippled the efforts of the Abdallees, and detached from their alliance one of their most valuable coadjutors; and here also, doubtless, are to close with life, all the gay visions, the high aspirations and anticipations of future joy, which have gilded my own short and stormy career. This is the explanation and result of all that mysterious inhospitality of which my unfortunate companions and myself have been the object. My poor and faithful friends, ye merited a better fate! Yet it has overtaken you in the execution of your duty, as it would had ye died on the field; and he your treacherous destroyer, sooner or later,—he too will meet his deserts. Ibrahim, Nadir himself, will exact a stern and bloody revenge for his perfidy. Nadir!—but these reports—is it possible that a full confirmation of them can have led to this last decisive step? Would Mouzuffer Khan, bold and rebellious though he be, have dared to commit himself so publicly, had he not full surely known that the arm of the avenger is powerless? Alas!

then, for that brave and hitherto successful chief! Alas! for the master I have served and loved! As for myself—often have I braved death; and now, although it does not present itself in its least revolting shape, it cannot be shunned, and must therefore be endured.” Shireen, too, my young and tender wife! did not thy image arise upon the eye of memory, and thrill through my brain with a pang that almost maddened me?

Just as these reflections were swiftly passing through my mind, my eyes, now better accustomed to the darkness, and perhaps their vision preternaturally sharpened by mental excitement, fell upon an object which engendered a fearful suspicion. Springing towards it, a chill of horror ran through all my frame when, on groping with my foot, for my fettered arms could not perform the office, I discovered, half hidden among the rotting straw, the white and mouldering bones of a human skeleton!

Motionless, with straining eyes and inheld breath, I stood gazing upon the ghastly, the ominous spectacle!—where now was that calm resolution, that steady zealous devotion, within which but a moment before I had contemplated the approach of the destroying angel? The appalling object at my feet disclosed a tale which opened my eyes to the truth; and robbing mor-

tality of all the rich hues which enthusiasm will often lend it, displayed it in its most disgusting and hideous shape.

Hitherto, if the thought of death ever crossed my imagination, it had been united with the fascinating visions of honour and renown. The animating hopes and the spirit-stirring struggles of the field of battle robbed it of all its terrors. Nay, even in the discharge of my present more pacific duty, while supporting the cause, the credit, and the honour of my master, I would have bared my neck to the scimitar, or stretched it to the executioner's rope, at the command of the tyrant into whose power that duty had led me. But to die a lingering solitary death, without the excitement of a struggle, far from the sound of a human voice, without hearing the blessing of a friend, or even the curse of a foe; to sink by slow degrees from the possession of youth, health, and strength, and all my lately found happiness, without either wound or sickness, to unnatural decay; to perish piecemeal by hunger, or by thirst, unopposed by all external force, save by the passive resistance of my dungeon walls; for this I was not prepared. My overwrought mind became disordered; and my awakened imagination busied itself in conjuring up a wild succession of horrors.

I groaned aloud: I called for help, but no one answered. The disorder of my mind increased, and

wilder visions whirled through my brain. My prison and its hateful accompaniments seemed to flit from my recollection, and once more I was in all the hurry of a skirmish. I fancied myself assaulted by Mouzuffer Khan and his myrmidons, and hotly struggling with a mighty odds. It was a furious conflict ; but still I was gaining ground upon my foes. I saw the mighty form of Nadir pressing through the throng, as often I had seen it in the day of battle, while men fell before him like corn before the reaper. I called aloud upon him to approach to save me ; but suddenly the ground gave way beneath my feet. I fell, sunk down,—down,—and remember no more.

How long I lay thus insensible I know not. I was roused by the rude thrust of a man's foot, and my ears were saluted by sounds as harsh as the act. "How the devil comes this? the fellow is dead—gone to hell already! How has this come about? But no matter; the khan will be all the better pleased, you may swear: Come, let the carrion rot where it lies." My awakening perception just comprehended the terrible consequences of his error. The chance of being left for dead in my dungeon, to moulder there as its last tenant had done, was present to my mind in all its horrors. I strove in agony to rise, but could not stir; my voice served me better. "I am not dead," uttered I, feebly: "for God's

sake unbind my arms, and give me food and drink."

"Hah! pider sookhteh!* is that the case? What! sleeping, I warrant: the curse of the devil on you! when better men are forced to watch. Well, loose his arms, Allee, and let him eat the food which the bounty of the khan provides for such dogs. Bind them up again when he has fed." — "In the name of the blessed Prophet, don't bind them again," exclaimed I. "Are not these walls strong enough? What can you dread from leaving my arms at liberty?" — "Silence, Ghorum-saug!—strong enough! Ay, they are so; they will serve as a lodging longer than you will want one. You think yourself a clever fellow, no doubt, and a stout soldier; but if you were Zal or Roostum themselves, you are safe enough here; and blood, the blood you have shed shall you pay for to the last drop." — "What blood have I to answer for to you?" said I in a tone of amazement. "What blood!—but hold your accursed tongue, if you don't wish me to tear it from your jaws." Here his companion whispered something which I could not hear, upon which he grunted out an answer equally unintelligible. My arms were left unbound, and they soon quitted the dungeon, carrying with them the

* One whose father has been burned (in hell); one of the most common terms of Persian abuse.

lantern, which they had brought to light their own way.

But they could not take from me the ray of hope which the few words that had been dropt, fierce and hostile as they were, and even the simple fact of their coming near me at all, had let in upon the dark and desponding condition in which they found me. Whatever might be the fate intended for me, I was not doomed to perish by famine. It appeared that a charge of blood had been preferred against me, and probably I might be brought forth for trial. Even this prospect admitted of some hope; faint, indeed; for how could I expect impartial justice at such a tribunal as that where I must appear? But still there was a hope—there was delay; many events might occur to better my condition; news of a success from the army of Nadir; a movement in my favour by Ibrahim Khan; an alteration in the views of Mouzuffer Khan himself:—the drowning man will catch at straws, and hope did not desert even me.

Still I had a personal foe to contend with; a dark, deadly, persevering foe had even obtained a charge of me, as it appeared. This was ominous no doubt. Might he not take occasion to satisfy his thirst of vengeance on a helpless enemy, and anticipate the tardy steps of justice? Might not this premature act be even grateful to the

khan, as exonerating him in some degree from the odium which could not but attach to the public execution of an accredited envoy? The thought thrilled through my frame, as like an icy bolt, and for a moment the cold dew stood upon my forehead. But the raging of my mind had subsided, and it was now more tranquil. I could reason with more calmness, and saw, that if there was much to dread, there still remained something to hope. "My fate," said I, mentally, "is in the hands of the Almighty; what is written must be!" I put up a prayer for protection, and resigned myself to his will.

I partook sparingly of the mouldy bread and stagnant water, which the munificence of the khan or the good-will of his servant had provided for me; and raking together with my hands the straw which was least decayed, I strewed it in the driest part of the cell; and chill and damp as it was, I gladly laid my weary limbs upon it.

It would be untrue to say that the succeeding days were spent in perfect tranquillity, or were entirely free from anxiety; but I waited the result of my confinement at least with calmness. My mind was untinged with despondency; and there were times when I was sensible of a ray of cheerfulness, the offspring of a hope, which, almost in spite of reason, lurked in my breast. Once in each day a pittance of the same indifferent pro-

visions was brought me by a man who rudely repulsed my repeated attempts to engage him in conversation ; but did not in other respects maltreat me. My declared enemy did not again appear.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRISON.

A WEEK of my confinement had elapsed, when one day, at the time when my food was usually brought to me, a person whom I had not before seen entered along with the keeper. Instead of the ordinary meagre fare, they brought with them a tray, upon which was placed a plate of pillaw and a savoury-smelling stew of meat. I took this seeming piece of attention for a good omen ; and in the joy of the moment, exclaimed with a cheerful voice, "Barekillah ! friends, this looks well ! good tidings, I hope, are to follow this good cheer."—"Who speaks ?" exclaimed the stranger, starting.—"Who ?—who should it be but your prisoner, Ismael Khan, a servant of Nadir Koolee Khan."—"Ismael Khan !" repeated he, in a voice of very peculiar emphasis ; but instantly checking himself, he continued in a tone of stern indifference, "Oh ! ay, I was dreaming.

Well, thank the khan's bounty for this comfortable change of diet, and enjoy it. Come, Allee; leave him to digest it as he may." With these words they turned to quit the cell; but as the keeper preceded him with the lantern, my new visitor turned suddenly round, dexterously overturned the dishes which he had set before me, and grasping my hand hard, exclaimed in an earnest whisper, "Eat not a morsel, as you value your life, until you see me again;" and without waiting my reply, he quickly followed his companion, leaving me not a little amazed at his strange and inconsistent behaviour.

His parting act had rendered the injunction almost unnecessary; for the victuals were scattered about the muddy floor so completely, that had I been ever so anxious, I could not have gathered up a morsel. But what could be the meaning of that injunction?—Why bring a poor hungry prisoner savoury food, to tantalise him by prohibiting its use? Could it be poisoned? was the first idea that struck me: the warning had all the earnestness of a friend's advice; yet how should a friend find access to me here, and be the emissary of one who sought my death?—Then his remarkable agitation at hearing the sound of my voice, and my name; and the awkward manner in which he attempted to conceal that agitation;—all was puzzling in

the extreme. On reflecting too more coolly, a something dawned upon me, a faint idea that the tones of his own voice were not unknown to me; but in vain I racked my memory to discover where I had heard them, or to whom they could belong; still the fancy that this might be a friend in disguise gained strength in my mind. He had promised to return:—well, patience till then:—and patience I was forced to exert; although the serenity I had enjoyed for the preceding week was greatly discomposed by what had happened.

Hour after hour had passed on, but no one came near me. Hunger I had none; but a fierce thirst had forced me to drain the last drop of the small reserve which I had hitherto used the precaution of retaining from the pittance of water they gave me. A fever of anxiety and subdued impatience preyed upon my vitals.

Midnight had now passed, and I said to myself, he will not come till morning; if, indeed, the whole affair be not a delusion, and that I am cheated by a creature of my own weakened brain. But just as I was seeking to reconcile myself to this bitter disappointment, my ear caught the sound of light footsteps approaching: the key grated cautiously in the lock—the door opened, and, muffled in a dark Arab cloak, a man carrying a small covered lantern entered my cell.

Carefully closing the door, and listening a while before he quitted it, he turned the light of his lamp full upon my face. "Ismael Beg!" exclaimed he, in a subdued and agitated voice, "Gholaum-e-Nadiree! It is the same! I could not be mistaken! Ah! have you quite forgotten your old comrade, Yar Mahomed?"—"Yar Mahomed!" repeated I slowly after a pause, during which my dazzled eyes sought vainly to recognise the features of him who addressed me.—"Yar Mahomed! my old messmate!—can this be?"—"Yes," replied he, turning the light of the lantern upon his own person; "yes, it is he indeed; but changed, Ismael, changed like yourself; only with you the change is for the better—with me, for the worse. Many a trick has evil fortune played me since we parted in Mushed, where you got spirited away, Heaven knows how. But I have not forgotten those pleasant days: I have not forgotten all your generous conduct, Ismael; nor the times you have shared your purse with me and that reprobate Fouje Allee; ay, and stood between us and the wrath of our stern master, when need was. Fallen as I am, I cannot—to save my own life, I could not, be the executioner of my former friend: come what may, this can never be!"

"My executioner!—then it is true?" said I, shuddering, "it was poison then? and thus it was

they would have settled accounts with me. Ah! my friend, we meet again in dismal circumstances; and these are sorry news to bring your old companion; yet welcome, thrice welcome is your voice and your presence to the poor prisoner; even should the friend's embrace be followed by the nassakchee's blow;"—and we embraced, and I felt his warm tears flow upon my neck.

“ Oh! do not doubt my earnest wish to save you,” said Yar Mahomed eagerly, when, after a few moments of powerful emotion, we had seated ourselves on the damp straw of my dungeon. “ Believe that I am ready to risk my life for yours, however small may be my power; but this is a terrible place. The khan (whispering) is a fierce and bloody tyrant; and woe to the unfortunate wretch who braves or deceives him!” —“ And how then happens it that I find Yar Mahomed, once a confidential gholaum of the mighty Nadir Koolee, now in the service of his enemy?—and such a service too! why does he not instantly quit it?”

“ The history of my disgrace with Nadir, and of the freaks of fortune that have thrown me into the service of Mouzuffer Khan Karaoee, is too long to be told you at present: thus far I can inform you, that by a very unexpected event I am now a nassakchee in the khan's confidence. Last night only, on my return from a piece of

duty, he sent for me, and informed me that a spy of Allah-yar-Khan, the ex-chief of Herat, taken by his scouts, was confined in this dungeon; that although justice demanded his death, it was his wish, he said, to avoid an open breach with Allah-yar-Khan, so that the execution could not be conducted in public: to me he should commit this piece of service. Business of the last importance called him that night from Toorbut; but the spy was never more to see the light of day; and poison, he observed, would be the surest means for avoiding equivocal appearances or impertinent inquiries. The keeper had his orders to admit me at all times.—‘Be speedy,’ concluded he, ‘and be faithful.’

“The earnestness of the khan’s manner, amounting almost to trepidation, while he entered into this unusual detail, convinced me that there was something connected with this condemned prisoner beyond what he had seen fit to communicate, and which rendered his death at once a measure of policy and of hazard; but this was no affair of mine;—my duty was to obey the master whom I served, and this duty I accordingly addressed myself to perform. Little did I guess who my intended victim was!”

“But the khan, you say, has left Toorbut: whither, and for what purpose is he gone?”—
“Neither are publicly declared,” replied Yar Ma-

homed ; “ but report states confidently that he has gone to join the standard of Zoolfecar Khan, the Abdallee. That chief, you are to know, after succeeding in driving his rival Allah-yar-Khan from Herat, and getting himself acknowledged as leader of the Abdallee tribe, resolved to take advantage of Nadir’s absence from Khorasan, and of the reports which at that time stated him to have involved himself in a tedious and uncertain war with the Osmanlees of Room.* Encouraged by Houssein Khan, the Ghiljee chief of Kandahar, and other discontented leaders of the east, he has at length advanced towards Mushed ; and hopes, in no long time, to invest that city.”

“ Good God !” cried I, “ what do you tell me ? —Where are all the troops of the Zoheir-u-doulut ?—Where is Ibrahim himself ? and how does he permit his enemy thus to approach and seize him by the very beard ?”—“ It is said,” replied Yar Mahomed, “ that the troops of Ibrahim have quite enough to do among the Koords, and in the Attock ; so that he is unable to show front to Zoolfecar Khan, who advances with ten or twelve thousand picked Abdallees and Ghiljees. He has sent urgent summonses to all his friends ; and Mouzuffer Khan, believing that the star of Nadir’s destiny is now on the decline,

* Constantinople, Turkey.

has concluded a treaty with the Abdallee, and gone with all his disposable force to join his standard."

"O Allah!" cried I, "to hear all this, and thus to be immured, unable to bear my part in what goes on!—But what are the reports respecting Nadir?—why should it be thought that his fortune fails?"—"Reports," replied Yar Mahomed, "confirmed through several channels, have asserted that our old master has failed in his attempt on the city of Bagdad, whither, depending on the continued success of his arms, he had somewhat too hastily marched: that he has been worsted in several engagements with Ahmed Pashah, the governor of that place; and that unable to make any further stand on that ground, he has fled towards Fars, where he had left a considerable body of troops. But it is moreover said that these reverses have rendered his service so unpopular, that he cannot procure recruits. Such are the reports in circulation; and I fear, from their general accordance with one another, and the various channels through which they have reached us, that they cannot be altogether without foundation."

"I'll not believe them; although a thousand messengers of evil were to swear it, I would not credit them!" rejoined I with some vehemence: "it cannot surely be: whose dogs are the Os-

manlees, to beat and drive back the practised veteran troops of his highness?—The reports must be infamous falsehoods.”—“Softly, softly, friend! remember where you are,” interrupted Yar Mahomed, placing his hand upon my mouth; “recollect that this violence is useless with me, and may destroy us both, if it should attract notice: be calm and wary. The trust reposed in me empowers me to visit you occasionally; but caution is absolutely necessary to give value to this privilege. I myself am watched: I know this to be the case; and the least suspicion of an understanding between us would prove the sure ruin of us both. The absence of the khan gives us time to breathe, and to contrive. If I am able to liberate, and fly with you, I will, at the hazard of my life; but it were madness to throw both yours and my own needlessly away. I must leave you now; but I will soon see you again, and shall do my best to add a little to your comforts. This is not like some of the chambers we have visited together,” added he, looking round him with a smile. “Here, take this cloak, and this numud too,” disengaging them from his person, “they will defend you from the cold and damp of this vile place: make as little show of them as possible; and now rest secure from treachery. Eat freely of the food I bring or send

you. Adieu!—May God protect you, my dear friend!”

He rose and quitted the vault as noiselessly as he had entered it, leaving me to ruminate at leisure on the caprice of fortune, which had thrown two old companions together in so singular a manner, and in circumstances so critical; and to speculate upon the chance of escape which this unexpected event might afford:—a chance which, however obscure, had effectually disturbed my former tranquillity, and excited powerfully that love of life, which the firm belief of my approaching fate had hitherto induced me to silence and subdue.

From this time forward Yar Mahomed frequently visited me; bringing along with him such comforts as he could introduce without the risk of exciting suspicion. Indeed my keeper seldom remained with me long enough, during his daily visits, to remark the alterations in the economy of my dark cell; and his brutal ferocity, which had probably been chiefly excited by my bitter enemy, had gradually sunk into sullen indifference. The latter I did not see again; and learned from Yar Mahomed that he had most probably accompanied the khan on his journey to meet Zoolfecar Abdallee.

My days now passed on in quietness: hope

grew stronger as danger seemed each day less pressing; till, with the sanguine spirit of youth, I looked forward more confidently than reason would acknowledge to the termination of my uncomfortable bondage, through the agency of my newly recovered friend.

It was about ten days after this fortunate change in my affairs that the keeper of my prison entered one afternoon, bearing a metal tray covered by a cloak of embroidered silk: he lifted this with an air of something like respect, and there appeared beneath it several dishes of sweetmeats and confections, such as are made in the harems of the great; together with a few small bottles of the inspissated juice of fruit for making sherbet.—“You are in luck,” said he, addressing me in a less rough tone than usual. “This is a present from the khanum: she has heard of your misfortunes, and pities you; and she has sent you these niceties in token of her good-will. I am a fool, to be sure, for my pains in bringing them, for I may get my head into a scrape to please her: but take them,” continued he, “I can’t stand waiting here all day.—Why, what in the devil’s name are you dreaming of? why do you hesitate?” seeing me eyeing the tempting dishes with suspicion, as the last similar occasion recurred to my mind, and I began to think that, suspecting the fidelity of Yar Mahomed, my captors had deter-

mined to do the job themselves. "What are you afraid of? Oh! I understand; but you're all wrong: they're wholesome, never fear. See!"—and suiting the action to the word, he put forth his huge dirty paw, and dashing it into several of the dishes, transferred a portion of their contents into his own mouth, to convince me that they were not poisoned.

It was a coarse but conclusive method of demonstration; besides, it was but good policy to refrain from affronting the man in his first obliging act; so, thanking him for his kindness, I besought him to return my humble acknowledgments to the lady who had considered and felt for an unhappy prisoner; and my heart melted within me as I did so; for I thought of poor Shireen, left unprotected and wretched by my mishap, in all the anguish of miserable uncertainty! The remembrance too of days long gone by arose unbidden; and the forms of the wretched Fatimah, and the mild and luckless Zeebah, flitted past the mental eye. Oh, woman! kind and gentle being! if in my short and troubled span of life thou hast cost me very dear, how many blissful moments have I not yet owed to thee! for how much tenderness and sympathy am I not thy debtor! Thy very name acts as a charm upon my troubled senses, and sends a thrill of delight through every vein.

The jailer's information raised my hopes to the most unreasonable pitch ; and from this kind attention, which had its origin alone in the compassion of a benevolent female, I was mad enough to anticipate an immediate or at least a very speedy deliverance from captivity.

I communicated this event to Yar Mahomed at his next visit. After musing a while, he observed, that if the story of the jailer were true, as there was good reason to hope, the result to me, though not exactly what my sanguine temper had anticipated, might be of great importance. " I have reason to know," said he, " that the khanum is a lady of great worth, quite unlike her tiger-husband ; but possessing over him no inconsiderable influence, which she often makes use of to restrain his ferocious disposition, and mitigate the cruelty of his acts. Such interposition would afford you the best chance of safety. I will make it my business to ascertain how far this may be looked for:—in the mean time, should Allee the keeper, of himself lead to the subject, endeavour cautiously to draw from him what you can ; but beware arousing suspicion by any unguarded question, for he is as cross-grained as an old mule. Coax him, and you may lead him to any point ; but let him once imagine that there is a design to entrap him, and he becomes furious and dangerous."

Whatever might be the natural disposition of

Allee, there was from this time a striking alteration in his behaviour to me, and a mighty increase of attention to my comfort: clean dry straw was brought into my cell, and its nuisances chiefly removed. A coarse quilted cotton mattress was given me to sleep upon; the quality of my food was improved, and its quantity increased.

On the second day another tray of delicate viands and sweetmeats was conveyed to me, which the keeper declared to be a further mark of the khanum's compassion. "She is a worthy lady," observed he, becoming more than ordinarily communicative upon the occasion; "and you are not the first captive in those dungeons who has had cause to bless her name. Multitudes of the poor are relieved by her bounty. Many a large sum of money does she distribute in alms among the dervishes and fakeers, who flock to bestow on her their benedictions; and the holy shrine at Mushed has often been enriched by her sumptuous offerings. Ah! she is truly an excellent lady!"

"May the blessing of the Prophet and of Allee rest with her!" said I, taking advantage of his loquacious mood: "she must be a most pious and charitable person. Is she a young lady?"—"Ahah! is it there you are?" rejoined he with a half leering, half suspicious glance.—Is she young? By the head of the khan, this is the way with all

young fellows ; a woman can't do a kind or a civil turn for them, but tchick ! that moment they set down that she is in love with them ! No, no, my fine youth, the khanum (the blessing of Fatimah be upon her !) is no chicken, not much younger than the khan himself."—" Is she his only wife ?" inquired I, " or has he many wives ?"—" Hah ! what have such as you and I to do with what passes behind the curtain in the houses of the great ?" returned the man. " Who can tell how many women the khan may have ? But report says, that although my master was once a sad rake, and could not keep his harem full enough of women, all that is past, and but little serves his turn now. He has other matters to mind, to be sure ; and this lady, his first and principal wife, is now paramount in the underroom."—" And of what family is the khanum, pray ?"—" Why, she was daughter to Nujjuff Khan, Affshar, a chief who dwelt somewhere to the north of Mushed. The match was made when Allee Koolee Khan, the father of my master, then high in confidence with the governor of Khorasan, was employed in military expeditions against the Toorkomans and Oozbecks."

" An Affshar !" I was about to exclaim ; but prudence checked the impulse. Here was a link of sympathy and connection by no means to be

lost sight of, although extreme caution would be required in making use of the discovery. "And what may be the business which you say had robbed the beauties of his harem of the khan's devotion?" inquired I, more with a view to change the subject than with any other object. But the question was unlucky, for it set the man's suspicion afloat. "What business!" repeated he, with something like a return of his rude manner. "Why, business that is neither yours nor mine; and you might do better, and so might I, than stand prating about matters that don't concern you." With these words he withdrew, leaving me full of what I had just heard.

There was in truth matter enough to occupy my mind, and busily did it go to work upon it. It appeared all but certain that the benevolent disposition of the good khanum might be by proper means turned to much better account than that of furnishing occasional supplies of pastry and sweet-meats; but it might not be easy to devise those means. A medium of communication was indispensable; and where was that to be found? The jailer, it was evident, was to a certain degree disposed to attend to the orders of the khanum; but how far he might choose to imperil his own neck by extending his good offices to her *protégé* in any essential point, might be at least doubtful;

and to tamper with him might endanger more than merely the loss of the comparative kindness he had begun of late to show to me.

Yar Mahomed, though perfectly friendly and well disposed, was timid; perhaps wisely so. He feared, as it seemed, to risk any thing for an uncertain result, where failure must be ruin; his inquiries, so far as I had learned from himself, were hitherto fruitless. Yet he also had abundant cause of anxiety—abundant cause for wishing to see my deliverance effected. The khan might unexpectedly arrive, and he then would have to give an account of the duty with which he had been charged. Now then was the time for action, were the means of acting but in our hands.

These and similar reflections kept my thoughts busily employed; and I had leisure enough at this time for considering events and consequences in every horrible variety of connection; for several days now intervened without a visit or communication from any of my friends. I began to dread that some unlucky discovery had taken place, or that frightened at the danger of concerning themselves in the affairs of one whose doom was sealed, they had retired and abandoned me to my fate;—but I was deceived.

It was about a week after my conversation with the jailer, and near the hour of midnight, that, while stretched upon a couch, rendered sleepless

by sickening anxiety, I was startled by hearing the key grate cautiously in the wards of the lock. In due time the door turned slowly on its hinges to admit two persons, who maintained a perfect silence. One of these was the jailer; the other, muffled in a cloak abba, I could not recognise. "Hush!" uttered the former in the suppressed tones of caution. "I bring you a friend:—beware of imprudent exclamation, which may be dangerous. Behold a messenger from the khanum."

Turning my eyes at those words upon the person to whom they referred, I saw the abba and turban drop to the ground, exposing the blue checked veil and low stature of a woman! Amazed at this unexpected apparition, I started to my feet, and sprung forward. "Lady," I began:—"Prisoner," interrupted she, "be silent! listen to my words, and only answer to my questions: who and what are you?"—"Lady, I am in your power: whether your intentions toward me be good or evil, I have no means to resist them, nor do I desire to conceal either my name or quality: the knowledge can injure neither myself nor the cause I serve; therefore will I answer you with all truth. My name is Ismael, an officer in the service of Nadir Koolee Khan, general of all the armies of Persia, restorer and protector of the kingdom; and I was intrusted by Ibrahim Khan, the brother of that Nadir, with a special mission

to Mouzuffer Khan of this place. Why I am now a prisoner, and my life in imminent peril, let those explain who can.”—“Thou hast answered to thy name,” resumed my concealed visitor, after a pause of some moments; “but thou hast not declared thy family:—art thou of city origin? or dost thou claim descent from some noble tribe?”—“My birth is noble, and my tribe might vie in glory and importance with the best and most powerful of Persia, even if it had not to number among its sons the brightest ornament and luminary of the age. I am of the tribe of Affshar and family of Keerkloo; thus claiming the same descent as the mighty Nadir himself.”—“No doubt the family of Keerkloo is noble,” replied the female; “but it too had many branches: which of these is it then that owns thee for its son? how is thy father called?”—“My valiant father, whose soul is now in Paradise, was chief of Karabulaugh: his name Moorteza Khan.”

The half-suppressed exclamation which escaped her lips as I uttered these words might have passed either for an unmeaning ejaculation, or an expression of regret at my father’s untimely fate. “The manner of his death?” again questioned she. “He was murdered by the Toorkomans: he and his whole family: I alone escaped. But excuse me: I too may now surely put a question in

my turn. Why these particular and urgent inquiries; and what effect may their answers, thus frankly given, have upon my own fate?"—"Rest contented, young man; be convinced that nothing but good is meant thee from my agency; friends whom thou dreamest not of watch over thy safety: be patient, and hope for better days."—"But who are these friends? may I not know them? Will you not cheer a captive, by telling him of those who are interested in his fate? Ah! if you knew the anxious doubts to which he must continue a prey, you would not leave him in ignorance, and yet talk to him of patience, of tranquillity."—"Yet thus must it be," said the female; "the knowledge could avail thee nothing, and might be fatal both to you and others."—"Oh! I will brave the danger," said I, "only tell me—is it the khanum?"—"The khanum! imprudent young man!" repeated the stranger with a start, and pointing towards the keeper, who still stood near us, with a significant gesture:—"the khanum, indeed!—but who knows? you may not be far wrong: only be calm, be prudent; the time may not be long ere you see me again." With these words she yielded to the impatient signals of the keeper, and quitted the prison.

How could she speak of calmness, or tell me that the time of her absence would not be long?

—the pace of a snail itself is swift, when compared with the lapse of hours, of minutes, to the anxious and miserable prisoner ! Day after day, and night after night lingered on, like a lame and jaded steed upon a journey of life and death, and still no tidings came. Patience !—for ever patience !—mine was at length thoroughly exhausted ; and the chill of despair was fast creeping over my heart, when the sudden entrance of Yar Mahomed one evening made me start with renewed and eager expectation from the couch on which I had listlessly thrown myself. But, however anxious to learn the intelligence of which he might be the bearer, his long-continued absence at so critical a time had inspired me with a degree of mistrust ; and this was visible in the constraint which somewhat checked my eager glance of inquiry as I rose to receive him.

“ You doubt me, Ismael,” said he, replying to the hesitating expression of my countenance : “ you believed that I had deserted you ; and, in truth, appearances might warrant your mistrust : but if little of my time has been passed in your company, the more of it has been spent in your service ; and not, as I hope, unsuccessfully. The hour of action is at hand, and not a moment must be lost. An attempt to set you at liberty will be made before two days are passed : thus far it is

necessary for you to know, in order that you may be prepared to act when called upon; but further, it would neither be possible nor safe to explain myself. Breathe not a word before your keeper; take heed lest you rouse his suspicions:—though the fellow has been made our tool, we dare not, and will not trust him. At present he is passive and harmless; but one unlucky word might convert him into an active enemy, and frustrate all our hopes. Farewell! when the time comes you shall be taught how to act; you will hear from us,—from your friends.”

“But stay—stay, my friend: surely you may explain to me whence I am to receive this aid:—who are these secret friends on whom I am thus blindly required to rely?—were it only to guard against treachery, I should learn in whom I may confide.”—“I cannot explain, or inform you of particulars; there is not time to tell you half of that, which, inshallah! you shall soon know; such confidences could not be attempted here: we stand on dangerous ground; a mine may explode at our feet, even while we deem ourselves most secure. Once more, farewell! be prepared to seize whatever opportunity presents itself; and rouse your own powerful energies to follow the directions, and second the efforts of your friends with all promptitude and exactness.” He de-

parted, and left me once more to the workings of my own wild conjectures; which in truth were busily, but vainly exercised, in attempting to discover who this secret friend or friends might be.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ESCAPE.

IN vain and groundless conjectures to relieve that restless impatience, which the anticipated approach of so interesting a crisis could not fail to excite, the night passed slowly and painfully away. Often were my keenly awakened senses aroused by fancied noises, proclaiming as I fondly hoped the approach of my deliverers; and as often did I sink back upon my uneasy pallet, disappointed and depressed.

The morning found me half-worn out with wakefulness and anxiety; but still ardent in hope. Yet as hour after hour flitted slowly away in the same tedious, irksome monotony, and the day wore on without signal or event to arrest my attention, all my efforts were unequal to repress the increasing irritation of my frame. Mind and body at length gave way under the struggle; and about three hours after noon I sunk into a torpor,

which though disturbed at first, by degrees settled into a profound slumber, from which I was awakened by a slight noise in my cell. On looking up, I became aware of three persons standing near me, two of whom were muffled in loose and ample garments; the third was my keeper.

Scarcely awake, it was some moments ere I could collect my faculties, and determine whether the objects before me were other than the unsubstantial creatures of a dream; but the voice of the keeper bidding me to rise, and attend to my visitors, dissipated the illusion, and convinced me that what I saw was real.

“Come, come, good aunt!” said the keeper, “we have no time to lose; you can’t remain here long; indeed I am running more risk than I ought to do in permitting this visit to the prisoner at all. Do you and your companion at once tell him your message; leave your presents and depart. Only think what might happen should some of the visiting officers chance to come by and find the female slaves of the khanum in the dungeons of the kallah! Stakfurullah! think of that.”—“We shall—we shall be quick, my good Allee,” replied one of the women, in whose voice I recognised my former female visitor. “But, believe me, no evil can happen; for if any one should see us, we should be taken for a pair of those reverend hadjees, who are constantly offering

themselves to exchange blessings for alms with my excellent and pious mistress ;—may Allah bless her ! And few ever pass too near this dismal place towards nightfall. But remember your promise ; we are to be left here by ourselves for a few minutes. No danger with old women like us ; and you know the khanum desired that her message might be delivered to the prisoner alone. No wonder, poor lady ! that she, an Affshar, should feel an interest in Affshar blood, and seek to learn the fate of her kinsfolk from one of her own tribe.”

“ Well, well ! I’ll do as you would have me : you are throwing dust in my eyes perhaps ; but you may find them sharper than you think for. Come, despatch ! I give you just ten minutes ; its enough for a moollah’s sermon, and for ten of the longest messages that a lady ought to send to any prisoner.”

With these words he quitted the cell ; and no sooner had the door closed upon him than the old lady, dropping her wrapping cloak and turban, and turning to me, whispered in low but earnest tones—“ Prisoner !—Ismael !—attend ! we have no time to lose in idle explanations : strip off your upper garments instantly, and put on this veil, which will conceal your whole person. In this disguise, and with this lady for your companion, you must pass from this cell to-night, or

never quit it with life. I will remain in your stead.—Come!—quick!—despatch!”

“And who then are you?” replied I hesitatingly. “Why do you propose thus to sacrifice yourself for me?”—“Oh! waste not the precious moments in these vain questions: be satisfied; I run no risk; no harm can come to me: your guide and companion will tell you every thing. Once more, by the head of your father and your own soul—by every thing you value most, lose not this only chance of life and liberty: involve not others who love you well in death and ruin.” I hesitated no longer. While I divested myself of kabba and ulcaluc, the speaker threw off her veil, under which appeared another, which concealed her person as completely as before. “Come, I must assist you,” continued she, giving directions at intervals concerning the management of my disguise: “there, fold it up, thus; and wrap it around you so, with your arms: on with these buskins next; now these slippers; so, the abba over your shoulders, and the turban. Mash-Allah! you’re complete.”

In another moment my ulcaluc and kabba were drawn over her under garments and veil, my cap was on her head, and my slippers on her feet. She was above the ordinary height of women, and looked the part of Ismael sufficiently well to de-

ceive one who entertained no suspicion of the trick ; especially in the darkness of my dungeon. On my part, had success depended upon the felicity with which I imitated the mincing gait of a female, it would have scarcely attended my efforts, for I felt the awkwardness of every motion : but the complete envelopement of my abba and turban gave me some confidence ; and hope mingled with the apprehensions which the approaching crisis could not fail to excite.

Scarcely had our exchange of dress been effected, and conversation been resumed in a more natural key, when the growling voice of the keeper was heard announcing that the stipulated time was expired, and that the ladies must forthwith depart. “ We are ready,” replied the voice of her, who had been the speaker. “ May God protect you, Ismael ! Rest assured that the kha-num will use her best endeavours with his highness in your behalf.” She was yet speaking when the door opened, and the keeper appeared. Standing close to my lowly pallet, she motioned me away, making at the same time the customary obeisance of one who takes leave of a benefactor and murmured in a voice intended to resemble mine—“ May your shadow and favour never diminish !” The shuffling of slippers and the rustling of garments partly drowned these accents ;

and at the same moment I took the lead, muttering to my companion something unintelligible, in tones as feminine as I could assume.

In crossing the threshold, (which I took care to do with the lucky foot foremost,) I permitted the blue-checked woman's veil to appear, in order that the keeper might feel satisfied of our identity with those whom he had so lately admitted; but the precaution was unnecessary, for the man lingered behind us for a moment to see that all was right within the cell, and to secure it with lock and bolt.

In the mean time my companion laid a trembling hand upon my arm: "Keep close to me," whispered she, "and say not a word to that man: even if he overtakes us he will ask no questions; therefore, in the name of Allah! be silent." She glided swiftly down the passage, which I remembered when first dragged hither, and which was now in darkness; but the door at its extremity was shut, and our speed was necessarily checked until the keeper should come to open it. This was the trying moment; a single question requiring from me an answer, and we were lost. Forward at length he came, growling in his usual key: "Ill luck hast thou brought me, aunt; and the father of asses am I to let myself be cajoled with your nonsense: remember, though, I'll put my head no

more in jeopardy for you or any woman. I don't understand these messages and presents, and eternal visitings of dungeons. I can't comprehend what the khanum, a respectable lady beyond doubt, can want with a miserable Mushedee spy, who, if he had his deserts, would, I dare say, long since have been hanged like a dog, and have saved me much trouble."

"Ah! now, Allee, don't speak so harshly," replied my companion, stepping adroitly in to cover my embarrassment, "my poor friend here is sufficiently overcome, as you may perceive, by her interview with that poor young man. Spare your reproaches then; and remember how hard it must be for her to see a clansman of her mistress and her own in so melancholy a condition; for, alas!—but hark!—what sound is that?" continued she, in accents of affected alarm: "Ullah kereem! what shall we do?—some one approaches: for the sake of Allee let us begone, or we may be discovered. May good fortune be yours!—come, respectable Khadijah, take comfort!—salute your good nephew, and let us begone."—"Khodah hafiz shumah!" uttered I, in a voice of affected emotion, while the keeper cast his eyes over my figure with a scrutinising glance, which shot a pang of alarm to my heart: but while he turned to arrange his bars and bolts we passed him; and traversing the little court in which the prison stood,

were threading the passages which led to it before he had finished his operations.

