ZOHRAB

THE HOSTAGE.

VOL. III.

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ZOHRAB

THE HOSTAGE.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "HAJJI BABA."

Hatred after hatred has been manifested by thee, O Tyrant Chief! and thy secret rancour has been revealed.

THE POEM OF AMRU, IN THE MOLLAKAT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ZOHRAB.

CHAPTER I.

Magpies in sunshine, and courtiers in a king's anteroom.
PERSIAN SIMILE.

THE violence of feeling which had urged the Shah to the destruction of his niece, was succeeded by acts of unprecedented barbarity, as if he were anxious to stifle the feelings of remorse which the one had raised in his heart, by others still more atrocious. In losing Amima he had lost the only tie in which the affections of his heart were engaged; having once surmounted this, he overthrew every barrier, and like a wild beast breaking from his confinement, spread terror and alarm wherever his steps carried him. The first ravings of his fury turned towards the Khajeh Bashi. After

this vile wretch had performed his hated office on the night of the poor maiden's expulsion from the harem, the Shah ordered him to account for his conduct in having allowed the entrance of Zohrab within the sacred precincts of his trust, a task which he performed in so lame a manner, that he very soon after paid the forfeit of his negligence. This led to a total dissolution of the harem itself; for when it was known within the walls that their mistress and princess was no more, the lamentations which were uttered by the women became so audible, accompanied by curses and execrations upon the author of the deed, that the Shah in his wrath ordered them all to be sent away. Mariam, the unfortunate and heartbroken Mariam, seeing the hopeless state to which she was reduced, and the dangers which she run by remaining at her post, fled and concealed herself in the house of an obscure relation in one of the neighbouring villages. Of the other women, some were sent as presents to the chief officers about the court, others were treated with violence, and barbarously put to death, and the old ones turned out to die and to starve.

The public attention during these horrors was much diverted by the vigorous preparations which were making for an invasion of Mazanderan, and for the siege of Asterabad. As much as the cruelty and tyranny of the Shah were conspicuous in matters where his passions were roused, so did he shine where intelligence and activity were required. It was in the field, in the dangers of warfare, and in the conduct of a campaign, that his good qualities were brought into action. Vigilant in the extreme, his prudence and foresight were unabated; his sagacious mind could seize at once upon the whole bearings of a question, and when once he had made up his mind how to act to that point he applied his extraordinary energies. He had been so worked upon by the mortification of having been outwitted, and by disappointment at the destruction of his plan of policy in what related to the administration of the Caspian provinces of his empire, that he was determined fully to restore himself in his own eyes, as well as in those of the public, to the situation which he conceived he had lost. His

revenge impelled him on the one hand, his ambition on the other; he determined that nothing short of the total and entire destruction of Zaul Khan, his son, and his whole family, should make him desist from his enterprise; whilst he expected, as his reward, to enter into full possession of those countries and the city which were now opposed to him, as well as to become the lord paramount of the numerous tribes of Turcomans who inhabited the great plains of Kipchāk.

In Persia a bastinado is not a disgrace; a prime vizir and a secretary of state may incur it, and return with all possible dignity to their posts. It was so with the general commanding the king's guards, bearing the title of Serdar, and the executioner in chief. The former was destined to be one of the principal officers in this expedition; he was much esteemed by the Shah for his bravery and activity, had served in all his wars, and had been instrumental, by his zeal and fidelity, in securing to his master many of the conquests which he had achieved. The other was also esteemed a most efficient officer

in war, and particularly in predatory expeditions; for, although proverbially a coward, yet he was so full of resource, so ingenious in laying a country under contribution during the passage of the army, feeding them and enriching himself, that the Shah could not proceed without his services. The other officers to be employed, were Ismael Khan, a Georgian, the chief of the gholams; Mohammed Hussein Khan, *zamburekchi bashi*, the commander of the camel artillery; Asker Khan, *topchi bashi*, in command of the artillery; besides many others, among whom we must not forget our friend Shir Khan Beg, who, although only a Gholam Shahi, yet was esteemed one of superior pretensions to the rest of that body, and was selected on this occasion, as likely to be of great use to the army from his knowledge, real or presumed, of the country and city about to be invaded.

It was the custom for most of these personages, previous to the great selam of the day, to meet in the small room of the chief executioner, situated immediately opposite the principal gate of the Ark. On this occasion, when

the expedition to Asterabad was declared, and the chiefs who were to be employed had received the notification of their appointment, those we have already mentioned were present, and were soon in anxious discussion as to the nature of the expedition and the probability of its results.

"The king has done well, *mashallah!*" exclaimed the chief executioner; "these dogs' sons of Asterabadis would have thought themselves something if we did not go to burn their fathers. It is long since I have smelt gunpowder."

"Yes," said the *Serdar*, "in truth he has done well; however, the undertaking will not be so easy as we imagine. In the jungles of Mazanderan we must put our trust in God! and those dogs of Turcomans are such devils, that they take a man's head off before he can say, *ya Hussein!*"

"Let them go to Jehanum," said the boaster; "what is jungle? what are Turcomans? the first, trees and bushes; the second, men like ourselves. What is all that to the king in person? The Shah! the Shah, after all! His

strength, his thought, his cruelty, his courage; what are all the Asterabadis, your Zauls, your Zohrabs, and your cows of Turcomans, when opposed to him? They will be like flies before the sweeping of the storm."

"Zaul Khan, however much of a dog he may be, and however we may despise him," said the Serdar, has lately afforded us such a specimen of what he can do, that we may be certain it will not be so easy a task as we imagine to take his city. Is it not so?" said the Serdar, addressing himself to Shir Khan Beg. "You were there lately, and know what sort of place it is."

"*Arz mi kunum!* I will beg leave to explain," said the Beg, setting himself well upon his perpendicular, in order to exhibit the tapering form of his waist; "I was there some time, and, praise be to God! as I do not walk about with my eyes shut, and, as in truth the Shah does not make use of fools for his servants, I saw many things. I saw their castle, I saw their towers, their ditch, and their drawbridge. I saw themselves, may their livers descend! and their guns, and their muskets, and every

thing that they have——*Bah, bah, bah!*" said he exulting, "I have seen many things."

"Well," said the Serdar, "there is no harm in that; but give me an answer—what sort of a place is Asterabad? Since you have seen, you can explain."

"It is not at all a bad place," said the gholam; "by your head, and by the salt of the Shah, it is no bad place! their walls are strong; they keep such a good look out from their turret tops that, may their fathers be burnt! I, even I could not approach without their asking me why I came, and whence I came; but I gave them their answer; they won't forget the Gholam Shahi for many a long year."

"Is it not a lie," said the chief executioner, in an inquiring though anxious tone, "that a man with a gun sits day and night behind every tree, and kills every man he sees without knowing how to miss?"

"What words are these?" said the Beg, happy to have an opportunity to teaze the man of blows; "'behind every tree?' rather say, behind every leaf. The woods are there as thick

as the wool on your cap. You can neither see the earth nor the sky for them; it is utter darkness; one gropes about. If I had not had the eyes of a lynx—mine are peculiar eyes—not like other men's eyes—I can see where a cat cannot. If I had not these eyes where should I have been? where would have been the Shah's business? but, *mashallah!* I saw through them all; if you want eyes look at mine."

"But you escaped," said the chief executioner, "notwithstanding these concealed men?"

"Leave me alone for escaping," said the Beg, "'twas these very eyes that were of use. You, Khan, would not escape—by your soul, you would not. With my eyes about me, whose dog is he who would venture to take Shir Khan?"

Ismael Khan, the Georgian, a man of an uncommonly fine person, who commanded the whole of the gholams, a body not equalled in Asia, either for the men of which it was composed, or the horses which they bestrode, smiled at the vapouring of the Beg, as well as the fear

which his words produced in the chief executioner, and emitting one long thin vapour of smoke into the apartment, which he had just drawn from his gold enamelled kalioun, said—"*mashallah*, Shir Khan Beg, you have seen and done wonderful things in Mazanderan during your short stay in it. We must send you ahead of the army with some of our picked gholams."

"Yes, yes," said the chief executioner, "and drive all those men without saints from behind the trees. Give me the open plain, with a spear in my hand, and a good Turcomani horse under me, and then, let what will happen, I am there."

"Upon my eyes be it," said the Beg, very unconcernedly wisting the ringlets behind his ears, "I am ready. But cavalry is no use in that unblessed country. However good a rider a man may be, and in truth I am not an indifferent one, cavalry is useless. My horsemanship is celebrated; I have ridden the father and grandfather of every horse, from the plains of Nejd to those bred in the mouutains of Circassia—what more do you want? I am one of

those who can ride quite differently from other men. I—"

"In truth, Shir Khan Beg is a good rider," said Ismael Khan; "but say, is not Zaul Khan, and Mustapha his brother, and the Turcoman deputies, are not they better? Whatever the mehmander tried to do, they did better."

Upon this there was a laugh all round, sorely at the expense of the conceited Beg, who, however, being rather accustomed to this species of railery, calmly adjusted his beard, gave a rub upwards to his eyebrows, and called for his kalioun.

Resuming the conversation, the Serdar said—"But if cavalry will not do, we must throw our *tuffenkchis*, our musketeers, in advance, and destroy every lurking ambush that may be in wait for us."

"You say well," exclaimed the chief executioner, as if he were delighted with this thought; "first let the woods be cleared by the musketeers, and then we on horseback will follow sword in hand. Praise be to God, you said well."

The Zamburekchi Bashi was a short crabbed looking old man; his head large, his back

rather inclined to hump, and like one of the camels upon which his small iron guns were mounted, sat for a long time in utter repose, quietly chewing the cud of such reflections as might chance to pass through his brain. At length he said—"After all a *zamburek* is something. It has burnt the fathers of the Muscovites, why should it not those of the Asterabadis and the Turcomans? Let the Shah only give me an order to take my camels, my gunners, and my fire amongst them, and jungle or no jungle, I will drive all life out of their heads."

"Man!" said the Serdar, "who ever heard of a *zamburek* in Mazanderan! you might as well talk of devils in Paradise. In the first place, your camels could not make five steps without falling, so slippery and mountainous is the soil, and lucky would you think yourself if they did not all split up in twain, like a criminal who has undergone the *shekkeh*.*

"My camels are not made for splitting up,"

* The *shekkeh* is a punishment common in Persia, by which a criminal is tied by the legs to two posts, with his head downwards, and then cut into two equal parts.

said the old generel of camel artillery, with some warmth, "my camels are made for fighting. Did they not scare the Chirkes, the Abhas, and the Lesgies—not to mention the Russians—out of their wits when the Shah last marched into Georgia. We threw balls at them with such an aim that we made their fathers dance out of their graves, and made all their old women cry *Aman!* and see, has not the Shah allowed me to wear a *jika* on my cap, and a jewelled dagger to my waist, for having hit an ass a parasang off? What words are these, O Serdar! Mahomed Hussein is no such fool either, not to know what he says. Why then shall we not strike these ragged Turcomans, and those less than curs of Asterabadis."

