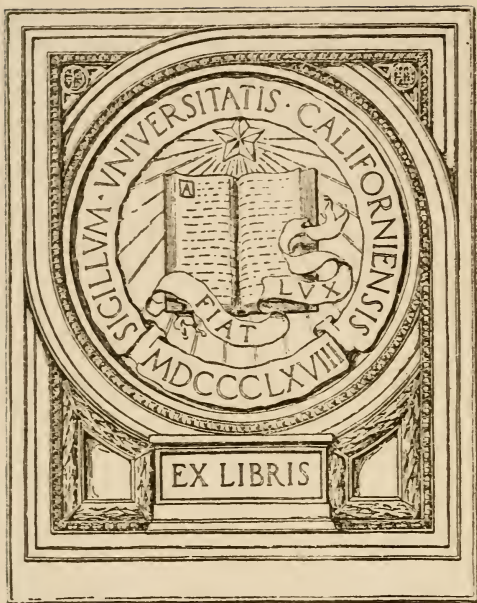


BILDAD THE
QUILL-DRIVER

WILLIAM CAINE



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BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BUT SHE MEANT WELL
THE IRRESISTIBLE INTRUDER
HOFFMAN'S CHANCE
PILKINGTON
THE CONFECTIONERS (with JOHN
FAIRBURN)
THE PURSUIT OF THE PRESI-
DENT
THE VICTIM AND THE VOTARY
BOOM
A PRISONER IN SPAIN
THE REVOLT AT ROSKELLY'S
THE DEVIL IN SOLUTION
OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW BETTER
AN ANGLER AT LARGE
SAVE US FROM OUR FRIENDS
THE NEW FORESTERS



THEN I, UPON WHOM WAS A TERROR NOT TO BE DESCRIBED, SLIPPED DEXTEROUSLY THROUGH THE CURTAINS OF THE LITTER WHICH WERE REMOTE FROM THE HOUSE

BILDAD
THE QUILL-DRIVER
BY WILLIAM CAINE

With six illustrations by H. M. BATEMAN



LONDON: JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY MCMXVI

THE ANCHOR PRESS LTD. TIPTREE ESSEX ENGLAND.

TO
W. S. C. AND D. C.

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BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

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IT behoveth every man of mature age to write his Book, that he at least may read it and (if he have kept nothing back) he at least may derive profit, of which none may have enough. For thus shall he say, "At such a time I held this (or that) opinion and acted thus (or so)," and shall praise Allah

who hath granted him life for the learning of better things.

This then is My Book.

I am the son of Bildad, the leather-dresser, son of Bildad, the leather-dresser, son of Bildad, the leather-dresser, offspring of innumerable Bildads, issue of an equal quantity of leather-dressers, all of Zog, *chef lieu* of the district of Zog, in the province of Maraudistan. The ancient shop was on the left hand of the

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Street of Guile, twenty-three paces within the tall Gate of Cupidity; but it is there no longer, my father, as Convener of the Committee for Town Improvements of the recently-instituted Municipal Council, having purchased the site from himself, at a great price, for the erection thereon of a State-subsidised Picture Theatre of which he was, indeed, the principal promoter.

Having many times encountered the brutality of the contumelious by reason of an alleged lowliness of origin, I here declare, by my hopes of salvation, which are sanguine, that the malice of my enemies is the only foundation for such a rumour and that the lineage of the Bildads is as ancient and honourable as that of any other family which is disposed to incur a little expense and disregard two, or at most three, generations of dubious smiles and incredulous shrugs.

This matter was settled for us beyond all question in the time of my grandfather.

You are to know that this, the first Child of Enterprise which my family had produced, adventured (under the rose) a considerable sum in the joint acquisition with its discoverer, a date-merchant, of an oasis, concerning which his associate reported fabulous things, and soon afterwards found himself in the possession of considerable wealth. For the dates of that oasis were not only of an exceeding

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bigness and succulence, but also had the property (according to a bazaar rumour set in circulation by my grandfather's partner) of carrying within them, in one case out of every hundred, stones of the purest silver. This caused them to be sought after with the utmost eagerness whenever a consignment of them arrived in Zog. Indeed prospective date-buyers soon learned to refrain from purchase until they could be sure of carrying home from their marketing *Silver Pip* dates and none other, and would besides pay almost any price rather than be disappointed of their desire for the novel brand. Thus were all the other date-merchants but one ruined.

My grandfather was now, by these so valuable dates, raised wholly above the need of dressing leather ; yet did he retain the shop in which he was accustomed to sit and receive his friends. For, first, he could be comfortable in no other place—a native plebeianism yielding but rarely to affluence in the first generation—and secondly, the immemorial custom of our country still precluding any man from adopting a business which has not been followed by at least three of his paternal ancestors directly before him, he was forced, if he would avoid inconvenient questions and a sudden access of extortion on the part of the Revenue Authorities, to maintain his leather shop in full activity.

One day there passed by a certain arrogant young

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man of patrician blood, who had formerly dealt with my grandfather for saddle-flaps and painted belts, but was now, by his own extravagances, reduced to mendicancy. My grandfather, with the worthy intention of proving to his late client that patronage is not the monopoly of the high-born, threw him one of the lesser coins and bade him go his way in peace; whereupon the youth, whose pride affliction had by no means chastened but rather rendered it wholly not to be bridled, spat to the left dexterously upon the gift, bent not his body for its assumption, and improvised the following couplet :

*Shall gold to copper stoop, which falls from dross ?
Were 't gold itself such salvage were a loss.*

My grandfather, who was a trifle short in the faculty of rhymed repartee but knew how to take a noble revenge, removed a valuable imitation diamond from his finger (for, it being summer, he had nothing by him which more nearly resembled a coal) and held it out in silence towards the ingrate, who, snatching it, instantly departed, reciting this metrical expression of his sentiments :

*A jewel on a dunghill sat.
The gamecock culled it, strolling past.
Then did that mixen smoke with pride.
It said, " He's noticed me at last."*

My grandmother, whom my grandfather had taken over, during less prosperous days, in part liquidation

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of a debt, happened, through a shutter, to witness this exchange of civilities. Her spleen instantly swelled to such an extent that her women caused a physician to be summoned hot-foot to her bedside, and had not my grandfather fortunately been apprised of the fact and propelled the man into the street with blows, there is little doubt but that the poor lady would have lost her life. All danger being now at an end, and she having bathed and eaten, she addressed my grandfather in the following words :

“ Master of my Days and Only Gladness of my Corporeal Faculties save wine, tobacco, and the combats of mantises—The stomach of a dog is known by that which he swalloweth. How long, then, wilt thou eat this dirt? Go to! Shall the city mock us for ever? What is money but the vehicle of satisfaction, but how shall contentment rest upon the cuspidor of men. Hearken, then, to my words and I shall tell thee a thing, Arbiter of my Destiny, thou Bearded Derision.”

Having taken counsel with my grandmother, my grandfather, accompanied by a slave, who carried a purse of gold pieces, repaired next day to the house of one whom my grandmother had named, and there, after stating his requirements, became instantly the owner of a pedigree which traced his descent by an infinite number of stages and lines, direct and collateral, back through the Prophet and Solomon

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and Bildad the Shuhite, to the Patriarch Noah and thence, easily enough, to Adam. That the furnisher of pedigrees had long been possessed of the facts relating to the genealogy of my grandfather is evident from the rapidity with which he prepared this chart.

This incident furnishes a good illustration of the profound maxim, "The Ignorance of the Expert is the Wisdom of the Layman," for whereas until that moment my grandfather had never had any suspicion that he was well-born, now he was unshakably convinced upon the point and, after a month or so, there was not a name in the list of his progenitors upon which he could not instantly lay his finger, and concerning whose owner he could not relate one or more veracious-sounding anecdotes. The Tree of the Bildads was glazed, framed, and hung up in the shop, and the neighbours allowed none of their amusement to mar the respect with which they appeared to study it ; for my grandfather was always hospitable towards Subservience.

So much, then, of my lineage.

The maxim quoted in the last section is not to be confused with the more readily intelligible saw, "The Ignorance of the Layman is the Opportunity of the Expert."

Shortly after this determination of my grand-

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father's ancient origin the only other date-merchant of Zog introduced to the notice of the public a small dried-up kind of date, which was said to bear a golden stone in one example out of every fifty. It was known as *The Nabob*. Upon this all custom forsook the proprietors of the vast and luscious *Silver Pip* date and my grandfather found himself bankrupt and reduced suddenly to leather-dressing, which now became for him a real rather than an ostensible livelihood.

His partner, indeed, eagerly besought him to expend the large remnant of his property which remained to him after his discharge had been granted upon the exploitation of a one in twenty platinum-stoned date, but my grandfather declined. "Commercial enterprise," he said, "is one thing; lying is another. I will never be party to a falsehood which my judgment tells me my fellow citizens are not likely to swallow. There is a limit to everything and you cannot persuade me that one in twenty *and* platinum is anything but a mirage. Indeed, had not these *Nabobs* cut the ground from under our feet we ourselves must soon have retired from business; for no one has yet discovered in a *Silver Pip* a stone that is in any way extraordinary, and it is an irrefutable truth that no amount of commendation by the trader can long make up, in the eyes of his customers, for a radical deficiency in the goods."

My grandfather's partner withdrew, abashed, and

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after a month of meditation caused three date-stones to be made of platinum.

Almost immediately afterwards the bazaar was in a ferment and the one in twenty platinum-stoned *El Dorado* was selling as fast as the utterly discredited *Nabob* could be obtained (at about the price of dirt) from the emporium of its proprietor, now in a fair way to be ruined. That evening the broken merchant approached the successful and made him a proposal, the result of which was an amalgamation. No further increase in the ratio between valuable stones and dates was now observable, the limit being fixed by the strong force of mutual interest, and each of these rascals was able to amass a gigantic fortune in a very short space of time. For being now the only date-merchants in Zog they had no competition to fear.

My grandfather, indeed, seeing how well they did, was for a while tempted to adventure himself against them with a one in ten diamond-stoned fruit ; but after much interior consultation he decided that the mere smattering of the date business which he had acquired could never avail him in a war to the death with two thoroughly competent traders, owning as they did the full control of the supply, and utterly unscrupulous, to boot, as they had shown themselves to be. He was an old man, moreover, and thus not only sagacious but averse to activity. All things, then, conspired to wean him from any idea of improving his already comfortable position,

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and for the rest of his life he applied himself solely to the husbanding of his resources and the recital of this profoundly truthful couplet of the poet Shadi, with whose works he was excellently familiar :

*All is Illusion. What is never what.
Cheats seem to prosper, therefore they do not.*

In the fifth month of the ninety-fourth year of his life died Bildad, my grandfather, the son of Bildad, the son of Bildad to the nth, Dean of the Leatherdressers of Zog, Emeritus Warden of the Gate called Cupidity, Past Great Bull of the Royal and Ancient Order of Yaks (wallow of Zog, no. 20301) Ex-Honorary Vice-President of the Mercury Club and Holder of other honours and titles innumerable, because never bestowed, Subscriber to Charities without end, because without beginning, Unparalleled Observer, during the last three days of his existence, of the Ordinances of the Faith, Interminable Discourser upon Things in General, and Undefeated Champion of the Quog Board.

The game of Quog is less well known than it surely deserved to be. It was the invention of my grandfather's later years and perished with him. It was played with the ordinary apparatus of Chess. From that game, however, it differed in many important particulars. For whereas Chess mimics the battle-field, Quog appeared, at first sight, to reflect the Asylum. The rules were so complicated and the

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variations so infinite that even my grandfather never succeeded in comprehending them, though it must be said that he never wearied of explaining them to his friends and relatives. One of the pleasantest memories of my infancy is the spectacle of the good old man, seated before the Quog Board and lifting the pieces over and over each other in an apparently hopeless attempt to bring about some desired result. I remember hearing him say that if he could only have brought himself to cheat he would on no less than one occasion have proved victorious, though over what he could not make at all clear to his interlocutor.

My grandfather, then, passed away at the very advanced age recorded in the last section but one, from the effects of a surfeit caused by his own rare unselfishness.

In virtue of his seniority he was always served first at meals, and his son, his wives, his son's wives, and his grandchildren awaited, with what pretence of resignation they could command, the completion of his repast before themselves falling to. It happened, on an evil day, that a sheep was placed before him, cooked *en pilaf* and stuffed full of Brazil-nuts, assafoetida, and red peppers. My grandfather no sooner tasted of this admirable stuffing, which was new to his palate, than he realised not only its toothsome-ness but also the extraordinary tax which any meat so prepared must place upon

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the digestions which should be called on to grapple with it. Immolating himself, therefore, without a moment's delay, upon the altar of Family Affection, he first recited to his sad-eyed dependents from the works of Shadi (who, like many another great poet, sometimes mistakenly indulged an elementary faculty of humour) the following lines :

*"Leave us the bones," they plead, "the bones to suck."
"If you find any bones," says he, "you'll be in luck."*

And then proceeded to devour the whole *pilaf*, with the exception only of the horns, and in less than half an hour was seized with the first symptoms of the disorder which, three days later, exposed him to the stroke of Azrael.

In the course of a fairly long life I have observed many things, and of these that which will most appropriately appear in this place is the following :

It is perhaps more respectable to die in the odour of sanctity than on the scaffold, but Allah hath much discrimination.

My father, having succeeded to the shop and considerable personalty of my grandfather, was in a position fairly to loose the reins upon the neck of his grief, and as by no surer means may a family of Zog secure the consideration of its neighbours than by a goodly funeral, he very rightly put no limits

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upon the expenditure which attended my grandfather's obsequies. The costliest mourners, endowed with the shrillest, most untiring, and most vexatious voices were hired in great numbers and, for the space of a week, caused the Street of Guile to be uninhabitable by reason of their wailings, teethgnashings, and other lamentable demonstrations. The first poet of the town was employed to threnodise upon the event to the number of five hundred and one couplets, and as, hitherto, no inhabitant of our quarter had ever been celebrated in above five hundred, this caused a great deal of satisfaction and my father received endless compliments upon his filial piety and his care for the dignity of the neighbourhood. And when I consider that my grandfather had invariably treated my father all his life in the most tyrannical fashion, that my father had hardly spoken three civil words to the old gentleman in the course of the previous ten years, in short that the two men had always lived together upon the worst imaginable terms, I stand amazed, to this day, at the power of Death to heal the breaches in family affection. And truly says the versifier in the *Chapbook of the Householder and his Hareem* :

*Not until She hath given away the coat
shall He assess it much above a goat,*

and more to the purpose.

When the howling of the women was no longer

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audible in the Street of Guile, my father removed the ceremonial wads of wool from his ears, took down the shutters from the shop which was now his own, and set to work resolutely to mask his sorrow with the activities of business. His thoughts also at this time naturally turned towards me, destined, as his son, one day to take down the shutters which should have been put up in his honour. Hitherto he had paid me not very much attention, for he was a man highly deficient in the family virtues ; but now he began seriously to set about instructing me in the rudiments of leather-dressing.

I was already a little above eight years old, a lively, handsome, and intelligent boy, with, however, no love at all for the ancestral craft of the Bildads. The scent of leather has always been distasteful to my nostrils and I have been told that my hatred of this substance declared itself at a very early age. I would never handle it or indeed come nearer to it than I could avoid, crying lamentably whenever I was carried into the shop for examination by favoured customers, stopping my nose with thumb and forefinger, and in every other way, within the competence of an infant, signifying my uneasiness at my surroundings.

This aversion from the staple of my family's livelihood could not do otherwise than excite a strong concern in my poor father's bosom. The son of a leather-dresser, I was marked by immemorial usage for his trade and it only. My father could

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conceive of no alternative and perpetually asked himself what, if this queasiness were allowed to take a firm hold of me, was to intervene in after years between myself and death by hunger? The indignation natural to parents also possessed him at the reflection that any child of his should presume to revolt from a traffic which he deemed suited to its capacities and the honourableness of which neither he nor any of his ancestors had ever thought of questioning. He therefore prepared a long, heavy, and subtle strap with which, at any least sign of my unreasonable fancy, he accustomed himself mercilessly to belabour me, hoping, I imagine, thus to compel a love for leather which he could not persuade me into feeling.

My mother, however, whether because, as I suspect, she secretly shared my horror of tanned hides (for to whom else should I be indebted to it?) or, as I believe, because my father's temper was, during these days, perpetually inflamed, espoused my cause, though, like the shrewd woman that she was, she took care to let my father guess nothing of her sentiments. Nay, rather did she vie with him always in the expression of wrath at my fastidiousness. Where he was emphatic, she grew vehement; where he shouted, she screamed with fury; did he tear his hair, she would be shattering his favourite water-pipe. Thus she not only saved herself the prolongation of many disagreeable scenes, but impressed my father unshakably with the belief

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that she was on his side, a rudimentary piece of tactics which his simple mind was very ill fitted to penetrate.

Having thus prepared him for the reception of advice, she one day addressed to him the following observations.

“Dispenser of my Economies and Stern Appraiser of my Housewifely Method :

“Hearken a little to the unacceptable brayings of the ass who married thee. Shall peace abjure thy house for ever because of thy son, this plague-spot ? Shall the strap of discipline weary eternally this arm that is my only succour. Not so. Come, let us make an end of these convulsions. The poet hath said :

*When Destiny declares its awful will,
hush, man, thy petty clamour and be still.*

Therefore, if it be written that the boy shall curry leather, curry it he shall, though his nose grow backwards upon his scalp from loathing of the commodity ; but if that he adopt some other trade than his father's (and the thing hath been done though not in Zog) then shall all thy lamentations be without fruit save the embrangement of thy domestic peace. Now since there is a certain wise woman in another quarter who, for a fee truly contemptible, will declare for us the intentions of Fate concerning thy son, is it not better to purchase quiet with a trifle than to save money and perish of contention ? ”

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Thus and with a great number of similar arguments, constantly repeated, did my mother bring my father at last to the suspension of the baculine argument temporarily in favour of a consultation with the Sybil.

Accordingly on the next day this crone, accompanied by a large gander, presented herself at our abode. These two having been introduced into the women's apartments, my father having been summoned, and the fee agreed on having been bestowed, the Seeress, after indulging in a few commonplace incantations (lighting the while in a censer some evilly smelling matter), addressed my parents thus and not otherwise :

“ The male goose which you here perceive is a bird endowed with extraordinary attributes. His feathers, like those of other geese, terminate in quills ; yet are these quills quite unlike the quills of other geese. For you are to know that they contain within their hollows all kinds of substances, such as gold, wool, a jewel, wine, water, and everything else that you can either suggest or imagine. Let, then, your son approach and pluck a quill, when, from its contents, I will proceed to declare the career which has been allotted to him and unalterably set down in the Awful Book, whose pages, with the assistance of this incomparable gander, I, the least courageous of mortals, am privileged, dreadfully, to explore. If the quill, when extracted, is found to contain, as

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it may, a diamond, then shall the child prosper as a merchant of gems. A piece of iron will assure you that he is to be a soldier of eminence. Should we find wool, a herdsman is indicated; leather, a dresser of hides; water, a carrier and vendor of that liquid; wine, a vintner; and so forth. Produce, then, your son and let him pluck fearlessly, for my gander is the gentlest of birds and has never been known to bite, save in play, and this is business."

I was accordingly introduced, whereupon she muttered five or six additional formulæ rapidly, first backwards and then sideways, drew a pentagon in charcoal on the floor round the gander, lit what I now suppose to have been a blue Bengal light and commanded me to pull a feather out of the bird. This, little loth, I did, and upon examination the quill was found to contain nothing more extraordinary than that pithy white stuff which is common to all quills.

Upon this fact the Diviner based the following prediction which, for a small extra fee, she was so obliging as to write down for my father, who, it is needless to say, was profoundly impressed by the result of his experiment.

"An empty quill is rarely plucked, but when this happens it plainly declares a Writer, whether of verses, commentaries, or, less gloriously, the entries in the day-book of some merchant. Cease, then, to persecute the child by reason of his aversion from

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leather, for he shall by no means answer to the intentions which you have conceived for him."

The walk in life which I was to tread was now definitely indicated. My father, a pious man, never henceforward considered the possibility of my succeeding him in his business. But that he should grumble a little was inevitable, for, like most of the fathers in Zog, he had proposed to quarter himself during the years of his decline upon a son whom he had begotten, reared, and should have trained to a useful handicraft with that very end in view. For in Zog the exploded theory still found favour with parents, that, because the child is indebted for his being to his progenitors, it is incumbent upon him to repay that obligation by labouring incessantly, during the better part of his life, to keep the old people in luxury when age and its attendant sloth have deprived them of the strength and energy to toil in their own behalf. It was this pernicious and absurd doctrine which so embittered the long intercourse of my father and grandfather. Whether it was that my father, in the light of his own experience, perceived the essential falsity of a rule of life which is founded upon the utterly mistaken belief that existence on this earth is a gift for which any one ought to be grateful, or whether it was simply that his slavish credulity forbade him to question the pronouncement of a suborned impostor, certain it is that, from this moment, he not only



J.M.
BATEFORD
1916

"AN EMPTY QUILL IS RARELY PLUCKED, BUT WHEN THIS HAPPENS IT PLAINLY
DECLARES A WRITER"

1862

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gave up all hope of ever living upon me, but also applied himself with redoubled industry to piling up money, arguing, shrewdly enough, that, if I was to be a writer, it behoved him to lay by a store sufficient, when he should have done with it, to maintain the hitherto honourable name of Bildad above the reproach of indigence.

The only equipment necessary to a writer—unless he have the means to employ a secretary or is well situated for stealing the manuscripts of other men—is penmanship. This, so far, I had not acquired, for since the accounts of a small leather shop in Zog are sufficiently kept with the aid of tallies, an abacus, and a careful supervision of the till, no member of my family had hitherto been concerned to burden himself with what is, after all, little better than an ornamental accomplishment for any member of the *bourgeoisie*. Yet, if I was to be a writer, I must learn to write. I was accordingly entrusted to the care of Yildiz Khan, a venerable forger, who, having served the full period of his third imprisonment, had now withdrawn (on a sufficiency) quite from his profession, was supposed, as became one so near the portals of Paradise, to be thoroughly repentant, and relieved the tedium of a sanctified retirement by writing letters for the public in front of the fifth arch eastward of the Tirmidzi Caravan-serai.

To the booth, then, of this Old Iniquity I was led

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henceforward each morning by a slave who returned for me in the evening about the hour when my master was accustomed to retire within his arch, where, concealed by a screen, a bulging wine-skin awaited the transference of its contents from its own stomach into that of my preceptor.

Here, before our arch, I, during the next eight years, continued to imbibe the principles of the art to which I had been called, together with the Elements of Morality, for instruction in which my father had stipulated with my master, which demand had been conceded without any extra charge being made. It was from Yildiz Khan himself that I subsequently obtained the explanation of this, at first sight, generous conduct.

“Master,” I asked him one day when I had been his pupil for some four years, “for what reason did you refrain from demanding any additional fee from my father in respect of that instruction in Morality which you promised to offer me, but of which nothing has till this moment been said between us?”

“Child,” he replied, blinking at me over his water-pipe, “you must know that every craft is nice upon some point of honour. As my father was before me, I am a forger, not a robber; and though I would gladly, should a favourable chance present itself, counterfeit your sire’s signature to a bill for any sum which would not too severely strain the confidence of the person upon whom it was drawn, I

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could not undertake to instruct for money anybody's son in that which does not exist and consequently is of no value whatever."

I record this pronouncement of Yildiz Khan because it gave me my first insight into the profundities of self-deception which the human mind can discover when it is concerned to distinguish that which it erroneously imagines to be right from that which it no less fondly believes to be wrong. To-day I know that Yildiz Khan was only a little more stupid or (who shall say?) a little less foolish than any other aged man now blinking (as I write) over his hubble-bubble and imparting imperishable fallacies to an eager disciple. But at that time—I recollect it with a smile—his power of discrimination amazed me; it still amazes me, though otherwise—and for some hours I maintained silence, wrapped altogether in the contemplation of subtleties.

Lines written on a door in chalk two hours after chastisement by my master for a mistake in the signature of Abdul Jujube, Zog's then principal importer of Turkish Delight:

*There was an old Scrivening Hog
who drank till he lay like a log.
He said, "I'm at rest
in the Realms of the Blessed."
He lied. He was lying in Zog.*

Verses partly composed in my fourteenth year

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after first setting eyes upon the peerless Fatma, doyenne of the Ladies of the Dhoo Bazaar, on the occasion of her dictating a letter to Yildiz Khan enquiring for the health of her grandson, aged ten, lately smitten with a spring colic at Teheran.

*Moon of my night, ah ! rise again
to bring my heart such - - pain.
Beam on this desert that is me
and flood it full of ecstasy.
Water I crave not. I crave thee.
Ah ! rise again.*

*Star of my East, ah ! come once more.
Thy - - on my - outpour.
Burning I watch the hills that hide
- - - - - bride
- - - - - whate'er betide.
Ah ! come once more.*

*Sun of my day, ah ! haste thee then
- - - - -
- - - - -
- - - - -
- - - - -
Ah ! haste thee then.*

The first of the foregoing two crudities I have by some chance retained for all these years in my memory. Nor can I forget the pride which accompanied its conception, or the satisfaction with which I inscribed it and the violently personal sketch in chalk which accompanied it. For the second I am indebted to a curious accident.

My master, after the departure of Fatma with her

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letter, fell into a gentle doze, a habit to which he became, as years passed on, more and more addicted ; and this opportunity I seized to put down in lasting form the hot words of passion which seethed and bubbled in my young brain. While I was in the full course of composition a shadow fell upon my paper, and looking up, I found a comely young woman called Moti bending towards me. She asked me what I was frowning over so terribly and, in the excess of my ingenuousness, I owned that I was writing poetry. I even read the first almost completed verse aloud, and, artist-like, desired her criticism, by which I meant her praise. She said that it was very pretty and if she had known that I had seen her coming she would have delayed her arrival until I had finished. The poor soul could not, of course, conceive that I had had anybody but herself in mind. She then went on to say that it was highly agreeable of me to write verses for her, and vowed that she would give me a kiss for them, which she did there and then. As for me, I was so pleased by this experience that, after extorting another kiss, I permitted her to retire with the poem in her possession. For I reflected that, even should she show the thing to someone who could read, there was in it no compromising reference to its true subject by name or by description—a certain mooniness, stariness, and sunniness being common to all women who inspire the admiration of youth. Thus she would never know and, perchance, more

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kisses might be my portion. I then applied myself to the production of a fresh lyric in praise of the ineffable Fatma, using an entirely new series of metaphors as became the serious poet which I now felt myself to be. If I remember, it was of a zoological nature rather than an astronomical. I mean that I likened the eyes of the subject to those of the cow, her ankles to those of the roe deer, and her waist to that of the greyhound.

Many years later I was again in Zog on business connected with my then far-reaching enterprises, and, passing through the Dhoo Bazaar, I heard my name called in a soft and familiar voice. Looking upwards I beheld a handsome old woman at a window, beckoning me within doors. What was my pleasure at discovering that she who had accosted me was none other than the dear Moti of my very young days, now in her turn doyenne of the Bazaar, removed by her thrift above any financial anxiety, and possessing the respect and consideration of the whole city! As I was rising to take my departure after much pleasant talk, she in her turn rose and, going to a lacquered cabinet, took from a drawer a faded piece of paper.

“This, my dear Bildad,” she said, “is a trifle which may have escaped your memory,” and she displayed a childish scrawl. I knew it instantly, for though this was but the second occasion on which I had spoken to Moti, my memory is naturally tenacious of all advantageous events.

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"And you have kept *this*, Moti," I said, with profound feeling. "Oh, Moti!" I said.

"Yes," she replied. "It is the only piece of poetry that was ever written to me, and I value it perhaps above its merit as a work of art, but hardly more than it deserves. I would wish to give you some handsome present in token of this happy meeting, but unfortunately I am much pressed by some importunate creditors. Take this, then, my dear, and keep it in memory both of our past love and of our present friendship."

I have kept it, but rather as a reminder of a very unusually prolonged case of self-deception.

The juvenilia recently exhibited evidence in their composer an early revolt from the mechanical business of the public letter-writer. Truly my master's trade was never very tolerable to me. The translation into elegant and flowing periods of the barbarous messages which the illiterate are accustomed to send to the uneducated is a task of which a youth, who has anything in him beyond a determination to fill his belly three times a day, should quickly tire. The perpetual repetition of the same genuine but trite sentiments becomes by turns tiresome, amazing, infuriating. When for the sixth time of a morning the scribe has been directed to express the hopes of some clod that his parents in the country are as well as this leaves him at present, when for the sixth time the wretched professional

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has tortured his wits to devise some novel and dazzling piece of metaphor which shall convey the intention of the client without blasting the reputation of the artist, he may be excused if, during a lull, he seeks spiritual balm in original composition.

For it is not enough simply to put down what the customer says. A letter-writer who should go about his work in any such fashion would soon find in the preparation of his own testament the fittest employment for his tackle.

The fastidiousness of the customer is inconceivable by anyone who has never suffered under it. And this is not all. These brutes being unable to write are equally incapable of reading. It follows therefore that any one of them who receives a letter in, let us say, Ispahan, is compelled to resort to some writer to elucidate it, whom, if conciseness and intelligibility at all appear, all respect for the client abandons; for he argues: "If this person's correspondent in (for example) Zog can afford nothing better than this, what am I to think of this person?" Which is monstrous, but not foreign to the methods of the human mind. The Ispahani who has brought to be read this short-winded and consequently inexpensive letter, knowing that these reflections must be passing through the mind of the reader, is abased in the dust, conceives a violent anger at the innocent man of Zog, and dictates forthwith an offensive reply in which he asks him what pig he thinks he is addressing by the agency of so incapable,

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inelegant, and economical a hand. And there falleth affliction upon the letter-writer of Zog, custom decreasing and the hairs of his beard being diminished in number by the daily assaults of his wife, exigent in the matter of revenue.

Another bane.

Ex nihilo nihil, as someone has, or ought to have, said. It is out of the competence of the most inspired and eccentric artist wholly to dispense with a model. Be it but a vague feeling of discomfort, the musician must have something to express. The sculptor may not, however independent he imagines himself to be, altogether disassociate his productions from the realm of the known. If it is no more than the discordance of certain colour-patches the painter demands a point of departure. The poet, were he never so mad (if he would be a poet and not an utterer of gibberish) shall offer some possibility of a solution to his admirers.

So with the public letter-writer. For the production of beautiful sentences thoughts must be provided, and the more suggestive the thought, the more exquisitely it shall evolve. Now, therefore, let us consider the lot of one who finds himself under the necessity of exercising his magic upon this :

“ Your letter of yesterday received and contents noted. Nothing doing unless you will take half.”

“ As the cow,” he may write, “ among richest grasses delectably chews the cud of her browsing,

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so with infinite satisfaction revolves my soul the honey-bearing words which you have condescended to address to me. But Allah at this season having laid the burden of excessive liabilities upon your slave's slave, the sum required to appease the overweening avarice of a person who shall be nameless may not be discovered within these ill-furnished coffers, unless haply, on consideration, the moiety of it be deemed acceptable."

So far, good. But if the same task be set again and yet again unto seventy times seven within the compass of an afternoon, what then? The Artist who should faithfully grapple with the fifth problem of the kind would, when he had made an end of his endeavour, be led away babbling to the Refuge for the Mentally Afflicted.

Inevitably therefore the artist perishes where the letter-writer remains; who remaining, sinks to the *cliché*, the made phrase, and *The Scribe's Vade Mecum*. But if the letter-writer revolt, the artist may endure.

Happily for myself, the Power that was in me proved too strong for my natural inclination towards regular food, and in the sixteenth year of my life and the eighth of my subordination to Yildiz Khan drove me out amongst the devils and angels, as is now to be related.

The University of Zog is ancient, honourable, and expensive above all the universities of my native

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land. To it accordingly resort all our noblest young men, a few of whom obtain degrees, most of whom incur disastrous debts, and all of whom strive to contract that which is known as the Zog Manner which sits upon them through life and is the Key of Place. The lesser sort of gentlemen, therefore, are accustomed (whether they have the means or no) to send their sons also to Zog in the hope that these lads, by breathing the same air as the lordlings, shall themselves acquire that so valuable Manner and themselves too step into high office. Quite undeterred is this lesser sort of gentleman by the innumerable examples which show the madness of this proceeding. Rather are their eyes blinded to the almost certain issue by a few conspicuous exceptions. Though it be easier for a rich man to pass through the bankruptcy court than for a bumpkin to clothe himself satisfactorily in the Zog Manner, these foolish fathers continue, year after year, to sow, after the fashion indicated, the seeds of estrangement, dissension, high words, and the alteration of testaments. And only very rarely is the crop not reaped in abundance.

There was at the time of which I speak a certain youth of low extraction and no great wealth dwelling in Zog because his father was among the foolish ones. Of the coveted Manner he had none; nor did he show any likelihood of obtaining the degree, the ostensible object of his ambitions. In the

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third particular, however, he left nothing to be desired ; I mean that his creditors were as the sand of the sea, the stars of the firmament, and the leaves of all the trees. And no more speedily than doth ice melt before the noonday sun did ready cash desert the neighbourhood of this young man. Fill his pockets and, until they were void, it was as if a spray of gold played about him.

To my master one evening this person resorted, and detaching from his turban a small, shabby turquoise which he laid upon the brickwork of the arch, thus said :

“ Hoary iniquity. The Pinch of Desire is hard and driveth forwards through barriers, but the Prod of Necessity abolisheth scruples. When both compel, how shall they be resisted by the unfortunate man ? Lo ! the impulse toward revelry is upon me in great strength at this season ; but gold in this accursed town is still to seek, though I have sought since leaving my bed. Remains my father from whom—indulgent parent—a remittance may be extracted if a proper tale be told ; and this remittance I can discount immediately among the money-lenders. But so shamelessly have I wasted my opportunities in this abode of learning,” he cried, striking his breast in his remorse, “ that I have not so much as learned to write the necessary letter. To thee then I come with my last jewel. Aid me, and the priceless thing is thine. Refuse, and I haul thee by the beard through Zog. And what says the poet ? ”

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Here he ceased suddenly, being unable (so unlettered was he) to call to mind a single couplet that in any way touched the question.

“In any case,” he continued, after a shameful interval, “thou mayest know that I am quite desperate and must drink much wine within the hour. Upon a good letter there will, I understand, be an advance; but it must be a very good one and warranted to move the compassion of a doting sire.”

Yildiz Khan, tossing the turquoise into his coffer, thus made answer:

“Confer with my disciple.” Then he locked the strong box, disposed the key about his person, to me said, “Two hundred words, Bildad,” and incontinently slept.

I desired further instruction of our customer. Not hitherto had this youth employed my master, and it was needful that I should be made acquainted with the tenour of those many other letters with which, in similar case, I made no doubt, he had favoured the miserable old man, his progenitor. Quickly he told me. Already he had used the Dead Professor and the Mourning Suit, the Unlucky Fall and the Grasping Surgeon, the Midnight Robber, the Accidental Loss, the Distressed Friend, the Unaccountable Disappearance, the Pocket with a Hole, the Hospital Contribution, the Retiring Demonstrator and the Mark of Esteem, the Attack of Fever and the Unconscionable Physician, the Removal to New Lodgings, the Aunt's Birthday

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Gift and the Untrustworthy Postal Service, the Supper to a Nobleman, the Sudden Increase of Tutorial Fees, the Conflagration and the Burning of the Books. Nothing seemed left. I said so, though I had a fine device ready. But business is business.

“There must be something,” he said. “No case is utterly desperate, little dog of a letter-writer. Bethink thee that I abysmally crave liquor and, if thou valuest thine ears, invent.”

This was never the mode of address that answered with Bildad. Making as if I plumbed the very depths of my imagination for some novel and shining piece of deception, I gave myself up wholly to meditation upon the excessive distaste with which my client inspired me.

“What crooked-eyed star,” I asked myself, “looked balefully upon the bringing forth of an accursed being that he should be condemned to eat dirt in such overpowering quantities? Is my daily existence not sufficiently nauseating that I must be reviled by this crapulous evildoer? Invent, quotha! Yea, by my beard that is to come! invent will I.”

And with that, inspiration came upon me, the letter-writer vanished, the artist declared himself and, casting away all fear of consequences and all memory of the forms for these cases provided in the *Aid to Letter Writers* and the *Precedents of Ben Ali*, I abandoned my genius to original composition.

After a while, “So be it,” said I. “We shall employ the Entrance Fee to the Exclusive Debating

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Society. And mark you ! this is a wholly new device upon which a fine advance is a certainty ; yet are we giving it to you for a green old turquoise. There should be something for Bildad, over and above."

He threatened me with his open hand. " Write ! " he cried.

So I wrote thus and in no other fashion :

IMPERVIOUS DOTARD,

Yet again approach thine ear for the biting.

As the sand sucks water so do I absorb thy substance, for it is meet that thou, who art old and ugly and past pleasure, shouldst minister to the inordinate capacity for wine and choice meats and the indulgence of the eye of me, thy son, who am young and strong, handsome and the delight of girls. Now, by reason of the Failure of Resources, the Wall of Refusal riseth between me and liquor. Up then, sell such small remnant of land as my importunity hath left unto thee, and remit forthwith, that I may continue to neglect my studies in comfort and not in misery.—THY SON.

" Read," he ordered when I had done writing.

So I delivered myself of the following :

AUTHOR OF MY BEING AND FOREMOST GLORY OF
OUR RACE,

The Sage hath written :

*Fools herd with fools and still more foolish grow.
Frequent the wise and Wisdom thou shalt know.*

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There exists here amongst us a body of choice youths, all of the best blood and of eminent bearing, who unite from time to time in the discussion of large questions. Thy son and servant hath this day been honoured by a proposal to make one of their number, and thy apprehension will readily discover the importance of this invitation. When I say that none but the best is eligible for this most desirable School of Dialectics it will, I trust, so gratify thy heart (because thy son hath been found worthy of the extraordinary honour) that the entrance fee of — shall appear to thee more contemptible than dirt. That the said sum is no light matter to thee I know only too well ; yet have I confidence that once again thou wilt not deny me succour. For to be a member of this favoured body is tantamount to the securing of an honourable and lucrative post. Those in Authority having always an eye to its young men and invariably hastening them into the highest billets so soon as their University hath dismissed them with its blessing. Wholly without trepidation, I await a reply and subscribe myself—first calling upon the all-seeing Allah to crown thy merits with the longest of lives—**THY SON.**

With this account of what I was supposed to have written the youth was well content and paid me for my skill and trouble with many complimentary phrases. Having enquired the sum of which he stood in need and having feigned to fill up with it the fictitious blank amount of the entrance-fee, I handed him the highly offensive letter which I had

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written and wished him a joyful termination to his embarrassments. Whereupon he departed hot-foot towards the Quarter of the Money-lenders.

I had now leisure to bethink me where my indignant precipitation had carried me.

It is the property of Consequences to withhold themselves from the scope of reflection until they are incurred, whereupon they monopolise attention. I had been so intent upon illustrating the dignity and might of the Pen that I had never paused to consider so much as the existence of the Baton. Now, however, the possibilities of that dishonourable weapon came thronging upon my imagination. The truculence, muscle, and vast size of my victim (how unimportant soever his mental equipment might be) suddenly presented themselves as things in no wise contemptible. Gazing upon the great court of the Tirmidzi Caravanserai I seemed now to follow the rapid movements of a certain whimsical young letter-writer from one point of it to another and thence to a third and fourth. And behind him there ran, roaring vengefully, a big-framed fellow who, plying a long and all-searching cane, dealt blows unending and productive of yelps with the utmost vigour of a brawny and intolerable arm. And all about the traders sat applauding and perspiring with laughter and calling out to one another pleasantly, "By my beard, Ali, dost mark the lad's agility?" or, "On my head be it! Yon

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was a shrewd cut," and reciting well-turned couplets appropriate to the occasion.

It was now that a great truth was discovered to me, nor have I ever subsequently found cause to doubt its validity.

Power is the Proper Throne of Dignity.

"At such a moment," I reflected, "my Beef approacheth the purveyor of means. Now the shrof receiveth the letter. Now openeth he it; now doth he read it. Now speaketh he his mind. Now Beef moveth rapidly in this direction. And now I had better bethink me what I shall do."

Calculating the distance which separates the Tirmidzi Caravanseraï from the Quarter of the Money-lenders, I perceived that five minutes was the extreme space of time granted to me in which to settle all my affairs and make my escape from Zog; for never once did it occur to me to abide the chastisement which I had earned for myself. Even though I had no affairs to settle my grace was a short one.

Some Poet has said :

*Since it is not in mortals
always to command the new ;
since 'tis the Thinker's duty
rather to declare the true ;
with twenty million pens let mine remark,
"The hour before the dawn is often preternaturally dark."*

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These incontestable reflections came into my mind as, with glassy glare, rat-in-pit-wise, I searched my environment for some hint of security ; but so little faith in philosophy had my education implanted in my bosom that I received them with annoyance rather than with gratitude. My hour was indeed dark, but the dawn seemed very far away. The student, I made no doubt, was even at that moment urging his legs over the short space of ground which still separated him from the Caravanserai, and I could find nothing more helpful to do than to sit repeating the conspicuous foolishness which twenty million pens and one had sanctified to the use of humanity. I began, beneath my breath (for Yildiz Khan still slumbered and I had learned to dread the disturbance of his siestas) to call down curses upon myself, for my folly, as if I were not already plunged in a quite sufficiently formidable bog of trouble ; but I was not yet in the twenties of my imprecations when I perceived three she-asses coming towards me in the charge of a man who was known to me. One of the beasts this man bestrode ; the other two he drove before him with much cracking of his whip and expenditure of breath in the service of vocal abuse. This was one, Muley Hassan, a donkey-stealer of only moderate repute in the province, since, having an exceedingly jovial disposition, he would drink with anyone and was consequently regarded as a man utterly devoid of religion. In person he was gigantic and for muscular power a very Rustam. I

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believed him to possess a kind heart because on one occasion he had permitted me, passing at the moment by his booth, to assume a sweetmeat which had fallen into the dust from between his fingers, rendered powerless by just recent gorging of similar dainties. I had always, therefore, regarded him in the light of a benefactor, and though I acknowledged myself to be totally unknown to him, I did not hesitate to welcome his appearance on this occasion as an omen of the very best kind ; for what says Fuzz ?

*A Favour is a Dragon's Tooth
the which thou, Wise, shalt never sow ;
for thou shalt reap—and this is truth—
a Pensioner if not a Foe.*

As my position warned me to make no more enemies than those whom I already possessed and as I was in acute need of a protector, my choice between the alternatives offered, on written authority, to the recipients of benefactions could not be a matter of much doubt. The great size and strength of Muley Hassan provided the casting influence. Rising from my place I approached the ass-abstractor and addressed to him the following petition :

“ Self-abnegating Sublimity—Deign to move those eyes, that slay through steel lattice-work, in the direction of the cockroach that, in imitation of a certain toothsome bolus, long since forgotten by Your Superabundance, but treasured, first in the

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stomach of the aforesaid insect and afterwards to eternity in the Digestion of its Gratitude, now abases itself before You. Do you happen to want a handy lad to help you in your business ? ”

Muley Hassan stroked his beard and regarded me without any pleasure. “ No,” he said at last. I continued :

“ Compassionate Generosity—The sand-like benevolences of your hand may not hope to be stored up in a heart which is careless of such things as is the cloud which drops moisture upon the craving soil. But, disregarding all claim which this black-beetle hath to your formerly-stirred commiseration, let once again the melting mood possess you, give your bowels of mercy leave to stir towards your slave, and accept his assurance that he is in serious peril of personal chastisement. Do you not, then, happen to want a handy lad to help you in your business ? ”

“ No,” said the man of mokes for the second time.

Perceiving that I must quickly persuade him or my Student would be upon me, I decided to abandon all flowers of speech and come to the point.