“ Take courage ! ” whispered the same soft female voice ; “ the worst is now passed, and we are not far from our friends. ” Turning short through a little door, which opened like a wicket, in a lofty wall upon our left, and which gave way at the touch of my conductress, we entered another court, which was at this time empty. “ This is the old harem, ” said she ; “ at this hour it is generally deserted ; for all the women are now assembled at their evening meal, in the principal apartments around the khanum’s chambers :— but, hush !—some one approaches. Come into this niche ; it is dark, and will conceal us : we shall be safe here till they pass. ” We entered, and waited anxiously for the appearance of the intruders.

In a few moments two persons approached, intently engaged in conversation. The voice of one proclaimed the speaker to be a woman ; the other spoke in the peculiar shrill and cracked voice of an eunuch. “ I tell you, Aga, I am certain of it, ” said the female voice ; “ I am positive that it was her I saw slipping out ; and it was in this direction too she went ; for I watched her from the loop-hole in that old tower yonder. ”

“ Well, but where could she be going ? ” inquired the cracked voice : “ that she has some

mischief in her head, I don't doubt, for few of her sex are without it; but what it may be, I cannot yet discover. Had I my will within these walls, as I ought to have, not a young hussy of them all should stir out of the courts or gardens of the harem; ay, nor from their own chambers, without my knowledge and permission."—"Mash-Allah! they would have little use of their feet then, Aga!" retorted the female. "The less the better," responded the eunuch; "but the khanum—ill-luck be her portion! has it all her own way, and I am nobody. — But, Inshallah! my time may come again. As for this light-heeled shameless, I shall find out her tricks, no fear of it; and then, by the head of the khan! she shall pay for her scorn of Aga Yussuff!"—"Ay, ay," quoth the female, "we know how the story goes; the rope, or the sack, the cup, or mayhap that fine old eastern tower; or what think you of that nice old dry well in the inner court yonder? they say it could tell some strange tales too."—"To be sure it could," replied the aga; "and a good convenient lodging it is for all impudent baggages:—I would it were oftener so occupied!"—"Well, well, Aga, no doubt you would play us many a clever trick, and rule with a sharp hand in the harem, if our old mistress were once out of the way; yet, even in that case, I fancy your services would scarcely now be valued. The khan, our

master, God preserve him! is now a changed man: little cares he for his women now-a-days. He whom fifty picked beauties could not satisfy, is at length contented with an old wrinkled hag!—What news is this?—she must have some talisman, some charm about her, beyond all doubt.—It must be magic!”

“ Magic, indeed!” quoth the eunuch; “ it is the magic of old age, I fancy; old age and debauchery, which never fail in due time to make the khan and the aga alike; and as for the khanum, she has a head fit to rule a kingdom, that must be said for her; no wonder she has found the weak side of Mouzuffer Khan; but her time may come for all that.”—“ Yes, it may,” rejoined the female; “ but in the mean time let us pursue our search; let us catch the sly, demure Hoosseinee.—How I do hate that daughter of evil!—It was this way she passed, and far from hence she cannot be.”

During the whole of this dialogue my companion, who at the first sound of their voices had been seized with a fit of trembling, clung convulsively to my arm, and continued to shake so violently, that it was with difficulty I could support her. Although not a syllable passed between us, it required no great penetration to perceive that she not only recognised the voices of the speakers, but felt that the subject of their dis-

course had reference to herself: the absence of herself and her companion had doubtless been discovered; these persons were obviously in search of them; and the malevolent perseverance which was indicated both by the words and actions of her pursuers completed the despair of my terrified conductress.

The woman and the eunuch now separated, and we could distinctly hear the directions which the latter gave for conducting the search around one side of the court, and the buildings connected with it, while he took charge of the other, in such a manner, that they might meet at the entrance to the passage beyond. It was now quite dark; the last yellow gleam in the west had given place to the glimmer of a few stars, which threw just light enough to display the white dress of the eunuch, as with smothered execrations he groped and stumbled from one empty cell to another in the prosecution of his search.

It was not without a thrill of horror that I became satisfied we could not continue long concealed; that the thorough search which these persons were now making must in a very few moments discover our hiding place: it was a question of life and death; and at whatever rate I might value my own life, it was no less than a duty to protect, at all hazards, that of the friend who had placed herself in jeopardy to save me.

There was not a moment to be lost ; so making my arrangements, I mustered up my best energies for the encounter. Placing my trembling companion in the farthest recess of the cell, I stood before her, prepared to anticipate the expression of the aga's surprise when he should discover our presence. " O God !" whispered the poor girl, " what are you going to do ?—all is in vain ; he will alarm the place, and we are lost without hope."—" Hush ! speak not a word, whatever you may see or hear : only rouse your strength and courage that you may be able to guide me from hence, if this obstacle shall be removed."—" But, Oh, Ismael ! be not rash !—Oh, think !—consider !—shed not blood : it cannot do us good."—" Hush !—be silent !—he comes !"

Perhaps the murmur of our subdued voices, or the rustling of our garments, had caught the eunuch's ear ; for at that moment he advanced straight to the recess. I saw his figure, relieved against the light, as with extended arms he entered the dark jaws of the cell : one moment more would have been too late ; the half-uttered cry of exultation would have escaped his lips, and spread the alarm :—but it never passed them. My hands, nerved for the occasion, grasped his throat with the strength of a giant : the miserable man struggled hard for a few moments ; but horror and surprise, joined with that throttling gripe,

withered his strength: he fell to the earth; his limbs quivered convulsively: the fearful rattle of death was heard in his breast—and then all was still. “ Oh, Ismael!—Oh! for Allah’s sake! let him go,” half shrieked the terrified girl. “ Oh! this is too horrible!”—“ Hush!” replied I, “ there is no other means.—And now, now is the time—our last and only chance: lead on while the way is clear.”—“ I cannot: I have no power,” rejoined she, trembling exceedingly. “ You must,” urged I solemnly: “ think, it is life or death: let not this man’s blood have been shed in vain. In the name of Allah! come on.”—“ Oh! I will try,” gasped my conductress;—“ life or death, indeed!—Come on, then; and God support me!”

I took the body of the wretched aga, threw it as far as possible into the recess, possessed myself of the kunjur which he wore, a useless defence at his girdlé, and following the tottering steps of my companion, onward we went, favoured by the shadows of the wall and our own dark vestments. A narrow passage led from this court towards the *khanum’s* apartments, from whence now issued loud and numerous voices, with all the merriment which belongs to the hour of evening repast and amusement. But avoiding these, we turned down another passage, at an angle with the one by which we had come, and which terminated in a door-way. It was with inexpressible joy that I

saw it opened beyond the high wall which surrounded the harem. Within the door, however, there was a small chamber, in which sat an eunuch upon duty: this was an obstacle for which my conductress was prepared; and somewhat recovered from her panic, and re-assured by our partial success, she now came forward to the charge.

“ Who have we here ?” demanded the guard, in some surprise at our dress and appearance. “ You want to know, perhaps ?” returned my companion; “ but we do not satisfy impertinent inquiries: we are on the khanum’s business, and must pass without delay or question.”—“ Not one step do you pass,” rejoined the eunuch, doggedly, “ until I know more about you and your business.—Come, off with your veils!”—“ Unveil!—shameless.—Hark ye, if you don’t want to have your delicate feet reduced to a jelly, and to see your beautiful toes all deprived of their nails for a month, you will say not another word, but forthwith open the door.—Behold this signet!”—and taking a small ring from her bosom, she showed it to the guard, who looked at it by the light of a lamp. “ Bebuxsheed!—forgive me!” said he, with altered tone; “ if such be the khanum’s pleasure, her slave has only to obey. Hoh! you guards there!” added he, opening the gate, and speaking to the two sentinels beyond the wall, “ permit these two persons to pass.”—“ Chushm!

by our eyes!" replied the guard, and drawing up, the one on the right, and the other on the left, as we issued from it, they gave us free passage.

Our pace was prudently deliberate while we remained within sight of these trusty guards; but my breath came more freely as, turning an angle of the wall, we sped swiftly onward. "The worst is indeed past," observed my conductress in low earnest tones; "but, Ismael, there still is cause of fear.—What if that girl have given the alarm? and she soon must discover what has happened. The gate of the kallah is yet to pass; but I apprehend no interruption there unless the alarm has been given. One of our friends should meet us near it."

While she spoke we turned another angle, and entered the small court within the gate of the kallah, where the guards on duty have their quarters, and those upon business wait for audience. At this time the guard was reduced in strength, for the greater number of those appointed to this duty had accompanied the khan; and of those who remained, many were engaged in preparing, or devouring their evening meal.

In one corner of this court stood two asses, provided with pack-saddles, and a man who held them was casting his eyes about anxiously in all directions. The moment we entered the court he observed and advanced towards us, and I saw that

it was my friend Yar Mahomed. "Welcome, my lord! welcome, most venerable moollah! your place has been void; your slave has devoured much of the bitter bread of anxiety and disappointment for these two hours past: but your honours have far to go, and must lose no time:—please to mount your beasts." This was immediately done, and drawing our dark abbas close around us, winding our shawls in folds about our necks, and holding down our heads to conceal the women's veils which still covered our faces, we boldly proceeded to the gate, of which the wicket alone was open.

"Hilloah! who goes there?" roared out one of the guards as we were in the act of stepping through. "Only the most reverend moollahs Hadjee Moossa Toosee, and Meerza Cossim Ispahanee, who having arrived from Kerbelah with clay stamps and beads from that holy place, have enjoyed the honour of being entertained by the khanum;—may her shadow be ever fortunate! and the pious lady has appointed her slave to conduct the venerable saints so far on their auspicious way."—"Very good! very good! but it is a late hour for the holy men to set out: perhaps they would halt awhile, and thrust their fingers into a soldier's pillaw, by-and-by; and tell us a little of their adventures on the hadj to Mecca and Kerbelah. Some of us too would perhaps like to

have a tusbee,* or a stamp so undoubtedly genuine.”—“ No, no, brother : these saints are bound by vow to the Imaumzadeh noor-u-deen Allee, where they remain for two days engaged in prayer, before proceeding to the holy durgah at Mushed : so pray open the gate without delay.”—“ Well, well ! since it must be so, let them go in God’s name ! they may meet with a worse offer : but perhaps they have a good shaum (dinner) awaiting them where they are going ; so, bismillah !” The man lazily arose to open the ponderous creaking gates ; and peeping as he passed into the face of my companion—“ A queer-looking moollah this !” exclaimed he, in a tone of surprise. “ By the holy kabba ! if his prayers and his pilgrimages have not turned his face as white as a sheet, nose, eyes and all ! Punah-be khodah ! defend me from such devotion !” His hearty laugh mingled with the grating sound and heavy clash of the gate, as it closed after us, and left us clear of the kallah and its perils at least.

“ On, on, in the name of Allah !” whispered Yar Mahomed earnestly, as he seized the bridle of my companion’s ass, bestowing at the same time some hearty blows upon it. “ We are far too late : God grant us well past the gates of the town at this hour !”

* A string of beads like the Roman Catholic rosary, and used in the same way for counting prayers.

A sharp trot down a narrow lane carried us into a maze of small mean houses, stretching behind the great bazar, the buz of which we heard distinctly. After threading our way for some hundred yards among these tenements, we reached a mass of mud ruins, in which Yar Mahomed halted and drew a long low whistle. In a few minutes he was joined by another man; and here, by his desire, throwing off our Arab cloaks and turbans, we arranged our women's apparel, and once more resumed our way, Yar Mahomed leading my ass, and the stranger that of my companion. "What! still disguises?" said I, addressing Yar Mahomed somewhat peevishly: "when is this part of the play to cease?"—"Silence, sir, for God's sake! nothing but silence and confidence in your conductors can save you or us now. I shall willingly follow you, sir, at another time; on this occasion permit me to be the leader; and depend upon my competence for once."

They led us directly into the street of the bazar, where, among thousands busied in their own affairs, we picked our way, jostled and jostling, until we reached the gate in which the street terminated, and through which we were to gain the country; but the hour of closing it had already passed, and we found it shut. This was a chance which our conductors had not calculated upon;

and it promised to prove a serious, if not a fatal impediment, to persons who dreaded every moment to hear the hue and cry raised, and see their pursuers at their heels. But Yar Mahomed did not lose his presence of mind.

Leading our beasts directly into the arched gateway, where the guards, who had quitted their posts, were smoking their calleeoons together upon an old mat, he ran his eye over them, and observing one with whom he was acquainted, he called him forth by name :—"Holla, Allee Nuckee!—come hither, comrade;—what! you have locked up for the night? we are too late, are we?"—"Yes, sir," returned the man, recognising Yar Mahomed with a slight salute; "I fear you are; it is long past the hour, and the keys have been sent to the naib in the kallah."—"Well, I'm sorry for that, because you must go and fetch them for me; here's a friend of mine from the country, who has lost his time in making purchases in the bazar, but he must be home to-night; he has two of his family along with him, and fearing that the gates might be closed, he came all the way to the kallah for me to get him passed through, in case he should be locked in;—I won't have him disappointed."

"Well, but the naib never gives the keys to any one. I may ask, and have my father burned,

for him ; and I don't choose to put my shoulders in the way of the furoshes' clubs."—" My friend, if you don't choose to be civil, I must try the Mushedee gate, where I need only ask and have : but its out of my friend's way ; and if I do, you will please to remember that, after all, I am somebody : you may chance to fall under my hand one of these days ; and see if the clubs of the khan's nassakchee or the naib's furosh will be the heaviest:—what ! you won't, then ? Well, God have you in remembrance ! no fear that *I* shall forget you."

" What news is this ?" replied the man, evidently affected by this last observation :—" why are you so hasty now ? stop, and I will see if the keys are really gone to the kallah ; perhaps the dehbashee has not sent them yet. But what time of night is this to leave a safe-hold, and begin a long march ? had not your friend better stay where he is till morning ? The ways are any thing but safe. Plenty of rude riders abroad, they say : hardly a chance of he and his charge getting safe to—what village did you say ?"—" Oh ! to Mas-soudabad, two fursungs hence."—" What ! any relation to my worthy friend the ketkhodah ?"—" Yes, a distant connection ; residing with him at present."—" Then by all means let them stay here ; don't let any harm come over them. I will give them my own outagh (chamber) for the

night; and in the morning—"—“To-khodah! I tell thee, man, it won't do: so either the keys, or I'm off to Hassan Beg, at the Mushedee gate.”—“Well, then, if it must be,” grumbled he, as he lazily rose and went to the dehbashée, who sat with some chosen companions in an upper chamber of the gateway.

This officer, somewhat out of humour at being disturbed at his evening meal, uttered a loud and abusive refusal in reply to the expostulatory representations of the soldier; but on hearing the name of the khan's nassakchee, he produced the keys, which in truth had never been sent away.

The trembling uneasiness with which we listened to this protracted dialogue may be imagined, as well as our eager impatience while the key turned slowly in the wards, and the heavy gate swung creaking on its hinges, disclosing to our longing eyes the dark cheerless plain beyond the walls. “So, if you will go, behold the path is open: but are you sure that all is right?” inquired the man of caution, as if struck with sudden suspicion. “I hope we shall get into no scrape by our civility.”—“Bah! nonsense! whose dog should I be to bring harm on the worthy naib or to you, comrade?—May God protect you!—I shall not forget your civility: perhaps, some day or other, it may be to your advantage.—Here, Yussuff, move on, I will see you safe to the first village.”

—“ May your shadow never diminish !—may good luck attend you !—forget not your servant,” said Allee Nuckee ; and the gate closing heavily behind us, shut us out from the city and its dangers.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FLIGHT.

“ Now, gently for a few minutes,” said Yar Mahomed: “ over-haste may spoil all yet; the sentinels might suspect us. So, now, bismillah! faster,” and striking the animal on which I rode, while the other attendant did the same for my companion, away we went rapidly for some hundred yards; till suddenly turning to the left, we entered a hollow or ravine, the natural obscurity of which was deepened by the darkness of an almost starless night. Here our progress was retarded by the roughness of the path; but we had not gone far when Yar Mahomed, desiring us to stop, uttered a long-drawn wailing cry, like the howl of a jackall.

In a few moments, this signal being repeated from a little distance, we moved forwards, and turning sharp to the right, found ourselves close upon a party of six or seven well-armed men;

some of whom were mounted, while others held horses ready saddled for use; all were rendered dimly visible by the scanty light of a paper lantern held by one of the group. "Holla! Yar Mahomed, is it?" exclaimed a voice from among them. "Ho! comrade, what news? Ye are late to-night. Missed the mark again?"—"Mujdeh! good news!" returned Yar Mahomed: "the arrow has hit the mark this time, thanks to the Prophet! the game has been snatched from the gripe of the hawk."—"Yah Khodai! is that truth?" exclaimed the voice of my faithful Cossim, who now rushed towards us; but seeing only Yar Mahomed, the stranger, and two women, stopped short, snatched the lantern, and held it up, as if quite at fault. "In the name of God! what news is this?" demanded he, in tones of deep disappointment. "What dirt have you eaten? This is not our mark."—"It *is* your mark, my good Cossim!" exclaimed I, leaping from the ass, and running up to him: "it is no falsehood: the game is here:—in truth, here is your master, thanks to that good friend, safe and sound!"—"Alhumdulillah! thanks be to God!" cried the old jeloodar, falling at my feet, and pressing my hand with fervency to his wrinkled forehead and grizzled beard:—"this is a fortunate hour! Your face is white indeed, oh, Yar Mahomed!"—"Yes, yes, white let it be; but this is not a time

nor a place to talk about it. If ye desire to keep your heads upon your shoulders, we must ride ten fursungs to-night. Blood has been shed, and the kallah must soon be in an uproar."

"How? blood? and wherefore?" demanded another voice, in which I recognised another of my former escort. "It was not to be avoided," responded Yar Mahomed; "but we have no time for explanations. Let Ismael Khan quit his disguise, and assume the dress and arms he soon may require to wield. You see yourself, my lord, surrounded by such of your fellows as have escaped the jaws of that fox Mouzuffer Khan, whom God confound! You are strong enough with us to make way against petty attacks; and as for more serious ones, we must take our chance of them. As for the devotion of every one here, of that you have received abundant proof already; and you have more—far more to hear, when time and opportunity shall serve. At present we must only think of our safety; we are too near that nest of filth and treachery to linger another moment."

"But which is the road?" said I, "and who is our guide? for I, you know, am a perfect stranger."—"My lord, the road leading to Mushed is at present beset, and impracticable for us. We must hold along the roots of the mountains, and reach Shereefabad by the least frequented passes. Here

is one who knows them all. The lady, for such she is, who has risked every thing to save you, must submit to the further hardships of the way ; but all of us, Noor Mahomed in particular, will watch over her safety."

I turned at this appeal to observe the person to whom it was addressed ; and a strange, undefinable sensation pervaded my mind, as I saw the man who joined us in the town ride up, and attach himself closely to the female who had led me from my prison. Perhaps it would not have been easy to analyse the nature of this feeling, which resembled that jealous fierceness with which our perverse sex is ever apt to look upon the slightest attention of another man to any female in whom we take an interest. But I had very little time to dwell upon or to examine into this lurking and unworthy emotion ; for scarcely had Yar Mahomed concluded his suggestions, when a shot rung sharply from the city wall, still not more than half a mile distant, and was succeeded by several others, as if sentinel after sentinel had caught, and were spreading a signal. Then came a sullen murmur, indistinct at first, but which rose upon the ear until the buz of an alarmed throng could plainly be distinguished. "Mount ! mount, and away !" exclaimed I ; "our flight is known ; the alarm is given." — "Where is Khodadad?—

Here, lead the way ; I shall follow you," uttered Yar Mahomed in the same moment. " Let no man spare his horse ; use your stirrups, in the Prophet's name, as you value your lives !"

Away we rushed. I saw Noor Mahomed take up his position on one side of my conductress, nor could I resist the impulse that prompted me to occupy the same position on the other. The rest followed close ; but as we left the ground the swing of the opening gates could be distinguished, and the heavy tramp of horse mingling with the noise of the multitude. The loose stones over which we drove in our rapid career rattled and flew in all directions, as we thundered along at the risk of horse and rider ; but our horses were stout and the riders bold. Old Cossim had contrived to carry my own two horses beyond the walls on the day preceding my arrest ; so I was mounted upon my favourite charger, on whose sureness of foot, and power of wind and limb, I could place every confidence ; nor, however it had been managed, did the rest of the party seem much worse off. Our case required it all ; for scarcely had we ridden half a fursung when a faint shout became audible in our rear :—" The miscreants ! they are on our traces. This cursed clattering ! the dead themselves might hear us. But a minute more, and we reach the bottom.

The noise will be less upon the moist clay, and we may yet throw them out. Keep to the left:—to the left!”

As the noise we made decreased with the altered nature of our footing, the trampling of our pursuers could be distinctly heard, floundering over the stony ground we had just left; but as we galloped in our new direction the sounds sunk by degrees; and upon halting to listen, in about an hour after, nothing whatever could be heard. “Barekillah!” said Yar Mahomed, “now if we can but contrive to gain the hills, we need not fear them; for who shall tell by which pass we may fly?—Hah! Khodadad!” — “Yes; but we must smell our way, I think,” returned he, “for this night would puzzle the eyes of an owl or a bat, much more those of a plain honest Musselman, Allah be my help! But, bismillah!—forward! forward!”

Too anxious for many words, we continued our way as rapidly as the difficulty of distinguishing it would permit; but it soon appeared that darkness was not the only embarrassing obstacle with which we were doomed to contend. The vapours exhaled by the heat of the day were now fast settling again over the earth in the shape of a fog; so dense, that had it then even been day-light we should not have been able to distinguish an object at three yards’ distance from our horses’ heads.

The instinct of our horses themselves was at fault ; they snorted, reared, and backed ; and not without cause ; for while we urged them onwards in our utter blindness, they were sometimes brought up suddenly, by deep hollows and ravines, which they could not discern until upon the very point of plunging into them.

The expediency of halting until the light of morning should come to relieve us from this dilemma was more than once debated ; but, unwilling to lose the chance of distancing our enemies, we persevered for more than three hours in wandering with equal perplexity and danger ; till at length the alarming irregularity of the ground, and the utter impossibility of making any useful progress, reduced us to a stand-still.

“ The curse of Allee be on this infernal fog, which is thicker than the darkness of hell itself ! ” muttered Khodadad, as he gave up the struggle in utter despair ; “ it will be our ruin yet. In any ordinary night we should have been safe among the mountains long before now ; but it would puzzle the king’s nujjoom-bashee himself to tell which way we have been riding for these last three hours. ” — “ Hark ! ” exclaimed one, “ what noise is that ? It is the lowing of cattle, or the holla of men. Hush ! listen ! ” And, in fact, low distant sounds did reach our ears, deadened by the dampness of the air. “ Oh, for one gleam

of light!" exclaimed Yar Mahomed. "Oh, for the glimpse of a single star! But what star could pierce that thick cloud of vapour?"—"Stars!" repeated one of the men who sat gazing around him in the general perplexity; "what then are these? Are they not stars?"—"Where? what?" demanded I. "Yonder. Look to the left—just over that horseman's shoulder." I turned, and straining my eyes in the direction of his arm, discovered indeed the twinkling of lights, which resembled stars dimmed and reddened by the misty atmosphere. The quick eye of our guide caught them at the same instant. "In the name of Allah, what have we here? These are no stars, their light is too steady. By the head of the Prophet, they are the lights of a village!"—"A village!" echoed another of the party. "By the soul of my father, he is right! See! it is on the mountains too. Look at yon great black hill rising above the cloud." And, in fact, as he spoke, the mist partially opening in the quarter to which our looks were directed, disclosed a tall mass, which reared itself in mysterious darkness against the dim sky, and which was magnified by the filmy haze into the semblance of a huge mountain. The effect was peculiarly imposing; and as the shadowy object stood insulated, both below and above, by the surrounding vapour, and studded with points of light, it might easily have been

taken for the abode of some powerful Gin or Deeve, removed by magic power from all approach of mankind.

But Khodadad was not to be so deceived. "No, no," cried he, "it is no mountain. I know it now. See you not the jagged outline of its summit? and look!—merciful Allah!—how fearfully close we have got! You can see yon broken arch, a building of the days of old, which rises above the walls. It is the old kallah of Darameen Tuppeh, the residence and stronghold of Baukher Allee Khan. Heaven send us clear of that den! If that old fox were once to scent us, it might prove as bad a scrape as the one we have just escaped from."—"Well," observed I, "but you know where you are now, do you not?"—"Yes, yes; God be praised! I know where we are; no great distance from the hills now. Let us be off, sir, while we may, in silence.—Straight-forward, comrades!"

We speedily got into motion; but whether it was our tongues or our horses that had betrayed us, a challenge from the fort swept along the plain; proving by the clearness of its sound how dangerously near we had approached to the foot of the earthen hillock on which it was built; and before we could greatly increase our distance, the sharp report of a wall-piece, followed by the hissing of its ball over our heads, made it equally

clear that the garrison had rightly guessed our position. We did not tarry for a repetition of the salute, and before a second shot could be fired were far enough distant to laugh at their attempts.

Our guide having now regained his proper course, pursued it with confidence; and our progress soon became more rapid and easy, over a level plain, which presented but few obstacles to interrupt us. The vapours, which during the night had floated over the whole face of the country, drew off from the dry plains as morning approached, and settled like a sea upon the distant sahra,* or clung around the skirts of the mountains, leaving their summits clear and sharply defined against the deep grey sky.

By the dawn of day we had entered among a maze of those earthy hillocks which so often swarm around the foot of the mountains; and preparatory to halting, for morning prayers, and for refreshment, in a spot which promised no interruption, Yar Mahomed had urged his horse to the summit of one of those hillocks to cast a precautionary glance around, when all at once the clattering of many hoofs was heard. A loud halloo succeeded, and six or eight horsemen appeared galloping

* Sahrah or beabaun are applied to desert and uninhabited tracts; but often also the word means simply a large plain.

towards us, along a little hollow which wound among the irregularities of the ground.

Fortunately for us, a deep rocky chasm which crossed their track had the effect of checking their impetuosity, and giving us time to prepare for receiving them:—"To the left!—to the height on the left, my friends!" shouted I; and seizing at once the bridle of my conductress' horse, and goring my own with the stirrups, I gained in a moment the summit of the nearest hillock. As good luck would have it, it was likewise among the highest of those around, and its surface was furrowed into hollows and fissures well calculated to afford shelter from the fire of an enemy. Before our whole party had joined upon this spot the horsemen, finding that they had failed in surprising us, and not caring to entangle themselves in the ravine, had unslung their matchlocks, and commenced their fire. The balls of their first discharge whistled among us: one of them grazed my arm, and another wounded one of our horses; but ere they could repeat it we, on our part, sprang^d from our horses, and covering them as we best might, in the hollows before spoken of, were prepared to return their salute with interest.

For my own share, assisting Noor Mahomed in estowing his female charge in a spot where she might be in tolerable security, I prepared to

defend the position we had taken up to the last extremity, and to sell, if so it was to be, my blood as dear as possible.

The advantage was now all on our side: the persons of our assailants were exposed, while ours remained in a great degree covered from their view. The consequence was, that three of their number were speedily disabled; while the rest, convinced as it seemed of the inequality of the contest, began to look about them as if meditating to decamp.

But their real object soon became apparent. Eager to repel the only enemies we could see, our attention was entirely diverted from other quarters, and it was not until they were within a few yards of our position that we were startled by the somewhat premature shout of ten or twelve fresh horsemen bursting in upon our rear.

All now seemed lost. It was a fearful moment. But my comrades were no cowards, and the struggle was now for life or death. "Servants of Nadir, remember your name, and your duty," shouted I, discharging at the same time my matchlock at the foremost with unerring aim. The rider sprung upwards from his steed, and fell beneath its feet as it still bounded on. The quick successive reports of four or five other matchlocks, which, from the closeness of the approaching mass, threw their shot with fatal effect, gave an instant

check to our new assailants ; nor did we fail to take advantage of their indecision. Yar Mahomed and myself rushed forward, drawing our swords ; and before our foes could recover themselves, three of their horses were brought to the ground, hamstrung, bruising and disabling their riders in their fall.

We strove to pursue our success, by ridding ourselves of these dismounted enemies ; but here our fortune failed us. I saw Yar Mahomed struck down by a horse ; but not before the rider had received from his sword a ghastly and disabling wound in the thigh ; and quitting the object of my own pursuit, I was hurrying to his assistance, when the swift rush of a charger, accompanied by a stunning blow on the head, stopped my career, as I believed at the moment, fatally. My senses reeled ; the vision of a fierce countenance, and the gleam of a dagger descending on my breast, floated dimly before me, when a piercing shriek rung in my ear. A slight shadowy arm darted across my half closed eyes, and the hostile form rolled, a ponderous and lifeless mass, upon my prostrate and now senseless body.

Some minutes passed before I recovered my senses. All was still around me ; the noise of the shouting and the firing, the clashing of swords, the neighing of horses, and the imprecations of their riders, had ceased. The first object which

saluted my opening eyes was the form of a female, on whose lap my head was supported, and who bent over me with an expression of earnest tenderness, which the disorder of her dress permitted me to remark in her beautiful features. It was my conductress; my deliverer of the preceding night. The stranger, Noor Mahomed, who had just bound up my wound with a fragment of his own turban, stood gazing upon us with painful interest.

A sick dizziness oppressed my brain: my recollection was altogether confused, and the first efforts of speech produced only some incoherent attempts at inquiry, where I was, and what had happened. But the sound of my voice, and the glance of my opening eyes, had an instantaneous and powerful effect upon the female. She started; the anxious contraction of her brow disappeared; her own eye shot forth a beam of joy, as she exclaimed with sudden energy:—"He lives, then! —Oh, God! thou art all merciful! I thank thee, Allah!" In the next moment Noor Mahomed was kneeling beside me; and others gathered round to listen to her words. But I only heard the sweet gentle voice of her whose hand was still pressed upon my bleeding head, and whose tones thrilled to my very heart.

"And who then are you, kind and benevolent creature, that watches like an angel over Ismael, to

save him, and to do him good?" uttered I slowly; and gazing upwards at her, after a pause of some moments. The disordered veil had been already replaced, so as to hide her countenance; but it could not conceal the agitation which almost convulsed her. Her tears rained thick and fast upon my face as she bent over me; heavy and frequent sobs shook her whole frame; and she trembled violently in every limb. It was long before she was able to utter a word; and I remained silent and motionless, like one in a dream; half doubting whether what I saw was real; half dreading the import of her expected reply. "Merciful Allah!" she exclaimed at length in broken words, "what a time, what a place is this for such a disclosure! but it must be—Ismael, dearest Ismael!" continued she, breathless with emotion. "How will you credit it? what will you say? Yet, oh God! could I have done it for any but a brother?—Ismael! will you not acknowledge and receive your sister Hoosseinee?"

Wavering and unsettled, my awakening senses scarcely comprehended what she said. The sacred and endearing name of sister pronounced by her was all that caught my ear. Instinctively, I sprang from her knees, upon which till then my aching head reposed, and met her outstretched arms as she leaned towards me, in overwhelming emotion. Our embrace was earnest and mutual; but the

effort was more than my wounded frame could endure ; and in a moment after my head reeled, and I fell once more insensible upon my sister's lap.

I will not dwell upon the mingled astonishment and delight which succeeded my second revival to consciousness, and the eager inquiries to which the surprising communication I had received could not avoid giving rise. But my sister gently reminded me neither time nor place admitted of her giving me satisfactory replies ; and contented herself with assuring me that all she had said was truth, and should be fully explained at a fitting season : in the mean time, she besought me to recollect myself, and prepare, if possible, to resume the journey ; “ for,” added she, “ neither safety nor convenience will admit of a longer stay in this place ; and I see that the party are already preparing for our departure.”

Her words recalled me to a recollection of my duty, and I raised my head once more to look around me. No one was near us, except the stranger, Noor Mahomed, who still stood a few paces off, regarding us earnestly. Forgetting at this sight his attention to myself, I shame to say that the jealous emotion with which this young man had already inspired me revived, as I recollected his impertinent continuance beside us, during a scene which should have been sacred against all

intrusion. All others of the party I observed had, in decency as it seemed, retired.

The frown which gathered on my brow, as my eye fell upon his person, slight though it was, did not escape the quick apprehension of my sister. "Ah, Ismael! my brother! look not so upon him," said she, with an anxious energy, which rose above the impulse of maidenly confusion; "be candid and generous to one who is brave and noble like yourself; without whose zeal and perseverance neither you nor I had ever seen this hour. Dearest brother, receive in Noor Mahomed the preserver of your sister,—her faithful lover,—her betrothed husband. Oh, God! this heart was yielded to him when there was no friend to help, no human being to care for the miserable Housseinee; when she dreamed not that in the wide world there existed a living thing that had the slightest claim upon her affection or her duty!—Do not—do not cloud the dawn of our happier prospects by coldly looking upon one who has already risked his life to save you, and would give his blood for yours!"

Disclosures came thick upon me: here was another for which I was totally unprepared, and which might not have been altogether grateful; but there was an earnest and affecting tenderness in the appeal of my sister which was irresistible: it roused the better feelings of my nature, and

showed me the hateful ungracious part which I might have been led to take, in its true light. Turning at once towards the young man, and embracing him with warmth, I thanked him for the zeal he had exerted in my own and her behalf, and assured him of my hope and conviction that he would prove himself worthy of the heart he had gained.

“And are ye then all safe?” inquired I, with renewed anxiety, as the agitation of these unexpected events a little subsided:—“where is Yar Mahomed?—surely I remember—.”—“Be satisfied, sir,” replied Noor Mahomed, “we are well off; so is Yar Mahomed; but he has had a narrow escape.”—“And Cossim? I see him not:—he was not wont to be last in attending his master in the hour of pain,” continued I, as past days and former services arose in my remembrance. They were silent. “Why speak ye not?—what has happened?” urged I, looking round upon them. “It cannot be concealed,” replied Noor Mahomed at last:—“we have cause, sir, to be thankful; for we have escaped a great danger, although not without paying for our safety. It will distress you; but it cannot be avoided:—your old servant is severely hurt.”—“Cossim hurt?—is he dead?”—“No, he lives; but—”—“Lead me to him; I must see my faithful old servant. May God avert

misfortune! but rather would I have lost a limb than he should come to harm."

They strove to prevent me ; but, dizzy though I still was from the stunning blow, I rose to my feet, and looked around. The tokens of our short but fierce strife were thick before me. On the slope of the hillock, close to where I had fallen, lay seven or eight men, and as many horses ; some motionless and dead, others still struggling and writhing with the agony of their wounds, or uttering now and then a painful groan. These were the foes with whom we had contended. Still nearer, and on the lip of the declivity, lay one or two of my own people, like the others, lifeless and at rest. Those who survived were occupied in securing the horses of the party, or attending to their less fortunate companions. My eye, however, instantly singled out one group of two or three men who surrounded a prostrate and bloody figure : among them I recognised Yar Mahomed, pale and wounded, like myself, bending over the dying man. I tottered forward :—it was in truth my faithful Cossim. The blood welled fast from a gaping wound between the shoulder and the neck, which those about him endeavoured in vain to stanch and bind up : the chill damp of death already stood upon his brow ; and his ghastly sunken features betrayed that life had nearly

ebbed away with the dark red tide that drenched the ground beneath him.

“ My poor Cossim ! is it thus I find you ?” said I, deeply affected, as the conviction of his hopeless condition forced itself upon me ; “ a dear ransom have you paid for your master.” The eyes of the dying man lighted up for a moment, as my voice struck upon his ear. “ That is my master, is it not ?” uttered he faintly, and endeavouring at the same time to turn towards the sound, while the blood flowed still faster with the exertion :— “ Let me see him, let me feel his hand :—blessed be God you are safe ! though your slave will not live to see it : but he has lived to see two of his noble master’s race alive,—escaped the destroying swords,—and is not that enough ? And is she not a worthy branch of the race of Keerkloo ?—what town-bred maiden could have struck that blow ?—how the ruffian withered under her arm !—was not old Cossim’s blood well spent in saving hers ? —Ay ! it will make smooth his path to Paradise ; and he will meet her father there, and tell him of his noble daughter. — But see !—see that ruffian !—he will seize her !—Save her !—will none of you rush forward ?—and I—I have no strength left.”

His eyes grew fixed : I could not bear their glassy sightless glare. My own hands closed the lids ; we turned the feet to Mecca ; and the angel

of death received the soul. Surely it went to claim the reward of a good and faithful servant in the joys of Paradise.