"Camels are good things, and iron guns are good things too," said the Serdar, "and *uashallah!* praise be to God, the Shah cannot boast of such another good servant as Mahommed Hussein Khan; but neither his bravery, nor his camels, nor his guns, can make a wet soil dry, nor a mountain a plain, nor can he give hoofs to his camels, or prevent them from splitting when their legs part asunder. Is it not

so, Shir Khan Beg; you, who know those countries?"

The Beg, who had puffed away the little check which had been put to his boasting, again called upon to give his opinion, answered the Serdar, although he looked at the Zamburekchi Bashi, with a most self-complacent air, saying—"What words are these? What fool is there who does not know that camels split up in Mazanderan? I, even I, man as I am, nearly split up myself as I walked over some of their unsainted hills. But I walk in such a manner, different from any body else, that with God's help nothing happened to me! but, oh, help in Allah! you ought to have seen the horses and the mules how they rolled about. There is the famous Sandûk pass, which we must all go through, where as sure as asses are not mules, and mules not horses, every one of your camels must split in two, and unless the halves can get up and walk on by themselves, you must leave your guns on the ground, and say *Allah akbar*, God is great! *wallah, billah!* By Allah, I say true—if I tell a lie, cut off my head for my pains."

"And so," said the Zambureckhi Bashi, anger rising into his face, "by your account, the Shah must be an ass, his Grand Vizir must be an ass, and Mohammed Hussein Khan must be an ass, whilst Shir Khan Beg, *mashallah*, alone must be the lord of wit and the lord of knowledge. Go, go; I spit upon such wit and such knowledge."

The old man, whose chief associates were his camels and their drivers, and his gunners, was expected when he spoke to be coarse, therefore his speeches never gave the offence they would have done had they come from the mouth of a more refined person; but, as nothing could convince him that camels did split in Mazanderan, his companions for the present left him to his obstinacy.

"The Khan speaks well," said the chief executioner. "The Shah, who has made war in every region in the world, who was bred and born in Mazanderan, who knows what zambureks are as well as a mollah knows his *fatheh*, and who has seen more camels than our astronomer stars,—the Shah—may the blessed Prophet take him into his holy keeping!—the Shah, I

say, has ordered the zambureks to be in readiness. Why throw more words into the air? Whose dogs are we to say 'nay' when he says 'yea?'—besides, hear my words—if a camel splits, does it follow that it becomes dust? No; it immediately becomes food; it becomes *kabob*, roast meat, and so much is saved to the public treasury."

"Well have you said," remarked Asker Khan, the commander of the field artillery, a renegade Frank, who had once been a Cuba pirate, afterwards a doctor in the service of an Indian nabob, then captain of an Arabian ship, and lastly general of artillery to the Shah. "Camel beef is no bad thing when you can get none else. I myself have eaten, in the new world, lion steaks done on a fire of flowing lava, and seasoned with gunpowder!"

"Indeed!" said all the assembled guests, who, like their countrymen, were always ready to believe any story, however monstrous, about the new world. "*Wallah!* by Allah! are there lions in the new world?" enquired one. "Does fire, then, always come from the earth?" said another. "Is all the roast meat in the new world made of lion's flesh?" said a third.

"It's all made of lion's flesh," said Asker Khan, "when it's not made of alligator:" speaking in a language which was meant to pass for Persian, but which was a farago of English, Persian, Arabic, and Hindostani words, and so far comprehensible that his auditors interpreted it each after his own fashion. The extraordinary accounts which this personage gave of himself even exceeded the habitual exaggeration of the Persians, but his prowess was so great that he made his words respected and even believed, whilst his knowledge of gunnery, which amounted to little more than to point a carronade from the quarter deck, made him pass for a miracle of science.

"Is it true," said the chief executioner, "that in the new world Jews have tails?"

"I never saw them," said the Frank Khan, "but I believe it; because I know that in a country called Guatimalo, there is a set of men who wear large bags behind, which serve them for pockets."

"Ah!" said the Serdar, not in the least disbelieving the fact, "like the animal which was

once brought to Shah Seffi, having a pouch in front where it carried its young."

"Just so," cried the general of camel artillery, "that must be true, for our camels wear inside pockets, where they carry food and water for a week:—it is plain that animals have their inside as well as their outside pockets."

"Wonderful are the works of Allah," exclaimed the Serdar!

"What are these things to what I have seen?" said Shir Khan Beg, as if he were oppressed by the invention of some great lie of which he seemed anxious to be delivered; "I have seen the hole in Mazanderan in which Rustam thrust the Dive Sefid after he had almost killed him, and then stifled him by throwing in a whole army, men and horse, which he first slew and then threw upon him. Talking of pockets, nothing was ever like this hole. When I see a thing, it is not like things which other men see. My things are worth seeing."

The renegade, who, although he had long known and been accustomed to the vapourings of the conceited Beg, could never refrain from

disconcerting him whenever he was able; but on this occasion, being anxious to acquire some information upon the sort of country through which he would have to drag his train of artillery, said—"I fear, Sir Beg, that if there be such large holes in that country, we shall have some difficulty in taking our guns across it."

"What guns! what artillery!" said Shir Khan. "It will be well if we can take ourselves through the country. There is not a road large enough for a cat throughout the whole of Mazanderan; how then can you drag a gun? There is one mountain down which your guns would go well enough, by placing them at the top and letting them run to the bottom! But that is my way—I always have a way different from other men's ways. Other men would have a hundred peasants to drag the guns, besides oxen and horses. Now letting them run alone is my way."

"'Tis true," said the chief executioner, who acted as a sort of commissary for the army, "that the passage of artillery through Persia is at-

tended with many inconveniences; sometimes the guns come to a full stop for several days; for where the inhabitants of a village hear that artillery is likely to pass through their district, they take to the mountains, abandoning their houses, and do not return till it has passed, lest they should be seized to drag it forward. If the road were all down hill, then the Beg's plan would not be a bad one; but the gun can't run up hill, nor along the plains, without the help of peasants."

"The report spread abroad among the enemy that artillery accompanies the Shah," said the Serdar, "is frequently sufficient of itself to quell a rebellion, and to bring the disaffected to the Shah's stirrup. For that reason we must take our guns with us, and Asker Khan will get every help he requires. In your country, Sir Khan," said he to the commander of artillery, "how many peasants do you generally harness to a gun?"

"*Allah, allah!*" cried the renegade; "my country is full of strange men and stranger customs. Peasants harnessed, indeed! they would

pull the king's palace about his ears if he ventured to order them to do what they did not like."

"Then your kings must be sorry folk indeed," exclaimed the Zamburekchi Bashi. "Look at ours—there's a true Shah—*bah! bah! bah!*—none ever cut off men's heads like him."

"Nor beat men on the feet like him," said Asker Khan, significantly looking at the three present, who had recently undergone that infliction.

"That is a stroke of *takdeer*, destiny," said the chief executioner, "which must happen every where. I dare say that your vizirs, and your secretaries of state, and your chief executioners, are persecuted by *takdeer* as much as ours, get as many bastinados, eat as much occasional dirt, and rub their foreheads on the royal threshold as well as we. Bastinado here is nothing. I have eaten my blows, and I only get up and say, 'May your shadow never be less.' What more do you want?"

In this manner did they converse, discussing every thing that came before them with the

greatest freedom. In a country like Persia, where lying is not esteemed a vice, the man whose abuse of the king may be repeated, and reach the sovereign's ear, has always the resource of denying his own words, and from long experience, finding that one man's word is as little worth as that of another, the king himself finishes by never believing either side of the question. Aga Mohamed in this respect was as liberal as a person in his situation could be; he seldom vexed his subjects for their opinions—all he required was unbounded submission. He rarely lent his ear to reports of things said of him, of scandal, or of malignant hints—such men he always reproved and even punished; therefore it was not easy to govern him except by facts, and although his nature was suspicious, yet that suspicion was only to be roused by his own observation. He had learned by long experience how totally his own countrymen were to be disbelieved in all they said. He found the simplest mode of equalizing justice, in cases of complaints and quarrels amongst his officers and

ministers, was to inflict punishment on both parties, a system which tended to diminish his own annoyance, although it increased the national duplicity.

The above recited conversation was in its fullest vigour, when the announcement of the Shah's being about to take his seat on the throne at the selam, was heard in all parts of the Ark, and the parties assembled immediately broke up in haste to appear in their respective places before their sovereign. It was always an awful moment; for in the presence of the tyrant, who could say that his turn for destruction might not be the next upon the book of fate?

As soon as the king was seated, he took this opportunity of addressing himself long and loudly to his prime vizir, Mirza Hajji Ibrahim, in order thereby to show the world that in the recent deadly events, he had arisen blameless, and that the confidence reposed in him had not in the slightest degree diminished.

The Shah now openly talked of his views upon Asterabad, and himself investigated, with the most scrupulous detail, every thing that re-

lated to the arrangement of the expedition. He inspected arms, gave his opinion upon clothing, and horses, and equipages; issued directions for provisions, and for the establishment of the Ordou Bazar, or camp market. He talked to Ismael Khan upon the equipment of his gholams, to the Serdar concerning his corps of musketeers, to the renegade of guns, and to the general of came lartillery touching his *zambureks*. His sagacity awed almost as much as his cruelty. Every one felt that, under the scrutiny of such an eye and such a mind, to do one's duty was inevitable, and therefore none flinched, but went heartily to work in its accomplishment. At the breaking up of the selam, the whole town soon rang with the activity, the excitement, and the anxieties of war, and in the general din was forgotten the individual misery produced by the late events. There was one order above all others which produced a great sensation, namely, that no woman, upon pain of death, should be admitted to join the camp. This injunction set loose every female tongue, from the lowest drudge in the harem to the khanum on her

musnud, and the Shah, his cruelties, and the murder of his niece, were subjects which occupied every mind, as they excited every execration. Although the inhabitants of the anderoon were in general pleased to be left behind, yet the fact of there being a prohibition, sufficed to set every woman in opposition thereto. Never was the perversity of nature's fairer half so self-evident as upon the proclamation of this order.

CHAPTER II.

It would be easier to change the *Kebleh* than the resolves of a wilful woman.

THE HAREM.

WE must now return to Zulma, who, by the escape of Zohrab and its consequent events, had been kept in a constant state of deadly apprehension, lest, owing to the part which she had unwittingly taken in it, she might have been added to one of the many sacrificed on this occasion. She felt that she owed her safety principally to the ingenuity of the Humpback, who being himself deeply implicated in all her intrigues, had left nothing undone which falsehood and ability might compass, to keep himself clear of danger—and he had succeeded. The Shah continued to confide in him, and so useful and necessary had he rendered himself

to the tyrant, that even where suspicion fell upon him, it did little more than glance, such would have been the inconvenience of finding him guilty.