“ I can,” I said, “ write the very script of Omar the Farrier. Take me and you will have no more trouble with your warranties.”

“ By my whiskers ! ” said Muley Hassan, “ why didn't you say so before ? ” Then, pointing to the second ass—“ Jump up on Zuleika,” he concluded,

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and never was one of the long-eared and patient more speedily bestridden than was that she-ass by Bildad.

At this identical moment—for it was so near a thing as that—entered the courtyard of the Caravan-serai my Student, armed with a horrid great kourbash and calling vengefully for a certain little Son of Satan. His anger was so great and his impetus so violent that the two of them carried him up to within three yards of Zuleika's nose before he understood that Muley Hassan barred his path to the intended administratee of the thumping of which his whole soul agonised to ease itself.

Muley Hassan, however, checking the forward movement of the donkey which was beneath him and permitting his feet to come to the earth, rose suddenly, vast and horrifying, to his full stature of four cubits one span, and stretching out over the head of the astounded Student a fist of the exact dimensions and weight of a wine cask, he uttered, as a clap of thunder speaks, the solitary word, "Be-gone!"

The appetite of the person who lusted to cut me into small pieces with reiterated strokes of a kourbash was now at once lost to him. He seemed to shrink up as shriveleth the green and juicy bladeling before the might of Sol; yet did he find manhood within himself sufficient for a protest. In a voice made ludicrous and as that of a mouse by reason of

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affright he stammered, "But the scrivening brat in shameful wise hath done me in."

"I see," said Muley Hassan, "no more than one to whom the scrivening epithet can be applied with justice, and if he is a brat let the long white beard of him declare." Here he pointed to Yildiz Khan, recumbent and plunged in profoundest sleep. "And now, young Devil," he continued, "give way or I tread thee into unrecognisability."

"Oh, Fool," said I, "bethink thee upon the Julian maxim '*Qui facit per alium, facit per se*,' which is to say, 'The master shall receive the castigation which the servant hath earned.' Yonder venerable weak sleeper I offer to your consideration as the only person (since I am now no longer what I was when last we met, but rather this divine ass-merchant's secretary) entitled to endure the eruption of your displeasure. I may also suggest that you will hardly find him in a situation more excellently designed to assist you in your intentions towards him. You may pulp the old man before he shall be well awake, for he is, on my head be it! a heavy sleeper."

Whether my unanswerable legal argument had weight with the kourbash-bearing numskull (which I cannot think) or whether the absolute necessity which was upon him of administering a drubbing made him careless as to the identity of its donee, (which is more probable) certain it is that, without another word wasted, that Student sprang upon the ancient whose service I had but a moment earlier

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quitted and, strongly knotting his left hand among the cascade of silver which lay upon the old gentleman's bosom, began to belabour Yildiz Khan athwart and alongst, after the manner of a servant who strikes the dust from a carpet in the courtyard of a house which his master hath hired for a season, furnished, from some other citizen. As my new employer, his donkeys, and his Secretary passed through the gate of the Caravanserai, these ears were witnesses of an indescribable hullabaloo, these eyes of a most scandalous and abominable breach of the peace; and in the gate the merchants who there were seated spake to one another saying, "*Billah!* how the old thief scratches!" and, "*Wellah!* what is this?" and laughter was beginning to go up furiously from their throats and they were all mopping their cheeks by reason of hilarious emotion. But as for me I passed on and, so, forth, in security, from Zog, Home of My Fathers, Pearl City of the Lower Maraudistan.

We proceeded in perfect silence for as much as two miles and I was thus accorded leisure to consider a little the situation into which an unprofessional sense of comedy, impulsively indulged, had hurried me. The proportions of the person to whose enormous hands I had committed my destinies began now to inspire within me other sentiments than they had hitherto suggested. Whereas in the Caravanserai Muley Hassan, by his stupendousness,

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had caused me to regard him as a Tower of Refuge, now that the danger had passed me by, leaving me scatheless, this very large man quickly assumed in my eyes an altogether different aspect. Something of his violent character I knew by repute, something I had seen, and it was with nothing like confidence in my freedom from oppression that I was able to view my future. Beside the moderate buffetings which it had been mine to endure at the hands of Yildiz Khan, beside the handsome bastonade which my Student would doubtless have handed out to me, the species of massacre which I might look to undergo should I incur the displeasure of my new *padrone* caused my flesh to crawl merely to think of it. I endeavoured to bring to mind some poetry which should encourage me to a more optimistic facing of the future, but only the following excerpts from the Sixtieth Volume of the sage Brachmann rewarded my efforts :

*How easily our need
turns Good to Evil
and seems to make us read
for "Allah"—"Devil!"*

The second was less profound but no more helpful :

*An egg lay boiling in a pot.
"This is uncomfortably hot,"
it said, and leaped into the fire,
and wished to Goodness it had not.*

"Well," I said to myself, "if that's all that an

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Education can do for one, give me Ignorance. My Ancestor of Job's day could have proved himself no less satisfactory a confidant," and I began bitterly to regret the many hours which I had spent in memorising philosophical couplets and quatrains in the belief that I was arming myself to confront any assaults which Fortune should elect to levy against me during the rest of my days. And even as I was so engaged came at last something which resembled a word of cheer. Its author, as I need hardly remind the cultured and polite person who holds this book in his left hand while with his right he conceals the yawn which I am fortunately in no danger of perceiving, is the venerable Labíd, and it runs as follows :

*When bursts the wine-skin in the nomad's tent,
twice lost the liquor that his tears lament.*

"Yes," I reflected, "that is true enough to be enshrined in verse." And instantly I remembered the words of Malik Uz :

*Fool, who thy coffee, from thy cup, knocked over,
disjected, hopeth, weeping, to recover !*

And these, whose author I have never been able to trace, though I know him to be a modern :

*When milk is spilt the man who cries
is very far from very wise.*

"Poetry," I reflected, "being the most satis-

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factory crucible yet discovered for transmuting the dross of commonplace into the pure gold of a paying proposition, if so many poets have said the same thing in so many different ways, it is odds that they have some kind of warrant for their conduct in a firmly established general consensus of opinion, among their audience, relating to the truth of the statement. It is the poet's mission to crystallise the thought of his age, and as these three representatives of the melodious choir were born with at least six centuries of years separating the first from the third, one seems to perceive that this belief in the inefficacy of tears as a help in time of trouble is as ancient as it is, on that account, likely to be true. Come then," I said to myself, "let us not meet woe half-way, brother Bildad, but rather put a cheerful face on the matter and hope that that brawny scoundrel in front there will be pleased to keep his hands off us until we can find an opportunity, which the present moment does not offer, of escaping from him."

The thought which I have just written down was hardly formulated in my mind when Muley Hassan halted his donkey, and having permitted me to arrive at his side, spoke as follows :

"Cub of a mongrel she-badger. I did myself a moment ago the dishonour to address you, but so far your voice in reply has not reached my ears. To stimulate you to a keener vigilance in the matter of

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your master's bidding, accept with my compliments—THIS." As he howled the last word he, with his open palm, hit me a buffet on the side of the head which fetched me out of my saddle and caused me to fly some yards across the roadway, and I verily believe, so stark was the jolt, that had not a bush, well provided with long and sharp thorns, happened to receive me, I should still be travelling onwards in obedience to the driving power of that terrific propulsion.

While I tore myself painfully and not without much laceration of the body from the detaining influence of those thorns, the big coward sat regarding me with a stony glare: he was not apparently so much as amused by my struggles. "So," I reflected as I writhed myself towards freedom, "my premonition was a just one. I have fallen into bad hands, it seems. To attempt to run away from those long legs were useless; to resent what has been done were madness; to dream of an immediate revenge were laughable. The choice of Abbashein is offered me and I would do better to accept it, smiling." I therefore began to laugh as loudly as the tears which choked my utterance would permit, and, having detached the last shred of my clothing and the last piece of my skin simultaneously from the bush, I sprang towards my oppressor with an alert mien and a pretty cheerful expression and, kneeling before him, took his foot between my hands, kissed it rapturously, and said:

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Adorably Benign—If the contemplation of Your Splendour, even from the rear, has so abstracted my other senses that only my eyes remained to me and my ears forsook their office, blame not your slave so much as your own intolerable majesty. Behold! my sight is now bent more suitably upon the roadway and my hearing is once more under control. Deign therefore to issue your commands and you shall see with what alacrity they shall be executed.

This said, I spread-eagled myself in the dust and so remained.

“Why, Bildad,” he observed, “I perceive that we shall make something of you yet. A cheerful demeanour under correction is of all things that which most becomes an employé; for those who would persuade themselves that the willingness to accept a stipend can coexist with the retention of personal honour are fools. When for money or money’s worth one contracts to obey another he thereby forfeits his right to judge that other’s actions and by implication his own. He becomes a tool and ceases to be a man. A monkey-wrench, for example, which should exhibit a nicety as to the uses to which it should be put, is unthinkable. So with the underling. If, therefore, it pleases me to knock you about, you do well to affect to regard it as a good joke; for thus you allow me to believe that I shall have no further trouble with you and establish a basis upon which a thoroughly pleasant mutual relation may be built up between us. For I can tolerate no nonsense concerning the rights of the

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individual where that individual fills a subordinate office. Remember that we live in Asia, where things are seen as they are. But do not be misled. I would not have you extend what I have said to your own advantage and thereby fall once more into affliction. You may suppose that what applies to you as my subordinate applies to the asses Zuleika, Zenobia, and Zeinab who are yours ; in other words, that while you have no business to resent my blows, they in their turn have none to resent yours. If you have been comforting yourself with any plan for sating your rage against me upon the hides of these poor dumb brutes, dismiss it from your mind at once. They are my property and as such I shall insist on your respecting them. But such little boys as we may encounter, these I abandon to your cruelty without restraint, only warning you to expect no aid from me if your conduct to-themward brings you under the displeasure of their natural protectors. And now that you understand your position, let us get on."

So saying he clucked to Zenobia,—the ass which he rode—and moved onwards, leaving me to mount Zuleika and follow him as best I might, driving Zeinab before me.

Shortly afterwards we began the ascent of those hills which shut in to the South the Vale of Maraudistan, and half an hour later we reached that point from which the last view of Zog is afforded to

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the gaze of travellers upon the Southern road. Here then—not daring to halt—I inwardly, while I glanced back at all the dear surroundings of my childhood which I was leaving, perhaps for ever, spoke the following valediction :

“ Zog, farewell! Lo, I, driven forth from thy beloved walls by the unopposable might of Adverse Circumstance——”

I had got no further than this when I heard my master’s voice pronouncing my name. Deferring therefore for the moment (and, as it transpired, for ever) the formulation of my sentiments concerning my Hegira, I hurried forward to the stirrup of Muley Hassan and requested to be told his pleasure.

“ Bildad,” he said, “ I have a mind to discover the truth of that assertion of thine by which thou didst lately induce me to burden my poor asses with thy society. Thou writest the script of Farrier Omar, sayest thou? Good, so far. In my trade the Door of Bargaining is not always too readily closed, and a well-signed warranty is as Oil to its Hinges. Take thy pen, therefore, and write speedily what I shall pronounce and let it be so done that Omar himself must swear to it. Do this and the shadow of my protection shall rest upon thee, Bildad, not unaccompanied by such wholesome food as shall remain over from my repasts. But fail, and I first beat thee to a jelly and then abandon thee to the vultures.”

By this time I was squatted by the roadside, pen in hand, ink-horn open and paper spread upon my

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knees, I having not failed, in spite of the precipitancy of my departure from Zog, to provide myself with these tools of my profession.

“ To hear,” I responded, “ is to obey. The ears of thy slave hunger for the melody of thy periods. His fingers pant to transmute thy profundities. Thy words shall——”

“ Ass,” said Muley Hassan, and when I seemed somewhat taken aback—“ Write it,” he cried, “ thou spawn of imbecility. Ass, five years old, sound in wind and limb, thoroughly broken to harness, pack, or rider, very suitable for a lady, void of all vice, never known to lie down suddenly in the path of a racing camel, bray at inopportune moments, or to refuse a hill. Name Zuleika. Worth five hundred piastres of anybody’s money. Signed Omar ben Harb, of Zog, in the province of Maraudistan, Master Farrier.”

I committed these words to my paper and handed him the result with a confident smile, for though I was wholly unacquainted with the handwriting of Omar ben Harb I was aware that Muley Hassan was a person of only rudimentary education and quite unable to read anything whatever. As the Eminent Jafar Mâlik, First poetaster to the late Khan of Bokhara, has written in the Tenth Book of his *Meditations for the Miserable* :

*When Danger's crag's a-topple, spring from under
nor let thine eye thy path too nicely con.
Better be safe for half-an-hour, by thunder !
Than spend that time as crow's meat carrion.*

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So, with my Student's kourbash whistling, as it were, about my shoulders, I had not been dissuaded from lying stoutly concerning my power of reproducing a certain valuable signature by the reflection that my inability to make my word good must sooner or later be disclosed. "Sufficient unto the minute" is a motto good enough for most of us, and I had trusted to the turning up of something which should save me before, or even when, matters should come to the pinch.

For the moment I was perfectly easy in my mind, for we were in a desert place where no men were, and consequently my new master, owing to the neglected education aforesaid, was in no situation to discover the disingenuousness of which he had been a victim.

He took the paper from me upside down, looked upon it with infinite concentration for the space of thirty seconds, and finally tucked it away among the many folds of his pyjamas, saying no word, good or bad. He then clucked to his mount and continued his road, I following with the other two donkeys.

Towards evening we came to the village of Jali the Blesséd, so called because it was by the local pious geographers felt that no spot of Allah's Earth should be left entirely uncommended. The sufferers who dwell within this dreary kraal, having no washing to do (saving always the formal oblations of the Muslim) live by taking in one another, a profession which, unlike all others, becomes increasingly

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difficult the more it is practised. Strangers, however, they refuse absolutely to enrol among their clients, and my master and I were accordingly constrained to pass on (after spitting, you may be sure) and leave the ugly thorp behind us, with its one dead date-palm, its muddy well, and its pedigreeless inhabitants. This done, by a mile or two, we encamped for the night in a *bunka*, or sandpit, near the road, where, after Muley Hassan had regaled himself and our four-legged wares from the contents of the corn sack and had treated me to a few blows for my supper, we all lay down and passed the night in what comfort or misery we could command.

So ended the first day of my wanderings.

The four which followed it were spent in a manner very similar to that one which preceded them.

On the fifth day we entered the *banlieu* of the prosperous township of Bul-on-the-Bul and our eyes were gladdened, after the aching wastes over which we had come, by the sight of busy streets, humming markets, thronged bazaars, and other stirring scenes. As it appeared to be highly probable that my master might at any minute set about disposing of his asses (it being with this end in view that he had travelled to Bul) and that in all likelihood the entire worthlessness of his fictitious warranty would then be made manifest to him (for Omar's handwriting was very widely known) I began to cast about for some

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means of mingling unobtrusively with the crowd. The truth was that I had had a good deal more than enough of Muley Hassan and was perfectly convinced that by no conceivable course of conduct could I worsen my lot save by remaining in his company.

But whereas, in the country, he had always led our march, as became what he supposed to be his dignity, now, and for the precisely similar reason, he sent me ahead of him with Zuleika and Zeinab as it were to clear his path. I imagine that the possession of a slave had to some degree turned the wretch's unstable brains, for he bade me shout, "Way! Way there for my master, the celebrated Muley Hassan!" which would have been highly becoming in the precursor of a pasha, but in the case of our ludicrous donkey-train could only be provocative of grins, mockery, abuse, or the turning of the deaf ear. I found myself, therefore, threatened on all sides and in a very horrible condition indeed. Did I cry as my master bid me, I evoked the hostility, most freely and often and painfully expressed, of the populace. Did I abate in the smallest degree my preposterous clamour, the long and pointed (acutely) stick of Muley Hassan advised me of his wishes in this matter of my bellowings.

But

Dire Necessity, Mother of all Wile,
as Uff the Sybarite hath profoundly named her,
suggested to me that by demanding passage for my
master on a high note of agony I should perhaps

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excite the pity of the people, and at the same time satisfy the Pomposity that rode behind me ; and this course I took with so much success that I arrived, bruised indeed and breathless, but actually unslaughtered, at the entrance of the Courtyard of the Camel-copers, where Muley Hassan proposed to lodge.

My master's first concern was to eat, and to this end he gave orders at the cook-shop of our Caravan-serai to furnish him instantly with a sucking lamb, two pigeons, fish from the Bul river, with rice, eggs, cardamoms and peppers, sweetmeats galore, all sorts of fruit and the purple wine of Shiraz in a goat-skin. He then summoned a musician and incited him, with fair promises, to ardent thrumming and determined vocalisation. Then, throned upon saddle-bags in his archway, he gave free rein to his self-indulgence and for two hours by the water-clock on the tower of the courtyard stuffed himself busily while the tears of his gladness coursed down his cheeks in rivers. Meanwhile the three asses did themselves royally upon their own form of victual. As for poor pilgarlic, he remained a little way off and meditated upon the hideous nature of his destiny, catching for his portion, from time to time, some sorry bone, whether of beast, bird, or fish, that was jerked in his direction.

Truly we had come through horrid hardships and would doubtless encounter many more of them. My master's extravagances were therefore no more than

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proper. For as the Wazir Hakim ibn Hizâm once said wittily to his Sultan during a contest of impromptus :

*Good cheer to-day. To-morrow dearth.
Then dine to-day for all you're worth ;
that memory of to-day your sorrow
may comfort when you starve to-morrow.*

The poet Ten-i-shahn was much less truly inspired when he wrote :

*Since the sorrow's crown of sorrows is remembering happier things,
always live on bread and water ; throw away your chicken wings.*

Such a philosophy would reduce life to a wholly absurd business wherein those who can command much happiness reject it lest some day they be reduced in circumstances and so add regret to discomfort. How vastly more sane and admirable is the rule of life which enjoins a present unrestrained self-indulgence as the best consolation for a future forced abstemiousness ! Were I to be brought to-morrow to a crust it would be sweetened, I swear, by the consciousness that I had never failed, where I found occasion, to cram myself to the capacity. All the goats, chickens, oxen, and other esculent creatures which have passed, through the years, down my gullet would rise up, visionary, before me, and bleat, cluck, low, and in other ways express their

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gratification that I had shirked in no case the doing of my best by them.

But though I can now praise the wisdom of Muley Hassan's conduct on this occasion, it is not to be supposed that I thought equally highly of it at the time. Indeed my soul was filled with loathing of the foul thief, and whereas his eyes gently overflowed by reason of the utterness of his satisfaction, mine streamed like the snows of Himalaya in summer through sheer despair at my inferior situation. My mouth at the same time watered so intolerably for the delicacies of his table that I was like to dissolve away altogether after the manner of the heathen goddess Niobe.

All at once I became aware that I was object of the scrutiny of a pompous being in voluminous robes and a turban of excessive dimensions, who moved, to the accompaniment of three black slaves, upon the surface of the courtyard. He, first beckoning me to approach, demanded the cause of my grief. "For," said he, "I am the person appointed for the maintenance of order here, and thy disorder is of so manifest a quality that I conceive myself concerned therewith."

"Oh, sir," said I, "it is grief for my own horrid wickedness that driveth me thus distracted."

"So?" he observed, stroking his scarlet beard, "So? An uncommon boy!"

"Death," I said, "should have been preferable to

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me, but the flesh is weak and Muley Hassan's goad is strong and very sharp. Were it not so, do you, sir, fancy that I would have consented to forge for him that ass-warranty, in the name of Omar the Farrier of Zog, with which he proposes presently to facilitate the palming off of yonderspavined beast" (I indicated Zuleika) "upon some one of the honest merchants who hither resort searching for flesh of burden."

"What sayest thou?" he cried. "Is such villainy then afoot within my jurisdiction?" and turning to the attendants: "Seize me this lad and his master and bring them instantly before my seat of justice."

In a trice the thing was done. Muley Hassan, surprised, from behind, in the midst of his orgy, was haled away vowing and protesting in the name of Mohammed and all the Caliphs of the Legitimate Line, while rice and raisins dribbled from between his shaking lips. As for me I went without compulsion; nay, rather, I leaped before them all to the place of justice, so exceeding eager was I to square my accounts with this odious oppressor of my youth and innocence.

Hatred is a beast concerning which let none predict with any assurance. A paltry this or an insignificant that shall rouse it in a moment; by another nothing shall it be as quickly quenched. I have known a man, apparently incapable of this passion, in whom it suddenly was born in overwhelming strength (so that he slew and hanged) at his careless

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correction, by the first of his friends, on a wholly unimportant point of table etiquette. A deep wrong we can forgive readily enough, but the small slight rouses us to savagery. Rob a man of his fortune rather than question his knowledge of the usages of polite society. Call a man to his face a thief, but not a bore. Laugh at his religion, but never at his taste in clothes. Accuse him of high treason rather than of tactlessness. Alienate the affection of his wife, but allow him to be a judge of liquor.

And so, the many hardships that I had suffered at the hands of my ass-dealer, though they had caused me eagerly to desire a separation, were all impotent to drive me into that fury of hate which the single act of eating a really good dinner before my eyes (and I hungry) had roused within me, blinding me entirely to the danger which, by confession of my forgery, I should myself run, and in truth to every other consideration save the destruction of my enemy. In the desert I had fed exceeding scantily on kicks, with a few grains of mouldy corn for dessert, but Muley Hassan had fared with frugality. Now I had gnawed bones (a great improvement on the desert corn) but he had gorged himself to blindness with the best of everything. Starvation and blows in the midst of starvation I could endure and desire nothing save to escape; but when it came to dining on broken meats while my master so gloriously guzzled, I was no longer oppressed, but mocked, insulted, and

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converted into a whet for appetite, and the desertion of my horrible companion was no longer enough for me. His utter undoing could alone content me. To achieve so much I was ready myself to be undone twenty times over.

A word to the Unwise.

Beware, ye Arrogant and Rich, how ye revel in public! These your orgiastic enterprises are marked by Eyes where the Spark of Hate slowly smouldereth against the day that is called "The Roaring of the Flames."

"Gaol me this ruffian," said our judge, pointing to Muley Hassan, "and bastinado me him once a week for seven years. Sell me also his beasts to pay the costs of these proceedings."

The case had been tried and thus concluded. Indeed the evidence against Muley Hassan was altogether too damning. The false warranty would have been enough, had not my passionate protestations of innocence, save in the matter of yielding to the threat of torture and death, weighted the balance even more certainly against the coper of donkeys.

He was led away and I was rid of him.

"And what of the boy?" enquired some assistant

"The boy," said our judge. "Ah, and what of the boy?" He pondered a moment while I asked myself whether I should be awarded six or perhaps even ten darheems for my public spirit.

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At length the arbiter of my destiny spoke, stroking always his brilliant and benevolent beard.

“ Kick him out,” he said, and before I had time to gasp the sentence was executed and I found myself upon the public thoroughfare, face downwards.

While I strove to recall the names of no less than thirty thousand sacksful of devils, the rotund accents of a highly cultivated voice spoke the following lines :

*All earthly things are vain. Poor worm, thy lot
more enviable by far, I find, than theirs
who by possessions multiply their cares.
The rich are rich, but rich I ask, in what ?
In trash, in nothing. On the other hand
thou poor in nothing art ; which is to say
that thou art really richer far than they,
though they be named the wealthiest in the land.*

At the same time a foot turned me over and I found myself being examined, not without apparent distaste, by a thin little young gentleman whose clothing and jewellery, no less than his large retinue of well-dressed servants, proclaimed him a person of considerable means. From these persons loud cries were proceeding indicative of the extravagant admiration which the verses had occasioned in their bosoms.

“ Rise,” he continued, when these demonstrations had somewhat subsided. “ Rise and bless the lucky chance that cast thee at the feet of Hosein ibn Soob to be the inspiration of an impromptu. Is it



"GAOL ME THIS RUFFIAN," SAID OUR JUDGE

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written ? ” he added to one who stood by, busily inscribing, and attired in a gown of a blue colour, one among several.

For answer the page was set between his fingers, whereupon he read it all aloud, made one small emendation, read it all again, and returned it to its proper guardian. A subservient murmur greeted the recital of the improved version.

“ Give this boy some money,” he said, “ he has deserved well of his country. Our Letters are richer than they were. Give him a great deal of money Give him sixpence ! ” He made to pass on.

I threw myself before him in the dust and wailed :

“ Not money, oh my lord, not money.”

“ *Tiens !* ” he said in French, “ what then, thou uncommon little rascal ? ”

“ I am poor enough, my lord,” I said, “ no money, then, but leave to quaff daily at the spring of thy incomparable wisdom.”

“ By my beard,” he cried, stroking his shaven chin, “ but the brat hath wit. No money ; I am poor enough, quo’ he ! Thou hast, then, understood my poetry ? *Hein ?* ”

“ My lord,” I said, “ I dare to dream that its superficialities has perhaps been penetrated by these shallow wits. Its profundities, however, are doubtless beyond the power of any but thine own sapience to fathom.”

He smiled upon me, while sour looks appeared upon the faces of his retinue. These faces, on his

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turning to address their owners, where they stood just behind him, were miraculously discovered to be reflecting his own delight.

“What,” he demanded, “is to be done with such a *coquin*?”

As no one ventured to suggest drowning (which every man of them thought too good for me) he continued: “There are brains behind his monkey’s face, or I am betrayed. *Nom d’un poulet rôti!* Could he but wield the pen, I would make him a Secretary.”

“But since,” said one of those attendants (a fat scoundrel with an infinity of chins) “since the scurvy youngster cannot, my lord, I am persuaded, so much as write his name, let my lord concern himself no further with such an abject.”

Upon this I drew out my pen, ink-horn and paper, and, “Dictate, my lord,” I cried, squatting to position and poisoning my inked weapon. “Dictate and it shall be written.” Now were the faces very, very black that stood out of range of the master’s eye, for a new favourite is The Enemy Himself and every one of the knaves trembled for his own place.

“*Sapristi!*” cried my gentleman, evidently delighted. “Mark me the child with his implements all ready. *Wellah!* there is no avoiding his service. Come, let us test thee. Hm! Ha! Ho! Ho! Hm! Ha!” He placed the point of his forefinger against his brow, rolled up his eyes, frowned hideously for the matter of ten minutes, and at

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length delivered himself of the following rubbishy jingle :

*If my words he is swift to indite
his fortunes are remedied quite ;
for I'll make him a scribe
of the fortunate tribe
who for Hosein exclusively write.*

At once the applause broke out anew from the group of attendants. Arms were waved in the air ; the name of Allah was taken upon every lip, and scraps of the latest bud upon this tree of versification were repeated in tones that seemed to evidence an unbounded wonder. As for me, I did my part with all the skill and speed of which I was master, and so well did I succeed, that the last words had barely been pronounced ere I had sanded my copy and placed it within the bejewelled fingers that awaited it.

He read it aloud in a voice of eminent satisfaction and once more the praises of his hirelings made music for his ears.

“ *Parbleu !* ” he said, “ thy future is assured. Nowfal,” he added, reaching out the paper to the fellow who had written down the previous effusion, “ take this and place it in the Section devoted to the fruits of my lighter moments, the Section called ‘ *Thistledown.* ’ And see that this lad is furnished with a lodging, his uniform, and rations. And look to it that he be well treated, Nowfal. He is thy master, Nowfal, in the use of his weapons ; and by the

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knuckles of the Prophet ! if he come to any harm among the Secretaries, our friend Kab shall accommodate the lot of ye." He said this very dreadfully and those who wore blue gowns all obsequiously showed their chattering teeth, while a tall oiled negro, who carried a sword only a little more naked than himself, hastened to the side of his employer. This was Kab the private headsman.

But he was waved away and we all felt better.

Thus did I enter the service of Prince Hosein ibn Soob, wittol, *soi disant* artist, and third son to the Ruler of Bul-on-the-Bul, fairest of Cities ; and thus were exemplified the words of Zoheir, that sturdy old professional, which are to be found in the Third Book of his *Preferences* :

*Better on husks with swine
but once a week to dine
than with the tedious tribe of diletanti
to live on oysters, venison, and chianti.*

For, oh, my friends ! poor Bildad was now secretary to an amateur poet, painter, playwright, musician, and sculptor, who was endowed with the power of life and death over others by reason of his third sonship to the tyrant of Bul.

And so it was that in the midst of that partial ease, which was henceforward for some little time my ignoble portion, I often dwelt regretfully upon my memories of Zuleika and Zeinab and Zenobia, the desert march, the supper of cuts and kicks, and the

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brutal voice of Muley Hassan, yelling to me to hasten.

Our procession now made its way through several streets and an immense deal of popular terror very passably disguised as affectionate enthusiasm, and came presently to a gateway in a high wall, through which, filing, it found itself in the gardens of the Palace. Immediately we entered the Prince's apartments and here were brought to him certain carpets, ivories, pieces of painted leather, pictures and other valuable objects in respect of which he had that morning been adding to his indebtedness to the tradesmen of the city. For Hosein ibn Soob, as became a dabbler in the arts, was a connoisseur and collector of rarities, and, after the manner of this breed, lived persuaded that his noble patronage was of very much more significance to those with whom he dealt than his cash. He may be said to have made currency of Royal Warrants, and while there was hardly a merchant of the town who was unable to boast (if he had the heart to do so) that Prince Hosein was a regular customer, it would have passed the wit of the cleverest police spy to discover one of them who would not have bartered this advantage for a five per cent. composition of his claims on the princely purse. But the great are used to ingratitude, and if Hosein ever suspected the dismay which his expeditions in search of rarities occasioned among the ranks of the shopmen, he never let anyone

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perceive it, but continued to shower favours of the kind upon all and sundry as if he were indeed the dupe of the universal satisfaction which seemed to greet his forays.

The Historian and Romance-writer Khattâb, who sometimes diverted his leisure with the stringing of inferior rhymes, has put the point not altogether ill, as follows, in the *Book of Preferences* which he compiled in imitation of that work hereinbefore mentioned of the wise man Zoheir :

*Better by far to nurse a humble clientèle
and gnaw a daily crust
than, as purveyor to the Great, with pride to swell
until you, swelling, bust.*

As is well known, the poor man had reason to believe his own words, for while the list of subscribers to the monumental work on which he was engaged for twenty years was perhaps the most imposing that has ever been put forth, the sum which he subsequently extracted from the united pockets of those persons proved insufficient to pay for the expenses of his writing materials.

After the Prince had taken his pleasure in regarding the many fine objects which he had acquired on such advantageous terms, he commanded them to be taken away, the best to his private storehouse and those of which he thought less to the Municipal Museum of which he was an enthusiastic friend, thereby saving himself a great deal of trouble. The

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Plunderers of the People have always understood that, in order to be tolerated, they do well to make restitution in some part of their winnings, whether by contributions to mosques, hospitals, universities and the like, or by presenting to the Shrines of Art such notable collections as they may have formed in their spare moments. And this they do commonly at the ends of their lives what time they feel the need upon them of acquiring merit, and a title belike, which shall stand them in stead when Allah separates his herd (for how shall a Baron be lightly added to a flock of unclean goats?).

Prince Hosein, however, had no need of titles and his birth had placed him among those who take their own merit for granted. Why then should he waste his time in laboriously completing a collection? Far simpler was it in his eyes (and in mine) to send straight to the Museum such objects of virtue as, having brought them home with him from his excursions among the dealers, he, on second thoughts, decided to discard—doubtful masters, flawed intaglios, and the like—while in his treasure-chamber he bestowed everything that proved authentic. Thus he reaped at once riches and the regular praise of men and a reputation for a perfect connoisseurship.

The inspection, the selection, and the rejection being at an end, a repast was served consisting of all the delicacies which would not be in season for

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another nine months, as is customary among the very wealthy, who are compelled by their position to value food according to its inaccessibility rather than for its flavour.

Of whom it hath been written :

*They never dream
of eating the delicious trout
that came, an hour ago, from out
some neighbouring stream ;
but prize the sole from Dover Strait,
yea, though it come a month too late.*

The meal was washed down with wines of rare vintage, Prince Hosein having spent a year in Paris during his adolescence (he was attached to the Embassy there) and having thus acquired a certain toleration for some of the more obvious doctrines of Christianity.

Music accompanied his assaults upon viand and liquor ; lovely girls wreathed in veils of hyacinth gauze danced and postured for the delight of his eyes ; his own verses were read to him in a soothing voice by one of his secretaries ; all sorts of perfumes were let loose from all sorts of alabaster boxes ; a juggler performed prodigies ; and a blue cat was brought for him to stroke. In short, every sense was wooed, first in turn and then simultaneously, and since all the while he jested and laughed with certain young gentlemen of the Court and seemed to pay no attention to what was happening about him,

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it was perfectly clear that he was a person of the ultimate refinement. Had any proof of this been wanting it was furnished by the circumstance that from time to time he threw bones, nuts, and other objects at the performers.

At length the dishes were removed, prepared hookahs were advanced, and the company gave itself over to the spell of tobacco scented with rose-water, ambergris, and other odours. Prince Hosein assumed the lute and sang deplorably in a deplorable voice deplorable verses of his own deplorable composition, accompanied by deplorable music which he himself deplorably had devised. He then made some knock-kneed sketches in charcoal, modelled something like a lion in wax, and otherwise exhibited his second rate versatility, while around him hands were raised into the air and strenuous *billahs* of admiration and amazement resounded through the chamber. Nor was this deponent's voice the least active and clamorous, though through his memory was running, over and over again repeated, a couplet of the divine Shagrân :

*Power to excel in every art
is his who head from neck can part.*

I suppose that my enthusiasm was pleasing to the gentleman (as it was most assuredly intended to be) for he beckoned me presently to his side whither my active young legs carried me with the speed of an arrow, thought, lightning, or any among a score of

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other things which the reader, if only he have some slight acquaintance with letters, will be as easily able to name as I.

And here I may observe that the made phrase, while it has placed Fine Writing within the capacity of everyone to achieve, is not on that account wholly to be condemned ; for it is capable, if rightly appreciated, of shortening by a great deal the labour of those who, having set up as oracles and judges and tasters of literature for the public, are compelled to peruse the works of the majority of our modern writers (I speak of my native land) by making it unnecessary for them to examine more than a very few words here and there, and yet possess as much knowledge of what has been set down as if they had not missed a letter. For instance, read only the words in the following example which are printed in ordinary type and I engage that you shall be able to declare what is in italics without having seen a word of it and without proving wrong in one single particular.

Her hair was black *as night*, her eyes *like sloes*, her teeth *like pearls*, and her lips *like cherries*. She was straight *as a dart*, active *as a cat*, in short *the personification of youth, grace, and beauty*. Lastly she was chaste *as Diana*, wise *as Minerva*, and calm *as a mill-pond*.

This method of reading a book would shorten the labours of many honest men had they not already

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devised a plan still more satisfactory as an abbreviator of toil, and that is not to read any of the book at all, but to form their judgment of it (high or low) upon the basis of the amount of money which its author is prepared to slip into their palms.

Always I speak of my native land.

But to my tale—since Digression, while it adds to the weight of books and so to their value as articles of commerce, is, like other forms of adulteration, to be indulged in only up to the limit where the consumer's displeasure is to be apprehended.

The Prince, then, addressed me as follows :

“ Thy name, *petit garnament* ? ”

“ My lord,” said I, prostrating myself, “ may the molecule which the Sun hath absorbed continue to insist upon a personal identity ? ”

“ *Tiens ! Tiens !* ” said he, smiling with pleasure (and the grinding of the teeth of all who stood around was as music to my ears). “ *Tiens ! Tiens !* ” he repeated, “ but let it make the effort, none the less.”

“ To hear, lord,” said I, “ is to obey. Bildad was my name before I dared to assume the appellation of Thy Slave.”

“ Look ye,” said he, nodding to his entourage, “ how nimble is this little knave's tongue. As Allah is my witness, there is here the makings of a very perfect amanuensis. *Nom d'un nom d'un nom d'un nom d'un nom d'un nom !* 'Tis a pearl that I

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have rescued from the gutter. What say you, Nowfal ? ”

The Chief Secretary smiled as smiles a skull, and said, “ A pearl,” and the rest of the assistants murmured “ A pearl, a pearl, a pearl among Secretaries,” while their toes opened and closed by reason of the hatred which I inspired in their bosoms.

“ Lord,” said I, “ a dried pea that my Lord honoureth shall rank even with pearls. For what saith Wuzz ?

*A piece of paper by the Prince imprinted,
may match the mohur from the mint new minted.*

“ True,” said he, “ and what is the conclusion of that verse which thy discretion forbids thee to pronounce ? *N'est ce pas ?* ”

*But let Mischance 'minish the Monarch's might ;
then is his paper in a parlous plight.*

which is as much as to say that thou fearest devilishly for thy life, friend Bildad, if I stand not between thyself and envy. Is it not so ? Hah ? ”

Seldom has memory more luckily failed me. I could not have concluded that Wuzz piece had my salvation depended on it ; yet because my ignorance fed the Prince's self-esteem he was unable to believe it to be aught but dexterity. I could not have appeared more gracefully to compliment his erudition had I devoted six years to the task of producing something acceptable. Yea, the golden nature of

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silence can seldom have been more signally exemplified.

“ Lord,” said I, “ it is written, ‘ *Majesty slayeth with a transient smile.*’ ”

“ *N’aie pas peur*, Bildad,” said he, “ and if thou *shouldst* chance to come to any harm I entreat thy shade to tarry here a while, for it shall see that which shall greatly rejoice it. I mean,” he added silkily, “ in the way of flayings alive and amusements of the sort, *que diable!* Was that heard?” he shouted with such sudden shocking violence that the knees of all the bystanders were loosened and they fell forward on their faces, while a murmuring went up from them which I take to have signified that they understood.

“ And so, thou Nowfal,” said the Prince, yawning, “ take away and set to its duties this which hath occupied too much of my notice already. *Quant à moi*, I go to the bath.” With these words he rose and passed behind the curtains, leaving me alone with my new enemies.

The good humour of the Prince had been no less conspicuously manifested towards me than had the apprehensions of his courtiers been noticeable, and I am perhaps hardly to be blamed if, in the ignorance of my youth, I regarded myself already as a made man. I believed myself favoured and feared, and what better warrant can be offered to the indulgence of extraordinary hopes? Do we not cast a shadow

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dark in proportion to the brightness with which the sun shines upon us? The scowls and whispering of my companions were (the warning to them directed of the Prince being taken into consideration) sweeter to me than any smiles or congratulations which they could possibly have exhibited. Protected from their assaults, I delighted to recognise in their hostility the sweet announcement of my approaching good fortune. And no doubt it had been so were it not that the Prince, at the same moment that he retired, had dismissed me utterly from his consideration and memory. Perhaps he had truly been pleased with my replies to his questions and my skill, so amply demonstrated, in penmanship; perhaps there had actually flitted across his mind a sort of intention to make use of the abilities which he professed to discover in me; perhaps he had been no more than idly desirous to vex his retinue by seeming to guarantee me in his favour. Who shall declare the mental processes of the Great or who shall discover the springs of their actions? They are thus and not otherwise, and it is as foolish to blame them for forgetting what they have promised as the lowly for remembering what has been promised to them. For self-interest is the only jog to memory that is perfectly to be trusted, and if this be deemed cynicism and revenge be adduced, I may point out that revenge, by satisfying hatred, partaketh decidedly of the nature of self-interest, yes, though the next result of it be crucifixion.

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Let me, then, tarry neither to suggest causes for my patron's affability nor explanations for his abandonment of me, but content myself (though even at this distance of time "content" is a word which I find ill-suited to this place) with observing that if, by his threats, my life had been rendered safer, by his promises (which he neglected) it was made even more than it might have been odious. Henceforth I was a mere Secretary, a writing machine that he had taken into his employment, and I beheld all my glowing hopes of promotion, honour, riches, and opportunities for exercising my caprice upon subordinates, recede daily further and further, paler and more pale, into the regions of the Unattainable.

Verily, as appeareth in the Eighth Book of the *Professions* of Badzan the Blackmailer :

*'Tis good to grasp the Rich Man by the hand
his smiling, flattering promises to hear ;
but better far to have him by the ear
and listen to his squealing. That is grand.*

Had I encountered this piece of divine wisdom before instead of long after my arrival at Bul, I should doubtless have suffered less under a sense of profound disillusionment ; but I was still young and inexperienced, and I will own that it went very hard with me ; and even at this day I cannot dwell upon this betrayal of my hopes without danger to my beard, the few hairs which still cling to my scalp,

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my wives, the furniture, the dog, the crockery—in a word, without something very like an outburst of petulance. And as such things are dangerous for a man of my age and full habit of body, let us pass on.

At this time the chief interest of Prince Hosein was the preparation of a complete and authorised edition of his poetical works. The Prince, as I have said, had spent some years in Europe and had imbibed certain Western ideas. He would surely have taken a printing-press into his service had the prejudices of his father the Sultan permitted it; but the Sultan was old-fashioned and a staunch conservative and could see no merit in books that did not cost enormously. As for newspapers, it was death so much as to import into the Sultanate so much as a tattered sheet for so much as wrapping so much as a parcel. Prince Hosein, therefore, who was minded to float an edition of not less than five hundred, was driven to employ human labour. But as writers were not too plentiful in Bul the work advanced but slowly and at the time of my entering this service there were only one hundred and sixty copies ready for the market. I, as an extra pen, was therefore to the Prince in the nature of a Godsend, and his care for my life becomes at last intelligible. In the case of the other Secretaries my arrival was less welcome, because the Prince had set apart a certain sum (not too sufficient) out of his revenues to meet the cost of his Secretariat in food,

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lodging, and wages, which sum every addition to the staff caused to be distributed a little more thinly, a fact which no one dared to point out to our patron. It was, of course, idle to expect a royal personage to discover anything so elementary for himself.

As Harb the Happy putteth it in his *Aids to the Endurance of a Humble Lot* :

*In the ends of the earth are the eyes of the King,
concerned with the plots of his numerous foes.
Then can we suppose
that His Highness shall also take heed of the thing
which is under his nose ?*

To be brief, I was set to work a-copying and, a-copying, I worked for many days of my young life which for tediousness have never been surpassed ; for the matter which the Secretaries of his Highness were required to transcribe was of a fatuity, believe me ! Only a royal self-confidence could have imagined the perpetuation of such poetry. It would have disgraced a party of schoolboys improvising verses for pastime ; yet fine parchment in acres received it, richest ink was poured out in its service, and a vast amount of skilful penmanship was utterly cast away that it might be made visible to the eye that must inevitably scorn it.

Truly it would seem that if the Lion sets up for singer all the Nightingales may go out of business. Do you suppose there was one single poor devil of another poet about the Court ? Nay, nay. There was not one, or if he existed he hid his light most

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scrupulously under the bushel of some honest livelihood. Hosein was not the man to suffer rivalry. To make amends, however, for this unmelodious desert which he created about himself he filled it to nausea with his own caterwaulings. He was forever at the turning of stanzas and couplets which were no sooner emitted than the Secretariat was required to add them to the mass already set down. The completion of his works and their publication to the world was consequently daily further and further postponed, it being impossible for the scribes to keep pace with him, let them work never so diligently.

Upon inferior verse my memory is incapable of laying hold, though for the true Hippocrene my mind has always been a vat of infinite capacity. The works of Prince Hosein, therefore, though I spent several months in committing them again and again beautifully to lambskin, have all, save one, passed entirely from me ; yet will I set out that one here and now, that this single taste of his quality may give the measure of all. Then there will be no quarrelling with me on the score of my forgetfulness.