For some moments we hung in painful silence over the corse; but the interests of the living pressed upon us. "We cannot remain any longer here," observed Yar Mahomed. "You, sir, and I, and those who, like us, are wounded, will soon get stiff, and unable to move; and if we would avoid more of this work, when we shall be less able to bear it, we must make the best of our way from this place, before the other parties, who are in pursuit of us, can be collected by the run-aways. These poor fellows must lie in this ravine; a few stones, and a little earth may protect them from the beasts of prey, which will have a good feast upon those miscreants there. Come, comrades, make ready the horses. Khodadad knows of a place where there is no fear of our being sought, far less found; we must remain there until we are fitter to travel. Come, bismillah! to work, and to horse!"

Our dead were accordingly quickly disposed of in one of the narrow clefts on the hillock. I shuddered as the earth and stones fell upon the body of my faithful old servant; but the survivors claimed my care; and once more setting my sister on her horse, while her lover rode by her side, our diminished party descended the fatal hillock,

and made off with all the speed in our power towards the hills on our right, under the guidance of Khodadad.

“ But what might be the meaning of poor Cossim’s last words ?” said I to Yar Mahomed, when, after more than an hour’s hard riding, we reined up for a little to give our horses breathing time, and were talking over the events of the late fray : “ Tell me what took place after I was struck down, and how the poor fellow received his death-blow.” — “ To speak the truth, sir,” replied Yar Mahomed, “ I saw not much more than you did ; for my own condition was little better than yours. I saw you rush towards me, and receive the blow that stunned you ; and I believed that all was over with you. At that moment your old servant, who had likewise observed my danger, came to my relief, and with one blow of his scimitar divided the head of my opponent, just as I expected the like office from him. It was at the same instant too that a female shriek alarmed both Cossim and myself. Your noble sister, too anxious for the event of the combat to remain in her concealment, had quitted it at the moment when your bold but rash charge towards the enemy had placed you in so critical a situation. She saw you borne down ; saw one of the dismounted horsemen, dagger in hand, making towards you, and heedless of every thing but your danger, she rushed forwards, draw-

ing a khunjar from her girdle, and uttering the shriek which startled us ; it even made the ruffian pause for a moment—in the next her dagger was in his heart !

“ Still only intent upon your safety, she was vainly striving to relieve you from the body of her victim, which had fallen across yours, and saw not that another ruffian was advancing to complete the work his fellow had left undone : it was then that old Cossim, attracted by her cry, saw at a glance the danger that threatened your sister, and quick as lightning interposed his own person between her and the powerful arm that was in the act of seizing her ; but already breathed and exhausted by his exertions, he was no match for his opponent ; the first blow beat down his sword—the second buried the scimitar deep in the old man’s neck.

“ Just as Cossim fell, Noor Mahomed, who had likewise caught a glimpse of your sister’s figure, and heard her shriek, having freed himself from his own antagonists, ran, full of alarm, towards her ; he saw poor Cossim’s fate, and in another instant his sword fell unobserved and unresisted upon the murderer’s neck. This was the last blow struck. The surviving assailants, reduced to a third of their original number, turned tail, and dashed right down the slope of the hillock, now covered with their dead or wounded

companions. The party who first attacked us had withdrawn to join their comrades, so that the field remained clear. Noor Mahomed and your sister then addressed themselves to assist you ; while I, grievously distressed at the fate of poor Cossim, sought to render him such aid as might be in my power. It was in this situation you found us ; and I thank God we have not your loss to deplore.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAVE OF REFUGE.

FOR three tedious hours we continued to urge our horses in a westerly direction, over the difficult rugged country that skirted the more elevated mountains, until we gradually found ourselves involved among the huge shoulders which they flung down towards the plain. At length, turning up the bed of a torrent, which had burst its way through one of the more confined and abrupt glens that furrowed their sides, our guide relieved us all by announcing that we now were approaching the place of our intended concealment.

No trace of human being or human habitation had we seen since the time we left the scene of our skirmish ; and it was fortunate for us that no new enemy appeared to molest us ; for those who had been wounded, myself among the number, had become stiff and faint from loss of blood, and were in no condition to sustain fresh conflicts.

The aspect of the region to which we were approaching was, however, little calculated to comfort us, or to give us hopes of obtaining those refreshments and consolations which our situation required. Rocks, scarred and bare, heaped in the original confusion in which they were shivered from the cliffs above them, almost barred up the entrance of the glen, and it was with difficulty that our horses scrambled over the loose fragments which filled the intervals among the larger masses.

“ A dismal desert this for poor wounded wretches to seek a home in,” I could not help observing to Yar Mahomed, as we struggled along the pathless route, every bound and exertion of our panting horses giving a fresh pang to our stiffened hurts. “ And what are we and our horses to do for food in this unblest spot ?”—“ Bad enough it is, I confess, my lord,” replied he ; “ but not quite so bad as a black dungeon and chains, with a poisoned pillaw or a bow-string for our fare. But what say you, Khodadad ?—do you mean to starve us outright here ? or have you better things to promise us, comrade ?”

“ Rest contented, sir,” replied the guide ; “ unless the stars are altogether against us, you shall want neither food nor comfort where I shall have the honour of lodging you.—They say that the gardens of Iraud may be found in the wilderness

by those who know to seek them rightly ;—upon my head be it, if the gardens of security are not found among these rocks !—and to us you will allow, sir, a dry morsel here, with security, is better than a feast in the house of the khan, with the nassakchee's sword over our heads.”—“ Right, my good fellow,” replied I ; “ but let us hope these same gardens are not far off ; for I do not think my head can stand this burning sun, or this rough path much longer.”—“ On my eyes be it !” said he ; “ we have not far to go.” Nevertheless we still continued clambering over the same rugged fragments, while the cliffs closed yet darker and darker above us, until they almost met overhead.

By this time my sister's strength was almost exhausted, and my own temples throbbed ; whilst the seething blood oozed out from my wounds so fast, that I scarce could keep from fainting. “ I must rest here—I must stop for a few minutes,” said I, “ whatever happens. I must halt, to recover a little.—Oh, for a drop of water ! for I am perishing with thirst.”—“ Oh ! do not speak of water,” echoed Yar Mahomed, “ my eyes are burning in their sockets, and my tongue can scarcely move within my jaws :—thirst will kill me.”—“ In the name of God !” exclaimed Khodadad earnestly, “ exert yourselves but a few minutes longer ;—let us but pass this gorge, and

x Till y^e high fever seeth your blood to froth
 Simon of A. act 4 sc. 3

we are safe;—until then, danger may be at our heels:—water, too, water awaits you: one effort more, and both thirst and fatigue shall be provided for.”

I think it was the promise of the blessed element that inspired us afresh, and gave us power to scramble up the almost impassable track, by which we crossed this fearful gorge. Dismounting from our horses,—for to sit them was impossible,—two of the people half led, half dragged me, over the steep ridges that shut out the lower from the upper part of the glen:—but my senses reeled in the effort, and I swooned outright as I reached the other side. But, what a changed scene did my eyes uncloset upon, when I recovered from this fit of weakness! Above the barrier we had passed, the ravine opened out into a basin of small extent, affording some excellent pasture on the banks of a stream, which ran through the centre, far below us. Lofty, and as it seemed, impassable precipices inclosed this basin, on the side of which were scattered a number of trees,—stunted, indeed, but still adding beauty to the singular scene in which they grew. The contrast between the spot we had reached, and the region we had quitted, was like that of Ginnestan to the deserts of Kâf.

“Behold, sir,” said Khodadad, addressing me, when I had somewhat recovered—“behold a

region scarce known even to the nearest inhabitants of these mountains ; for the peaks and ridges which surround us have a name which keeps most men at a distance. But it might be hazardous to remain openly even here :—follow your servant but a little further, to a shelter formed by the hand of Allah himself, when the foundations of the earth were laid.”

How the horses were to be disposed of was a question which suggested itself with the first return of recollection ; but there are few situations into which that noble animal cannot follow, if not bear its master. Before my senses were completely restored, the greater number of our trusty steeds were already around us, panting and shaking the dust from their sides after their severe exertion.

Still maintaining our elevation above the little basin, we slanted up along the slope of the hill, towards the foot of the precipice, which rose like a wall above us. About a hundred feet from thence we found the ruins of a small building, with niches and recesses, in the fashion of a mosque ;—a few fragments of painted tiles showed that in times of old it had boasted of some ornaments ; but all other traces of its original design had vanished.

“ This is a holy place,” said Khodadad, repeating the culmeh, and several other pious ejaculations ;—“ in this very spot is the foot-print of

the sacred and celebrated Duldul—the mule of the holy Allee, (blessed be his name!) which upon a certain occasion, when its sainted master had left the noble animal here, while he retired into the wilderness to pray, bounded to him at his call; and while its fore feet lit upon the opposite side of yonder ridge, the hind hoofs left their impression here where it stood:—you cannot see them, indeed, for the ruins have covered them; but your servant has seen them:—it is now many years, since an old fakeer, who dwelt among these mountains, and who is now gone to Paradise, showed me the sacred prints. They were not indeed very plain even then; or perhaps my virtue was not great enough to enable me to distinguish them clearly:—yet he, that sainted man, could point out the impression of every nail-head of the august shoes!—But the holy man!—the Prophet's blessing be upon him! imparted to me a secret, which, God forgive me! is more to the purpose at present: let us go, and take the benefit of it.”

With these words he led the way upwards once more; and at length we found ourselves at the foot of the rocks. Advancing a few yards along their base, we came to a heap of fragments, fallen as it seemed from above; and, clambering among them, Khodadad soon pointed out a small opening between two large stones, so trifling in appearance, that it never would have attracted ob-

ervation ; and screened still more by its position behind a projecting buttress of rock. Assisted by one or two others of the people, he removed a number of the fragments, and at length discovered a deep low-browed cavern, into which he led the way, desiring us to follow with caution. After a few paces of rapid descent, we found firm and level footing ; and advancing still further inwards, we were surprised at finding an increase of light streaming in from a fissure in the rock, many feet above our heads.

“ This cavern,” said Khodadad, “ is of immense extent, and has many branches ; but we need not perplex ourselves with its dimensions. Let us occupy this spacious natural hall, which has a floor of soft dry sand. Pray, sir, lay yourself down, and cause the lady to do the same, until the rest of the party and our horses are safely stowed, and then we shall endeavour to attend to your comforts.” Happy to enjoy rest from actual labour, I threw myself upon the cool dry sand, and drank in the refreshing air of the cavern, which after the burning heat of the sun, reflected from the brown rocks, was inexpressibly grateful. My poor sister, not less exhausted, though patient and unrepining under the unusual fatigue, lay down beside me ; and Yar Mahomed, with the other wounded men, sought relief as they best could find it, while our unhurt comrades, en-

larging the aperture sufficiently to admit the horses, dragged the unwilling beasts into the cavern along with themselves.

“And now, my lord,” said Khodadad, “your servant will perform the rest of his promise, and have the pleasure of supplying you with a beverage you scarce would look for in a place like this. Where is the *aftaubeh*?* and bring one of the horse-ropes and halters.” With these our guide proceeded forwards into the cavern, until we entirely lost sight of him; but after a few moments he re-appeared, bearing the *aftaubeh*, dripping with wet, and full of clear sparkling water. Oh! how delicious was the pure cool liquid to my parched lips! How deep did I drink to allay the fever burning in my veins! We all in turn enjoyed the blessing; and the horses by this time having been stript of their harness, their *numuds* with our cloaks were spread in a recess upon a heap of dry sand, for my sister and myself, who thus refreshed, and at our ease, began to taste the sweets of comparative comfort, as we hoped, in perfect security.

A short time served to complete the arrangements of the rest of the party; and the horses, under the superintendence of Khodadad, were served with water, and secured as well as circumstances would admit of, in another part of

* Ewer or water-vessel of brass or pewter.

this spacious cave, where, with their tobras at their heads, supplied with a little of the grain which every man carried at his saddle-bow, they were at least as well off as their masters. After all was thus ordered, our trusty guide, together with Yar Mahomed, at my desire, took up their position close to my own carpet.

“ This, in truth, is a choice and comfortable retreat for poor hunted fugitives,” observed I to Khodadad ; “ but as to its security, how are we to be certain of that ? and then how do you propose to subsist us ? What is to save us from dying of hunger ? As for thirst, I confess you have satisfactorily proved we run no danger from that.”— “ Oh ! be satisfied, sir,” replied he : “ with regard to the first point, rest assured that few now live who possess the secret of this cavern ; and you will admit that it is not likely to be discovered by those who are ignorant of its existence. Besides, there is no chance that any one should approach even within sight of the valley itself, far less that he should enter its boundaries. You are now somewhat more at ease, sir, and while the people examine their joals for such scanty fare as they may contain, it may amuse you to hear how I became acquainted with a spot which is so little known to the rest of the world.

“ Circumstances, which I need not relate at present, made me acquainted with the well-known

dervish Fakeer-u-deen Allee, who for many years frequented the shrine of Imaumzadeh Noor-u-deen Allee; but whose principal haunt for many years before his death was among these mountains. Here he lived, and would wander for weeks together unseen of human eye. The nature of my acquaintance with this holy personage was such as to give me no small claim to his favour; and on many occasions of difficulty or danger I availed myself of this privilege to solicit his advice or protection.

“It is now more than fifteen years since the hot pursuit of certain persons, with whom I had a blood feud, forced me to fly from the neighbourhood of Toorbut, to a village not many fursungs from hence. I remained there, however, only a few days, when my situation becoming desperate from the eagerness of my enemies, I resolved to claim the protection of my friend Fakeer-u-deen, who, as the people informed me, was to be found in some part of this range of mountains.

“The search was a vague and desperate one; but it was better to attempt it than to risk being seized, and having my throat cut in the villages: so I set out in low enough spirits, and soon got entangled among the bare ridges and wild ravines which surround us now.

“I shall never forget the extraordinary and almost fearful meeting which I had on this occa-

sion with my friend the dervish. The evening was fast creeping on ; and the clouds which had lowered for some time before, having discharged themselves in a heavy shower, were drawing up like a curtain in the western quarter of the sky, permitting the setting sun to break through a crimson and fiery mass of curdling vapours ; when upon the summit of a rock, which threw its dark form against this glorious back-ground, stood the figure of the dervish, strongly relieved against the flood of glowing light. He seemed like the genius who had raised the storm, and was now exerting his power to bid it cease. He stood motionless until I reached and accosted him. ‘Friend,’ said he in reply, ‘you are welcome ; I know your necessity ; *I* acknowledge your right to my protection ; and *you* shall acknowledge that Fakcer-u-deen amply redeems his pledge. Follow me!’

“ Striding along with the alertness of youth, and the resolved step of mature years, the aged man, for his beard was now white with the snows of many winters, moved rapidly over the rough surface and steep ascents of the mountains, until descending by a cleft, so narrow at its entrance as to elude observation, and so dark, that the light of day was almost shut out by the overhanging rocks, we at length reached the upper part of the hollow in which we now are. ‘Behold,’

said he, 'the wonders of the omnipotent Creator ! In this unknown recess you are safe from all pursuit ; nor will the necessaries of life be found lacking. Man requires but little to sustain his feeble frame ; and yet he thinks only of heaping up provision which he can never use.'

“ The dervish then led me to this cavern, concealed at that time as you found it now, in a manner which, even though the valley were frequented by human beings, would secure it from discovery. But superstitious terror guards it more effectually even than its secluded situation from the prying eye of curiosity ; for these scathed and barren heights have the reputation of being haunted by evil spirits, who sport with human life. In olden times, it is said, that many persons straying in this direction were spirited away, and never heard of more. Nay, even in later days, more than one of the neighbouring shepherds, who ventured among them in search of stray sheep or goats, seem to have shared a similar fate ; and hence the evil report of the place is still kept up ; so that none of the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages will venture near it, nor permit their sheep to be driven in this direction.

“ The interior was, as you see it, dark and vast. But the dervish led me through many of its intricacies, and made me acquainted with recesses which would conceal a little army, in case of need.

In one of those the rush of waters might be heard ; and upon approaching a chasm, which yawned in the bottom of the recess, faint as was the light received from fissures in the rock, I could see the quick glitter of a foaming stream, which ran deep beneath this cavity. It is from that inexhaustible source that the water which has just refreshed you, sir, was drawn.

“ ‘ Behold,’ said the dervish, ‘ your home of refuge. Here no mortal eye can see you ; the hand of man can never reach you ; — and see ! here are the means of sustaining life ; coarse food, parched peas, a few dried fruits,—the fare of a dervish ; for in the solitude of this cavern does Fakeer-u-deen often meditate on the Almighty name of God, and the vanity of human life.’— ‘ And how did this retreat become known to you?’ inquired I. ‘ It is many years,’ returned he, ‘ since the bounty of Allah provided his servant with this shelter from the storms of the world and the persecutions of evil-minded man. And listen to the simple means by which it was his will that the discovery should be made.—Sitting one day upon a rock near to this place, absorbed in contemplation, my attention was attracted by the appearance of a fox, which stealing along with its usual swift but cautious step, entered a little cavity between two rocks, and disappeared. It is the animal’s hole,—its home, was my unuttered

idea : blessed be the bounty of the Creator, who ministers to the wants of his lowest creatures ! While my eyes remained unconsciously fixed upon the crevice into which it had entered, suddenly it appeared once more at the entrance of the aperture, and after looking stealthily around it for a little space, it came fairly out and retired by the road whence it came.

“ ‘ As it passed near me in its way, I remarked that its head was wet ; the moisture still dripped from its hair. There must be water in that cavity, said I to myself, with awakened interest ; for the thirst which had for some time been painful, increased at the sight, and I started up to examine it. Displacing such fragments as I had strength to move, I discovered the mouth of this cavern under the ruins of the cliff above it ; and entering, found it as you see. Although frequented by brutes, I was probably the first human being that ever set foot within its jaws.

“ ‘ It was some time before the murmur of the water drew me, groping cautiously, towards it ; but how the animal contrived to reach it, deep as it runs beneath its surface, I cannot say. It was not without the aid of my girdle, torn into shreds, that I found means to fill the cup which I carry in my scrip, in order to slake my thirst. I loved the perfect solitude of the place ; and since that time have often resided here, disturbed by none but the

beasts, which, ignorant of man's intrusion on their long enjoyed retreat, do not unfrequently come to slake their thirst, or rest themselves in the cool shade ; and I disturb them not. The secret rests with me, and one or two who, like yourself, have needed the secure retirement it affords.'

“ Such, sir, was the dervish's narrative. He has been gathered to his fathers ; and of the few whom I have conducted hither for shelter, scarce one remains alive. And now, to relieve your doubts as to the means of providing for our subsistence, be it known to your lordship that, coarse though it may be, we have along with us food sufficient, if sparingly used, to maintain us for two days : when that is finished, I will leave this place, with your permission, in the dusk of the evening, taking with me the stoutest of our horses,—that Yaboo, which poor Beder rode, will answer best in this rough ground,—and repair to a village which lies three fursungs from hence, retired among the mountains. The disguise I shall wear will prevent suspicion ; and after purchasing as much food as the beast can carry, I shall return again before the evening of the following day. In this way, and by making use of different dresses, and going to different villages, I think there will be no difficulty in supplying the whole party with necessaries, until you, sir, and the other wounded people shall be in a condition to travel.”

We derived no small satisfaction from the narrative of Khodadad. The security it promised us, joined to the comparative comfort and perfect quiet we enjoyed, had a powerful effect in raising our drooping spirits, and brightening our hopes of the future. As therefore the cavern was to be our abode for some considerable time, we all set about establishing ourselves as commodiously as things admitted of. Carpets, cloaks, and horse-cloths, were put in requisition, and spread in the most convenient forms ; and a sort of veil or curtain was even got up for the accommodation of my sister. A general examination of provision and utensils for cookery was held ; and above all, the hurts of those who had suffered in the skirmish, were looked to, and after being washed with water, which we heated by means of dried weeds and brushwood, found in the cave, were bound up with the cloth of our turbans and girdles.

To the wounded, indeed, the want of plentiful food was rather beneficial than injurious ; and for my own part, the fever ran too high during the whole day and following night, to allow me to relish a single morsel. My sister and her lover tended me with the most affectionate care during this time ; and what with the perfect repose and coolness of the place, the spare diet, and a good constitution, they had the satisfaction on the

evening of the second day to find me considerably better.

On that night Khodadad set out upon his foraging trip, followed by all the hopes and wishes of the party. Stripping himself of every military appearance, he put on the coarsest brown wrapper he could find in the company ; a brown sheep-skin cap covered his head ; a jacket of the same material was drawn over his under garments, and on his shoulders he threw the Arab cloak in which I had made my escape. More than one of our party, when they saw him depart, betrayed some feelings of mistrust ; but Yar Mahomed, pointing to his joals and arms, observed that these were a sufficient pledge for his honesty, even if he did not know the man. At all events, we were in no condition to do better ; and for my own part, it has always been my opinion, that the best method of making a man trustworthy is to show that you believe him to be so.

By this time also it was judged safe enough to turn out the horses, which had hitherto been supported by a pittance of corn, into the valley below, where they might supply their own wants ; and accordingly, taking the precaution to shackle them partially, by tying their heads to one of their fore feet, they were left to graze till morning.

It is needless, and it would be tedious to dwell

further upon the particulars of our stay in this cavern. Khodadad, sometimes alone, and sometimes accompanied by another of the party, brought sufficient supplies of food; and the wounded gradually recovered. As health returned, and I became able to attend to what was passing about me, it was but natural that my heart should turn with increased affection and interest towards the new-found sister, to whom I owed so much; and I felt the strongest anxiety to hear her story; to learn how she, like myself, had escaped the massacre of our family: what had been her lot in life, and how she came at length to land in the harem of the chief of Toorbut. On all these points she readily satisfied me; but the subject was too interesting to both to admit of being speedily discussed; and I have endeavoured in the following narrative to embody the result of the numerous conversations which took place between us and her lover Noor Mahomed, during our residence in the Gaur-e-Dervish.*

* Dervish's cave.

CHAPTER IX.

HOOSSEINEE'S STORY.

IT is scarcely necessary to revert to the catastrophe described in the outset of these memoirs,* which destroyed the district of Karaboulagh, and blotted at once from the pages of the book of life the whole family and followers of my father. The fearful silence which on that day succeeded the departure of the plunderers, was only broken by the groans forced by thirst or agony from some dying wretch. But before the sun had sunk in the west the ruined walls echoed once more to the tread of horses, and the shouts of their armed riders. A strong party approached, cautiously examined, and then entered the dismantled gateways of the village.

“ We are late!—we are too late!” exclaimed a horseman, who, sent in advance to reconnoitre, met

* Part first of “ The Kuzzilbash.”

the leader of the party as he was returning from the interior of the village. "The game is gone: the hawks have struck and carried off the quarry. Nothing but trash and carrion is left."—"Is that all your news?" coldly replied the chief, a dark stern-looking man in full armour.—"Methinks as much as this might have been gathered from the tokens we have seen already: where a bird is stricken, the feathers are generally scattered:—but, come on!—advance, men!—all seems still enough:—no ambush?"—"No sign of it, your highness; not a living soul to be seen, nor the sound of a living thing to be heard."—"Good! see that your sagacity is as great in this as in your first report:—lead the way."

This leader was Seyd Sooltaun of Diroom, a restless crafty chieftain, who having by dint of policy and force obtained considerable power in this border district, strove to preserve it, by taking such part as his interest prompted in the feuds that agitated and desolated the country around him. Thus, at one time, he would range himself with the Koords, and other tribes of the Attock; against the Toorkomans of the desert: at another, he might be detected in supporting by his intrigues, or even by less equivocal means, these very Toorkomans against his former friends.

At this period he was, nominally at least, in firm alliance with the Koords of Khabooshan, and

the Affshars of Dereguz ; but there was reason to suspect that he was not uninformed of the chappow which the Tekeh Toorkomans meditated against Karaboulagh ; and the present expedition, undertaken professedly to assist my father in getting rid of his foes, was probably intended to serve a double purpose : in the first place, to gain himself credit as a good and faithful ally, at a moment of danger ; and in the second, to secure a fair proportion of the booty, as well as the good-will of the other party, by appearing to have purposely retarded his arrival until too late to prevent their object.

On this occasion, however, he had either miscalculated or been outwitted ; and in consequence he reached the scene of action too late for either purpose. The blow had been struck, the booty carried off, and pillaged ruins and naked carcasses alone remained. His disappointment was severe, but irremediable ; for many hours had elapsed since the event, and his deceitful allies were far beyond pursuit, had pursuit been advisable. He had been over-matched at his own weapons ; and it now only remained for him to make the most of his pretended good intentions, and boast of his promptness with his friends of the district.

While the chief was musing on these considerations, his followers dispersed themselves about the place, to pick up whatever might have

escaped the hands of the plunderers ; but the Tekehs were no blunderers at their trade, and their search proved fruitless. In passing through the courts of my father's dwelling, however, an officer of the household of Seyd Sooltaun was attracted by observing a movement in one of the groups of bodies which lay there ; and presently a female almost naked, and covered with blood, half rose from among them, and stretching out her arms towards him, besought him in a weak voice for mercy and assistance.

The man advancing towards her, and observing, that in spite of her wretched plight, she was young and beautiful, was easily induced to render her the aid she sought ; and was preparing to lead her to the spot where his master stood, when, bending over the spot where she had lain among the dead, she faintly exclaimed, " Oh save this too !—save this child, this innocent miserable child !"—" Child !" returned the man, with a sneer : " what ! your child, no doubt ?—No, no, we want no children ; we shall have plague enough without such animals."—" Oh God !" cried she, " do not leave it ;—it is not mine : save the infant daughter, the only remaining creature of my master's family, the child of Moorteza Khan."—" Hah ! that alters the case ; is it indeed the khan's child ?" demanded the man ; " and where are all the rest of them ?"—" Gone ; mur-

dered, or prisoners," said the woman; "my own eyes saw it. I saw the miscreants spear the poor innocents like the cubs of a wolf or a jackall. I did not even know that this sweet child had escaped. I found it cast among a heap of mangled carcasses, but unhurt. I gathered the few rags which were left, to cover it from the sun and the air. Wounded as I was, I could not leave the place; and long did I pray for help. Your party came; but not until I was certain of their being friends would I venture to discover myself. Surely you will aid and protect this babe and its miserable servant."

Notwithstanding the pitiable condition of the child, there is reason to suppose that the earnest appeal of its protectress might have been lost upon a chieftain, who, like Seyd Sooltaun, would not for a moment have put the cries of an hundred women and children in competition with his own interest or convenience. But policy pleaded in behalf of the sufferers; and it did not lift its voice in vain. A child of Moorteza Khan, the brave and respected chief of a considerable district, and connected with a powerful tribe: to be possessed of such a pledge would ensure him by far more favourable terms of protection or alliance from that party than he could otherwise have hoped for. The Affshars would doubtless feel and acknowledge this service; it would even influence the Koordish tribes in his favour. Ignorant at the

time of the fate of Moorteza Khan himself, and of the complete destruction of his house, it was thus he reasoned the matter with himself; and desiring the infant to be placed in safety, and the woman taken care of to attend it, he quitted the desolate village and returned to Diroom. That infant—I scarce need say it—was Hoosseinee, my youngest sister.

Arrived at Diroom, the chief gave the child in charge to his principal wife, with directions that it should be treated with kindness and respect; urging as the cause of so unwonted an order in favour of a slave, for such in other circumstances must the child have been considered, the political importance he attached to its possession. But this gleam of good fortune did not long shine on the little Hoosseinee. The fate of her father and his clan soon became known; and the chief of Diroom perceived at a glance that the political consequence of the family could not survive for a moment the destruction of its physical power. Its nearest connections, the Affshars of Dereguz and Kelaat, were occupied in matters of more immediate importance to their particular interests than the ransom of an infant female, the sole remaining representative of a ruined house; and the Koords evinced still less regard for a name, which was now but an empty sound, being neither able to assist or to oppose them. My sister having lost

her political value, sunk at once into the condition from which that alone would have preserved her, and became a slave to the wife of her master.

Fortunately for her, she could not at that time be sensible of a reverse which threatened to be more than ordinarily severe. The khanum, in all cases a stern and rigid mistress, sympathised with her husband in the disappointment of which my sister had been the innocent cause, and viewed her with prejudice and dislike. This unfortunate predisposition acquired strength rather than otherwise in the khanum's mind, as Hoosseinee increased in years; so that it soon became apparent even to the poor child herself. Naturally warm-hearted and affectionate, she was eager to please, and exerted herself to win the approbation of her mistress by diligent attention to her commands; but the coldness of that lady's bearing towards her when no fault was to be found, and the harshness with which she visited her smallest errors, weaned by degrees the heart of the unfortunate child from her. Obedience at length became the effect of habit or of fear alone; and her affections thus rudely restrained from flowing in their natural course, sought for other objects to fix upon and to rejoice in.

That the person who had been my sister's earliest friend, and whose exertions and entreaties had proved the means of saving her life, should

view this conduct of her mistress with indignation, and detest her cordially for it, was not to be wondered at; and, at first, the faithful creature injured herself, and even risked her life, by the display of her zealous affection for her young charge; but she soon found that such undue indulgence of her feelings was productive of more harm than good; and she contented herself in the sequel with continuing to labour in private for the comfort of her darling, and lavishing upon her those silent attentions which she thought were the more required, from the harsh treatment she met with in other quarters.

Deprived of every friend by the common catastrophe, and hopeless,—perhaps careless, of ransom, this woman became the more easily reconciled to the will of the khanum, who bestowed her as a wife upon the man who had been the first means of saving her life at the ruined village; and as the duty of both herself and her husband required their constant presence in the kallah, the earlier years of my sister's life were divided between the apartments of her mistress and the humbler dwelling of her servant. Thus, as soon as the child could comprehend her meaning; she made her acquainted with the history of her own family and its cruel fate; nor did she fail to instil into her young mind, sufficiently proud by nature, a high

sense of her own dignity, together with a fixed dislike to those who, as the poor woman averred, abused so shamefully the power they had unjustly acquired over the daughter of so noble though ruined a stock.

Her mind, disgusted with the present, found a sickly joy in dwelling on the past; and her conversation during the hours she could spare from her various duties, turned ever upon the fame and glory of the Affshar tribes, and in particular of the race of Keerkloo; to which she took care to mention that her favourite's family belonged. She dwelt upon the high descent, the gallantry in war, the generous liberality, and noble deeds of her forefathers; of their feuds and friendships, their alliances and enmities, with every particular which her excited imagination could conjure up, calculated to call forth the veneration and fondness of their daughter.

Thus did that daughter become as well acquainted, with the names, at least, of all her family and clan; and with their characters also, in so far as the partial account of their dependant might be trusted, as if they had continued to exist, and she to live among them. It is not therefore to be wondered at, if, when she learned that an Affshar of the race of Keerkloo was confined in the dungeons of the palace at Toorbut, her heart should

leap within her, and she should resolve to risk her own life to save his:—but let me not anticipate.

Time passed on, and Hoosseinee advanced from infancy to childhood; but the joys of that happy careless period were little felt by her. The kha-num, whether her vanity was gratified by the attendance of a slave of name and family, like my sister's; or, whether she loved to indulge her spleen by constantly mortifying the pride, crushing the spirit, and withering the affections, of one whom she disliked, by reproaches and severity, is uncertain; but, from a very early age, she insisted on the close attendance of Hoosseinee, and kept her perpetually employed in tasks and offices, not always suited to her years and strength; while an error or failure on her part was sure to call forth sharp rebukes, and even serious punishment. The attentions of her nurse were first discouraged, and then prohibited; till at length, the woman's husband having received charge of a distant fortified village, she removed with him to it; and the poor girl saw her only friend no more.

This was her first serious misfortune, and it fell upon her with unmitigated weight: there now was none to whom she could pour out her childish sorrows: her pillow was wet with bitter tears; and she, whose fondness had been her comfort under every affliction, was not there to dry them.

She pined sadly for a while; but childhood is not the season of lasting grief: her spirits revived by degrees: a single word of kindness, nay, even of less than ordinary severity, from those around her, would fall like a beam of sunshine on her little heart, and make her cheerful almost without an effort. Perhaps the unremitting labour which the performance of her tasks demanded, though severe, might have been a wholesome infliction: it prevented her from brooding over her sorrows, and sent her to her couch at night prepared to lose all recollection of either pain or fatigue in a sound refreshing sleep.

Hoosseinee was barely nine years of age when this loss befell her; and from that time the kha-num took to retaining her more entirely about her own person. At night she slept at the door of her mistress's chamber, in order to be more within call: she assisted her to dress; plaited her long grey hair, mingling it with other locks of a fresher hue, and interweaving with it the customary ornaments in great profusion: she had the charge of the soormah box and hinna for tinging her long shrivelled fingers: she was chief pincher and operator when in the bath; and performed all the other offices of the toilet. While busied with superintending her various household duties, it was Hoosseinee who followed to receive her orders; often bending under the weight of the various

utensils which her mistress forced her to carry. When seated among her pile of cushions, watching her women engaged at their looms, fabricating carpets or cloth for the family use, it was Hoosseinee whom she called upon to hand her calleeoon and other refreshments ; to bring her trinkets for the ladies' amusement ; or still more frequently, her little round set mirror ; for her personal vanity was great, as it seemed, in proportion to her age and ugliness.

Situated as the family and followers of Seyd Sooltaun were, in a district bordering upon the desert, in possession of a powerful chief, and inhabiting the remains of an ancient city, yet surrounded on all sides by tribes of various denominations, their manners and customs received a mingled character. Fixed in a great degree by the political and local situation of their chief to a particular line of country, the pastoral and erratic propensities of the tribes were in their case much controuled ; and his followers, living for the greater part of the year in villages, adopted many of the customs of their more settled neighbours. Their dress, which formerly was that of the desert tribes, became, like their manners, gradually mingled with the costume of Iran. The simple desert fare, in the same way, gave place to the more refined cookery of Persia ; and the high-seasoned pillaw and stews, the savoury kabauhs, the rich sweet-

meats and sauces of their more luxurious neighbours, began to make their appearance at the repasts of the richer classes. The Toork and Taujuk* were united within their walls.

Their occupations also partook of both conditions ; and although cultivation was carried on to no inconsiderable extent, still, horses, camels, cattle, and flocks, formed a large portion of their wealth. Even the property of the chief consisted principally in such stock, and all of his household were in their turns employed in attending to them and preparing their produce. This employment was in truth no hardship ; on the contrary, it was looked upon as a delightful recreation, to quit the confinement of the city, and accompany a party in driving the cattle to fresh pastures, to prepare their milk for its various uses, to shear the sheep, and collect the winter stores. Even the khanum herself would often join in these pleasant expeditions, and laying aside her habitual austerity, under the cheerful influence of the scene around her, would mingle in the gaiety, and enjoy the unfettered liberty which the customs of the tribes permit. On such occasions the veil, that odious invention of jealous tyranny, was never seen : such as were more prudish than the rest might indeed put on the slight handkerchief of crimson

* Toork and Taujuk were terms signifying respectively the erratic or wandering tribes, and the dwellers in cities.

silk, which is to be seen among the Toorkomans themselves; but the loose shift and brown jubba, with the high and ornamented cap, formed the dress of even the best among them.

In the city all was different. There constraint resumed her sway; some of the females even went so far as to adopt the full Persian dress from head to foot; while others contented themselves with the light screen of silk which only hides the mouth and chin, leaving the eyes, those dangerous female weapons, at liberty to bewitch, to allure, or to reprove, at the good pleasure of their owner. The khanum herself, who by no means relished excessive constraint, and who was proud of the charms which perhaps she might one day have possessed, and which she still considered as her property, seldom wore a veil; and in this particular her example was followed by all of her household to whom she would grant the liberty; but some there were whose youthful charms she thought it more prudent to conceal, even within the walls; and not all the beauty which this irksome distinction implied could compensate its possessor for the vexatious concealment and constraint it involved.

Nor did the monotonous and laborious dulness of the town occupations form a less irksome contrast with those of the country. Resuming her cruel and tyrannical habits, the khanum, as if to

compensate herself for the short comparative respite which her unfortunate dependants had enjoyed, would double her demands upon their labour, and exact the performance of their tasks with increased rigor. From morning till night, and day after day, were her numerous slaves, many of them young, and naturally overflowing with high spirits, forced to sit over the loom, weaving the same eternal carpets, or picking wool for the thread of these same carpets, or to stuff the khanum's vests; cleaning the lamb-skins for her cloaks; spinning cotton for the coarse cloths used in the family; cutting and washing whole mauns* of tobacco, to supply her incessant appetite for smoking; and cleaning her well-used calleoon; or picking rice and raisins, or Bockhara plums for her dainty pillaw; with a thousand other equally interesting employments; and if for a moment the eye wandered, or the wearied fingers relaxed, or the worn-out spirit relieved itself in a groan or an expression of its suffering, the ever-watchful eyes of its mistress were sure to detect the culprit; and serious were the consequences. Stern and revengeful as was the chief himself, and dreadful as were the tales told of his deeds when the dark mood was upon him, the still more active and unsparing cruelty of his wife was scarcely less fatal.