The bastinado which had been inflicted upon the chief executioner, was scarcely felt as a family misfortune; for so common were punishments of all descriptions during the reign of the present sovereign, that scarcely a house was there in the city which did not occasionally hear within its walls the moanings of bodily pain, or lamentations for the death of a relative; nor had even Zulma found relief from the supposed death of her rival; for, lost as Zohrab was to them both, she now deplored, in common with the rest of the people, the destruction of one who was ever the refuge of the miserable, and a barrier to the overwhelming despotism which now oppressed them. It was only when she heard the Shah's order promulgated—his positive order that no woman should be allowed to follow the camp, that all the perverseness of her sex was revealed, and she determined, happen what would, to disobey it and go. Her love

for Zohrab was roused;—she anticipated the moment when she might be of use and comfort to him, should he be unfortunate enough to fall into the Shah's hand—perhaps even save his life—and now that her rival was no more, she felt confident that his heart would no longer turn from her. Then feelings of ambition dawned on her mind: "Who knows," thought she, "what influence such a woman as I may not acquire over the king. Wretch, and much to be pitied as he is, habit is every thing, and he will feel the necessity of a female confidant. Why should Zulma not take the place of Amima?"

Awakened and fired by these thoughts, she could not rest until she had communicated them to her chief adviser the Humpback, whom, notwithstanding in the main she despised, yet was he so useful to her, that she could take no step without his advice. He exercised as much sway over her father as he did over the Shah himself: and although Zulma scarcely wanted his assistance in the first instance, inasmuch as she acted entirely without control in the paternal mansion, still his word was always certain to pro-

duce its due effect upon occasions of emergency; besides he always brought with him that look of mystery, which induced whisperings and gadding in corners, so dear to women in general, and particularly so congenial to the atmosphere of a chief executioner's house.

"And so," she said, as soon as he appeared, "women are prohibited from going with the army?"

"They are, my soul," said the crafty deformity with his usual smile; "not one is to go. The Shah gave the order this day at the selam; not one goes."

"So be it," said Zulma, with a forced expression of resignation on her face: "so be it—the Shah is free to do whatever he pleases in his own dominions, with either his male or female subjects; but withal this, he eats dirt, and—I go"—

"You! How, and by what means? Heaven forbid!"

"I go, happen what will," she repeated; "upon that make your mind easy."

"It cannot be," said the Humpback, "you

know the Shah is not to be trifled with, and particularly in his present mood. As there is but one Allah, I approach his head with a caution and silence which makes my blood run cold when I think of it, and when I do handle it, it is with the same fear that a man touches a bomb-shell, lest it should go off, and blow him to ten thousand atoms. Once I thought you the mistress of wisdom, the owner of penetration; now you will make me suppose you a candidate for madness."

"What words are these," exclaimed the maiden, "you yourself must be mad, not to see that what I propose is nothing less than wisdom. Is Zulma to be lost for ever?—immured within the walls of a hated anderoon, with nothing to do but to puff the smoke of her kalioun from her mouth, chasing it with her eye until it be lost in air?—to talk with none but gossiping dames and idle girls, and have no higher ambition in life than to see that her father's ferashes perform their duty? Do you not perceive that there is a Shah to be won, and an empire to be governed? That he who has lost one tie in life, as necessary to

him as the air he breathes, will require another; and that a princess's place is vacant, surrounded though it be by danger? Go to, thou art the candidate for madness, if thy eyes cannot see these things!"

The Humpback, to whose understanding such flights of imaginative eminence had not yet reached, opened all his eyes as he heard the words of his companion pour from her mouth; and new schemes of ambition very soon formed themselves in his mind. He immediately felt that, Amima being no more, the reign of his rival Sadek in the Shah's good graces might easily be brought to a close, and should it ever happen that Zulma became a royal banou, he would stand a good chance of leaving his razor to wield the pen. The head which was now employed in small intrigues, he soothed himself by hoping might ere long be engaged in conducting affairs of state.

But the more he pondered on these things, the more he foresaw how difficult it would be to put Zulma's scheme into execution of accompanying the camp; and he loudly disclaimed

any intention on his part of proposing it to his royal master.

"Allah, Allah!" he cried out, "to ask such a favour of the Shah is in other words to ask for the bastinado; I am not the man to undertake any thing so dangerous. Besides, you are not my daughter; 'tis your father's duty to ask: persuade him to make the supplication."

"No wheat will spring up unless the soil be well sunned," said Zulma; "what good was ever gained without some risk? But you say right; it is not your business; it shall be my father's, unless he too fears a second bastinado; let us send for him." Upon which she ordered one of the slaves in the court-yard to seek her father, and require his presence, a practice which, although against every rule of respect and decorum between a child and its parent, she never hesitated to adopt.

He came at her bidding, and no sooner was he arrived, than having recourse to her most coaxing arts, and throwing all the persuasion she was able into the tone of her voice, she explained the reasons why she wished to accompany the

camp, asserting that it was solely to watch over his safety, and finished by entreating him to secure the Shah's permission to that effect.

"Are you mad," said he, "or do you wish to kill your father? Have I not already eaten more stick than falls to one man's share, and do you require me to undergo the punishment again merely to advance your whim?"

"*Astafarallah*, heaven forbid!" she exclaimed, "but the king surely can never be angry because his subjects claim the privilege of being of use. Only ask, and should he refuse, there is no harm done."

"Only take the lion by the tooth, and if he does not bite, there is no harm done, you might as well say. Allah, Allah!" exclaimed the ruffled chief executioner, at the request made him by his daughter.

"Grant but this to your daughter," said she, "and I ask no more. The Goozoo says that there can be no harm in going before the Shah upon this errand, therefore why should you hesitate?"

"Does he say so, indeed?" said her father.

"Your slave said," replied the Humpback, "that it would be well if the lady Zulma were to go. We want all the wise heads in the country to oppose those *shaitans* of Asterabadis."

"There," said the animated maiden, raising her voice, "did I not say so? Now go, if you do not wish to see your daughter dead before you, go!"

"'Tis well in the Goozoo to say this," said the unwilling father, "he has not eaten stick."

"That time has gone by," said the Humpback: "the king has had enough of punishment for some while; he has taken to moderation, and he smokes the kalioun of quiet. There is no harm in him now."

After much additional persuasion, in which the daughter made use of all her entreaties, and the Humpback his craft, the weak man consented to go, and with unwilling steps bent his way towards the palace. When he got there, he found that the Shah had been for some time in his *khelwet*, his closet, in close conference with his Prime Vizir. He therefore determined to wait without until the Vizir should be dismissed, his heart misgiving him all the while, and his tongue seeking with fear and trembling for the

words with which he should bring forward his request.

We must there leave him, in order to inform our readers of what took place at this conference, in which many schemes of public policy were discussing.

The Shah, after the fatal catastrophe which had taken place in his house, by which we mean the destruction of his niece, became anxious, whenever it reached the ears of her brother, Fatteh Ali Mirza, the then Governor of Fars, that it should not affect his loyalty. He heard that no prince had ever rendered himself so popular to the Shirazis, since the days of Kerîm Khan, and he was fearful lest, in the excitement of his rage upon hearing the death of his beloved sister, he might throw himself into open rebellion. Upon this, the first order which the Shah issued to the Grand Vizir at this conference, without giving any reason for so doing, was the recall of the Prince Fatteh Ali from his government.

"Hajji," said the Shah, "let a *rakm* to our nephew at Shiraz be immediately dispatched;

the courier must use all speed; on his head be it! Let our orders be implicit and peremptory that the prince, upon the receipt of it, instantly leaves Shiraz, and *chappari*, with the haste of a courier, join our royal stirrup in Mazanderan."

The Vizir knew too well the temper of his master, when he issued such an order, to reply any words but "*Be cheshm*, upon my eyes be it!" He would have made a remonstrance had he seen it fitting, for the prince was one of his greatest favourites. In the conduct which he had held during his government of the city and province intrusted to his care, he had shown the greatest wisdom and moderation. Every report which he received from the south, spoke of the prosperity, the quiet, the improving wealth and population of Fars and the adjacent country; and greatly did he fear, lest in robbing the state of so good a servant as the young prince, the usual consequences of the rapine and exactions of inferior officers would destroy all the good that had been effected. However, in this instance he was obliged to obey, and instantly seating himself before the Shah,

with his own hand he wrote the order, applied the royal seal, and dispatched it with the necessary injunctions to the courier to use all speed.

The Shah then led to the discussion of the affairs of Asterabad.

"It is evident," said he, "that Zaul Khan is a person not to be despised. We have seen the extraordinary ingenuity which he displayed in withdrawing his son from our power; we have seen the judicious manner in which he combined the evasion of the deputies with his own escape, and their return, unhurt, and unmolested, to their fastnesses. He has literally taken the cap from off our head; he is an enemy not to be despised. However the Shah may trust to the bravery of his troops, yet in this expedition bravery goes for less than skill; and as we know that the greatest skill will be opposed to us, so it behoves us also to exert our utmost ingenuity in foreseeing every thing, and providing for every thing. The Shah requires the aid of your understanding; have you made any thought by which he may receive benefit?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the Vizir, "it

has struck your slave that we must devise some means of communicating with those of your majesty's subjects, who do not participate in the rebellious spirit of the governor of Asterabad, and who look to the coming of your victorious troops, as a moment of deliverance from oppression. Such we know there are; upon one in particular your slave knows dependance is to be placed."

"*Barikallah*, you say well! praise be to God, your thought is in unison with the Shah's. We know that the Mollahs and the priesthood are with us; they hate the *sunni* Turcomans, and esteem an alliance with them as unlawful and impure. Firmans must be addressed to them. But who is the one man, whom you say we can depend upon?"

"May I be your sacrifice," answered Hajji Ibrahim, "it is one Shireen Ali, the Mirza or scribe to Zaul Khan, a Shirazi, a man of considerable talent, a great penman and learned; your slave has known him long, and has ascertained to a certainty, that he goes with us, and that he looks to the coming of your majesty as

the Jews do to that of their prophet. When your majesty's slave, the Gholam Shir Khan Beg was at Asterabad, he saw enough of this man to ascertain that he was ready to do any thing to serve your majesty; he has already frequently received the proper *rishweh*, manure or bribe, and now let us hope to see the fruits of it."

"It will be proper," said the Shah, thoughtfully, "to communicate with this man instantly, and to establish a correspondence with him."

"Perhaps," said the Vizir, "it would be the wish of the asylum of the universe to despatch Shir Khan Beg again, with orders to make his way into Asterabad itself if possible, and there disseminate the proper firmans, by which the well-inclined might ascertain how favourably the Shah is disposed towards them, and thus secure a co-operation against the present governors; and also, he might have a conference with the Mirza, and settle some plan of communication beneficial to your majesty's arms, and to the ultimate object of the expedition."

"You do not say ill," said the Shah, "let us see this Shir Khan. I know his merits; he is

a *foozool* and a coxcomb; but he is active and brave, and no bad youth. Send for him."