ODE TO HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN OF BUL-ON-THE-BUL ON THE OCCASION OF HIS SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY

*Hail to my Royal father,
of Bul the potentate !
For sixty years
have loyal cheers
proclaimed his awful state.*

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Yes, he is sixty, just, to-day.
So let us all unite to say
"Hail to my Royal father!"
Then let the people gather;
within the public square
and sing the National Air.
Let cannon thunder his applause;
and let the town be draped, because
he's sixty,
just sixty
quite sixty years old.
Behold
him there upon his throne,
entirely alone!
His beard is white as winter snow
and reaches both his knees below.
Such is my father royal.
Then shout ye leal and loyal!
Cheer
for my dear
and long lived father!
His deathless deeds let all proclaim,
to let them die were such a shame.
And let the message glad be sent,
from far Bokhara to Tashkent,
that he is sixty
just sixty;
quite sixty to-day.
So let us all unite to say,
"Hail to my Royal Father". . .

and so on *da capo* twice.

It will not have escaped your perspicacity that between the style of the above phenomenon and that which distinguishes the impromptu verse

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which Prince Hosein declaimed over my prostrate form on the occasion when I first came under his notice (*q*—as the commentators say—*v*) there exists some considerable disparity. One could almost believe that they were the fruits of different geniuses; and such is the fact, the Prince in the former case being himself responsible for the lines, in the latter having appropriated (like the gentlemanly amateur that he was) the work of another. This had been a young member of the Secretariat, named Suheib—I say, had been—who, superior to the mere pens, his companions, occasionally indulged a highly dangerous passion for original composition. Being egregious in one thing he was egregious in another and had the temerity to bring certain of his works privately beneath the eye of our master. His end was swift, but, I believe, not painful.

Now if, as a rival poet, this Suheib was not to be tolerated on the premises, as a Source of Inspiration, he was found to be not without his uses. Thus it happens that fifteen poems of Suheib (surnamed the Anonymous) have seen the light, which they would never have done, in all probability, had they not excited at once the jealousy and the cupidity of Prince Hosein. Thus, again, is the rule, that the items of which the volume entitled *Moments Perdus* is composed exhibit a consistent triviality, proved by not less than fifteen exceptions. Thus, finally, is it demonstrated that the enterprise of the rich is the only hope (your true poet's only concern is to be

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read) of the poor far more convincingly than by any two hundred and five editorials of *The Capitalist* in strike time.

For this bit of knowledge I was indebted to Nowfal our Forepen. I believe he had nearly lost his head over this Suheib business, a circumstance which made him, ever afterwards, very careful to explain to any new addition to his staff the vital nature of abstention from poetry-making in the Palace and City of Bul.

“For,” said he to me, speaking low and behind his hand into my ear, “in Bul there is but one poet so long as Hosein is with us, and it is better to recognise the fact than to die by strangulation. Stick then, my son Bildad, to this, thy transcription, in which thy skill is undoubted, and avoid the trickery of rhyme and the mastery of measure, lest thy seams be undone to the scattering of thy sawdust.”

Though self-interest prompted this counsel of my superior much more certainly than anxiety for my welfare, it was to me none the less valuable, a circumstance which the reader has my permission to adduce in support of his case when next, in a company of friends, he shall have occasion (after three or four bottles) to maintain that Egotism is the Highest Form of Altruism. But that which benefits is not always to the taste of the beneficiary, as witness, among a thousand less obvious instances, the refusal by the rich man of food to the

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starving baby, who is thereby saved from pauperisation and is (in many cases eternally) confirmed in that self-respect which is humanity's most priceless possession. And so it was—to employ a phrase commonly on the lips of Prince Hosein—*chez moi*. I recognised that old Nowfal's advice was admirable, but I detested it heartily; and though that care for my own skin which I have always regarded as my first duty to my fellow mortals restrained me for some weeks from attempting anything so dangerous as composition, this violence to the higher dictates of my soul could not, beyond a certain moment, be prolonged.

Let a whole universe of Philistines refuse to admit it; the Artist is not his own master. The Creative Demon rides him at and over every obstacle to his worldly welfare that Prudence denounces. Has he an appointment with a patron at ten in the morning? Does a commission await him, with whose fruit he may be rendered independent of his old drudging mother? Though Prudence thunders in his ear, "Get up!" his Genius, needful of recuperation, holds him to his couch. Is he bidden to some solid dinner of merchants whence profit may be sucked for the maintenance of his wife and twenty-four children? What moment more suitable for his Fancy to urge him into unprofitable debauchery in a tavern at the other end of town? Is it his blame? Not so. Accuse rather within him the scorn of the Divine for the Worldly.

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And that this may be surely known, mark, I pray you, the Reward of Apostasy. By the measure of his revolt from the tyranny of his temperament may the Artist's advance in worldly ease be meted. Does he break his slumbers? Commissions arrive. Does he dine with the stodgy prosperous? His wife and his children bulge. The Traitor hath his reward. He goeth clad in purple and fine linen, his servants multiply, he addeth daily a course to his dinner. Philistia approveth him a wonder; it raineth loaves. As for fishes, it haileth them.

But what say his fellows that he has left behind, the good comrades of the lean but loyal days? Do they too applaud? They do not. By Allah's Rod! they do not. And this is his punishment: that by every foot that he climbeth in the esteem of the Goth, by seventy times as much doth he descend in the opinion of Parnassus, until the moment which sees him finally removed above the competition plunges him definitely beneath the notice of his former friends. It is said of him that he has "arrived," and those, his early admirers, weep that it cannot rather be said, "He hath been buried." But to resume.

At the end of a month and three or four days my spiritual parts were no longer to be denied; the itch to produce became intolerable. Thus what, under happier conditions, had been a noble practice was converted, by reason of the danger to which it

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must expose me, into a veritable cacoëthes ; which proves (if proof of a thing so obvious were required) that the distinction between the good and the bad is entirely non-existent apart from the circumstances of the agent or the patient or both, that morality (as my old Master in Penmanship Yildiz Khan used to maintain) is a shadow, and that convenience is the only guide to, success the only criterion of conduct. The world is slow to abandon its toys and I despair of ever seeing these truths admitted by more than a small minority of men ; but if it saddens us to see no immediate prospect of our solemn treaties being disregarded or our gaols being abolished, let us cheer ourselves by reflecting that Nature has decreed, for her own mysterious ends, that the fools shall always be in the majority.

However—

The moment came at last (as all moments do) when the stilo of the copyist revolted from the transcription of banalities and insisted, against all the vehement utterances of Caution, upon sprouting feathers and assuming the qualities of a Pegasus-quill. In other words I composed four or five quatrains expressive of the contempt with which Prince Hosein and his verses inspired me. They were highly scurrilous and infinitely fraught with danger to their author. They were hastily penned and as hastily destroyed. This latter circumstance

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we need not regret, because they were of no literary value and were utterly unsuited for reproduction in this book, which may find its way—who knows?—into the studies of Anglican clergymen and the boudoirs of their daughters. I mention these rhymes for two reasons only : first because, having once yielded to temptation, I could no longer, whatever its risk, restrain myself from authorship ; and secondly, as an illustration of the advantages which Art confers over those who have it not.

As of all the Secretariat it was given to me alone to perceive the infamy of our task, so to me alone was it given to celebrate in burning satire the absurdities of Prince Hosein. The deeper distress was mine ; yes, but joys whose exquisite nature my surrounding clods could never penetrate were freely at my command. They endured the continuous and unrelieved tedium of the mill-horse ; I, an exasperated infuriation out of which, at will, it was mine to ascend among the gods. They had nothing but the excellence and speed of their penmanship on which to flatter themselves ; but *I* knew myself to be a clever fellow.

I have said that, having once succumbed to the appetite for composition, I was unable henceforth to abstain from the sweet, perilous practice. Had I continued to destroy what I produced, I had been wiser ; but any man of letters will readily understand that anything of the kind was impossible. To sacrifice to my own safety four hastily scrawled,

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ill-constructed, halting, but inexpressibly delicious, abusive, and unrepeatable quatrains was nothing. As an Artist I must have condemned them had not Wisdom counselled the act. They were fruits which my genius could not value, being of the nature of those vigorous wall-inscriptions with which political or religious hostility seeks to alleviate a rancour which it cannot satisfy—"To Eblis," for example, "with the Sheik ul Islam!"

To destroy such verses cost me not a pang. It was otherwise when, as happened next day and every day succeeding, I produced some Ode, Sonnet, Virelai, Triolet, Elegy, or what not, in which, as I could not disguise from myself, the True Quality was more than perceptible.

The spring of melody, so long dammed, by the adversity of Circumstance, within my bosom, having at last found a chink of exit (though that which escaped were no more than a few stanzas of licentious vilification) now gushed forth with quite undeniable strength. I found myself fertile to an unexampled degree and not only fertile but precious; these were no nettles that pushed so vigorously in the soil of my imagination, but the right golden corn of undeniable Ecstasy. I seemed to myself to be compounded exclusively of rhyme, cadence, and original thought. Every incident that I encountered, no matter how trivial, became the inspiration for abounding verse. I knew myself a Poet of the First Water.

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To refrain from capturing every drop of this rare liquor would have been a crime against humanity, and so it became the principal care of my existence to preserve my verses in some tighter receptacle than the leaky vat of my memory. But to do so was no easy matter. Paper and parchment were, to be sure, at my hand in sufficient quantities, but leisure to employ them was almost entirely to seek. Task-masters prowled ever among the Secretariat, their eyes alert to mark the smallest slackening in the pace of production, their long sticks ever prepared to visit with chastisement the shoulders of delinquency. The process of speeding-up has never been more conspicuously exemplified—no, not in the galleys of Rome or Spain—no, not in the stockyards of Chicago or the Model Mills of Industrial England—than among us, the Secretaries in Ordinary to His Highness Hosein ibn Soob. All was upon a smaller scale than the examples which I have noted, but in the article of thoroughness no reproach can be sustained.

You must understand that the Secretariat was clearly divided into two orders—the Transcribers, among whom I was counted, and the Secretaries proper, those, that is to say, who attended our Master, whether in his apartments or upon his excursions, with the object of committing instantly to paper such bubbles of ill savour as should rise from time to time to the surface of that morass of imbecility to which he was wont to allude as “ my

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fancy," " my genius," or " my brains." This band was composed of Nowfal and certain pens who by their dexterity or power of insinuation had captured Nowfal's approval. These were happy in that they escaped the odious business of copying over and over again that which Hosein gave to the world ; but as they were in perpetual danger from some capricious use by the Prince of his faithful servant Kab, the Headsman, the advantages of their lot (I mean fresh air, movement, and the sight of their fellow-men) were fairly balanced by its terrors. Still, I would at any minute have exchanged the secure tedium of my office for the dreadful variety of theirs, but Nowfal, though he saw to it that my existence was not threatened, was much too sagacious to bring me ever again beneath the notice of his employer. I was evidently forgotten and it was not for him to rouse the august recollection concerning one who had given proof of so much wit, daring, and skill with his tools. And so, though I did everything in my power (and it was a great deal more than aught of which my rivals were capable) to secure his friendship by submission, flattery, and other contrivances, he still remained unfriendly, and I, sunk beyond hope in the slough of transcription, was compelled to witness the successful retention of his esteem by sycophants whose capacities were of a kind infinitely smaller than my own.

The knowledge that my degradation was due

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singly to my superiority was very bitter, but it was made almost tolerable by the reflection that, had I been constantly abroad in attendance upon the Prince, I should have found it utterly impossible to commit to writing the orthometric abundance by which I was embarrassed ; whereas, in the Hall of the Transcribers, I was able, by the exercise of prodigious caution and speed, to outwit the watchfulness of our wardens and to cover innumerable fortunate parchments, destined to receive the vapidities of our employer, with my own inconceivably finer productions. These sheets as they were completed I bestowed, as I found opportunity, between my person and my clothing, and at night profited by the darkness to arrange them more compactly and comfortably than the haste of their first bestowal made practical. The quantity of my transcription indeed fell off and the batons of our overseers were used unsparingly upon me ; but since the more I earned of these thumpings the more rapidly I cased myself in protection from them, I was only confirmed in my resolution, hugged my sweet secret to my bosom (also to my back, ribs, loins, and buttocks), and confounded my masters by growing daily fatter under their hail of blows and reproaches, until at length no chastisement, however severe, could make the least impression upon me, and all, transcribers and slave-drivers alike, stood amazed at my fortitude no less than at my steady advance in rotundity.

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I soon became a veritable ball. From head to ankle, from shoulder to wrist, I swelled porpoise-like, shapeless, horrible, and indecent. I rolled through the quarters of the Secretariat a tun, a mass, a mountain. My clothing was tense about me; my stitches threatened to give way. Only from my face, chin, and hands did the inundation of adiposity refrain itself, and this fact added no little to the singularity of my appearance. Above this grotesque bulk my young, lean, delicate head rose at the end of its thin boy's neck like a pea pinned to a pumpkin, and my monstrous arms terminated in slender wrists and fingers, quite appropriate to my tender age but utterly out of keeping with the turgid limbs of which they formed part. It was generally supposed that I suffered from elephantiasis.

And still my inspiration flowed, still I neglected my legitimate tasks in favour of furtive original composition, still my corpulence increased. Soon, it was clear to me, my attire, by bursting in all directions, must betray the true nature of these mysterious accretions and deliver me over to the office of Kab; yet the fear of death and torture had no power to restrain my productiveness. I was at the orders of Something stronger than that instinct of Self Preservation which, we are told, is the First Law of Nature. Indeed I presented a striking example of the truth that it is Art which truly distinguishes Man from the rest of the Animal Creation. No beast could have flown (or should I

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not rather say waddled?) with such persistence in the face of its own safety. I was perfectly aware of the danger which I ran (or shambled) yet my poetic rage would not be denied; and though I knew that my discovery would practically synchronise with my destruction, I could no more help hastening the fatal moment by every means at my command than I could have pretended (without stripping) to pass through the eye of a needle. It was a folly, if you please, but it was divine and I glory in it; and I entreat any young poet who may have incurred, by the publication of some slim volume, the mockery of his acquaintance, the hostility of his sire, and the contempt of the reviewers, to comfort himself, in his loneliness, penury, and disappointment, with the reflection that he has ranged himself definitely on the side of the Angels, and see in the death by starvation which awaits him only a convenient method of attaching himself forever to their Society.

But what is written in the *Commonplaces* of Kush the Continuous? I profess that I forget, but it is very much the same as is to be found (by those who care to seek) in the *Platitudes* of Punkah the Persistent. The quatrain runs thus:

*Thy Book of Destiny's a varied text,
of terror and of glad surprise complex;
and what condemns thee at one page's foot
may save thee when thou turnest to the next.*

And so it was with Bildad at this crisis in his affairs.

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On the very afternoon when, according to any reasonable calculation, one further addition to my concealed manuscripts must have resulted in a sort of explosion, our dilettante Prince suddenly appears among us, leaning on the arm of a certain jolly-looking old fellow, sumptuously attired, who, as I subsequently learned, was none other than His Excellency, Obeidallah ibn Othman, brother-in-law of the Sultan of Bul and consequently uncle to our Master, now just returned from an important embassy to a distant court in Central Asia, where with the utmost distinction he had spent several months in achieving nothing whatever. Prince Hosein, with a view to securing this influential name upon his list of subscribers, had invited him to dinner and, after stuffing him with exquisite and costly meats and stupefying him with his strongest and most precious wine, had succeeded in inducing him to admit that he might perhaps write himself down for a single copy. Having so far interested the old gentleman in his enterprise, the Prince hoped, no doubt, to confirm the impression by introducing this possible supporter to the scene of our activities; perhaps the spectacle of all these fine books in the making would provide the deciding inducement to my lord Obeidallah's resolution. It is a fact that success beyond his wildest hopes crowned this essay, but it is no less true that what happened is to be attributed in no way to the attraction of the wares.

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The two august relatives had proceeded but a little way among the lanes of bent heads and busy quills (for our attempt to escape momentarily from toil by rising to do honour to our visitors had been repressed), when, suddenly, like a thunderclap the laughter of Obeidallah burst forth and it was discovered that he was pointing a finger at a certain distorted and globular object which plied a pen at a short distance from him.

“ In the name of Allah, Source of all Merriment ! ” he cried, “ what kind of a funny tulgous monster hast thou got there, nephew ? ”

Prince Hosein put up an imported monocle and regarded me wonderingly.

“ By the saddle-bags of Omar, Uncle ! ” he replied, “ I cannot tell. ” Then, turning to Nowfal, obsequious at his elbow : “ Whence, ” he enquired, “ didst thou roll this *boule de suif* to thy assistance ? ”

“ Lord—— ” began Nowfal, but he was interrupted by a second tremendous peal from the Uncle.

“ Whiskers of Shaitan ! ” he gasped when his paroxysm had subsided, “ I have not laughed so since Azrael garnered my second wife’s mother. ” (I may say that this nobleman’s sense of humour was something primitive). “ With *that* before my eyes I should never know care ; not though the whole edition of thy pretty poems, Hosein, were added to my library. Ho ! ho ! ho ! ” he bellowed, clasping his stomach in the agony of his mirth. “ Yield me this oddity, nephew, and I’ll fear not to subscribe

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for a hundred of thy volumes. Thirty thousand djinn ! I must have him for my Collection."

Prince Hosein was not the man to lose so favourable an opportunity. A Secretary more or less was to him a matter of small moment, whereas the sale of a hundred copies of his works to a person of Obeidallah's prominence would (if properly advertised) lift him instantly and forever out of the ranks of the Amateurs and place him definitely among the number of those infinitely rare beings who are supposed to live by the sale of their poetry. The offer of his uncle was tantamount to Immortality.

" Why, my dear Uncle," he said, " if the creature pleases you, pray take him. Tee-hee ! As I hope for Paradise, he will not unworthily fill a niche in your museum."

" And," said Obeidallah, " it is ready for him. My fat man has fallen off recently in a deplorable fashion, and I must in any case have put him on the retired list. Whether it was the fatigue of the long journey from the scene of my late embassy or, as I shrewdly suspect, grief at his rejection by my horse-faced girl (she has just paired with the two-headed dwarf) I can't tell you ; but it is certain that he is no longer fit for his job. Far from exciting my amusement he now causes me to weep for what I have lost in him ; for Allah be my witness ! he was at one time a very comical brute."

" Then," said Hosein, " nothing remains but for you, dear Uncle, to affix your signature to this piece

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of paper. That done, you are at liberty to drive your prize beef to its stable."

Nowfal had hastened forward with a form of application filled to the tune of a hundred copies. Upon this was poured wax whereinto Obeidallah pressed his seal ring and the transaction was complete. I had a new Master, Hosein a Secretary the less, and the museum (whatever that might be) of Obeidallah could boast the addition of an exhibit.

"And now," said the last-named, "I am for home. Nephew, I thank you for your entertainment, but infinitely more for your condescension in ceding this miracle. Farewell, nephew. And as for you," he added to my address, "up and follow, my bonny new, fat man." At the same time he playfully thrust the point of a staff which he carried into what he supposed were my ribs, which dig caused me no discomfort, because its geniality was all expended upon the wadding of my inspirations.

Then he passed out of the chamber, chatting gaily with the Prince, and I, laid hold of by his servants, was hastened I knew not whither, nor indeed greatly cared, so heavily upon me had been the fear of Kab and the instruments of Kab, both human and devilish.

Thus did I quit the service of my lord, the Prince Hosein ibn Soob.

The residence of the Lord Obeidallah was situated at no great distance from the Sultan's palace, a

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circumstance for which I, loaded as I was, had some reason to be thankful. Of late, indeed, it had become difficult for me so much as to pass forwards or backwards between the dormitories and the scene of my daily labours; for verses, however spiritual, cannot assume the concrete shape of parchment pages without acquiring a certain measure of weight. And I had about me not less than a thousand and four poems averaging eighteen couplets apiece. Another rod, pole, or even perch, and I must have fallen dead; but my Web was woven of a pattern in which such a decease at such an age found no place. From the beginning of time the All-Providing had foreseen this, my extremity, and had caused my new employer to inherit and inhabit a house built at that point to which my strength should prove just sufficient to carry me. A good three pounds lighter than when I started from the palace I sank down on the spot which my conductors indicated and for several minutes knew nothing of my surroundings.

At length my faculties began to return to me. I sat up, stared about me, and at once supposed that I had after all died and been received (by some mistake) into the regions of the damned.

I was in a large, circular hall dimly lit by openings high up in the walls which were very lofty and perfectly smooth. But one door was perceptible and this was guarded by two gigantic negroes of ferocious aspect. Their teeth were filed to sharp

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points, they chewed glass perpetually, their eyes were shot with blood (the effect of those stimulating drugs with which they were fed) and they were hung all over with pistols and curved swords till they would have reminded me of those ingenious trophies of weapons which I have since admired in the armoury at the Tower of London, had I not at that time been still ignorant of their existence.

In the centre of this chamber was a round daïs on which a single armchair of a very luxurious kind was placed. In front of this chair stood a telescope on a brass tripod. There was also a table, on which stood a hookah, some boxes of cigars, and an amazing battery of bottles, syphons, cruchons, decanters, flasks, and demijohns, and all sorts of cups, tumblers, rummers, goblets, and other similar things.

Close round the walls was ranged a series of platforms, the halves of which, furthest from the daïs, were occupied by pent-houses of thatch and wattle. In the front wall of each was a small door.

Upon these platforms stood, sat, lay, or prowled a number of people who together formed the oddest assemblage that I had then or have ever since admired. The distance of many from my own place prevented me from making them completely out, but even in the most remote I could discover something which marked them off definitely as exceptions to the ordinary scheme, while those near by, being plainly visible, excited my wonder in a

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fashion that was at once less vague and more disquieting.

Immediately to the right of me sat a fellow whose skin was of a bright and shining scarlet, whose eyes protruded from his head upon stalks about six inches long, and whose curiously jointed arms terminated in immense horny claws, not unlike those of a scorpion. These claws he was clicking happily together as another man might have snapped his fingers, and this appeared to be his sole occupation. I was naturally at a loss to imagine any cause to account for this person's very special anatomy, but I discovered later (and this seems a good moment to impart the information) that he was the victim of pre-natal influence, his mother, a native of Kafiristan, having acquired a passion for lobster from the contents of a tin which had been opened, rejected as dubious, and left behind by some British officers who had moved their hunting camp about a fortnight before the poor woman happened to discover its late site. This passion she had never again been able to gratify, and our ruddy friend of the starting eyes and snapping claws was the result. For, as Joad the Jejune has so well observed: It is better to know Thine Own Limitations than even to perceive certainly What The Public Wants.

On my left sat a dark-skinned young man who wore nothing but a loin-cloth and a pair of pale blue sock-suspenders of which, as I subsequently dis-

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covered, he was intensely proud, though I could never learn (nor is it of the slightest importance) how he came by them. But since he was one who suffered under the erroneous belief that Asia is behind the times and has much to learn from Europe, the value which he attached to these superfluous conveniences is readily to be understood. His occupation in life seemed to be to pull out with his fingers the skin of his cheeks, chest, and ribs, which, being remarkably elastic, permitted itself to be extended to arm's length, and then to let it fly back with a sound something similar to that produced by the impact of mud hurled against a stone wall. This faculty was the second and last cause which he had to be satisfied with himself, and, as it had proved the foundation of his fortunes, it must surely be regarded as the superior of his hoseless garters, though it is doubtful if any other advantage which it is possible to possess could as easily as they have taken the second place in the esteem of the majority.

Beyond him moved gently up and down upon her platform a woman about nine feet high and of proportionate development. She was dressed in a loose robe of cream-coloured calico which in no wise lessened her significance. Her complexion was tawny and the cast of her features slightly Mongolian, and she was capable—it may be convenient if, while I relate my first impressions of these my new associates, I anticipate the acquirement of knowledge which I did not then enjoy—she was capable,

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I repeat, of devouring a hen at a single mouthful. Otherwise than this she calls at present for no special mention.

Further on I perceived a man whose legs were where his arms should have been. This was sufficiently out of the way ; but when my eyes bore witness that he had been compensated for his disadvantage by having his arms adjusted to his hips, I was forced to own that Nature had exercised a very unusual beneficence towards him.

In another place there was a young Mesopotamian whose face recalled strongly the sculptured portraits of King Ashurbanipal the Fiftieth, save in the matter of his nose, which began almost at the summit of his skull, swept downwards in a majestic curve fully eighteen inches long, spread right and left by means of vast nostrils till it threatened to touch his ears, and, in a word, almost completely usurped the place of his other frontal features. I suppose that he had a mouth somewhere in the background, though I never saw it ; but his eyes were to be discovered, if diligently sought, two little slits set one on each side of his head about half-way along the outer edges of his trunk, snout, or whatever we may choose to call it, which astounding ex-crescence was, by the way, as smooth and as shiny as highly-polished marble, to which substance, owing to its many conspicuous veins and blotches, it bore a good deal of resemblance. It is unnecessary to say that this nose was the first object of its

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owner's consideration and that all his time was spent in working up its surface with turpentine, linseed oil, and a sheet of soft leather.

I should weary you were I to catalogue with persistent minuteness all the remaining members of this College of Monstrosity. Let me content myself therefore with so much bald enumeration as will suffice to possess you of the collection's hitherto unmentioned specimens' distinguishing characteristics.

Item.—The horse-faced girl and the two-headed dwarf of whom Obeidallah spoke, it may be remembered, to Prince Hosein. These were now married and occupied the same platform. I may add that subsequently their union was blessed with a child furnished with four legs exactly like those of a horse, but otherwise in no way noticeable.

Item.—A tall lad with a head less large than a billiard ball.

Item.—A Footooristi with genuine green hair, and skin that was striped black and white like a Zebra.

Item.—An Afghan woman with only one eye, which was in the middle of her forehead. And that one squinted.

Item.—The Human Frog, whose name is his sufficient description.

Item.—A man whose teeth chattered with cold when he came near the fire and who perspired furiously when seated upon ice.

Item.—The last of the Ogres, who ate live rats as you would eat live oysters, the cruel savage.

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Item.—The Serpent Girl whose hips were narrower than her neck and whose stays were *numero un*.

Item.—A person who spent all his time in compounding nude statues out of broken bricks, old sardine-tins, and beer-bottles, when he wasn't knocking them down in his rage at failing once again to achieve the Ultimate Beauty.

Item.—A woman with full beard, moustache and whiskers, who argued by the hour that man's undeniable aptitude for growing such things proves him to be naturally more smooth-chinned than her own sex.

Item.—A perfectly symmetrical woman who, enjoying abundant health and extraordinary beauty, proclaimed perpetually to her fellow oddities that their drawbacks were imaginary, because Omnipotence is incapable of imagining aught that is not quite satisfactory.

Such were, and were for some little time to be, my companions. The optimistic will say that though I had small reason to anticipate very much pleasure from their society, I had even less to suppose that life among them would prove monotonous; and that, since monotony had been of late the first bane of my existence, I was not wholly without cause for self-congratulation. Optimism, however, is the prerogative of the happily-circumstanced, and my situation was far from favourable to the culture of the virtue. I was dreadfully aware of the falseness of my pretence to figure in this gallery of natural sports, and the knowledge that at any moment my

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clothes, by bursting asunder, might expose me to the fury of my purchaser (for whom my sole value resided evidently in my fatness) caused me to take a very dark view of my prospects. It was extremely probable that Obeidallah maintained some kind of a Kab upon his premises.

Yet, if you will believe me, such is the power of the creative impulse, that, even now, I could not refrain from composition. I had, with the instinct of the craftsman (to whom his tools are his life), carried away with me the necessaries of my profession, and, certain thoughts relative to my situation and metrically embodied occurring to me, I sat down at once and abandoned myself to the behests of my dæmon. Twenty minutes later I crammed the result down my neck, whereupon a small rending sound informed me that, at last, at last, the pen had triumphantly proved itself mightier than the needle.

Meanwhile nobody had taken the slightest notice of me, for (as I was to learn) to do other than ignore his competitors is the highest affront that the Human Oddity can offer to his self-respect. The Man Lobster on my right had continued to click his claws together without a second's interruption, nor had his strange eyes turned upon their stalks so much as once in my direction. The Elastic-skinned Exception had never ceased to demonstrate his superiority to the rest of his species in order to favour the new Fat Man with even a glance of contempt. And so with the others. Each remained

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occupied exclusively with his or her own perfections, a circumstance attributable to that mysterious Law which has decreed that in proportion to his deficiencies shall the self-esteem of a man be increased.

As the Excellent Ashraf observes in his Calendar for the year A.H. IX. :

*Search for a fool who knows it and you won't
scan less than ninety million who don't ;*

and though I am inclined to think that his estimate is below the true one I cannot but subscribe to the tenour of his proposition.

Yet have we not here one other proof of the all-providing wisdom of The Potter ? For were the eyes of these cracked and mis-shapen vessels open to their own condition, must they not inevitably destroy themselves, in which event we clever fellows would find life a very much less simple business, and we beautiful ones would lose all the advantages of our present transcendence ? In short, fools are necessary to the existence of the wise, who if they could prey only on one another, must quickly disappear in mutual destruction ; and the ugly are of no less vital consequence to the handsome, who, in the absence of this criterion, must cease to be, and thus the race would utterly perish, which, though no doubt at first sight a desirable consummation, is evidently, for some reason, not included within the intentions of The Great and Marvellous Scheme.

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From all of which the conclusion may be drawn that Folly is the Corner Stone of the Whole Edifice. Which is absurd.

But I am led away.

While I sat shivering with apprehension of the catastrophe which my stitches could not much longer delay, the door of our Menagerie was thrown open and our Lord Obeidallah entered. It was evident at a glance that he had dined and dined well and dined not in accordance with the practices of the Pious. His eye rolled richly in his head, and his feet were not entirely his subjects ; and such is not the aspect of the Sherbet-drinker. He stood a moment, swaying and clutching the sides of the doorway, while he, as it were, aimed himself at the central divan ; then, letting go, he charged and, by what may have been skill but seemed much more like good luck, attained the armchair, into which he sank instantly with a triumphant hiccup. This done he clapped his hands and at once a procession of slaves entered bearing baskets of bread, great platters heaped with the seethed flesh of the goat, huge bowls of rice, others of various fruits, and, lastly, tall jugs of palm rum. These munitions they proceeded instantly to distribute among the people on the platforms, who showed no hesitation about beginning their repast. Almost as quickly as it can be recorded every guest had been served and the

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feast was under way. To my share fell a succulent hind quarter of kid, several splendid oranges, and a water-melon ; bread, rice, and the liquor were *à discrétion*.

Now during my life with the scrivening fraternity not my smallest cause for dissatisfaction had been the shortcomings of the alimentary department ; for, as I have hinted, the sum which was allotted weekly from the treasury of Prince Hosein for the nourishment of his Secretariat had been expected to suffice, no matter how many additions might be made to the staff ; and as, at the time of my entry into his service, the number of pens was considerably in excess of that which had witnessed the inauguration of the work, the amount of food that was going was correspondingly unequal to our requirements. In a word I had for some weeks endured a state of semi-starvation.

Conceive then the rapture with which I fell upon the good things now offered to me ; conceive the conscientiousness of the spirit in which I dealt with them. All my cares vanished away and I yielded myself without stint to the ineffable delights of stuffing. Caution, in view of the precarious tenure of my clothing, should have held my hand, but if " a ravenous belly knows no Law," how shall it so much as enjoy a nodding acquaintance with Prudence ?

Let the Dyspeptic answer and the Diet-Specialist reply.

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Meanwhile the good Obeidallah had mixed himself a true Rajah's peg of brandy, champagne, Kümmel, stout, and curaçoa, lit a vast cigar wrapped in gold-leaf (he smoked it gold-leaf and all), adjusted his telescope, and abandoned himself to his customary post-prandial diversion and digestive. For you must know that all this was done in the name of Eupeptics.

It appears that some twenty-six months earlier Obeidallah had begun to suffer from acidity after meals and, having submitted his case to innumerable physicians without any success, had at length (learning Wisdom from its only Professor, Adversity) undertaken his own cure. The confirmed Valetudinarian is so alert to remark every unfavourable symptom that he is prone to overlook things which would perhaps give him ground for hope; but Obeidallah had not been long enough in the hands of the doctors to mistake a substantial relief for a sign that the end is near. One evening, towards the close of dinner, a great dish of tripes which a slave was bearing balanced on his head, being, I suppose, cracked, suddenly parted in twain and its contents was let down like a sort of drapery upon the man, who at once began to dance with agony, for the stuff was boiling hot. This spectacle so diverted my simple-minded old gentleman that he laughed for thirty minutes on end. That night he experienced no discomforts and, surmising that this surcease

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from trouble might possibly be due to his immoderate merriment, he gave his order and, next evening, another dish, loaded with further tripes, scattered its scalding contents upon a second slave. Again laughter possessed Obeidallah to the apparent benefit of his digestion. After a third similar experiment he harboured no further doubts of his discovery, and thenceforward always saw to it that cause for much mirth should be given to him at the conclusion of each hearty repast. Soon afterwards he gave all his medical attendants their *congé* and continued with perfect satisfaction to treat himself. Someone, hearing that he sought for laughter by every means, presented him with a hydrocephalous child which had been born in the donor's establishment. This digestive proved so excellent that Obeidallah's thoughts were turned towards the acquisition of further funnily-made humanity. Soon he obtained the one-eyed female Afghan whom I have already mentioned, and a bat-eared boy who subsequently died, as did the hydrocephalous child. But by this time the thing had become organised ; Obeidallah's agents already scoured the neighbouring provinces in search of after-dinner correctives for their master ; and several valuable additions had been made to the bizarre gallery.

And now the Valetudinarian began to give place to the Collector, and pride in the number and expense of his remedies to usurp the place in Obeidallah's breast which had formerly been

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occupied by the single desire for health. For it is the compensation of sickness, that long and persistently seeks its remedy, at last to triumph in the number of the doctors that it has consulted or the varieties of the medicines which it has swallowed. Obeidallah, accordingly, soon almost lost sight of the purpose for which he assembled his specimens, and though he continued faithfully to employ them for stimulating the flow of his gastric juices, he valued them much more highly for the distinction which they conferred upon him over his fellow dyspeptics.

And here appropriately may be introduced a few lines from Jafar Mâlik, his *Meditations for the Miserable*, of which work mention has already been made :

*Lo ! I have found a little pill,
a little pill of pearly grey,
that promiseth to take away
my every ill.
And, let it lie or keep its word,
to-day I am exceeding glad,
since Ibrahim and Abu Sad
of it have never heard.
Yet soon I shall be even gladder ;
for when my treasure trove they see
poor Ibrahim will envy me
and Abu will be Sadder.*

To be short, it was Obeidallah's custom each

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evening to palliate the excesses of his board with laughter excited by his Cabinet of Curiosities, and as he valued these possessions highly (for upon them depended all his physical welfare) and trusted his servants not a particle, he had ordained that the daily feeding of his animals should synchronise with this, his constitutional session. Thus, at the same time that he stimulated his liver, he made certain both that the inhabitants of his vivarium were properly nourished and that he himself was not robbed by his domestics. Which shows that if he had not read and profited by the following Cautionary Couplet of Aswad the Arabian :

*Be kindly to the beast on whom thy life
depends ; e.g., thy horse, thy hound, thy wife—*

he had independently arrived at the same conclusion as that which inspired the advice of the Sagacious Nomad.

Obeidallah then (once more to resume) while we attended to the claims of appetite, feasted his eyes upon our various physical idiosyncrasies through the canal of his telescope, roaring ever with stronger and stronger laughter as the survey progressed and the contents of his beaker diminished in volume, until at last upon me, as upon some *bonne bouche* set aside at the edge of a plate, he directed his attention.

It was this moment that my attire chose in which

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to fall to pieces ; for the ruin which my latest poem had just failed to precipitate, my copious dinner now succeeded in accomplishing. Even as the object-glass of the telescope brought me within the field of its manipulator's vision, a loud, rending sound was heard and a veritable cascade of manuscript burst forth, inundating my platform and causing me, in a breath, to assume (save for my legs and arms, which still retained their bolsterlike appearance) my natural slim and quite uncomical proportions. It seems that the old gentleman was under the immediate impression that I had indeed burst, and the entertainment which this belief afforded him was so acute that distress at the loss which he must sustain of one of his newest acquisitions was spared to him. His earlier laughter became almost weeping by comparison with the ecstasy of amusement which now held him in its clutch. He howled and screamed and grabbed his sides and called upon Allah to be his witness that this was enough to banish the devil of indigestion for a fortnight to come. And it is a fact that this paroxysm was attended with results highly beneficial to his disordered system.

He fell about for laughter and during several minutes was no longer able to maintain either his control of the telescope or his eye in position at its smaller end ; but presently he was again master of his movements and returned to his examination of me. I suppose that the discovery that I was still erect caused him astonishment, for I could see him

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screwing up and unscrewing the wheel as if he doubted the right adjustment of the focus. Next moment he became articulate and the loud command, "Bring that here!" rang through the chamber. At once I was seized by the attendants and hurried, shedding poetry at every step, to the foot of the daïs. Obeidallah fastened his piercing little eyes upon me for a second or two and then with a cry of, "Paper fat! Paper fat!" fell back in his chair and laughed till my ears threatened to cave inwards.

The while I stood shaking with fright, and at every shiver fresh evidence of my talent and industry slid downwards to join the pile about my feet. The appearance of the executioner could not now, I felt, long be delayed.

After an age, during which the unsentient clock may have marked a minute, Obeidallah found breath for further speech. "Strip him!" he cried, and in the twinkling of a camel-staff Bildad appeared as he really was; the contents, other than my arms and legs, of my sleeves and trousers were added to the heap on the floor; and the deceit and the deceiver were at once fully exposed.

"So," said Obeidallah, "the turkey had a stone in it." Then, apparently finding his comparison a happy one, he again gave himself up to his guffaws.

Meanwhile I had somewhat collected my wits. It was evident to me that the old gentleman was not yet angry, though I had no means of telling when he

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would remember his right to become so. I saw that my only chance was to increase his good humour, and I bethought me that, by declaring the trickery which I had practised towards Prince Hosein (between whom and his uncle I suspected there was no love lost) I might successfully divert his attention from that of which I had been guilty towards himself.

“Yea, Lord,” said I, “but the Farmer knew it not.”

“How now?” he cried. “Canst deny that Hosein hath sold me?”

“Yea, Lord,” said I. “Since that thou boughtest hath sold *him*.” Then in the fewest possible words I declared what I had done, speaking frankly my contempt for Hosein’s verses, telling my own imperative need of parchment, and explaining the larceny which I had practised upon my late master’s stationery and the device which I had found for concealing my depredations.

When I had done, “So!” he said thoughtfully. “We are a poet?”

“A poet, Lord,” said I.

“Hand me up some proof of that,” he commanded, and I obliged him. He conned the thing with his head on one side. “Another,” said he and his fingers received a second skin. “Another,” and the process was repeated.

At last, “My son,” he said, “here is a lot of wretched stuff, but it is not to be denied that thou

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canst rhyme and hast some gift of tum-ti-tum, I mean rhythm. I would not exchange my old age for youth at the price of reading more of this tripe of thine—tripe, ha! ha! the word comes aptly—but as it happens I am in need of something not unlike thee, and if thou canst rise to thy opportunity, behold! thy fortune is made; for my nephew Hosein has made the versifying breed as scarce in this town as fleas in camphor. It is doubly well for thee that thou hast changed masters. If thy stitches had parted a day earlier thy soul would be in hell; whereas, by doing so now, they have brought thee to the notice of one who is in much need of a humorous rhymester. Behold, thou art received into my favour, though its continuance must depend upon thy execution of the tasks to which I shall appoint thee. Here, in this *parc aux cerfs*, thou hast in future no permanent place, though thou wilt, I trust, return hither many times in the execution of thy new office. For to-night, I am too drunk to consider thee further; but to-morrow I shall have some commands for thee. And so, gather up thy rags about thee, lest the Giantess blush, and begone with this slave"—he indicated one of his attendants—"who will conduct thee to thy quarters, give thee new attire, and spread thy bed. As for this wordy, sloshy piffle of thine, I will have it all cleanly burned for thee, so that not a syllable of it shall remain to accuse thee in a later and wiser day. And now," he concluded as he mingled in his goblet a cocktail of

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whiskey, absinthe, vodka, saki, and unsweetened gin and diluted all with the strong wine of Posilipo, "here's to thee, my merry bard, and may Allah inspire thee to drollery or else give thee strength to encounter trouble!"

So saying he tossed off the contents of the vessel and, applying his eye to his telescope, turned the weapon unsteadily in the direction of the horse-faced girl and her husband, while his minions quickly raked all my poems into a sheet and carried them away in the direction of the bath-furnace. Nor did I ever see any of them again, for which reason I am unable to offer them *in extenso* to your notice, which I would otherwise infallibly have done.

As for me, sorrowful yet rejoicing, I followed my guide out of that Court of Miracles.

"Apprehension," says Salman the Saw-giver, "maketh of a down mattress red coals, and a snoring wife induceth to slumber more surely than a little care." Tell me then, if I did or did not sleep soundly upon the excellent bed which now received me.

All immediate cause for fear having been removed, my young, resilient spirits were incapable of impression by a single doubt of my power to satisfy any demands that Obeidallah might presently make upon my pen. It was apparent that my fortunes hung upon my pleasing him, and I was quite in the dark as to what might be expected of me; yet the

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tranquillity of my mind was in no wise affected by these considerations. But the confident Ignorance of Youth is ever its greatest asset and leads to more triumphs than all the cautious Experience of Age ; for in this world of fools, while Experience may teach the existence of and the advisability of avoiding danger, it does not often point out the way to conquer it ; and to the Conqueror, as they say in America, shall be the spoils. No man got very far on the road to Conquest without taking chances, and the taking of chances is possible only to Ignorance. From which it is to be deduced that the more ignorant a man is, the further he is likely to go. Which is a very painful reflection for Your Sapience.

I slept, then, like a tree all night and woke mightily refreshed, to find standing over me the slave who had shown me to my bed the previous evening.

He said " Up ! " which I did ; then " Wash ! " wherein I obeyed him ; and finally " Follow ! " and within three minutes I once more stood before Obeidallah. The good old man was still abed and not yet wholly awake (indeed he looked hardly alive), but as I entered his apartment he added a drop or two of vitriol to a morning pick-me-up of old cognac diluted with Harvey's Sauce, arnica, Eau de Cologne and sal-volatile, and instantly shot all down his throat with one rapid movement. This done, he coughed a little, wiped his eyes on his beard, sat up, and shewed in several other ways

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that he had been satisfactorily galvanised. He then beckoned me to approach and the following conversation took place.

O.—What is thy name?

B.—Bildad, an it please your worship.

O.—Let us have none of that. Ceremony is the curse of high birth, and to be born in the purple is to know the true unworth of politeness. Familiarity in his servants is poison to the gent, but to royal personages it is the salt of existence. Your squire, owning his inferiority to my lord, must needs be perpetually convinced of his transcendence of the footman! but the Ruling Blood has no love of such assurances and values them not a split date-stone; nay, would by all means escape from them. Now, since the welfare of Society requires that the herd be impressed—for how would it be if the King were perceived to be an ordinary fellow?—formulæ and observances must still be the chief of our diet. But as the Gods of Greece, nauseated by their regime of *toujours ambrosia* were wont to descend, attired in rags, among men, and at cottage doors beg for the harsh rye bread and the bitter barley beer which their jaded palates craved, so we, whose greatness is above competition, seek every occasion to exchange the truckling of courtiers for the stimulating insolence of chosen servants. Let there be an end, then, brother Bildad, between thee and me, of these an-it-please-yous and if-your-Royal-Muggship-willses, for I am kindly disposed to-thee-ward by reason of the deception practised by thee upon that stuffed fool, my kinsman Hosein. I think thee to

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be such a merry vulgarian as I may love. Come then! Courage! Slap me on the back and call me Uncle. Go to! Show me that thou believest thyself my equal, or by the hind leg of Balaam's donkey! thy shoulders shall be eased of the burden of thy head.