The shrieks of pain and agony which issued

* A weight of $7\frac{1}{4}$ lbs.

from the court of her underoon too often betrayed the terrible punishments that were inflicted there; and the maimed countenances of many a wretch about the kallah bore witness to the danger of rousing the anger of its mistress. Many were the cruel and bloody acts which were committed, not only consistent with my sister's knowledge, but often before her eyes: nor, young as she was, did she escape without her share of the general suffering. One or two instances of these cruelties I will give in her own words:—

“ Scarcely was I ten years of age, when, one day, being ordered along with a girl three years older than myself, to dress the skins of some lambs that had been killed, in order to prepare them for being made into cloaks, we quitted our task on some occasion, leaving one or two of the skins inadvertently behind us. A dog having scented these, made its way into the place, and was detected in the act of tearing and destroying them. The khanum soon discovered her loss, and directed the culprits to be brought before her. We appeared, trembling with fear, and not without cause. Her female executioners, who were in attendance, were ordered to strip me on the spot; and I believe my shoulders to this day can bear witness to the strictness with which they obeyed her orders. My companion fared still worse. Being older, she was considered more to blame

than me, and able to endure a severer punishment. Her inhuman mistress directed the bastinadoe to be applied to the poor creature's feet; and she never recovered from its effects. She continued lame for life.

“ But one instance of atrocious severity I never can forget, for it was the first I ever witnessed. A female servant had been employed to wash some clothes belonging to the khanum, and by some accident, when they were returned, one or two articles were missing: the khanum, without deigning an inquiry, upbraided the woman with the utmost bitterness, and exhausted every term of abuse in denouncing her for a dishonest thief. The poor creature repelled the accusation in language by no means disrespectful, but more free perhaps than prudence warranted:—alas! she never spoke more. ‘What! does the impudent thief (the term applied was by no means so mild) attempt to make *me* eat dirt?—to make *me* a liar?’ exclaimed the khanum, foaming with rage. ‘Here, Gulreez! Massuah!—where are you, slaves?—lay hold of her, and stop her mouth. Do you hear? Cut out her tongue instantly:—she will learn to wag it again in the face of her mistress.’ Even the two ministers of her will shrunk, appalled at a sentence so disproportioned to the offence. ‘Slaves! do ye hesitate?’ cried the khanum, with a look of

fled, as was supposed, over the imperfect wall, by which they probably had entered.

In a few minutes the lanterns were rekindled, and the khanum, who through fright and breathlessness had sunk to the ground, was raised by my sister and their new champion; who then leaving her to the care of her women, fell modestly back from the group. It was then that Hoosseinee, raising her eyes, observed by the light of the lantern, which fell full on his person, that his were fastened upon her countenance. Filled with confusion, she bent her looks on the ground, and mechanically raising her hand, became aware that in her exertions to assist her mistress, the silken screen which concealed the lower part of her face had fallen off, leaving the whole of her features exposed to his gaze. The consciousness of this exposure increased her perplexity, and involuntarily raising her hand once more, she felt her cheeks covered with burning blushes, at observing the look of unequivocal admiration with which the young man continued to regard her. She could not bear his piercing glance, and once more averted her head; but the noble figure of the youth, his dark expressive eyes, and cheeks like tulips, all glowing with emotion, made an impression upon her heart that was not to be effaced.

Pitying her confusion, as it seemed, the young man turned away his eyes, and respectfully ad-

vancing to the khanum, who had now recovered her self-possession, expressed his hope that she had sustained no injury, and begged permission to guard the party to their home. The khanum, grateful for his timely aid, replied in terms of sufficient courtesy, accepting his proffered attendance; and at the same time intimating the rank of her to whom he had rendered this important service. The young man's reply was still more expressive of concern for the accident, and of respect and surprise at her being the object of so bold an outrage; and then, for the first time, it occurred to the party to seek for, and examine the body of the wounded man. But no trace of him was to be found, except a pool of blood where he had fallen: his comrades, doubtless, had removed him, or he had crawled away, favoured by the darkness. And no discovery was ever made of the perpetrators of this singular assault.

It was suggested, indeed, that certain of the neighbouring tribes at enmity with the chief of Diroom, and who doubtless had agents in the place, might probably have received notice of the khanum's intended visit, and formed the plan of robbing her of her jewels, of which, upon such occasions, she always wore a profusion; or even of securing her person, with the view of extorting a large ransom: but all this was mere surmise; the truth was never known.

fury ;—‘ do ye also brave me ?—obey, or tremble.’ The hint was sufficient ; in a moment the miserable victim, who had fallen upon her knees, imploring for mercy, in accents that thrilled through my very soul, was thrown upon her back : I saw the knife gleam in the hands of her executioner ; a shriek of horror, which I could not repress, mingled with the half-stifled scream of the wretched woman ;—a mist overspread my eyes, and I found myself stretched on the ground by a blow from the hand of the khanum, whose fury at this unfortunate expression of my terror and disgust was excited to the highest pitch.

“On recovering, I saw the object of my compassion slowly lifted from the ground, her eyes half closed, as if in death, and her mouth welling out with blood. Such were the kind of scenes which were too often acted within the walls of the harem ; and I could tell of worse than these ; but you have heard enough to comprehend how much reason I had to dislike and to fear the khanum. But mine was a hopeless terror ; for the idea of escape from her power never entered my brain. Whither, indeed, or to whom could I have fled ? Diroom and its neighbourhood was the world to me ; and there Seyd Sooltaun was absolute lord and master.”

In sorrow, or in gladness, however, years will roll on ; and in spite of the frowns of her mistress, and the laborious monotony of her life, my sister

advanced in health and stature, until she had numbered fourteen summers. At this period an event occurred which changed the colour of her destiny, and strewed some roses in her thorny path.

One evening the khanum being invited to an entertainment given by the wife of a principal officer in the service of Seyd Sooltaun, went to it accompanied by some of her women, among whom was my sister. Upon their return, late at night, as they passed along a narrow street, close to the wall of the town, which in that part had fallen somewhat into disrepair, they were startled by the noise of a scuffle in front: the paper lanterns carried by two attendants were struck from their hands, and several armed men rushed forward to seize the person of the khanum, while others kept the servants from aiding their mistress. At this critical moment, when one of the people had already been struck down, and the struggles of the khanum and my sister were nearly overpowered, a young man coming up, rushed to their assistance, with a stout staff in one hand, and his drawn dagger in the other. With a single blow he knocked down the ruffian who had fastened upon Hoosseinee, and struck his khunjur into the body of him who held the khanum; shouting aloud at the same time, as if to a party of friends in the rear. The wounded man fell with a loud groan, and the rest of the assailants, panic struck, quitted their prey and

and will you not reply to them? Oh! after all that has passed, after all my earnest efforts to communicate with you, do not, lovely Hoosseinee, call me stranger: surely your eyes, if my heart has interpreted right, have not spoken the words of discouragement." Poor Hoosseinee blushed high at these words, with mingled confusion and anger: she felt that he was almost right; yet could not endure that he should see her weakness.

"You are very bold, sir, to speak thus to one who knows you not," replied she at length, with an air of displeasure; "nor can I allow that the service you rendered to my mistress gives you any right to insult her slave:—let me pass, sir." At these words, the colour fled from his cheeks. "Alas! I have offended you," said he: "I, who would give my life to please you; but I will do so no more, since it is your desire I must leave you: but—"

His disconsolate look melted her young heart, and her anger, which never was very serious, vanished from her thoughts: she stopped irresolute;—"What would you have?" she said. "You know I cannot listen to you without a breach of duty:—speak! what is it you desire? I would not be ungrateful to one who—"

"What would I say!" returned he; "alas! I scarce can tell. The lover is eloquent to the moon; but before the face of his mistress he is

dumb. My heart is melted, lovely Hoosseinee ; love for you has turned it into water, and yet I burn ! Ever since that happy, fatal night, I think but of the charms which accident revealed to my view, and I sigh and call upon your name." In this way did the young man run on, expressing his passion to the innocent girl, who scarce understood his meaning, but who was almost unconsciously flattered and delighted by the admiration he professed ; and it was only her extreme terror for the anger of her mistress that at length induced him to quit her, after she had, in her simplicity, half promised that she would see him once more at no distant period.

Slowly did she return homewards, musing on what had passed, and filled with tumultuous emotions : terror and uncertainty predominated, it is true ; but there was also a secret sense of pleasure, a sweet consciousness of being beloved by one, whose image had dwelt in her mind from the first moment of their meeting ; and the assurances of love and devotion which she had just heard, the first sound of affection which had greeted her ears for so long, sunk deep into her heart, and filled it with gratitude and delight. Young and tender as poor Hoosseinee was, without a creature on whom to pour out the overflowing kindness of her soul, it is not to be wondered at if her feelings, thus long pent up, should be lavished upon the

A few days after this event, my sister, in company with another of the female slaves, was sent to the bazar upon an errand by her mistress. As they passed along the street on their return, her companion, touching her arm, exclaimed—"See, Hoosseinee! look at that handsome young man:—how he stares at us! It is very wrong of him to do so:—I wonder who he is." Hoosseinee turned, and her whole face crimsoned, at observing the same dark and piercing eyes, the same bright downy cheeks, and the same slight but noble figure, which were so deeply imprinted on her memory;—it was the young man who had interposed so opportunely, when the khanum was attacked on her way from the entertainment.

Observing her involuntary glance of recognition he ventured upon a low obeisance, to which, however, she did not dare to make the least return; but pressing her companion's arm in her turn, she hurried her away, scarce conscious of what she did. From that time she scarce ever moved beyond the walls of the kallah without seeing this young man, who seemed to have no other business than that of watching her steps; but as she was always accompanied by one or other of her fellow-slaves, he never dared to address them.

One day, however, about a fortnight after the first rencontre, my sister happened to be sent on

some occasion, alone, to the bazar, and on returning from the shops, she observed her persevering admirer watching her with great earnestness. Fluttered and alarmed, though scarcely knowing why, Hoosseinee hurried homewards; but no sooner had she reached a less public part of the town than she was startled afresh, by meeting him full in the face. Her agitation was too great to escape his observation.—“Be not alarmed, beautiful Hoosseinee,” said he, approaching with a respectful salute:—“you see a slave who would give his life to serve you: long, long have I sought an opportunity of speaking with you; do not deprive me of the blessing which my good stars have at last vouchsafed to me.”

Poor Hoosseinee’s confusion now became extreme; and for some moments she could not command the utterance of a single word: yet even then, she confessed that a furtive sensation of pleasure began to mingle with and tranquillise her fears. At length, recovering a little,—“Why,” said she, in scarcely audible accents,—“why should you speak to me? You know that it is wrong for a stranger to speak to the female servants of another: let me pass on, I entreat you: I must retire home.”—“Oh, stay!” said he with earnestness;—“do not leave me!—call me not a stranger. It is true we have never spoken with our lips, but my eyes have uttered many things;

first object fitted to excite them. With all the glow of youthful enthusiasm, she dwelt upon the idea which her fancy (for as yet it scarce was more) had formed of the being who had thus proffered his own love, and claimed her's in return; a boon in truth but too easily granted. She called to mind his gallant bearing and noble form, his countenance, in which the brilliant light of youth was joined to the dignified deportment of manhood; above all, she dwelt upon each expression of affection, each avowal of love and devotion, and thought how blessed she would be with such a creature to cherish and protect her.

These thoughts passed with wonderful rapidity through my sister's brain, and it was her arrival at the gate of the kallah that first aroused her to the painful contrast of her real situation. Perhaps these delightful impressions were strengthened by the stormy reception which awaited her from the khanum, who thinking, and for that time not without cause, that her slave had trifled an unnecessary while upon the road, assailed her bitterly in word and deed; nor did she fail to pay full dearly for the pleasure she had so unexpectedly experienced.

From that time forward the interviews between Noor Mahomed (so was her lover called) and Hoosseinee increased in frequency and interest. Whenever she ventured out alone, and she soon

learnt to invent occasions for so doing, she was certain of meeting the young man, whose time seemed chiefly spent in watching her movements. He soon became acquainted with the hours at which she usually went abroad, and never failed to meet her in some retired part of the way, so as to enjoy with her a few moments' conversation, and assure her of his unceasing love. Short as were these moments, they became the delight of poor Hoosseinee's life, the only object worth living for; and, as if their stars had been disposed to shine upon them benignly for a season, to increase this sweetening drop in the cup of their existence, their oppressors themselves, by their own acts, contributed to facilitate the intercourse of the lovers.

The attack upon the khanum had occurred at a time when Seyd Sooltaun had left Diroom, in order to assist with his forces Melek Mahmood Seistanee, with whom he was then in alliance; nor did he hear of the event until his return a month afterwards; when the khanum, in relating the circumstances of her escape, described the gallant conduct of the youth whose opportune appearance had driven the marauders from their prey.

The chief, at all times an admirer of gallantry, and anxious to enlist among his followers a person who had evinced so much daring intrepidity,

caused strict inquiry to be made after Noor Mahomed ; and having discovered that he was a servant, indeed a slave, belonging to one of his principal officers, he soon made arrangements for adding him to the list of his own household. Thus did Noor Mahomed and my sister become inmates of the same dwelling ; a circumstance which, in an establishment like that of Seyd Sooltaun, more than half Toorkoman in its customs, was of itself sufficient to afford them frequent opportunities of meeting without suspicion.

It was now that Hoosseinee became more fully acquainted with her lover's history. That it in some degree resembled her own, perhaps gave an additional charm to their intimacy ; which continued as it had commenced, in perfect purity and simplicity of heart. A captive, like herself, in infancy, but not like her enjoying the attentions of a devoted friend, who might have kept alive in his breast the knowledge and the love of his family, he was ignorant of all that related to his origin. His earliest recollections were those of living with an old merchant at Bockhara, of whose family he believed himself to be a member ; until, upon some occasion of displeasure, he, to his mortification and grief, was informed of his real condition.

The merchant, whose dealings were extensive, was in the habit of purchasing such captives as were taken by the tribes of the desert in their

plundering excursions, and of selling, or receiving ransom for them, as the case might be. In the course of his business, he made frequent journeys from Bockhara to Khorasan, visiting the aouls of the various tribes in his way : a welcome guest ; for to him they looked for the supply of many an article which they required ; while he on his part was equally well pleased to make his ample profit of the produce of the desert, including such prisoners as they had to dispose of all of which he received in exchange for his arms, his hardware, his cloths, and various other goods.

By the time that Noor Mahomed had reached his twelfth year, his master, who loved him, and had it in view to render him a useful assistant, resolved to make the boy his companion on these journeys ; and having occasion to visit the ancient city of Merve, on his way to Mushed in Khorasan, he loaded a number of camels with black lamb-skins and captives ; and joining himself to a small caravan already waiting to set out, he began his march to Merve. But, when only two days' journey distant from that place, a fearful storm arose, in which many of his camels were destroyed, together with some of his servants and prisoners. The guides bewildered by the tempest, lost their way ; and the whole caravan was in imminent danger of being lost, when they were discovered by a party of Toorkomans returning to

their encampment near Merve, among whom was Salour Beg, a soldier of fortune, at that time in the service of Malek Mahmood, and sent by him as one of his agents among the tribes of the Attock.

That men whose business was plunder, should fail to make the most of a caravan discovered in so helpless a condition, was not to be expected. The privileged persons of the guides, together with that of the old merchant, and some other well-known traders, all of whom produced their *perwannahs** from the principal chiefs, whose tribes lay in their route, secured it from open hostility; but the demands of recompense for assistance rendered,—demands which the travellers were in no condition to resist,—left them but little to congratulate themselves upon. Heavy contributions were exacted under one pretence or another; and many of the prisoners who had entertained fair hopes of deliverance, passed once more into a state of hopeless bondage. Among the rest, Salour Beg took a fancy to Noor Mahomed. “He is yours, sir,” said the merchant with a sigh, well knowing the futility of remonstrance; and the boy was immediately hoisted upon the crupper of a huge Toorkoman horse, behind a servant of his new master.

* Protections for the road; passports.

A change as complete as it was sudden and unexpected, thus took place in the condition and prospects of Noor Mahomed ; who, after the first shock was over, found no reason to regret what had happened. The bustle and excitement of a military life was far more suited to his ardent mind and fearless disposition than the sober monotonous employment of a merchant. This war-like propensity was soon discovered by his new master, who took delight in gratifying and encouraging a taste so entirely his own ; and the boy continued to attend upon his person, growing in favour as in years. In process of time Salour Beg entered into the service of the chief of Diroom, carrying with him the boy, now become a youth, improved in strength and all manly accomplishments. On more than one occasion he had distinguished himself for courage and activity ; and when the name of Noor Mahomed was intimated to the chief as the champion of his lady, it only rendered him the more 'desirous of numbering the youth among his more chosen followers.

But although the constant attendance of the young man upon his new master, when at home, increased his opportunities of seeing my sister, and enabled them frequently to prolong their interviews, these advantages were greatly counter-balanced by the obligation of following that chief in all his military expeditions. Often was she

weeks and months without seeing him, and all that time her heart was filled with terror and anxiety for his safety. Still the delight of meeting when he did return overpaid her for all her sufferings ; and, strange as it may appear, such was the caution, which terror for the fury of the kha-num on one side, and fear of consequences to his beloved mistress on the other, inspired the lovers with, that this measured intercourse continued to subsist undiscovered between them for many months.

It is not easy to say how long they might have been contented with such stolen and imperfect enjoyment ; but at length their communication was very rudely interrupted. I have said little regarding the family of Seyd Sooltaun ; for my sister had little pleasure in talking of any one of them. Among other children, however, he had a son, Mouchtar Beg, a man of a debauched and worthless character. It would be painful to explain how this person insulted and excited the indignant reproof of my sister's lover ; it is sufficient to say, that stung with disappointment and fury, he vowed the young man should rue what he termed his insolence ; that he would never rest satisfied with less than his utter ruin : and in conformity with his vow, he employed spies to watch Noor Mahomed's actions, in hopes of discovering something to his prejudice.

But although the uprightness and regularity of the young man's general conduct left no room for censure in points of duty, his enemy was but too successful in obtaining a piece of information suited to his purpose. His interviews with Hoosseinee were detected; and not once, but repeatedly, was that enemy an unseen witness of their blameless endearments. Such a discovery was beyond his hopes. To be detected in an intrigue with a slave of the chief! how could such a transgression be pardoned?

In truth Mouchtar Beg had good reason for expecting the fulfilment of his denunciations; for the chief, astonished and highly irritated at his son's communication, which was given, as may be easily imagined, in the most exaggerated shape it would bear, directed the khanum to deal as she thought fit with her slave; while he himself sending for the hapless and unsuspecting Noor Mahomed, and listening only to the dictates of his wrath, inflamed by the representations of the cowardly informer, ordered him to be beaten with rods in his presence, until he was carried away almost insensible.

The punishment of my unfortunate sister was even more severe; for the merciless blows which were showered upon her person, embittered by the furious and keen abuse of her savage mistress, was not thought sufficient: a coarse cloth being

thrown over her lacerated shoulders, she was dragged, half fainting with pain and weakness, to a dark cold cell; where for near a fortnight her only sustenance was a pittance of bread and water. At the end of that time she was led from her dungeon to the scarcely less loathsome and terrible presence of her mistress, to suffer the intolerable tauntings of her poisonous tongue. "So, young wanton, has the wholesome discipline which my prudence has administered to you cooled your blood, and brought you to your senses? *You* must be a woman forsooth! *you* must be set up with a lover!—but I will teach you what you are;—a slave's business is to wait for orders; and this you must do, shameless! though you are the daughter of a khan, Mash-Allah!" In this manner did she run on, working herself up into a most unnecessary rage; her cruel attendants, ever and anon twisting the unhappy girl's ears, or striking her on the mouth with their iron-heeled slippers, at the signal of her mistress, whenever she made an effort to speak.

Trembling with terror, poor Hoosseinee could scarce support herself; for she remembered the bloody deeds she had witnessed in that very apartment, and believed that her own time was now come; but after exhausting every species of invective she could think of, the khanum contented herself with giving orders that she should be set

to work at beating and preparing wool ; a work for which, in her state, she was but ill qualified.

Happy, however, to be released from her presence, she followed the servants to the task assigned her, and strove to bear her misery as best she could, and conciliate rather than irritate those in whose charge she had been placed. Bitter indeed and desponding were her reflections, as at length released from labour, she sunk upon her wretched pillow. The sun of her life was darkened, the only solace of her miserable existence—till now she scarcely knew how miserable—was snatched from her. The future presented but one dark and threatening prospect of cruelty, hardship, and oppression.

But not for herself alone was the terror and despair of my wretched sister excited. If such had been her own treatment, what might not have been the fate of her lover ? This was the overwhelming thought ; and the horrors of anxiety and suspense were added to the ills under which she already laboured. These told her that fate had yet a darker cloud in store for her. Bitterly did she weep ; but her tears brought no relief ; for the period of terrible certainty and hopeless resignation had not yet come. Her weakness and pitiable condition moved the compassion even of her taskers. They exacted a less rigid account of her work, and gave her better food than her mis-

tress had ordered for her. Alas ! she had little desire to eat. Emaciated in body, and enervated in mind, the desponding girl would fain have laid her down to die.

But that was not the object of her tormentors. After a seclusion of several weeks, during which she was reduced to the brink of the grave, directions were given to relax the severity of her confinement : she was permitted to breathe the fresh air ; and, as soon as she was able, to accompany the graver and elder of her fellow-slaves abroad upon their several errands. In time the strength of her constitution prevailed over the effects of cruel treatment : her strength returned ; and if not cheerful, she attained at least a calmness, or rather apathy of mind, which, like the eye of one in a reverie, regarded the future with vacant listlessness. Gradually the restraints imposed upon her conduct were still more relaxed ; and insensibly she resumed her former habits and duties.

CHAPTER X.

STORY OF HOOSSEINEE, CONTINUED.

MANY weary months now elapsed, and Hoosseinee had received no tidings of her lover; she knew not whether he still existed upon earth, or had gone to share the joys of the just in Paradise. One day, when executing a commission for her mistress, in company with another slave, they were returning to the kallah through a retired part of the town; their attention was attracted by some of those sounds by which dervishes generally intimate their approach; and scarcely had she reached a turn in the lane, when two of these wandering saints met them full in the face. "Hoh! there, khanums, in the name of the blessed Allee! from whose tomb we have just returned, bestow your charity upon two poor houseless wanderers, who will never cease to pray Allah to bless you with good husbands and plenty of children. — Good lady," continued the speaker, attaching

himself to Hooseinee's companion, "beautiful and pious as I know you to be, you will not grudge a few shahees for this tusbee, formed of the most holy clay of Karbelah; or this potent talisman, stamped with the signet of the great Solymaun. It is sovereign against the influence of the evil eye, and confirms the virtue of fortunate days and hours;—see! it was drawn forth by a spell from beneath one of the pillars of the Tuchte-Jumsheed!—La-illah-il-ullah!"

While her companion, flattered by the fakeer's address, and interested by the curiosities he displayed or described, permitted her attention to be fully occupied, the other dervish approaching Hooseinee, and addressing her with a hoarse voice, in the common cant of their profession, endeavoured to attract her observation. Indifferent and uninterested, however, and disgusted by his dirty figure, bedaubed with ashes, and hung round with rags and patches, she fain would have hurried away from him; but having succeeded in separating her a few paces from her fellow-slave, he changed his tone, as well as his manner, and in a voice which, though little louder than a whisper, pierced through her very soul. "Have a care, Hooseinee," said he; "be prudent, for God's sake! look at me; listen to me; but restrain yourself. Hooseinee, dear Hooseinee, it is Noor Mahomed who speaks!"

What a moment was that for the trembling girl! a thunderbolt could not have stunned her more effectually than these few words from one whom she believed dead, or gone for ever from her: her head swam round, and she would have fallen at his feet, but he caught her by the arm, and sustained her till consciousness returned.

Well was it that the attention of her companion was so intently occupied, and that her lover and she had fallen a little behind: my sister's disorder passed unheeded, save by him who had caused it; and he, made prudent by bitter experience, did not venture to evince the smallest alarm. In a few seconds the faintness passed away: the whispered caution, "if you value your own life or mine, be firm," restored her to self-possession: joy and hope darted into her breast, and strung her nerves to the urgency of the moment. "Oh, Heaven! then you live!—you have escaped!"—"Hush!—yes, Hoosseinee, I have; but we have not a moment to lose:—listen with attention,—mark well what I say:—the fate of both may depend on it. You see yon small ruined mosque there, down yon dark lane? observe, you can see its broken dome over that mud wall,—you know it?"—"Yes, it is the Musjid-e-heft Peeraun, is it not?"—"The same;—you know it is a solitary unfrequented place?"—"Yes," replied my sister, with an involuntary shudder.—"The better suited to

our purpose, Hoosseinee. On entering the mosque, as you go towards the old mimber,* you will see a small door-way on the left ; it leads to a court, surrounded with cells, once intended for the use of khadums : † some of these cells are half closed with mud and broken bricks ; and above the second from the centre you will see fixed a small red rag. For six days to come, I will watch there from the third hour after morning prayer till mid-day ; and from the hour of evening till that of morning prayer. You, Hoosseinee, if, as I hope, you prefer the arms of a fond lover and faithful husband to the tyranny of a cruel heartless mistress, must seize the earliest moment when your absence may pass unheeded for a while, to gain that spot. If, from any unforeseen cause, I should not be in waiting to receive you, lie quietly in the cell I have described ; nothing will disturb you there.”—“ Oh, Noor Mahomed !” gasped the terrified girl, breathless at the boldness of his project,—“ I cannot—I dare not ; my head fails me at the very thought.”—“ Never say so, sweet Hoosseinee,” returned the young man with flashing eyes.—“ You, the daughter of a warrior ! sprung from a warlike tribe !—think !—let the prospect of freedom excite you, if the fate of your lover fails to do so ; for, if my hope is disappointed, I will

* Pulpit.

† Officiating servants.

not endure life: nay, it will not be left in my choice:—promise then!”—“Oh, but that dreadful place! how can I?—at night too!”—“Ay, Hoosseinee, night is the best; and the place with all its horrors is our best friend: such only as you now see with me ever approach its walls; and these are now my friends. But see! your companion seeks you: I must leave you. Remember the life of Noor Mahomed and the liberty and happiness of Hoosseinee depend upon her firmness and exertion. May Allah ever guard her!”

The dervish, who had fixed upon my sister's companion, had by this time most probably exhausted her curiosity and charity together; for she paused until her fellow-slave should join her. The two dervishes then quitted them, and turning down the lane which led to the ruined mosque, disappeared, roaring out their cry of “Yah Allah!—huk! huk!”

“Strange rogues, strange rogues, these fakeers,” observed the old slave, shaking her head with a dubious expression, as if not altogether certain whether to be satisfied with every thing she had heard. “If one could only believe what they say! It is said they can read the stars, and predict future events: and if so;—they deal in spells too! Holy Prophet, preserve us from magicians! And what have you got, Hoosseinee, or what have

you heard? was your fellow also a seller of good luck and talismans? what is to be your fate? Not a pleasant one, if we may judge from your countenance:—eh?”—“Tchah, Meertha, what nonsense!” replied my sister, trembling still more at her remark; “who would be fool enough to lend an ear to the words of such cheats? they only want to wheedle a little money from us, that’s all; and you know I have little to spare, God help me!”—“Hoh! I see: poor thing!—no good news for you: that must be bought dear, like other good things. I pity you truly: see what a fine talisman I have got! it is a ruby,—a pure ruby:—no doubt it belonged to Jumsheed himself; for it was found at the Tuckt-e-Jumsheed, with a heap of other rich things, he said. Ay! and it keeps off the evil eye. I wish I had got it ten years ago, when my poor baby was smitten! I should not have been a slave now, if it had thriven, perhaps;—but, never mind,—all in good time, may be. (This was uttered in rather an under tone.) Well, after all, the man let me have it for—how much do you think?—why, for six abbases only!—is it not a bargain?—see here!”

While she run on thus Hoosseinee was gradually recovering composure; she took the bit of red glass which the fakeer had imposed upon poor Meertha for a ruby, and hung over it as if to admire its beauty and lustre, but in truth to divert the

attention of her companion from herself. As they proceeded, however, Meertha continuing the subject, appeared all at once to recollect the length of time which Hoosseinee had continued in conversation with her dervish ; and insisted on hearing some of the particulars, so pertinaciously, that the poor girl's confusion would in all probability have excited the suspicion of her companion, had they not arrived opportunely at the gate of the kallah. It may be easily imagined how much relieved my sister was when Meertha, turning to her as they entered, observed that there was no need of mentioning the incident which had occurred on the way. Full cheerfully did she promise secrecy, and she repaired to her usual duties, pondering on all that had passed ; but still too much stunned by the interview with her lover, and above all with his bold proposal, to think of it as aught but the dream of a disordered brain,—a scheme too wild and visionary to be entertained for a moment as practicable.

Joy, like sorrow, is often an enemy to rest. The delight of knowing that her lover still lived, and still loved her so faithfully, was too poignant ; and the crowd of contending and perplexing considerations, arising out of all that passed in her interview with him, were far too overpowering to admit of sleep. Restless and wakeful, she lay ruminating over every word he had uttered, and her thoughts

would still revert to the proposal of escape he had suggested, and the promise he had endeavoured to exact from her. Escape ! deliverance from a thralldom which, always severe, had of late become almost intolerable ; and happiness with the only being who had ever loved her, were implied in that single word ! A thrill of undefinable emotion shot through her frame at this conclusion, which, the more she dwelt upon the subject, became the more palpable. The extravagance—the impracticability of the measure, appeared by degrees to diminish, and before the dawn of morning it dwelt upon her mind as a thing not only to be anxiously desired, but, if circumstances should prove favourable, to be boldly and zealously attempted.

But how to ascertain whether so favourable a conjunction might be looked for,—how were the particulars of the plan to be ascertained ? There was no other way than to seek the appointed spot of rendezvous, and learn them from Noor Mahomed himself. Such a step did not pledge her to unconditional consent ; it was but a preliminary measure, which might be followed up or retracted at pleasure.

Still this preliminary step involved considerations which were alarming to so young and inexperienced a creature as Hoosseinee, and she shrunk with the natural timidity of a woman, as the moment for action approached, and the dangers with which it

teemed became more palpably apparent. Although she enjoyed more liberty at this time than at any period since her disgrace, she knew well that her conduct was still subject to suspicious vigilance, and that it would be impossible for her to be absent for any considerable length of time without inquiry; and the smallest suspicion might cause utter ruin, or even the cruellest death, to her lover and herself. Besides, that mosque—that terrible mosque,—to visit it unperceived by day would, she knew, be impossible; and by night—her courage failed her at the bare idea.

It was a building of great antiquity; its peculiar style of architecture—the materials of which it was built—the inscriptions upon its walls from the Korân, done in coloured bricks, of which the gay lacquering had crumbled off from age, declared it to be the work of those sturdy Arabian heroes who (blessed be the Almighty for it!) first introduced our sacred religion into Iraun. Holy and sacred as the place had once been esteemed, it was now totally deserted, and had become the theme of many a fearful legend. A foul and bloody murder, of which it was once the scene, had caused this change. The story was as follows:—

An aged hadjee with his two sons, natives of the city of Bockhara, arrived at Diroom, on their return from Mecca. They were reputed to be wealthy, and the equipage of the travellers cor-

roborated the report. But they were Soonnies—accursed Soonnies—enemies to the Sheah faith: nevertheless, as pilgrims from the holy shrine,—as men who had faced the dangers of the desert—traversed thousands of fursungs to behold the sacred caabah, to rub their beards upon the threshold of the thrice holy tomb,—against them the door of hospitality might never be shut. They were lodged in a principal caravanserai; but the chief moollah of that very mosque entertained them in his own house, on the very evening before they were to resume their journey.

It is said that a long discussion respecting the different points of their respective religious tenets took place between the old man and his host, and that the latter, a man of sullen and haughty temper, was greatly irritated by the mild firmness with which his guest maintained his own opinions. But the moollah smoothed his brow, exchanged courteous greetings with his guest when he rose to depart, and commended him and his sons solemnly to the care of God, as they quitted his roof.

Motives of religion, as it appeared, had induced the old man and his family to visit the mosque at midnight; and his servants received a message desiring them to load their beasts and go forth from the city that night, as their master wished to continue his journey without the delay of loading, immediately after morning prayers. The men

obeyed, and the loaded beasts with their attendants, issuing from the gates which were opened for the purpose by special order, proceeded to await their master in a small plain just beyond the walls. But, strange and fearful to tell, they were never more seen or heard of.—Sounds, indeed, of an ominous nature, cries and groans, mingled with the shouts of the servants, and tinkling of the camels' bells, came to the ears of those who drowsily watched on the walls; but they were taken for the bustle and the uproar of the party decamping, and no attention was paid to them.

But when morning broke, and the cry of the muezzins had announced the hour of prayer, a sound of horror and affright arose within the walls, and crowds were seen hurrying to the Musjid-e-heft Peeraun. The cause was soon made known; for upon the stone pavement in the arcade, to the left of the mimber, lay the corpses of the old man and his two sons, cold, stiff, and horribly disfigured, weltering in their blood, which was clotted around them in thick streams.

Upon examination, it appeared that the old man had been killed outright by heavy blows on the head; but one of the sons had drawn his khunjur, and probably made a powerful resistance, for he was yet more fearfully mangled by dagger-wounds in the body, while his right hand still clenched his own weapon. Of the murderers no trace was ever

found, although much pains, it is said, was taken to discover them: but the deed was laid to the door of certain robbers who haunted the neighbourhood, and who, doubtless, had heard of the old man's wealth, and concerted this plan to get possession of it.

However the truth might be, the occurrence was fatal to the mosque and its establishment. No one chose to frequent a place which had been polluted by so foul a murder, and it soon was totally deserted. On the chief moollah this desertion had a striking effect: he never again held up his head. He might be seen passing along the streets, or walking in the neighbouring gardens, with a long tusbee in his hand, and his head sunk upon his breast; at times starting, and looking behind him, as if alarmed; then hurrying forward in total abstraction. Men shunned him too; from what cause was never declared. He lived abandoned and unnoticed; and so poignantly did he feel this loss of his great popularity, that he drooped, and died a few years after, as was affirmed, in great mental and bodily anguish.

All the rest of the moollahs and khadums who had ministered in the mosque quitted it one after another, and from being a place of worship more holy than any other in Diroom, it not only lost its sacred character, but became an object of super-

stitious dread and abhorrence; for evil spirits were said to have taken up their abode within its walls, where they howled all night, and watched to destroy any being of the race of Adam who should venture to intrude upon their haunts. The whole quarter of the city participated in this mysterious influence; the houses around it were gradually abandoned, and fell into ruins; and even at the present time, no one, however poor, will take up his abode in the vicinity of the Musjid-e-heft Peeraun. The only human beings who approach the place are dervishes, callunders, or fakeers; men who, by dint of prayer and self-denial, have acquired a certain power over evil spirits; of such persons it is often made the home, and they remain in it unmolested.

To this spot, accursed as it was, and notoriously the abode of evil spirits, was my sister required to repair at dead of night: nor were the only human beings she was likely to meet with there, better calculated to inspire a young girl with the confidence she required. Bold and licentious as persons of their profession too often are, if she should chance to reach the place in her lover's absence, what might she not have to apprehend? No wonder then, that her reluctance to a measure, which must expose her to such perils, was almost insuperable: she had yet to learn how distant and

contingent evils shrink into insignificance in the presence of closely impending danger.

Two days passed away, and the succeeding night found Hoosseinee as much perplexed and undecided as ever. It is true, no opportunity of visiting the mosque had occurred, even had she been disposed to attempt it: but to resolve on making the attempt was beyond her power. An incident, however, occurred, which forced her to make a quick decision.

The khanum had invited several of the principal ladies of Diroom to a feast. The entertainment was magnificent; and all the slaves of the family were summoned to attend the guests. When the trays of meat had been removed, and calleoons were called for, my sister, whose duty it was to hand these pipes to the guests, heard the khanum observe to the principal lady, who sat next to herself, "Now you shall judge for yourself; you will find whether I speak the truth." And each, without delay, applied herself zealously to inhale the contents of their respective instruments. But scarcely had a few whiffs been drawn, when the face of her mistress suddenly darkened with anger. She called the poor girl forward, and addressed her furiously:—"How, wretch! what stuff is this you dare to give my friends and me to smoke? this is none of the khojah's tobacco." Her heart sunk at these words; for she recollected

that the remainder of some fine Sheerauz tobacco, which her mistress had received from a merchant of that place, had been unaccountably purloined, while in her charge as keeper of the khanum's calleoon. It was a trifling matter; but with her mistress no fault was a trifle; and she had never dared to mention the theft, nor had the affair been brought to notice until this unlucky day, when she had been forced to charge the calleoons of her mistress and her friends with an inferior article.