As soon as the name of Shir Khan Beg was called upon, among the numerous courtiers and officers who plied at the royal gate, the eyes of all were turned towards him, as one destined to receive a further infliction of punishment. He himself turned pale, and was speechless; he slowly arose, followed the messenger, forgetting even to give his cap a new pinch, or his shawl a more graceful adjustment. When he came to the small low door which led into the *khelwet*, he could scarcely stand, so truly was he terrified (in common let it be said with all the Persians of his day) by merely knowing himself to be near the presence of the Shah. He made his proper bow, and left his shoes at the door. As soon as the Shah perceived him, he said in a milder tone than usual, which gave courage to the faltering man, "*Biah pish*, come forward! upon which he immediately resumed a sufficient portion of his self-assurance to put him in possession of his wits, and approached, standing on the brink of the basin of water, making one of

his lowest inclinations, although in so doing he did not forget one of those characteristic vibrations of his hips, which indicated the repossession of his natural assurance.

"You were at Asterabad," said the Shah; "was it not so?"

"As I am your less than the least," said the Beg, "I was."

"What did you hear of the state of public opinion there? How much in favour of the Shah, how much in favour of the rebels?"

"As I am your slave," said the Beg, quite himself again, "your slave saw and heard many things there; your slave said to himself, 'This is the time for prudence; open eyes and ears, but shut the mouth.'"

"Well," said the Shah, "never mind what you said to yourself, what did others say to you."

"Your slave heard that most of the *Ulemah* looked upon the Turcomans as dirt; and only required the presence of the asylum of the universe to send them and their friends, by the blessings of the prophet, to jehanum! your slave heard this, by the salt of the Shah, he heard this!

By the Shah's head, he has a way of hearing things different from other people!"

"Be silent," said the Vizir in a suppressed tone, "speak to the purpose, and cease being a *foozool*, an officious prater."

"And who was the man amongst them, most likely to be of use to the Shah's government?" said the king; "such a man you saw?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the Beg, "a bankrupt Mirza was there; a fellow who would have taken any thing, even as low as a cucumber, for a bribe; who said this and that, and that and this; who made promises as thick as the trees in the forest; who swore quicker than any Shirazi ever talked; and told more lies in a minute than your slave could tell *asterferallahs* in an hour. Your slave, who knows the value of such men better than any one, thinks he might be turned to a good account for the Shah's service."

The Shah's face curled up into a malignant smile at hearing this speech from the Beg, as he glanced his eye at the Prime Vizir, who was himself a Shirazi, and who seemed to wince at

this account given after the eulogiums which he himself had made of the individual; but, however, his good temper never forsook him for an instant, and he allowed this little check to his dignity to pass unnoticed.

"Now, Shir Khan," said the Shah, "do you think that firmans might be introduced into Asterabad, announcing protection to the well-affected, and death to those who abetted the rebels?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the Beg, "*chera*, why not? With wit and activity, every thing can be done."

"Then be you the man to do it. You are a good servant, the Shah knows you, you are a better gholam than a mehmander; you must forthwith set off, introduce yourself into Asterabad, and do all that you will be instructed to do. You shall have every help from the Shah, and should you perform this service well, the title of Khan awaits you, as also the right to wear a jewelled dagger."

At every word of this speech, the enraptured Beg grew taller and taller; his hips immediately

felt the arrogant impulse, like horses on the fret anxious to be off; he could not resist giving a twist to his mustache, and as fast as the Shah lauded, he bowed and bowed; until at length, upon the last promise of the jewelled dagger, he fairly went on his knees and kissed the ground.

"Your slave, who is less than the least," said the Beg, "will lay down his life for the Shah. Whatever happens he goes. If every tree in Mazanderan concealed a Turcoman, and every Turcoman presented a spear, he would fight his way through. Give your slave his instructions, and he will say *be cheshm* unto death. Whose dogs be they, who will dare to say aught to him, when he exhibits the royal rakm!"

In this manner did he go on, until he was almost black in the face with the explosions of flattery and professions of self-devotion that issued from his lips. At length he was stopped, and having been dismissed with the strictest injunctions of secrecy, he departed with such a feeling of elevation that the clouds of heaven seemed to hang too low for him.

As he appeared again among his friends at the *derakhoneh*, at the royal gate, the swagger of this self important personage was a thing which the Persians had still to learn. His tightened silk vest actually burst with the swelling of his inward pride. He walked as if 'khan' were written upon every step, and his nether person vibrated so intensely, that he conceived the jewels and the dagger were actually in his girdle. No one could conceive by what rapid operation he had thus been acted upon, for he seemed to have been as quickly inflated by a new infusion of vanity as ever a balloon was by rarefied air.

One of the persons who met the Beg upon his exit was the chief executioner, who observing the expansion of his looks and the appearance of joy spread over his whole person, and who had been pondering over the disagreeable task which had been imposed upon him, now took courage, and determined to make his daughter's request known.

"God's pity was upon you!" said the chief executioner. "We thought that the counte-

nance of the Shah was again turned against you, and that there was more work for the *felek*."

"Are men mad," said Shir Khan Beg, "that they cannot see a person go before the Shah, without thinking that he must of necessity be going to receive punishment? Cannot they also sometimes think that he may be going to receive reward?" said he, pressing his shawl down, admiring his waist, and casting a look of delight over his whole person. "The Shah treats me in a peculiar way—he does not treat me like other men. The Shah is one who knows his man—he distinguishes a good servant from a bad one."

"How sits his humour to-day," said the anxious Khan; "can he be spoken to?"

"Some men may speak to him, others not," said the Beg; "it depends upon the person—some are fools, and some are wise. It is now two hours that we have been conversing together; let every man judge for himself."

Upon this he left the chief executioner to

speculate upon what might have befallen the Beg, who seemed to look upon all others as less than the dirt of the field, and moreover to settle in his own mind what steps he would pursue in order to put into execution the wishes of his daughter.

When the Shah broke up the conference with his Vizir, he issued from his private apartments to transact business at the public selam, and thither the chief executioner awaited him. Occupying his usual post at the ceremonial, he anxiously studied the lines in the Shah's face, in order to discover whether they might be propitious to his undertaking or not, as a pilot will study the rippling on the surface of the water to ascertain whether the current which it denotes will bear him favourably into port. The king, during the ceremony, called aloud to him to enquire who had gone forward to provide provisions for the camp during its stay at Firouzabad, when the Khan, in a fit of absence, only engaged with the one object of his thoughts, answered, "As I am your sacri-

fice, my daughter," to the utter astonishment of every one present, and still more to the surprise of the king himself, who exclaimed, "O little man, are ye turned mad? Did he say his daughter, or are our senses deranged?"

The wretched executioner, upon being convicted of this mistake, regained his self possession, for now he lost sight of the object which he had in view, and said, "as I am your sacrifice, your slave has eaten dirt, his ears have been mistaken." He then answered the king's question to his satisfaction, but he left the presence fully resolved not to risk his own safety by asking that for his daughter which he knew would not fail to overwhelm him with confusion.

At the breaking up of the selam, he returned home, but was in no hurry to encounter his impatient and wilful daughter, who thwarted as she would be in her expectation, he felt would exhibit one of those violent paroxysms of temper so common to her. However, at length he did return, and informed her of his inability to perform her bidding. To

his surprise he found her perfectly prepared for a disappointment, and when he had told the whole history of his morning's adventure she scarcely gave any signs of being displeased; but there was a dogged obstinacy in her manner, which showed the woman, and which seemed to say, "stay awhile, and you shall see."

CHAPTER III.

A lame man has not always a lame story.
EASTERN PROVERB.

THE gentle reader may or may not have discovered that the mysterious person who received the wretched Amima at the wicket gate of the Ark, and who deposited her with so much apparent cruelty and such extraordinary haste in the desert, was neither more nor less than Sadek, the Shah's confidential servant. He is a personage of too much consequence in this our narrative not to merit some more particular notice, and we entreat a few moments for the short history of his early and subsequent life.

He was a Georgian by birth. He was bought a slave when quite a child, by the father of the Shah, and had been brought up with him and

his brother, acting as their slave, and identified with the family of his master after the manner of the east. He had more particularly attached himself to the fortunes of the Shah, although in fact he felt himself as much the servant of his brother. He was a man of peculiar character, unrelenting and firm of purpose, but kind and considerate in the main; possessing, under a stern expression of countenance, a tender and compassionate heart.

When the Shah had put out his brother's eyes and had ordained his death, it was upon Sadek that he pitched for the perpetration of his horrible mandate, but the faithful and sagacious servant, who well knew the character of his master, whilst he bowed submission to the order, determined in his own mind that it should not be executed. He had secured to himself the lordship of a small and obscure village, situated on the borders of the Great Salt Desert; and precisely in the same manner in which he had preserved the daughter, so he had some years back the father, and installed him in the small tenement which we have already de-

scribed as situated near that village. But with such sagacity and secrecy was this conducted, that none but himself was aware that the order had not been executed; and as he knew that his own life depended upon the secret being preserved, so every plan which he formed was always with the view to keep it from publicity. The miserable peasantry of the village, ignorant and barbarous as they were, knew that such a being existed, but who or what he was no one cared to enquire, and thus year succeeded year, leaving Hussein Kûli Khan in security and oblivion, cheering Sadek in the success of his scheme, and in the comfortable satisfaction of having saved the life of one to whom he was attached by so many ties.

As soon as the Shah informed him of his determination to put his niece to death, and that he had selected him to do the deed, Sadek's mind was immediately made up to save the daughter as he had the father. He had been ordered to make away with her unknown to any one, but he was obliged to make an accomplice of the Khajeh Bashi, in order to draw

her from the anderoon without exciting suspicion. He selected two of the Shah's fleetest horses, from among those kept in training to be used on emergencies, and, disguised as he was, performed the rapid journey in the manner we have already described. It being a matter of life and death, he could do no otherwise than steel his heart and shut his ears to the temporary pain which he knew must be inflicted upon his unfortunate charge, feeling that the quiet which would follow would soon restore her strength; and as it was necessary for him to re-appear before the Shah on the very next morning within a reasonable time, it became urgent to lose not a moment's time, in depositing the maiden where he did, a feat of rapidity which none but horses such as they bestrode could have performed. In fact, he appeared before his master as usual, almost at the same hour in the morning at which he was accustomed to awake him; and in so doing he said not a word, but put on his accustomed, unmoved, and stern aspect. The Shah did not venture to ask a single question, trust-

ing in the fidelity of his servant, and he remained satisfied, by the inflexible bearing of the man, that his orders had been but too faithfully executed. And thus for the moment ended the horrid tragedy.

In the state of things that followed he was more than ever interested that nothing should compromise his secrecy, and this circumstance made him more stern and silent than before. He was persecuted by his sister Mariam, who, in deploring her own miseries, was always most inquisitive about the fate of her mistress, and sometimes committed herself by acts of such imprudence, that she formed the torment of his existence. She was constantly expressing her desire to proceed to Asterabad to gain an asylum in the family of Zohrab, where she was certain of a welcome, and although Sadek saw that this schemewas in every way objectionable, yet rather than continue open to her indiscretions he at length ceded, and assured her that he would soon form some scheme for conducting her there in safety. The widow of the late chief huntsman, during the late

events, had taken refuge in her old dwelling at Firouzabad, together with her son, the attached servant of Zohrab, who thus had escaped unnoticed; to her Sadek persuaded his sister to go, and when there, under the protection of the young though prudent Ali, he pointed out how easy it would be for them to make their way to Asterabad, particularly if the widow herself, to whom the whole of that country was well known, would accompany her. This scheme succeeded without the least suspicion being thrown upon any one, and after having threaded their way through the intricate forests, they were rewarded for their fatigues by reaching the gates of Asterabad in safety.