B.—(*touching him deferentially on the back with a hand that falls as lightly as a butterfly upon a spray of jasmine*) My Av-v-v-v-v-unk-k-k-k—

O.—None of that palaver, I say! None of thy gorbellied politeness! Of rotund speech I have enough elsewhere and now I am in my shirt sleeves. I crave thy familiarity, not thy civil circumlocutory phrases. Be, then, horribly familiar or I disembowel thee.

B.—(*smiting with the courage of despair*) What cheer, Nunky!

O.—(*digging B. in the ribs*) That's my bully boy! That's my ticket for soup! That's the right medicine for *ennui*! And now, do better! Pluck my beard! Rumples my turban! Insult me copiously!

B.—(*obeying with a wanion*) Silly ass! Goat-bearded old gobbler! Senile dipsomaniac!

O.—(*coughing*) Ugh! Ugh! Enough, my son, enough. Now we understand one another and can speak together as man to man. Enough, I say! Hold thy hand, or the bow-string shall stifle thee.

(*At this B. recalls the Tenth Truism of Tosh the Trite which runs:*

*Wisdom will lose that with the King plays ball;
for not by stooping are Great Men made Small.*

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And also there comes into his mind, of the Fables of Fug the Far-travelled, the seventh in the section called The Anomalies of Anglo-Saxony, which is thus conceived :

*The socialist Duke made a moving oration
and claimed for his brother each man in Creation.*

*His valet (who'd been in the hall
and believed what his master let fall)
next morning omitted " my lord " and " your grace "
from his chat as he lathered the nobleman's face.*

*But the only reward of his tact
was to find himself instantly sacked—*

*and at once abandons his grasp upon the beard of
Obeidallah and the tousling of his turban).*

B.—To hear is to obey, Lord.

O.—(*filling a cup with Uam Var*) None of that stuff, I tell thee! Let another speech of the kind escape thee and the Pool of Crocodiles is thy bath. And now how slepest thou?

B.—(*seeking at once to avoid Scylla and escape Charybdis*) Well, Uncle.

O.—(*adding green chartreuse*) Not so I. *Billah!* no sooner had my feet touched the pillow than my mind set to work upon the plan in which thou art to aid me. (*Throws in a spoonful of red-pepper.*) Not a wink did I sleep, may I choke! So let us dispatch this matter while my thoughts are clear. (*Fortifies with Advocaat and Benedictine.*)

B.—Wade in, Uncle; but I could be more familiar, I promise you, with a drop of the creature for myself.

O.—Here is a bottle of something or other, thou

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corrupt little villain. Drink it down and grow oblivious only to my splendour. I have work for thy wits.

Being now both comfortably established, we devoted ourselves for the next hour to the consideration of his project. This was nothing less than the manufacture of a series of farcical stage-plays, with songs and dances, to be executed by the members of the Deformed Clan of which I had so recently been made one. From beholding these interludes the fantastical old ruffian promised himself an infinity of entertainment and a correspondingly large benefit to his interior economy. Only of late had the brave conception been his, and owing to the jealous policy of Hosein he had despaired of finding anyone in Bul who should be capable of bringing it to fruition. He knew himself quite devoid of the rhyming gift, and as for Hosein (the only professed poet of whom he could hear) he, as he expressed it, would rather have never laughed or digested again than entrust so rare a notion to the mercy of that melon-headed maudler; for, like every one who has managed to strike out an idea for himself, he exorbitantly valued his notion, the originality of others being the only kind which a man is commonly slow to acknowledge.

It is easy to understand that to find in me (extract from the household of this same Hosein) the very versifier that he needed, was to Obeidallah a source

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of most poignant satisfaction ; and this explains the special favour which he accorded me no less than does his longing now and then to cast off his majesty and escape, in frank society, the wearisome subservience of the flunkey and the toad-eater.

But though it was not in him to string so many as two rhymed lines together, he was not without his broad notions about his projected *divertissements*. He had even prepared during the night (and when I saw it I could well believe that he had not slept) a sort of prospectus or system of performances, and I cannot but own that there was a cleverness in the thing. He had proceeded somewhat upon the principle which has been pithily thus formulated by Loot ibn Raid, formerly the First Mime of Stambul, in his well-known work *The Dramatist in Doubt* :

*Now for the Plot—a very simple matter,]
No need is here thy precious brains to batter.
Incompetence destroys himself by making it
that thou, Experience, may live by taking it—*

and had sought elsewhere than behind his own forehead for his stories. From the inexhaustible cemetery of Indo-Caucasian Folk-lore he had unearthed twelve skeletons which he now proposed that I should clothe with the dialogue, lyrics, and diversions necessary to their incorporation into an acceptable dramatic form. To mention but one or two, we had *The Beautiful Sleeper*, *The Little Red-*

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robed Benevolent, Yon and the Magic Bean, The Lucky Apprentice at the Court of Morocco, and The Slipper of Fur. Upon *Thumbkinetta* he had fixed for our first essay and (that you may at once seize the nature of his plan) it was the Giantess that he had selected to play the name part. After this it can be hardly necessary for me to say that the Horse-faced Girl was to fill all our Princess rôles, and (Obeidallah showed sometimes a queer, prudish streak) her two-headed husband those of the Princes. These three points had been definitely settled before I was consulted, and our principal business, on this first morning, was to distribute the remaining parts as inappropriately as possible among the rest of our stock-company. The old women were accordingly allotted to the Lobster-faced Unfortunate, the Last of the Ogres we made our Animal Impersonator, and for our General Utility we took the Elastic Man. But I need not labour this.

Suffice it that, on Obeidallah at last signifying his willingness to be relieved of my society, I carried away enough work for several days and, repairing to the apartments which had been given to me, set to work at once upon the preparation of my first spectacle.

When the unknown author of the successful play steps from behind the curtain to receive the delighted plaudits of the many-headed, how few among those who behold him have any conception of the miseries

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through which the smirking, happy-looking man has recently passed ! When the gates of Paradise open for the entrance of the Roman Catholic, fresh from Purgatory, and the inhabitants hasten forward with their felicitations, they can be no less ignorant (thanks to the oblivion of old sufferings which is inseparable from their blessedness) of the new-comer's recent experiences than are those simple theatre-goers.

Audience and Ransomed alike perceive only the reward of endurance and give never a thought to all the urns of trouble that have been lately poured out upon the head of this Fortunate Unfortunate. His glory is as conspicuous as his now-ended sorrows are unguessed, and so it is little wonder that the first occupies the corporate imagination to the utter exclusion of the second.

But the young playwright (and to a less degree, the young angel) must often wonder at these demonstrations. The horrors of his recent existence are so fresh in his memory that the smiles which now greet him must seem quite unreal. He has forgotten that people smile ; he has lost the power of expecting others to be pleased. A month of rehearsals is just behind him and it will take more than a minute or two of assurances, however warm, to convince him that the world is not exclusively the abode of discontent. His play, apparently, has captured the town, but a belief in its rottenness has been too deeply instilled by those with whom he has been so

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long consorting for the impression to be easily removed. His lines have been universally condemned by the actors to whom they have been entrusted, his humour has been found to be wanting, his passion to be rhodomontade, and his pathos more proper to be spelt with a b. His construction has been pronounced crazy, his protasis obscure, his development forced, his climax uninteresting, and his catastrophe fatuous.

Of all this he has been so often informed that he has long despaired of his talent and has only continued to attend rehearsals and postpone the day of suicide to the morrow of the first performance, because the manager has told him that they are in for it now and that, as a lot of money has been spent on the piece, they may as well see it through and take their medicine.

And lo! the theatre raves with pleasure, and, behind the curtain, mimes and management vie with one another to bring to his recollection their steady prophecies of this great and deserved success. Journalists are enquiring for him in the green-room, a peeress has sent him an invitation to supper, and the leading lady has entreated him to let her act in his next play.

It is sweet, but of course it is a dream from which he will presently awake to find the governor at his elbow asking what the devil he means by falling asleep instead of writing in that scene for which the First Comic clamoureth. And the rehearsal will be

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going on and the sour old faces will be distastefully regarding him.

No wonder he wonders.

The foregoing may serve to prepare Your Simplicity for the news (which you are unlikely to suspect) that from the moment of my leaving my noble impresario things began to go sadly with me.

At first I had to make my play, and though everyone who has never tried to do anything of the sort (and indeed many an one who has) believes that nothing is easier (as witness the congested condition of the contents of all the drawers of all the desks of all the managers of all the theatres of Europe), this belief proves on examination to be no more well-founded than any other which possesses the mind of the majority; and helps to confirm the acute Choopal when he remarks:

*The World says thus that we may know
(we wise men) that it isn't so.*

But a writer of my kidney and then enthusiasm no difficulty can long delay, and within a week I had produced a scenario for my *Thumbkinetta* which satisfied me. The entirely unexpected and vexatious independence displayed by my characters had been patiently undermined and at last converted into absolute submission to my will, and in no single case did a personage enter when he was already present on the stage or join in the dialogue when he was at

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a distance of many leagues. The scenario being completed, it only remained to turn out the dialogue, and this I accomplished in a very few hours, the discharge of verses to any extent by a poet of the right quality being only a matter of finding thoughts to clothe.

My play was now fit to be read, and without a moment's delay I went into the quarters of my Company, called them about me, and explained what was required of them. To say that they were well content would be to fail in justice to the pleasure which they evinced. The escape promised from the tedium of their existence would alone have been enough to explain their delight, but even more must we lay it to the account of that self-satisfaction to which I have already referred as being a distinguishing characteristic of the Distorted. At once each beheld himself taking the stage with the eyes of the world riveted upon his motions, its ear hanging upon his every utterance. It is needless to add that, in consequence, each one aspired to the principal part. And here my real troubles began. I had no sooner acquainted my troupe with the allotment of the rôles than the expectant smiles vanished from every face save that of the Giantess, who, as you will remember, was designed to play Thumbkinetta, the name part. This lady's joy knew no bounds, and the circumstance that, with her nine feet of solid flesh, she was expected to

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represent a creature so dainty that a walnut shell was for her a boat and the menace of a cockchafer a matter of life and death, was powerless to cause her an instant's doubt as to her suitability to play the heroine.

This proves her to have been possessed (though all unsuspected) of an unusual degree of histrionic power; for subsequent experience has taught me that the most convincing proof of this virtue is a blindness to any kind of personal disability. But if the Giantess was enchanted, it was far otherwise with the rest of my Company. Shrugs, scowls, and mutterings were presently perceptible on all sides, and I believe that, if each had not feared to lose the share (small though it might seem) of the admiration which he craved, and if I had not thought to hint that contumacy would be visited with the refined torture of starvation, I should have been left with a leading lady on my hands and not a solitary supporter. But as in all other theatrical companies, so in this; the appetite for strutting and the fear of discomfort united to bring about a more reasonable state of mind. It is more tolerable to be incompletely recognised than totally unfed, and the strike, which for a moment threatened, dissolved before the logic of this consideration. In short, they consented to accept their parts.

Now as they were, to an individual, uneducated, my labour was not susceptible of curtailment (as it

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had been in a more advanced society) by the simple process of distributing little books of cues and lines. Every word of my play had to be taught orally to the mime who was to deliver it, and as their general level of intelligence was very low (among such ogres and lobsters one would hardly expect anything else) this was a task that tried my patience and strength to the utmost. Add to this that my verses were written with the object of causing merriment and that during no instant of my tuition was I rewarded by so much as a titter from my pupils ; forget not that I was much subjected to horrid abuse and horrid threats from my master Obeidallah for that I was so long over my business ; imagine me the perpetual prey of chagrin, irritation, fear for my life and hatred of my subordinates ; and the truly execrable character of my life will become easily apparent.

Yet did I persist until Time, solver of all problems, at length stood my friend. At the end of seven months my people were word-perfect and rehearsals could begin ; but as I had, during the whole of this period, been employing all the hours of every day in teaching and had been keeping it up with my patron throughout the whole of every night among his bottles (when I was expected, though with none too clear a head, to insult him perpetually and at the same time never overstep the limit of safety) you can believe that I approached this my most important and difficult task in a condition of considerable physical and mental exhaustion.

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To complete my troubles the Giantess had fallen in love with me.

To find oneself adored is commonly to experience a good deal of elation. A man's self-esteem is flattered, sweet hopes become the guests of his bosom, his natural belief in his superiority to others is confirmed, and the intensity of his rapture corresponds to the degree of youth, beauty, wit, and wealth to which the female happens to attain.

But if she be nine feet high and the object of her passion be rather below the middle height of men, he is not to be despised for a soulless clod if his delight is not excessive, nor for a poltroon if it be qualified by a certain measure of alarm. Alongside of Ogga (for such was the name of my admirer) I presented the appearance of a two-year-old child, and the knowledge of my physical inferiority made the idea of sustaining her caresses almost as dreadful to me as that of suffering under her anger should I reject them. Already she had dealt me one or two playful slaps, by way, I suppose, of encouraging me, and though no bones had yet actually been broken, I saw that I could look for nothing less if she should ever really forget the diffidence proper to a maiden—a catastrophe which the smallest response on my part must inevitably precipitate. The mere thought of being clasped in her arms was enough to make my hair stand up on end, and the reflection that she

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might wish to be taken on my knee was always followed by a profuse outbreak of perspiration.

It is quite possible that she might have learned to cherish these sentiments towards me without any other warrant than the dictates of her own fancy, but she had much more (though I disclaim all responsibility) than this. My ruthless Fate had decreed that I should seem to have singled her out from among her associates for quite special notice. I had allotted to her the principal part in my play ; I had consequently given her many more lines to speak than anyone else ; and, as a result, I daily spent with her nearly thrice as much time—she being excessively stupid—as with any other member of the company. To a person of her very limited capacity there could be but one explanation of my conduct, and I have no doubt that a flame, which would never have been kindled had I been free to follow my own inclinations, was not only nourished but blown to a white heat by the mere circumstance that I was compelled to execute the orders of another. In short, I was always with her, she regarded my conduct in the only way she could, and construed the simple execution of a duty into the Prosecution of a Siege. Once the flattering belief had taken root, it found itself at home in a fruitful soil ; it grew hourly and soon blossomed into a conviction that I was her slave ; and as adoration (though it exist only in the mind of the object) must quickly beget either its like or its opposite, and as I was a very personable



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youth, the unfortunate Ogga was soon the prey of a devouring passion, of which the only hope lay in the excess of her muscle over mine. For not only did I shrink from her as a giant; I loathed her for her stupidity and the hours which it forced me wearily to misuse in her instruction.

It is not to be supposed that I was long in discovering the frightful position in which I stood. Ogga was a girl of a very direct and uncomplicated nature and lost no time in giving me hints that I had captured her heart. From the kittenish slaps of which I have spoken she advanced rapidly to punches in the ribs, which deprived me of breath, squeezings of my hand, which hurt me exquisitely, and languishing looks, which caused me nearly to lose my reason. You have no conception how disquieting an *œillade* can be when it is performed by an eye that seems as large as a plate. Her teeth, when she smiled on me (they looked bigger than piano keys) caused me, with their two strong, even, glittering rows, always a sensation of sheer terror. The victim of Superstition, bound to his stake by the edge of some West African river, can regard the opening jaws of the Sacred Crocodile with hardly less emotion than was mine when Ogga beamed.

And all the time I must drive my funny lines into her thick head, one by one, and teach her over and over again the right intonation for each separate syllable.

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There was one lyric which she found particularly hard to retain. It was that for her first song and dance, and was thus conceived :

(1)

*I am a tiny tot
no bigger than your thumb,
a dainty little dot,
a perfect crumb.
They call me Thumbkinette
because I'm such a pet,
and everybody loves me, for which I'm very glad.
So very, very small am I
the people say as I go by :
" Oh, what a tiny, teeny, tawny, tasty, tiddly tad ! "*

(2)

*Whene'er I want a ride
I mount a butterfly ;
and through the air I glide,
now low, now high.
A cobweb neatly spread
provides me with a bed,
and a drop of dew's sufficient if I should need a drink.
And everywhere when I go out
the people gather round and shout :
" Oh, what a dainty, ducksy, darling, deevie, dearest dink ! "*

This is submitted not as a specimen of my poetry (for while it is much above the level of most stage verse it is not precisely by such stanzas that a serious bard would choose to be judged), but in order that you may realise something of the torture which

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I suffered during my tuition of this woman. I suppose I repeated the above worthless bit of stuff alone in her hearing not less than ten thousand times before she had learned it, while always she leered upon me, sighed like a grampus, and otherwise indicated that while a stage career was no doubt very well in its way it could never rival in her estimation a really happy marriage.

However—

Enough has been said, I think, to show that few dramatists can have inaugurated the rehearsals of a play with less prospect of enjoyment; but I was young, sanguine, and monstrously afraid of failing to please my employer. To be plain, Obeidallah, for all his pretence at good nature and condescension, was a savage drunkard with whom I could never feel my life to be for a moment safe; and I knew that unless this play should amuse him the easy relations which he insisted on our maintaining would become much more than strained. I must outrageously divert him with *Thumbkinetta* or the soup would be my portion.

I girded myself, then, to my work with something of the courage of despair, exerted my every faculty, called to my aid all my resources of patience, cunning, and invective, and in the course of a few days was gratified to perceive that things were beginning to shape themselves after a fashion not

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altogether unsatisfactory. My people, at any rate, from the start, knew their lines (an advantage which no producer in the history of the Drama has before or since enjoyed), and the difficulty which I had already experienced in teaching them made me the absolute superior alike of that temptation to improve which is the rehearsing playwright's most deceitful snare, and those sarcasms, grumblings, and artful entreaties with which his discontented actors are skilled to make his life a misery.

Of these effusions there were plenty, as I need hardly tell you. The most handsome and symmetrical actor is a person very difficult to satisfy that in the length and importance of the part justice has been done to him ; but when the mime that is to be mollified is at the same time a notable physical Outrage, his estimation of his own value approaches insanity. I leave it to your fancy to supply the detail of all the trouble that a company so singular as mine was able to give me, all the mutual jealousies which broke out, all the passionate criticisms to which in my presence my play was subjected, all the single-hearted suggestions for promoting the " good of the piece " which I was called upon to reject. It is needless also to remark that the special favour with which I seemed to treat our leading lady did not escape the notice of her associates ; and perhaps among the hardest things which I had to endure were the covert winks, the sly whispers, the nudges, and the titters which went round whenever I had

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occasion to address the Giantess. These things the ordinary playwright (who probably regards his leading lady with perfect indifference) may find not wholly unflattering to his vanity ; but *chez* Bildad, in whose heart loathing filled the place where adoration was supposed to reign, they were very nearly insupportable. But a good conscience stood my friend to bring me through even this trial, and the fear of Obeidallah's wrath, in case I should fail to please him, raised me wholly above the reach of all such petty spite. And I was in one respect more fortunately situated than the ordinary playwright ; for while he must look to tact as his best defence, I was in a position, if necessary, to employ torture, Obeidallah having thoughtfully placed all the resources of his executioner's battery at my absolute disposal.

The music for our play had been prepared by the First Sackbut of Obeidallah's private orchestra, one Khattâb. This fellow possessed a certain knowledge of elementary musical technique, but when that is said his highest praise is sung. His melodies, on the other hand, were so reminiscent as to border upon piracy in the few cases where the line was not overstepped ; while his rhythmic invention was childish and his orchestration was contemptible. Add to this that a predilection (perhaps excusable) for his own instrument caused him to favour the brass to the almost complete exclusion from his

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music of strings, wood-wind, timpani, and everything else, till any piece from his hand seemed to resolve itself into a competition in trombonising (and not so much in skill as in power and endurance) and you have some faint idea of the strains by which my seemly words were supposed to be accompanied. And it was this ruffian who had the audacity to complain that my language was unvocal, that my measures were monotonous, and that my themes were uninspiring !

He is not, I know, the first composer who has attempted to divert attention from his own shortcomings by abusing his librettist, but—to say nothing of mine—there can seldom have been one whose venom was less justified by his own talents.

Apart from the regrets which it occasioned in me, this disaccord between the words and music of *Thumbkinetta* was of small importance. Obeidallah, a rank barbarian, asked for nothing more refined from his band than plenty of ear-splitting sounds united to cadences to which a stamping foot could easily keep time. So much secured, he thought himself sufficiently, nay, ravishingly served. I had therefore no reason to suppose that our master would be otherwise than pleased with Khattâb's setting of my verses, and, that being the case, I made what shift I could myself to be content with it, strengthening my lacerated soul with the comfortable words of Pind the Potboiler :

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*The dewdrop on the blade refuses
to fly before the Fiery God.
So may the tears of all the Muses
prevail above the Patron's nod.*

But to conclude this matter.

Came at last the evening so full of Fate.

A stage had been erected close to that circular divan upon which Obeidallah was wont to spend his after-dinner hours in cachinnating contemplation of his dwarfs and other semi-human etceteras; The inventor and paymaster of the forthcoming diversion sat in his armchair, telescope handy, a stiff grog of neat alcohol, flavoured with essence of bhang and sprinkled with gunpowder, at his elbow. A little apart squatted the orchestra with the infamous Khatâtâb well in evidence, his ugly sackbut between his fingers, ready to serve as instrument or conductor's baton as the exigencies of the moment should demand. Behind the curtain I moved about, putting the last finishing touches to the stage set, the costume of my players, and my own apprehensions.

I was still so engaged when Obeidallah was heard to utter a loud cry of impatience and at the same moment to clap his hands. At this signal the curtain instantly rose, I bounded into the wings, and immediately *Thumbkinetta, a Children's Play in Three Acts*, had begun its career.

This was not to be a long one, though nobody can deny the success of the play. Indeed from the first

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moment, when the Human Lobster was discovered attended by the Elastic Man and the person whose legs and arms were in the wrong place, singing a serenade under the windows of Thumbkinetta's stepmother's house, the pleasure of Obeidallah was enthusiastically declared. He laughed and applauded unceasingly and so loudly that most of the time he can have heard not a syllable of what the actors were delivering. But when a man can say of any enterprise that has been completed, "It was in my brain that this originated," it must go very hardly with him before he will cease to believe it to be excellent. I might in truth have spared myself a great deal of anxiety and toil, because the complete success of the play had been decided many weeks earlier, when Obeidallah thought of it; and I have no doubt that by this time the bemused old Bacchanalian believed himself to have written every word and composed every note which was being uttered.

Had anyone else been present as audience I should certainly have met with, if not a more favourable, at least a more informing reception; but it was not for me to quarrel with actualities. Whatever the cause might be, all was going well, and in spite of the fact that nervousness was playing the deuce with my company, so that they spoke my lines just as they occurred to their memories, upside-down and tail-before-head, it mattered nothing, for, as we all know, the box-office is the only touchstone to the

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merits of a play, and so long as the audience is pleased the author may rest content, though his actors spout gibberish and his stage hands go on strike.

This inconceivably satisfactory state of affairs should, of course, have warned me to prepare for some particularly severe stroke, but I was too happy to remember the perversity of Fate. Even as I went about, rubbing my hands and congratulating myself on a bright and unassailable future, the Sword was out of its sheath and in an instant fell.

Ogga, having lumbered on to the stage, had recited her song—she had no singing voice, poor thing, but that is usually a small defect in a leading lady, since beauty and kindness of heart are advantages which can make as nothing a hundred such handicaps, though in the case of Ogga her qualifications for the part of Thumbkinetta were of an even less common kind—Ogga, I say, had recited her song and was now in the middle of her elephant-dance, when suddenly the appalling noise of laughter which was proceeding from Obeidallah ceased and a loud cry of alarm broke from the attendants by the door.

Putting my eye quickly to a crack in the proscenium I was horror-struck to perceive Obeidallah collapsed in his chair with eyes that started from a face suffused with the deepest crimson. To pass from my station behind the curtain to the daïs

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was for me the work of a moment ; but swiftly though I moved I was not in time to receive what the French call *les derniers soupirs* of my employer. They had already been rendered. A stroke of apoplexy, brought on by excessive laughter working in conjunction with alcohol, too long, too regularly, and too bountifully administered, had done his business for the merry old gentleman, and I was once more a masterless man.

To say that I was grieved would be untrue, but enraged I was. In a moment the brimming cup of Hope had been dashed from my lips, all my expectations of ease and emolument as playwright in ordinary to a powerful and wealthy nobleman were scattered, and I saw myself again cast upon the world with no weapon but my pen and no defence save my own wits. I had, indeed, succeeded very much beyond my desires. To entertain my master I had certainly plotted, but by no means to tickle him into his tomb. To cure him of his indigestion I had schemed, but never so radically as this. It is true that I had put him quite beyond the reach of acidity, but at the same time I had sent him where (if Allah is just) he should laugh no more, but rather exhibit his few remaining teeth in the act of gnashing ; and consequently it behoved me to think what I should do.

Already the alarm had been given. The domestic doctor had been summoned post-haste from his apartments and messengers were scouring the city in

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search of further medical aid ; and even while I stood, scratching my chin and asking myself puzzles relative to my future conduct, the Profession began to pour into the house, followed by their assistants, bearing all sorts of drugs, powders, and essences in bottles, boxes, and less simply named receptacles.

Like vultures who have scented a carcass, they swarmed about him in an instant and it was abundantly clear to me that, even if my own diagnosis of his condition were wrong, it could not be many minutes before they would make sure of him among them. The honour of sending a prominent man out of the world is one greatly coveted by Medicals, because it gives them consequence in the eyes of Society and brings them the custom of the fashionable ; and the more of the nobility a doctor is known to have dispatched, the more certainly will he be summoned to the death-beds of aspiring persons. For there are few loyal subjects who would not rather lose their father at the hands of a Physician to the King than see him restored to them through the unavoidable offices of some small apothecary.

And so, already, one had bled him in the arm and another in the neck, a third had cupped him, a fourth had applied leeches to his eyes, a fifth had clapped a sinapism to his spine, a seventh had resorted to friction of his extremities, while an eighth had inserted a funnel between his teeth and poured down it the best part of a gallon of liquorice-water. A little apart a ninth prepared the instru-

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ments of the trepanning operation and a tenth blew through a tracheotomy tube with an air of extreme resolve.

“ When fools fall out the wise man comes to his own,” and “ Confusion is the opportunity of the Cool Head,” and again, “ When the Pot seethes the Cook skimmeth the Fat ”—all truths which are as well known to the politician on the fence as to the pickpocket on the outskirts of a riot.

Here were fools falling out ; here was confusion ; and here seethed the pot of the late Obeidallah’s establishment. To my soul I said, “ Begone.” Everywhere the members of the household hurried about, calling directions which nobody obeyed, asking questions which nobody answered, giving advice which nobody followed, and uttering lamentations in which nobody believed. At every minute a new doctor arrived to add his voice to the clamour that raged about the corpse of Obeidallah ; at every other a new messenger was dispatched by the majordomo to spread the good news or to summon the undertakers. The way to liberty, it seemed to me, probably lay open, and it was for my resolution to profit by the circumstance. A fairer chance of escaping from Ogga would never present itself. No sooner was the thought conceived than my feet were putting it into a practical shape. In a moment I had passed the doors of the Menagerie, hastened down several passages, crossed a number of court-

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yards, and darted through the gateway. The last sound that greeted my ears as I sped up the dark street was the cheering of the harem, and as it died upon the ear I found myself, breathless but free, suddenly upon the City Wall. Behind me was the scene of my misfortunes, in front of me stretched the immense, dim expanses of the country, above me were the solemn stars, and below me—below me, I repeat—below me, may Allah confound it! was the Fosse. Sheer from my feet dropped the wall, fifty fathoms deep to the bottom of the vast excavation which on all sides surrounds the stronghold of Bul-on-the-Bul. (The river forms no part of the town's defences, being a stream of little account during three months of the year and non-existent during the other nine—but such are the rivers of my country, where rain is so rare a phenomenon that when the March of Civilisation shall have at length enlarged the women-folk, they will find themselves short of one valuable excuse for buying a new hat before they have learned to put the last one on becomingly. In which case they will invent something which Europe knoweth not.)

Now I ardently desired to be out of Bul. Apart from my terror of the Giantess, I had no mind to return to the Secretariat of Prince Hosein, which I thought it more than likely I should do, were daylight to discover me still within the boundaries. Having no friend in whose house I could lie concealed until I could be smuggled out of the town, I must

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infallibly be required by the police to give an account of myself. As the servant of Muley Hassan—a well-known character—I had passed the gates unchallenged on my arrival, but now I had no one to explain me should I present myself before the wardens for the purpose of emerging. I must be known for a non-citizen, and in my country (as in many others) it is a very serious matter to be a stranger to the Constabulary unless one is furnished with some kind of credentials or a large amount of money. It is true that I had brought away with me the weapons of my trade, but how the devil was I to write a passport for myself without light? And at any moment the Watch, going its rounds, might discover and apprehend me. From this to an appearance before the magistrate would be but a step, and there I would be confronted with the choice of declaring the truth about myself or being lodged in gaol as a vagabond with the slenderest hope of ever getting out again. And should I take the former course it was a mohur to a mulberry-pip that I would be returned to the house of the late Obeidallah, where his heir would have the disposal of me, unless, which was more likely, I were reclaimed by Hosein as the unsatisfied consideration for a contract which Obeidallah, by dying, had made nugatory, the wise laws of my country forcing no heir to assume responsibility for the follies of the late owner.

Now the very thought of resuming the trans-

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cription of that Princely Piffle made me perspire under the ears and behind the knees.

The only thought that at all comforted me was that whatever my fate might be, it would be unattended by the pursuit of Ogga. Her I had definitely shaken off.

And even while these anxieties invaded my mind the Watch was upon me. Four strong fellows, appearing from the darkness, laid hold of my arms and hair and moustache, while their Officer desired me to explain my presence upon the Wall at that hour of the night when all honest men should be abed. Resistance had been madness and I was just about to bow under this last buffet of Fortune when there loomed up against the starlight a monstrous mass, human in form, which, without the least delay or warning, fell in perfect silence upon my captors. In an instant all but one had been hurled or kicked to their doom over the battlements. Four wails of terror hung for a moment upon the air, to be followed after an interval by four faint but sickening thuds, and the police force of Bul had been diminished by the same number. As for the Officer, who had placed his back in an angle and was attempting to draw his scimitar, his puny defiance availed him nothing. He was overwhelmed like a Toy Boat by the onslaught of the Tornado. My rescuer simply fell upon him and his spirit fled in a squeak mingled of an appeal for help and the

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sudden expression of all his breath from his body.

To make sure of him, however, his assailant picked him up by the heels and dashed him once or twice against the stonework as some playful boy might deal with a blind kitten.

This done the following words were pronounced :

“ Master of my maiden heart and Lord of my girlish fancy—

“ But for the coming of those tiresome wretches I had still been lurking yonder, fearing to intrude upon thy august meditations ; but what makest thou thy *Thumbkinetta* to say in her Second Act Song :

*Small though I be,
my love for thee
is very great,
my future mate.*

and when I saw thee man-handled by all that common crew, the self-effacement proper to a *fiancée* became impossible to me and I stepped forward and crushed the vermin. But now that those thy interruptors are dead, suffer me once more to retire, and grant me thy pardon for thrusting my so unworthy person upon thy attention. Resume thy cogitations, dread master, but go not far away, lest some other ill chance happen. And believe me, it is useless, for thy Ogga covereth ten yards to thy one.”

With these words my latest menace retreated and

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her vast bulk mingled with the shades of night, than which my soul was no less gloomy, but rather more so.

Oh, that I could have exchanged for that unseen but fearsome neighbour the close and comfortable grasp of my late oppressors !

Further flight being out of the question, guile was my only hope. It was necessary to sweat my brains a little. But as, highly *à propos*, Yak the Meta-physician hath written :

*The wits are a dog that 'tis easy to call
but to cudgel him proveth another affair ;
for shouts and abuse
are no manner of use
and unless he agrees, it is safe to declare
that the cudgelling process won't happen at all—*

or, in other words, it is a simple matter to resolve to be clever, but to lay hands upon the wherewithal is within the competence of few. Now false modesty is no part of my equipment and I am quite ready to own that I am commonly (and uncommonly) well furnished with brains ; but the strongest understanding may be temporarily paralysed by exceptional adversity, and on this occasion my last experience had wrought disastrously upon my intelligence. In a word, I was utterly besotted with misery and the Vehicle of Thought was bogged immovably in the Slough of Trepidation. The harder I strove to disengage it the more deeply did

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it sink and the more arrestingly did the mire rise upon its wheels; and through the remaining hours of darkness I leaned, stupid as an oyster, against the parapet, staring out over the pale wastes of sand which rolled ocean-like to the lip of the town ditch, conscious only of the proximity of Ogga (who from time to time uttered a deprecating cough) and quite unable to grapple, even for an instant, with any thought but the realisation that I was undone.

But at length a whiteness in the East told me that the day was near, and with that, Courage, child of the Sun, came creeping back and laid her hand in mine. I remembered that I was not yet actually wedded.

I moved and looked this way and that. Already the silver of the dawn was about me and the outlines of the battlements were dimly visible. Not far away crouched a shapeless bulk in which I recognised my appalling follower, and almost at my feet, grotesque in its travesty of man's repose, lay the stiffening corpse of the Officer in its gaudy rig of blue jacket, scarlet trouser-rooms, orange fez, and purple sash. I sickened at the spectacle.

But here came Hope also, suddenly, to bear me company, and, finger on lip, whispered a suggestion.

I considered the body with another eye. And immediately my brains were once more at my command and a plan stood there conceived down to its last detail.

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“Ogga,” I said. “Ogga.”

The Giantess rose and came to me at once.

“Shall we to the Registrar’s?” she enquired eagerly.

“Not so, Ogga,” I said. “Before anything of that sort is undertaken it is necessary for us to escape from this place. If I am another hour in Bul I am lost to thee for ever.”

No further explanation was required of me. To intuitive woman, always impatient of logic, the conclusion is everything, the premises of any syllogism being devoid of either interest or value.

“It shall not be,” she cried, clenching her mutton fists. “I will smite. I will destroy. It shall not be.”

“It shall not,” I said, “if you will be a sensible girl and listen to what I propose.”

“Let my Lord speak on,” she said and squatted by my feet, her chin on a level with my eyes.

“I must instantly assume,” I told her, “the uniform of this dead dog here. Then, driving thee before me, I will present myself at the city gate, which will soon be opened. I will pass myself off and out as a Lieutenant of the Constabulary and thee as a gift from the Sultan to some neighbouring great landowner. Thy hands must be bound behind thy back and thou must go weeping. I shall urge thee on with blows and harsh abuse; but thou must resent nothing, for only thus can we save ourselves. To an actress of thy astonishing capacity,” I said,

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with my tongue in my cheek, " thy rôle of the driven will be as easy as that of the driver will be hard for me, thy adorer. And be comforted ! For every word of anger that I speak I will give thee ten of love when once we are out of sight of this accursed town ; and such stripes as I may have been forced to bestow upon thee I will then heal with my kisses. Go to, my Ogga ! " I said. " Is it better to be beaten, but softly, and have thy heart's desire, or 'scape a little pain and lose thy Bildad utterly. ? "

" It were better still," she grumbled intuitively, " to go scathless and retain him ; " but I was in no mood to argue with her.

" Since that," I said sternly, " cannot be, retire, sweetheart, while I clothe myself in these constabulary trappings."

" None of thy nonsense," she cried as she obeyed me, wagging a warning finger than which a red banana were less huge.

At once I set to work. The corpse was stripped and tumbled over the wall's edge, my own duds were discarded and the uniform put on, and my own things bundled up and bestowed in the seat of my new trouserettes ; for, once in safety, I had no mind to be conspicuous. The sash I reserved for the binding of my captor, the kourbash for her chastisement. Then I summoned that Giantess, tied her up securely, hands behind back, and without further delay took the road for the town gate.

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By this the day had grown considerably, and though the sun was not yet up, I had no reason to suppose that the gates would not be open. My surmise proved correct. As my prisoner and I turned into the Street of the Entrance of Entrances (I may remark that to all the footy little town there was no other entrance than this) the drawbridge, already laden with camels, was visible through the archway and beyond it the far white peaks of the Jebel Zukkum, glittering against the tender blue of the early sky.

With this I began to shout and belabour till the street rang with my execrations and blows.

“Advance,” I bellowed, “female dog of a misbegotten monolith! Forward, she-hyæna of a peripatetic pyramid! On, thou ambulating amplitude! March, exceptional enormity! Take up thy legs, oh, blundering behemoth! Step livelier, tonnage! Get a move on, corpulence! Mass, proceed! Quicker, thou maypole mound! Alp, accelerate!” and with every second word I brought the kourbash into play. Ogga, insensible to every consideration but two, our escape and her reward, submitted to my epithets and lashings without a murmur, and thus I was enabled in perfect safety to repay a small amount of the uneasiness which she had caused me under the roof of Obeidallah.

Two minutes of this brought us to the archway of the Gate, and we were not unaccompanied by citizens, whom my loud cries and the rumour that a

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Freak was on show gratis had brought running and hurraing in floods from every alley and side street. Each window had its craning heads, each door discharged unending streams of eager participants, till, by the time we arrived at the barrier, there must have been rather more than two thousand spectators of our progress, besides women and little children. I would have been better pleased if our success had been less conspicuous (considering the earliness of the hour it was remarkable—but it is a soft bed that withholds from a free show), yet I could not reasonably expect to conduct a woman of Ogga's commanding physique through a principal artery of traffic without exciting some notice.

But the astute mind is quick to turn calamity to its own advantage and wastes no time in futile complaint. For what says Nathan the Naturalist in his authoritative work upon the Fauna of Feluchistan?

*When lightning burns the Owl, his nest,
upon a snowy night,
The Bird of Wisdom takes no flight
nor is at all distressed.
"Why, here's a jolly fire," he says,
and warms his pinions at the blaze.*

Since therefore I could not hope to go unobserved, to put on a bold face was clearly the best course, that thus my pretended authority might be confirmed for the Guardians of the Gate, by that very notoriousness which threatened its exposure. I

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accordingly redoubled my abuse of Ogga and the number of my blows, and thus, at last, we came to the straight place, beyond which a limited measure of safety would be ours, since, even though we should win the open, pursuit was to be feared. But it is always the best way to take each difficulty as it comes, as the moneylender said to the spendthrift when the latter objected to a rate of four hundred per cent. on the ground that in a few weeks he would be obliged to sell himself into slavery in order to keep up his payments of interest.

Fortune favours the desperate and my resolution was rewarded. The uniform which I wore or, it may be, the courage with which I assailed my redoubtable convoy, certainly inspired in the Gatemen a persuasion of my importance. No obstruction was offered to our exit, and beyond being asked, in simple admiration, or perhaps solicitude, how far, in my valour, I might be taking my prisoner—I so slight and small, she so huge and powerful—not a word was addressed to me by any of those Custodians. But I knew that not an instant was to be lost. At any moment might come the messengers of Obeidallah's heir with word of playwright Bildad's elopement with his leading lady; at any moment the discovery of five dead policemen in the town ditch might be made. Our safety hung upon a hair and an exchange of civilities with the janitors was out of the question. So to him who had asked my destination I made, waggishly winking, that

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answer which Boor the Dull gives to the child Wy in the Twenty-fifth book of *The Reparteedious Conversationalist* :

*The boy who Questions can abjure
will hear no lies, he may be sure—*

and to the accompaniment of the laughter which the couplet never fails to provoke among the uneducated—to whom wit is like the face of a friend, the better known the better loved—stepped triumphantly upon the drawbridge, driving my abductress before me.

And behind me I heard the wardens telling one another that “ The little fellow hath some confidence in himself,” and that “ The mouse that the mountain mothered hath gone *wellah!* among his father’s nieces by marriage for a wife,” and otherwise making merry at my expense. Little I cared. The Gate was behind me, now the drawbridge was passed, and now the road streamed away from our toes into the white distances of the sandy plain. And lo! as our feet took the highway, the first spear was launched along the earth by the Hunter of the East, and the Sultan’s turret was encircled in a noose of light, exactly as dear old wine-bibbing Omar has described it in the First Edition of his well-known paraphrase of the *Rubáiyát* of Fitzgerald the Englishman.

“ He who is in a hurry,” says Ahab the Abece-

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darian, "doth well to be quick." The proverb "Less speed, better haste" does not apply to movement in a straight line, but rather to the packing of saddle-bags. Yet though neither of these inestimable thoughts came to urge my feet forward in a direction remote from the City of Bul-on-the-Bul, I padded the hoof during the next hour with a persistence and a rapidity which showed that muscle can at times very easily dispense with education. Learning is a valuable possession, but for the purposes of running away give me a clean pair of legs; and as a knowledge of the Classics cannot be guaranteed to triumph over every emergency, I beseech any young man who may read these words not to cultivate his brains too much at the expense of his physical activity. Shall a quotation divert a mad bullock from its purpose? And who shall, with a bouquet of verses, fill the maw of a man-eating tiger?

As I ran I continued the walloping of Ogga, first out of precaution, that the Gate's suspicions be not aroused, then out of anxiety to cover the earth, and lastly out of sheer pleasure in the exercise. But when we had gone some six miles and the city was lost to sight among the undulations of the land (we had soon left the road and struck across country) Ogga, I suppose, began to hope that a little less vigour on my part might not prove compromising to the safety of us both, for she cried suddenly (having hitherto said no word, neither good nor bad): "Not

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so shrewdly now, my darling. Not so shrewdly now." At the same time, bursting the scarf which bound her hands behind her back as if it had been a thread of cotton, she turned upon me, and felled me to the ground. "Love bird," she added, "shall we not quit this mumming, which can be no longer necessary, and talk a little of our future? Where art thou leading my youth and innocence and in what nearest city dost design to make thyself mine? For I need not say that, had I not believed that thou art actuated by honourable intentions towards me, I had never consented that thou shouldst fly with me. A girl cannot be too careful and it is time that we understood one another. Declare then, plainly, where and when we are to be married, or I crush thee like a spider." So saying she raised her ponderous right foot and menaced me openly.

Now I feel no shame in confessing that, while my intentions towards her youth and innocence had been irreproachable, my hope always had been to amuse her with promises until some means should present itself of escaping from her, or, as she would no doubt have preferred to express it, basely deserting her. I was therefore quite unprepared with any answer. Where or what the nearest city might be I knew no more than herself, but I had trusted that shortly after our arrival in it I should be able somehow to lose myself from her vigilance. Among these deserts escape was impossible, and my only chance lay in surrounding us with some teeming multitude.

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I was therefore no less eager than herself (though with a different end in view) to come to some focus of civilisation, where, though the machinery of marriage might be available, opportunities of escape would also not be wholly to seek.

“Heart’s delight,” said I, nursing my jaw, “as thou truly observest, our pantomime has probably served its purpose and we may, I hope, now adopt an attitude towards one another more consistent with our real sentiments. But first it is necessary that I change my clothes, since this uniform, besides being dreadfully visible (we must remember that pursuers may be in search of us) is (having regard to what we left behind us in the town ditch) enough to hang me (after I have been torn to pieces with red hot pincers by the minions of the heir to our Lord Obeidallah for having persuaded thee to fly with me.) And so, with thy leave, my Pearl Girl, I will repair to yonder small oasis, and there, among the modest palms, assume my old rags, which I have brought with me in the seat of these pretty trouseroshes.”

So saying, I rose and, leaving her seated on the sand, proceeded to carry my programme into execution. This done, I was about to emerge cautiously from my shelter on the side remote from the situation of my twin soul, when a cloud of dust, which approached at great speed from the direction of the city, gave me sudden pause. Even as I watched, the long striding legs of camels, looming through the sand mist that they themselves created,

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and, a moment later, the figures of their riders, bent double and lashing their mounts, proclaimed our active and remorseless pursuit. In the forefront rode the tracker, his eyes riveted to the ground as he followed the spoor of Ogga in the sand. It was indeed a script that he who ran might read, and the Neolithic hunter on the trail of a brontosaurus can have had no simpler task. And now from the pack of villains burst forth the cheerful view-hullo which tells that the quarry hath been sighted. Scorning further assistance from the earth, they launched themselves directly upon the devoted maiden. She was as good as re-enslaved.