Poor Hoosseinee hung her head, unable to reply; but this increased the khanum's fury. "Kumbucht! haramzadeh!" cried she, "you have robbed me, I am certain of it."—"Your slave would represent, that the khanum's tobacco was exhausted."—"It is a lie, and you know it!" exclaimed the lady, furiously hurling at her slave the head of the pipe, which she had just taken off. "You have stolen it for yourself, and your vile companions!—hold your tongue, shameless! Here, Massuah! Goolrez! shut her mouth with the slipper." Quick as lightning the ready ministers of her wrath rushed from the passage where they always awaited her commands; the poor girl's arms were seized, and the iron-heeled slipper applied, till her mouth gushed out with blood. "Hoh! get sticks there! let her be beaten soundly; or stay—as she likes tobacco,

she shall have it in abundance." But the principal guest now interfered. "I beseech you, khanum," said she, "forgive the poor thing, she has got punishment enough."—"Forgive her! the impudent hussy!—the insolent thief! she deserves to lose her ears; and she shall feel it: but, I beg pardon;—for your sake, not to disturb the pleasure of our guests this night; she shall be let alone just now. Retire, vile one; but remember I am in your debt, and I do not often fail to pay."

The trembling Hoosseinee retired, led by the two female guards; who, pushing her rudely into the outer passage, left her to find her way to the slave quarter of the palace. "Great God!" cried she, in anguish and terror, when she found herself alone, "what will become of me? nothing but punishment and misery; mutilation probably, and soon death itself!—Death! Ah! Noor Mahomed, we shall never meet again!" The remembrance of their last interview was instantly suggested by the name of her lover; a sudden thought flashed through her brain.—"Not meet again! and why? at least the effort may be made; my case is desperate; but, thanks to my cruel oppressor, my courage shall be found equal to it. If I am to perish, it shall be in the attempt to reward the fidelity of one who risks his life for me, and not to glut the cruelty of a tyrannical mis-

tress." Her breast burned with renewed hope and energy: she could feel her cheek glow, and her eye flash with the resolution born of despair. At that moment her character underwent a change, as complete as it was instantaneous; the timid slave became at once the freeborn, intrepid daughter of warriors; and she felt as if she could have braved the sternest frown of her persecutors. "I can but fail," said she, internally, as she reached her own apartment; "and if Allah befriends the unfortunate, or upholds the just cause, why should we not succeed? in Allah's name, then, will I make the attempt."

In this resolution she put on her half veil, took her cloak and slippers, and with a basket in her hand, went boldly to the gate of the kallah, as if she had been going abroad upon some ordinary errand. It was two hours after the time of evening prayer. The night was dark; and as she attempted to pass the wicket of the closed gates, the sentinel on duty stopped her.

"Whither go you at this hour?" inquired he. "What is that to you?" returned she, with an air of unconcern; "I am on my mistress's business. You know me for the khanum's slave;—let me pass."—"That may be true," returned the soldier; "but my orders are to let no woman pass after the second hour of the night without a special token: so produce your token or go back."—"Very

well," replied Hoosseinee, struggling to conceal her disappointment. "You may send me back, it is true, but the khanum will thank you but little for keeping her guests waiting. They have sent me to the Attaurs* for certain perfumes and sherbets, required for the ladies who are feasting with the khanum; and you know she is not very patient under delay. But I shall faithfully report the cause."

The assumed air of indifference and contempt with which she turned, as if to go back, induced the sentinel, who probably dreaded the consequence of his incivility, to hesitate. It did not escape my sister's penetration; and at that moment recollecting that she had about her the small keys, hung by a silver chain, which, as an attendant on the khanum's person, she usually had in charge, she produced this symbol of office in hopes of overthrowing his wavering resolution. "Ah! I forgot," she said, "perhaps you will acknowledge these, and save yourself a beating."—"It is sufficient," replied he, drawing back with respect, and opening the wicket. "Pardon my rudeness;—soldiers must obey their orders;—but pass in peace."

By this time several of the guards, attracted by the altercation, had assembled at the door of the guard-room. And though none of them interfered

* Druggist.

in the dispute, my sister did not fail to remark, that one among them regarded her half-concealed face with a look of peculiar meaning; and that instead of returning with the rest to the guard-room, the man quitting his companions, retired into the body of the kallah just as she passed through the wicket: but absorbed in her own more agitating reflections, she paid little attention to the circumstance, and only thought of making her way to the Musjid-e-heft Peeraun.

The clouds which mustered round a moon, far advanced in her first quarter, lent to the night a misty indistinctness scarcely less dreary or perplexing than the blacker obscurity of a moonless sky; and the sudden though faint bursts of light which flashed for an instant through the driving rack, gave a tenfold darkness to the long intervals which succeeded. In spite of all her high excitement and newly acquired courage, my sister's heart beat violently as she threaded the long narrow streets; and when she reached the entrance of the dark alley, and saw the black dome rising dimly against the thick grey sky, a chill of horror crept through her veins, and she almost fancied, that in the wild fantastic forms of the clouds, as they whirled along on the wings of a fierce wind, she saw the spirits of evil which haunted that fearful place sporting in the precincts of their own domain.

Her resolution faltered for a moment, and she almost forgot the real dangers from which she had fled, in the fancied horrors that now surrounded her. It was only for a moment. The khanum's fury, and the endearments of Noor Mahomed, came at once to confirm her purpose. "No, no," she mentally exclaimed, "the worst,—the worst that can happen here, is better than the best I can look for yonder." The sound of approaching feet served to quicken her motions, and she boldly plunged into the alley, and stumbling over the ruins with which it was strewed, never stopped until she reached the entrance of the mosque.

All there was dark and silent as the grave;—the stillness weighed like lead upon her breast, as she listened with intense anxiety for a human sound;—but none came. Mustering her spirits with a powerful effort, she entered the arched doorway, and the echo of her own light and timid steps was still the only sound. Blackness was all around, except when a faint gleam from the lurid sky fell through the rents of the dome upon the old mumber, marking its jutting points with ghastly indistinctness.

"This is too horrible," murmured the terrified girl:—"alone in this den of murder and of evil spirits! I cannot bear it!" At that instant a short but brilliant burst of moonlight flashed

through the ruined dome, discovering both arcades ; and aided by its momentary ray, she gained the door-way that led to the court beyond. A broken cistern, half filled with dust and fragments of brick, occupied the centre space, and the arched entrances to the various cells yawned black around,—all but one ; and from it, through the crevices of an ill-built breastwork of rubbish the feeble rays of a glimmering lamp struggled to force their way.

Indescribably cheered by this token of human presence, and forgetting the preconcerted signal, Hoosseinee approached the welcome light ; but yielding to an instinctive feeling of caution, she paused to examine the cell through some of the crevices in the wall before venturing to enter it. This imperfect survey, however, served but to satisfy her that the cell was of small dimensions, and dark and dismal, in spite of the little iron lamp, which, stuck in a niche of the wall, threw its dim light over the thick atmosphere of the apartment. Naked and smoky walls, a floor littered with some half rotten straw, and having a bit of worm-eaten numud spread along one of its sides, a bundle or two of dirty clothes, some sticks, such as dervishes carry, a few matchlocks, and a sword, made up the list of what she could discover in the place. The survey was not inviting ; but her case was urgent, and it was the rendezvous appointed by Noor Mahomed himself,

who, according to his promise, if not there at the moment, would certainly soon make his appearance. In this spot, therefore, she resolved to await his arrival; and accordingly, lifting to one side a mat which hung over the low contracted door-way, she entered, made one step forward, and then stopped motionless; her blood curdling in her veins, and her very hair rising on end with indescribable horror.

Her worst fears seemed realised; for there, in one corner just opposite the lamp, which threw its yellow sickly beams full on the mysterious object, sat a half-naked figure bearing some resemblance to the human shape, but of aspect so appalling and so wild in its attire, that no stretch of the imagination was required to take it for one of the evil spirits said to haunt that accursed spot. The figure sat motionless as an image cut in stone, with its long lean naked limbs crossed beneath its meagre body, and that body was placed bolt upright against the bare wall, having one arm raised and clenched over its elevated head; its eyes were turned upwards until the whites alone were visible beneath the lids and deep over-hanging brows: nor did the noise of Hoosseinee's entrance produce the smallest change of position or sign of consciousness. Naturally dark in colour, the body and limbs were thickly smeared with grey ashes; and streaks of blood, at that time black and clot-

ted, had trickled from gashes which still yawned red and ghastly upon its arms and skeleton-like bosom, both of which were sprinkled with long curled grey hairs : around the head was twisted a confused mass of hair, mingled with ashes, dirt, and rags. Thus grisly and disgusting, did this being sit in fixed abstraction ; and but for the scarcely perceptible heavings of his breast, it might have been taken for the corse of some murdered man torn from its premature grave, or his spirit sent on earth to await its final doom.

Horror-struck at this unexpected vision, the first impulse of Hoosseinee was to quit the place and flee ; but awe or terror had bereft her for the time of all power to move, and in spite of herself she stood rooted to the spot gazing upon the terrible phantom. Still no motion was to be perceived ;—still it maintained the same fixed position and impressive silent abstraction. Reason now gradually resumed her functions, and a ray of the truth flashed upon the mind of the terrified girl ; she knew that the place was frequented by fakeers, and she had heard of the extraordinary austerities and penances which some of these ascetics impose upon themselves. It was plain that she now saw one of these holy men in the act of *tupussia*,* or abstract contemplation of the

* For an account of this singular description of religious fanaticism, see MALCOLM'S *History of Persia*, 8vo. ed. p. 4.

Divinity. From him there could be no danger ; on the contrary, she felt that the sacredness of his occupation might prove a powerful protection in case of insult from other quarters.

Timidly advancing, and with a profound obeisance, she addressed the repulsive form :—" Father," she said, " deign to shelter and assist a wretched female who implores your aid." No answer was returned—not a muscle moved—the eyes still wore their preternatural glassy glare, fixed and distorted, as if the last agony was past, and they were set in death.—" Oh, holy man !" ejaculated she yet more earnestly, with clasped hands, and eyes almost starting from their sockets, as she advanced yet another step towards him ; " do not, oh ! do not reject my prayer !" — but she was interrupted by the sound of voices and the tread of approaching footsteps. The glare of torches flashed on the outward walls. " Oh God, I am discovered !—Save me, father ! save me, or I am lost !" cried the bewildered Hoosseinee, as instinctively rushing past him into the extreme corner of the cell, she shrank behind some old mats that were piled against the wall.

Neither the precipitate rashness of her action, nor the increasing noise of the approaching party produced the least effect upon the abstracted saint. The mental as well as the bodily eye was strained upwards in holy rapture, and was equally

insensible to all that passed around him. And now with what agony did the poor fugitive distinguish the words of those without, which too surely proved them to be her pursuers. "Search these ruins narrowly—seek through all the neighbouring buildings: they are certainly hereabouts. See that they do not escape by any of these passages.—Caussim, stay you in the alley with a torch;—here, Mahomed Allee, watch this door;—Hussan and Hyder, come in with me.—See! here is the very place; this cell here—examine it well;—no! here it is—here, quick!—the torch, the torch!"—and Hoosseinee heard the trampling and the buzz of the searchers, as they separated each to his charge, and she gave herself up for lost.

The search continued briskly for some time; so long indeed that she almost began to hope that they had overlooked her hiding-place; when at length the torches having been carried in other directions, the feeble light of the small lamp, which till then had been overpowered by their glare, caught the eye of one among the party. "What have we here?" said he. "Quick, Hussan! bring the torch!—here's a hole we have not looked into yet: the sly foxes may be here;" and up he rushed to the entrance, followed by Hussan with the torch, and tore down the matted screen.

The same unearthly death-like figure which

had appalled my sister produced now a like effect upon her pursuers. They started back.—“Stakfur ullah ! what is this ? a gin or a deev ?” and they retreated with all speed ; but half ashamed at their terror, they rallied at the entrance, and cast another look behind them.—“Pider soochteh !* its but an old rascal after all,” exclaimed one, as his eye fell on the details of the human form ; “but he’s dead, I think.”—“No, no, Hussan ! let him alone in the Prophet’s name ; this is no game for us. It is an old fakeer at tupussia :—don’t bring down ill luck or his curse upon us by disturbing him ;—they can’t be here ;” and the men were moving off, when the leader of the party coming up called out—“What is the meaning of this, comrades ? what ails you now ? fine fellows you for a close search !” They told him what they had seen. “By the head of Allee, you are bold youths to be frightened at an old fakeer ! but let me pass—saint or devil, see whether I don’t search every corner of his hole with the point of my dagger !”

Again did the blood of Hoosseinee run cold, for the voice was that of her master’s son ; the wicked, the devilish Moochtar Beg—the author of all her misery, and of her lover’s disgrace : she knew his active malice, and despaired of escape. The crisis in truth drew near. Rushing boldly for-

* May his father be burned !—a term of abuse.

ward he entered the cell, followed once more by his two associates. But even he was arrested by awe and superstitious dread, and paused irresolute; for still fixed and silent as the dead was the figure of the fakeer.

His irresolution was but momentary. Determined to push his inquiries to the uttermost, and ashamed that his followers should see in him the smallest symptom of that weakness which he had scoffed at in them, he advanced towards the immovable being, and addressing it in haughty and insolent terms, demanded if any one had entered the cell? No answer was returned, nor did the quiver of a single muscle betoken the least consciousness of the inquiry. Again, more loudly and impatiently was the question put: a pause ensued, and still there was no answer. Furious at such contemptuous neglect, the young man made a step to drag the object of his anger from his seat, when both ear and hand were arrested by a loud shout or rather yell, uttered by three wild-looking naked fakeers, who rushing into the cell, and pushing aside the two attendants, seized Mouchtar Beg by the arm, and threw him violently back towards the door-way. "Allah-hu-akber! yah Allee! yah Hyder!—what sacrilege is this?—what madmen — what ruffian have we here?" exclaimed they, rending the air with their wild cries.

Stunned and confounded by the suddenness of

the action, the young man felt for his sword; and his attendants, till then irresolute, prepared to defend their master; when one of the fakeers, with an air of lofty authority under which the boldest of them quailed, ordered them back, and commanded silence. "What are ye, men?—are ye kaffers, infidels, that ye thus insult a servant of the most high in his holiest exercise?—Are ye mad or desperate, that ye brave the fearful consequences of breaking the mysterious abstraction which now unites that being to his God? Lay but a hand upon his person, and it will wither to the shoulder!—rouse but these eyes from their holy abstraction, and their glance will strike you dead!—Happy is it for you that my presence has prevented this impious crime and your awful punishment! Depart!—depart!" His wild majestic figure dilated as he thundered forth these denunciations in tones that penetrated the souls of his hearers. Trembling and astonished, they shrunk without a word from the cell, which was now left in possession of the fakeers alone.

No sooner had the sound of their retiring footsteps announced that the intruders had not only quitted the court but the mosque, than he of the fakeers, whose words had caused their flight, approached to the spot where Hoosseinee lay concealed; and removing the mats, which had till then screened her from view, addressed her thus:—

“ Daughter, come forth!—your enemies have departed. With us you are in safety ; but the air of this cell is not for females to breathe : repair in confidence to your appointed place ; and behold, here is one who has waited for you long, and is still ready to guide you to liberty and happiness.” Amazed no less at this ready discovery of her hiding-place than at the words of the fakeer, the poor girl stood lost in doubt ; till a voice at the door of the cell roused her to recollection, and springing forward towards it, she fell into the arms of her lover.

The joy, the rapturous assurances of happiness and security, which now rushed upon her mind, combined with the severe agitation she had previously suffered, completely overcame poor Hoosseinee for the moment ; and when she recovered, it was in another cell, accompanied by her lover alone, who supported her with the tenderest anxiety. “ Hoosseinee ! dearest Hoosseinee !” said he with fervour as soon as he saw she had recovered her recollection, “ long, long, and earnestly have I prayed for this hour : it has come at last ; and now, please God, we part no more.” —“ Alas !” replied she, “ willingly would I think that this may be ; but what safety can we enjoy here ? and how to get hence ?”—“ Be content, life of my soul ! all this is arranged. I have friends, and so have you, dearest Hoos-

seinee, powerful and zealous friends to aid us; and by the favour of Allah we shall soon breathe free in a better country. But time is precious—we must instantly quit this place.”—“Alas! will that be possible?—Know you not that the alarm has been given,—that Moochtar Beg has already been here, and must still be on the watch?”—“I know it, I know it; but he too has met with his match;—he will lose his labour. But, Hoosseinee, you see this disguise?” She looked up, and now only observed that he still wore the fakeer’s dress. “This garb is our security. These holy men are my friends; and like true friends, cast over us the mantle of safety. Hoosseinee, you must assume this dress; and behold, here is one suited to your stature, and provided for your use.—Lose not the precious moments, but equip yourself at once; and muster up your spirits, for the time of action is at hand.”

There needed not a moment’s consideration to convince my sister that her lover was in the right. To quit an asylum which the light of day would destroy, and to get beyond the city walls before a more rigorous search should be made, were measures clearly necessary to their safety; and only in the garb of such privileged wanderers this to be attempted. Quitting therefore the greater part of her woman’s dress, Hoosseinee put on the tattered robe: her hair, long the ob-

ject of much attention and pride, was twisted up fantastically with rags and feathers, bedaubed with ashes, and covered in part with the felt cap of a dervish: her naked legs were likewise smeared with ashes; and she was supplied with a pair of the wooden sandals used by such mendicants. These arrangements were no sooner completed than Noor Mahomed, slinging a sword from his shoulder, seizing his fakeer's iron mace, a formidable weapon, and taking his bag containing the common necessaries for a journey, called aloud to one of his friends: "Now, Shooker Oollah! Bismillah irruhmaun, irruheem! in the name of God let us depart!"—"Amen!" responded the other, "we are ready. God send us good fortune and a happy hour!" and out they all sallied; Hoosseinee leaning on the arm of her lover, and mustering all her resolution for the trying hour that had at last arrived.

The lamp was then extinguished; but my sister observed that Shooker Oollah was full as completely armed as her lover. On entering the court he whistled a low distinct note, upon which the party was joined by another armed man, also in the garb of a dervish; and they all set forward, leaving the old mosque upon their right, and passing through one of the side cells by an opening which was temporarily closed with bricks and concealed by a tattered mat. They now found

themselves in a maze of ruinous and deserted houses, embarrassed with broken walls and fallen rubbish, through which, guided by Shooker Oollah, they made their way with great difficulty in the dim obscurity of the night. At length they came to a building of greater extent, through the tenantless courts and roofless halls of which they reached a small area that led to the chief entrance.

“ See ! yonder is our point of safety, and we have almost reached it : this is the old deserted house of Sooltaun Allee Hyder ; and just beyond that gateway is the city wall, no barrier to us ; for we have a spell by which to pass it unperceived. Cheer up then, dear Hoosseinee !—come, friend, Bismillah !—go forward, while I support this weaker one.” But Shooker Oollah paused :—“ Not so fast, not so fast, brother,” replied he softly :—“ all is not right, or my ears are less faithful than usual. Let us examine yon gateway :—stop a moment :—there is another way by which I will go round :—Noor Allee and you must wait for my signal :—do not stir till you hear it.” He quitted them, disappearing in the gloom to the left ; while they remained on the spot in that breathless suspense which magnifies minutes into hours. At last a low whistle was heard beyond the gate : it was repeated, and Noor Mahomed called on his companion to advance. “ That will not pass for the call of Shooker Oollah,” said the

fakeer : “ let us wait a while longer—there is some mischief here.”—“ In the name of Heaven, what would you have? it is the signal,” said Noor Mahomed impatiently : “ the second whistle was to decide us.”—“ I do not think it is,” returned the other ; “ but if you will tempt Providence, let us move cautiously at least:—be on your guard.”

It was well they were prepared ; for scarcely had they entered the dark portal, when they were startled by the rush of footsteps, and heard the well-known voice of Moochtar Beg shouting, “ There they are ! seize them in the name of the chief ! strike down the dogs ! kill them if they resist ! We have no old fakeers at tupussia now to deal with.” Happily for the fugitives he was too precipitate : one moment more would have placed them all within his reach : one moment more, and they would have issued clear from the darkness of the gateway into the light beyond, where he might have chosen his victims. As it was, their pursuer’s impatience just turned the tables, and gave them the advantage which he threw away. Noor Mahomed, springing to one side of the archway, placed his mistress with one hand in a recess, while, wielding his heavy iron mace with the other, he met the assault of Moochtar’s followers, who, six or eight in number, advanced, distinctly relieved against the light in the

entrance of the archway. The foremost as he entered met the full swing of the weapon ; and the crash which succeeded told them of his fate. Noor Allee, on the other side, was not less successful ; for the thrust of his short spear at the advancing mass was followed by a groan, and a second of the assailants rolled at his feet.

The torch, which had been hitherto concealed lest it should alarm their intended victims, was now loudly called for ; but it rather increased than diminished the confusion, by its glare and smoke. For a moment the followers of Moochtar stood irresolute, scarce able to distinguish friends from foes ; while their opponents made use of this opportunity to aim their blows with fatal effect. But the combat was still unequal : three men fell upon Noor Mahomed, while Moochtar Beg himself, observing that my sister took no part in the fray, in an instant saw through her disguise, and seizing her by the middle, was endeavouring to carry her off, when the quick eye of her lover caught sight of the action. Heedless of himself, he turn'd sharp round, and aimed a blow at the ravisher with his mace. The force of the stroke was broken, for he had overreached himself, and staggered in consequence almost to falling, but it saved his mistress ; for the wretch rolled senseless on the ground. Still gasping for breath did Hoosseinee look round, and what was her horror to see her lover beaten to

his knee, and three swords flashing over his head in act to descend upon it. Weak and weaponless as she was, she rushed frantically forwards to intercept the blows ; when the welcome cry of “ Hah dervish ! Yah Hyder ! ” rose above the uproar, and one of the assailants fell by a blow from the hand of Shooker Oollah. The others, staggered by the sudden attack, gave back in alarm, while Noor Mahomed recovering his footing, buried his weapon in the brain of him that was nearest.

During this struggle Moochtar Beg recovered the stunning effect of his blow, and getting upon his legs, ran towards Noor Mahomed with his drawn dagger ; but scarce had he lifted his arm to strike, when he was again prostrated by a blow from Shooker Oollah. “ Unblessed villain ! ” exclaimed the dervish, “ has the time then come ?—Receive then that which I owe thee—that which thou hast earned so well ! ” and with the words he drew his dagger to despatch him. “ Amaun !—amaun ! pity !—mercy ! ” shrieked the miserable wretch ; “ save me ! save me ! and I promise—” “ Your promises, miscreant ! and what are they worth ? Remember Mouraud Allee, and despair ! ” The knife gleamed in the air, but Noor Mahomed caught the falling blow :—“ Bind him and leave him here,” said he ; “ the rest have fled, and he is past injuring us.”—“ Away !—dispose as you choose of your own foes,” replied the dervish in

a subdued but terrible voice, "but leave me to deal with mine;—there is blood between us, and the debt of blood must be paid! Merciless destroyer! take this from the hand of the ruined Mouraud Allee." Again the khunjur flashed aloft, but no hand now stopped its sway, and in the next moment it was buried to the hilt in the heart of the imploring wretch at his feet.

A shudder of horror ran through the veins of the lovers as they witnessed this deed; but the dervish, calmly rising from the body of his victim, said, "So much for justice—for vengeance: now for safety, for there is no tarrying here; the city will soon be alarmed, and we must not abide the search.—Follow me closely."

Immediately in front of the gateway rose the wall of the city, which, though in many places ruinous, was too well watched to admit of the fugitives escaping unperceived. But Shooker Oollah had a surer game to play. Proceeding but a few yards along the wall to the left, the party reached a hut, the door of which at the signal of the dervish, opened, and admitted them into a mean and small apartment. In this they were received by an old man, who gazed doubtingly upon the intruders, until Shooker Oollah addressing a few words to him in an unknown language, he immediately withdrew a curtain at the lower end of the room, and ushered them into a second chamber,

but a little more spacious than the first, and lighted by an iron lamp.

In this apartment were set forth a few simple refreshments, cold rice, some milk, dried fruits, and sherbet. "Eat," said the dervish; "you will require the support of food; you have far to go, and the way is rough. Lady, take some refreshment." But Hoosseinee's mind had been too highly excited to admit of her becoming sensible of bodily wants: she forced herself to eat a few mouthfuls of rice, and drank some refreshing sherbet. During this time the old man, cautiously fastening the door of the apartment, removed an old numud which served the purpose of a bed in one corner of the room, and with a shovel scraping away a portion of the earthen floor, discovered a trap-door of wood, which, with the help of the dervish, he lifted without difficulty. "And now, bismillah!" said the latter, "follow me down these steps: count twelve, and then go straight along." He moved forward, followed by the others of the party. The trap-door was closed above: it was dark as pitch; but the steps were regular, and the path beyond them smooth, although the passage was so low that they could not move along without stooping.

They had proceeded about twenty paces when, after a noise which sounded like the undoing of bolts, a faint ray of light broke upon them as if

from the rising of a curtain; and through the opening thus made they issued, one by one, into the open air. — “A good convenient burrow this! thanks to the jackall from which I first took the hint,” whispered the dervish, as the opening closed of itself, leaving no appearance of a cavity. “I think you will allow we are beholden to it; but silence for a while, if you love not the whiz of a matchlock ball;—look around and above you.” They did so, and saw that they were in a rough hollow heaped with rubbish and overgrown with weeds and briars. It was the ditch beyond the walls of the town; and above them rose the walls themselves. The barrier was passed: a fervent *alhumdulillah!* rose to every lip; but it was only uttered mentally; for the tread of the sentinels could be heard above them as they kept their watch upon the parapet of the walls.

Cautiously crawling along the hollow way until they reached a path which led from it into the plain beyond, the dervish, followed by the rest of the fugitives, proceeded in silence for a considerable distance; nor was it until all appearance of the wall was lost in the darkness that he permitted them to rise from their painful posture, and pursue their way more at ease. They had traversed half a fursung of rough and difficult ground, when at length they could distinguish certain dark shapeless masses rising gloomily before them.

The dervish halting at this point gave his usual signal, which was distinctly answered from a little distance. Beckoning the party onward, he led the way towards the objects in sight, which proved to be the habitations of the dead. They had arrived at one of the ancient burying places, which are situated without the walls of the city; and startling as such a retreat might at another moment have been, poor Hoosseinee had witnessed too many real horrors on that eventful night to be greatly agitated while enjoying her lover's protection, even at approaching the tombs.

They followed their guide into an arched and domed mausoleum, the resting-place of some ancient king; and in one of its cells they found three others of the dervish fraternity seated around a fire of embers, and circulating their pipes charged with the intoxicating beng. Scarce any notice was taken of their arrival, and little of greeting passed. Shooker Oollah, after taking a whiff of the calleeoon, uttered a few words unintelligible to my sister or her lover, upon which the whole party rose, stretched themselves, gathered up their smoking apparatus and fire utensils, took their clubs, maces, or spears, and quitted the apartment. "All is ready," said the dervish, "and time presses:—let us depart."

Descending from the cell, they found Noor Allee and the other three fakeers of the tomb

holding a number of mules, asses, and stout yaboos,* sufficient for themselves and the whole party. "These are not chargers for a bahadourjung like you, my friend," observed Shooker Oollah to Noor Mahomed, "but they will do our business better; so take you that shaggy broad-chested yaboo, while the lady shall have the best ambling ass in all Khorasan. Let dervishes alone for finding beasts to suit their need. So now mount, and away!"

In a moment all were in their seats — saddles they could scarce be called; for the ass my sister rode had only an old paloo or pack-saddle cut down a little for lightness, and the others were accommodated in a nearly similar manner. But accustomed as Hoosseinee was to clambering on the back of an animal, with or without a saddle, after the manner of the tribes, she was at no loss on the present occasion; and the ass, at once fleet, easy, and tractable, did not belie the eulogium of Shooker Oollah. Away they rode; and dark as was the night, it did not appear to embarrass their experienced guide. A glance upwards at some star which peeped out for a moment from its veil of clouds, or a rapid sweep with his eye around the horizon in search of some familiar land-mark, was all he required to direct his course. Through rough and smooth, over height and hollow, he

* Ponies, pack-horses.

urged them on without a moment's halt ;—at one time turning aside to avoid a village ; at another, dashing right through a maze of cultivation and gardens, or of brier and wild pomegranate thickets ; now plunging into the bed of a torrent, and clattering along its dry, stony bottom ; then mounting its steep side, and scouring over the gravelly plain beyond it. The little steeds carried them bravely, neither starting nor stumbling in the rough and broken ground, although mercilessly urged onward ; for the riders knew that every foot of the way was a year of liberty and safety.

During the whole of this long and arduous ride, there was but little communication between my sister and her lover. A quick-breathed word of encouragement—an expression of kindness, was all that could pass, although he kept steadily by her bridle-rein, even in the most difficult part of the way, and cheered her as best he could. But the night was far spent, and they had gone many a fursung before Hoosseinee could raise her spirits (crushed down as they had so long been by terror and anxiety) to contemplate the chance of liberty and safety which was opening on them. Bodily fatigue was in truth fast weighing her down ; and it was with feelings of thankfulness beyond what she cared to express, that, as the grey light of morning just appeared in the eastern horizon, she saw Shooker Oollah check his mule, and heard

him break the silence he had long observed, by remarking, "Unless my land-marks and calculations have deceived me, we are near a secure and convenient resting-place. The lady must be almost exhausted, and who of us is there that will not enjoy rest?"

They were at this time crossing a narrow level tract, dotted with brush-wood, and surrounded with undulating swells, sometimes rising into steep craggy knolls among which their way (for path there was none) had for some time led. In front might be dimly discerned the outline of lofty mountains, rendered more distinct by reflecting the first pale tints of morning. Their guide now led them down into the bed of a deep but narrow water-course, along which they wound; until reaching a pass, where the banks, well sprinkled with ragged wood, rose high above the chasm, the dervish once more halted. "This is the place," said he; "quit your beasts, and do you, Noor Allee, come and assist me."

The party cast their inquiring looks around them, but could discover none of the usual marks of a halting ground: there was no pasture for the animals, not even a drop of water in the dry stony bed of the river. At last they saw the two dervishes at work in a thicket of wild thorns and brambles matted together, and which formed the outskirts of a dense jungle of oak, beach, and

other forest trees, tangled and thickened with wild vines and creeping plants. The labour of a few minutes removed a mass of shingle from the bank beneath the arching cover of the thicket, and exposed to view a hollow which might have been taken for the outlet of some petty rill.—“Come on,” said he, as the operation was completed. “The path of safety, like that to Paradise, is none of the broadest or smoothest, but happy are they who find it: enter—follow your guide. Noor Allee, you remain to secure the entrance.” With these words he plunged into the thicket all glittering and wet with the dew of the morning, and each of the party followed in succession, leaving Noor Allee alone behind, in charge of the animals.

They had not clambered many paces before the path became wider and easier, and the brushwood had been cut away so as to leave an overarching shade, under which they advanced in darkness and in perfect concealment for full a hundred yards. The forest then became less dense, and at length they reached a spot of very striking beauty.

It was an open meadow of the greenest and most luxuriant herbage, forming a hollow less than a hundred yards across, surrounded by hillocks, which were all covered with a forest so thick as to be impenetrable to all who had not

the secret of access. At one side of this meadow, beneath some large oaks, and at the foot of a craggy hillock, stood the remains of a building which, to judge by the extent of its base, the size of its shattered dome, and the fragments of brilliantly lacquered bricks that still studded its crumbling walls, must have been of no mean consequence in its day. Its form at once declared it to be one of those ancient mausoleums so common in the province; and its situation, remote from the habitations of men, was sufficient to indicate it as the tomb of some holy descendant of one of the imaums.

The words of Shooker Oollah confirmed the fact.—“Al-hum-dulillah! behold us at length in safety; here we may defy the chief of Diroom and all his power. Besides my brethren and myself, the only visitors of this holy place are the beasts of the desert, and the fowls of the air. Peace be to the soul of Imaun Zadeh Hoossain! and pardon to the repentant Mamoon,* who built this mausoleum to protect his bones.”

Ascending some mouldering steps, he led the way to the principal part of the building, which consisted of a large central domed-hall, with four corner apartments. A part of the dome had fallen in, and lay strewed on the broken pavement, which

* Probably Mamoon-ul-Resheed, son and successor of the caliph Haroon-ul-Resheed.—*Translator's note.*

still exhibited remains of the rich devices by which it had been ornamented. Azure and gold still glittered obscurely on the walls, in spite of the damp of many ages. Of the four corner apartments only two were habitable; and in one of these, blackened by the smoke of many fires, and covered with traces of its casual visitors, in the stones placed for cookery places, bits of old mats, and broken earthenware utensils, did the party take up their quarters.

The cares of Shooker Oollah, as well as of her lover, were directed to the accommodation of Hoosseinee. Directing two of his brethren to cut a quantity of fern and wild flowers, which grew in profusion in the meadow, he formed for her a couch, which would have been inviting even had her weariness been less excessive; and throwing over it one of the numuds which formed their saddles, they had little difficulty in persuading her to occupy it. The rest shifted for themselves as each found best; and the animals, which by that time had likewise made their way up the hollow, found a luxuriant repast as well as a soft bed in the herbage of the meadow.

Cold rice, cheese, bread, onions, dried butter-milk, and such fare was produced in sufficient abundance from the scrips of the dervishes. A fire was quickly lighted, and the rude travelling calleoons of the party were produced; cool deli-

cious water was drawn from an aubembareh or cistern, which was still in good repair in the vaults beneath the building ; and, on the whole, a repast was spread before them, which to persons so hungry and exhausted might be well thought luxurious.

“ Ai khodai ! ” exclaimed Shooker Oollah, arousing himself from a fit of abstraction in which he had indulged for some time after the repast, while the calleoon went round, “ to find myself once more within the walls of Mukbureh Hous-sain—again in its well-known asylum ! Merciful Allah ! what recollections does this very chamber recall !—Ah ! friends, little have I now to do with earthly concerns ; the world and I have settled accounts. When I put on this tattered robe and cap, I forsook its pomps and vanities, and wished too to smother the feelings that belong to them. As it is written : ‘ When the dervish accepts the scrip and tattered mantle, let the embroidered robe, the purse of gold, and the eye of beauty, be blotted from his memory—they belong to him no more.’ Alas ! I would have fixed my thoughts on God alone : I would have lost myself in the absorbing contemplation of his all-pervading essence ! But now, thus dragged into the scenes of my youthful haunts, nature will be heard ; and he who made all things is for the time forgotten !—but rest is needful : sleep is on your eyelids ;

and your frames require its refreshment: rest in peace.—No danger will reach you here: for me, I have other tasks to perform.”

He rose and left the apartment; while his friends full readily pursued the advice he had given, and soon sank to sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

HOOSSEINEE'S STORY CONCLUDED.

THE sun had already declined from its meridian, when the fugitives awoke, and starting from their lairs, they found the dervish Shooker Qollah busied along with one of his brethren in preparing an ample and substantial meal. By whatever means obtained, they had procured meat, and managed to prepare from it some palatable soup and an excellent stew, of which, as soon as cooked, they invited the lovers to partake; assuring them that all their physical powers thus invigorated would be required for the night's march before them. Accordingly they once more were seated round the coarse cloth on which the food was placed; and few as may be the apparent comforts of wandering dervishes, and little as they profess to value the good things of the world, our travellers were astonished to observe how many appliances to comfort, and even to luxury, they

contrived to produce ; for not only were good plain provisions forthcoming in abundance, but no lack was there of the scarce condiments and spices, nor of dishes, drinking cups, and copper vessels for preparing their food. Tobacco of the finest quality was in plenty ; and above all, their favorite maajoon or beng, which produces so delightful an exhilaration of the spirits, and if more freely indulged in, will intoxicate more surely than the forbidden juice of the grape itself. All these things were carried in an* incredibly small compass, or must have been stored in the retreat for the use of the fraternity.

While thus seated at their meal, it was, that my sister for the first time remarked the appearance of their guide, the dervish Shooker Oollah. Until then the hurry of their flight, and her own painful reflections, had sufficiently occupied her thoughts ; but now that she felt more at ease, his figure, as the light streamed full upon it from the great arched entrance, fixed her attention powerfully.

The dervish was far above the middle size and strongly formed, although his person rather inclined to meagreness than corpulency. His features were of noble cast : in his youth he doubtless had been handsome, and still the traces of departed beauty lingered around the scathed and ruined form. The broad elevated forehead, the decided brow, the well-formed nose, with chin

and jaws of almost gigantic proportions, denoted a resolute and powerful mind, no less than the smile which lurked around his full lip, and the melting of his dark, deep-seated eye, indicated the natural benevolence which dwelt in this rude exterior. But the restless glances of that same eye, and the hurried, varying expression which like the clouds of a summer's day would flit across his striking countenance, betrayed as surely the wild enthusiasm, frenzied zeal, and shattered intellect so characteristic of the fraternity to which he belonged. At times a shade of gloom, dark, as if his thoughts were occupied by some terrible purpose, would overspread his brow; but a word, a sound, a look would recall his wandering senses, the cloud would vanish as rapidly as it came, and the sweet benevolent smile would illuminate his features, as a gleam of sunshine when it falls on the black and barren rock.