Vague reports of all the horrors which had taken place at Tehran, after the escape of Zohrab and his father, had reached Asterabad, but the death of the Princess was still unknown. Zohrab's mind, however, was a prey to constant and unceasing apprehension for her safety. The armlet, the fatal armlet, was ever before his eyes, and left him not a moment's peace. He revolved in his thoughts all the probabilities of

its being found, and foresaw that if it fell into the hands of the Humpback, an event most likely to happen, the dreaded discovery must take place; for being delivered to the Shah, it would tell its own most intelligible tale. He lived in apprehension of news from the capital; his brave spirit was subdued by a thousand conflicting emotions, all tending to destroy that exertion which his country and friends now expected from him. He no longer in their eyes appeared the same person: instead of exhibiting that alacrity for which he had been so famous, he was thoughtful and uneasy, seeking solitude, and shunning whatever would otherwise have been full of attration.

One morning, at the earliest dawn, he was awakened by what seemed to be the sobs and moanings of some person in distress; they were female lamentations; he listened again and again, and still the sounds were repeated, and even appeared to increase. He called to his servant, who slept without, to go see what was the matter. He soon returned, saying that two strange women, accompanied by a Persian

youth, had taken possession of the entrance of the principal gate, had there established themselves; that the women were crying most piteously, the cry of death, and were calling upon the name of Zohrab Khan to come to their relief. In spite of every remonstrance, nothing could persuade them to desist. Zohrab, whose mind was prepared to receive intelligence subversive of all hope for Amima's safety, started up, struck with conviction that every apprehension was realized; a deadly paleness came over him, cold sweat ran down his forehead, and his limbs could scarcely support him, when, with a dress loosely thrown over his person, he followed his servant to the gate. There he immediately recognized his faithful Ali, who rushed to kiss his hand, and to throw himself at his feet. But who are the women? thought he. Ali's mother also seized his hand and kissed it, and he recognized her without any difficulty; but the other woman remained closely veiled, increasing her cries and lamentations.

"Who are you? in the name of Allah!" said Zohrab, not having recognized Mariam. "Speak

—why do you cry thus? what is the cause of your grief?"

"Oh my master!" said the boy, "we have brought bad news—the lady Amima—" It was not necessary for him to finish the phrase—the stricken youth heard the words, covered his face with his hands, and fled to his apartment as if he expected there to meet the spirit of his departed love.

The scene of woe which followed this disclosure is not to be described. We must give our hero time to grieve—his was a deep and inaudible grief. In the estimation of his countrymen it was unmanly and reprehensible—tears for the loss of a woman they despise and suppress. Zohrab had no disguise in his nature, and he allowed his heart to express its true feelings. At the same time he respected the prejudices of his countrymen, and therefore did not expose himself to their gaze, so long as grief held dominion over him. But when at length he had succeeded in subduing his feelings, a reaction took place, which at once called into life all his latent energies, and restored him to the notice and admiration of his family and friends.

He seemed to have shaken off by one great effort all the anxieties which had weighed him down, and he again stood forward the energetic youth, who before his captivity had formed the glory and pride of his country. It seemed as if his nature was renewed—he became the life and soul of the city—he encouraged every one, both by precept and example, to meet with vigour the storm that was about to break over them. He was to be seen in every workshop encouraging the manufacturers of arms in their labour, and was early among the soldiery, exercising them in the use of those arms. The mortal hatred which he had sworn against the murderer of her, for whom alone he cared to live, impelled every thought and every exertion. He felt that in his own person he could encounter the whole invading force, and avowed himself ready to become a sacrifice to atone for her blood, which, in his conscience, he was convinced had been spilt on account of his negligence.

In providing for the unfortunate Mariam, which he had done by placing her an inmate in

his own family, he determined never to see her, and steadily to avoid every thing which might awaken in his mind recollections of the lost Amima. He knew how hopeless as well as how enervating would be any regrets for the past, and, although the wretched Mariam was always making endeavours to throw herself in his way, still he had fortitude sufficient to persevere in his resolution, and found himself all the better for it.

His father, however, who, during his adventurous life had learnt how to take advantage of every circumstance which fortune might throw in his way, as soon as Mariam had reached Asterabad and had made known her story, conceived that through her brother Sadek, some correspondence might be established, which directly or indirectly would throw some light upon the meditated operations of the Shah against the city. But when he consulted his son thereon, he found him so averse to holding communication with one whom he esteemed the executioner of his mistress, that he no longer urged the subject. Besides Zohrab was certain, from

the character of the individual, how hopeless any attempt would be to induce him to turn traitor.

He was, however, as anxious as his father to establish some mode of acquiring intelligence; and, from his long acquaintance with men and things about the court, he thought that he could at once name the man best suited to their purpose—the most able, the most avaricious, and the most treacherous—and that man he knew was the Humpback.

Zaul Khan willingly agreed to this; the more so, because during his residence at Tehran he had not neglected opportunities of sounding the depth of the barber's honesty, which indeed he had found very shallow. They then unanimously pitched upon the youth Ali, as the fittest bearer of their proposals, both because they could depend upon his fidelity and intelligence, and because he would be likely to pass free and unsuspected. Zohrab accordingly addressed a letter to the Humpback, and in direct terms offered him certain sums of gold, if he would convey back true and certain intelligence of the intended movements of

the Shah; of the plan of the projected attack; with as correct a statement as possible of dates, persons, and numbers. This done, they called the youth before them, explained the nature of the service required from him, and enjoined the greatest secrecy and precaution. They then gave him the letter, which he was ordered to deliver secretly to the Humpback, together with a sealed parcel enclosing a sum of tomauns, which he was also to deliver whenever he had received the answer. The boy lent an ear to his instructions with all the attention of an old spy, and as he well knew every inch of the ground over which he was about to travel, he felt confidence in himself, and having received his master's hearty "God be with you," straightway took his departure.

The father and the son had taken upon themselves the principal responsibility of providing for the defence and security of Asterabad. They had visited and caused to be repaired all the towers, strengthened the gates, cleared out the ditch, and made the approaches to the city as open as the encroaching nature of the dense sur-

rounding vegetation would allow. They had in former times occasionally purchased cannon of various caliber from the Russian vessels which came occasionally to the small harbour some eight miles from Asterabad, and had manufactured a sufficient quantity of gunpowder, an art known very generally in the East. The guns were placed in different positions on the walls, and gave a great feeling of security to the inhabitants, who, in the days we speak of, attributed miraculous powers to such instruments.

One large gun in particular, which had been one of the curiosities of the city ever since the days of Shah Abbas, was mounted immediately over the Tehran gate, and commanded the road from which it was most likely the invading army would first appear. A fortunate day and hour was fixed for its installation, a ceremony which was conducted with considerable solemnity; the whole city was collected to see it; the mollahs were there with their prayers, the women with their shrill cry of encouragement; and the governor, his son, the principal men of Asterabad with the Turcomans, were congregated on the

spot to give directions. After considerable labour it was raised, by means of rude though effective machinery, to the summit of the tower, and then shouts of *mashallah* and *barikallah* rent the air.

During the progress of this operation, an apparently way-worn traveller was seen to enter the gate, mounted upon a sorry broken-down steed, himself meanly dressed, and in no wise worthy of observation, except in being a Persian, a *Sahara nichin*, a liver in the plain. His sheepskin cap was drooping and dusty, his caba of cotton was rent, his red cloth *shalwars* were torn and stained with frequent rains, and his boots had seen their best days. A battered sword hung by his side, a rusty pistol protruded from his girdle, and there seemed no one article about him worth stealing; but with this, there was a certain air, a substratum of gentility, which crept out in various parts of his person, which showed that he was not quite a common man. As he rode slowly on he looked about him in surprise at what was going forward, when one of the Turcoman

chiefs, whose eyes were accustomed to the scrutiny of persons, exclaimed, "By the soul of Zohrab Khan, that is the mehmander! That is the dog Shir Khan Beg!" The eyes of all present were turned towards the stranger, and at once he was recognised. The recognition was made rather in derision than in hostility, for in the execution of his office during the stay of the deputies at Tehran, he had inspired them more with contempt than hatred; but his apparition at this present juncture excited universal astonishment. In Zaul Khan it excited suspicion, and immediately he was armed at all points against a trick. The deplorable looking Beg was forthwith invited to dismount, and mutual favourable signs of recognition having taken place between himself and many of those present, he seemed entirely to have laid by the airs and graces for which he was so well known, and with the humblest mien and language he dismounted and approached them. He appeared to be lame, walked with considerable difficulty, and looked more an object of compassion, than the brilliant and flourishing per-

sonage whom their eyes had been accustomed to behold adorned with silks and brocade.

"What has happened, Sir Mehmander," said Zaul Khan. "You are welcome. But why alone? why so fallen? has fate struck you?"

"May your condescension never diminish," said Shir Khan, in a very subdued voice. "Ashes are strewn upon my head; I have fallen from above to below; I am come to kiss your feet, and to ask a corner to sit in."

"Tell us your story," said the Blind Lion; "we are your friends; we know no evil of you; why are you thus fallen?"

"What can I say?" said he; "in consequence of your flight, the Shah seized upon me, and beat me; this is only one among the many miseries which have ensued from that event. I have fled from his hands, and praise be to Allah that I have fallen into yours! You have been the cause of my misfortune, therefore you must protect me. I appeal to you as Mussulmans, let not the destitute apply in vain."

This short appeal softened the hearts of those around, and every one seemed anxious to receive him with kindness. Zaul Khan, alone, did not easily give credence to his narrative, although he did not refuse him a hospitable reception. He inspected him with a most suspicious scrutiny, with eyes that might rival the brilliancy of an eagle's, and as he conceived that he detected an unusual degree of false humility in his looks and general bearing, said, "You must pardon us, Sir Beg, we are rustics, and are plain spoken folks; we call a man a man, and a dog a dog. This is war time; this is a season for open eyes and anxious ears. Whatever you say is right, no doubt; heaven forbid that we should disbelieve you; but you come from a king who is a wonder, a misfortune if ever there was one, who won't let the back of his hand know what is going on in the palm thereof. You too, *mashallah*, praise be to God, are one of those men, who by your own account are not like other men, and are a fit servant of such a king. Not to suspect you of something

more than beaten feet, and ragged clothes, and to believe your story at once, would be an insult upon your understanding which your best friends would not put upon you. How much more then does it behove us, who are in open rebellion, when they see a personage like you, known to have enjoyed the king's confidence, to have been distinguished by a beating, to receive him with doubt and precaution. Heaven forbid that we should break through the laws of hospitality! that we withhold from you the welcome of peace, that we should not feed and lodge you, or that we should despoil you in any way!—but for our own safety we must ascertain whether, within the recesses of those unworthy garments which clothe your person, are not concealed papers or other things injurious to our safety, or to the welfare of those who look to us for alliance and protection. Allow then that proper search be made; show us that our suspicions are unfounded, and when we are satisfied, we need not say how thankful we shall be to receive one amongst us,

who by his valour will add to our strength, and by his wisdom to our councils.