There were not less than twenty men in the party and I suppose their numbers made them reckless, for, instead of having a care to arrive all at once, they raced for the prize. One, who bestrode an animal of exceptional speed, soon outdistanced his fellows and, plying his spurs at a great rate, bore down upon my lady with cries of triumph. No doubt he already dreamed the spending of the reward and his soul was aflame with the foretaste of much wine. Arrived at Ogga's side, he drew rein so suddenly that his camel was forced upon its haunches; then, clapping his hand on the poor girl's shoulder, he named her his prisoner.

As for Ogga, she caught up the camel by the hind legs, whirled it thrice round her head, regardless of the projection from his saddle of its rider (he hit a

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rock thirty yards away and smashed like an egg) and charged.

A camel, in capable hands, is a weapon that is not to be despised, and none was ever wielded more dexterously than on this occasion. The troop, taken by surprise and given no time to scatter or collect their wits, went down like ninepins, and almost as quickly as I can write the words the plain was littered with the dead and dying. Not a man escaped, not a camel was left on four legs. It was colossal. Have you seen an avalanche overwhelm a mountain village, built on the site of fifty similar catastrophes? I expect not, but it was like that. At one moment twenty strong men hurtling forward, full of red blood and life and hope; the next, a heap of pitiful corpses and Ogga, reseated on the sand, doing her hair up.

"Come out, my pet," she called (and her voice was quite unshaken), "that is, if thy toilet be sufficiently complete to encounter a maiden's eye. Come out, dear Bildad, and let us get on. I pant," explained this woman of one idea, "to be called thine own, and the city, mayhap, is far away."

At this my knees, already loosened by the spectacle which I had witnessed, became as water and I abandoned all the crafty intentions with which I had entered the oasis. To court (by flight) the vengeance of this Cyclone was evident lunacy and in conciliation lay my only hope. I therefore came out, running and buttoning my jacket about me.

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“Had not my condition been exactly midway between the uniformed and that in which I am at length enabled to appear,” I panted as I reached her side, “my strong right arm had been potently exerted to protect thee, my bliss, from the arrogance of these scoundrels. See!” I cried, spurning the corpses with my foot. “See how I despise them! Oh, that these togs had been quicker a-buttoning, that thou mightest have seen how fights thy Bildad for his lady! For it is well known that modesty is ever the mark of the brave man.”

“Ay,” said she, “and even as I did my little share I knew what kept thee from my side and loved thee but the better for it. Say, duckling, shall we not onwards to the Magistrate’s?”

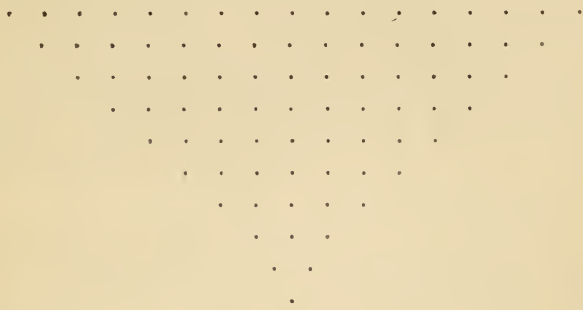
We made another twenty miles under the blazing desert sun and here my strength, already much tried, gave out. It was in a bad place among hideous heaps of black sand and blacker basalt rock. Vultures and bleached bones were everywhere and the mirage continually mocked our thirst. Not far away were the foot-hills of the Jebel Zukkum, but I knew myself nigh to death and the thought was absolutely sweet to me, for Ogga, who was slightly delirious, babbled incessantly of marriage-settlements.

“Leave me,” I croaked as I sank down, “leave me, my soul.”

“Never!” she said. “Never, my precious!”

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Whilst thou hast life, *I* have hope." And taking me up like a child by the scruff of my neck, she staggered onward.



I

regained my senses to the sound of running water. At first I was disposed to believe that this was one of the more refined torments of the place to which I, having died with the sin of abduction on my soul, had come ; but the absence of excessive heat and certain grateful sensations which I experienced reassuring me, I opened my eyes and was rewarded by the disquieting spectacle of Ogga's large face distant from mine but a few inches. She had me across her knees and she was bent solicitously over me, while with a wet rag she moistened my lips and bathed my temples. On returning to consciousness for the second time I discovered that I had been placed on the ground under a shady baobab ; glancing fearfully about me I perceived the Giantess,

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some steps away, busily engaged in kindling a fire by the primitive method of rubbing two green sticks together. This is a tedious process to ordinary people, but in Ogga's case it was considerably shortened owing to the vigour with which she was able to undertake it. As my eyes fell upon her she was just beginning, and I had hardly realised her intention when the wood burst into flame. Hung upon a branch was the carcass of a buck, already skinned and galled but wanting three legs; in a twinkling the remaining limb had been torn away and thrust in among crackling twigs. I perceived that Ogga had made a raw dinner, but that for me a more dainty repast was intended. Yet while this circumstance spoke volumes for her devotion, her system of cookery shouted whole libraries against her merits as a housekeeper. The venison was rapidly burning to a cinder, but Ogga seemed quite undisturbed; and nothing that had gone before had been able so strongly to arouse my determination to die rather than link my fate inseparably with hers.

For what says the unnamed Author of *The Politic Policeman*, which work, by the way, I found in the pocket of the Lieutenant's uniform, just before I abandoned it among the palms of the oasis, and took with me to lighten the tedium of travel?

*Marry the Cook, nor let thy fancy
caress the idea of Housemaid Nancy;
for Nancy may be fair and good,
but Cook will give thee decent food.
In dimpled cheeks Love liveth not
but rather in the Seething Pot.*

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Ogga, however, was a person not lightly to be criticised and I kept silence until it pleased her to announce that my dinner was done to a turn and bring me thereafter a long bone surrounded by clinging cinders. Of this, as there is no more penetrating criticism of cookery than its reception, I forced myself to swallow every crumb, while Ogga stood by, smiling her satisfaction with my appetite and her own culinary skill.

Polite conversation is the salt of banqueting, and as I had no other and as she seemed to expect something of the kind, I paid her several compliments. Then said I, "My Ogga, here we are, lovers declared this long while, yet know we nothing at all of one another. Tell me thy story, Ogga, that the Wings of Digestion be upborne upon the Breeze of Informing Narrative." I knew that though it should be a hundred-knot gale it would help me in no way, but this I kept to myself.

"To hear is to obey," she replied and forthwith commenced.

THE STORY OF OGGA

OR

THE GIANTESS *malgré elle*.

"I was born not very far away from the City which we have just quitted and lived in my father's house till about a week before thy arrival, my

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Bildad, among us of the Piastre Museum, when there came one of my lord Obeidallah's collectors to the village, attracted by the report of my great hugeness. My father, a poor man, was only too happy to part with me, whose appetite constituted a regular and serious drain upon his finances. I was sold for twenty darheems a pound and my parents were thus enabled to move into a much nicer house. Such," Ogga concluded, "such, dear love, is my story."

"Tell me, Ogga," said I, when I had congratulated her upon the skill with which she had unravelled her complicated tale, "how comes it that thou couldst endure not only to become the subject of such an atrocious transaction but actually to remain a week in the establishment of Obeidallah? Whose grave may dogs defile! A very slight exercise of the strength which is thine had freed thee from that collector or wrought upon thy father's heart to the repudiation of that bargain. And how should the whole City have withstood thee hadst thou been minded to quit it? How couldst thou value thyself so cheaply? Where was all thy strength?"

"Ah," she said, blushing adorably, "but *then* I had not loved."

The place where we had spread our rustic meal was a little glade among those woods of oak, cypress, acacia, birch, hornbeam, willow, abele, fir, black-

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thorn, elder, poplar, wych-elm, paw-paw, cedar, alder, larch, chestnut, white thorn, ash, teak, rowan, white beam, cinnamon, wellingtonia, mahogany, maple, tamarisk, sycamore, napoleonica, holly, buckthorn, hazel, service, bread-fruit, yew, linden, beech, logwood, cornel, aspen, hawthorn, plane, wayfaring, boot, beerbohm, and other trees which spread their grateful shade along those foot-hills of the Jebel Zukkum which I have mentioned and to which Ogga during my first period of unconsciousness had carried me. Down the centre of this glade laughed a little brook of delightful limpidity wherein sported many lively fishes, among which I noticed the trout, the grayling, the mullet, the dace, the roach, the pike, the whiting, the sturgeon, the salmon, the barbel, the minnow, the mackerel, the bull-head, the finnan-haddock, the chevin, the halibut, the bleak, the conger-eel, the carp, the smelt, the stench, the miller's thumb, the tarpon, the catfish, the tunney, the octopus, and the potato. Grass of emerald hue made glad the eye recently disgusted by the glare of inhospitable sand, and all the lawn was starred with the gay blossoms of the mushroom, the water-lily, the begonia, the boustrophedon, the calendula vulgaris, the gregaria smithia, the polytrichum brownii, the infusoria jonesyitis, the echinoderm campestris, the blastoderm schweinkopfsius, the medusa duboisiosa, and the warty dodder. In the branches above our heads a feathered choir of brightest plumage and sweetest note sang per-

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petually, and I remarked the characteristic utterances of the corncrake, the condor, the ostrich, the goose, the owl, the carrion crow, the jay, the shrike, the macaw, the goat-sucker, the swan, the peacock, and the duck-billed platypus. Gorgeously winged ticks flitted about among the flowers, while from beetles of metallic sheen—the cockroach and the burying beetle particularly engaged my attention—the beams of the sun were reflected in a thousand thousand rays. Mosquitoes danced their giddy sarabands; fleas sprang hither and thither with an agreeable agility; and both united with the wasp and the gadfly, the midge and the centipede, the earwig and the woodlouse to employ their engaging talents incessantly towards the banishment of *ennui* from the fortunate visitor to this pretty Paradise.

If my *fiancée* had not been there and if the pangs of indigestion had not fulfilled the promise of my dinner, I swear I could have been almost happy.

“Bildad——” Ogga presently began, but she was interrupted before her sentence had attained to a more perfect condition of intelligibility.

A voice of rich tenor quality (though somewhat uncouthly produced) broke at this moment upon the ear and we were treated, *à la cantonade*, to the following musical plaint, which, from information subsequently obtained, I am able to entitle

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THE LOVE-SONG OF CASSIM THE CUT-PURSE

*A Brigand chief am I,
the boldest of my band.
I sally forth,
West, South, and North,
to harry all the land.
The life is simply grand,
so happy and so free,
and not a spot
would blot my lot
could I encounter THEE.*

CHORUS

*What is thy name, my darling ?
Where dost thou coyly hide ?
Lonely I'm waiting
the day of our mating.
Oh, come to me soon, my anonymous bride !
Be Sarah, Rockeya, Kadajah ;
fair as Day or a daughter of Ham ;
if only thou'lt hurry
thy Cassim won't worry
a——*

Here the singer broke suddenly off and a loud exclamation of "Bismillah!" told us that some surprising circumstance had caused him to disappoint the just expectations of the rhyme.

That he had perceived us I surmised, nor was my suspicion long wanting in confirmation. Next moment, at the far extremity of the glade, the close branches of a banyan parted and there stepped into view a figure whose description (as the Victorian novelists used to say) deserves a new chapter.

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It was that of a tall man.

He advanced upon us without hesitation, his ready hands playing over the armoury of swords, pistols, muskets, javelins, daggers, and lances with which he was equipped. It was plain to see that he was a fellow not easily to be taken at a disadvantage. When he had come to within a yard of us or two he halted and surveyed us arrogantly, fingering his enormous moustache and pawing the ground in an intimidating manner. I did not like his looks at all and whispered in the ear of Ogga that it might be as well to be getting on to the Magistrate's; but she paid me no attention. Her eyes were fastened eagerly upon the newcomer and in them beamed a light with which I was painfully familiar; but hitherto it had existed only for me. Her large nostrils were dilated, her colour was high, and between her open lips the breath panted in quick, strong gusts not unlike those which a locomotive produces when it is drawing out of a station with a train rather too heavy for its horse-power. And I heard her whisper, "Is *this*, then, love?"

A more signal instance of first-sight capitulation can rarely have occurred.

It will surprise you to learn that my earliest impression on listening to this artless avowal was one of peculiar annoyance only if your knowledge of the human heart is as incomplete as was mine at this

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early period of my life. To reject a detested admiration is one thing ; to lose it, quite another ; and of that which we ourselves despise and reprobate we cannot gladly perceive anyone else in receipt. The sugar-plum which the child disdains may not with impunity be devoured by his little companion, and only when the hat at which the Parisienne has scoffed appears on the head of her rival, does she at last perceive that it is truly *chic* and find herself in command of language in which to characterise it with satisfactory venom. In other words, what *we* don't want no one else shall have if we can help it. The symptoms which Ogga exhibited told me as clearly as if she had articulated the information that I was referred to the second place in her affections, if not altogether banished from them, and the knowledge was bitter. Two minutes earlier I had desired nothing so forcibly as to be quit of her, yet this discovery, which promised everything that I could wish, was a blow to my own complacency which I could ill sustain ; and I believe that if I could have procured the instant extinction of my supplanter I would have done so unhesitatingly and would have resumed my mastery of Ogga's heart without a single shudder at the price which I was paying for the healing of my lacerated pride.

But none of this was within my competence and I was forced to put up with it.

The newcomer was the first to address us.

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“As I live by plunder,” he said, “here is a likely lass! Say, my strapper, whence comest thou with that undersized baboon of thine? Knowest thou not, thou fine large girl, that 'tis death to enter these ranges without the leave of Cassim the Kurd? I had better, perhaps, to make everything quite clear, inform you that *I* am Cassim the Kurd.”

“Cassim!” she said—and oh! but her voice caressed the name—“Cassim! How lovely it sounds! Cassim! 'Tis sheer music! Cassim! Come hither!” and with the last word she sprang suddenly from the earth and stood upon her two feet, her arms spread wide. By her movement I was overturned, but my jealous eye lost nothing of the scene.

I will say this for the fellow, that he showed no alarm.

“A mother!” he cried, staring her over with his bold black eyes. “A mother for heroes, as I live by luck!”

Whereupon Ogga, with a power of impromptu versification with which I would never have credited her (but what cannot love accomplish!) opened her mouth and bellowed, to the tune which had carried the words of Cassim's song, the following adaptation of its refrain:

Ogga's my name, my darling.

No longer I coyly hide.

Here I am waiting

our moment of mating.

Then take thy no-longer-anonymous bride.

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*No Sarah, Rockeye or Kadijah,
no blubber-lipped negress I am.
But enough of this chatter !
All that doesn't matter*

a—

The last word was drowned in a stentorian "Ha!" from the bandit. A moment he stood at gaze, his eyes dilated with astonishment; the next he had turned, like a hare, and bounded towards the shelter of the woods.

In three strides Ogga was upon him and had seized him in her arms; in three others she was back at her starting-point.

"Thou hast asked me," she said as she put him on his feet and took away all his weapons, upon which she now sat down, "thou hast asked me, Cassim, and I say 'Yea' to thee."

"But," he stammered, "is not mutuality of intention of the essence of every contract? I believed myself alone. I had no knowledge that thou wast here. I did but sing to pass the time. How, then, can words which were never meant to serve any purpose other than my own amusement be construed as a proposal of marriage directed to thy address?"

"But how," replied Ogga, "shall they otherwise be construed by *me*? Were thy explanation admitted, it were open to any professional heart-breaker to ride off cheerfully from the consequences of his villainy upon the plea that he has been

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'amusing himself.' Such a defence is a little too truthful for the Law to swallow, my Cassim; but apart from that, consider the purely moral aspect of this matter. How was I to know that thou wast only distracting thy leisure? Thinkest thou that a girl will hear a proposal couched in such very definite language and waste time in considering whether it is or is not meant? Not so. She leapeth to meet it and to clutch it to her poor empty heart.

"How shall she know, why should she ask, if it be genuine? A proposal is, to a maid, a proposal, and what careth she for your mutuality of intention? She alone hath enough mutuality for a dozen engagements. And how shall she suspect her lover? Has he not, with a few words, set himself on high in her esteem as the King of Men, and where shall she find the power to imagine him capable of deceit? She is ten hundred thousand miles distant, at any rate, from supposing that he is 'amusing himself.'

"No, Cassim, if the most prudent phrases of a young man sound like marriage bells in the ears of a girl, how, think you, will she hear the breathings of his love? Will she examine them closely? Will she be alert to mark if the note of deceit be present or absent? Not so. Not so. Instantly her soul flames to the spark, and the conflagration may not be extinguished by telling her that it was only *pour passer le temps*. The damage is done, Cassim, if not paid for. The rick is consumed, Cassim, and there is no insurance-money forthcoming.

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“ From which we may conclude that you young fellows cannot be too careful. And what says Supp the Celibate ?

*Though Speech was by Nature intended
my actual meaning to cloak,
at times, even better befriended
by Silence, her aid I invoke.*

*And especially so,
I would have you to know,
when I chat with a girl who's in want of a beau.
Ah ! better sit dumb and seem soft in the head,
than talk of the weather and find yourself wed.*

And although these lines reflect the poltroonery of the cynical egoist rather than any right perception of womanly nature, they are not wholly unilluminating, since they exhibit the danger that a man's light word may occasion to a happiness which he may have no smallest intention of compromising.

“ I am willing, my Cassim, to admit that what you have done may have been unintentional, but that consideration is neither here nor there. The hurt has been inflicted and can only be mended in one way. This, if you are a gentleman (of which I feel certain) I shall not need to indicate ; but if not, I must look for the vindication of my honour to myself (since I have no natural protector but this Bildad, my late *fiancé*) ; and as the method which I shall adopt will be the same as that which you (supposing you always to have been a gentleman) would have taken, I think you will agree that you will do well to marry me at once and so preserve

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your character for chivalry, since its loss cannot save you from the same consequences of your inconsiderateness."

To this harangue the unfortunate brigand had attended without very much pleasure being expressed by his countenance. Indeed, at the beginning of things, he had made one or two resolute attempts to bolt, but on each occasion had been caught, ere he had gone a yard, and returned gently to his place. But during the last two hours of the address, realising, I suppose, the present hopelessness of his situation, he had made no offer to escape, but had remained where he had been put, biting his nails, scowling, and otherwise demonstrating his uneasiness. Yet, as the discourse drew to a close, a happier expression appeared and he seemed willing to speak.

And now, finding that the torrent had for the moment ceased to flow, he eagerly cried: "But what is this? 'My *fiancé*,' sayest thou? This is thy *fiancé*, is it? Then what——?"

"*Was*," said Ogga. "I was engaged to him until *thou* camest. Now I am engaged to *thee*."

"Why!" he cried, "but this settleth it. Thinkest thou that I am the man to pay my addresses to the property of another? This disposeth of all intention, mutual or otherwise. I did not know that thou wast here and, if I had, I am too honourable a man to rob even this, thy blue-faced mandril, of the

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object of his accepted affections. As I live by booty ! this letteth me out," he cried in an ecstasy of delight.

" Listen, Cassim," she said patiently. " That I was promised to Bildad is true, but think not the less of me therefore. Know that before I saw the little man I had viewed none of thy sex save my father, a certain buyer of Human Curiosities, and sundry very ugly fellows and loathsome among whom it has lately been my lot to dwell. As for that buyer, he was an old man, an Armenian, bald, bent, shrivelled, toothless, and of piping voice. This Bildad (who is after all none so simian as thou dost insist) was the first male human of so much as tolerable appearance (saving always my sire) that these eyes had encountered. What wonder, then, if I listened, in my ignorance of what a man may really be, at last to the passionate tale of love which the little villain poured hourly into my unwilling ear ? What wonder if he prevailed over my natural timidity and the circumspection proper to a maiden, so far that I consented to fly with him. Only since I beheld *thee*, my Cassim, hath the folly of which I was then guilty been in its entirety perceived. Yet, though it was folly it was wiser than very wisdom ; for it hath brought me to thee, my Cassim ; thee to me.

" This being the case, stand not upon thy dignity and thy honour and what becometh thy gentlemanliness. Consider not Bildad, for my heart was

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never really his, and of that which a man hath not had how shall he be robbed? As for our engagement, it was but a form upon which I insisted ere I would entrust myself to his protection. Like you young men of your tongues, we girls can, of our reputations, never be too careful. My late betrothal, then, need give thee no anxiety whatever. It is over," she cooed, "ended, and never was, from the moment that thy warm and fruity voice shattered the ice that bound my maiden heart."

So saying she picked him up and kissed him soundly once or twice, and, returning him to the ground, was silent. But she beamed on the poor devil as beameth bulb-nosed Bacchus on a butt of bonded brandy.

Cowed, I suppose, either by her strength or the power of her speech, the brigand too said no word, and a rather awkward pause ensued which I presently broke by observing that the year was very warm for the time of day.

I beg that, although the Comic Muse has by long usage obtained an almost sacred right to this arrangement of words, no waggish intention be here attributed to me. Tact alone prompted my remark; and if the tenseness of the moment caused my speech to stumble, it was not the first, as it will not be the last, instance of an attempt to relieve a general embarrassment that assumes the appearance of an ill-timed jest.

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In this connection there occur to me some lines of the poetess Juweira, a chief ornament of Cairene salons during the winter of 1899 :

*The Leader of the Hope Forlorn
commands our admiration ;
and such is he who would retrieve
a Social Situation.
And though in failure ends the Deed,
the Man we must acclaim.
The Martyr charging to his doom,
the Idiot in the drawing-room,
are heroes, just the same.*

Cassim, however, was too nervous and Ogga too enraptured to remark upon the spoonerismical turn of my words, but to me it was very dreadfully obvious. As the above-mentioned talented female has it, a little further on :

*Our own mistakes, our own mistakes,
how hard they are to bear !
Another shows himself an ass,
indulgently we let it pass
with giggle, nudge or stare.
But oh ! with rage and shame we hear
our own unchancy word !
Down through the floor we long to sink.
(Unless, indeed, we've cause to think
that no one else has heard.)*

Since it was not possible for me to know whether the silence of my companions was due to a wish to spare my blushes or simple insensibility to my presence, I abandoned all idea of helping things along with a little light chatter upon the topics of

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the day, and relapsed, myself, into a silence which I employed in attempting to restore my courage with repeated assurances that my fatuity had escaped unnoticed.

When we had all remained without speaking for an hour, three minutes, and six and forty seconds by the shadow, Ogga gave a sudden start and came out of her beatific daydream.

“ My Cassim,” she said, “ shall we not be going ? ”

He had never once taken his eyes off her. “ Going ? ” he repeated in a hollow voice. “ Going where ? ”

“ But to thy home,” she said, opening wide her eyes, “ that the marriage feast be laid and the needful functionary procured.”

“ I am much fatigued,” he answered crossly, “ and would repose myself yet further,” and though in my heart I hated him, in that he had been preferred to me, I almost pitied him, he looked so beaten and despairing and his struggles were so futile.

“ Surely, dear heart,” said she, indulgent of her choice. “ And meanwhile Bildad shall prepare our marriage contract. Out with thy tackle, Bildad, and write to my dictation.”

“ It is a writer ? ” demanded Cassim, exhibiting sudden signs of life.

“ It is,” she answered.

“ As I live by ransom ! ” he cried, “ this falls out well. I am, as it happens, perniciously in need of a

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pen. My last scribe is dead this ten months and I have not been able to lay hands on another in all that time. Hence we of the band are greatly overstocked with captives, by reason of our inability to communicate with their friends, and in consequence the revenue hath decreased in a double manner, which threatens our coherence. For every day that a prisoner must be maintained is so much sheer loss, and the mutual loyalty of no brotherhood can long stand the strain of wholly unremunerative operations combined with incessant outgoing. Indeed my authority over those thugs of mine hangs at this moment on a thread. They are for murdering all the prisoners this afternoon, in order to save our money. It were wiser for a man to throw away a sack of gold because the weight of it bears hardly on his shoe-leather. But the uneducated are always thus; one minute ahead they can see, but beyond all is darkness. It was to avoid the painful sight of this butchery and at the same time escape the necessity of issuing commands which were certain to be flouted (a thing which no leader can afford to do) that I wandered hither. But there is yet time. The massacre was to be for five o'clock and if we hurry we may avert it. With a writer to show to them, I fear no trouble. Their imagination will leap all intervening weeks and it will be for them as if they fingered their share of all that money. Up!" he sprang to his feet. "Let us out of this."

"To hear my lord," said Ogga, as she too rose,

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“is to obey him. Hast thou, perchance, a Magistrate of good repute among thy captives?”

“Truly,” he said, “I know not. The cattle have increased so much upon us this season that I cannot carry all their trades in my memory. But doubtless we shall find something of the sort. Forward!”

Hope was in his eye and I now understood fully the cause of his late dejection. From a crowd of mutineers he could look for no help in his extremity; but backed by minions, rendered faithful by the production of Bildad, he now trusted to repel the menace of the Giantess. Knowing Ogga as I did, I could feel little confidence in the power of his men to save him from her, but I did not feel called upon to tell him so. Though I had been greatly angered at being supplanted by him, I had no real wish to be restored to my position of first favourite, and it seemed to me that if Ogga was to be suppressed, which I infinitely desired, it was better that she should have no warning of any attack that might be meditated. Therefore did I hold my tongue, put up my writing materials, and follow. Ogga went on, humming happily as hums the buzz-saw; in the lap of her robe she had collected all the weapons which she had taken from Cassim, and, as she walked, she thrust the swords and javelins into her coiled hair to ornament it withall.

“Tell me, Ogga,” said I as we went along, “how it happeneth that thou, who hast never hitherto

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given evidence of any conspicuous command of language, wast enabled all of a sudden to deliver a speech to that robber fellow which for eloquence, conciseness of reasoning, and length rivals the best efforts of Log the Loquacious of whom it is written :

*He talked them deaf, he talked them blind,
of smell and touch and taste bereft them,
and when to murder they inclined
he talked them petrified and left them.*

Never hast thou thus addressed *me.*”

“ Ay ! ” she said, while the rose crept into her cheek, “ but *now* I love.”

We pursued the course of the rivulet upwards for over an hour, and came at last to a place where the water gushed out of a cave in the side of an immense cliff. Cassim, without a moment’s hesitation, entered the stream and disappeared into the darkness. Ogga, kilting her petticoat-trousers to the knee, and driving me in before her, followed. After a few blind, splashing paces, a torch, suddenly illuminated, showed us our way and we found ourselves on a rocky path which ran along the water’s edge. In front went Cassim, bearing the torch and striding along with the assured step of one who treads a well-known track. Twenty minutes brought us to the other end of this tunnel and showed us again the blessed daylight, striped with the strong bars of an enormous iron gate. Beyond we perceived a long, green valley entirely surrounded by

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towering and precipitous walls of rock. It was a place peculiarly suited to be the home of brigands.

Cassim, with a key which he drew from his breast, unlocked the gate, opened it, and motioned us to go through, which we did. He then pronounced the word "Swag" which I take to have been the password; but as there were no guards with suspicions to allay, it is possible that Devotion to Routine proved once more in this case its notorious ability to override the claims of Common Sense.

Behind us the gate clanged, Cassim hastened to rejoin us, and, again taking the lead, resumed his silent striding. Soon we had followed him out of the bed of the stream and had engaged our feet upon a path which led straight across verdant meads towards a number of houses built at a mile's distance under the shelter of the Eastern cliff.

As we approached the robber town a murmur assailed our ears which, increasing in volume with our every step, soon developed into the surging bellow of an angry crowd. Cassim quickened his pace, as did we, until he and I were running our hardest and even Ogga was walking quickly. As we neared the scene of action, which was hidden from us by the nearest buildings, articulate cries began to detach themselves from that great shouting and to rise superior to it, as flecks of foam are tossed above the raging billows of the sea.

"Death to the captives!" I heard. "Bring them from the prison!" "We'll learn them to eat

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us out of house and home!" "We'll give them Unearned Increment!" "Allah punish the scoundrels!" and again, sharper and more dreadful, such savage advice as "Hang 'em!" "Drown 'em!" "Stone 'em!" "Roast 'em!" "Make pincushions of 'em!" "Make collops of 'em!" "Disembowel 'em!" "To the ants with 'em!" and so forth.

It was evident that the popular excitement ran high and that the town was working itself up to the horrid deed of whose projection Cassim had spoken.

But now we had dashed round the corner of a tavern and the town square lay open to our gaze. It was filled from side to side with a heaving mob of men, women, and children all under the influence of violent emotion. Hands and weapons were brandished aloft and every pair of lungs was being employed to its fullest strength. At the many windows of a large building, which confronted us from the further side of the square, pale faces came and went. I had little doubt that this was the prison and that these were the captives, and the sequel proved my surmise to be correct. The gaze of the crowd was directed towards this building.

Owing to this circumstance we were not at once observed and Cassim had a moment's leisure in which to beg the loan of a sword from Ogga. This she yielded to him without any hesitation, for her action in disarming him had, I fancy, been prompted less by

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fear of any mischief that he could do her with his weapons than by the desire natural to a woman in love to see the object of her affections suitably humbled.

The sword in his hand caused a sort of transfiguration in the bandit. Courage he certainly did not lack, or he had never (for he had no guarantee that he would get a sword from Ogga) approached this spot without weapon save his naked hands ; but with the receipt of that sword he became at once twice the man that he had been. He seemed to swell and tower ; his eyes burned brightly in his head ; his moustache bristled and rose on his lip. Then he suddenly put a hand to his mouth and howled for Silence.

At once all the heads swung round and in the place of turbans and back-hair presented a sea of flushed faces, starting eyes, and gaping mouths. And the silence which Cassim had commanded fell upon them.

It lasted but a moment.

“ Brothers——” began the Chieftain, and at the word a yell of execration burst from all throats.

“ Ah-h-h-h-h ! ” they shouted. “ There you are then ! Chuck him out ! Knock him down ! Beat out his brains ! Duck him ! Bonnet him ! Rip him up ! Resign ! Resign ! ”

By this time Cassim had mounted the steps of a neighbouring house, rapidly arranged a small table with a glass of water on it against the railing of the verandah, and now stood composed and cool,

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waiting the favour of their silence. Between his hands he lightly held the sword (he had thrown away the scabbard) across his thighs at the full extent of his arms. His demeanour excited their curiosity. This was not the appearance of one who had betrayed them to their loss. Some memory, perhaps, awoke in their bosoms of all that this man was supposed to have done for them in the past. At any rate the character of the cries began to change.

“Fair play!” they screamed. “Silence! Shame! Let the gentleman speak, can’t you? Shut up! Hit that yelping fool over the mouth with thy slipper, Aly! Ayesha, stifle that brat of thine, woman!”

In a very little time this new current of public opinion had quite overwhelmed the first and everyone was now shrieking for silence so loudly that the noise which had formerly existed was utterly outdone. But this intensity of clamour lasted not long and Cassim was soon able to make his voice heard, whereupon every sound but one ceased, as by magic, and only the bellowing of Ayesha’s infant (which was due to wind and not to political animus) affronted the ear.

“And now,” cried Cassim, “let us have this out, fairly and squarely, once and for all. I needn’t tell you that I court the fullest investigation. An honest man like me—No, Jallas ibn Yezid, there is no ‘Question’ about it—I say, an honest man like

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me doesn't need to have any fear of meeting his associates, so long as everything is open to all the world. It's only underhand goings-on that can give him any uneasiness. There's been too much of that kind of dirt (and I won't say on whose side, because *you* know) in the past, but there's not going to be any more of it, if *you* please. This meeting is going to clear the air and you may be perfectly certain of that. So come along, boys! Let's hear your grievance. You tell me frankly what you don't like in me and I'll tell you frankly what I think would be improved in you, and between the two of us I shouldn't wonder if we can be very good friends again. But let us be frank, quite frank. And now, who's going to give it a name? "

At this there was a very little applause diluted with a considerable amount of hissing and booing. It was evident that Cassim was thoroughly unpopular. I could see members of the audience feeling the blades of daggers with their thumbs and looking to the priming of their flint-locks, and at that time I would not have given a rush for the life of the promoter of their enterprises.

An elderly man was hustled to the front. With rather reluctant steps he mounted the stairs and stood upon the platform as far as possible from Cassim, who was sipping water with an air of indescribable *sang froid*.

"Well, Ob ibn Ab," he remarked cheerfully, "give tongue. Don't keep your pals waiting."

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Thus encouraged the elderly man, after hemming thrice, began the recital of the confederacy's wrongs.

"Cassim ibn Ishac," he said, "we—I speak for a majority of the brethren—accuse thee of incompetence in the management of our affairs, in that thou hast accumulated captives to an inordinate extent to the prejudice of the revenue of our association. Over capitalisation—the curse of modern industry—threatens us and ours with a diminution of the wherewithal. Not only are no ransoms coming to hand, but an unconscionable quantity of foodstuff must be provided to keep life in the stock. Not only has no dividend been paid for months, but the expenses are mounting all the time. Among the captives twins have recently been born and milk must now be sent into the prison daily. And still thou organisest forays of the Young Men—even now are there not six boys absent on such business?—and still thou addest to the number of our prisoners. This cannot, wellah! go on. For to spend money without making it is to take the quick road to bankruptcy. Since, then, the sources of revenue are dried up, let us at least save our meat and vegetables. In a word, let us massacre the prisoners, cut our losses, and wind up this no-longer-profitable concern. As for thee, it is proposed to steep thee soundly in petroleum, set a light to thee, and chase thee, burning, with spears down to the river whose kindly waters, it is trusted, will at once put thee out of thy pain and carry thy

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accursed carcass from this valley, of which thou hast too long been the presiding and evil genius. Is it not so?" he cried turning to the people.

And the people answered, "It is so. It is so."

"Well," said Cassim, when these murmurs had subsided, "nothing could be much more straightforward than that, and I am greatly obliged to our brother Ob ibn Ab for the plainness of his speaking. And now I'll give you my reply."

With this he launched himself upon the stream of an oration so long, so complicated, so skilfully compounded of fallacious argument, pathetic appeal, scornful denunciation, and humorous anecdote that I despair of giving you the least idea of it. But if you would trouble yourself to attend the next Extraordinary General Meeting of X, Ltd. (in Voluntary Liquidation) at the large hotel at Cannon Street in the City of London (supposing you to be on a visit to that tremendous Necropolis of the Arts and Metropolis of the Crafts) you will perhaps learn, for yourself, more in five minutes than I could tell you in five hours of the methods which Cassim employed on this occasion to convert the frenzied hostility of his followers into a passionate expression of love and gratitude.

Compared with some of those Masters of the Cannon Street Hotel he had indeed an easy task. His followers' anger against him was the anger of primitive and ill-informed men, roused all of a

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sudden by the discovery that their dividends were falling off; not the slowly matured and deadly hatred of those Church of England clergymen, retired colonels, schoolmasters, and admirals' widows to whom the English Manipulator must announce the penultimate failure of all the hopes that he has nourished in them and revived, again and again, during long years, with his ever-new prospectuses, his ever-new reports from his paid expert optimists, his ever-new issues of capital, his ever-new (and ever more beautifully engraved) share certificates.

Yet as this Magician is competent to bring the meeting, that began by howling for his blood, to a close with a vote of thanks to himself and another of a service of gold plate for his wife, so Cassim, in his smaller way, proved himself the best man there. His people complained that the revenue had ceased to come in? He showed them why this had happened, pointing out that the extraordinary difficulty of obtaining writers (which was proved very simply by his failure to secure one) accounted alike for the decrease of profits and the increase of expenses. They objected that he wasted the resources of the concern in feeding the captives? He patiently explained his reasons for doing so, not forgetting to employ the metaphor of the sack of gold and the shoe-leather. He appealed to the *camaraderie* which had always hitherto existed among them, to the memory of the battles they had fought in company, to the undefeated record of the band,

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flattering their courage, endurance, savagery, and other noble, brigand-like qualities. He opened or pulled aside his garments at various points and exhibited the wounds which he had got in their service. He spoke affectingly of their Happy Valley, of the love they bore to their hearths and homes, to their wives and children.

He reviewed the history of the band from its first small beginnings, ten years earlier (when he and three others first embarked upon the business of brigandage), tracing its rapid and steady advance in strength and prosperity until, as he pointed out, it stood to-day so securely upon the very pinnacle of reputation that capture at its hands had become a distinction with which no European Explorer to those parts could afford to dispense.

All this left them quite unimpressed in his favour.

But Cassim knew his business well. It is essential to anyone who would convert such a meeting's hostility into admiration to have something up his sleeve ; and this *coup* of the Glad Surprise is always most successfully worked when a great deal of windy rhetoric has established a conviction in the minds of the audience that the speaker is without other resources. Then and not till then may his trump-card be played with real effectiveness ; for the sudden revulsion of feeling which it produces is calculated to overthrow the crowd's antipathy in just proportion to the accession of strength which it

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has received. The unlooked-for abolition of pain is the most exquisite of pleasures ; and the keener an anxiety has become, the more delicious is relief from it found to be. To a man who has always regarded himself as the heir of some rich uncle, from whose hands he has all his life been accustomed to accept a constant stream of benefits, the news that that uncle is dead and has left him all his money will indeed afford considerable pleasure. But tell him, first, that the fortune has been bequeathed in its entirety to some Charitable Institution, plunge him in the abysses of despair and fury, and then, laughing, announce that it was but a jest and that he is secure in the fat inheritance—and you shall see him transported with a delight which the unthreatened confirmation of his hopes could never have yielded. It is odds if his emotion may not even produce a tear, which he is enabled to pass off as a tribute to the devastating nature of the loss which he has suffered.

And so, just when the impatience and disappointment of his audience appeared ready to burst all bounds and overwhelm in common ruin the leader, the captives, and the fortunes of the Association, Cassim produced his Glad Surprise—that is to say, your obedient servant. Calling me suddenly to his side he exhibited me to the surging throng. And while, asking themselves what this might mean, they forgot to shout—"Brothers," he cried, "behold the WRITER that I have brought you.

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Communication with the relatives of our prisoners is restored. Gold is about to flow once more into your pockets. We have again the Pen, which though it be not mightier than our sword (for that is unthinkable) must be acknowledged its imperative ancillary."

So ended the Revolt at Ras Keliz, which is the name of that secret valley. The joy of the robbers at the discovery that their ignorance of letters was no longer to be allowed to infect the tree of their valour with the blight of unproductiveness, instantly swept away all the suspicious hatred which they had lately nourished in their bosoms to the prejudice of their leader's popularity, and excited within them the desire for loyal demonstration, which they at once began liberally to indulge. Within the scope of these operations my person was included. The scorn of the soldier for the clerk (attributable to a consciousness of inferiority) does not preclude the employment of the lettered man when the necessities of the professional slaughterer demand it ; just as the contempt which the learned must always feel for these swashbuckling fools in no way prevents him from putting himself under their protection when there is war. And in each case the despised is found to enjoy an unusual measure of the despiser's favour. And so these fierce men who, in other circumstances, might have picked sides and made a football of me in the town square,

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now overwhelmed me (and nearly destroyed me) with the marks of their favour. I was caught up and handed about from one to another till every man had held in his arms this earnest of his wealth. As each man set me down he lost interest in me, and I was soon quite alone. As for the brigands, they proceeded, some to set about the cooking of an ox and others to roll out and tap a pipe of strong wine, gluttony and drunkenness being ever man's highest compliment to favourable Fortune.

In the meantime the Giantess had not been idle.

While Cassim had been addressing his followers she had escaped the attention of the populace, occupied with, and consequently blind to all other considerations than, the preservation, as far as possible, of its financial security. But so soon as the gloom of those people had been dispelled, place was found again within their hearts for the exiled virtue of altruism. And so, finding suddenly in their midst a stranger of colossal dimensions, the interest of several old men, women, and children was again directed outwards and at once they had formed a group about Ogga (who remained seated on the ground) and, supposing her to be the latest addition to the list of their captures, had begun to ply her with ridicule, abuse, and other customary features of the welcome which attends the involuntary guest of the bandit's camp. To all of which Ogga submitted patiently enough, as might

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an elephant to the buzzing of harmless flies ; but when a young boy, emboldened by the insolence of his elders, advanced a sharp stick which he carried and prodded her strongly in the ribs, her quick temper flared up, and catching the urchin by the hair, she pulled him towards her and, opening her mouth to its fullest extent, made as if to bite off his head. The lad, paralysed, made no sound, but a wail of terror went up from the spectators, who, as one man, started backwards several hundred yards. Ogga laughed and threw the boy away from her against a stack of hay, into which he penetrated more than five feet, though I am happy to say that on being subsequently dug out by his mother he was found to have sustained no injury more serious than a bad fright.

This well-timed action on the part of Ogga convinced her tormentors once and for all that she was a person not to be trifled with ; and it was now pretty to see the change which came over the popular attitude towards my late *fiancée*.

In *The Dog's Monitor*, that secondary masterpiece of the Fabulist Walid ibn Walid, there are some lines to the purpose spoken by the sagacious Boarhound Wuff to his pupil, the Whelp-harrier Yap :

*Lest thy fellow cur suppose
that thy soul he's cowing
with his snarley-yowing,
turn on him with wrinkled nose !
Boldly bite !*

Then, and not till then, he'll learn to be polite.

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And so, after their first alarm had subsided, these persons began to crawl back towards Ogga, smiling, rubbing their hands together, and rolling their eyes upwards, and soon they were again all around her ; but now their insolence was perfectly invisible, nor were they so close to her as they had been. Ogga sat still and smiled benevolently upon them. She meant to be respected, but not too greatly feared, by these people whose Queen she was to be. I have always thought that, the very limited nature of her experience considered, Ogga's *savoir vivre* was almost as remarkable as her altitude.

One old man at last expressed the general curiosity.

“ Who art thou, then, Immense Lady ? ” he, with some difficulty, articulated.

“ I am,” Ogga answered simply, “ thy master's bride.”

All this time Cassim had been bustling about, ingratiating himself with the strongest and boldest members of his band by slapping them on the back and bestowing endearing epithets upon them, such as My Son-by-my-favourite-Wife, Valiant Core of my Soul, and My Left Kidney. No doubt this course was followed in pursuance of his resolve (at which I have hinted) to set, presently, upon the Giantess at the head of some devoted companions and, by slaying her, put it beyond her power to marry him.

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Now when Ogga gave the boy what was probably his first lesson in good behaviour, and the elder people, howling, fled, the incident had not passed unremarked by the bandits who were busying themselves about the barbecue and the wine-butt. A great many of them had dropped their work and come running to see, and every moment the number of persons around the Giantess increased.

Accordingly Ogga's announcement of her approaching marriage with their chief was heard by perhaps half, if not more, of the band, who hailed it with the acclamation which was to be expected from a people which lived by strength rather than cunning and saw in this great, fierce wife with which Cassim had provided himself a very happy augury for their future. As Cassim had said, she was a veritable mother for heroes, and her promise, in this kind, was not lost upon the inhabitants of Ras Keliz. Already no doubt they were counting confidently upon a future brightened annually by the accession to their numbers of a little giant.

In short Cassim, if he had ever contemplated it, had delayed his blow too long. Popular opinion must now be definitely against him were he to propose any attempt upon the life of this woman of whom they had learned to expect such great things.

The news spread as wildfire (whatever that may be) is reported to do. "*Mashallah!* Praise be to God! Cassim hath brought home a wife," was the

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cry. " And *such* a wife ! We shall soon see some lusty lads hereabouts. What a stunner ! Eh ! but she is worth a Jew's eye, that one ! Do you remark the shoulders she hath on her ? Is that an arm, I ask you ? *Aferin ! Aferin !* This is tip-top ! "

And soon other cries were heard : " Where is Cassim ? Arrive, oh Chief ! Here is a matter not to be delayed. Call the captain ! Cassim, ho ! Cassim ! We would see thee wed and that instantly. Hail to the Governor and his wife ! Blessings on their enormous family ! Cassim deserves well of the Republic. I move a very hearty vote of thanks to Cassim." Every moment increased the number of Ogga's admirers and of those who believed that their leader had acted with discretion.