Hoosseinee was still gazing on this interesting personage; who, having concluded his meal, sat with his right arm resting upon his knees; when chancing to glance at the sleeve of his tattered vestment, her eye was arrested by a deep red stain. The scene of the preceding night flashed fearfully on her recollection, and her frame shook with an involuntary shudder: neither the glance nor the action escaped his notice. "Ay, lady," said he, replying to her look of horror, "such

scenes as we have lately passed through are suited neither to your age nor sex. The sight of blood revolts you, and it is fitting such should be the case. There was a time when I too would have shrunk from such deeds as you witnessed last night; but thirty winters passed among the evil ones of this world leave the best of us but little innocence to boast of. See, lady! even your own person is not free from these sanguine stains."

Starting at his words, she threw a rapid glance over her own dress, and saw with horror tokens of the deadly work. The blood of those who perished in the scuffle at the gateway had dyed her garments as deeply as those of her companions.—“ Ay, even the dove will strike at the hawk in defence of its young; and you, lady, would lift that gentle hand to save a precious life.”—“ Oh! Allah, grant that this may be the last of bloodshed!” exclaimed Hoosseinee, shuddering again; “ liberty, and even life itself, is dearly bought at such a price!”—“ Lady, you are right,” replied the dervish; “ to shed the blood of man is to break the sacred law of his Creator; yet that just God has himself ordained that life must answer for life, and blood flow for blood. In defending our own lives, we blamelessly destroy our enemy; and when innocent and injured blood cries aloud from the earth against its murderer, shall man turn a deaf ear to its voice? Woe be to him who shrinks

from such a call—from the mandate of the Almighty himself! Yes, murdered victims! the debt of vengeance is at length paid; and your pale spectres shall no longer haunt my dreams, reproaching me with neglect.” His flashing eye was strained on vacancy, and every feature was convulsed with emotion as he uttered this wild and unexpected apostrophe.

Startled and amazed, his auditors remained for some moments silent spectators of his unaccountable agitation; till at length the mental whirlwind passed away; and he resumed his speech with greater calmness. “ You start at my present vehemence, my friends, as you were shocked last night at the deed which you sought in vain to prevent. Both impulses were natural; and did time and circumstances permit, I would willingly explain the mystery which hangs over my conduct, and justify myself in your eyes; but the short space which remains before we can resume our journey must be very differently spent. Believe, that although this arm be red with blood, it is the blood of a savage oppressor, an insatiable plunderer, a remorseless assassin, a brutal ravisher, who had too long insulted the Majesty of Heaven, and defied the arm of man. You saw my dagger drink the life of the villain Moochtar as he lay prostrate at my feet. Had you then known that in him I slew the murderer of my parents, the

foul violator of my young and innocent sisters, the brutal coward who made a ruined and degraded outcast of the son of a Hadjillar chief, you would not have sought to save the miscreant from the just vengeance of the dervish Shooker Oollah."

"For you young man," continued he, addressing himself to Noor Mahomed, "your destiny, inch allah! is of a brighter hue—your day is yet in its morning; and the clouds which obscured its dawn are already dispersing. With talents and energy like yours, a brilliant career lies before you. All Khorasan is in arms, and chiefs of power contend for the mastery: but if my advice be worth attention, I counsel you to join the party of Nadir Koolee, whose star is bright, and whose arm is strong as that of the destroying angel. Tomorrow we shall, please God! overtake a caravan which is on its way to Mushed: once across these mountains, and in the Koordish states, you are safe from the power of Seyd Sooltaun, and may journey in peace, as a dervish or as a young soldier attached to the fortunes of Nadir, until you find yourself in the protection of his camp. Tomorrow then we part, but not until you shall be beyond the reach of danger: the interest I take in you, young man, is of no common sort, as you have had cause to know:—nay, spare your thanks, and listen yet awhile. You believe that to the service you rendered me, and which was the origin

of our acquaintance, is to be attributed the zeal that has been evinced in your cause. But willing as I might have been to assist you, and highly as I have seen occasion to esteem you, I must declare that something of that zeal, and much of the power which has been exerted in your behalf is due to a higher quarter: a more powerful influence than mine keeps watch over your safety, or rather over hers, to whom you have united your destiny; and I have been but its agent.—But seek to know no further; the limits of my confidence as of my duty have their bounds, and both draw to a conclusion.” Rising speedily, he prevented all reply; nor did any other opportunity for question occur, until the arrangements for the march being made, the party resumed their journey.

The march was long and tiresome: path, for the most part, there was none, and they picked their way along the bottom of shaggy ravines; scrambled up the sides of steep hills covered with thorns and tangled brushwood; or wound among wood-knolls, until the hills increased to mountains; and they found themselves at last in one of the arduous and lengthened passes which form the communication between the desert and skirts of the hills with the more elevated districts of Khorasan.

Halting but once on the way to breathe the animals, and refresh the party with a calleeoon, they journeyed on all night; and about two hours before

day-break found themselves crossing the highest gorge of the pass, and commencing their descent on the other side. The first dawn of day brought them to a little plain covered with grass, and surrounded by hills, more naked and less lofty than those which they passed during the night. Here the dervish halted. "Noor Mahomed," said he, "our time to separate is come at length: you are now in the district of Dereguz, and safe from all pursuit. Beyond the shoulder of yon hill to the left, and not one fursung distant, you will find a village; when you reach it, inquire for the reish suffeid, old Baba Allee: greet him in the name of dervish Shooker Oollah, and he will receive you kindly, and guide you on the way. The yaboo and ass which you and your lady ride accept of as memorials of the dervish: and see! here is gold—you will require it, and we can spare it.—Now, God protect you!"

"Nay, stop, kind and true friend; it is not in this way we must part. We cannot so abruptly quit our benefactors. Say, shall we not meet again?—how can I show my gratitude?—how can I requite the deep obligations we have received?"—"By silence and obedience, my son! My course and duty lie one way, yours another: embarrass us no further; our time admits of no delay. Cherish and support her whom you have chosen;—be patient, be prudent, be virtuous:—once more, may

Allah keep you !” He turned, waved his arm, and rode off accompanied by the other dervishes, leaving my sister and her lover to find their way to the village of Baba Allee by themselves.

Deep and fervent was the morning prayer which they put up as the sun arose in his glory above the eastern hills; and unbounded was their joy, and heartfelt their congratulations while journeying onwards; now, as they hoped and trusted, beyond reach of the tyranny under which they had languished so long, and blessed in each other, never more to be parted. Many subjects of reflection had their recent adventures supplied; but none engaged their attention more anxiously than the mysterious hint given by their friend the dervish; and earnestly, though all in vain, did they exhaust conjecture to discover the hidden source to which they were indebted for the effectual aid they had experienced. Thus occupied, the time passed lightly on, until following the broad pathway, they reached the village of Baba Allee.

That person, a venerable old man, with a perfectly white beard, and eyes dim with age, received them, as the dervish promised, with perfect hospitality. No sooner did he hear the name of Shooker Oollah, than he rose, and welcoming them with cordiality, insisted upon their occupying the highest seats; got ready water for washing, with all other comforts travellers require; and

understanding that they had travelled all night, he supplied them with mattresses and carpets, and left them to take a little repose, while a substantial meal should be prepared.

By the time they awoke other guests had arrived;—a merchant on his way to Mushed, accompanied by a number of servants and camels loaded with various merchandise; and certain slaves, prisoners, as it was said, ransomed from the Toorkomans, and returning to their families. The merchant, a fresh-coloured well-favoured man, with a good-humoured though somewhat sly expression of countenance, a bustling manner, and a great deal to say, strove to make himself agreeable to every one about him. He had a way of eliciting the opinions of those he conversed with by means of indirect allusions and sidelong observations, and of insinuating himself into their good graces by adopting their ideas thus obtained as if they had been originally his own; a process which, masked by a bluntness of manner that flattered while it disclaimed all approach to flattery, threw his auditors off their guard, and gained their confidence by surprise: the crafty old merchant collected more information in this way than he could have obtained by the most ingeniously framed inquiries.

Observing that, although they wore the miserable rags of the dervish costume, the travellers

received no small marks of attention from their host, this gentleman favoured them with his particular notice also; and it was plain that he eyed them with a curious and somewhat suspicious gaze; but whenever he caught their eye, his own was in a moment averted, and his face resumed the air of careless good-humour, which might have been taken for its natural expression.

Entering into easy discourse with them, he made, with apparent unconcern, such inquiries as might lead them to advert to their business, and to name the place from which they had last come; but Noor Mahomed, who saw no good reason for being explicit on these subjects to a stranger, evaded his questions, or replied to them in a tone which silenced the inquirer. Breakfast was served in due time; and after all had satisfied their appetites, their host retired, leaving the whole of the travellers to further repose if they required it.

When the servants had withdrawn, and all around them was quiet, the merchant assuming a significant and mysterious air, approached Noor Mahomed, and thus addressed him:—"Young man, I request your attention to what I am going to say; for it is dictated by pure benevolence, by a real wish to serve persons whom I perceive to be of merit. There is something in your appearance, disguised though it be, (for that these rags are a disguise requires no magician to discover,)

which strongly interests me in your favour: were I not fearful of offending, I should say the same of your companion." He paused; but the piercing glance which he cast upon Hoosseinee covered her with confusion, and called up a burning blush to her cheeks. She felt that her sex was discovered. "Yes," continued he, "the matter is plain: there is about you both a mystery which ye have not address to conceal; you are too ingenuous to cope with the world and its ways:—but set your hearts at rest;—you run no danger here;—trust to me, and all shall be well. Think you, young man, that the truth which I saw at a glance can be long concealed from other eyes?—that the sex of that lovely tulip can be hidden by that disguise?—It is enough: on that subject I need say no more; but let me warn you of the danger you run in travelling with such a charge unprotected in a troubled land like this. The very disguise in which you put your trust will prove your bane: let your wife or your sister, be she which she may, assume without delay the proper dress of her sex. Do you resume your own;—travel openly in the eye of men, and your risk will then be less than as you now are."

He paused: confounded and perplexed, my sister and her lover remained silent, casting stealthy looks at each other, at a loss how to reply. At length Noor Mahomed, observing that further at-

tempt at disguise would be vain, assented candidly to the truth of the merchant's surmises, adding that he felt sincerely grateful for his good advice: "But," said he, "we can be in no danger; for to-day we join the caravan for Mushed, and shall travel under its protection."—"Join the caravan! Poor young people! you are misled; the only caravan which passes through this district for Mushed has reached that city some days since; and there will not be another for more than a month."

Again the lovers gazed on each other with increased perplexity. Could the dervish have been misinformed? Treacherous to them he could not be, for their safety sufficiently proved his sincerity; but this merchant—what motive could he have for asserting such a falsehood? He observed the uneasiness which no doubt he had anticipated. "Come," said he, "dismiss your anxiety: I am going to Mushed; my escort is strong: you shall join me, and go there in safety."—"May the shadow of the Almighty be ever upon you!—we accept your kind offer," replied Noor Mahomed, "and shall accompany you in full confidence."—"It is well," rejoined the merchant; "so let it be. I move in the afternoon; take your rest till then without anxiety. My servants shall summon you, and have your beasts in waiting; and they shall attend to your convenience in all things, as if it

were myself." The lovers once more expressed their gratitude, and then betook themselves to repose.

It was three hours past noon when the travellers were summoned to prepare for departure. As they were nearly ready, the merchant himself, accompanied by a slave bearing a bundle, entered the apartment. "I have been providing for you what you might have found it difficult to procure here for yourselves," said he; "see, here are clothes for the lady—not gorgeous ones certainly; but they are the only ones among my goods, and will do well enough to travel in; and here are others for yourself, of which the same may be said. Dismiss that ragged coat and cap, and put these on instead: your appearance will not lose by the change, I assure you." The lovers did as they were bid: a female kabba and vest, with a full veil, along with those articles of her own dress which had been retained, sufficed to clothe Hoosseinee: she remarked that they were homely and of a singular colour, but saw no objection to that; and with her lover they joined the merchant's party.

The baggage and slaves had been sent on before; so that, during the first part of the march, they travelled with the merchant and his more immediate attendants; but when, as night approached, those who were in advance halted that

the others might come up, my sister remarked with somewhat of an unpleasant sensation, that all the male and female captives wore the same sort of dress as that with which the merchant had furnished them; but on pointing this out to him, he smiled at her fanciful apprehensions. "The poor man had no others, dear Hoosseinee," observed he: "the garments are unworthy of you, it is true; but they are better than the rags you have thrown off."—"God grant they may prove as fortunate to us!" rejoined she; and no more was said about it at that time.

During the march the merchant made a further attempt at worming out from his new friends the secret of who and from whence they were, and what their plans for the future might be; making a merit of his courtesy and good wishes for their welfare. But finding himself still met by a cautious reserve, he changed the subject; talked of the districts through which his trading concerns had led him; and mentioned, as if incidentally, that he had just passed through the immediate vicinity of Diroom. "An old bird like me," observed he, "does not care to trust itself in such dens; for few, fledged as I am, can count upon quitting the hole of an old fox like Seyd Sooltaun without leaving some plumes behind them. Besides, the chief was in bad humour it was said; he had just lost two slaves, a young

man and woman, who fled from the city under very suspicious circumstances. Moreover, his eldest son, a worthless sprig of the old tree, it is true,—but still his son, had been murdered, with with four or five of his servants ; and some cowards who escaped from the fray swore that it was all done by a troop of vagabond dervishes.”

While saying this, the merchant bent his keen eye full on Noor Mahomed, adding, with significant emphasis, “ you have heard of Seyd Sooltaun, no doubt ? ” Confounded and quite thrown off his guard, the young man was unable to conceal his consciousness and alarm ; and still more so to reply to the perplexing question which closed the observations of his interrogator. Before he could recover himself, the merchant, resuming his benignant patronising tone, continued, “ Come, come, my young friend, I know it all : I long ago saw how it was, and only desired to show you how vain are all your attempts at concealment from those who, like me, know the world : but lay aside your alarm ; with me your secret is safe. I will perform my promise ; but, believe me, Mushed is no place for you just now : your arrival there must soon be known ; and the agents of your late master who are resident in that city would instantly negotiate for the delivery of yourself and your companion into their hands ; thus, before you could have the means of

securing a single friend, your mistress and yourself would be once more fast in the toils of that old fox of the desert the chief of Diroom. Listen then to what I am going to propose; consider it well, and yield to the force of reason. Our way leads through Chinnaraun, a Koordish town, only two days' journey from Mushed: Byram Allee Khan, its chief, a brave man, has with Seyd Sooltaun a feud of blood: that you come with your hands stained in the blood of his enemy's son will be all in your favour. I know the chief, and can tell him that which will much advantage you. Enter his service: at least remain with him until it may be safe to depart; and then join yourself to any chief you may select as your protector."

While the merchant spoke thus, Noor Mahomed recovered from his embarrassment. His alarm at the discovery thus announced to him was greatly mitigated by the friendly assurances which had accompanied the communication. The promises of the merchant were fair, and his actions hitherto had corresponded with his professions. At all events his company afforded protection; while on the other hand there appeared to be no reasonable cause for apprehension from an elderly and respectable person like him. To Chinnaraun therefore there could be no objection to proceed; whether or not it might be an eligible asylum to

remain in for any time, could only be determined on the spot.

With due thanks, therefore, to the merchant for his benevolent consideration and sound advice, Noor Mahomed signified his intention to comply with it; so far at least as to accompany him to Chinnaraun, and to ascertain whether the chief of that place might be disposed to grant him protection and service. "Doubt not of that, my young friend," rejoined the merchant with peculiar emphasis, and a sidelong look of singular expression. "The representations I shall make cannot fail to ensure for you a fitting reception from Byram Allee Khan."

By the evening of the second day they reached Chinnaraun, a small fortified town, where their first care was to procure comfortable lodgings. They alighted at a mud-built and sufficiently miserable caravanserai. "This will never do," said the merchant: "I cannot permit my friends to remain in such quarters: stay here, however, until I return. I have acquaintances in the place, who at my request will give more comfortable accommodation, until you shall have seen the khan; after which you will want for nothing." With these words he quitted them, overflowing with gratitude for his active kindness, while his principal servant, doubtless by order of his master, took his post at the door of their chamber, and drove

away with a zeal and attention which won their entire good-will, the idle gazers who are always ready to stare at travellers newly arrived.

In something more than an hour their kind protector returned. His friend was ready to receive them, and they were forthwith conducted to a neat dwelling, with a comfortable apartment, overlooking a small court-yard, where Noor Mahomed was desired to make himself at home.—“ I am to be your fellow-guest,” observed the merchant, “ and by and by we shall see our host. Within are the private apartments, where the lady may be more comfortably lodged ; for I conclude,” added he with a smile, “ that now you have reached the regions of civilised life, you do not intend your mistress or wife to be exposed to the general eye? You can yourself view the rooms: a bath will be agreeable after our journey, and a private one shall be immediately heated for her use.”

Hoosseinee at these words looked at her lover : it was the first time that they were to be separated since the moment of their flight from Diroom ; and she felt it more painfully than the occasion appeared to warrant. The prospect of losing sight, even for a moment, of him who was every thing to her, filled her with a gloomy foreboding of evil for which her reason was at a loss to account. Yet the propriety of the step was obvious ; and where

could be the danger? It was folly to be so strongly moved; she smiled faintly, gently embraced her lover, and followed the female who was called upon to attend her.—Alas! could she—could he have conjectured the nature and term of this their first separation, how different would have been their parting! But the pain of bootless resistance was spared them. They were as birds in the snare of the fowler, powerless alike to resist or to fly.

Noor Mahomed continued with the merchant, whose servants supplied such refreshments as travellers require; but the familiar footing on which he appeared to be in the house of another, did not fail to attract the young man's notice; and he made a remark to that effect. "Ah! my friend is an excellent fellow," replied the other carelessly: "he loves to see his guests at their ease. You shall see him presently; but here comes what I dare say you will relish more at this moment—a good dinner.—Come, bismillah! fall to it with a traveller's appetite."

The good pillaws and well-seasoned kubaubs were in fact true incentives to eating: the sherbet was delicious; and Noor Mahomed did them justice. No sooner had they washed their hands, than a bustle at the entrance, with a shuffling of slippers, announced the approach of a visitor; and a tall dark man, with large features, staring eyes,

and a great black beard, entered the apartment with considerable fracas. “ Ah ! my dear friend ! my worthy companion ! ” exclaimed the one.—“ Ha ! respectable hadjee, esteemed friend ! ” echoed the other. “ Welcome ! very welcome ! how goes your health ? ”—“ And yours ? ” &c. &c. Such and a thousand more of the warmest compliments were interchanged between the parties, before the ceremonies of meeting were completed.

At length the new comer accepted a seat on the other side of the merchant ; and settling himself well on his centre, began the conversation. “ Well, worthy hadjee ! always punctual—always fortunate ! never come empty-handed ! and here you are once more with your bales of well-earned wealth and goods of all sorts : you never forget your friends. ”—“ Oh no, my excellent nazir, I never do forget my friends : I never fail them : there are few things they can desire which cannot be found in my packages or in my heart. And by the bye, among the best things I have brought at this time may be rated this young friend of mine, who is ambitious of the honour of serving the khan ;—Allah bless him with long life, to be a shadow and protection to his servants ! Let me recommend the youth to your favour, my esteemed friend. ”

The man threw his big rolling eyes over the person of Noor Mahomed, who instantly made the

customary movement of half rising, in acknowledgment of the introduction ; but a glance of peculiar meaning, which passed between the merchant and his host, did not escape his penetration, although the former bent his eyes upon the ground, unwilling perhaps to take notice of the signal. “ Ay, ” replied the nazir, “ his highness is not the chief to refuse the services of a stout young fellow,—and so handsome too as your friend is, ” making a slight inclination of the head towards Noor Mahomed ; “ but all that may be settled to-morrow ; in the mean time, as you must be exhausted by your march, I have brought a cordial to relieve you of all fatigue. ”—“ Ah, my friend ! still the old man, I see—still the same light-hearted, good-humoured companion. Well, it is delightful to meet you now and then—it makes a man young again ; and what have you brought now ? ”—“ Just something carefully prepared to cheer up the heart, ” said the other mysteriously, and at the same time giving a signal to one of his youthful attendants, who advancing with equal mystery, produced from under his cloak a large round glass bottle filled with an amber-coloured liquid.

“ Not wine !—it surely is not wine ! ” exclaimed the hadjee with a gesture of horror : “ remember my sacred character ;—remember my religious adherence to all the precepts of our holy faith. ”—“ Oh ! by no means, ” replied the other ;—“ wine ?

—No, quite a different thing, take my word for it ;—quite exempt from the prohibition you allude to :” and taking a small cup from the hands of the boy, he filled up a brimmer. “ I will show you the example,” said he, and drank it to the dregs. “ Now, do you thus likewise,” said he ; and filling the cup once more, he presented it to the hadjee, who muttering over a few words, which might have been the culmeh, or some other pious prayer, put it in his turn to his lips ; and throwing his eyes up towards heaven, suffered the liquid to glide down his throat. After which, emitting a sort of grunt, peculiarly expressive of the pleasure it had afforded him, he returned it to his host.

The latter, meantime, having taken and filled another cup, offered it to Noor Mahomed, who, unaccustomed to such excess, hesitated for a moment to taste it. But his host observing gravely, “ What fear you, young man ? the beverage is lawful—drink of it. Surely you cannot doubt it when I myself have tasted of the cup.” He grew ashamed of further opposition, and drained it to the bottom.

Neither its pungent aromatic flavour, quite unlike any thing he had ever tasted, nor its warm exciting effect were by any means displeasing ; and in the course of less than half an hour he was easily prevailed on to swallow two more cupfulls. But he afterwards recollected, what at the time

he paid little attention to, that his portion was always filled into a different cup from that which the others used. By that time his ideas became confused, and his head grew giddy, and in a few minutes more he lost perception of all surrounding objects. His swimming eyes were fixed by intoxication or by sleep, and he sank insensible to all around him upon the carpet where he sat.

Upon his return to consciousness, his first sensation was of racking pains in his head and through all his bones ; and on attempting to rise and look about him, he fell again upon his couch through excessive giddiness. His tongue cleaved to his palate from extreme thirst, and his sensations altogether were of the most painful description. Another effort enabled him to look around. Where was he ?—what had happened to him ?—where was the merchant ?—where Hoosseinee ?—what dream had he dreamt ? The place where he lay was a narrow clay-plastered cell, which looked out upon a crowded, bustling court, and he lay upon a coarse felt horse-cloth, thrown over an old tattered mat. Where was the neat apartment which he had occupied on the preceding night, with his friendly merchant ? and how had the unpleasant change been effected ? He was surely still dreaming : once more he rubbed his eyes, but the deadly sickness which now overcame him sufficiently proved that he was awake ;

and he called loudly on the merchant his companion, on the servants, and less audibly on his beloved Hoosseinee.

The outcry which he made brought a person to the door of his cell. "What news, comrade? what uproar is this?—Not awake yet? What do you want?—but—what the devil!—who have we here?" and away he ran, leaving Noor Mahomed still more perplexed than before. He was endeavouring to rally his scattered spirits, and slowly attempting to rise, when a little decrepid old man entering the cell, saluted him as follows: "Salaam aleicoum! Is your health sound?—You are awake then at last. I saw they had overdosed you, so I let you sleep on; but how is it with you? Ay, pale and sick enough, no doubt. Well, well! a couple of hours more sleep will do the business; you will wake fit for any thing:—here is water,—or stay, this is better, here is grape vinegar and water to slake your thirst. It will settle your stomach too:—so lie down again, and be quiet."

"But where am I, in the Prophet's name?—and where is—"—"Hush, now!—don't talk;—be quiet for a while; and when you have got to rights again, you shall ask as many questions as you please:—lie down, I say."—"But Hoosseinee—but my wife? I must—"—"Wife! why, what in the name of the twelve imauns do you want with a

wife, you that can't even stand?—Be quiet, or I must confine you:—take my word for it, all is right: go to sleep now, do, and get well.”

Sick, dizzy, confused, and reckless, Noor Mahomed contended no further; in truth he was unable to dispute the point; his spirits were overwhelmed with an insuperable weight, and he lay torpid and motionless; until at length sleep, disturbed at first, but afterwards more quiet and refreshing, stole upon him; and at the end of two or three hours he awoke, still languid and low, but free from pain, like one recovered from a tedious illness.

He now arose, and quitting the cell, looked around for some one to speak to; but finding the court apparently deserted, he was about to leave it in the prosecution of his search, when the same little old man once more presented himself before him. So confused had been the brain of Noor Mahomed during the first interview, that the young man believed this being to have been but a creature of his dreams; and he started, as he now saw him substantially approach, and heard his address. “Ahah!—all is right now,—eh?—slept off your debauch:—ah! little do young men think of consequences when they first taste the forbidden liquor: dearly do they pay for their stolen pleasure. It is your first exploit in this way, I dare say; and no fault of yours neither.

But come,—the sirdar* is at the dur-khaneh, and waits to see *you*.”—“The sirdar!” returned Noor Mahomed, staring at him; “and who may the sirdar be?—and who are you yourself, my old friend?—and where, in the name of Allee, have I got to?—and what has become of Hoosseinee and —.”

“Softly, my *young* friend,” returned the old man in a tone of irony; “one question at a time, if you please; the angel Gabriel could not answer so many at once: but, for the first, you will learn who *I* am soon enough; and for the sirdar, by the Prophet! he will not be long of teaching you who *he* is, if you don’t look the sharper. As to where you are, there is no difficulty in telling you that;—you are in the quarters assigned to the khan’s confidential slaves—the blessing of Allah be upon him! But, touching your last query, I profess not to tell of what I do not know: this is the second or third time you have mumbled something about *wives* and Hoosseinees:—we know nothing of such animals in the slaves’ barracks; and I suppose you have been dreaming hard; it is often the case after a debauch: but you are broad awake now, so let us have no more such nonsense, but follow me quietly to the dur-khaneh.”

“Slaves! the quarters of the slaves!—and what

* General.

have we to do there?" demanded Noor Mahomed. "Where is the merchant with whom I came to Chinnaraun? and where is my wife, my Hoosseinee, I again demand?"—"Hah! hah! hah! Lailah-il-ullah! here is a fellow—here is a passion for us with a witness! what has *he* to do among slaves? a pretty question truly; and once more, his *Hoosseinee!* Come, come, friend, be sober; be quiet—no more raving: come along peaceably:—as if he did not know he was a slave! good, very good!"—"Slave!—miscreant! who dares call me a slave?" shouted Noor Mahomed, rushing upon the old man, and shaking him violently. "Holah! this is a little too much; let me go, madman! Hey! Gholaum Allee! Noor Buksh! Hashmee! quick; here, seize this fellow; by the head of the 'khan he'll strangle me!"

Upon this, three or four fellows with great clubs ran in, and seizing Noor Mahomed off his guard, in a twinkling got hold of his arms, and spite of his struggles, bound them firmly behind him. "Holy Mahomed!" exclaimed the old man, while this operation was performing, "what a fury he's in! hold him fast now, be sure; the youth is surely mad! but, bring him along; lose no more time; let the sirdar himself take him in hand; I have done with him." And without more ado, they dragged him forcibly along through several pas-

sages, into a small square, where, in the upper room of a gateway, sat the person alluded to, as the sirdar.

Raheem Beg was a Koord by birth, and a soldier of fortune by profession, who had seen much hard service in his day ; the marks of which he carried on his person in the shape of innumerable scars. The spear of a Toorkoman had rid him of an eye ; and a deep furrow in the right cheek, continued across the nose, bore witness to the sharpness of an Affshar scimitar, and the strength of the Affshar arm. His bosom, where visible, was no less distinctly imprinted with marks of his enemies' goodwill. Raheem Beg was of these pehlewan, whose proper element is the field of strife, and who care but little for whom it is they draw the sword, provided they receive their own share of pay, of plunder, and of fighting. Stern and decided in manner, as in mind, he found little difficulty in coercing the fiercest spirits that might be placed under his charge ; and it was this quality, together with his fearless intrepidity, which had induced the khan to intrust him with the command of the greater number of his gholaums and followers. He was his principal officer and sirdar ; and it was in this capacity that he now sat at the dur-khaneh superintending the details of his command.

The abuse which was lavished upon Noor Mahomed ceased as the attendants arrived in sight

of this redoubted personage; and the old man, who was, it appeared, a sort of keeper of the quarters or barracks of the slaves, coming forward with a profound salute, stated the case, and requested the great man to make use of such means as might appear to him expedient for reducing the new and obstreperous slave to submission.

“Slave!” once more interrupted Noor Mahomed, “who dares say I am a slave? My lord, this old wretch deceives you; I am no slave; I am a free man, who have come voluntarily to Chinnaraun to offer my service to the khan. I cannot tell what trick may have been played upon me, nor who I am addressing; but I beseech you to give orders for my release, and that not only liberty but my wife be restored to me.”—“Allah! Allah! wife again!” cried the old capidjee,* with uplifted hands; “there he is again at the old story. My lord, I need not tell your lordship that the youth is dreaming; that he was brought to the serai profoundly intoxicated, by the servants of Hadjee Shamal Thajir, who sold him to his highness; and as to a wife, Khodah kereem! it is the disorder of his brain surely, not yet recovered from the fumes of the wine or maajoon on which he got drunk.”

Noor Mahomed was about to reply with great indignation to this charge of the capidjee, but the

* Door-keeper.

sirdar in a stern tone ordered him to be silent.—

“ Old Allee Capidjee tells the truth,” said he ;

“ whatever you may have been, you now are the khan’s slave, and under my orders : quiet submission will be your best policy ; so no more words about the matter, but prepare to learn your duty.”

—“ La illah-il-ullah ! what do I hear ?” exclaimed the astonished youth. “ Oh, my lord, in the

name of Heaven, and by your own head, I conjure you tell me what has become of my wife ? the

young woman who accompanied me ; who was with me until last night, when that accursed merchant

—may his soul burn in hell !—” —“ Be silent,

once more, I say,” interrupted the other more sternly ; “ what ! will he not hold his peace ?

Give him the club then ; let him learn to obey ;”

and the club was accordingly administered to him with an unsparing severity ; but the unhappy

young man would still continue his frantic ravings, until at length the sirdar, after having had

him severely beaten, ordered him into confinement until he should be found more reasonable.

On the evening of that same day his guards returning, bound his arms so tight that he could

neither struggle nor attempt to escape ; and leading him through the gate where the scene of the

morning had passed, into an inner court of a considerable size, placed him in front of a window

where sat a person of imposing presence, whom he had no difficulty in recognising for Byram Allee Khan. The sirdar was standing near his chief, and when Noor Mahomed was brought forward the former immediately observed,—“ There is the man, your highness, that is the slave sold you by Hadjee Shamal Thajir, and a refractory animal he seems to be.”

So soon as he heard these words, Noor Mahomed, making as respectful a salaam as his bonds would permit, addressed the chief in the most earnest terms :—“ Ai Khan,” said he, “ your servant rejoices in the opportunity he now enjoys of throwing himself at your highness’s feet: he craves justice, he craves his liberty; he craves that his wife may be restored to him, and in return he vows his best services to your highness.” The khan, in the deep, cold, formal tones which great men are wont to use to their inferiors, responded thus :—“ Listen, youth !—we know both who and what you are. You are ours by purchase, and ours you shall remain: on your future behaviour depends your future fate. As for the woman you claim, she is none of yours, and you see her no more; nay, you know full well how heavy a punishment your conduct in regard to her already merits: be satisfied, therefore; awaken from the dream of folly in which you have in-

dulged, and rejoice that fate has decreed you no worse a lot than to belong to Byram Allee Khan."

"Oh! by the soul of your father! by the holy Prophet! I adjure you to pause;—to be merciful. Offend not justice thus. In the name of God, send for Hadjee Shamal, and examine him; he will tell you the truth; he dare not deny it: he has no right over me—I never belonged to him. I came with him voluntarily to enter your service, khan." —"Well, youth, and he has kept his word,—you have entered it. With his rights over you I have nothing to do; I only know those which I now have acquired over you; and as for Hadjee Shamal, by this hour he is well on his way to the holy city;—he left this place last night, after giving over yourself and some other slaves and merchandise to the hands of my nazir; so set your heart at rest, and in future think only of your duty."

"Merciful Allah! can this be thy will?—Hadjee Shamal gone, and I left thus!—and Hoosseeinee!" The blow was too severe; his head sunk upon his breast, his limbs collapsed, and he fell, bereft of power and sense, upon the ground before the chief.

"Poor wretch!" said the khan, somewhat affected by his misery; "take him away, and be careful of him; there is stuff in him to make a

stout gholaum, no doubt, when he gets rid of these fancies:" and accordingly he was carried unresistingly from the presence, and placed once more under the charge of the old capidjee, who, touched with his condition, attempted vainly to soothe him with good advice and pithy apophthegms. To these the wretched Noor Mahomed, now fully comprehending the infamous deception which had been practised on him, and the extent of his misfortune, and subdued by mental and bodily sufferings, listened with exemplary patience; he even sought to make a friend of his ancient consoler, letting him by degrees into so much of his history as he thought might prepossess him in his favour; and aware that there was no chance of gaining the smallest intelligence of his lost mistress, while still subject to restraint or suspicion, he determined to control his impatience, and earn a degree of liberty, by mildness and tractability.

And what during these events had been the fate of Hoosseinee? After quitting her lover and the merchant, she was conducted by two women, whom she took to be servants of their host, through a series of courts and passages, until after a descent of a few steps she found herself in the outer apartment of a bath. This she had been prepared for; and as a matter of course, she accepted the services of the women, who began to undress her; but she was in some degree

surprised to observe in their deportment a greater degree of freedom and less of respect than she might have looked to meet in the persons for whom she took them. Her surprise was increased when, in spite of her repeated desire to be excused, they forced her to put on several articles of dress, which had, as it appeared, been prepared for her use, and which, when urged to declare their reason for thus insisting, they asserted had been provided by order of their master.

The bluntness and almost rudeness with which these persons replied to the questions of my sister effectually silenced her inquiries; and, after the business of the bath was completed, she followed them in silence to the quarters prepared for her. She remarked that the way by which they led her was not the one by which she had come; but before she could hint a suspicion, or begin a remonstrance, a small door was opened, and she was ushered into a court surrounded with buildings, and well filled with females of all ages and appearances. It was evidently a large harem; and she started back, amazed at this unlooked-for and unwelcome termination to her progress.

But neither time nor opportunity for retreat was afforded her; for the women, seizing hold of her arms, dragged her forward to a chamber well lighted up and larger than the rest; where, sup-

ported by cushions, on a pile of handsome felts, sat a lady, somewhat advanced in life, but still good-looking and handsomely dressed. Stopping in front of the entrance to this apartment, her conductresses bowed profoundly; and one of them, in a formal and respectful tone of voice, addressed the lady: "According to the orders of the khanum, we have brought before her presence the slave which our lord the khan has just purchased as a gift for his exalted lady. Young woman, make your obeisance to your mistress!"

Confounded by this unexpected termination of the night's adventures, Hoosseinee remained for some moments bereft of the power of speech, and fixed to the spot in helpless amazement; but, roused at length by their efforts to make her salute the khanum, she stared wildly around, and bursting from those who held her, fell on her knees before that lady. "Oh! holy Fatimah!" cried she at length, gasping for breath, "what can all this mean? I am not dreaming, surely!—what may you be, lady?—why am I thus brought into your presence? I am a traveller, brought to this city by my betrothed husband only last night: it is but this moment I have left him. I am no slave; no one has a right over me."—"Hear what she says!" cried one:—"what does the hussy mean?" demanded another. "Wullah! here's a story, forsooth!" exclaimed a third.

“What dirt she has eaten!” roared a fourth. “Silence, all!” said the lady, calmly; “the poor thing is a little beside herself. By and by she will come to;—but I like her looks,—she will answer my purpose well; and I am obliged to the khan for his present:—do you hear, Tekooah, take care of her!”—“Stand off!” exclaimed Hoosseinee, whose indignation rose at this cool treatment: “stand off, and let me speak! Lady! by what title am I thus used? I repeat again, I am a free woman; the wife, the betrothed wife of a brave young man. We are strangers in your city: respect the rights of guests: do not violate justice so grossly as to detain me longer. I entreat—I demand to be released, and restored to my husband.”

“Poor girl! she must be greatly disordered,” remarked the khanum calmly to her slave; “but good treatment will restore her. Set your soul at rest, young woman; you have fallen into good hands, and shall have no cause to complain of your lot:—you have leave for the present. Tekooah, see her disposed of:”—and Tekooah, a fat old woman, upon this waddled forward, and giving a sign to the attendants who had brought my sister, they drew her away, while still shrieking out her remonstrances.

The plots of the treacherous merchant were thus crowned with success. Availing himself of

the simplicity and inexperience of two confiding young creatures, he scrupled not to make them his prey; and inveigling them to a place where he was certain of assistance, remorselessly consigned them to a wretched joyless servitude. Poor Hoos-seinee, when first she became aware of the hopeless nature of her bondage, was overwhelmed with despair: stunned and subdued alike in mind and body, she was for several weeks unable to make the smallest exertion; and when her bodily health at last did revive, her mind continued sunk in sullen indifference to all around her: she performed mechanically the tasks assigned her, insensible alike to praise or blame: her hopes were blighted, and her heart was seared.