"True you say, O Khan!" exclaimed the humble spoken Beg; "if there is wisdom in one man's words above those of another, it is in yours. If *Aflatoon* had opened his lips he could not have spoken better. So much are the men of Tehran astonished at the skill which you have displayed, making play under their beards, and dancing round their fingers, that we no longer say, as learned as Socrat, or as ingenious as Locman; we now say as cunning as Zaul Khan. The king himself is all astonishment; from morning to night he sits in a corner with the tip of his finger in his mouth, exclaiming '*Bah! bah! bah!*' and saying nothing but 'Wonderful devil,' and 'Marvellous dog's son!' By your soul, by the head of Zohrab Khan, and I can't say more, people talk so much and so continually about you that, as I am a true believer, the prophet and the twelve Imans are now become nothing—nothing more than dirt. I, in truth, I who amongst men am not altogether dust, I have

longed to rub my head against your threshold. You see I am come! Whose dog am I, that should not say yes to all you say? *Bismillah!* in the name of Allah! search, look: and first let me remain without a cap," upon which, taking his cap from his head, he turned it inside out, lowered the lining, in which the only paper that was concealed, was a copy of some lines in which he attempted to describe the beauty of his mistress. He then exhibited his pockets, in which there was nothing save some crumbs and onions; he showed that in the baggy parts of his *shalwars*, a pair of shoes, and a lump of cold rice were secreted; in his breast he wore his purse, and in his girdle a knife, a pistol, and an iron ramrod.

"Is there any thing more at your service, Shir Khan?" said the accommodating Beg.

"There is no harm done," said Zaul Khan. "Your face is white. Those boots, however old they be, still may contain riches; let us take one survey of them, and all will be well."

Upon this the Beg pulled off his boots, and exhibited his feet, which still bore marks of the punishment they had undergone; and that fact more than any other spoke in his favour, for he seemed to have produced conviction of his honesty in almost every one's mind save Zaul Khan's, and therefore he for the present was subjected to no other scrutiny.

Shir Khan, who had hitherto played his part to admiration, finding himself secure, turned his eyes about, in the hope of discovering the moonshee, Mirza Shireen Ali, to whom his instructions more particularly pointed, as the man upon whose treachery dependance might be placed. He soon discerned him, by the constant discharge of fawning, flattery, and sycophancy, which he did not cease making upon whoever chose to hear him. Compliments upon their refinement and eloquence to the rough Turcoman chiefs—congratulations upon the merits of his son to Zaul Khan—kissing of hands and slavish meanness, interlarded with apt quotations from the loves of Ferhad and Shireen to Zoh-

rab; and indiscriminate offers of service, as well as little acts of attention to every one present. When the Mirza's eyes met the Beg's, he made an inclination of the head, as if to say, "I am your servant," whilst there was evident treason in his look, which the Beg thought he could understand.

The meeting having broken up, Zaul Khan appointed a ferash to wait upon Shir Khan Beg, ordered his horse to be fed, and prepared a room for him in his house. The Beg, however, would in no wise accept of a better place for his lodging than a corner of the stable in which his horse was kept, urging that the beast was one which he prized, and that his care was necessary to restore it to its former vigour. Finding that this would not be permitted, he agreed to take up his quarters where they had been provided, but he insisted upon carrying his saddle with him, saying that he was so accustomed to use it as his pillow that he could not sleep without it. No objection was made to this, and the night passed off without any

occurrence worth relating; but during the course of it he had managed unobserved to disengage from within the padding of his saddle, a roll of papers, consisting of firmans and letters, of which he was ordered to make such use as circumstances might admit; and doing this he said to himself, exulting, "Aye, Zaul Khan, you think yourself a lynx, but Shir Khan Beg, *mashallah!* is the grandfather of lynxes."

On the morrow Shir Khan strolled into the bazars, and sought those places where he might expect to meet the traitor he was in search of, and it was not long ere he succeeded. He met him upon entering the shop of a barber, whose good offices he had secured, to trim his head, beard, mustaches, and curls, which had been long neglected. Their recognition was like that of two sharpers, who by certain unequivocal signs, known only to such personages, were at once led to mutual confidence. They very soon understood each other. Shir Khan delivered the letter with which he was charged from the Grand Vizir, to the Mirza, who did not cease to make protestations of his devotion

to the Shah's interests, and of his readiness to promote them by every means in his power. He promised when the day of trial came to do wonders, and hinted that with money much might be effected by securing a large party in the city. Zaul Khan was greatly feared, and it was difficult to take a step unknown to him; but the men of the law were generally inimical to him, and that was a difficulty which he could scarcely surmount, for it paralyzed that energy of resistance which he might otherwise inspire in the inhabitants. Shir Khan enjoined the greatest possible secrecy, and said that in proportion to the Mirza's exertions so would be his reward, and those exertions the Shah expected would be made manifest, when his army should approach near enough to form the siege of the city. The scribe promised that he would keep the Vizir constantly informed of every occurrence likely to be useful in placing the city within the Shah's power, and after a hasty conversation they parted.

Zaul Khan rose at an earlier hour than usual, and, having sent for his son, said, "I have had

misgivings during the night, that Shir Khan is here for no good purpose. I do not like his conduct since he has been among us. The enquiries he makes have raised my suspicions; and it has struck me, that notwithstanding his appearance of innocence, he may still have secreted papers in places which we omitted to search. For instance, his saddle!—I was told that he would not separate himself from his saddle."

"Let us send for him, in the name of Allah!" said Zohrab.

Just as they had come to this conclusion, old Osman, the *onbashi*, whose delight upon seeing the return of Zohrab has before been recorded, stepped into the room; making a low bow, he stood before them, but with so disastrous a face, that it was evident something had taken place to cause it.

"What has happened?" said Zaul Khan.

"Why stand ye there, Osman?" said Zohrab, in a kind and encouraging tone.

"The king's firman, may it please my masters," said the old soldier.

"What of that," said Zaul—"what firman?"

"The firman which is stuck up against the gate of the mosque," said Osman.

"Firman!" said father and son in surprise.

"Yes," said their informant; as I am your slave, men are now collected round it, and the mollahs are reading it, and men say that fighting against the Shah is unlawful."

"Did not I say," said Zaul to his son, "that all was not right? I have always believed in forewarnings, and now my mind is confirmed in them. Go, Osman," said he to his faithful attendant; "take two keshekchi with you, and bring hither the gholam shah who arrived here two days ago, if he is to be found within the city; and come, Zohrab, let us go see the firman. Our beards have been laughed at, that is plain," added he, shaking his head thoughtfully, accusing himself of negligence in not having exerted his usual watchfulness. When they arrived at the porch of the principal mosque, they there found a large concourse of the inhabitants, who, having heard of the extraordinary circumstance of a royal firman being found posted upon the gate, had come in all-

directions to see it, and to gain knowledge of its contents. It was addressed to the mollahs, the *Sheik il Islam*, the *peishnamaz*, the *ketkhodas*, and collectively to the *ullemah* and the *rayats* of the city of Asterabad, denouncing Zaul Khan, his son Zohrab, Mustafa Khan, and his whole family' as rebels and outlaws, and calling upon all faithful subjects, both as men and Mussulmans, in the name of Allah, of Mahomed his holy prophet, of Ali his son in law, and of the twelve Imams, to oppose any further resistance to the Shah's government, to seize and deliver to the Shah the said Zaul and his family, and to open the gates of the city to whomsoever the Shah should appoint to govern; and in case of non-compliance, threatening the most summary revenge, by delivering over the city to the horrors of a *Katl-i-aum*, or general massacre, without distinction of age, sex, or situation. To this was appended the *fetvah* of the *Mushtehed*, the chief of the law, a man of the greatest celebrity for his piety, making it lawful for any person to take away the life of all or any of the denounced persons.

Zaul Khan, followed by Zohrab, went to where the firman was placed, and with great self-possession having read it through, deliberately pulled it down, tore it into a thousand pieces, and strewed it on the ground. He then addressed those who surrounded him, and particularly a mollah, who had been active in reading and explaining the firman to the people. He said, "'Tis thus, friends and men of Asterabad! we treat an unlawful command. We do not own the supremacy of the king of Irân, why therefore should we receive his orders? When first he came to the throne, he treated us with justice, and we sought his protection; but elated with prosperity, he would have oppressed us, and we threw off his authority. Be not deceived, my friends, by fair words. The rapacity of the Shah—which knows no bounds, beginning from the palaces of the rich, and descending to the hovels of the poor, searches out and seizes upon that which is not his own—is too well known for me to warn you of. When once you have received either himself or his governors within your walls, you may bid adieu to

all security; your houses will be forcibly entered; your harems will no longer be sacred; your labour will be extorted from you, and whatever goods you possess will be taken from you; to resist will be vain, for instant death ensues. If I who am your governor have wronged you, speak; I and my family are ready to go. But if not, and ye be satisfied with my government, then join with me in repelling the oppressor and the tyrant. Our walls and towers are strong; our jungle is impenetrable; we only want unanimity to be invulnerable."

These words produced a strong sensation over all present. No one opened his lips but to praise, excepting the mollah above-mentioned, and he, evidently in the royal interest, ventured to say, "Whatever you have said, no doubt is true, but in the name of the Prophet what shall we say to the *mushtehed's fetvah?* Is the command of a saint of no value?"

"O little man!" said Zaul Khan. "If they have their *mushtehed*, we have ours; saint for saint, ours is as good as theirs. By what account do you reckon? If you think I am worthy

of death, *bismillah*, come and do your worst! but let our *mushtehed* issue his *fetvah*, and say that you, or the Shah, or any of his myrmidons, are equally so, what would you say if I were to take your life? Go, go; don't eat dirt!"

This reply to the mollah was so satisfactory to the mob, that all the effect which he thought he had created was at once dispelled, and Zaul and his son returned home more secure in the affections of their countrymen than when they set out, and so far they felt delighted that the Beg's mission should have proved abortive; but still they were anxious to ascertain what had become of him. The old Osman had returned after an unsuccessful search; "And still," said Zaul, "how could he possibly have escaped from the walls unseen and unnoticed?" At length, after much investigation, it was discovered that on the evening before, the Beg, leading his horse by the halter, had asked permission of the officer on guard, a Turcoman, to allow it to feed on a patch of fresh grass without the gate during the night, it being so ill that he was fearful it might die before morning.

This had been granted, the horse was tethered, and the Beg returned within the walls. How he got out again no one could say; but true it was that no signs of either cavalier or horse were to be seen; it was plain that he was gone, that he was too well skilled in the arts of deceit to give a pursuer any chance of overtaking him; and thus he was allowed to proceed unheeded and unpursued. Zaul Khan, who judged, and truly so, that he was a match for any one in the tricks and stratagems of war, was at first mortified to have been thus bearded in his own capital; but when he considered how simply the trick had been performed, he could only smile at the result, and owned that he and his colleagues were rightly served for having thought contemptuously of the silken-vested narrow-waisted Kizzilbash.