I have said that Cassim was a brave man, and it is in the character of such people to meet with resolution the Fate which they know they cannot overcome. Ogga having in an instant achieved the summit of popularity, all hope of murdering her was over for the unfortunate brigand and he could not conceal from himself that he looked Matrimony starkly between the eyes. Evasion was out of the question, for the road to the secret (and only) exit of the Valley lay over open fields and he had learned the folly of running races with his betrothed. And so, putting on a bold face, he now appeared, tricked out in his finest clothes, bristling with the fresh weapons which he had taken from his domestic armoury, smiling,

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bland, assured, magnificent, thereby demonstrating himself to be a true Leader of Men ; since to be able to make a ruinous defeat assume the appearance of an overwhelming victory is perhaps the most crucial test to which warrior-statesmanship can be submitted. And he passed it triumphantly.

“ My lads,” he cried, when the enthusiasm which his appearance evoked had somewhat subsided. “ My lads, this is the proudest of all the many proudest moments of my life. I would make you a proper speech, but my feelings ”—he affected to wipe away a tear—“ choke my utterance. No words of mine could be adequate to express the gratification which this proof of your loyalty affords me, and therefore I will confine my observations within the bounds of a very few minutes. But this I must say—and I do not think that anyone present will be inclined to resent it—that . . . ” and so on for three hours, from which circumstance the depths of despair in which his spirit was plunged are made manifest ; for it is well known that the measure of the bridegroom’s happiness is the ineptitude of his oratory.

The end of his speech happening to coincide with the completion of the barbecue, we all went at once to eating and drinking. Cassim and his bonny bride were throned on high in the middle of the town square and all about them sat the bandits and their families scattered upon the ground, gnawing bones, emptying buckets in honour of the happy pair,

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making speeches, laughing, singing, dancing, pelting one another with coloured paper torn up into small bits, fighting with knives, blackening one another's eyes, and in a thousand artless ways evidencing their happiness at this foundation of a dynasty.

When everybody was in a favourable condition of drunkenness a truce of a few minutes was called on behalf of the wine-pots ; a Magistrate was brought out of the prison ; a curtain-ring was procured from a neighbouring house ; and Ogga and Cassim were made indissolubly one. This event was celebrated by a further orgiastic outburst in the course of which no less than fifteen men were stabbed, but none seriously, while thirty-two women lost some of their hair, teeth, or the cuticle of their faces.

In short, there can be no doubt that this wedding was a complete success, and though things were, perhaps, carried a little farther than is customary in more civilised communities, I have never assisted at an occasion of this kind—no, not in Paris or London or even in New York (where the Social Arts have attained their highest development)—which was characterised by a more perfect recognition of the guest's duty to insure that the entertainment goes with a swing and that not an instant's opportunity is given to anyone to doubt that everybody else is thoroughly satisfied.

How or at what hour a term was put to the festivities I am unable to say, because, by reason of

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devotion to my duty, my perception of realities became first cloudy, then obfuscated, and finally disappeared altogether, and, as the same thing appears (from confessions which I afterwards received) to have happened to all of us, it is evident that the party broke up (or rather down) gradually and not at any given moment. I have some memory of helping to bed a man who had been partially stunned by a shin bone and thereafter of returning to the scene of action, but I am as much at a loss, now, to say what course of conduct led to my waking next morning on a practically inaccessible ledge some distance up one of the valley's precipitous walls, as I was then unable to descend without the assistance of the band's two most daring and active climbers. I may have been chased up there or I may have done it for a bet. If the former, nobody would admit it ; if the latter I have never been paid. 'Twas long ago. It is enough that I was brought down from my perch in safety. Let the symbol

?

explain how I got there.

Now, as I had only been rescued because Cassim had sent for me and as Cassim had only sent for me because he required an amanuensis, here again is shown how fortunate it was for me that my mother had the wit to pay a certain swindling beldame and her male goose to come and awe my father into

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relinquishing his claims upon me as an apprentice to the noble craft of leather-dressing. Otherwise I had never learned to write and, being of no sort of value, should have been left on that ledge to starve and sun-dry, and should there have remained, a target for the juvenile slingers of the Valley, a handy example for such parents as should wish to warn their children against the sin of intemperance, and, finally, a larder for the vultures, until the first storm of winter sent my bleached bones clattering down the rocks. For there was no member of the community, I am persuaded, who would have stirred an eyelash to extricate me from that perilous position, had not my salvage promised him some benefit.

Your professional robber is a Nietzschean, conscious or unconscious ; else cometh he very quickly to a bad end.

I may here observe, parenthetically, that your professed Nietzschean is generally an unexposed philanthropist. But let me not be led away. Once more—to my tale.

I was instantly hurried into the presence of the Chief, whom I found seated in the divan of his house, drinking thrice-brewed coffee of the colour and consistency of ink. This was the only thing to show that his potations had been excessive, for he was as fresh-coloured and bright of eye as ever and his hand was as steady as a commissioner. Yet no man

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among us had on the previous night curried the can to better purpose, though it was then noticed that he ate little or nothing, toying now with a rib, and anon turning over a cow-heel distastefully. But such are ever the marks of the melancholy reveller.

And attend to this stanza from *The Note-Taker*, which many say is the work of Sheyk under the alias of Beyk, more hold to have been written by Beyk but announced falsely as the production of Sheyk, others swear is by neither of them, others again by both, and still others by some totally different person, who never existed, save in the imagination of certain people who are unknown :

*While Glee is a Lad of voracity,
the Daintiest Victual is Poison to Care.
Yet while Joy is a Wine-jug of decent capacity,
a Bottomless Well is Despair.*

“Hast thou thy tackle about thee?” the bandit asked after I had paid him my compliments and enquired concerning the health of the Lady Ogga.

For answer I drew forth my pen, inkhorn, and some clean sheets and bowed.

“Bildad,” said he, “there is a busy day before thee and the paper thou hast there will last thee perhaps an hour. Here, however, is more when thou shalt require it; for as to writing materials, we are well provided with them, having lately seized a Caravan of Stationers, travelling from Tashkent to Bul with prepared lambskins for which

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there is a brisk demand, so they tell me, at the Court. Sit therefore and make sharp thy pen against the labour that is required of it. It is thy office to write the replies which the captives will make to the questions which I am about to ask them, from which data thou wilt compose the letters to their wives, creditors, and other persons interested in the continuance of their existence, which subsequently shall result in the dispatch either of their ransom or of themselves. And now let the prisoners be admitted."

At once there was brought before us a plump elderly man in whom I recognised the Magistrate who had officiated at the previous evening's nuptial ceremony, and the following examination took place.

CASSIM.—Thy name, scoundrel ?

PRISONER.—Muhammed ibn Hizâm, Your Clemency.

CASSIM.—We will see about my clemency, egg-head, by and by. Thy calling ?

PRISONER.—I am a Stipendiary Judge, oh Compassionate Lord !

CASSIM.—My compassion, lewd dog, is as it may be. Thy home ?

PRISONER.—The City of Bîsh, may it please Your Lenience.

CASSIM.—Thou lookest for lenience ? *Here ? Thou ?* By thy death ! thou art come to the wrong market, thou tier of indissoluble knots. Thy income ?

PRISONER.—I am a poor man, Allah knows. The

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salary is only nominal and is now eight and forty months in arrear. Bish is a little city, my lord, where the extortion of cash is as the wringing of honey from alum. By the prophet's hackney-camel! I am a poor man. By the Black Stone! I am a very poor man. My many wives are woefully prolific and children are numerous in my house as birds about a carcass. And like that carcass am I of them devoured. And the salary is only nominal and is now eight and fifty——

CASSIM.—Peace, cesspool! And thou, Bildad, write only that this *pauper* hath many wives.

PRISONER.—Did I say many? By my liver! I lied. They are few. I have but one and she is dead.

CASSIM—Write, Bildad, that his only wife has died after giving birth to innumerable children.

PRISONER.—Children! I have none. I am as childless as the babe unborn. On my toes be it! How would I, so poor a man, nourish a brood of babies?

CASSIM—Write that he hath no incumbrances at all.

PRISONER.—Incumbrances! By my fist! I am weighed down with them as a small ass by a pair of millstones. My town house is mortgaged to the tiles at an exorbitant interest. Of my farm on the Wady Room the Bailiffs are in possession. My corn business, which my sister's husband manages for me, is—I swear it by my sweetbreads!—in the hands of a receiver, and all my gems are in pledge to the money-lenders.

CASSIM.—Write that he hath a town house and a arm in the country, conducts a corn business, under

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the rose, and is possessed of much jewellery. And how many of these same bailiffs dost thou maintain upon this farm of thine? Methinks only a considerable property hath need of more than one.

PRISONER.—Your worship mistaketh. The persons of whom I speak are officers of the law and in no way thy slave's servants, upon whom be curses! for that, by their waste and robberies, they have ruined me utterly. For what saith Sofian the Satyrist in his *Hapless Householder*?

*My home's a funnel, upside down, in which my wealth I
try to store.*

*What by the front comes piecemeal in outgushes by the
hinder door.*

Trust me, my lord, among my whole fifty and two there is not one honest nature. Pillagers all, robbers, brigands—saving your presence—growing each minute fatter on the sale to hawkers of my corn and dates, my mutton and rice, my oil and wine, while I, in my great dining-hall, waste to a shadow through inability to obtain a decent meal.

CASSIM.—Write that he hath fifty servants and two and that there is an abundance of victual in his establishment. Write also that he dineth in state in a chamber especially reserved for that end and that such chamber is very large.

PRISONER.—Curses on the father of my tongue and Perdition snatch the mother of my vocal chords! May boils afflict the false pride that must still be seeking to make me appear in my lord's eye a person of consequence! For what is the truth?

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Have I two and fifty servants? Nay, but one old woman, a *chah*, an outdweller, cometh in, each third day, to turn over my poor mattress and cook me my miserable bowl of turtle broth.

CASSIM.—Write that this *gourmet* holdeth in contempt the luscious extract of calipash and calipee and that thus we may judge how pitifully he fareth in a customary way.

PRISONER.—By my belly——!

CASSIM.—Enough. I set thy ransom at five hundred thousand gold mohurs.

PRISONER.—Israel be my witness——!

CASSIM.—Away with him!

PRISONER.—Abraham reject me if——

CASSIM.—And, one of you, whip me off an ear from him to be pinned to the letter that shall open our correspondence with his family. I'll teach him to be a Magistrate before I've done with him. I'll larn him to officiate at weddings! Our next letter the other ear shall accompany, and if that fails I shall, I suppose, be compelled to proceed to his extremities.

The unfortunate Stipendiary was led out calling Moses to his aid with all the strength of his lungs, and Cassim signified that the examinations might continue.

Two men were now brought in. The first was a fellow in the middle time of life whose green turban proclaimed him one who had made the Mecca pilgrimage, whose pious expression showed him to be fully conscious of the superiority to his fellows

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which he thereby enjoyed, yet whose sumptuous attire and numerous chins whispered a not-wholly completed victory by his Spiritual Man over the Seductions of Earth. His companion was obviously his body-servant.

On being asked his name by Cassim, he replied :

“ I am the Hajji Moghira ibn Bilâl of the city of Doh in the province of Roh. My life has been spent in the practices of our religion and I have three times travelled to the Holy Places. But to boast of such things is far from my wish. I understand that this interview is intended to establish a basis upon which negotiations for my ransom may be opened. Know, then, that any hope which thou mayest have entertained of exchanging my worthless carcass for money is vain. A few months ago I definitely abandoned the world, sold all my goods, divorced all my wives, discharged all my servants (save only this faithful lad who refused by any means to be parted from me), gave all that I had realised to the poor, and set out with this humble friend for the desert, where it was my design to become a hermit. I looked forward to a life devoted to perpetual meditation upon my sins, varied by unbroken intercession for those of my fellow-men. Such food and drink as might be necessary to support me in this holy work were to be brought to me from time to time by the hand of my associate. On our way desertwards we were taken by your band and brought hither, a wretched spoil enough, since between us

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we do not command interest with the outside world for a copper coin and that a bad one. Suffer us, therefore, to depart in peace, to the desert, where, so soon as we shall have found a convenient, dry, and airy cave, not too far removed from a pure spring, date palms, and the chance of a buck, I will not fail to remember thee in those prayers which night and day I shall cause to ascend unto Allah. Or, since thy crimes are innumerable and those of thy comrades as the sand of all the seas, might it not perhaps advantage thee to have a well-recommended hermit here in this, thy valley? In return for a regular ration of victual and drink I will undertake to shrive you all once a week, and my prayers, by rising hence, will more certainly cause the All Merciful Eye to rest compassionately upon thee and thine, than if they be pronounced in some waste and distant spot, where I may have no very clear notion of how I am situated geographically in relation to this place. I have spoken, and the rest is in the hands of Allah."

"What think you, Bildad?" said Cassim. "Is this not a proposal that should be considered? It is my practice to scoff at Allah and deny His existence, but one never knows. It might be that this fellow's prayers would be worth his keep. And the servant is a strong fellow. One of the old women could carry his provender to the Hajji and this would free the young man to ride out with the Companions. Say, brother," he went on, addressing

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the servant, " canst ride and shoot ? Canst hold a spear straight, brother ? "

" My lord," said the servant, " to be plain with you, I have no wish to be a brigand. I am a very cowardly man and the mere sight of a musket loosens my knees. Nor do I take any shame to myself for this. As the Mad Millah saith in *The Everlasting Oven* :

*When the Baker kneads His dough
all ingredients He takes
for the mixture of his Cakes,
Wisdom, folly, caution, bravery,
kindness, malice, honour, knavery—
higgie-piggie ! in they go.
When the Cakes to Market go
(how compounded, who shall say ?
—finest corn or powdered hay ?)
if their taste is sweet or sickening
must depend, when they were quickening,
on the Fortune of the Dough.*

Thus for their virtues, as for their vices, men are to be held no more accountable than for the regularity of their features or the weakness of their frames ; and I have as little a right to be proud that I am handsomer " (he was a particularly ugly rascal) " than that clerk of thine, as thou hast to plume thyself on being my superior in courage. But this is not quite to the purpose. I am concerned to inform thee that I am an unlikely bandit and that thou wilt get little profit from enrolling me among thy

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followers. But an thou lettest me depart at once I can put thee in the way of making much money."

"Hah!" cried Cassim, "and how?"

"Swear by thy beard that thou wilt let me go if I do this," said the other, and I marked his eye travel a little apprehensively to the Hajji and return.

"By my beard!" said Cassim.

Here the Hajji began suddenly to cry out: "He lies. He lies. He is a liar and the son of a liar. By my four gold-filled teeth, the truth is not in him! Hear him not, my lord Cassim. Smite him rather across his traitorous mouth."

"Softly, softly, friend," said Cassim. "Thou hast had thy turn."

"Nay, my good gentleman——" the pious person began, but one, who stood by, performing for him the office which he had desired for his companion, he fell silent.

"This man," said the servant, "is a broker, not of the City of Doh in the province of Roh, but of the City of Roh, in the province of Doh. Having recently embezzled immense sums belonging to his clients, who are all widows and orphans, for whose simplicity his pretended saintliness had proved too much, and finding the fact discovered, he fled by night, seducing me to accompany him as his body-servant (for he hath never learned to shift for himself and believed that to travel alone would be his death) with rich promises of what he would do for me once we should be beyond the reach of

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pursuit, safe in some city, where, unknown, he should be free to re-embark upon his career of villainy. But—*quem Deus*—to-day he hath refused me a paltry rise in wages that I demanded and I am done with him. Know therefore that he is wanted very urgently by the police of Roh City and that there is a reward of one thousand pounds Turkish out for him. This I, having earned, gladly make over to thee in consideration of the liberty of which thy beard hath assured me. Communicate then with the Rohdian Chief of Police and the cash will be thine for the delivery of this vermin's body. Lo!" here he produced a paper from inside his shirt, "deign to cast thine eyes over this proclamation and the truth of my words will become evident."

Cassim motioned me to his side and together we examined the advertisement which bore out in every particular the statement of the Hajji's valet. To put everything beyond the reach of doubt the fat villain's face was there, chins and all, in the midst of the printed matter.

"So!" said Cassim as he handed me the paper for safe keeping. Then—"Nur," he said, "remove the Hajji. Hur, take the other and kick him out of the Valley with all dispatch. He polluteth the air. I stifle while he remaineth among us. Oh, that he had not taken my beard in surety!" and he spat upon the body-servant of the Hajji.

Now was thrust into the Presence a man the like

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of whom I had never yet seen. Physically he enjoyed little distinction, being no more than a chubby, pink-faced fellow, with lank yellow hair parted in the middle and plastered firmly to his head. He wore on his wart of a nose lightly framed steel spectacles which, by a cunning device of springs and bars, were enabled to adhere thereto without the aid of those lateral supports, turned about the ears, which usually characterise these aids to vision. His eyes were of a pale and watery blue and his mouth was round and rosy. In his expression a shallow wit seemed endeavouring to produce an owlsh parody of pedantic wisdom ; humility there contended with self-sufficiency ; in short, a flatter looking fool it is hard to imagine. But by his costume an interest was excited which his physiognomy could never have aroused.

He was dressed all in black from the ground upwards, black boots, black and curiously tight *trouserilles*, and a black coat, long and close fitting and buttoned up to the chin. Here the blackness suddenly ended and was replaced by the greyness of a stiff collar made of what had once been white linen. In his hands he carried, pressed to his bosom, a round, plate-shaped hat of black felt.

At the sight of this human crow I will confess my blood was chilled and I had some difficulty in restraining myself from jumping up and running away, for a more unlucky object than this no one need fear to see. Black is the colour of death and

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misfortune and they that wear it are rightly regarded as ominous persons. What then was my amazement at learning, as I presently did, that this fellow believed it to be his business in life to go about spreading good news! The sequel will explain this matter, but I may observe here that were I to constitute myself the bearer of happy announcements I would, lest my clients lack confidence in my reports, take some care to dress myself in rather gayer colours.

This person bowed thrice to my lord Cassim, clasping his hat to his breast and smiling foolishly at each inclination. This done he put his heels together and waited the brigand's pleasure.

"Thy name?" said Cassim, and, in an aside to me: "It is a Frank," he said, "but he hath some of our tongue."

"Aurelius Abercrombie Aggs," was the reply, as I know now, though, at the time, I took it down as Aurungzebe Abu-Wakkas Agga.

"Thy trade?" he was asked.

"A shepherd," he replied unctuously and with no very ill accent, "of lost sheep."

"Ha!" said Cassim with a laugh. "Thou hast an easy job. An the flock be lost there is naught to do, and thou followest thy shepherding, I warrant, on thy back beneath a tree, playing thy pipe the while."

"Not so," said he whom I may henceforth call

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Aggs. "Since I go searching those lost ones continually, calling out, the while, that they are found."

"Wast so employed when my young wolves took thee?"

"Ay, was I," said Aggs, with his complacent smile.

"No more riddles," cried Cassim. "State plainly thy occupation and how thou camest into these parts. I know thee for a Frank and an infidel dog, and I had hung thee long ago, in honour of the Prophet, upon whom be peace! had I not thought that there might be some money in thee."

Thereupon the prisoner related what, by anticipation, may be called

THE STORY OF THE BISHOP'S CHAPLAIN

I was born, at a very early age, in Stoke Poges, a village not far from London, which, as you know, is the capital of England. My father——

"One moment," said Cassim, holding up his hand. "Canst thou tell me, by the way, in just what part of Russia England is situated?"

The Frankish captive smiled. "No," he said, "I can not tell you *that*."

"Well, well," said Cassim, waving the subject aside, "it is, after all, a matter of no importance. Proceed."

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“ Pardon me,” said the Frank hotly, and smiling no longer, “ but it is a matter of considerable importance. Let me inform you——”

“ Silence ! ” cried Cassim, and turning to me : ‘ Pray mark, Bildad,’ he said, “ the complacency of these barbarians. One might almost suppose that this fellow imagined his dirty little country to be of some significance. But that is always the way with foreigners. They are invincibly parochial. Even travel cannot open their eyes, seest thou ? ” And, again addressing the Frank : “ Continue,” he said sternly. “ At another time I may listen to thee, but now I have no leisure to take a lesson in the pettifogging geography of America.”

The Frank, thus admonished, cleared a dry throat and addressed himself without further delay to

THE STORY OF THE BISHOP'S CHAPLAIN (*continued*)
—who was high in the service, in short, the butler,
of the Duke of West Drayton—

“ Halt ! ” said Cassim. “ What is a Duke ? ”

The Frank, perspiring freely, wiped his face with a scrap of cotton. “ Merciful Heaven ! ” he cried. “ Don't you know what a Duke is ? An English Duke ? The first rank of our nobility ? ”

“ Thou hast nobles in thy land ? ” cried Cassim. “ Ha ! ha ! Hearst thou that, Bildad ? We have a nobility, it seems. Ho ! ho ! Verily there is truth in the lines of Rabat the Rustical :

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*This louse—a louse and nothing more to thee—
a king among its fellow lice may be.
Then crush it not, lest slaying a paltry foe,
thou plungest loyal millions into woe.*

“But,” cried the Frank, “I cannot possibly allow you to remain under any misap——”

“Silence, I say,” shouted Cassim imperiously. “Get on!”

The Frank, intimidated, abandoned his attempt to instruct us in the degrees of English chivalry and related, as follows, the

THIRD INSTALMENT OF THE STORY OF THE BISHOP'S CHAPLAIN

—had no anxiety about my future, since he counted upon the interest of his noble employer in obtaining some comfortable position for me. I received the ordinary education of a gentleman of the Upper Lower Classes, attending, until I was about nine years old, the village school and learning to read and write in company with the sons of the surrounding peasantry. Then, being advanced——

“Stay!” Cassim commanded. “Thou art an original knave, but I would have thee understand that humour is at present out of place. A certain comic exaggeration is permissible in a story that is designed solely for entertainment, but this is not the case here. We are, I may remind thee, engaged on

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business. Stick therefore to facts or it may be the worse for thee."

The Frank looked frankly puzzled. "But wherein," he asked, "have I exaggerated? How have I been comic?"

"Dost hope, then," said Cassim, "that I will soberly accept thy statement that the peasants in thy country are commonly instructed in the arts of reading and writing? I warn thee, friend, that my beard is not grown for *thy* pulling. And so, have a care. To thy tale."

The Frank accordingly choked down his discomfiture and proceeded with

THE STORY OF THE BISHOP'S CHAPLAIN (*Part IV*)
—to a Preparatory School for Young Gentlemen at Margate, I made acquaintance with the Greek and Latin languages. In these——

"A moment," said Cassim. "What is this Greek and what is that Latin?"

"They are," replied the Frank, "the tongues of two peoples that flourished many centuries ago, and though they are what are called 'dead' languages, their current use being wholly discontinued, they are considered indispensable among us to the acquirement of a Liberal Education."

"But," cried Cassim with a loud laugh, "this is the very insanity of madness! Assuming thy mendacious jest to be true, tell me, I pray thee, how

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it profiteth the young men of thy country to stuff their heads with matter so dispensable? I vow, if thou canst make that good, thou shalt be pardoned for thy persistence in wrong-doing. To a hardy joker much may be forgiven; but he capereth on a hair."

"My lord Cassim," began the Frank with a serious air, but his interlocutor had already changed his mind.

"Tush to thee!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Tell thy story and spare us thy embroideries. Lie on! Say what thou wilt! Entertain us with thy inventions, but let them not be robbed of their savour by tedious commentaries. If every dancer paused, with her leg in the air, to expound the technique of each step, what gain would there be in watching her? Go to! Thou art, it seems, a prolific liar. Fictionise, therefore, at thy will. I will hold thee unaccountable for everything but dulness."

Thus encouraged, the Frank embarked upon

THE FIFTH (*and last*) CHAPTER OF THE STORY OF THE BISHOP'S CHAPLAIN

—I prosecuted my studies, as in Geography, History, Elementary Mathematics, Football, Cricket, and the use of Tobacco and Oaths, until by my fourteenth year I was considered sufficiently educated to affront the ordeal of the examination held annually by the College of Preceptors. This I

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failed to pass by a broad margin, which circumstance encouraged my father to send me to the first school of our country, where he trusted that the deficiency evident in my brains might be made up to me by the cultivation of polite manners. Here again he was disappointed, for, though I was now surrounded by young gentlemen of the purest blood and utmost refinement, I was debarred from all useful intercourse with them by the fact that my father filled a menial office in the house of a nobleman who was grandfather to one of these, my schoolmates; and in spite of the fact that my father, whose vails were as enormous as his discretion over the household finance was absolute, could have bought up the parents of many of them, the generous pocket-money with which he provided me was never sufficient to purchase for me anything but the privilege of enjoying their contemptuous acceptance of entertainment at the tuck-shop. For the rest they declined so much as to speak to me.

At the end of five years I left Eton, unknown and unregretted, more ignorant than at my arrival and brutalised by association with the tapsters and stablemen of the town, among whom alone my real friendships had been formed, and repaired to the University of Oxford, where my always-optimistic father believed I should at last acquire at least the rudiments of culture.

But here the same story was repeated. Persons to whom the horrid secret of my birth was known

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had preceded and now accompanied me to the new Home of Learning, and again I found myself shunned by all. I was the child of a butler, albeit the butler of a Duke, and as such I was only fit for the sons of the nobility to insult. As for the offspring of stock-jobbers, money-lenders, colliery-proprietors, attorneys, doctors, clergymen and bookmakers, they ignored me utterly; while the cubs of prosperous retail tradesmen and Royal Academicians fled me like a pestilence.

Three more years passed over my miserable head until, having sat for and been ploughed in Responsions for the tenth time, my father lost all hope and patience and removed me from the scene of my defeats.

I need hardly say that my father, while I was still an infant, had been led to indulge the fondest hopes for my future. My proved ability to overcome the difficulties of pronouncing the word 'Dada' before I was two years old had seemed to augur the brightest destiny for me; and at this time my father had definitely intended me for the Navy and an Admiral's flag at thirty. But he had been obliged to lower his ambitions for me by my failure to pass the College of Preceptors' Examination, and henceforward, for a time, had fixed on the Corps of Royal Engineers as the field of my future triumphs. This again he had found reason to abandon in favour of, first, the Civil Service, then the Bar, and then by turns the Medical Profession, Politics, Commerce,

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the South African Constabulary, the Canadian Mounted Police, the Detective Service of the Gold Coast Colony, Publicity, Journalism, and Authorship.

On my return from Oxford he told me plainly that there was nothing for me now but the Church, and desired me to direct my thoughts accordingly.

As I was quite devoid of any predilections nothing was easier for me, and I was very soon a curate. My father, from the fact that in the nice art of decanting valuable port he was without a rival, enjoyed considerable influence with the Duke, and this he exerted to bring me to the favourable notice of the Suffragan Bishop of Mesopotamia then in England on one of his frequent begging campaigns. The good old man, who is infinitely sick of his job, and longs, after placing his vast and fatiguing See in the hands of some younger and more active apostle, to assume the restricted but comfortable duties of an English Bishopric, and who knows that in keeping himself resolutely *dans les petits papiers* of the powerful lies his only chance of ever exchanging the waterless deserts, perpetual alarms, and disgusting fare of the one for the cosy palace, the undisturbed tranquillity and the salmon, green peas, goslings, Southdown saddles, hot-house grapes, sound claret and (on Feast Days) vintage champagne which are attached to the other—the Bishop, I say, made no difficulty about accepting His Grace's suggestion that he should engage me his domestic

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chaplain, and my appointment was made out over the very walnuts which concluded the luncheon at which the Duke had proffered his request.

In this capacity I accompanied His Lordship when a month or two later he, having yet again failed to achieve the purpose which, far more than a lack of funds, had brought him to England, set out yet again for his appointed field of labours. We travelled slowly, passing through Constantinople, Smyrna, and Aleppo ; thence via the Mesopotamian plain to Bagdad and Teheran, and so, at the end of seven months, came to Asterabad. Here I was attacked by a colic and was forced to remain behind while the Bishop went on three hundred miles eastwards upon an urgent and unprecedented piece of business, nothing less indeed than the Christening of a Turkoman suckling who had been found, abandoned, by one of our lay readers, and for whom a relapse into barbarism was to be feared unless the strongest measures were immediately taken to prevent that catastrophe. Such a triumphant vindication of his efforts was not to be ignored by any Missionary Bishop, and so, with great regret, he left me at Asterabad and pushed on with all speed, bidding me rejoin him when I should be re-established and giving me *rendezvous* at a month's end in the City of Kharzanipore.

It was while I was journeying thither about three weeks ago—concluded the Frankish Priest—that your young men met me, who, having bound

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me, brought me captive to this secluded vale, where ever since I have been permitted to enjoy your hospitality. Any communication which you may desire to make relative to my ransom should be addressed to the Bishop, care of Obey ibn Amr, banker of Kharzanipore; and if I may presume to offer a suggestion, I do not think that my Lord the Bishop will be inclined to spend more than a hundred pounds English on my release; for not only are the funds of the diocese scanty but it is possible that a martyrdom might promote the flow of charitable gifts into its coffers and that the Bishop, who can get on very well without a chaplain, may think it his duty to consult the good of the vineyard rather than that of its humblest labourer.

He ceased, and Cassim (who had never once stopped laughing during the whole narration) said to me: "Write his master that this fellow can be had for six and forty shillings. More it would be dishonest to ask and with less we should be out of pocket for his victuals. It is also an act of religion to spare his life, since to hang him would evidently be to rob our Faith of a valuable ally. Throw him out! I have understood nothing of his story save that it was stuffed with comical lies, and larded with laughable affronts to the intelligence. I would keep him here to make us sport, but I never let pleasure interfere with business; besides, now that I am married it

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behoveth me more than ever to look to the incomings. Throw him out, therefore."

And this was done.

Now entered an old bent man wearing a green eyeshade, going on two sticks and accompanied by a young woman whose face was heavily veiled. Thereupon Cassim addressed the lady in the words which succeed.

"The religion in which we have both been brought up forbids that I should gaze upon thy features, but the principles which that religion inculcates also require me to act honestly towards my comrades. Either, then, I wound thy modesty by causing that veil to be removed or, by allowing it to remain, I render myself unable properly to estimate thy value. But I owe it to my loyal fellows to leave nothing to guesswork where the fixing of ransoms is concerned. Here, then, I find myself at the commands of two rules which ought both unequivocally to be obeyed, yet are diametrically opposed the one to the other. But what is written in the *Proverbial Philosophy* of Ecclesiastes the Second? '*The fool saith "Is it this way? Is it that way?" but the Wise Man goeth after the Goods.*' Therefore, lady, where, whichever course be followed, a wickedness must be done, is it not better to take that which at any rate leadeth unto somebody's profit? And so, let her veil be lifted."

The lady offering no opposition, but rather



"WRITE HIS MASTER THAT THIS FELLOW CAN BE HAD FOR SIX AND FORTY SHILLINGS"

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aiding with the pins, and the attempted objections of her husband having been successfully combated, this command was quickly put into execution and there appeared a face of such surpassing loveliness that I came nigh swooning by reason of the impression I received. As for Cassim, new married though he was, he gave vent to so loud a cry of amazed delight that his bride came running into the divan to ask what ailed him ; from which it appears probable that during the whole of these investigations she had never been very far away from the curtain of the women's apartments.

Cassim, whose eyes were fastened as with nails upon the face of the lovely captive, made answer that his soul was ravished by the thought of the vast sum which, in ransom, so much excellence must fetch ; but Ogga laughed scornfully and said that for a creature of so little account only a very modest sum should be asked, lest, through a too wide opening of the mouth, she be left on their hands and no profit whatever be reaped. Having thus expressed herself she sat down with a resolute air and desired that the examination be continued.

By this Cassim had wrenched away his eyes and somewhat collected himself, and so, seeing that there was no hope of ejecting the Giantess, he addressed the aged man after his usual form, enquiring his name.

The old man making no reply, he repeated the question in a louder and sterner voice and, again

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receiving no reply from the ancient, enquired of the lady if her father were deaf.

“ My *husband*,” said she—and her voice was soft as the ring-dove’s and melodious as the lute, so that again I was all but overcome—“ my *husband*, it may be, *is* a little deaf.”

The old fellow was accordingly led up to Cassim, who, putting his lips close to his ear bellowed, “ Thy name ? ” at the top of his voice.

The prisoner put up a hand, curved shell-wise, to the side of his head and replied, “ V-v-v-v-very.” I imagine that he may have supposed Cassim to have observed that it was a beautiful day.

Cassim, after shaking him violently to show him that he was in error, repeated his question with such loudness that the perspiration started out upon his brow at the effort. This time Antiquity seized his meaning, for he said at once: “ My name is K-k-k-k-k-k-k-k-k-k-k-k-k-k-k-k.”

“ Gehenna fry this old hen that hath laid an egg ! ” howled Cassim in a passion. “ At such a rate we shall never be done with him. Answer me ! ” he roared. “ Answer me, thing that was once a man ! How do they call thee ? ”

Hereupon the old fellow made answer thus :
“ My n-n
n-n-n — My — n-n
n — M — m-m
my n-n
n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n-n — Nay — m-m-m-m-m-

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m-m-m—my — nay — m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m—moo-eee ! ”

The end was a sudden violent escape of breath, pitched on a lamentable note, for the might-have-been-expected had occurred and he was on his back.

“ Lady,” said Cassim passionately, “ thy great-grandfather is old and hath lived his life. To him an hour is no more precious than a minute, or a second than a week. But I am still young and value my time. Take, then, upon thyself the burden of answering my questions.”

“ With joy and good will,” she said. “ It is true my *husband* hath a slight impediment, but, an you let him alone, he always, soon or late, conquereth it. He hath an indomitable soul and I have known him sit up all night, hissing like a kettle, in order at sunrise to reply, ‘ Sugar only,’ to one who had asked him, during the afternoon, what he would be pleased to take in his tea. Still, I am ready to act as his succedaneum if you wish it.”

“ Then,” said Cassim and—“ Take hence that numbling mumbler ! ”—he roared, for the old man had recovered his wind and had again attacked his sentence. When this had been done : “ Then,” he resumed, “ tell me thy name, egregious among women.”

“ Tell *us* thy name,” said Ogga softly, and—“ Oh ! Us, us, by all means,” cried he.

“ My *husband's* name,” replied the lady, “ is

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Khobeib ibn Amr. He is of the City of Kharzanipore and brother to Obey ibn Amr, the great banker of the place. The said Obey is a very pious man, strong in family affection. He hath moreover in his boxes ten thousand timauns belonging to my husband, of which thou mayest rely on his willingness to spend every penny to secure our return to the city. Were my husband present he would endeavour to deny this and to lead thee to suppose that we are poor people ; but I have had enough of being alone with him in this place and ache for the companionship of my friends, the exchange of gossip and laughter, the rivalry of clothes and bangles and earrings and necklaces. I sigh for the comforts of my house, the bath, the ministrations of my women, the scented pipe, the sweetmeats, and the coffee, morning, afternoon, and evening ; for all the things, in a word, which make existence tolerable for the wife of such as he. Therefore, I beseech thee, give no hint in thy letter that any special information is thine, but rather fix the ransom at ten thousand timauns and be content to let us go quickly and without haggling. More thou wilt never get, for Obey is one who will, in the cause of his salvation, go all lengths with the property of another, but where his own cash is concerned may not divorce his thoughts from the consideration of temporal matters. As for my name, my lord," she continued, making an eye at Cassim, " it is Asma. I am the daughter of——"

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“Never mind which pig’s daughter thou art,” said Ogga sternly. “My *husband* hath all such information as is necessary. Follow *thine* to the kennel with all speed.”

Cassim (whose spirit matrimony had already pulverised) waved his hand, the lovely Asma was removed, and to me the blinded sight of my eyes was a little restored.

Here may be introduced appropriately a pen-picture of this dazzling person which I composed that same evening and have retained in my memory, though the paper that received it I subsequently tore, for reasons which you shall learn, into ten million pieces which I then burned and scattered, in the form of ashes, to the four winds of heaven.

It hath been said that it is easier to forget poetry than to sell it, but there are verses which, alas! it is a less simple matter to obliterate from the memory than to destroy the writing which embodies them. And such are these. They are but a draft or *brouillon*, written (as I have said) that same evening at the hottest speed, and rising spontaneously from the sea of tumultuous emotions which was my heart. It must be understood therefore that they are submitted here only as a description of Asma and in no way as an example of my best poetry. With so much preliminary and no more, let them go down.

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THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL OR FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF ASMA

(1)

*Her cheek was snow, her bosom too ;
her hair so black I thought it blue.
Her lips were red as strawberries ;
as great as eggs her pansy eyes.
Her teeth (not one of them was gone)
and ears, more white, or rosy, shone
than shells, and daintier was her nose
than you can readily suppose.
Her brows made one and with their line
imaged (so round they were and fine)
the silver crescent, with its back
turned upwards, thus,*

and painted black.

*Her ankles were the young gazelle's
that browseth by the desert wells ;
her slender wrists—as fingers small—
were hardly visible at all.
Ah ! she was slim and oh ! so lithe,
she seemed some lovely snake, awrithe.*

(2)

*And all her person did exhale
a troubling and an odorous gale,
sweeter by far than balmy breeze
that bloweth through Arabia's trees ;
sweeter than bergamot, I wis,
than attar, musk, or ambergris ;
sweeter than fragrant New Mown Hay
or Jockey Club or Ess Bouquet,*

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*or Treek-à-Trique, or Brise de Mai,
Opopanax, Ylang-ylang,
Enigma, Flirt, or Peau d'Espang,
Du Barry, Trèfle, or Fleurs d'Amour,
Ambreine or Souvenir de la Cour ;
than Thisbe, Chypre, Campeador,
or Azurea Safranor,
Le Bon Vieux Temps, Hasu no Hana,
Le Vertige, Patchouli, Phul Nana,
Rève fleuri, Iberis, I ween,
or Pot-pourri aux Plantes Marines,
Macassar Oil or Pilophene,
or any other thing, I wot,
that the Apothecary's got.*

*It was a strange, elusive scent,
that came and went ; and came ; and went ;
and came once more ; and went again ;
and is not easy to explain.*

*It was not that, it was not this ;
it was not musk or ambergris ;
it was not fragrant New Mown Hay
or Jockey Club or Ess Bouquet.
No perfume that above is named
can be particularly blamed.*

*In fact,
somewhat of all of them it smacked.*

When this Pearl of Price had been conducted through the door the Lady Ogga addressed her spouse in the following words :

“ Sweet Assassin of my Heart and Handseler of my Young Affections. Enough has now been done by thee in the way of business. What says Uzzîm the Unballasted ?

BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

Cottaged with Love, to gnaw a crust ?

Alone, to rule a Sugar Trust ?

Had I my choice,

I'd raise my voice

for number one,

my Son ;

since Love can dulcorate thy lot

however little thou hast got ;

but all the sweets

of German beets

may not

the lack of Love to thee supply.

Then why

frown in thy counting-house all day

while loveless lustrums speed away ?

Oh ! leave thy cares behind thee !

No longer let them bind thee !

Love laughs at Ledgers and their lure.

Love is Old Melancholy's cure.

Then send cold Caution packing hence.

Come out ! and live and love and hang the expense !

What, Cassim ! Shall thy bride of a day languish solitary, and thou compute ransoms ? Not so ! Fie ! Up, little miser ! Give Mammon the go-by for once ! Art married every week of the year that thou shouldst sit calculating with " (indicating me) " this frowsy clerk of thine ? Am I not minded to see our dominions and take the air of my realm ; and shall a chieftainess, unaccompanied by her consort, challenge for the first time the loyal demonstrations of her people ? It were an infamy. Lo ! I have found a small cart in which thou shalt draw me about, since it no longer be-

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seems my dignity to go anywhere on foot, and I know thou wilt never yield to menials the privilege of transporting thy dear lady from place to place. And now," she cried from the door, "art thou coming or must I fetch thee?"

Cassim sighed and rose to his feet. "Bildad," he whispered, "the spurs of Cupid are sharp and long; he rideth over or through and may not be unhorsed. Lo! the society of my lady imperatively claimeth me and my soul is supposed to be filled with a horror of commerce. An I walk not out with her as she wishes, it may well be the death of me. Would to Allah she had gone on loving thee, oh, Bildad! But since it hath fallen out otherwise and thou art not required to attend this progress through the town, go, my dear friend, into the prison and collect the necessary information from the captives who have not been examined. Then write me these letters, that they may be dispatched to-night after I have put my mark to them and thou hast witnessed it. Coming, Mistress of my Soul!" he cried, pretty cheerfully, in response to a threatening gesture. "With you, Marrow of my Spine!" Then, bounding across the intervening space, he joined his lady and passed between the curtains.

As for me, I went at once to the prison.

Now though, in obedience to Cassim's orders, I examined that day about fifty captives and so became acquainted with all their stories, I do not

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propose to describe the first or relate the second with the smallest particularity. It is not only the principal duty of Art to conceal Art ; but, should it be that of other people, to exterminate it, if possible. In obedience to this important canon of the Literary Law, I suppress the narratives of these fifty persons as matter not germane to this book's purpose, which is to celebrate myself. To describe the narrators would be equally beside the mark. Let it suffice you to know that they hailed from places as widely sundered as Mogador and Khokand, Kazalinsk and the Laccadive Islands, that they were of both sexes and all ages, and that, like the generality of the human race, they differed from one another—if personal appearance is concerned—only by the degrees of their ugliness ; if their wits, in nothing but their greater or less lack of them ; and if it is their honesty that is in question, according to the measure of certainty or doubt which existed as to their being rogues.

This said, we may leave these wretches with the sage reflection of Mowl the Misanthropic Misogynist :

*To judge of mankind in the mass
lay hold of the nearest example,
and if he's a rogue and an ass
thou art seized of an average sample.
The nearest,
thou hearest ?*

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*But who is the nearest ?
'Tis thou, pretty dearest.
'Tis THOU !
Bow ! wow !*

Having spent the rest of the day in collecting information, writing letters to the addresses which I had obtained, securing the signature to them of the Illustrious Marksman, my new employer, handing them for dispatch to the elderly brigand who directed this department of the community's executive, and composing the poem about my enchanting Asma which you have had an opportunity of reading, I went to bed in the quarters which had been given to me, not wholly dissatisfied with my situation.

As far as I could see I had made an end of all the work that was likely to come my way for some little time. It must be weeks before any replies to our letters could be received, and meanwhile, unless other captives were brought in, I should have nothing whatever to do and would be free to exercise my poetic talents to the full. No dearth of paper was to be feared, the Stationers' Caravan having yielded more sheets than even I could expect to fill in a year of Sundays. Nor, with a subject to hand like Asma, need I anticipate any drying-up of the Pierian Spring. With leisure, inspiration, and unlimited paper (not to mention an abundance of wholesome if rather rough fare, wine *ad libitum*, a cosy chamber, and a downy bed) no poet needs to quarrel with his

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Fate. Thus it was with a mind at peace that, plotting great quill-deeds in honour of my lady, I fell asleep, to wander, in dreams, through an ambrosial Paradise, to the strains of exquisite music, hand in hand with an ugly little boy whose face was quite unknown to me.

It is one of the strangest features of all Art that the great exponents of that Technique, without a perfect command of which no Artist is allowed to hope for Immortality, are commonly people who either never heard of it or, if they have, never bothered their heads about it. Whenever a creative genius has been accepted as such by the World, the rules of this Dismal Science must be revised to explain the breaches of them which he, in his ignorance, has committed. Technique, however, is not on this account lightly to be flouted, since, unless this be done successfully, the artist covers himself with ridicule and infamy and finds his way quickly, in turn, to the casual ward, the hospital, the cemetery, and oblivion.