With her lover the case was somewhat different; his indignation at the treachery of which he had been made the victim, and his anxiety regarding the fate of his mistress, were to the full as great and painful as hers on his account; but his hope for the future was less completely destroyed: even the words of his master, the khan, had afforded him room for believing that his mistress was still within the walls of Chinnaraun, although inaccessible to him; and this belief was strengthened by certain hints which he picked up concerning the character and connections of Hadjee Shamal. Prepossessed then with the conviction of his mistress's vicinity, he resolved upon

exerting all his powers and activity in ingratiating himself with his commander and present master; in hopes of thus obtaining a degree of liberty that might favour his inquiries after his beloved Hoos-seinee. Perhaps he even flattered himself that, by dint of such exertion, he might aspire to the restitution of his wife, as a reward for the services he meant to perform. In so far at least were his exertions successful, that the stern and dogged Sirdar Raheem Beg began, ere long, to express his approbation of the new gholaum; and even the khan cast the eye of favour upon him, and greeted him with an approving smile. "Barek-illah!" said he to the old sirdar, "I liked that lad's looks from the first; and I do not think I shall have cause to be ashamed of my judgment: we must encourage him."

While matters were in this state Noor Mahomed, by means of the old capidjee, who had become much attached to him, and whose intimacy with the heads of other departments in the khan's establishment gave him access to much secret information, became acquainted with certain circumstances, which not only removed any doubts he might have had regarding the residence of his mistress within the harem of the khan, but afforded him a faint hope of being able to see and communicate with her.

He knew that the private apartments were

close to a lofty wall on the north of the fort, to which all resort was prohibited; and as females might occasionally be seen walking upon a terraced roof but ill concealed by this wall, he resolved to hazard the experiment of climbing it, or of concealing himself in its vicinity, in the hope of catching a glance of Hoosseinee; and then acting as circumstances might indicate.

With this vague purpose he proceeded one evening to the north side of the kallah; and was making his approaches with all possible caution towards some houses that had been dismantled in consequence of their too close vicinity to the harem of the khan, when, scrambling over a broken wall, he was startled to find himself in a small area, at the other end of which stood a figure whose appearance rooted him to the spot.

It was a man, of noble presence, yet tall and meagre, almost beyond humanity. The dark and piercing eyes, and lofty open forehead, contradicted the tale of age which was told by his gaunt features and deeply-furrowed cheek. His emaciated person was smeared with ashes, and scantily shrouded by a tattered mantle: over his shoulders hung the skin of a leopard, and his black and matted hair was twisted with a few flowers and feathers into a lofty cone. His garb denoted the dervish: but the high intelligence and composed dignity, which beamed from his

countenance, belonged to a being of some higher order; and so motionless did he remain in the closing gloom of evening, that it might have well been doubted whether he did in truth claim kindred with the children of clay.

Awe-struck and fixed, as the object of his contemplation, Noor Mahomed stood gazing on the figure before him, without the power of articulating a word; and the long pause was broken at length by the deep, clear, impressive tones of the dervish. "When man, bowing to the will of his Maker, sustains his trials with submission, and treads with steadiness the path of virtue, the Almighty regards him with an eye of favour. But when he swerves from the course of rectitude, or seeks by crooked means to anticipate or contravene the will of Heaven, the Omnipotent in wrath withdraws his countenance, and leaves the worm to perish in his own way. Hast thou forgot thy late deliverance? or has the arm that saved thee when all hope was lost, become powerless now? have thy vows of patience and of prudence turned to foolishness, that thou hast cast them behind thee? or hast thou discovered that a giant may be overthrown by the open attack of a dwarf? How is it that thou dost rush upon thy ruin, and wouldst thwart the favouring influence of thy destiny? Forbear! once more take prudence for thy guide: of thyself thou canst do nothing; but there is a

power which protects both thee and her thou seekest, and which, if not counteracted by thy folly, will preserve thee both. Be vigilant, but be patient. Watch and profit by events ; but seek not to anticipate their course :—farewell ! treasure up this counsel in thy heart, for thou wilt hear it no more : follow it, and be fortunate—neglect it, and be miserable.”

The dervish ceased ; and waving his long meagre arm, as if to forbid either question or pursuit, he turned, and was instantly hid among the ruins. Although the first impulse of Noor Mahomed was to follow the author of this warning, with all the speed in his power, a moment’s consideration checked his steps ; for he felt assured that the attempt would be vain. So solemn, so impressive was the appeal, that, overwhelmed by its truth and energy, he doubted not that it came from a superior power ; and under this conviction, he resolved to guide himself implicitly by the advice which it conveyed.

Retiring to his quarters, he applied himself with redoubled zeal to the discharge of his duty ; and though at times powerfully assailed by doubts and fears, his perseverance was so effectual, that in the course of a few months he became inrolled in the list of the khan’s best and most confidential gholaums, and was employed with them upon the most important duties.

It was in the course of such duty that he was one day selected with five other gholaums to accompany the wife of his chief herself ; who, with certain females of her household, had resolved, from religious motives, to undertake a pilgrimage to Mushed. But the lady being by birth of the tribe of Beyaut, was anxious to see some of her family who resided at Nishapoor ; and therefore made arrangements for visiting that celebrated city on her way to the holy sepulchre. The route indeed was neither very direct, nor safe at the time ; but the escort attending her was deemed sufficient to protect her to Nishapoor, from whence a caravan of pilgrims would easily be formed, along with which she might safely traverse the remaining more dangerous road by Cudumgah and Shereefabad.

Hoosseinee was appointed as one of the numerous attendants of the khanum on this occasion ; and Noor Mahomed, when he was informed of this, through the means of his friend the capidjee, remembered the cautions of the dervish, and accompanied the party, prepared to watch with lynx eyes for the long-wished-for opportunity of seeing his mistress. Nay, his ardent spirit suggested, that not only might he see and communicate with her, but that the hour was at hand for breaking his slavish fetters, and rescuing not only himself, but his betrothed wife from the thralldom into which they had been so iniquitously betrayed.

The journey to Nishapoor was prosperously performed ; and in the confusion of coming to their ground at the second halt the lovers did see each other for a moment ; although prevented by the fear of observation from approaching so as to speak. But during their stay at Nishapoor they were more fortunate, and enjoyed a short interview ; in the course of which they had only time to make one another respectively acquainted with what had happened since the night of their separation, and to agree on certain signals, calculated to facilitate their intercourse in case that any means of escaping from the party should occur upon the road.

The khanum's visit having been duly paid, and a small caravan from Ispahan having arrived, they joined it, along with sundry other pilgrims and travellers, and quitted Nishapoor on their way to Mushed. But it had been written that the party was not at this time to see the holy city ; for when scarcely two fursungs distant from Cudungah, at a point where the road crosses a small ravine, a thundering clatter of hoofs was heard, and before any effectual means of defence could be resorted to, the caravan was furiously assailed by a large body of horsemen ; who in a twinkling, bearing down all who seemed disposed to resist, speared and trampled under foot the mule and camel drivers, and scattered the caravan, like

leaves before the breath of winter. A terrible confusion ensued. The females of the cafilah, and among the rest the khanum, were secured, after a desperate resistance on the part of her escort. The goods and animals were collected with the utmost expedition; and in a few minutes all in condition to move, were on their way to Toorbut Hyderee; for it was the riders of Mouzuffer Khan who had committed the deed.

It would be vain to enlarge on poor Hoosseinee's despair at this rude destruction of all her hopes; of her lover she knew nothing; she only knew that many had fallen, and it was more than probable that he was among the number; still a secret, scarce acknowledged hope, would lurk in her heart, and sustain her spirits, which otherwise doubtless would have sunk under these reiterated shocks. This happy frame of mind was greatly promoted by the comparatively fortunate lot which befell my sister in her new servitude. No sooner had they arrived at Toorbut, and been examined by the officers of the khan, than she was at once made over to the principal wife of that chief; a lady who formed a remarkable contrast to her two first mistresses, being good, kind, and charitable. This worthy lady conceived from the first a liking for Hoosseinee, and had no sooner learned her melancholy story than she claimed the connection of clanship, and assured the forlorn girl

that she should have no cause to regret the accident which had placed her in the hands of a countrywoman. "As for your lover, my poor girl," said she, "I fear you must perforce reconcile yourself to his loss; for even if he survives, how is it to be expected that he can ever discover where fortune has thrown you? and in truth, though I may possess the means of protecting you from violence here, it might exceed my power to do more, however strong my inclination. At present rest satisfied with my assurance that no evil shall befall you." The weeping Hoosseinee returned her such thanks as she was able, and felt truly grateful for the exemption from immediate molestation which this kindness secured to her.

But it was not long before Hoosseinee made another, and to her, still more interesting acquaintance, in the person of an old woman, who had been born in the district of Karaboulagh, and had once been a servant in our father's family. The chances of a wild and changing time had brought her, like the child of her former master, to Toorbut; where the name of her tribe had secured for her the khanum's kindness and protection. In process of time she had married a person in the service of the khan; and the jailer in charge of the prisons of the kallah was a son of her husband's brother; of whom, on the death of his father, she had taken charge; and who, in spite of his rough and chur-

lish manner, was neither destitute of affection or gratitude for his aunt. When this old woman became aware of Hoosseinee's name and family, she clung to her with the most affectionate tenderness during her whole residence in Toorbut. For hours would she sit in the apartment assigned to my sister, exerting herself to alleviate the sorrow which could not be removed; exhausting her powers of amusement to divert the poor girl's mind from her misfortunes, and conjuring up every anecdote of the family which she had ever heard, as the most gratifying subject of conversation.

One evening, while they were occupied in this manner, at the hour when most of the females in the harem had assembled in parties to enjoy their meal, and the court was left unoccupied by all except themselves, they were startled by observing the figure of a man emerging from a gloomy corner, in which a narrow passage opened into the more ruinous and unfrequented parts of the kallah. Their first impulse was to give the alarm, and call for assistance; but as the figure advanced from the darker shade, they saw that it bore the scanty habiliments, and other distinguishing marks, of some of the more austere callunders or fakeers; and such personages being frequent visitors in the kallah, to the underoon of which the more celebrated and holy of the fraternity obtained ready

entrance through the influence of its mistress, their alarm abated ; and they awaited with greater tranquillity the further movements of the intruder.

They were not suffered long to remain in doubt. The fakeer advancing some steps towards them, remained standing in the centre of the court, in front of the chamber which they occupied, and full in their view. His person was striking and commanding to a degree which overcame them with awe and almost with terror. His gaunt but noble features, his piercing eyes, and lofty forehead, conspicuous in the dim twilight, forbade the suspicion of unsettled intellect, which the fantastic dress, the wreathed and matted hair, the tattered robe, and leopard-skin cloak, would otherwise have suggested, and impressed the beholders rather with an idea of superior intelligence, than of the wild and uncertain enthusiasm so common to his order. It was, in fine, the same extraordinary personage who had appeared to Noor Mahomed at Chinnaraun, and exhorted him to patience and perseverance, when arresting his ill-advised attempt upon the harem of his master. Need I say that in both their descriptions I recognised the same mysterious being who had exercised so powerful an influence over my own life—who on four different occasions had appeared, to reprove, to encourage, to rescue, or to commend me? and whose inscrutable agency uniting by an unseen

bond, the destinies of a brother and a sister, who almost from their birth had existed unknown to each other, became at length, under Providence, the means of their happy union, in circumstances of the most interesting character ?

While my sister and her attendant gazed thus in doubt and terror, the dervish addressed them in his customary deep and solemn tones. “ Daughter of Keerkloo,—bud of a noble but blasted branch ! the time of energy and action has arrived. Waste not thy hours in listening to the deeds of thy father’s house, when thou art called upon to gather and unite its scattered fragments ; weak as thou art, to thee has the power been given to raise the broken column ;—to save the sole surviving eaglet of that nest from which thyself didst spring. Up, then, and be watchful ! In the dungeons of this very den, in the toils of the wolf which tenants it, lies the son of thy father, the brother of thy blood—Ismael ; besides thyself, the only living child of Mourteza Khan Keerkloo ! By thee only can he be snatched from that unholy lair, where otherwise his blood must flow, and his bones lie unburied. On thy courage and resolution alone depend thy own freedom, the happiness of thy lover, and thy brother’s life. An effort will secure them all : without it, all are lost together ; for in thy hands has Providence seen fit to place the means. Doubt not—fail not ; the power which

demands the effort will surely aid it with all needful help. But man is doomed to eat his bread in pain and sorrow; nor can the flower of safety be reached, save by the rough paths of toil, nor plucked, save from the thorny tree of danger. Be firm, therefore, daughter, and resolute, and Allah will bless thy endeavours. May he ever keep thee under the shadow of his omnipotent arm!"

No sooner had the dervish pronounced these words, than retreating towards the quarter of the court from whence he had advanced, he disappeared in the increasing gloom, leaving the women bewildered with amazement, and rooted to the spot where they sat, scarcely knowing whether to consider all they had seen and heard as a dream or an illusion of the senses. At length, slowly recovering and pressing her forehead, as if to collect her thoughts, Hoosseinee, with an abstracted look, exclaimed,—“A brother!—did he not say a brother?—a son of my own father?”—“Allah Kereem!” said Khadijah, “I scarce know what he said: his form was more like a Gin than a man, and his voice resembled a trumpet! Punah-be-khodah! it went through me like a dagger. Yes, dear child, he did say words like these;—something too of the house of Keerkloo—the blessing of Allah be on them! but his meaning did not reach the comprehension of your servant.”—“Ay, Khadijah; but it did to mine.

I heard his words, and marked him too; for they came upon my soul like the decrees of destiny. He declared that this branch of the house of Keerkloo was to be found in the dungeons of this kallah. Heard you not that, Khadijah?"—"Blessed Allee!—can it be? There is, I remember now,—there is an Affshar youth, one of whom my mistress has heard and interested herself in. Oh! if it should prove to be him!"—"It must be him, Khadijah—it must! and we must find him out, and know his name. Ismael! oh! were it but thee, how willingly would I adventure my life to save thee, brother!"

It would be tedious to describe the difficulty which Hoosseinee had to contend with, in persuading the old woman to engage heartily in the attempt which she meditated; although, in justice to the zeal and fidelity of old Khadijah, it ought to be said that her hesitation proceeded rather from a want of nerve to face an undertaking of such overwhelming magnitude, than from any dread of personal risk to be incurred in the enterprise; and, in fact, when once she had been brought to contemplate success as possible, her enthusiasm was scarcely inferior to that of Hoosseinee herself.

But their plans and efforts would all have been fruitless without the aid of Yar Mahomed, and of another person, sent as it might have seemed by Providence, according to the dervish's prediction,

in their hour of need. This was no other than Noor Mahomed himself, who escaping almost miraculously from the overthrow of the caravan, and seeing the hopelessness of further resistance, had taken the part of following the robbers to ascertain the place of their retreat. He traced them to Toorbut; entered the town a little after them, as a traveller; resided there for a short time in an obscure quarter, and after a while found means to enter the service of a darogha connected with the kallah; by which means he at length discovered the existence of his mistress, and her residence in the harem of the khan. It was doubtless by another interference of Providence that the fact of her lover's being in Toorbut should be made known to Hoosseinee, very soon after the time when she was singularly informed of the existence and danger of her brother in the same place. No sooner did old Khadijah learn this circumstance than, clasping her hands together, she exclaimed, "It is the work of Allah himself, and foretells success. But one other bold and faithful friend was required; and behold! he is found." An intercourse was speedily established between Yar Mahomed and the lover of Hoosseinee, and the whole of the plot was methodically organised. Those of my followers who had contrived to escape from confinement were gradually collected, and the presents which my sister had received from

her mistress, in dress and jewels, together with the property of all those concerned in the enterprise, were devoted to supply the requisite arms and equipment. The result of these admirably contrived arrangements has already been described.

CHAPTER XII.

THE JEW.

BUT not all the offices of sisterly affection, nor the zealous attentions of friendship, with every alleviation that could be afforded to my sufferings, could reconcile me to the confinement of more than a fortnight, which the state of my wounds and the illness arising from them rendered necessary. The uneasiness which I felt regarding the fortunes of my master and his gallant brother, whom I had left in circumstances so critical, increased as it was by the gloomy reports which had reached me in my prison at Toorbut, combined with many considerations of a private nature to render this period of constraint intolerably irksome. Among the latter, not the least painful was the thought of my poor Shireen — my lately recovered, lately wedded wife, left to live in loneliness and uncertainty; if yet indeed the rose of her life still bloomed in the garden of existence.

More than once, when goaded by the poignancy of these reflections, did I start from my couch, and issue orders immediately to prepare for the march; and as often did the weakness of my wounded frame paralyse the effort, and teach me the folly of such impatient attempts; but the moment my wounds were closed, and my strength was so far re-established, as to admit of my sitting on horseback, I refused to listen any longer to remonstrances; and my friends themselves, distressed at my uneasiness, agreed that we should lose no more time in quitting our concealment, and making a vigorous effort to reach the holy city. Accordingly, our horses being caught, and the few requisite preparations for our march being made, on a glorious evening of summer we quitted the hospitable cavern, which had saved our lives, and so long given us shelter at our need; and using the remaining daylight to guide us through the intricate path which led to it, we took the direction of Mushed.

From anxiety to avoid all rencontres with the riders of Mouzuffer Khan, we overlooked the danger of falling in with parties of the Affghauns, and somewhat imprudently determined on making a day's journey to the westward before striking into the true direction of the holy city, which lay to the north-east. In conformity with this arrangement, as soon as we got into a more prac-

ticable pathway, we urged on our horses to such good purpose by the light of a brilliant moon, that before sunrise on the next morning we had reached the caravanserai of Chukawee, in which we resolved to repose ourselves until the succeeding night should enable us to pursue our way, unexposed alike to the scorching rays of the sun and the danger of observation.

But our precautions and calculations were alike fated to be vain; for, as we were reposing in our cells, too thoroughly fatigued to maintain a strict watch, we were roused from our slumbers by the shouts of a strong party of Affghauns, who very unceremoniously seizing upon our persons, in a moment bound our arms, and reduced us once more to the condition of captives.

The bitter mortification I felt at this cruel mischance received a yet deeper poignancy, when I learned, as our captors took care we should very soon do, that these Affghauns had just returned from the neighbourhood of Mushed, which the troops of Zoolfecar Ghiljee had ravaged up to the very gates, after defeating the brave, but on this occasion imprudent Ibrahim Khan. This gallant soldier, listening rather to the dictates of his courage, and his indignation at the audacity of an enemy whom he despised, than to the voice of prudence, had issued from the town with very inferior numbers to give them battle. The conse-

quence was, the necessity of returning once more under shelter of the walls, mortified by disgrace, and weakened by defeat; unable to afford the country under his charge even the limited degree of protection which till then they had enjoyed, and forced passively to see that enemy beard him up to the very range of his guns.

While our captors triumphantly boasted of their success, they did not fail to exercise the first acknowledged privilege of conquerors in pillaging and stripping their captives. Our arms and other property, even to our very clothes, were torn from our backs; and, that a decent portion of garments were left to my sister, was more to be attributed to the instinctive respect for the sex which influences every true believer, than to the effects of our entreaties or their moderation.

“But,” saith the sage Saadee, “rail not at the tempest which destroys thy dwelling, for thou knowest not what hidden treasure may be exposed by the fall of its walls.” Little did I think when inwardly I cursed the brutal rapacity of the Affghaun soldiers, as they tore from beneath my arm, where I had always preserved them like talismans of great value, the emerald of Abisham the Jew and a fine tourquoise presented to me by my friend Meerza Abou-Taleb;—little did I think that what I then deplored was to prove the means of safety to my friends and to myself.

Our captors proceeded straight to the city of Herât, where we arrived without any further incident of consequence ; nor did we meet with any ill usage beyond that which captives led to slavery have cause to expect. That slavery was in truth to be our portion was soon placed beyond all doubt ; for, after a space of four or five days, which was granted to us that we might recover from the fatigues of our journey, and for the preparation of such raiment as our captors chose to bestow upon us, in order to improve our appearance in the sight of purchasers, we were exposed, along with many others of our countrymen, in one of the serais belonging to the charsoo or great market-place of Herât, to be sold as slaves. Remonstrance would have been absurd as well as vain. The Affghauns, deeply mortified by the disgrace and defeat of their brethren, lately the conquerors and rulers of half Iraun, were filled with implacable resentment against the Persians, and the Khorasanees in particular, who had been so instrumental in their overthrow. Thus all of that country who fell into their hands were treated with the utmost severity ; life itself was not always spared, and when spared, the alternative was slavery or a heavy ransom.

By the arrangements of our masters the male and female prisoners were separately confined ; thus Noor Mahomed and myself were interdicted

from all communication with my poor sister, a privation which added greatly to our sufferings. The male prisoners remained together dispirited and melancholy; we were kept in our serai exposed to the view of purchasers, who sometimes taking a fancy to one of our number, carried him off from amongst us; while the poor wretch, unable to resist his fate, was obliged reluctantly to follow his new master.

Sitting thus, comfortlessly enough, musing over my untoward fortune, my attention was attracted by the appearance of a venerable old man, who entered the serai, followed by an Affghaun soldier and one or two servants, and began like other purchasers to look around at the various slaves exposed for sale. The fashion of his garments, as well as his peculiar style of features, bespoke his Jewish origin; but there was a benevolence and even a dignity in the expression of his countenance, and particularly in his clear hazel eye, which was the more striking, as it little belonged to those of his nation in general.

How apt is the imagination to connect together past and present events, even when reason can supply no link of association! What else than this propensity of the mind could it be that conjured up to memory the catastrophe of Yacoob the Jew of Mushed, and my connection with his children and their uncle Abisham? These reflections shot

through my brain as the old man approached, conducted by the Affghaun soldier, towards the groupe formed by myself and my companions. "Are these," inquired he of his conductor, "the persons who were taken prisoners on the occasion you have described?"—"They are," replied the soldier; "of that you may rest assured."—"And can you point out the person from whom you obtained the articles I have purchased from you?"—"By the head of Omar, Jew, thou art a fool!" replied the soldier gruffly; "who, in the hour of battle or of plunder, marks the prey he has rifled that he may know it again? These are the men; that is all I know, and all my bargain; give me the promised reward, and let me go."—"But what you have done is nothing," insisted the Jew, "unless you assist me further. Exert yourself; find out the man, and your reward shall be doubled." The cupidity of the soldier seemed to be aroused by this proffered stimulus, and his surly indolence was quickened into action. "I know not if that can be done," returned he, throwing a searching glance around us; "but I remember that the man from whom these things were taken,—not by me alone,—was wounded in the head, he said; and he talked much and earnestly about a sister who was taken prisoner along with him:—these men can tell if they please which of them it is who had his sister in the company."

“It is I who had my sister,” exclaimed I eagerly; “and if you have compassion, and possess the power, tell me what has become of her: let us not be separated: whatever happens to one, let it be the lot of both, and one faithful Mussulman will remember you in his prayers.”—“Be calm, young man,” replied the Jew, “on this subject we can tell you nothing; yet if you reply truly to the questions I have to propose, it may tend to your advantage. You have been plundered it seems; of what property have you been deprived?” I mentioned a few articles of clothes and arms which I had lost. “And was this all?” rejoined he: “had you no jewels?—no signets?—talisman?” I recollected then the small casket which had been torn from my arm, and described the jewels it contained. The listener’s interest increased as I proceeded; I saw his aged eye grow brighter, and his lip quiver, as I spoke of the emerald. “And whence, young man,” interrogated the Jew, “did you obtain this valuable gem?”—“I know not,” replied I, “the motive of these inquiries, nor why I should reply to them; but I have no cause for concealment; for if there is an event of my life for which I have no cause to blush, it is that to which I owe the possession of the gem in question. I received it, Jew, from one of thy own nation, as a token of gratitude for a good office done, and I bethink me that he said

the token was well known to many of his tribe; and if shown to them, would be acknowledged, and command their services if required: but it is gone; poor Abisham's signet is gone with the rest!"

"Abisham! didst thou say, young man? I pray thee where didst thou know him? and what was the service he requited by so valuable a gift?" The voice of the Jew faltered, and his manner was agitated as he uttered these inquiries, which I answered readily and fully; he listened with painful earnestness, and eyes which filled fast with tears, as I proceeded. "Oh, God of Israel!" at length exclaimed the old man passionately, "I thank thee that thou hast hearkened to the prayer of thy servant, and that he has lived to see this day: yet swear to me, young man—swear to me, that in thee I truly see the preserver of the Jew Abisham and of his brother's orphans."—"By the One Eternal and All-merciful God, in whom every faithful Mussulman believes, and by his holy Prophet," replied I, "you have heard the truth; in me you see that Ismael, who was the means of protecting the Jew Abisham and his family, after the catastrophe of his brother Yacoob."—"It is enough, excellent young man," rejoined the Jew. "Pardon my boldness, thy words are indeed the words of truth; and thy face, that of the ingenuous and sincere. In me behold Omri, the uncle of

that very Abisham whose life thou didst save, and of that Yacoob whose orphans thou didst protect; and surely in him thou hast a servant whose utmost power shall be taxed to do thy pleasure; yea, if the demand should extend to half of his possessions. But let us be cautious, good youth, or those in whose hands we both are placed may thwart our efforts, and turn this advantage against us. Be of good cheer, Omri the Jew will not fail thee, nor will he rest until thou and thy friends shall be free."

As the Jew uttered these words his habitual wariness was alarmed by a distant bustle, which might be heard approaching the serai, it was occasioned by the entrance of an officer, attended by a number of soldiers, one of whom approaching the place where we were seated, and fixing his eyes upon me with an earnest gaze, exclaimed, "By the head of my father! the very man;—there is no doubt of it. You have got hold of the favourite of that bloody tiger whose hands are dyed in the blood of Affghauns, and whose devilish witchcraft has blackened the Affghauns' name; it is the cooler-aghassee* of Nadir Koolee himself. Secure him, in the name of God!" At these words the officer gave orders to have me fettered, and conveyed to a more fitting place of confinement; and the soldiers were obeying his directions, when

* Chief, or commander of the gholaums.

the Jew stepping forward, made offer of any ransom that might be required, to procure my liberty or purchase me as his slave.

“Jew,” replied the officer, “we traffic not with such as thee for captive Mussulmans: and, as to his liberty, know that were thy whole wealth doubled, it would not purchase the freedom of this man from Zoolfecar, or his brother Ahmed, who governs this city in his stead. He is a prize of too great value to be trucked for a few gold pieces; but beware! best look to thyself; if thy coffers are so swollen, there are those in this place who may relieve them without their owner imperilling his head, by ransoming the enemies of our chief.”

The habitual caution of the Jew was alarmed at these serious hints; and, aware of the impolicy of persisting in so warm a display of zeal, he contented himself for the time with purchasing, by a considerable bribe, the privilege of a few minutes' conversation with me before I was led away. He earnestly entreated me to be of good cheer; to fear nothing; but to trust confidently in his management. “These fellows growl fiercely and bark loud,” said he, “but I know how to silence them. If you would turn a stream, begin with the fountain head. These menials swear as their masters say; and I know how to put words in their masters' mouths. Set your heart at rest; you may have to brook delay, but nothing worse will befall

you: let us proceed with caution, however; a slight imprudence might rouse suspicion; and who can tell what the will of a tyrant may ordain? our lives might prove the forfeit: meantime, tell me what I can do for you or for your friends: is there any one here regarding whom you are anxious?"

I shortly stated my anxiety regarding my sister, and that not only on her own account, but on mine, it was desirable that her lover and herself should be set at liberty, if that should be possible; that they would prove the best and most trusty messengers to Mushed, and convey the most accurate intelligence of the danger in which I stood. "It is well," said the Jew. "They shall be set at liberty; one and all of your friends shall be free, and provided with safe conducts to reach Mushed in safety. Farewell, sir! I leave you, to work for your service; and may the God of my fathers be with you and protect you!"

The Jew was faithful to his promise. In less than a week information reached me, that not only my sister and her lover, but Yar Mahomed and the rest of my followers, had been ransomed by the Jew; and being provided with perwannehs from the Affghaun authorities, were safe upon their road to Mushed. My sister had prayed hard to be permitted to see me; but that was a favour not even to be solicited; for, had their intimate

connection with me been brought to notice, it would not only have frustrated the efforts of the Jew in their favour, but would have involved him in the ruin which must have fallen upon us all : she therefore allowed herself to be persuaded that the most effectual efforts in my favour were to be made in Mushed. As for me, I was conducted, it is true, to a secure prison, and held in strict confinement ; but, after a short period of darkness and privation, a change was perceptible in my treatment. Not only necessaries, but comforts, and even luxuries, were supplied to me : I need not add that this was the Jew's doing. At a heavy expense, he bribed my jailers to permit the introduction of such articles as he should supply, instead of the miserable fare, accompanied by the severe and even cruel treatment which were prescribed by Ahmed Khan, the deputy-governor. To the good and venerable Omri I could not be otherwise than grateful ; yet what were all these alleviations, while I remained in tedious, painful captivity ? Now and then the kind old man would venture to see me,—to cheer my spirits,—to speak a word of comfort and of hope : such visits were of too hazardous a nature to be often repeated ; but they were, for that reason only, the more valued by me.

To enlarge on the misery I endured during the weary months of this protracted captivity would

be tedious. In spite of the encouragement of my friendly benefactor, hope began to fail me, and both health and spirits were fast yielding under the chilling pressure of lengthened confinement, when one evening the Jew entered my prison with a countenance of much emotion, and followed by a servant bearing a packet. "Thanks to the Almighty ! worthy young man," said he, " the term of your bondage has expired : you must quit this place immediately ; and in a very short time will, I trust, be at liberty and in safety. Lose no time : but put on this garment, which, mean as it is, will ensure your passing through your prison gates unobserved." It was a dress resembling that of his servant, formed of coarse materials and of peculiar shape ; but my eagerness to get clear of my prison was too great to admit of my making close inquiry into the Jew's arrangements ; so I obeyed him without loss of time.

When thus metamorphosed, the Jew, anointing my face with a liquid which deepened its colour, and placing upon my head a huge brown sheepskin cap, pronounced my disguise complete. By what agency the doors of my prison were opened I know not ; but no one impeded our progress ; and we proceeded unmolested through the streets and bazars, until, stopping at a mean-looking door, which opened in a brick wall, surrounded by houses of a like wretched description, my conductor made

a signal. The door opened, and we were admitted ; and after traversing several passages and courts, the Jew led the way into a neat apartment, which he entreated me to consider for the time as my home.

“ You will repose yourself here, sir, if it please you, until a safe opportunity shall offer for joining your friends, who are less distant than you may suppose. You are not aware that your celebrated general and chief, exasperated at the outrages committed by this people, has at length bent his way hither to punish their audacity, and that he has reached within but a few fursungs of the city.” My astonishment and joy at this intelligence may be imagined : I scarce could contain it within moderate bounds ; while the Jew continued, “ Yes, sir, Nadir is at hand ; and his enemies, already panic-struck, must give way before his superior fortune. The reason why you have not hitherto been informed of his progress is, because, while the period for releasing you from confinement was uncertain, it would have been cruel to add a fresh source of irritation and anxiety to those under which you were already suffering : in truth, your life itself has been in greater danger than you knew of. While Ahmed Khan continued in charge of the city he contented himself with holding you and other prisoners of consequence in strict confinement ; perhaps considering you as a hostage, in case of any Affghaun chief, of name,

falling into a like misfortune. But when his brother Zoolfecar Khan returned to the city, he openly proclaimed his determination to show such prisoners no mercy; and long since would your doom have been fixed had not the pressure of more important business occupied his thoughts, and diverted them from dwelling on lesser considerations. But the close approach of an enemy, whom he hates even more than he dreads him, has revived the spirit of active malevolence; and he has issued orders for the slaughter of all the principal captives in his power. Some of these, I regret to say, have already suffered under this cruel mandate; and your head, sir, would have now been forming one of the pile which greets his sight before, the windows of his dewankhaneh, had not a method most opportunely offered of withdrawing you from its operation. It is unnecessary to describe the means employed: all that remains is to enable you to rejoin your own camp; and the only way to effect it is this:—

“The Persian army will soon invest the city; but in the mean time, a sally has been determined upon, with the view of seizing if possible upon their cannon and military stores, and forcing them to a retreat, by depriving them of the means of carrying on the siege. You shall be supplied with the arms and accoutrements of an Affghaun soldier, and in that disguise must join the sallying

party under command of Seyed Allee Ghiljee. Under cover of night, you will be able to withdraw from this party, and gain the camp of your friends. This is the only method by which you can safely pass the gates of Herât."

It is superfluous to describe the triumphant joy which this intelligence excited in my breast ; nor the bursts of gratitude which, mingled with eager interrogations, broke from me towards my benefactor. Even when left to myself by the good Jew, I found it impossible to controul my emotions, and gain a decent degree of composure, so powerful was the excitement produced by the prospect he had opened for me.

On the second evening after my liberation from prison, this state of restless speculation was fated to be exchanged for one of active reality. An hour after the time of evening prayers the Jew made his appearance. "The time," said he, "has arrived, sir, when I must bid you adieu ! the hour of action is close at hand, and here are the means of improving it : here is the disguise of which I spoke." His attendants produced a full suit of dress and arms, such as are worn by an Affghaun soldier of the Ghiljee tribe. There was the gay, low-crowned cap, the brown leather boots, and the stout felt chogha (cloak), calculated for covering both arms and person. There was the round Hindee shield, the powerful damasked battle-axe, and the

terrible straight knife, long and sharp, with which the Affghauns inflict the most ghastly wounds ; and when I found myself thus accoutred, I could not help gazing, half doubting, at my own figure, so completely transformed into that of the enemies against whom I had so often been matched.

“ Good, very good !” said the Jew : “ thus equipped, you will pass muster without difficulty among the troops now parading for service ; a companion in whom you may trust, will shortly call here, and guide you to the rendezvous. If inquiry be put, as to who, and from whence you are, your reply must be, a Ghiljee of the Alleezehee teer,* a follower of Moumen Beg, of Subzawr, of whom a few have in fact reached Herât ; although Moumen Beg does not accompany the sally to night. And now, respected young man, think not that Omri the Jew deems the debt of gratitude, which is due thee from the family of Yacoob and Abisham, discharged by service which he has been fortunate enough to perform.—No ! if ever hereafter it rests in his weak power to serve or aid you, you shall find whether the uncle of those who rest with their fathers holds himself exonerated, or is slow in tendering his assistance. And lo ! that the needful help may be yielded by others of his tribe, behold once more the signet of Abisham ; well have you

* Teer is the subdivison of a tribe ; literally, “ an arrow of a quiver.”

earned it ; and I restore to you the recovered gem. Here are also the valuables of which you were pillaged by the Affghauns ; they were offered to me, as a ready purchaser of such things, and fortunate have they been, when they proved the means of leading me to you. Here too is gold ;— you will require it ; and more is at your service, if more be wanted. We Jews are chary of our gold ; but on fitting occasions, we can pour it as freely as the fountain yields its water.”—But here I stopped the generous Jew :—“ Worthy Omri,” said I, “ keep the gold, I entreat you : I don’t require it : whatever service I may have rendered your family has been overpaid by your zealous kindness and liberality to my companions and myself. We have, I am fearful, cost you too dear. The signet I accept with joy, and will retain it while I live ; but for the money, I pray you press it not upon me.”

But enough of this ; it avails not to detail at length our parting conversation. One only request did he make, which had not for its object my own interest. “ The arms of Nadir are strong,” said he, “ and sooner or later this city will fall into his hands. In that day, when the fury of the soldiers shall be roused, and neither age nor sex may be respected, and when this old form may have returned to its dust ; if Omri have found grace in thy sight, young man, exert

thy power to protect his house ; as thou didst for that of Abisham ;—as Omri has done for thee.” I swore that I would do this : that my credit and my life should be staked to fulfil my promise ; and I thank Heaven that I did fulfil it, and that Omri lived to acknowledge the benefit.

Jew as he was, I parted with the good old man as I would have done from the brother of my father. May the holy Prophet forgive me ! but when he would have pressed the hem of my garment to his forehead, my heart was full, the thought of the little orphans of his kindred came over my mind, and mingled with emotions of gratitude and love to himself : I fell upon his neck, and kissed his cheek.”—“ Worthy, kind-hearted youth,” exclaimed he, in broken accents ; “ may the lamp of good fortune shine for ever on thy path, and may the God of the Jew and the Gentile overshadow thee always with his protecting arm !”

The third hour of the night had arrived, when the Jew’s servant entered, and introduced a young man, clad also in the Affghaun dress, as my companion and guide. A keen glance was interchanged between us, as each saluted the other ; but the frank and kindly greeting which followed this reconnoitring manœuvre proclaimed that the examination was satisfactory on both sides. “ You see before you Camraun Saloomeh,” said he, “ and let your name for the present, sir, be

Poordil Gireeshee ; but leave me to reply to troublesome questions. It is time we were moving ; —bismillah! with your leave I will guide you.”