"By my beard!" said Zaul, "his ingenuity in making a horse, which it is evident was excellent, pass off for one dying, must be great. Now I think of it, the horse bore the appearance of being in full training, and not of broken

condition; he could not else have performed his fatiguing journey."

This incident having placed the governor, his son, and the other chiefs more on their guard than ever, they met to devise the best plan of defence without the walls, and it was determined immediately to man the defiles of the forest with their best musketeers, and keep large bodies of horse on the alert, ready to harass the approaching army in every possible manner.

CHAPTER IV.

War is fraud, *i. e.* Stratagem is necessary in war.

PERSIAN DEFINITION.

ALI had toiled with success through the intricate jungles that encumber the territory of Asterabad—had ascended the great Sandûk mountain—and traversed the dreary track which intervenes between the woodlands and the Caspian passes; when, within a few miles of his native village of Firouzabad, he descried the royal camp spread out before him on its adjacent plain. The royal pavilion, with its crimson *ser-a-perdehs* (walls), arose conspicuous in the midst; the golden balls which crowned it, glittering in the sun, whilst the uplifted gawdy silken banners, bearing upon them the royal Persian insignia of a lion and rising sun, were seen floating in the air.

Around, extending in various directions, regular in its irregularity, was spread the camp, exhibiting a world of canvas white as snow, diversified by every variety of military ensign. The great officers of state occupied magnificent tents, whilst their dependants were lodged in smaller ones round about them; vying with each other in the brilliancy of their cortêge, the beauty of their horses, and the richness of their trappings. The cavalry occupied the right, the infantry and artillery the left. Before the tents of the cavalry were stuck the spears of the horsemen, giving to each establishment a peculiarly picturesque and Asiatic appearance. Every where horses were standing at their picquets, tethered in long rows, and rending the air with their lively and repeated neighing. On one spot was remarked the dense group of the zambureks or camel artillery, whose high and grotesque saddles, ornamented by pennons of brilliant colouring, added a new picture to military scenery, and surpassed the heavy though more efficient corps of field artillery, by its showy decorations. The surrounding hills were covered with

numerous strings of baggage-mules, enlivening the scene by the constant jingle of their bells, and so entirely changed was the whole aspect of his village, from loneliness and melancholy to activity and life, that Ali could scarcely recognize where he was. The pillar of skulls, however, so celebrated in the former part of our story, was still there, serving to remind the poor youth of his earliest misfortune, and a landmark by which he might guide his steps.

The intelligent boy felt that he was now called upon to use every precaution in discovering the tent of the Humpback, and in making known to him the object of his mission. He proceeded warily towards the camp, and as he found himself involved in its intricacies, he stopped ever and anon to ascertain the direction of the royal standards, in order that he might thither direct his steps; for in the nighbourhood of the Shah's pavilion he knew that he should find his habitation. When he had approached sufficiently near to begin a closer scrutiny, he discovered a barber's shop, established on the skirt of a row of tents, and of its officiating

owner, a brother strap, he enquired the residence of the Shah's operator.

"And what may one like you want of the Goozoo?" said the barber; "he shaves a head, like me, 'tis true, but then it is only one, and that one royal and despotic. Other heads he holds cheap as the dust of the field."

"I am a poor boy," said Ali, "and want his assistance."

"Have you money to give him," said the shaver, "you may then secure his assistance; if not, go not near him; you'll only eat dirt for your pains. However, there is his tent," pointing to one in the rear of the royal pavilion, "and in the name of Allah go, if go you must."

Ali proceeded as directed. The Humpback's tent was one of the smaller sort, made of crimson canvas, which denoted that of a royal servant, elegantly made, fitting well to the ground, and mounted on two poles neatly painted. It was lined with a rich chintz. Though small, there was a snugness and a comfort about it, which marked its owner for a man who was not unmindful of his own ease. As is usual in Per-

sia, where every habitation is open to those who choose to enter, Ali, without making further enquiries, lifted up the tent door, and walked in; but in so doing he heard a rustling of silk and huddling on of clothes, as of some one making an escape to the small separate chamber behind. This caused him to pause, but a sharp shrill voice, which he recognized to be the Humpback's, crying out, "*Biah*, come, come!" encouraged him to proceed, and he stood before him.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" said the Shah's barber.

"I am your slave," said Ali, "I want you."

"Whence come ye?"

"I come from Asterabad." said the youth, looking around anxious to ascertain that he was not heard; but at these words he heard a rustling of silk, as approaching the separation wall.

"Who are you?" said the Humpback.

"Your slave is Ali," answered the youth, "who once waited upon the hostage, Zohrab Khan."

Upon this the rustling increased, and the breathing of some one behind the screen was heard.

"What do you want of me?" said the Humpback, roused into attention by this communication.

"I have a letter for you; here it is," said Ali.

Upon this an eye and a small hand were seen through the crevice of the screen, showing anxiety to know what might be the contents of the letter.

The Humpback read the letter with the greatest earnestness; but in proportion as he dived into its contents, so did he sidle off from where he sat, to a spot where he could not be overlooked by the eye behind him.

"What have you there?" at length said a female voice, in the most impatient and authoritative tone: "Who is that letter from?"

"*Cheezi nist;* it is nothing," said the Humpback, in the coolest manner; and rolling up the note, thrust it carefully into his bosom. Then, in a low tone, and with a very significant cast

of his eye, as if he would say "I cannot speak now," he desired Ali to return in due time for an answer.

When the boy was gone, the back curtain of the tent was violently thrust on one side, and the ardent Zulma, with wild impatience and astonishment in her whole demeanour, darted into the seat on the carpet next to the Hump-back, and asked what had taken place.

"I heard of Zohrab Khan and Asterabad," said she: "What is it? tell me!"

"Nothing," repeated the self-collected barber; "it was a youth of no consequence, who brought me a letter from none you know or care for."

"A youth of no consequence, indeed!" said Zulma. "As I sit here, it was Ali, Zohrab's servant, and is he a youth of no consequence? Are you mad, to think that Zulma is so easily to be deceived?"

"Ali, or no Ali," said the other, "the contents of the note are of no consequence to you."

"Man," said the maiden, anger starting into her eyes, "can one come from Asterabad, and that one be Zohrab's servant, with a letter to

you, and be of no consequence to me? What say you? Am I nothing in your eyes, that you dare say this to me? Or am I become so low a fool, that a still lower fool like you can venture to hold me thus cheap? Show me that letter!"

"By your head, and by the Shah's beard, there is nothing in that letter," said the barber.

"Show it to me," again and again repeated the infuriated Zulma, at each demand the strength of her voice and rage increasing, until at length, unable to contain the excess of her passion, she seized upon her companion, and clawed upon his face and beard, with the violence of one bereft of reason: "I will, I must have the letter," she roared out.

The barber, who knew full well the vantage ground which he occupied, forcibly rose from his seat, and abandoned his tent to the sole possession of the violent woman. He left his habitation with all speed, followed by Ali, to whom he beckoned, and when they had reached the skirts of the camp, he seated himself on the grass, and taking out his writing implements, wrote an answer to the letter which he had received.

He then sealed it, and looking into the face of the youthful messenger, said, "You have something more for my hand, have you not?" "Yes," said Ali, "*bismillah*, in the name of the prophet, here it is;" upon which he drew from his breast the bag of tomauns, which he duly placed into the hands of the traitor.

"It is well," said the Humpback, as he looked at the glittering coin, with an eye of covetousness and exultation. "Thou art a good servant! There, take this letter; give it to thy master, and when thou comest again be careful how thou approachest my tent. Send for me; I will come to thee; and as thou valuest thy life, never speak to me before a third person."

Upon this the youth took his leave, left the camp, and retraced his steps whence he came, rejoicing.

Not so the Humpback; he returned with slow and uncertain gait to his tent, occupied by one whom, though he feared as standing in the way of his avarice, yet he could not help contemning for her indiscretion. She, in the meanwhile, had acquired sufficient command over

herself to meet the Humpback with calmness, although coldly, but his conduct on this occasion laid the foundation of a determination in her breast to revenge herself upon him upon the first favourable occasion; and as this desire became the constant dream of her thoughts, she did not cease devising every scheme which rancour and malignity could suggest for succeeding in her determination. Foiled in her attempt, as we have already seen, of securing the Shah's permission to follow the camp, she had taken her measures accordingly, and without any assistance but her own exertions, she contrived to reach Firouzabad before the Shah's arrival, and as soon as her father's tent was pitched she took possession of one corner, bidding defiance to his entreaties to return to Tehran. It may be conceived to what extent her feelings were excited by the scene which we have already described, when we state that her real motive for the step she had taken was her love for Zohrab, who she fondly expected would no longer reject her, now that her rival was no more, and for whose protection

and preservation she hoped her interference, should the moment ever come, might avail. It will soon be seen what a fatal error the Hump-back committed, in withholding from her the communication he had received.

The Shah, having left his capital with all the parade and ceremony which usually attended him on such occasions, timed by the astrologers, lauded by the mollahs, accompanied by the whole population of the city, arrived in due time at his camp. There he immediately took the command of his army, and although he appeared to make light of the expedition, asserting that ere a week had elapsed he would be master of Asterabad, yet well acquainted as he was with the resources of his opponents, and with the difficult nature of the country about to be invaded, he did not omit any precaution which might ensure his success. Having called his officers together, he ordered a large body of cavalry to push forwards, to ascertain where they might first expect to meet the enemy, to take possession of the defiles, and

there to wait until the infantry should come to their support. At the same time he ordered the march of the *Tuffenkchis*, and the advance of the artillery, issuing his commands for a general rising of the peasantry, to make straight the road for the passage of the guns, and in case of absolute stoppage, to carry them bodily onwards over every impediment.

He was in the midst of these occupations, when the Vizir walked in, and stood before him.

"Has any thing occurred, Mirza?" said the Shah.

"As I am your sacrifice," answered the Vizir, "your slave Shir Khan Beg is returned, and requests to kiss your feet."

"Let him come."

Upon this the Beg, dusted, torn, and way-worn, was seen to walk with difficulty towards the presence, and having made his lowest obeisance, with his hands resting before him, stood before the king.

"Well, so you are returned," said the Shah;

"what say those dogs' sons at Asterabad? Have they read our firman?"

"Let the royal condescension never be less," answered the Beg in the greatest humility; "owing to the poor exertions of this least of men, they have read it."

"Relate thy story from beginning to end," said the Shah, "and don't lie, or make thyself over officious. First, where did you go?"

"As I eat the salt of the king of kings—as I am a true believer, and as I hope to live, I will not lie; I will speak the truth; it is this—"

"Speak on," said the Shah.