To do this was never my ambition. Accordingly I have always thought it wisest to endeavour to obey the laws as laid down by the Critical Fraternity, since (though I have my own opinion) I have never been encouraged by anyone else to anticipate for myself a translation to Parnassus. And now, though affluence is mine and I need fear no penury should I never sell another word that I write, habit

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is too strong for me, and I own myself unable to fly so completely in the face of Technique as to relate all my experiences of the next fortnight.

For it has been decreed by the Technicians of Letters that Monotony is Death. I know that, on a day, a Creator will arise who will knock even this article of our faith on the head by showing us, for example, the whole life of one who, paralysed at ten years old, has lived until ninety, always in a chair, quite unable either to see, hear, touch, taste, or smell—and making it of interest.

Or he may write with like success about the London Season.

I, however, am not such an one and, even if I were, it is too late for me to begin rebelling against Technique now. My pen has learned of itself to avoid monotony and I cannot teach it new tricks at this time of its long and active life.

And so let us pass over two weeks with so much and no more delay than to inform you that I lived well, slept well, felt well, and wrote enormously; and that beyond this I did little or nothing but wander about the Valley, throw stones into the river, avoid the brigands and dream of Asma. To Cassim (who had no use for my services until the answer to his letters should come to hand) I never so much as spoke, though I saw him several times dragging Ogga about in her cart, an exercise to which she grew every day more attached. Inactivity and abundant food, collaborating in a work of which

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much experience has made them the proficient masters, quickly transformed her into a mountain of flesh ; but as, for every pound which she added to her personal burden, one was subtracted from Cassim's, the couple's weight remained exactly what it had been, though the contrast between them was intensified every day. Before I left the valley Cassim had qualified for the situation of Living Skeleton in the late Obeidallah's Gallery of Monsters, while his wife, having already succeeded in compressing the Giantess and the Fat Lady into one costume, seemed almost to be contemplating an amalgamation of all the lines of business for which her husband was ineligible.

I cannot, however, justly omit the mention of a singular character whose acquaintance I made during this period.

In my comings and goings about the Valley I often encountered a morose-looking fellow who, though he was as unlike a brigand as any man that I ever saw, being small, slight, and dapper, and excruciatingly frizzed as to the hair—these rascals are mostly quite indifferent to their personal appearance—went always with a large razor in his hand and continually whetted or tested the edge of this enigmatical weapon upon the skin of a palm that was as soft and rosy, almost, as that of a houri, prinked and scented for the reception of a believer. I have said that he was morose-looking, and this

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circumstance was the only thing about him (unless we except also the too evident razor and the fact that he was always alone) which seemed to reflect any but a frivolous and inoffensive character. Yet this torvous aspect made me suppose him to be a man with a grievance, and as such an one (even when he does not perpetually brandish an open razor) is by all means to be avoided, I for some days succeeded in ignoring a desire to accost me which I thought he exhibited. But one afternoon, while I was seated by the stream, occupied in throwing pebbles at the fishes, he appeared abruptly at my side and, sitting down, signified his desire of an interview, at the same time causing his blade to flash disturbingly in the sunlight. As I always recoil from the very thought of appearing impolite to anyone who is in a position to command civility, I assured him of my perfect readiness to meet his wishes, and, thus encouraged, he spoke as follows :

“ To be oppressed by the sense of any strong injustice is to suffer from a kind of moral dropsy, whose ever-swelling waters must from time to time be tapped or fatal consequences may ensue. Except thine own, there is not an ear in this Valley into which I have not many times discharged the story which I am about to impart to thee, and consequently it is a very long time since I was permitted to obtain the relief of which my soul stands so much in need, all my fellow brigands (men, women, and children alike), being active and

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resourceful to a degree which I cannot hope to emulate. As I am, for reasons which I shall mention, denied all access to the captives, remains only thyself. Prepare, then, to hear my story or to suffer a solution of the continuity of thy carotid artery."

Between the alternatives thus reasonably presented to me there was no room for hesitation.

"Say on," I replied, "I am utterly at thy service. Only put up the razor."

"There is no need," he said bitterly. "It is a poor harmless thing that hath altogether forgotten the taste of blood. I often wonder why I carry it about as I do. In this accursed Valley a sausage were more dangerous. But to my tale."

Thereupon, without further ado, he embarked upon

THE STORY OF THE BARBER'S ASSISTANT

OR

THE SEDUCTION OF THE IMMACULATE SURFACE

I am the son of a barber, and for his trade I was of course educated. From the very beginning I showed an aptitude for the work which only increased with practice.

Having become the perfect master of my implements, I was taken into the shop and for some years exercised my art with diligence and success. Not only did I enjoy the approbation of my father's *clientèle*, but if I do not unduly flatter myself, I also

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attracted to our establishment a good deal of new custom. I had an exceptionally light hand with the razor, and as for hair-cutting, no head, however irregular its contours might be, could give me the least anxiety. The customer who put himself in my hands needed not to apprehend that his first subsequent entrance into his harem would be hailed with derisive laughter or sarcastical commiseration. I had besides a very large stock of amiable observations relating to the weather, which I never hesitated to display for the benefit of any patient to whom I might be attending. I had several anecdotes at my command, a good number of proverbs, and at least three quotations from the poets ; and anyone who sat down in my chair was sure of hearing one or two scraps of the latest town gossip.

I was, moreover, alert to discover the least symptoms of any disorder of the scalp which threatened the welfare of my customers' locks, and could talk so convincingly upon such matters that the souls of men were filled both with awe at my erudition and gratitude for my anxious care ; and it was very seldom that anyone escaped from the shop unaccompanied by a bottle of wash, tonic, or lotion ; for I could most sirenically sing the praises of such things, while none more speciously than I could explain their failure to bring about the results promised by their labels ; of which assertion the fact that their sale in our shop increased daily by leaps and bounds is a triumphant proof. Indeed

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the balder my liquids made my customers, the more eager they became to empty them over their pates.

And most truly does Kog the Strategist observe :

*Allah, with forethought for the Sage's rations,
blindeth the Fool to his own limitations.*

To be brief, I was a barber of the very first quality.

Among my most regular clients were two men whose natures, as the poles, whose physical attributes as opposite points on the Equator, were widely sundered.

The first was the good Abd Abbas, a wholesaler of sugar-plums, a fat, kindly man, rich, greatly benevolent, and correspondingly beloved ; wholly without pride or arrogance ; devoted greatly to the trencher ; the friend of little children and tame dogs.

The other was Shekr ibn Yasâr, a scraggy half-corpse of a retired Army Officer, hobnailed as to the liver, splenetic like a mangy cur, more close-fisted than an empty bottle, hated by everyone who knew him, a terror to servants and all subordinate persons, a secret drinker, and of a venomous tongue.

Every morning these Antipodes were accustomed to submit their throats to the edge of my razor, and you may imagine with what happy expectations I was accustomed to make ready my lather for the one ; with what dismal forebodings for the other. In the case of Abd Abbas I knew that everything would go well. The razor would be keen, the soap moist, and not so much as a pin-

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prick would, at the end of the operation, mar the fair, plump, white surface of the throat of the excellent man, who would compliment me on my skill, press a handsome gratuity into my palm and leave me entirely satisfied with life. But from Shekr ibn Yasâr I could expect nothing of this sort. Snapping, snarling, growling, cursing, he would sit in his chair, fidgeting, twitching, and making my every breath a burden of abasement and apprehension. Only by a series of miracles was it ever possible to debarb him without cutting him somewhere, and the least starting of the blood was always the signal for an outburst of poisonous vituperation.

Nor, you may be very sure, when the shave had been performed, was there any tip for the unlucky operator. Shekr ibn Yasâr threw not his money away like that. How I longed sometimes, as he got up from the chair, cursing into his long moustache, and tottered away, to jump upon him from behind and twist his scrawny yellow hen's neck for him.

Of any punishment more refined than this it never occurred to me to think, for I was then and am still, in all save one particular, the least imaginative of men. Of this particular I must now speak.

One morning while I was shaving my ninth chin for the day, my mind occupied with none but professional considerations, someone seemed to say quite distinctly at my ear, "How easy it would be to cut this man's throat! And how nice!"

At first I thought it the ill-timed jest of some

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customer, but on looking over my shoulder I found that the shop was empty except for the gentleman to whom I was attending and myself. This caused me some surprise, but I at once perceived that I had been the victim of an hallucination, attributable no doubt to a slight nervous depression which I had experienced since waking.

“What odd ideas rise unbidden to the mind!” I reflected. “A pretty one, that!” And suddenly the thought of my customer’s surprise, if he should unexpectedly find himself with his throat laid open, struck me with a humorous effect so strong that I could hardly maintain my professional gravity.

Something occurring at this moment to change the course of my ideas, this *bizarre* conception vanished as quickly as it had come, and I suppose I might never have recollected the occurrence had it not been repeated a month later, as I was reaping the first crop of lamb’s wool from the chin of a very young gentleman. Again came the whisper, “How pleasant to slit this throat!” and this time I no longer looked behind me, but found myself feeling the tender weazand with an exquisite sort of judgment, as, in imagination, I contrasted the clear white of the skin with the vivid colour that would spring out against it. Yet this fit too passed nor did I think of the matter again until I was in bed that night; then it recurred. I lay awake long, busy with luscious speculations.

A week later the hated Shekr ibn Yasâr, being

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under my razor, had just favoured me with some particularly pungent criticisms, when it was suggested to me that nothing could be easier or more delightful than to settle my account against the odious creature once and for all in a way which I need not specify. I considered Shekr's throat with a judging eye and suddenly I was seized with a violent aversion from it. It would, I was certain, be a most objectionable throat to cut, so brown it was, so baggy, so thoroughly uninviting. My memory examined all the hundreds of throats which I had shaved and there was not among them one that I did not prefer, for my purpose, to that of Shekr ibn Yasâr.

It was a fresh grievance that I had against him.

But how run the lines of Push the Perspicacious ?

To, " Allah confound thee ! "
through pretty lips muttered
that me are bewitching
I'll gladlier hearken,
than to, " Blessings surround thee ! "
complacently uttered
by one whom I'm itching
the eyes of to darken—

and it is therefore not strange that the very feature of this detested person which had stayed my hand from the commission of folly should be regarded by me as merely an added offence.

No sooner had Shekr gone out, cursing and grumbling, than the benevolent Abd Abbas took his

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place in my chair and I knew that I saw before me—full, round, soft and white—the Throat Ideal, the Throat of Throats.

As I contemplated that fair, intact expanse, there passed through me a spasm of desire akin to that apelike longing to throw mud which, as I have read, sometimes assails the most nicely balanced mind when confronted with a wall new whitewashed; or the more innocent, but in its essence identical, impulse—everybody knows it—which urges the arm which propels the stone into the middle of the glassy pool. There is a sort of challenge to tarnished human nature in these immaculate things.

For a few seconds I stood, towel in hand, gloating in silence upon the throat of Abd Abbas. I could hardly believe that such a throat should have been fashioned. And still more did I marvel that hitherto, for all the innumerable occasions on which it had already been exposed for the delectation of my eyes, some amazing blindness should have forbidden me to recognise for what it was this Phoenix, this Paragon, this Last Word, this Acme, this Ne plus ultra.

Then, the barber reasserting himself, the amateur gave place; and, tucking the towel about my jolly customer's neck, I shaved him magnificently.

From this time onwards that which had been no more than an occasional, almost whimsical, suggestion assumed the character of an obsession, sometimes whispering, sometimes shouting in my

SHAVING
2'
HAIRCUTTING
4'

CHIROPODY!

SHAMPOOING
DRY FRICTION

BARBERSHOP
WASHES NOT BE
REJECTED.

NO BEARDS
ALLOWED



THE SEDUCTION OF THE IMMACULATE SURFACE

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ear, but always present and always urging me to the accomplishment of a definite and fearful act. I say "fearful" because I was perfectly well aware that, should I do this thing, I must be professionally ruined, a consummation which I was far from desiring. My father was getting on in years and had more than once hinted a wish to withdraw from business and leave the shop entirely in my hands. There was even some talk of finding a wife for me, that I might be thoroughly established; and I believe that a marriage-broker had been actually approached on the matter and had laid before my father the names of one or two girls, none of whom had, however, been thought quite suitable.

And if I should cut the throat of Abd Abbas—and this was the only throat that now really appealed to me—I should be done for. It would be the end of my barbering; for while I was quite certain that with its triumph the temptation would leave me for ever, I could not but suppose that my customers, chary of submitting themselves to any future ministrations of my blade, would do the same. The thing was bound to be talked about; the public's confidence in me must inevitably be diminished; and once it is reported of anybody who practices my craft that he is not wholly to be trusted he may as well shut up shop, a reputation for a steady hand being to the barber what her virtue is to a woman. Nothing can repair the loss of it.

Moreover, I liked Abd Abbas extremely and in no

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way did I wish to injure the amiable veteran. Yet I could not conceal from myself that to sever his jugular would be to do him a serious wrong. But it was his jugular, and only his, that I was under the necessity of severing.

Perhaps I may make this clearer to you if I say that I did not wish to cut the throat of Abd Abbas ; only Abd Abbas's throat. It was the throat, not the life of its owner, that would satisfy my shining blade.

And there was another thing. Abd Abbas was the very best of my customers. None gave more freely in the way of gratuity ; none was more ready to be persuaded into buying a bottle in the shop ; none was more careful of his scalp or less cautious in his purchases of antidandrine and brilliantol. And with the decease of Abd Abbas all this desirable outlay would automatically cease.

You see there were a good many things for me to consider and these for many weeks succeeded in staving off the victory of the Master Idea.

During this time I lived in Hell. At nights I would wake up from dreams of having " done it," sweating at one and the same moment with relief and professional agony, only to discover a professional relief in the fact that I had but dreamt, and a new kind of agony in the realisation that " it " was still to do. In the evening, as I walked about in the town, my eye was irresistibly drawn to the smooth cream-coloured cheeses which decorated

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certain stalls in the bazaar ; and before these I would stand for hours at a time, wallowing in thoughts that were wholly concerned with the severance of even, blonde surfaces. There was about these cheeses something exceptionally akin to the white throat of fat Abd Abbas.

And every day I must confront the crucial temptation of the sugar-plum wholesaler's three gleaming chins. Every time Abd Abbas came into the shop I nearly screamed, so painfully did I shrink from the coming ordeal ; and every time my client went undivided away I breathed a prayer of gratitude, as with one hand I pocketed my very handsome tip and with the other passed across my face the napkin which I had just removed from beneath the Ideal Throat.

The douceurs of Abd Abbas meant so much to me ; and I greatly loved Abd Abbas.

Again, in the night watches now and then, the thought would present itself to me that because, once I should have cut a throat, I should be quit of my dangerous desire—(that this would be the case I was, as I have told you, convinced)—it behoved me quickly to do this work to which I was evidently appointed and to choose some one other than Abd Abbas, some stray customer for whom I had no regard and whose regular tips I would not as regularly miss. Or even Shekr ibn Yasâr.

At night this last suggestion would always seem a particularly good one ; and I generally ended by

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resolving definitely to do my business and the retired soldier's on the morrow. A moment's resolution, one strong effort to overcome a foolish and unreasonable repugnance, and the thing, I told myself, would be done, and I should be free for ever, with my enemy dead and my friend's life secure. Yet when, next morning, the moment came, Shekr ibn Yasâr had only to bare his thin and ugly neck, and my exquisite taste was at once in revolt, to turn aside the blade which my most vehement purpose strove to bring into operation.

And there were so many reasons—my detestation of Shekr ibn Yasâr, his parsimony, his rudeness—which demanded the sacrifice to my lust of this half-pay curmudgeon rather than the kindly Abd Abbas!

But as—you may remember this verse—Sard the Cloven-Footed, principal *Agent Provocateur* to the late Begum of Khajuyarak, observes in his *Convictions While you Wait, or The Zealous Officer* :

*When the Foe in the Citadel sits,
pray how shall the City endure ?
And if devils bedevil the wits,
how may Flesh of its sureness be sure ?
For Spirit is stronger than Muscle
when it comes to a tug or a tussle,
as the abject Teetotaler thickly replied
to the chuckles that came
(to his shame ! to his shame !)
from the emptying wineskin that lay by his side—*

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and my defeat was only a question of how late?
how soon?

One morning Shekr ibn Yasâr came into the shop in a quite unusually abominable temper. He growled at me for being occupied with another customer, snarled at me for my slowness with the shaving-water, snapped at me for its excessive heat when I applied the brush, told me I was a clumsy left-handed fool, asked me if I wanted to boil him and, in the same breath, enquired if I meant to keep him there all day. Beyond and above all this he permitted himself to cast several odious reflections upon my birth, hailed me brother-in-law, and in other abominable ways gave me to understand that I was his dog to eat such dirt as he chose to throw me.

While I stropped my razor my mind was fully made up to do it on Shekr ibn Yasâr there and then; but in the event, that yellow throat for the hundredth time disarmed me and transformed my thirsty blade into a harmless apparatus of the toilet. I could have wept as the ruffian left the shop, still nagging, and I was shaking with impotent fury at myself as Abd Abbas sat down, some urbane remark on his lips, and, laying his head comfortably on the rest and stretching his throat till he seemed all throat, abandoned himself to my skill.

With my heart full of passionate prayers for strength I seized the brush and began the lathering process. As the Ideal Throat was hidden from sight there came back to me some degree of self-pos-

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session, but this, as I began to uncover the desirable expanse, evaporated with greater and greater rapidity. At length, so appalling did the strain which I put upon myself become, that I nicked the chin of Abd Abbas, who, supposing that he must have moved, apologised to me and begged me not to be distressed, since such small accidents *will* occur, no matter how much care be taken.

But *I* remained frozen and dumb, staring with goggling eyes at the little scarlet trickle that had sprung out to creep downwards. Then all the fierce energies of my determination seemed to fall out of me, as if the bottom of my soul had collapsed, and taking Abd Abbas resolutely by the nose—I did it.

The ex-barber paused, licked his lips, and tested the edge of his blade.

“That,” said he, “is my story.”

“And,” said I (Intimidation being the Father of Compliment) “and, if I may say so, a very pretty one.”

“Well,” he said reflectively, “as to that, I don’t know. I should be inclined to call it rather sad myself. You have no idea how fond I was of that dear old man. And to think that he is no more! I protest, it is a thousand pities.”

“You have not told me,” I said, “what happened afterwards, nor how you came here.”

“No,” he replied, “how could I? I’ve not had

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time. But in any case it's of small consequence and is easily told. Of course, as I had expected, that was the end of my professional career. Abd Abbas was widely known, universally respected, and as greatly loved. I found that I was avoided. People wouldn't or couldn't—at any rate, didn't—understand. They gave up coming to my shop and soon ruin stared me and my father in the face. For my father's I did not care at all, though my own was a matter of some consequence; but my chief cause of anxiety resided in the fact that my desire to cut people's throats had not left me as I had hoped would be the case after it had once been assuaged. Resist the devil, they say, and he will continue the siege; but give him an inch and he will carry you instantly to Hell. And so it was with me. The appetite which I had trusted to appease had only been sharpened by feeding, and the slaughter of my best friend had done nothing but inspire me with the longing to cut the throats of my acquaintances. I clearly foresaw that the time would come—and that soon—when the sacrifice of perfect strangers would alone satisfy me; but I shrank—oh! I shrank—from the unpopularity which must be mine were the stages intermediary to this result to synchronise with my continued residence in my native city. In a word, I determined to flee while yet I enjoyed some measure of public esteem, however small. Exile is in itself a sufficiently horrid fate; but how much more dreadful must it be when its victim knows

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that in all his birthplace there is not one solitary being that hopes for his return. Even a faithful dog, even an old persistent mother, reading her Koran in the chimney-corner, is better than nothing ; but if not so much as one of these frail ties with the homeland exists, how complete and unendurable must the realisation of severance be !

“ And so, one evening, taking nothing but a case of my sharpest razors with me, I slipped out of the town, just before the gates were closed, and directed my steps towards this place where you now find me. It had seemed to me that a man of my peculiar temperament must prove of value to a brigand band, constantly under the embarrassing necessity of putting down captives for whom no ransom has been forthcoming, and it was with the highest hopes that, after a week’s travel, I demanded admittance at the water-gate. I was conducted to Cassim, who listened carefully to my story and to the proposals which I made him, and then said :

“ Thy surmise was correct. We stand much in need of thee and thy blade. For a brave man, to slay in battle is one thing ; to murder, quite another ; and my companions, who ask nothing better than to destroy thousands of our enemies in the field, disclose an invincible repugnance to disburdening our hands of a single unransomed captive. Now the imputation of leniency is fatal to the repute of a brigand band, since only by frightfulness can it hope to make itself respected.

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Once allow Rumour to declare that the quickest way of getting a father, son, wife, or what not home safe and sound is to refuse a penny of ransom, and all hope of doing business is at an end. It is true that we sometimes overcome our honourable scruples sufficiently to detach an ear, say, or a finger from one of our captives and enclose it, during the course of negotiations, in one of our letters ; but beyond this we do not, I confess, care to go, more especially as in most cases this expedient brings matters to a good and speedy conclusion. But you know the proverb :

*When Allah was making my big dog Bluff
He spread him wide and He pulled him tall ;
He gave him a bark, oh ! sure enough,
but never a tooth to bite withal.*

And so, in the obstinate cases there is nothing for it but to maintain our captives indefinitely at the public expense, or to send them about their business. And I need hardly say that this latter course is as dangerous as the former is costly and unsatisfactory. But if I can make it known about the country that there is in this valley one like yourself who is the victim of a propensity to solitary and cold-blooded throat-cutting which may not be denied, a very different complexion will be put upon our menaces. At once we shall be again respected. At once the price of our takes will go up.

“ ‘ Your proposals, then, are acceptable and are accepted ; and you may now consider yourself

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Captive-sticker-in-Chief to our Community. If you should be writing home it may be well for you to mention this, that your legend may lose no time in beginning to grow, and if you can also persuade your friends to send you a testimonial to your dexterity and ruthlessness I shall be obliged; since its circulation in the surrounding provinces should have a happy effect.'

"He then dismissed me with a few kind words; I was provided with a house, a wife, and other conveniences, and all seemed to promise me a future devoid of anxiety."

The ex-barber again paused and considered me with gloomy eyes.

"And so?" said I brightly.

"Dost thou suppose," he cried harshly, "that I have ever had a job to do yet? Nary one, by my lather!"

"Thou surprisest me," said I.

"The post," he shouted, "is a sinecure, a fraud, an empty farce. The mere report that I had settled down here has established the position of Cassim and his band, as on a rock. Their reputation, which at the time of my arrival was in a fair way fatally to be impaired, has received an accession of strength which they believe nothing can shake. And so, though I have been here eighteen months, not a captive has been delivered over to me. Not one, sir. Until the Writer, your predecessor, died,

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he had not more than two letters to send concerning any single prisoner ; first, the announcement of the capture with the terms of ransom ; and secondly, the appointment for the delivery of same. And since his death, though the place swarms with prisoners, I have been put off and put off and not one—NOT ONE—have I been permitted to suppress. And now that *thou* art here there is less chance of it than ever. And what about my vice ? Is it appeased ? No. What about my longings and temptations ? Are they satisfied ? Are they given in to ? No. I say, no ! I have been played with, deceived, swindled. By my brush ! by my strop ! by my blade !” he cried, brandishing his razor and foaming hideously at the mouth, “ I think myself a much ill-used man.”

His disorder was so dreadful that I feared even to sympathise with him.

“ And there’s another thing,” he went on passionately ; “ I have reason to suppose that in certain cases—I say *in certain cases*—an even lower depth of villainy has been plumbed by these men. I am not without suspicion that there have been captives who have been let go. I say, *who have been let go*. Poor men who are not worth a month’s keep, men of no character whose words will not be easily believed, men who live in places far away, where their reports of Cassim’s confounded clemency will not act detrimentally to his name for ferocity. Not all that come here remain in the prison. I have

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marked fellows brought in whom I have never seen again. And what has happened to them, I ask? Tell me that? Thou knowest not. Nor I. All I know is that they have not passed through *my* hands. I say it is an infamous shame!

“But let them beware, these faint-hearted tricksters! Let them not hope to hoodwink me for ever. I am on the watch. I keep my eyes and ears open. I miss nothing.

“And I warn them, as I warn thee, that once I am sure, once I am convinced, once I am satisfied, once I have no doubt, once it is perfectly clear to me, once I know positively that anything of the sort has been done, it will be the end.

“I will shew them that I am not the man to be toyed with, that I am no plaything of theirs, that in their list of pastimes I am not to be included with impunity, that there is a limit to my willingness to provide them with entertainment. I will go on strike, by Soap! and if I cannot cut anyone else's throat I will cut my own. For I am very near unto desperation and my razor may not much longer be baulked of the rights with which my agreement with Cassim hath endowed it.

“And when I am dead, when it is known outside the Valley that captives have nothing to fear but the loss of some small unimportant feature—a nose, a dozen teeth, a big toe—and that, such loss once sustained, enlargement will be granted to them, how will it be then, thinkest thou, with these

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brigands? Inevitably their revenue must decline, dwindle away, and altogether vanish. And when they see themselves faced with starvation and the necessity of disbanding, will they not howl, thinkest thou? Will they not rave, thinkest thou? will they not gnash their teeth, thinkest thou? will they not tear their hair, thinkest thou? will they not beat their bosoms, thinkest thou? and bite their nails, ha? and wring their hands, ha? and curse their fathers, ha? and their mothers, ha? as they reflect that had they kept faith with me to the extent of a single young baby I had not withdrawn the support of my terrible name and they might still be not of the number of those that are in the cart."

He ceased, leaped to his feet, and with a wild cry disappeared, running, as suddenly as he had come.

I never exchanged another word with him, though I saw him many times again. But always at a distance. I took care of that.

For I had long ago assimilated the advice of Fadakkholasabudhâacarcarat ibn Safwâniwakidykhazrajaduldul, more generally known (and more easily remembered) as the Melodious Bear-tamer :

Thy company thy merit shall proclaim.

(But even sans merit, life endured may be.)

Then shun the man of homicidal fame

lest, not content with murdering thy good name,

he also murder thee.

At last came letters to cheer the brigand band with

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the immediate prospect of much gold. The Chief of Police of Roh in the Province of Doh readily agreed to meet the emissaries of the Lord Cassim (to whom he presented his compliments) on a day and at a place to be agreed on, and receive from their hands the body of the notorious embezzler, Moghira ibn Bilâl, in return for which the promised reward of one thousand pounds Turkish should be delivered to them. He also begged respectfully to compliment the Lord Cassim upon the public spirit which he was showing in this affair.

The eldest son of the magistrate Muhammed ibn Hizâm thanked the Lord Cassim for his letter and enclosure, but entreated him to believe that it was not within his power to purchase his father for any sum that even approached the stipulated amount of ransom, five hundred thousand gold mohurs; however, in the cause of filial piety, he was prepared to offer ten of the same coins. If the Lord Cassim should unfortunately be unable to see his way to accept this offer he was desired to inform his correspondent at the earliest possible moment if the family ought or ought not to incur the expense of mourning apparel.

For the Bishop's Chaplain the banker Obey ibn Amr stated his willingness to pay the forty-six shillings asked by the Lord Cassim, and for the Sheik Khobeib and his young wife, the lady Asma, the sum of ten thousand timauns, as mentioned in his favour, both exchanges to be effected as the Lord

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Cassim should direct. He further begged to enclose a statement of his terms for advances of ready money, and, with kissing of the hands and feet, remained etcetera.

Most of this was highly satisfactory, and in great good humour Cassim dictated replies which defined the time when and place at which there should be restored to their anxious friends those captives who had been considered sufficiently valuable to undergo that ceremony. So pleasantly was he affected, indeed, by the excellent result of his negotiations, that he not only gave up all idea of pursuing the affair of the Magistrate any further, but actually refrained from having him put out of the way. "Let him stay here," he said. "He shall, by my beard! grind corn, cut wood, and otherwise make himself useful. The continued spectacle of his degradation may help to make certain matters supportable to me." Here he sighed heavily and with a cry of, "Coming, coming," disappeared through the curtains from behind which his spouse's voice had been heard, pronouncing his name in tones of angry demand.

And so the replies were despatched, time went on, rejoinders arrived confirming the arrangements made for the delivery of the four captives, and the day before that fixed for their departure dawned, drew to a close, and was swallowed up in night.

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You will not have forgotten, I trust, that all this time Asma had reigned the undisputed Queen of my Heart and that I had spent my every waking moment (save those during which I had been engaged with my employer's correspondence, and of them there had not been many) in the composition and writing out of eulogies addressed to that lady of infinite perfections, or despairing laments of my own unworthiness so much as to raise my eyes towards her.

And all in my best style of poetry.

It is true that I had never seen her from the moment when she and her abominable husband had quitted the divan of Cassim, after that interview which I have described; but this was of little consequence to a poet as fruitful as myself. Worship like mine can feed on a single such memory with more exquisite satisfaction than can your ordinary lukewarm love on fifty solid years of actual marriage. My paper was almost as unlimited as my enthusiasm, and the amount of poetry which I accordingly created beggars imagination. The close-stacked piles of written sheets in my apartment already encroached seriously upon my convenience, and had the negotiations relative to the captives been much longer protracted I should have been put to my trumps to find room for myself. But, as you are to learn, the departure of Asma from the Valley was to coincide with the cessation of all my anxiety touching the impositions of this paper tide.

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The moment fixed for the dispatch of the captives being now only a few hours distant, I perceived that it behoved me quickly to do something to justify all this outlay of stationery and genius. I felt that self-scorn must be my portion for the rest of my life were I to suffer Asma to quit the place unaware of the existence of my passion and the quality of my verse. To see her go away into the outer world uncheered by any knowledge of what she was losing, would be myself doubly to lose her. Fate had forbidden our union, but if only she should have been convinced of my intellectual splendour my future would not be wholly tenebrous. My heart might break, but my self-satisfaction would be preserved.

Though I had never again seen the dear object of my passion I knew the happy building which lodged her. This was a house, close to the main prison, which belonged to Omm Habiba, the widow of a principal brigand, who had perished, some years earlier, gloriously, on the field of battle. In recognition of his services to the Community his relict had been granted the privilege (it was in the nature of a pension) of sometimes receiving a few captives whose social status or delicate physique seemed to entitle them to treatment a little more comfortable than the common gaol could afford; it being always understood that they must be in a position to pay handsomely for this easier accommodation.

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Such captives were Asma and her husband, and they had lodged with Omm Habiba since the day of their arrival.

I may observe that, as it was impossible for anyone to escape from the valley, no restrictions were placed upon the movements of the prisoners, who wandered where they would and were commonly on very good terms with the brigands. The prison was thus in no sense a gaol or lock-up, but merely the building to which its inhabitants retired to sleep and where their meals were served. So it was with the home of Omm Habiba, whose guests were perfectly free to go in and out at will, and, had only the good Omm and the regulations of Ras Keliz been concerned, my sight would no doubt have been blessed (and dazzled) frequently by the spectacle of my lady. But she was submitted to a keeper more cruel than any brigand in the place. Her husband, jealous as only such old beastly miseries can be, kept her securely under lock and key, and, while he himself often crawled out to take the sun and the breeze in the town square, the divine Asma was never suffered to emerge.

Their room was upon the ground floor, the old man's many infirmities rendering the ascent of stairs a matter of some difficulty to him; their window, however, had been strongly barred, at his expense, when they took up their abode behind it. Thus he could leave his property with an easy mind.

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It may be thought that a lover so ardent as myself would have found some opportunity to open up communication with the dear prisoner while her gaoler was abroad ; but where all the circumstances are not known it is generally easy to suggest clever schemes for circumventing them. In this case the factor of which you are unaware is the state of public feeling which prevailed among the brigands with regard to the moral behaviour of their prisoners. As the debauched governing classes of all countries (seeming to wish to atone for the enormous excesses of which they themselves are guilty by the strictness with which they condemn the milder revelry of others) endeavour by Acts of Parliament, Sermons from the Pulpit, and every other means to repress the propensities of the lower orders to self-indulgence, so these brigands, themselves a godless gang, unrestrained by any considerations of religion or even conventional conduct, frowned darkly upon the least suspicion of levity among those whom they kept in durance ; and it would have been to provoke a terrible scandal, if not my own and Asma's destruction, to have been discovered at her window during one of the absences of her spouse, which only occurred in the daytime when all the vicinity of their residence was under public observation. It is needless to say that while he was at home the chances of my holding any secret conversation with her were even less favourable, and since, during the ten days then immediately past, he had been

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confined to the house with an attack of gout, of which disease, it seems, he was a greatly oppressed subject, I had not even been tantalised by so much as the appearance of an opportunity. It was indeed fortunate that things had so come off, for had old Khobeib once put his nose out of doors during this time, I have little doubt—so reckless had my longing to deliver some of my verses to Asma become—that I must have affronted every risk of being observed and insinuated some poetic declaration between the bars of her cage.

This seems to me the more certain because, at the last, I proved unable to restrain myself from attempting this very thing, though I knew positively that Khobeib was at home and, from the nature of his sickness, almost as surely awake. But the Author's Pride, in the words of the melancholy Cassim concerning Love, 'rideth over or through,' and not all my fears were able on this occasion to unhorse it.

Fortunately it was a dark night, the moon being far gone towards death and, like the invalid she was, rising late. Until her appearance I knew I should find my lady at home, the hour fixed for the setting out of the little party of about-to-be ransomed captives and their guards being that in which the Queen of Night should first cast her revealing rays upon the path that must be travelled.

Having provided myself with that set of verses

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which seemed most likely to please—I mean that in which the manifold charms of my lady were described in greatest detail, that, in short, which has already been submitted to you—I slipped out of the room, left the house, and with beating heart approached The Shrine.

There was a light in the window, from which circumstance I concluded with despair that my lady was already engaged in her preparation for departure and that Khobeib must inevitably be awake. Nevertheless my resolution to hand her my verses was in no way diminished in intensity. Though destruction must overtake us both, should the fact become known, still I persisted in my design. I went forward hardly by my own volition, so utterly was I obsessed with the belief that my happiness was bound up with the doing of this thing.

To have written such a deal of fine stuff about Asma and to permit her to depart without so much as suspecting my cleverness was impossible. Come death, come torture, come shame, come public reprobation, the thing must be done. For to write poetry is to take a drug wholly destructive of prudence towards oneself and mercy towards others.

As witness these stanzas from *The Fleshpots* of Gorj the Gastrolater, known to Europe as the Abyssinian Brillat Savarin. They are in the thirteenth section, which is called *The Dark Side of Dining* :

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*About the board each smiling guest
promotes the feast with quip and jest
and with the victuals does his best.*

*A shoal of minnows, this is like,
that feast and gambol while the pike,
hard by, attends his hour to strike.*

*For when the plates are cleared away
their poet host, to their dismay,
produces his Unspouted Play.*

*Nor may their fattened innocence
against his will provide defence ;
nor may their legs convey them thence*

*until the Hero's soul has fled,
until the Heroine is dead,
until the Tragedy is read.*

How, then, should I be restrained by fear of disaster, whether to myself or to my mistress, from handing in my verses at her window ?

Night is the friend of lovers and through her kindly shadows I made my way stealthily and unchallenged as far as the very casement. Here I paused a moment, listening if haply I might be comforted by the snores of Khobeib. I did not indeed hear anything proceeding from himself to assure me that he slept ; but the mellow tones of Asma's voice, plainly audible through the thick

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window-curtain, gave me the same news in a fashion not to be disbelieved.

“Wake up!” she was crying, “wake up, Khobeib, and help with the straps. Allah singe thee, wake up! Lo! the hour of setting out draweth nigh, and the bags are not yet made. Is not Preparation the Corner-stone of Enterprise? And what saith Talik the Twice-thinker?”

*It is easy to go in to dinner
if only thy cooking be done.
It is simple to pick thee a winner
if thou know'st how the horses will run.
For he who would tackle a job with success
must PREPARE, or he'll get in the deuce of a mess.*

Wake up, then! Feign not sleep, old loafer! Prepare! Prepare! The packing of luggage is, *wellah!* a vile business, but it may be endured if there be but a trifle of honourable co-operation betwixt man and wife. What an thou *hast* the gout upon thee? Have I not my sore finger? Up! Wake! Help! Give a hand, I say! Oh! Allah shake thee and let the djinn tug thy beard! for I am at an end of my resources and the lock of the great trunk will *not* catch.”

No word spake Khobeib and I was about to profit by that strong distaste from the packing of baggage which in him the words of Asma disclosed and which seemed to render him stoical to endure all shakings, twitchings of the beard, and other misfortunes

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rather than do his share—I say, I was about to profit by this to rap lightly on the window-frame, when a very small scream from Asma held my hand. Evidently something new was afoot. Perhaps the old man had roused up to box her ears, in which case——

But further speculation was made unnecessary by the words which now proceeded from Asma.

“Dead!” she exclaimed. “Dead! The gout bath reached the heart and he is dead. By my hair! he slept soundlier than I had supposed. Well, well! and so thou art no more, old miser. And I, oh joy! am a widow woman. And when I reach my home again there will be no Khobeib to share it with me. What do I say? When I reach my home! But—but——” And she fell suddenly silent.

Khobeib being dead, I had no further reason to delay. I rapped, and, making my voice soft, called: “Fear nothing. It is I.”

At once the curtains were parted and she appeared, and the light of her lamp illuminated my face.

“Thou!” she exclaimed, “and who in Shaitan’s name art Thou?” Her eyes stared, her bosom heaved, and it was evident to me that she was the sport of violent anxieties.

“Thy slave,” said I, presenting my poem.

She collected herself a little. “Which?” said she, and I replied: “The humblest.”

Upon this her expression relaxed something in its

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tenseness and—" I have seen thy little rascal's face before," she said. " Where ? "

" It was," I said, " when thou hadst audience of my lord."

" Ah," she cried, " the clerk ! "

" That very same Bildad," said I, again offering my verses.

" And what," she said, taking them, " is this ? If thy lord hath employed thee as his Mercury——"

" Nay, lady," said I, " but I am my own Mercury. Deign to cast those star-like eyes upon my script and thou shalt learn——"

" Thou ! " she cried, laughing gaily. " *Thou* lovest me ? Ha, ha ! Bethink thee, Precocity, that I am wedded."

" Nay, lady," said I, " since his gout hath driven the soul from Khobeib."

" Thou knowest ? " she cried, paling. " Oh me ! I am undone. What help is there now ? " With these words she flung my poem into a corner and covering her face with her hands began to sob.

" Oh, Asma ! " I cried. " Exquisite female ! Weep not for that old man who was unworthy——"

" Fool ! " she said, removing her hands, " thinkest thou I mourn Khobeib ? Nay, but my own wretchedness. What saith Oob the Optimist in his *Definitions and Diagnoses* :

*The ills of All the World—A load of care,
which thou, being well, most easily may bear.*

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Khobeib is dead, but his misfortune would affect me no whit were it not that it has altogether compromised my own prospects. For his brother hath agreed to ransom him and me, not me alone ; and if Khobeib be not delivered to the messengers of Obey ibn Amr to-morrow they will decline to accept me, refuse the ransom money, and the whole transaction will come to nothing. And who knows if Obey will even consider the ransoming of me alone, since my retention here will enable him to claim, as Khobeib's sole heir, that sum of ten thousand timauns which he holds of Khobeib and which his returning messenger will give back into his hands ? So must I drag out the rest of my life in this odious, dull valley, denied the simplest of the luxuries to which I am accustomed and in perpetual terror of that enormous woman, the wife of Cassim, whose malevolent eye hath marked the predilection which her husband evinceth for my society and whose jealous arm will be swift to torment me, once I can no longer pretend to the security which the prospect of a large ransom affords the captive of outlaws. Aï ! Aï ! but I am very wretched ! ”

I, having no suggestion to make, held my tongue, and for some little space nothing but the sobs of Asma broke the silence of the night.

Suddenly she ceased to weep and, looking up, bent upon me a gaze of extraordinary significance.

“ Bildad,” she said, so softly that I could hardly hear her for the beating of my heart, “ Bildad, dost

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thou then truly love me? Because—I love thee dearly.”

With that, all the marrow of my bones melted for bliss, and I sank down with my face against the bars, speechless and almost swooning.

“Asma,” I babbled. “Oh, Asma!”

“Nay,” she said, rising and approaching the window, “let not thy happiness affect thee in that manner. I have much need of thee, my Bildad, and it behoveth thee now to be not weak as Afrasiab, but strong as Rustam and quick as Bleyziz. It hath become suddenly evident to me that if thou and I go to work speedily and in the right way, not only shall our freedom from this dismal place be secured but also our love shall be crowned with an eternal and hitherto unhopèd-for union. I have, in short, a plan; for, as Safia the Suffraj saith in her *Females First; an Unanswerable Demonstration of the Essential Inferiority of Man*:

*There is no lock where woman's wit
shall prove a key that fails to fit.*

And speaking of keys, suffer me only to get that one which openeth the door of this room and I will let thee in, when, with less chance than now of being remarked by some nocturnal wanderer, I may unfold to thee what is in my mind.”

So saying, she crossed the room, rummaged awhile in the clothing of the deceased Khobeib, produced

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a key with a small triumphant cry, and, motioning me to go round to the door, went thither and began softly to unlock it. Before she had it open I was on the other side of it. Springing across the threshold I cast myself at her feet with the intention of embracing them; but she hastily withdrew, pulled the curtain across the window, and, turning to me again, said :

“ Joy waiteth on the Accomplishment of Labour, and Payment on Account is the Ruin of Faithful Service. Moderate, therefore, these transports, my Bildad, which, complimentary though they be and dear to my heart, are infinitely unseasonable. Our time is short and we have much occupation before us.

“ Indeed, I may pertinently apply to our situation the words which are spoken in the Tragedy of *Shalmanazar* by the Protagonist, when the Ten Thousand Bashi Bazouks burst in upon him and his wife Sawda, in the grey of the morning, clamouring for his blood and brandishing weapons of every conceivable variety :

There's a time to be loafing and lazing.

There's a time to be lying abed.

*There's a time to be gawping and gazing,
to be wondering and scratching the head.*

*There is also a time to be casting
sheep's eyes and for stealing a kiss,
and for promising Love Everlasting—
but not one of the bundle is This.*

And so, my dear Bildad, to work !

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“ Yet would I premise that, deeply though I love thee, if thou performest not in every particular that which I am about to enjoin upon thee (and which, I may add for thy information, leadeth up to flight in thy sweet company) I will shriek for help and, on its arrival, I will accuse thee of my husband’s death, when, owing to thy presence in this room where thou canst have no manner of legitimate business, thou wilt find thy explanatory faculties sufficiently taxed to save thee from the fury of the brigands. And now—since thy expression telleth me that I was not mistaken in supposing that the first alternative is more to thy taste than the second—draw me out this bed on which the deceased Khobeib so comfortably repositeth. Draw it me out from the wall.”

When I had done what she commanded—“ Next,” she said, “ take this, which is one of my late husband’s sharply-pointed walking-sticks (for he would ever have a sharp point, being very fearful of a slip). Lo ! I will take the other, and between us we will dig him a cosy grave in the soft earth of this floor. Here ! dig here ! ” she added, pointing to the place where the bed had previously stood.

Though I knew no more than my hand what she intended, I obeyed her strictly, for I was aflame with love and ready to do everything that should further any plan for which a result was promised as attractive as that which she had suggested.

After an hour and thirty and two and a half minutes of violent effort I (Asma had very soon

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desisted on the plea that it was unbecoming in a widow to help to hurry her husband's body underground) I, I say, had scooped out a trench, shallow indeed, but of a depth sufficient to receive Khobeib, who had been a thin old man.

"And now," said she, "help me to pull off my poor dear gentleman's upper garments."

This was done, when she continued :

"Now, Bildad, clothe thyself quickly in this turban, robes, and slippers ; assume this green eye-shade ; hobble on these two sticks ; and the devil will not know thee from Khobeib."