We quitted the house, and crossing the charsoo bazar, in which, even at this hour, there reigned a considerable bustle, we made for the Mervee gate. In the open space before this gate, and in the streets leading towards it, there was mustered a force of full two thousand men, both foot and horse, which under the superintendence of their officers were getting into order. We mingled along with those who were not as yet enranded, intending to fall in with a party stationed in the rear, as being least exposed to the observation of the leader, Seyed Allee. But this manœuvre was defeated by the previous arrangements of the Ghiljee officers, who having ordered out only such men as they thought might be depended upon, had formed them into separate troops or divisions ; we were excluded from all of these, and forced along with a considerable number of other volunteers, as they appeared to be, to move forwards nearer to the advance, and consequently more under the officer's eye. However, in the hurry and confusion which always more or less attends upon a night movement, my companion and myself were overlooked, and fell unquestioned into the line of march, almost in the rear of our commander and his suite.

Issuing from the gateway, we advanced with as

much silence as is usually observed among an Affghaun force, where discipline is less strictly maintained than in the conquering armies of Iraun. After a march of nearly two hours the whole body was halted—a measure not achieved without considerable confusion; and it was only then I understood, that in consequence of information having been received that Nadir himself had taken up his quarters, with a very small escort, in an old tower close by the river side, and a little in advance of his troops, it had been resolved to send a detachment of four hundred picked men, expressly to attack this post, and seize if possible upon the person of his highness.

I did not listen to this bold project without a thrill of alarm; for although I had too much confidence in the steady vigilance of Nadir's officers to dread the consequences of an attack upon the camp, the result of a night assault with very superior force, upon an advanced post imperfectly guarded, as it was said, might fairly be a subject of uneasiness. To warn my master of the threatened danger was my first impulse; but the difficulty was, to effect that purpose in proper time. A stranger in the country,—uncertain even where the tower in question was situated, for me to have left the corps with which I marched would have been madness:—the only alternative was to keep with it, and watch keenly for the first opportunity

of giving the alarm. But then my companion,— what might his views be? was he acquainted with the country? I was resolved to discover these points if possible; but he himself prevented my intended appeal. “Hear you these news?” said he;—“what think you of this intended attack?—how do you mean to act?”—“Nay, friend,” replied I, “you are the guide; I should rather put that question to you: I am ignorant of this country—I do not know where we are—my life even is in your hands; but you have been sent by Omri, and I confide in you implicitly.”

“And you shall not have to repent of the confidence,” replied the young man; “your course is mine, for our object is the same: we are to join the Persian camp, and to enter into the service of the great Nadir; is it not so?”—“It is,” said I;—“but you speak to one who is already his servant, and who would risk his life to warn him of this formidable attack: we cannot judge of his reasons for thus separating himself from the bulk of his troops, but you see he is like to suffer for it.”

“It is a dangerous business,” returned the young man;—“I hardly know what to say to it. I am well acquainted with the country, but I don’t know what tower it is of which they speak: let us go on yet awhile with the rest, we may gather a hint to set us right; and then it will be

time to try the swiftness of our heels ; once across the river, we may mock at pursuit." This conversation was carried on in a low tone and in Persian, which few of the Affghauns understood, although Camraun, as he called himself, comprehended both the remarks that were made by those around him, and the directions which were passed from front to rear.

We had scarcely marched a mile, when, after listening attentively to a fresh order which caused a considerable stir in the marching column, my companion again whispered me :—" Yaftim," said he, " I have it now ; I know the place ; and it is high time we should leave the party : in two minutes we shall pass an old ruined building ; drop out of the line and get to the north side of that ruin, and do not stir until I join you ; I shall not be many seconds behind ; but we cannot both venture to quit the line at once."

I followed the directions of Camraun, and soon saw the dim array hurrying past me, while I stood ensconced among the ruined arches. Scarce two minutes had elapsed when my companion stood by my side.—" Away !" said he ;—" keep to the left,—it will be hard work to get there before them ; but let us make the attempt." The night was dark and the way intricate, leading over rough ground, frequently among gardens and country-houses, through which we had to wind by

circuitous routes. The sweat poured from our limbs in our efforts to get forward ; but before we gained the river side the dull heavy trampling of those we had left might be heard not far on our right. “ By the Prophet ! they will ford the stream and commence the attack before we can reach the spot ! ” exclaimed Camraun : “ the tower in which Nadir sleeps is one belonging to the old fort Sukhleem ; and it is nearer to them than to us now :—what is to be done ? ”—“ Let us fire our matchlocks,” said I ; “ it will alarm our friends, if they watch at all.”—“ By the head of your father ! ” exclaimed the young man, “ take care what you do : foes as well as friends may take that hint.”—“ I care not,” replied I, lighting the match of my piece,—“ we shall only have a run for it ; or, I hear the river close to us, we may dash in and swim for our lives.” I fired without listening to further remonstrance : the shot rung sharply on the silent air, and presently we could distinguish an increased buz from the marching force, which proved that they at least had taken the alarm.

“ Now for it,” said Camraun ; “ the late rains have swelled the stream.—I have seen it so shallow that you might have almost crossed it dryshod : our whole bodies will be well washed now ; for swim it you must. The river ran in a rough irregular bed ; the banks of which were in some

places covered with gardens, in others formed of hard gravelly hillocks. Securing our arms as best we could, we plunged in, and soon found ourselves beyond our depth, swept down by the force of the current; but a stout arm and buoyant spirit carried us through.

We had just landed, and were shaking the water from our garments, when turning our eyes accidentally up the stream, I saw torches flash. "By Heaven they are at it already!" cried I. "But no, these are not the flashes of matchlocks: there are no reports."—"They are crossing the stream by torchlight," said Camraun: "and lo! they give light to more than their own steps.—Behold the very tower!"—"Have forward!" exclaimed I, impatiently; and we made direct for the place: but long before we reached it, a volley of musketry from the tower itself rattled upon our ears, and was answered by a furious shout from the Affghauns. "Oh! brave souls!" cried I,—"*they* taken off their guard! how I wronged them to suppose it possible." The yells and the shouting, with the sharp rattle of the matchlocks, quickened our steps. We strained every nerve, and reached the foot of the tower just as my old master, who had made a gallant charge from its portal, was forced back by overwhelming numbers. We gave a terrible shout as we advanced, which produced its effect upon both parties. The

Affghauns took it to come from a reinforcement of Persians ; while Nadir and his men, casting a look upon our Affghauns' caps and cloaks, imagined us to form part of another troop of Affghauns taking him in rear. " Hoh ! look out there :—treason !—shoot the Ghiljee Ghorumsaug !—slay them !" shouted the general.—" Hold, hold your hands, friends !—we are friends !" returned we at the top of our voice.—" It is I, Ismael Gholaum !—Ismael the servant of Nadir !" But the mistake was within an ace of proving fatal to me ; for before the last words had passed my lips a ball from the matchlock of a gholaum sung past my ear, grazing my very cap.—" Good ! my fate is not to die by the hand of a friend," exclaimed I. " Hah ! Gholaum-e-Naderee ! strike home !—charge the villains !—here is rescue !" and my voice, known to all the party, explaining the truth, I was answered by tremendous acclamations from every mouth ; and rallying with enthusiasm, we all made another and successful charge, beating back the Affghauns to the river's brink.

" By the head of my father, and the salt of the king, Ismael !—and from what cloud have you fallen ?" exclaimed Nadir, as he breathed more freely for a moment after this gleam of success. " But whether from heaven or from hell, welcome now ; for by my soul we shall have need for all

our metal!—Upon them, men!—Drive back the scoundrels!” On they came, in truth; and the battle thickened fast; for the Affghauns were brave and resolute; and they were hundreds to our tens. Nadir had some twenty matchlocks in all, and with these he had to keep full five hundred at bay. He had quitted the crazy and tottering tower, lest they should have pulled it down about his ears; and in spite of the terrible battle-axe, and the deadly bullets of his gholaums, the Affghauns were fast succeeding in surrounding the post: but help was at hand; the shot I had fired had done its duty; and Nadir alarmed, had sent a swift messenger to the camp for a few squadrons of horse, which now came thundering up, quickening their pace as they heard the noise of the fight. Their appearance decided the affair; for the Affghauns, not knowing how numerous the reinforcement might be, gave way; and in recrossing the river, lost many of their number.

The attack upon the camp was still more easily repulsed; for it so happened that the advance of the sallying party encountered a large party of the Persian horse, which waited, ready equipped, to cross the river at day-break; and this early repulse dispiriting the assailants, they withdrew with considerable loss to the city.

The interview between my noble master and his slave, after so long and eventful a separation, was

such as might become a gracious patron, and an affectionate servant. “Thou ever comest in the hour of need, friend Ismael!” said his highness with a most gracious smile; “and seldom has that need been greater than this night. We are not wont to be unwatchful; yet thy hint was not lost, as thou mayest have perceived.—Thou hast had thy share of perils too.—I rejoice that they are past, and thou in safety. It was a wild thought in that imprudent brother of mine to send thee helpless and blindfold as it were into the very den of the wolf; but a time may come for bringing the beast to bay. Enough!—to-morrow thou shalt resume thy duties, and thy station in our camp, with no diminished honors.”

On the next morning accordingly, the verbal approbation of my beneficent commander was confirmed by a full khelut or dress of honor, including a noble charger, and suitable armour, conveyed to me with an intimation that the general, aware that I must be destitute even of necessaries, had thought fit to provide for my present wants. I need not say how greatly this generous consideration added to the gratitude and veneration I felt for this mighty chief, with whose fortunes my destiny had become so intimately linked. In the camp I found Noor Mahomed, who had already risen high in the service and favour of Nadir; and joyful was the meeting to both; for however con-

fidest he might have felt of the Jew's zeal, and however light he thought fit to make of my danger, in speaking to my sister and poor Shireen, he could not disguise to himself the real peril of my situation. On my part, the delight of knowing that the wife of my affection was well, and lived only in the hope of once more seeing me, and that with her Hoosseinee had found a tender friend and sister in love, as well as by connection,—of being restored to the free exercise of my duties, the favour of my master, and the society of my friends, was a measure of good fortune and happiness almost too great to be borne with decent composure.

I shall not describe the progress of the siege of Herât, which city, along with Furrâh and Subzawr, and all the principal places of the province, fell one after another, beneath the victorious arms of Nadir, the pillar of the state, and conqueror of nations. It is sufficient to say that the Affghans being thus completely humbled, and the government of the country duly regulated, the hero, after having celebrated with due pomp the happy festival of the No-roz, returned to Mushed, in the year of the Hegira 1144 (A. D. 1731).

CHAPTER XIII.

A CLOSING SCENE.

DURING the Affghaun invasion which has just been described, and the campaign which succeeded it, there were many of the districts and ballooks in the eastern quarters of Khorasan which, encouraged by the confusion and disorder of the times, had openly refused or purposely neglected to account for the revenues due from them to government. The Affghauns being subdued, Nadir determined to punish these disaffected or time-serving quarters for their treachery or tardiness; and at the same time to replenish at their expense the public treasuries, exhausted by a long and expensive war. For this purpose detachments of troops, under officers of trust and experience, were sent into the quarters in question; and among the rest, I was not sorry to be appointed to levy from the districts of Jam, and the ballooks to the westward, the fines imposed upon them; for I was not without hope

of falling in with mine ancient host of Toorbut, Hyderee Mouzuffer Khan, and having an opportunity of repaying him some of the attentions I had met with under his roof. Hither accordingly I repaired with my command; and was not unsuccessful in squeezing the purses of old miserly ket-khodahs, and petty oppressive darogahs; who upon various pretences had sucked their ryots dry, to line their own coffers.

But we were not always so usefully employed: at intervals, we amused ourselves with hunting the game which abounds in this part of the country. Not only were antelopes and ahoobarras* to be met with in plenty, but our sport was varied by a chase of the wolf or hyena; the marshes swarmed with the ghorauze or wild hog: the fleet gour-khur, or wild ass, would often quit his more extensive plains, to feed in the richer vallies of the district in question; and the noble mountain-sheep might be found by the adventurous hunter among the loftier cliffs which bounded them.

It was while in chase of this gallant animal one day, that an adventure befell me, so singular, and even so wild in its character, that, had it not referred with wonderful consistency to certain occurrences of my earlier life, and even connected itself marvellously with them, I should have been

* Bustards.

tempted, perhaps, to consider it as a mockery of the brain,—the vision of a disordered mind.

The heat of the day had been intense, and, joined to the fatigue of a long and arduous chase, had almost exhausted the greater number of our party; when, about three hours after noon, a herd of the mountain-sheep was perceived by five or six of us who had kept together, peering over the high cliffs above us, tossing their curled horns, and stamping with their feet, as they gazed down upon the intruders: the sight awakened our slumbering energies, and re-animated our failing strength. “A fair challenge, by the head of my father!” exclaimed one.—“Can we suffer these animals to laugh at our very beards?” cried another. “May I never look upon the antelope-eye of my mistress, or clasp her slender person, if I have not, at least, a climb for them!” said a third: “but we must spread, and take different sides of the height to surround them, or they will be off like the wind:” so, leaving our horses on the spot where we dismounted, (for to clamber up the crags on horseback was impossible), each man unslung his matchlock, and took such a direction as might ensure him the best chance of his game.

For my own part, observing a hollow which appeared to lead downwards into the main valley, from the very crags upon which the animals had

gathered, and along which I thought it possible they might descend, in case of being scared from the height, I made for this pass, which was to the left of all the party, and soon found myself upon the brink of a deeper ravine than I had anticipated.

The sides of this hollow, which was the bed of some mountain torrent, were interspersed with stunted wood, and covered with grey shivered fragments of rock, among which sprung up a few weeds and tufts of grass, now yellow and withering in the heat of the advancing summer. The descent was steep and difficult; and I paused upon the brink, uncertain how to proceed, as I discovered the great and unexpected depth of the chasm; but this indecision lasted only until my eye chanced to fall upon a magnificent mountain ram, which, scared as I believed by my friends above, had quitted the heights, and was bounding downwards, as I had anticipated, among the broken masses of rock and gravelly scaurs, the stones of which clattered as the animal displaced them in its course.

Every now and then it paused for a second, erected its portly head, tossed high its immense wreathed horns, and cast an inquiring glance backwards in the direction from which it came. Still and motionless, I lay behind a crag, awaiting its approach. The distance was considerable; but

confident in my own skill, I only paused until it should attain that point of its course approaching nearest to my station, when, taking advantage of one of its momentary halts, I took a rapid aim, and fired : it seemed that my shot had taken effect; for the animal bounded upright, and, staggering forwards a few paces, fell tumbling head over heels down the stony face, across which he had been passing at the moment when he received it.

Delighted at my success, I no longer hesitated in plunging down the rugged slope to seize my game, and had made considerable way with no small peril ; when, to my disappointment and surprise, I observed the animal, which at first lay as if dead, once more upon its legs, and making off along the ravine towards the valley. Its progress, however, was so slow and unsteady, that believing every moment that it must fall a second time, I resolved upon following it; and continued to do so over very dangerous and toilsome ground for near an hour ; at times losing sight of it, and then again catching a glimpse, which revived my hopes, and induced me to continue the pursuit.

At length, wearied, panting, and my brain reeling with exertion, I reached the brow of a height ; but what it overlooked I cannot tell ; for at that very moment my head grew giddy, and every

thing swam around me. I was conscious of falling and rolling down a steep declivity ; but I remembered no more.

My first returning sensations were mingled with a dull confusion, which floated through my brain and clouded all my perceptions. By degrees, this indistinctness died away, and on looking around me I found myself in a scene for which the country I had just passed through had by no means prepared me.

It was a little lonely valley fenced in on every side by mountains, of a height and steepness which rendered it to all appearance inaccessible ; upon the skirts of these, and along the banks of a little stream, which trickled rather than flowed along its bottom, was scattered a little wood ; the rest was luxuriant meadow land.

The sun was nearly setting in a cloudless sky of radiant glory ; its lingering beams tinged the tops of the eastern hills with a rich hue, as they rose in long succession, and varied form ; until the extremity of the valley was closed up by a huge cliff, which still lay fully bathed in the golden light. The bosom of the vale itself lay quiet and wrapt in sober grey, except when the current of the little rill sparkled upwards to the sky, reflecting back a borrowed and a wavering gleam. It was an impressive, but a soothing scene ; and I was gazing upon it with a placid interest, when the breathing

stillness of the place was broken by something like a distant and half-smothered groan.

“Can human suffering find entrance even here?” was my half-uttered thought, as startled by a sound so little in unison with the spot, I turned around to discover from whence it might have proceeded. The action made me aware of an object, which being behind me, had hitherto escaped my attention. It was a small ancient building, in the form of a mausoleum, or as they are termed, Imaumzadehs.* Its domed roof, blackened and mouldering with age, had partly fallen in; and a few grave-stones around it proved that the place had been used as a burying-ground. A single branching sycamore, which threw its shade over the spot, was contrasted by the spiry form of a tall poplar, and one stunted cypress. A wall had once enclosed the space occupied by the burying-ground; but it was now very ruinous, and the side next which I stood, and which overlooked the full extent of the valley, had fallen entirely down, so as to expose the whole interior to view.

The sight of this simple cemetery in so solitary a spot affected me powerfully; an inexplicable impulse constrained me to approach and enter it. Rank grass grew high, and sere, among the tombstones, which bore half obliterated inscriptions in

* Literally, born of an Imaum; in this acception, the tomb of a descendant from one of the Imaums.

ancient characters. Every thing announced it to be the abode of the dead alone ; a place of silence and decay. The scene was striking—solemn, and I gazed upon it unable to withdraw my eyes. The same incomprehensible fascination rooted me to the spot. “ What is going to befall me ?” thought I :—“ what hidden purpose can my fate intend, by leading me so strangely to this retired spot ?” And scarcely had the mental exclamation been formed, when my eyes fell upon an object which seemed to furnish a full and terrible reply.

The space in front of the mausoleum had once been occupied by a stone basin, such as are generally found near mosques and shrines of this description, to contain water for ablution. It was now dry and dusty ; but, upon the bank of this basin, and close to the entrance of the tomb, the great sycamore tree of which I have spoken had rooted itself. At the base of this majestic tree, between two of its huge gnarled roots, and upon a tattered mat which was spread on the bare earth, lay the body or rather the skeleton of a human being, dead as it seemed ; for nothing living ever showed so ghastly ! Could the groan I had heard have been uttered by this poor wreck of humanity ? The time, the place, the occasion, was overwhelmingly impressive ; and my flesh crept as I approached to ascertain the fact. But, how shall I paint my feelings, when, in the miser-

able object before me, I recognised the memorable countenance and person of the dervish, Sheikh Allee Callunder !

Penetrated with a mingled emotion of sympathy and awe, I stood fixed to the spot, with my eyes fastened upon the vision before me. I could not be mistaken: there were the well-known habiliments, scantily covering his emaciated frame; and there were the lofty expressive features, scarcely more shrunk than when I had last beheld them, although now fixed, as it seemed, in the rigidity of death.

But the angel of death had not yet completed his conquest. While yet I gazed upon the painful scene, the dervish's sunken eye moved slowly in its socket, and fixed itself upon me with a piercing brilliancy, which declared how unsubdued by human pain or human weakness was the spirit that animated the frail and fading frame. "Child of clay," said he, in firm, though hollow and unearthly tones, "thou hast tarried long. The soul, wearied of its earthly tenement, pines to rejoin the immortal essence from which it first emanated! Thou who art appointed to release her bonds, delay thou not her flight! Speak not, question not," continued he, with increasing solemnity; "the moments are few and fleeting:—all that hath mortal taint must die. The worm ordained by the Most High to watch over thy youth has reached

at length the termination of his own painful course; and while the ethereal spark seeks absorption in the essence of its Creator, to thee is it intrusted to consign what is earthly to its earthly resting-place. Seest thou yon glorious sky, without a cloud to stain its spotless azure, the emblem of a pure and holy life? The light fades fast, and darkness will cover it as the grave covers the body, yet shall it see a glorious morrow. Look upon these mountains! behold! as the setting beams flit fast from peak and summit, how each after the other falls into shade: and mark yon giant cliff which closes up the valley, how bright above the rest it still shines in the golden ray! Behold in these the fleeting minutes of human existence, and in that, the placid sunshine which gilds the latest hour of a virtuous life! Again, observe yon little silver rill, how it winds and twinkles through the valley, till lost far, far away in the grey mists of evening: behold in it once more the current of human life. In the morning a slender stream, it brawls and sparkles along its bed of pebbles; more copious at noon, it pours along a rapid and impetuous torrent. As age creeps on, and the sources of life and energy fail, the stream fails with them, till it once more becomes the slender rill: but never more on earth doth it regain its strength or increase its current, for man renews not his youth, like the herb of the field. When once he

fails, he fails for ever, and the spirit returns to him that gave it. When that sun shall set—when the slender current of that rill shall cease visibly to flow, then is the course of the dervish finished; then shall the weary pilgrim be at rest!

“ Now, mark my words, my son. There is a tomb within this building, the resting-place of a saint of the days of old. At its feet thou wilt find a broad stone, inscribed with many holy sentences. When the soul has left this tenement, do thou remove that stone: by thrice repeating the culmeh, it will readily obey thy hand. Beneath there is a cavity, within which is the source of that mysterious stream which thou seest flowing in the valley; take from my arm the talisman which thou wilt find bound upon it, and drop it into that cavity, repeating at the same time the Mussulman confession of faith; then lay thou in this body, and see that no living thing shall touch it, save thyself. Replace the stone with the same holy prayers, and thy task is ended. Beware that thou dost faithfully discharge it; for so only thy soul shall have peace! And now, my son, the moment of my departure is at hand. Forget not the holy precepts conveyed to thee by the mouth of the dervish. Be virtuous, be faithful; and though fortune may frown for a season, truth, fortitude, and integrity will in the end prevail!”

The dervish, while he uttered these words, lay

reclined, so that the whole valley in its tranquil beauty lay spread before his eyes. The sun was fast declining; peak after peak grew dark: but still his eye was bright, and his voice firm, though sepulchral. While I listened to him with absorbing attention, a black speck appeared far off in the air, which rapidly increased in size. It was a large raven, which, as if attracted by the savour of death, came wheeling from afar, and perched with an ominous croak upon the stunted cypress. "Hence, foul demon!" cried the dervish, with an unearthly shout: "hence! I defy thee. Chase him from hence, my son! Let him not approach! Look that he touch me not!" Involuntarily almost, I re-echoed the shout, and drove the bird of ill-omen away. "Thanks to thee, my son!" said the dervish, in sunken hollow tones, "may the arm of the Most High overshadow thee for ever! With me it is past!"

The last gleam of the sun faded from the farthest cliff as the dervish uttered these words; and looking instinctively at the rivulet, its sparkle appeared no more; its stream had ceased to flow. I turned to the dervish; the brightness of his eye was gone,—he too had ceased to be. Slowly I closed the eyelids; but as I bent over the body—could the failing light have deceived me?—it shrunk and withered in my grasp, until of the tall and commanding, though emaciated form of

my mysterious protector, there remained but a shrivelled and a wasted skeleton, bearing every trace of extreme age and decrepitude!

Thrilling with amazement, and almost with horror, I lifted the light though fearful burden without difficulty; and prepared to follow the solemn injunctions of the departed spirit, when a shadowy form flitted between me and the light, and I perceived the same huge raven wheeling round and round my head, with heavy sloop; seeking as it seemed to tear the body from my grasp. My terror at this unexpected attack was extreme; and I was considering how to rid myself of the ill-omened intruder, when a beautiful white bird in form like a dove, appeared descending from the sky in a stream of light, and darting at the raven, drove it once more, screaming, to a distance.

Without a moment's delay I applied my strength to the stone, which, as the dervish foretold, yielded to the sacred adjuration. Uttering a solemn prayer for the peace of the departed spirit, I dropt the talisman into the cavity, which still retained a little water. A hissing sound ensued, and the grave seemed slowly closing, when I rapidly deposited the body, and replaced the stone. But scarcely had the prescribed form of prayer been completed when the mausoleum and its contents shook violently, and crumbled around me with a loud crashing noise. I saw the

raven with fluttering and extended pinions swallowed up in the ruins ; while the white dove soared upwards towards heaven. My head once more whirled round, again my senses failed me, and I fell amidst the mighty uproar, unconscious of all that followed.

How long I lay in this condition, or what occurred to me while it lasted, I never knew ; but upon recovering recollection, I found myself surrounded by several persons, whom I recognised for my servants and companions of the chase ; and who were endeavouring to raise me up and set me upon my legs. The light was almost entirely gone, so that objects were but faintly discernible, and I could not distinguish the scene around me sufficiently to determine whether it resembled the lonely valley, nor whether the ruins of the Imaunzadeh, among which I had fallen, were still visible. Several bruises, and considerable pain in many parts of my body, seemed to attest the injury I had sustained in that fall ; but when I inquired of my friends respecting these things, they treated my words as those of one whose brain was still distracted ; so I insisted no longer at the time, but suffered myself to be conducted to the place where my horse was waiting me ; and thence, with no small difficulty, we regained the village from which we had set out.

I afterwards learned that the party, after having

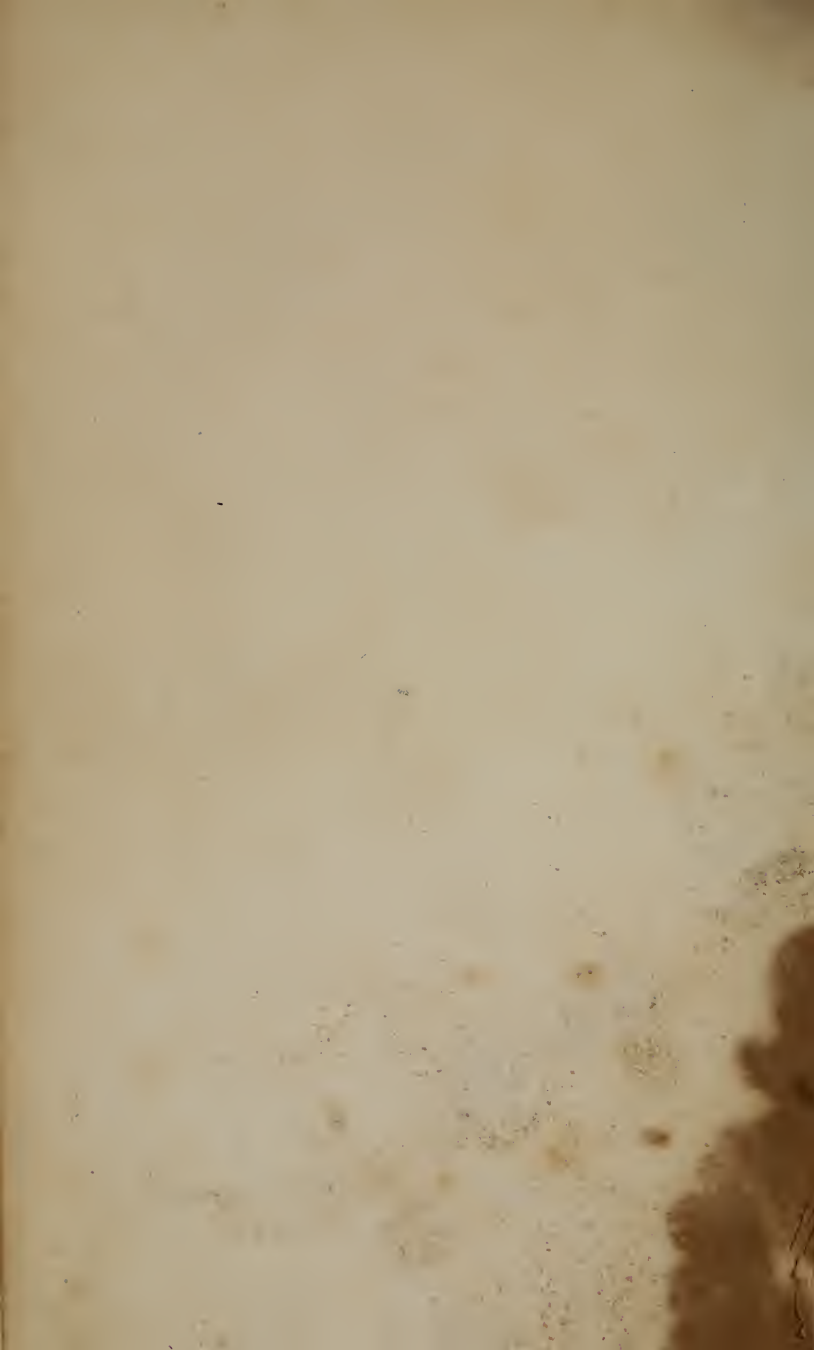
met upon the height, alarmed at my long and unaccountable absence, had sought for me in the direction where they had heard me fire, until the light had nearly gone; and they had almost given up the search in despair, when one of them by chance looking over a precipice into a hollow below them, had caught a glimpse of some white object resembling the body of a man clothed in light-coloured garments, and lying motionless on the ground: it was by this accident they were led to the spot where they found me stretched senseless, and as they supposed at the time, dead, amongst a heap of old grey stones.

I failed not to put many questions to my friends after my recovery, regarding the circumstances in which they found me; but observing that they treated the matters of which I spoke as the fancies of an overheated imagination, and experiencing a strong aversion to even hinting at the solemn and extraordinary events which had happened to me in the valley, I deemed it most advisable to preserve a total silence regarding all that could lead to a subject which concerned no one but myself, and which might, if spoken of, be set down as the fanciful conceit of a weak and superstitious brain. The prudence of this resolution has appeared more strongly the more I have since reflected on it; not that my belief in the events of that memorable evening has ever been

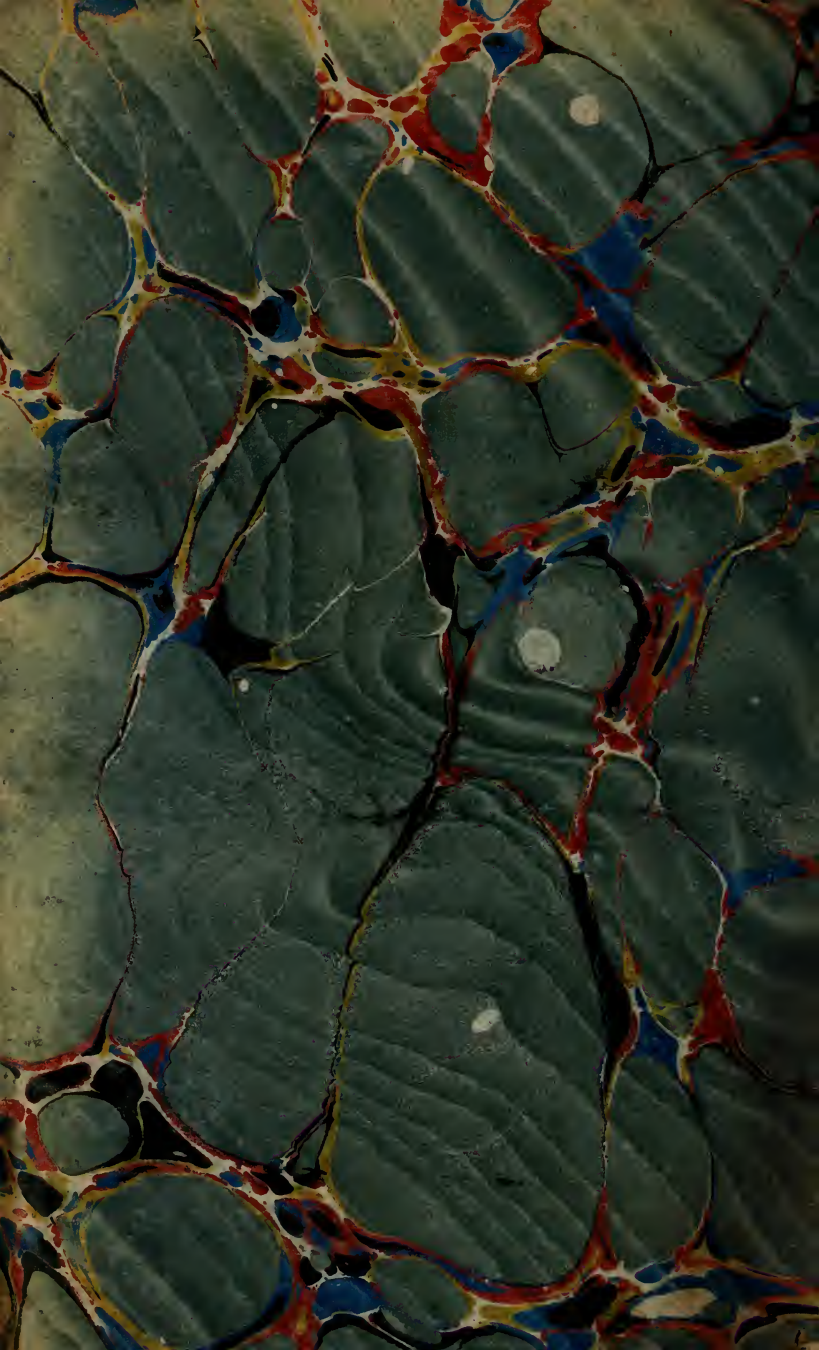
shaken in the smallest degree ; but that such is the perversity and incredulity of mankind, that they wilfully shut their eyes against the truth, and reject the plainest evidence of all facts which consist not with their own notions of probability. For my own part, the more I dwell upon each circumstance, the more firmly is my mind persuaded that at the time I have stated, and in the valley which I have described, the dervish sheikh Allee Callunder resigned into the hands of Allah the life which had been preternaturally sustained by the will of the Almighty ; and that my own hands closed his eyes, and deposited his body in its silent house ; and never again accordingly did the sheikh appear upon this earth.—Peace be to his soul ! Amen !

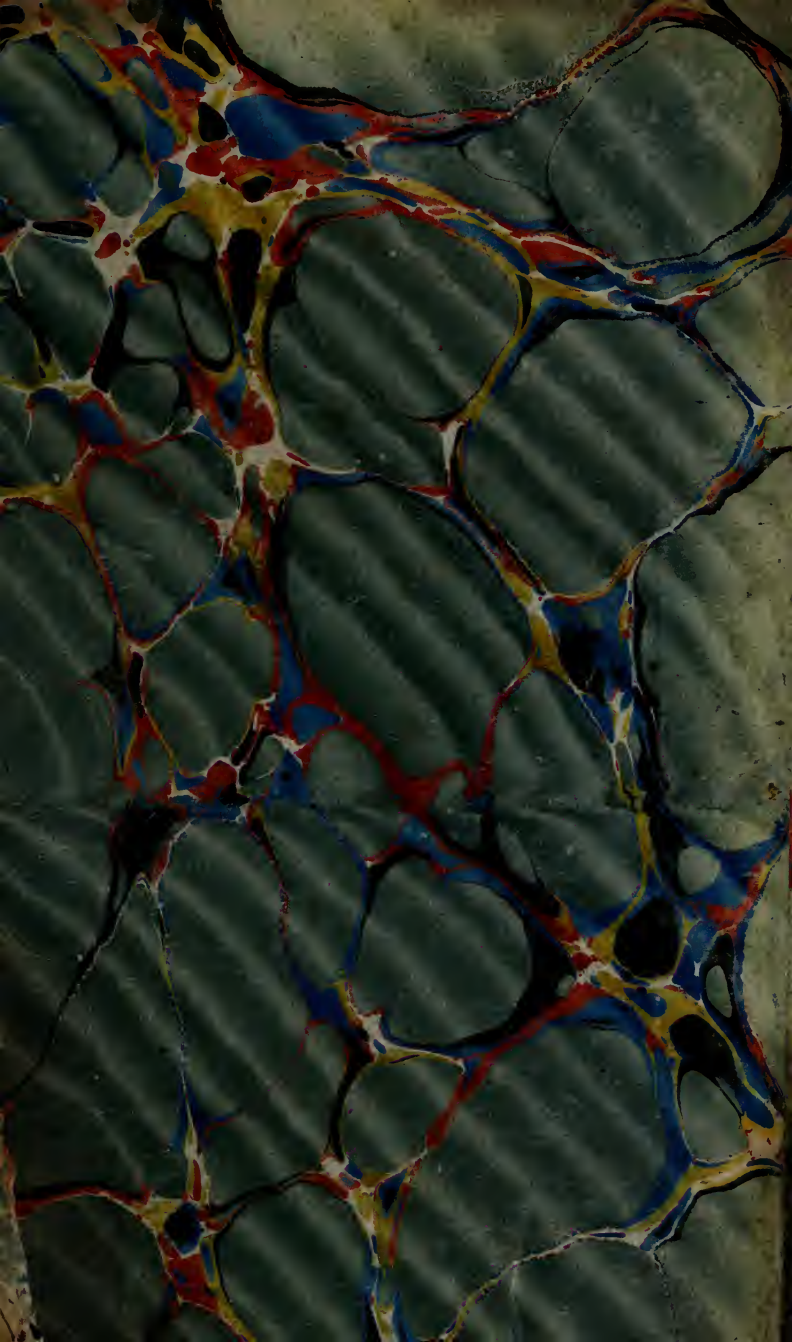
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