"Ha !" said I. "In the words which the Sultan Gul, in the play from which thou didst just now quote, addresses (as he rises for the third time) to the Grand Vizier, who has always pretended to be his best friend, but now, having administered poisoned coffee to his Sovereign, has ripped him across the abdomen with a meat-saw and thrown him into the Bosphorus :

*'Dissolved all mysteries thy purpose screening,
at last I seem to understand thy meaning.'*"

"And now," she pursued, quite unimpressed by the aptness of my quotation or the evidence which it afforded that my knowledge of our National Drama was at least the equal of her own, "roll me Khobeib into this snug little home that we have provided for him, fill me in the earth, push me back the bed into place, and, if the messengers of Obey ibn Amr pay

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not over the ransom to-morrow and if thou and I be not in Kharzanipore six days hence, thou hast my liberty to call me Chinawoman."

All that she had commanded I performed with the same breathless speed which I (having no means of gauging the flight of time and consequently none of estimating how much of it remained to us before the moon-rise should give the signal for the departure of the captives) had brought to bear on all my former tasks. And indeed it was well that I had not delayed, because, hardly was the bed in position and everything restored to its former state, than there came a thunder on the door and the voice of Khalf, conductor of the expedition, was heard crying: "Bestir thee, Khobeib ibn Amr. Lo! the moon, with Eastern radiance, her coming announceth and the hour of departure is at hand. Up, then, thou and thy female! Open the door, that the young men may carry out thy baggage. And forget not the customary *pourboires*, lest some evil chance overtake thee and thy trunks at the outset of thy journey. How runneth the warning of the Sage, Beydekr, in his *Handbook for the Hostelry*?

*Practice Economy toward him alone
who cannot practice Devilry toward thee.
By tips withheld, a dragon crop is sown
that very inconvenient may be."*

Asma was not slow to obey this summons. Having veiled herself, she cast the door open and there

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entered two lads of the Fraternity who instantly shouldered the baggage which, being still unfastened, burst asunder and discharged its contents on to the floor. Then was there the loud noise of uncouth brigand laughter in the room, to which I, acting my part, added the furious hen-cluckings with which I supposed the stammering old Khobeib would have commented upon this event, had he been in a position so to do, while Asma joined in with the sounds of wailing. But Khalf, entering, put an end to this, laying about him busily with a staff and calling upon Allah to defend him from all clumsy louts and all fools of travellers who knew not enough to part with their money at a time when such expenditure could be useful. Taking the hint, I pulled out the well-filled purse of the late Khobeib and distributed coins among the brigands (not forgetting their Chief) who at once stuffed everything back into the trunks, strapped them up in a twinkling, and ran out of the room with them upon their shoulders.

I (having taken up my poem from the corner, where all this time it had remained) followed, leaning (with what rapture !) upon the arm of my supposed wife.

That Asma would have executed her threat of denouncing me to the brigands as the slayer of her husband, had I declined to assist her in the deception which she proposed to practice upon them, I did not

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have the least doubt. Only a fool would have refused to adopt a course of conduct so eminently circumspect ; and since, by Asma's assertion that she loved me, I was precluded from believing her to be devoid of wits, I could not suppose that her menace had been an idle one.

Yet how unnecessary it had been, I alone knew.

Life in the Valley was made tolerable to me only by her dear neighbourhood. I was comfortable enough, to be sure, well housed, copiously fed, and in the enjoyment of much leisure ; but these things are not enough for a man of spirit and intelligence. Had Asma not been near, to render my prison a Paradise, my soul, eager for fame, adventure, and riches, must have suffered the torments of the damned in that closely restricted sphere, where thought of any profundity was a coin which had no exchange value, poetry was a drug, and an acquaintance with the Classics was of less use than a broken back-scratcher.

With Asma, then, all possibility of enduring my lot must make its exit from the valley of Ras Keliz, and I had foreseen that with the closing of the river gate upon her departure there must rise against my happiness a barrier no less formidable than the Gates of Death.

And behold ! I was offered a choice between, on the one hand, flight from this spot so inhospitable to my genius in company with her whose proximity could alone make my life worth having, and, on the

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other, infamy and disintegration at the hands of the brigands, whose outraged sense of propriety could not fail to visit with the most condign punishment the apparent invader of domestic peace, while their disillusioned avarice must excite the most active demonstrations of hate against the assumed destroyer of a valuable captive.

Is it marvellous that I had fallen in with the suggestions of Asma ?

I think not.

The upper horn of the waning moon was already visible above the cliffs when we stepped out into the night air, and its tender illumination revealed a small body of men, all fully armed, and most of them mounted, grouped about a species of large box which reposed upon the ground. This was the litter in which Khobeib, incapacitated for marching by his various disorders, had bargained that he and Asma should travel.

Simulating an old man's gait and pulling my eyeshade well down over my face, I walked slowly to this machine and held the curtains apart that Asma might enter ; but she, shaking her head resolutely, declared her intention of walking. " For," said she, " I would not incommode thee, dear Khobeib, with my presence in this exiguous palanquin. Thou art old and gouty, and the jolting of the bearers will be hard for thee to bear. There is no discomfort to an invalid like cramped quarters and

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the restriction of movement, and all the space that this paltry thing affords must be thine. Lo ! I will walk, and if I tire, as tire I may, are there not here a dozen gallant cavaliers who will fight for the honour of taking me up behind them ? ”

“ Yea ! ” roared the mounted brigands as one man.
“ Yea, verily.”

While I stood speechless with disappointment : “ Let my lord enter his litter,” she went on. “ The night is chilly and breathes rheumatism into ancient limbs. Let my lord enter and trouble not his soul for his Asma. The way will be long and tedious and thy entertaining conversation I will greatly lack ; but which among our predatory friends here will refuse to attempt the impossible task of supplying thy place as a whiler-away of dull moments ? ”

And the brigands with a single voice cried : “ Not I ! ”

As I still made no movement to get into the now-loathed receptacle : “ Inside ! ” she hissed suddenly into my ear, “ or I declare the stratagem and swear that thou hast intimidated me into thus abetting thy escape. Do as I say, and we both win out. Refuse, and I denounce thee. I may perish, though I place much reliance on my beauty ; but *thou* wilt spend thy last hours among the ants. In ! ”

The curtains of the litter, closing, hid from my glaring eyes the spectacle of this woman already deep in affable talk with the best-looking of our guards.

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Conjuration addressed to certain Master-devils and composed in a Litter by Moonlight admitted through a Chink of the Curtains :

*A—lmousin, Zariatnatmik,
S—emhamphoras and Chavajoth,
M—ark her name well, snatch her to hell,
A—nd fold her in your hottest wrath.*

This I wrote out fairly—or as fairly as the jolting of the litter would allow—in my own blood upon the back of my rhapsodical description of its subject. I then tore the paper into shreds, and to these, while we waited for the opening of the river-gate, I set light, borrowing for this purpose a torch from one of my carriers. The ashes I then scattered abroad, whispering the Incantation the while, and holding my left great toe between my right thumb and forefinger and my right ear between the little and third finger of my left hand, glancing, lastly, over my left shoulder with my right eye only—all as The Books recommend.

We had passed the river-gate, emerged from the water-tunnel, turned Westwards between the hills and the desert, and were already some miles upon our way.

The order of march was as follows :

1. Two slingers, in open order, as an advance guard, armed with scythes.
2. Four hoplites, armed with muskets.

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3. The Hajji Moghira ibn Bilâl, with his hands tied securely behind him and a rope round his neck held by
4. Khalf.
5. Four heavy cavalrymen on war horses, armed with two-handed swords.
6. Aurelius Abercrombie Aggs armed with an umbrella, his only luggage.
7. Four light cavalrymen on ponies, armed with hand grenades.
8. Four porters carrying on their shoulders
9. THE LITTER.
10. Three huzzahs on donkeys, armed with megaphones and driving before them
11. Nine pack she-asses which were to bring home the ransom money.
12. Asma and the best-looking brigand mounted on mules, both armed with smiles and amiable observations.
13. Two spearmen, in close order, as rearguard, armed with battle-axes.

And now the false dawn shone for a moment ghastly in the West, died, and was succeeded by a renewal of darkness; this in its turn gave way to the more trustworthy harbinger of morning; the sky grew white, pink, rosy, flame coloured; up leaped the great desert Sun and the vultures burst into their glad chorus of welcome; the horses neighed; the asses brayed; the very mules were moved to rapture; and at a little distance appeared

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the palms of the oasis where the exchange of the prisoners for cash was to be effected.

From among those trees appeared one on horse-back who waved a large white flag; and immediately our little company drew closer together, looked to their primings, sharpened their spurs and otherwise put themselves in readiness to cope with the danger which seemed to threaten. But soon our apprehensions were all dissipated by an exclamation from our leader Khalf, whose unrivalled eyes—in the warfare of the desert to him of keenest vision is always the command, because no strategical advantage is more highly valued than a good start—whose unrivalled eyes, I repeat, had recognised in the flag-bearer a leading Detective from the City of Roh in the Province of Doh.

“*Barik Allah!*” he cried. “Praise be to God! It is my old friend Harîth ibn Hamza come to take thee home, oh, Moghira ibn Bilâl, and all is well. We have had too many and too lucrative dealings with friend Harîth in the past, and he hopes for too many of the same in the future, for there to be any question here of his *bona fides*. Shall a man play fast and loose with the Source of Revenue? *Wellah!* he shall not. Harîth yonder hath built him a row of houses out of the fees paid him by afflicted persons for the discovery and restoration of their relatives, captured by our Confederacy; and think ye that he hath not a mind for more real property? Advance then, every

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mother's son of ye. In yonder oasis lurketh no ambush, and thence shall fly into your bellies no leaden pill, as ye approach, to purge ye of your souls ; but rather shall ye find there a good welcome and breakfast laid out and money that maketh glad the heart of man.

“ So Onward ! Take up your legs and let the Grease of Pleasurable Anticipation make pliant your marching muscles. ‘ Even the heir,’ saith Mum the Mute who, as you will remember, produced a volume entitled *Reflections by the Way* just after the Battle of Bedr :

*Even the heir, for all his bitter woe,
thinketh the funeral cortège much too slow.*

How then shall we loiter who, by the loss of a few prisoners (who are less than nothing to us) are to gain very much wealth ? ”

At once, with a loud cheer, the troop cantered forward, and soon Khalf and Harîth were in one another's arms giving and receiving the kiss of peace. And now, on the edge of the oasis, appeared certain men who cried to us to hurry and made amicable gestures in our direction. Doubt was no longer possible to the ignorant fellows who surrounded me. The meeting arranged by correspondence had positively eventuated. For to the wholly-unlettered writing must always be a species of magic, and any result which it may bring about must seem a miracle ; and indeed, when even educated persons

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find difficulty in believing that a writer lives by his pen, how much harder must it be for the vulgar to comprehend, at any time, that by the same means he has actually achieved something really desirable !

The persons whom we found awaiting us among the trees were twenty-five in number and divided between two parties.

First there were the Rhodian Police and their leader, a band of five stout fellows, armed to the teeth and admirably mounted.

The second company, and much the larger, was composed of those Emissaries whom the great banker of Kharzanipore, Obey ibn Amr, had sent out to ransom and receive from the hands of Cassim's merry men his brother Khobeib and the lady Asma. They had also been entrusted with the duty of performing the same offices for the Chaplain to the Bishop of Mesopotamia, Aurelius Abercrombie Aggs. The Kharzanipore contingent was composed of twenty strong men, all copiously provided with swords, pistols, muskets, and daggers, after the fashion of my country, where a display of weapons is commonly regarded as being likely to be more efficacious than their employment.

Yet—so powerful is mutual interest—our twenty-five outlaws mingled fearlessly with all these policemen and armed retainers ; since they knew that Harîth would never sanction, much less order, an attack upon such valuable allies.

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The business which had brought us together was first dispatched.

Harîth, being a Representative of State, took precedence of everyone else. The Hajji Moghira ibn Bilâl was accordingly led up by his rope to where Harîth sat upon the sand with a chest full of money before him ; the reward was counted out by Harîth and the coins checked by Khalf ; lastly witnesses to the transaction on both sides were secured and impressions of their inked thumbs were appended to the receipts which were mutually exchanged. All this was done with the most admirable method and dispatch. Thereafter Khalf loaded some bags which he had filled with the cash, upon a couple of donkeys, and the Hajji was led away to a palm and tied up there securely.

Then Harîth gave place to the leader of the Kharzaniporians, who sat down likewise and caused several boxes of gold to be ranged in front of him.

My litter was placed before these boxes and the lord Khobeib was desired to step out and show himself ; but this I had no intention of doing if I could help it. I accordingly thrust my head out for a moment between the curtains (being careful to display nothing but the green eyeshade and turban of the late lamented Khobeib) and set up a furious cackling and bubbling which Asma, with her ready tongue, translated as the expression of my detestation of anyone who should expect a poor gouty cripple to leave his bed for any purpose whatever.

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But the noises I made had already convinced the Agent of Obey ibn Amr that he had to do with the Banker's brother, and he naturally assumed that the veiled lady who stood beside the litter was the same person's sister-in-law ; and so with no more difficulty than I have described our identity was established and Khalf and the Banker's Man settled down to the counting of the ransom money. As there was a considerable lot of it this took about an hour, but ultimately the figure was agreed, the necessary evidence was secured and Aggs was led up.

As by this time everyone was getting very hungry and as neither the Chaplain nor his ransom (as someone very frankly said) was worth half a minute's fast, the Banker's Agent, taking a fistful of silver at random out of a box, offered to toss Khalf whether he should have that or nothing for the holy man. Khalf agreeing, the matter was settled with a coin, and Khalf winning, took the money and found that he was two piastres short of the six and forty shillings which Cassim had named as the Chaplain's ransom ; for which sum he would have to account to his Chief out of his own pocket. But since this concluded all the business and breakfast could now be undertaken, Khalf, reckless as all brigands are, only laughed loudly at his bad luck, and, swaggering up on to his feet, called for the production of the eatage and potables and swore that he was going to be the death of a brace of gallons of the best or let Allah split him !

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And now brigands, policemen, and civilians sat down, mingled together in all friendship ; wine-skins were brought out of the spring, a hearty breakfast of dates, cold soft-boiled eggs, curd sandwiches, potted tongue, salmon mayonnaise, galantine of camel veal, buckwheat cakes, meringues, and peppermint lozenges was served, and fun and feasting became the order of the day. Toasts were drunk, Sentiments were proposed, speeches were made, songs were sung, the lute was played, a scarf dance was performed by one of the younger Kharzaniporians, and the Sergeant of the Police did tricks with string, matches, corks, and a handkerchief, which Harîth (jealous of his subordinate's success) explained all wrong, behind his hand, to Khalf and the Banker's Agent.

Food and drink of the best were also given to the mock-Khobeib, not any mortal's situation being permitted to be totally evil. For only by its contrast with light does darkness exist.

The last item of the programme was a song executed by the chiefs of the three parties, to which each contributed a verse in praise of his own business. It was conceived as follows, and though some of its rhymes are not wholly above criticism, this defect seemed in no way to prejudice it in the favour of the audience, which joined in the Chorus with a gusto that was positively terrifying :

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(1)

KHALF

*My bonny Barb and I,
as round about we canter,
a caravan espy
and go for it instanter.
Such merchants as I take
I sell for goodly ransom,
and so, upon the whole, I make
a living pretty handsome.*

CHORUS

Yáh-ha !

Yáh-ha !

yah-ha-ha-ha-HAR !

*Oh ! the Ass was made to thole the Thong,
and the Right was made to help the Wrong,
and the Weak were made to feed the Strong.*

Yah-háh !

(2)

HARITH

*As through the city dark
discreetly I am flitting,
a criminal I mark
his felonies committing.
I'm on him with a leap.
He can't say 'no' to halving.
'Tis thus, and otherwise, I keep
my family from starving.*

CHORUS

Yáh ha ! etc.

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(3)

THE BANKER'S MAN

*On Thief or Rentier,
on Social Prop or Canker,
indifferently I prey.
All's Fish to Mister Banker.
They recognise their Foe,
but still his loans invest in.
Give me Finance, because it's so
Compounded-Interesting !*

CHORUS

Yáh ha ! etc.

The feast had been spread a little apart from the place where two fine litters, brought from Kharzanipore for the conveyance of Khobeib and Asma, stood, into one of which Asma had already retired with a large supply of salad, sandwiches, and sweetmeats. But while Obey Ibn Amr had been willing to extend this courtesy of the litters to his brother (to whom, after all, the machines belonged), he had apparently not thought fit to provide a conveyance for the Bishop's Chaplain. Probably the Bishop had forgotten to give him any instructions to do so, and the Banker (cautious in the article of expense on behalf of others, as all successful financiers must be) had not felt sufficient confidence in his reverend client's passivity, to risk an outlay which had not been authorised. A cleric is usually too great an enemy of Evil and its every manifes-

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tation to submit tamely to charges which the Law will not compel him to pay.

Aggs was therefore unfurnished with a litter or any other carrier than, as we say, "the dromedary of Chank," a popular metonymy which (as you may have divined) signifieth nothing more out of the way than a man's own two legs. By this circumstance he seemed a good deal annoyed, for I heard him complaining savagely to himself in his own language as he walked up and down near my litter, though at that time I knew not English and was therefore unable to understand his meaning. But there is no mistaking the voice of Chagrin.

In *The Moral Apothecary, or Every Man his own Medicine*, it is written :

*If thou needest a salve for thy sorrow,
Just borrow
a dab from the grief of another,
my brother.*

And the soundness of this advice was made evident to me by the relief which the unhappiness of this Aggs afforded to my own lacerated soul. Trusting that the spectacle of his distorted features might work even more to my benefit, I parted the curtains and looked out from beneath the eyeshade.

As I did so the fellow (he was facing me) stopped dead ; then darted to my side and began to pour out a torrent of my own language.

"Sheik Khobeib," he panted. "In the mercy of

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the Rich Man is the only hope of the Indigent. Lo! thy brother the Banker, to whom my Lord, the Bishop, hath committed the business of procuring the release of thy servant, is a man devoid of the rudiments of generosity. For thee and thy spouse he hath sent litters; but I am to walk. Six days afoot will be the death of me; for I am a man little used to hardship, being soft and tender and ill-constructed to support the fatigues of marching. How shall a priest be muscular and how may he steal time from the performance of his functions for the hardening of the corporeal frame? It were a villainy so to do. His mind is set wholly above the considerations of the body, save in the matter of such necessary articles as eating and drinking and repose, without which no labourer may dispense. Thou knowest not the life of the parish if thou thinkest that a Curate who doth his duty can be a strong man. Tract-distributing among the poor absorbeth his mornings; tea-drinking with the wealthy (no less in need of his ministrations) accounteth for his afternoons. At night there is the Glee Club and the Debating Society, the Reading Circle and the Sober Workmen's Happy Hour. Perhaps a little croquet, perhaps a little archery, perhaps an occasional square dance (where the Vicar hath some breadth of mind) from time to time may mildly tax his thews; but these games do less to strengthen the bodies of the participants than their mutual disesteem. Know then, oh Khobeib ibn Amr! that I do woe-

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fully dread what is before me. By this bunion ! ” —here he held up a foot—“ I had rather return to Cassim’s Vale and be a brigand, than walk all the way to Kharzanipore. Deign then, oh, Khobeib ! to purchase this litter, in which thou hast hitherto travelled, from the miscreant Khalf ; give order that it be placed at my disposal ; advance me the sum necessary to melt the hearts of four porters ; and, at our arrival in the City, I will refund thy outlay with interest at four and an eighth per cent., which is as much as anyone can expect in these hard times. There is due to me a half-year’s salary, and though I was to have sent it all to my parents (who are in great distress) it is thine, every penny, if only thou wilt save me from the calamity which threatens. It is by thy beard that I conjure thee.”

To have complied with his request even if I had been willing to do so—from which intention I was very far—would have meant destruction. How could I have done a quarter of that which he requested without the deceit which I was practising becoming known ? It is impossible to buy a litter and make arrangements for its employment through the medium of those cacklings and gobblings to which my utterances were confined. I therefore, maintaining silence, closed the curtains in his face, and I suppose the implacability of mind thus declared frightened him from making any further attempt, for after a moment’s pause I heard him shuffle away over the sand.

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Peeping out an instant later, I saw him on his knees by the side of Asma's litter.

At this I laughed inwardly. Did he, then, hope to soften *that* heart ?

Closing the curtains once more I betook myself to the recital of that Incantation which has previously been submitted.

Having done which, I finished my breakfast.

And now the brigands and their fellow revellers, "having put from them the desire of meat and drink," as the old Greek, Omar (a progenitor, doubtless, of Persia's immortal Tentmaker) hath it, and also of music, stretched themselves out in the shade side by side, cut-throat by policeman, outlawed by authorised pillager, wolf by lycanthropist, and snored away the heat of afternoon, in such perfect amity and confidence that it was pretty to see. Nor, you may be sure, were those fatted knaves, the servants of Banker Obey, any less ready to sleep. Even in this desert place among all these desperados their simple trust in the Aegis of Jupiter Capitalinus preserved them from all alarm.

Brigands and also Policemen depend ultimately upon Finance, for where are ransoms and blackmail to be raised save at the Bank ? Your small scoundrels cannot afford to quarrel with the Great

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Ones. Obey ibn Amr's brother might be held to ransom with impunity, but not his domestics and clerks ; for the temporary loss of a relative afflicteth the heart only ; but that of an employé means inconvenience at home or disorganisation at the place of business. Obey, by merely writing a few letters, could have smashed Cassim & Company like an egg, Harîth and his Myrmidons like a window. It was therefore inconceivable either that the brigands should attempt, or the constables turn their blind eye towards, any attack upon the liberties of the Kharzaniporians.

And so they slept, all of them, like the hogs and hoglings of hogs that they were, by which circumstance I profited to effect the transference of myself from the litter in which I had come, to that in which I was henceforth to travel ; it being easier to pass for Khobeib behind curtains than out in the open. On my way I came upon Aggs.

Even Aggs slept, having apparently abandoned as useless his attempt to make interest with the abominable Asma. After removing his coat, waist-coat, and boots, he had stretched himself under a bush with a red silk handkerchief over his face, and as I passed him I perceived that each half of his braces was embroidered longitudinally in green and purple silk with his full name and address, the work, doubtless, of some good woman in his own country, who understood the importance of safeguarding

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from loss an article of attire so essential to a clergyman while its owner should be voyaging through countries where such things are unknown and replacement would be impossible.

Having spat upon Aggs and thus by a little relieved the smarting of my self-esteem occasioned by the treatment which at Asma's hands I had suffered, I went on towards my new litter.

As I passed that in which the unspeakable woman reposed, its curtains were parted just sufficiently to admit of the extrusion of a small red tongue, contumeliously rolled into a point, and a light titter offended the silence of the slumbering oasis. Stooping quickly, I caught up a fistful of sand, scattered it over the object and strode on, happier than I had been for many hours.

Then I climbed into my litter, where, after once more commending the partner of my flight to the most particular attention of the leading Lights of Devildom, I lay down and set fire to a water-pipe which I found there. Having no mind to be stabbed through both cheeks with a hairpin, I was very careful to remain awake and, to show the enemy that I was on guard, I chose the most irritating little tune that I knew and hummed it over and over again, till I myself was nearly driven out of my wits with the thing. Thus I awaited the termination of the general siesta.

Even with the worst consciences men cannot sleep

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for ever, and at last, as the sun began to decline towards the horizon, one of the recumbent snorted, stirred, opened his eyes, shut them again, yawned, stretched his arms, sighed, opened his eyes again, took the name of Allah in vain, and finally struggled to his feet. This done, his soul was incontinently fired with indignation at the sloth so without exception to him circumjacent, and he began to haul at the arm of another fellow and cry to him to waken, because the day was drawing to a close and it behoved them to be stirring. The second, when roused, performed a like office for a third, he for a fourth, the fourth for a fifth, the fifth for a sixth, the sixth for a seventh, the seventh for an eighth, the eighth for a ninth, and so on through the whole fifty of them. Soon all the camp was in commotion. Some busied themselves with putting (always by mistake) their own saddles on better horses than they had brought, or better saddles than they had brought on their own horses; others carefully scattered about upon the clean white sand the bones, discarded wrappings, broken eggshells, uneaten crusts, and other remnants of the feast that the devils of the oasis might be propitiated, a ceremony which must never be omitted by *al fresco* banqueters; others carved their names on the palms, that there might be fulfilled in their case (with such variations as might be necessary) the prophecy of Watchir the Waggonettist :

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*Upon this wall
my name I scrawl,
that men unborn may pause
and cry, "WATCHIR
hath lingered here!
I wonder who he was?"*

Others, again, filled up the well with sand and trampled down the flowering shrubs out of sheer lightness of heart to think that they had brought their business to a good conclusion.

When everyone was ready for the journey the bandits and constabulary, after exchanging embraces and wishing one another a speedy and equally profitable reunion, went their different ways, the first Westward by the path over which we had travelled during the previous night, the second (the green turban of their sanctified prisoner discernible in their midst) to the North, the Kharzaniporians waving them adieu from the edge of the oasis. Then the last-named prepared to take the Southern road.

The litter in which I had come was left behind by the brigands, and if this surprised me (as you can suppose) what was my amazement to see, first, Aggs enter it, and then four stout footmen take it upon their shoulders. Apparently the Chaplain had, by some inconceivable means, persuaded Obey's men to give him credit for this portorage. However, it was no affair of mine and, even had it been so, my extremely false position, by imposing upon me the

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imperative necessity of remaining as far as possible inconspicuous, would have forbidden me to make any objection.

My litter and the litter of Asma were then assumed by other teams of four ; the leader of our party trotted to the rear, the only other mounted man, a Soudanese negro, armed with eighteen cutlasses, placed himself in the van, the rest of the company took up the baskets of provisions, skins of wine, cooking-pots, and other necessaries of travel, and without further delay we set forth upon our six days' voyage.

For three days little occurred to break the scorching monotony of desert travel. We marched and camped and marched again and camped once more. Then we marched again. On the second morning we sighted a large iceberg to the N.N.E. by W. $\frac{3}{4}$ S., but it turned out to be a mirage. During the same afternoon we passed a school of lions ; I counted over five hundred, but there were possibly more. On the third day we were threatened with annihilation by a sand-spout, but someone fired a cannon at it and broke it in two and we had no more trouble with it. In a word, we experienced those common incidents and hazards of the Asiatic highway for whose description I may refer you (if you have a fancy for such stale goods) to the innumerable works of countless pedestrian authors upon whose unelevated province I have no intention

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of trespassing. Shall the skylark waddle with ducks, or the Poet (unless he hath just launched a volume and standeth in need of favourable criticism) herd with journalists? Nay, by This Quill!

Owing to the fact that we travelled under the protection of Cassim and carried his safe-conduct with us, no watch was set at night, since all this country was his strict preserve. When hawks fall to picking out one another's eyes the rabbit whose possession they dispute often escapes them both; it is therefore of the first importance to every brigand chief that his enterprises should remain unhampered by the activities of rivals. And so my native land has come to be divided up by her bandits into what are called indifferently "beats," "pitches," or "spheres of influence," one to each confederation, which never dreams of crossing its allotted boundaries. Thus not only all overlapping, with its attendant economic waste and effusion of blood, is avoided, but the convenience of the public is consulted, since the relatives of any person who is captured are able to place perfect confidence in the genuineness of such proposal for ransom as they may subsequently receive. How would it be, I ask you, if money were sent only to fall, with its bearer, into the hands of some unconscionable scoundrel who has never even seen the gentleman whose body he has deceitfully professed his willingness to deliver? Whereas, under the arrangement which I have

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outlined, no such exasperating miscarriage can possibly take place, and if any given brigand announces a capture, the parties interested can be absolutely sure that their father, sole heir, or what not, is in that brigand's possession and can take steps to raise and dispatch the necessary sum without any troubling suspicion that they may find themselves to have been victimised by a sharper. Indeed, it may be said that in my country the close practitioner has been entirely eliminated from that business, a circumstance which affords a legitimate source of pride to my compatriots and finds its reflection in the phrase, commonly employed by those who seek to convince others of their honesty: "My bond is as good as a brigand's word."

It would, then, have been, not only superfluous, but dangerously insulting had those who travelled through Cassim's country under Cassim's protection placed sentries about their camp at night. And so, though by day our Soudanese and his cutlasses pranced always truculently ahead of our company, the rôle that he played was much less that of a protection than of an ornament or testimony to our party's distinction. We may be said to have expressed ourselves in that way, "simply," as Maniloff said to Tchitchikoff, "for the sake of beauty of style." And so again, once each evening meal had been consumed, we all betook ourselves to our night's repose without the slightest fear lest our slumbers be interrupted by some hostile attack,

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and in no way disturbed by the knowledge that our Soudanese was invariably the first to fall asleep and that to wake him was the work of ten men.

Now you have not, I suppose, been imagining all this time that, though I travelled in a luxuriously-appointed litter, I travelled at ease. All the cushions in Constantinople shall not blunt the thorns of anxiety, and I was indeed at this time filled with many serious forebodings.

“What is to happen when we reach Kharzanipore?”—this was the constant burden of my reflections, which of it I could by no means rid.

“What is to happen when we reach Kharzanipore?” The question would make a suggestive refrain for a Ballade or Chant Royal in the Provençal manner, and in similar inconsequent and tiresome wise did it continue to intrude itself upon my thoughts. Thus—

“The heat inside this litter, with the clothes of two men upon me, is infernal. Yes, but what is to happen when we reach Kharzanipore? It must be getting near the hour of the midday rest. No doubt, but what is to happen when we reach Kharzanipore? I wonder if they have found the body of Khobeib yet and, if so, what they think of it; and what do they fancy has become of me? Never mind all that. What is to happen when we reach Kharzanipore? Baalzebub fly away with Khar-

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zanipore ! Talking of which, what is to happen when we reach it ? ”

Perhaps the most unpleasing feature of this persistent query was the fact that for the answer I could only look to my imagination. I knew no more than my shirt what would happen when we should reach Kharzanipore ; I could only be fairly certain that it would be disastrous to myself. The time must come when I would be required to quit the shelter of my palanquin, nor could I hope thereafter long to deceive the intelligence of Khobeib's household. My eyeshade and my stammer might serve me as far as the gate of the deceased's house, but not much further. It was also more than likely that Obey ibn Amr would take an early opportunity of coming in state to offer his felicitations upon the restoration of his brother to liberty, since a name for valuing the domestic virtues is useful to a Banker. There would, moreover, be Khobeib's cronies to reckon with. Clearly there was no hope of my being able indefinitely to escape exposure.

And then ?

Crucifixion, it appeared, was the least that I could expect.

That nobody would be more surprised than Asma at the discovery of myself in the clothes of her husband, I did not doubt for a moment ; while that she already had her story prepared down to the last detail I was certain. What this story might be mattered nothing. I only knew that I should be

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quite unable to disprove it. No man, placed in the situation which I previsioned for myself, would be capable of explaining it on the spur of the moment, in such a way that the carefully formed and *ad unguem*-polished inventions of an unscrupulous and vindictive liar should be defeated.

Escape had for me never before been so advisable. But how to escape ?

But how ?

But how ?

Allah, says the proverb, maketh blunt wits, but the devil hath a persuasive whetstone.

Accordingly I soon hit upon a plan which, though its rascality was, on the surface, undeniable, was essentially meritorious ; since by putting it into execution I must do an incalculable benefit to one who had grossly injured me. Horse-stealing is but a trivial offence compared with swearing away the life of another, and the first (which I proposed to do) would assuredly save Asma from the second. My duty, then, was clear before me.

The only four-legged animals amongst us were the two horses on which our leader and the Soudanese rode during the marches. To have left one of these creatures behind would have been to invite pursuit and risk recapture. My anxious care for Asma's soul compelled me therefore to resolve upon the rape of both these steeds.

BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

Owing to the confidence which we placed in Cassim and the resultant non-posting of sentries about our camps, nothing, I saw, could well be easier than for me to slip from my litter (what time the entire company should be plunged in profoundest slumber), mount one of the horses, take the other by the bridle, and spur away for dear liberty and dearer life.

To do this, accordingly, I resolved during the third night of our journey.

On the following morning there was handed into me between the curtains of my litter a paper, folded, sealed with a thimble, and thus atrociously inscribed :

The Words of Elusion to Convenience.

These many hours hast thou laid to thy soul the balm of this reflection : “ She is in as bad a box as I.” Lo ! this lenitive is now void of efficacy. Already I am far away and there will be no one to compete with thee for the first place in the public interest, what time the litters halt beside the door that once was old Khobeib’s. If it is easier to avoid trouble than to quench it with explanations, only the fool will neglect to turn aside. Doubtless I could have won through, since I am very beautiful ; but there is a small doubt. To the success of Phryne’s *coup* a susceptible judge is a condition precedent. Now the chief Hangman’s Agent of Kharzanipore is a very gluttonous eater and hath a

BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

thirst abysmal ; so, in his bleary eyes, a fine woman is of less value than a little unripe fig. Of the other judges I have no fear, but the Gormandiser hath the say-so. I should plead then at a great disadvantage, and it is conceivable that—though Allah forbid it ! —Justice might miscarry. Now is it an act of good citizenship to do anything which shall cause Justice to go astray ? By my little left ear ! it is not.

Having stolen, therefore, the two horses and departed secretly by night, I have removed a stone of possible stumbling from before Her feet, thereby acquiring merit, and safety to boot. What saith the anonymous author of *The Exquisite Art of Fleeing with the Fieldfare and Following with the Falcon* ?

*Whene'er to Deposit thou placest so much,
to Current Account put the double ;
lest, perchance, when thy Savings thou trustest to touch
the Bank and the Banker dissolve like a bubble.*

Who, then, shall blame me, if, while aiding Justice, I also aid myself ? Thou, perhaps ; but none other, by my ten pink toes !

Shouldst thou seek an explanation of the Frankish Priest's absence, behold ! I give it thee freely. He is here with me and mounteth the second horse. To stay on one of these plaguey beasts is as much as thy servant can accomplish ; to lead at the same time a second is beyond her skill. But to have left a horse behind on which pursuit might have been made would have been to act indiscreetly. There-

BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

fore have I caused the Frank to believe that I love him and that if he can convey me into security I will be his wife.

To this end it hath been necessary for me to betray to him the secret of my widowhood and thy personation of Khobeib; for the Frank feareth the wrath of Allah equally with the backturning of the Respectable and would in no wise have consented to aid me had he thought me a married woman. He trusteth that his Bishop shall unite us; but such is not *my* intention. Shall a daughter of Mohammed mate with an Unbeliever? Not so. On a day he shall ask, "Where is she? Where is she?" and never an answer shall be forthcoming.

And if thou hast wondered concerning the brigand litter and its reception of the Frank, behold! I am at the bottom of that business. For a companion was necessary to my escape, and the Frank (being a fool) seemed the likeliest. Therefore did I, with a few smiles, persuade Obey's man to arrange this affair with Khalf.

And now thou knowest all save whither we go, and *that* I shall not tell thee. Only will I observe that it is not in Kharzanipore that thou mayest hopefully search. But what do I say? At Kharzanipore thou wilt be over busy, poor Bildad, for seeking.

Her
who plucketh thy beard,
ASMA THE ANGELIC.

BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

Before I had finished this monument of impudence, the voice of the Banker's Chief Servant was heard beyond my curtains ; and it was woundily vexed.

“ Listen now, Khobeib ibn Amr,” it roared, “ and attend to what I say. Lo ! the jade, thy wife, hath gone off during the night, for which I care nothing, since she is thy concern alone. But she hath taken with her the Frank of whom, at my hands, Obey, my master, will require deliverance or, in default, the sum of six shillings and forty handed by him to me for this same dog's ransom. But that is not all. There are missing also two valuable horses, and this meaneth, first, that recapture of the fugitives is not to be hoped for, and secondly, that I must pay much money to my master in respect of the horses, as of the Frank, and thirdly, that I and the Soudanese must walk hence to Kharzanipore, a matter of days ; since though there are two litters at our service, it beseemeth not the dignity of the footmen to carry their fellow dependents, nor is it permitted by the rules of their Union.

“ Choose then, oh ! Khobeib, of two things one : to swear by the Beard of the Prophet to pay me five thousand timauns on arrival at Kharzanipore, or to be slain by this dagger ”—here the weapon in question was pushed through the curtain—“ and to be lamented by thy brother as one whom a galloping fever, occasioned by a dishonourable experience, hath carried off in the midst of the way. Choose ! ”

BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

To have employed this moment for the explanation of my own case would have been lunacy, for, in the mood in which he found himself, the person beyond the curtains would have been only too delighted to discover a good excuse for dismembering somebody. Therefore I began to gibber and squeak in the manner of the tardiloquent Khobeib, and devoted five minutes (for dispatch was advisable) to the delivery of the following sentence :

“ By the Beard of the Prophet ! I will pay thee five thousand timauns.”

(And so I will, if ever he findeth me to claim them. Am I not a man of my word ? But it may be long ere he cometh, for he is dead ; and it is a far cry from Hell to Paradise. Of which, through my countless contributions to Charity, I am at last happily secure.)

Thus, for the time, was my evil Fate again deceived of its prey. The Banker's Man gave order to break camp, my litter was assumed, and the march upon Kharzanipore was continued.

But if my Destiny was balked for this time, it may be said only to have retired in order to make a better spring. The mercies of the Banker's Man would assuredly have been swift, for he was in a great passion and such calculateth not its cruelties.

BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

But what was to happen when we reached Kharzanipore? There Justice must lay hold upon me, from whom (yea, though she smile) Allah preserve us all! But whose Favour ruineth, what shall be the fate of him who earneth her Displeasure? I had no reason to suppose that the torturers of the Criminal Court of Kharzanipore were conspicuously unfertile in devilish expedients, and I knew that, if I once should be delivered into their hands, with the sort of recommendation which I might expect, I should think upon the dagger of the Banker's Man as the most regrettable of all my lost opportunities.

Let me then draw the curtains of my litter upon the many disquieting reflections which hunted one another through my mind during the rest of this atrocious journey. A lively imagination is, to the Artist, a priceless possession; to the Accused-of-a-criminal-offence-which-he-seeth-no-chance-of-improving it is a disaster; and more particularly so in a country where the infliction of penalties is regulated in no way by statute, but rather by the discretion and fancy of those who carry them out.

But (as some people are still not afraid to say) even the most pleasant times must come to an end, and the Fate inevitable of all periods overtook this one.

It was early in the evening when we entered Kharzanipore, and the streets were filled with citizens, breathing the cool air that the first star bringeth. A few lamps were already lit within the

BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

houses and in the booths of those merchants who still traded. Above the streets ran the sky's narrow ribbon of luminous sapphire velvet broidered with great glowing pearls, which, with the passage of each moment, grew in number most wondrously.

It was the sweet hour of the day.

For everyone but Bildad.

Crouched on my knees in my jolting prison, clutching the curtains together with my two despairing and futile hands against the each-moment-nearer-approaching exposure, a Cat in a Bag if ever there was one, with my body bathed in apprehensive perspiration and my mind occupied with the enumeration and comparison of torments, a Toad beneath the Harrow of Anxiety, I passed through the streets of Kharzanipore to the accompaniment of loud cries from my bearers. "Way for the Estimable Khobeib ibn Amr!" they shouted. "Give place, good people! Here cometh the noble Khobeib, happily escaped out of the hands of violent men and wonderfully anxious to rejoin his Penates. Room there for Khobeib, dear friends! Room for your distinguished fellow citizen! Lo! his perils are all past and the piety of his brother, Obey the Worthy, hath placed him beyond the reach of trouble. For ten thousand timauns hath Obey ransomed Khobeib. What saith Eg the Explanatory?"

BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

*Since Goodness is Omnipotence,
by Evil why are we oppressed ?
Because alone at Its expense
the Good itself can manifest.*

Hail, therefore, the signal illustration of this Great truth that is here offered to your perceptions. Had Khobeib not fallen into the clutches of the wicked, the religious magnanimity of Obey had not been displayed in his behalf. Stand not, then, gaping and wondering at the Ways of Allah, but move aside, that the two brothers be parted by no unnecessary moment."

Thus adjured the people made way; then, thronging in behind, accompanied our little party, to behold the issue of the event.

And all about me I could hear them asking questions of one another. "What is toward?" and "Where is the fire?" and "Who, then, hath done this murder?" and "Why do we run, and whither should we direct our eyes?" and answering, "It is a dog-fight," and crying, "Shove me not, oh! shove me not!" or "Let me stand upon thy foot, my father, for I am of small stature, look you," or "Keep thy hands upon the purse, oh! Zeid."

And so at last we came to the house that had been Khobeib's, and my trial was upon me and the dismal prophecying of Asma was about to be fulfilled. The litter halted, swayed twice, came to the ground, and was still; and the voice of the Banker's Man cried:

BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

“ In a good hour, Khobeib ibn Amr, do thy servants now discharge themselves of their care. Lo ! thy portals open for thy reception, and behold ! the Pious Man, thy brother Obey, standeth on thy threshold, with his arms stretched wide for the Embrace of Welcome and his lips pursed for the Kiss of Congratulation. Remembering, then, what thou hast sworn by the Prophet’s beard, emerge, oh, Khobeib ! ”

And all the bystanders shouted : “ Emerge ! Emerge ! oh, Khobeib ibn Amr.”

Then I, upon whom was a terror not to be described, shed rapidly the clothes, turban, and eyeshade of Khobeib, and, clad only in my own things, slipped dexterously through the curtains of the litter which were remote from the house. Then, bounding across the space which separated me from the crowd, I mingled suddenly with the populace. Nothing but the utterness of desperation could have suggested this manœuvre, since it was impossible to have done the thing more publicly ; but Fools rush out where Wise men fear to tread, and sometimes, it appeareth, with success.

On this occasion the eagerness of everyone present to witness the exit, from that side of the litter which was next the house, of an uninteresting old man whose name hardly any of them had ever heard before, was so intense and so frantic, that not an eye marked my escape, though it must have been visible to at least two hundred persons. But there

BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

are none so blind as those who are resolved that, if *they* can't, no one else shall see.

I had moved only just in time. Hardly, I believe, could the curtains through which I had passed have fallen back into place, when Obey's Man had separated those on the other side of the litter.

Instantly an immense shout went up from those who were in a position to see into the interior. "*Staferallah!* God forgive us!" they cried. "Where is Khobeib ibn Amr? What has happened to the poor old gentleman? Here is his robe; here, do you see? are his slippers. This is his turban, these his sharply-pointed walking-sticks, and here, *wellah!* is his eyeshade of green cardboard. But where is *he?* Oh, Khobeib, where art thou? A moment since and thou wast with us. It hath passed, and thou art no longer here. It is a miracle! Khobeib, by my eyes! hath been translated!"

Upon this the crowd (hitherto kept back a little by politeness) surged forward irresistibly and I was carried up to the very curtains of the litter which was already being ransacked by Obey's Man and his associates in their search for the missing merchant.

And all the people among whom I stood were demanding, "What hath happened?" and "How knowest thou that she was in liquor?" and "Whose child hath the fit taken?" and "From which roof did the tile fall?" and shouting, "Grant him air!" and "Let the Police be summoned"; while the

BILDAD THE QUILL-DRIVER

young boys whistled on their fingers, made sounds with their lips resembling the rending of calico, and otherwise confounded Confusion.

As for me, I added my voice to the other voices and no one present gave evidence of more astonishment than I, or of keener curiosity, or of more anxious solicitude than I for the welfare of some unidentified misfortunate who might possibly be supposed to be the centre of interest.

And when the fact of Khobeib's disappearance had been established beyond all question, and when the litter had been carried into the house, and when the Banker Obey ibn Amr and his Subordinate and the rest of the party had followed it, and when the gate had been fastened, and when the crowd had melted away, still asking questions and still receiving inaccurate information, I, even I, took my departure, smiling to myself, humming a tune, and praising Allah, Source of all Glad Surprises.



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