"Overcoming one hundred thousand difficulties of road, of jungle, of marauders, by dint of keeping his eyes open, your slave reached the walls of Asterabad; and he entered the gate just as the rebellious dogs (may their souls grill in jehanum!) were mounting a large gun over the protecting tower. By the head of the Shah, it was a gun which since the days of Jemsheed has never yet been seen! Your slave asked no questions, but entered. He found the whole city assem-

bled; Zaul Khan, the hostage Zohrab, the Turcomans, all where there. Your slave was immediately recognised and surrounded One said, 'Seize him;' another, 'Kill;' another would have blown him up; but Zaul stopped all their proceedings, and put questions to your slave. By the salt of the Shah! your slave gave such answers, that one after the other, all rogues and dogs' sons as they are! they looked at him with astonishment, and exclaimed, 'Marvellous wise king must that be, who employs such servants!' Your slave made them all less than dust. At length Zaul Khan the cunning said, 'All this is very well; but we must have proof that all you say be true; we must search you.' 'Your slave,' said '*Bismillah*, search on!' upon which they turned him inside out. No paper, no firman did they find. Then they remained with their noses in the air, whilst your slave laughed within his beard at them, and said to himself, 'You have got Shir Khan Beg to deal with, and not one of your cows of Turcomans!'"

"Never mind what you said to yourself, ass!" said the Shah. "Speak on."

"Your slave then looked about for the Shirazi, whom he recognized, and soon they understood each other. If your slave has wit; if he can laugh at men's beards; if, by the condescension of the Shah, he can make fools walk round his finger; he gives all the credit to his saddle! A *tekelteh*,* by the blessing of the Prophet, is a wonderful thing."

"Wonderful dog's son art thou!" said the Shah, smiling.

"At night your slave took from his *tekelteh* your Majesty's blessed firman, which, if placed on a rock would melt it into dust, and also his Highness the Vizir's letter to the bankrupt moonshee. The next day your slave sought the Mirza, spoke to him, secured his obedience to the Shah's commands, and here is his letter in answer. The king of kings may depend upon frequent information from him; and when the day comes, by the blessing of Allah! he will secure to the Shah's victorious army an easy entrance into the city. On the following morn-

* A *tekelteh* is the padding used in a Persian saddle, which is generally detached from the saddle-tree.

ing, long 'ere the dawn, your slave stuck the auspicious firman upon the gate of the royal mosque, having previously secured the co-operation of one of the most influential mollahs; and then, with that wit which by the favour of the asylum of the universe he possesses, making his famous horse Ser-mest pass for a sick *yaboo* at the city gate, and himself for a lame beggar, your slave has returned to claim your majesty's skirt, and to rub his unworthy forehead against the royal threshold.

"*Barikallah*, well done!" said the Shah, amused by the narrative, and pleased with the results; "you have made your face white; the Shah is pleased with thee." Upon which the overjoyed Beg knelt down and kissed the ground, whilst the Shah cried out to Sadek, who was in attendance, "Bring hither the *calaat*, the dress of honour;" and addressing the Vizir, said, "let a firman be made out, in order that it may be known that the Shah knows how to reward a good servant. From this day he becomes a Khan, and commands a thousand men." Upon which a *catebi*, a rich cloak of cloth of gold,

trimmed with fine sables, was thrown over his shoulders, until he should be more formally invested with the whole dress; and then the king, turning to the entranced and overjoyed Beg, said, "Shir Khan *mubarek*, good fortune attend you!"

Should my reader have seized the character which I have endeavoured to draw of the Beg—that of an active, lying, vain, flattering, amusing Irâni—he may perhaps conceive the raptures with which the new-created Khan heard the words which struck his ear, coming not from an ordinary mouth, but from one whence flowed the issues of prosperity or wretchedness, to whom men looked for life, and even for the possession of the air they breathed. He trembled with joy as he poured out the expressions of his gratitude, and when dismissed, speedily took his way to his own quarters to await the arrival of the emblems of his future honours. He had not waited long 'ere he espied Sadek, attended by a ferash, carrying a tray upon his head covered over with a Cashmire shawl napkin, trimmed with gold fringe, and accompanied by one of the mirzas belonging to the

Grand Vizir, making their way towards him. His heart leaped with joy at the sight, and as they aproached, he stepped forward with the utmost obsequiousness to receive them. When they had entered the tent, Sadek took the royal firman into both his hands, and breast high presented it to its owner, saying "This is the king's rakm;" upon which the whole party standing up, the mirza read it aloud. It stated the approbation of the Shah of the services rendered by Shir Khan Beg, and what was principally gratifying to his ears, he heard himself styled *Alijah*, the high in station, and in conclusion announced that the title of Khan was conferred upon him. Upon which receiving the precious document into his own hands, he carried it with the profoundest veneration to his head, whilst those around him showered down reiterated "*mubareks*" upon him.

He then was invested with the dress; a brocade *caba* or vest was fitted to his person; a Cashmire shawl adorned his waist, whilst a cap with a *goush pîsh*, or an ear-girding shawl over it, usurped the place of his dusty sheepskin. Then

over all was thrown the dignified *catebi.* At length appeared the diamond hilted dagger, upon the possession of which, the deepest longings of his youth had been exhausted. Although the diamonds were little better than bits of discoloured crystal, yet a *kord muraseh* bore a reputation that made its owner so superior to the rest of mankind, that he did not cease feasting his eyes upon it as it protruded from his girdle; a sword, with gold enamelled knobs, hung at his side, and completed his adjustment. Then the firman was stuck in a conspicuous manner into the folds of his cap; and thus adorned, complimented right and left to the fullest gratification of his vanity, he mounted his horse and proceeded to make his selam to the Shah. He took the most circuitous road which he could devise through the camp, in order to exhibit himself in all his honours, and never before had he cocked his cap to more satisfaction, or looked with more self-complacency over his person. The reception which he met from the Shah was all he could wish, and for three successive days,

arrayed in his calaat, and with the firman in his head, did he enjoy his dignity, and not a little the envy which he created in the breasts of his brother Gholams.

The Shah, in heaping honours upon this vainest of his servants, had marked him as a proper officer to take the lead in the most dangerous part of the expedition, namely exploring the forests, which in the hands of an expert enemy would require all his skill and prudence. He was thus intended to take possession of the road for the army, clearing the defiles, and threading the paths through the jungle. The country, as far as the commencement of the forest, was open, like the rest of Persia, and of easy access to the troops. There was only one celebrated defile, the *Teng Shemshir bûr* (so called from the tradition which records that Ali, with one blow of his scimitar had cleaved the rock in twain,) which it was necessary to secure in order to obtain a free passage into Mazanderan; and thither the Shah was anxious to despatch in all haste the new made Khan, with a chosen body of men, in order that the enemy might not be beforehand with him.

Accordingly, he received orders to depart immediately, and to keep possession of the pass until the arrival of the main army. The airs of importance which he exhibited upon this occasion, even were new to his own countrymen. He was seen in all parts of the camp, calling up his men, inspecting their horses and arms, and evincing a degree of activity that frequently told upon the shoulders of those who did not sufficiently second his zeal. At length he departed, but he had scarcely passed the defiles of *Serenza*, when he was surprised by the appearance of a small company of horsemen whose movements were indicative of those of spies; for they kept at a distance on the declivities of the surrounding hills, and carefully avoided approaching him. The cap which they wore, so much larger than the one common to Kizzilbashes, announced them to be Turcomans; besides their spears were thicker, and they carried them in a different mode to that used in Persia. Shir Khan made every effort in his power to come up with them, but in vain; they evaded him with so much dexterity, always

however managing to keep him in sight, that he remained, as the expression goes, "hand broken and head bewildered." He on his powerful horse, followed by two chosen Gholams, darted onward, over rocks, stones, down steeps, up the most difficult acclivities, in the hope of overtaking them, but to no purpose; they seemed to mock his efforts, and as fast as he shewed himself on one eminence they rose conspicuous on the one beyond it; until at length, in utter despair, he was obliged to give over the chase and return to his main body. He was dispirited and enraged. It was evident that the enemy had taken the field earlier than the Shah, and had already pushed their parties of observation to the very skirts of the Shah's camp, and must evidently have taken possession of the defiles. With these discouraging prospects, Shir Khán returned to his troops, and calling his officers around him, dismounted, and seating himself upon a patch of grass, addressed them as follows:

"See," said he, "what a thing is *tahdeer*, is destiny! I who am Shir Khan, I who have laughed at the beards of the Turcomans, who

have made the man whom it is the fashion to call famous, an ass in the face of the world—who have made their great Zohrab less than a dog—here am I seated on the grass, delayed and brain-worn. Maledictions upon their beards! maledictions upon their ancestry, if perchance they ever had fathers or mothers! Whenever I get a flea into my shirt, I hunt it—in and out one fold, up and down another, until I catch it—and then kill it; but these vermin, (whose dogs are fleas when compared to them!) they are not to be caught. You men! (addressing the group standing before him,) wherefore should I speak on? You know who and what Shir Khan is! He has done things, he has seen countries, he has talked to men, and when the service of the Shah requires it, he treats them like Franks and unbelievers; he has succeeded in every thing; he has carried all before him; but now, *takdeer* has set all crooked, and here he is like a dog looking after his own tail. What shall we do? where go? It is plain these dogs' fathers, the Turcoman and Asterabadis have already taken possession of the passes!

What shall I do? The Shah must know this instantly, whatever may happen. It will excite all his rage, and perhaps he may say Shir Khan has not been active enough. May I defile destiny's grave! for Allah better knows, I may have been made a Khan one day, only to eat dirt on the next!"

Upon this, a rough, weather-beaten Gholam, who had followed the Shah in all his campaigns, said with humility, "Shall your servant go to the camp, O Khan! He will get there by the middle of the night, and be back to-morrow with the Shah's orders?"

"You say well," said Shir Khan, "I would have gone myself, but I can't leave my troops. The army must advance immediately, or the campaign will be fruitless. Upon which he ordered his mirza, for he had lost no time in setting up a scribe, to make a statement of his situation to the Prime Vizir, signifying his determination to push on to the defile, but urging that he ought to be supported by the main army, since it was evident the enemy had already made effectual and alarming advances. Upon this

the volunteer was dispatched, and the party slowly advanced to take up their quarters at the nearest village on the road for the night.

The Shah was a thorough soldier; all the adventures and circumstance of war were agreeable to him. He then forgot the degraded state of his person, and from the energy of his character he became equal and superior to other men. The more difficulty stood in his way, the more the superiority of his mind was evinced, and that superiority, putting him in good humour with himself, made him forget his other deficiencies, and softened his feelings toward his fellow creatures.

The information transmitted to him by Shir Khan, instead of rousing his wrath, only produced an agreeable excitement. The instant he was informed of the circumstances, he ordered the *jarchi bashi*, or the herald in chief, to appear before him, and commanded him to proceed into the different quarters of the camp, according to established custom, and announce the departure of the army on the following morning towards Toweh, in the direction of the Teng

Shemshir bûr. He then ordered all the different officers in command of the troops to assemble in his presence, and issued his commands with an alacrity and even joyousness of manner, which he was known to possess on similar occasions. Very soon afterwards the whole camp was in motion, different to the departure of a fleet, the canvas which was now spread, all at once was furled; and the field which but an hour before had been overlaid with tents and pavilions, was at once reduced to its former aridity of aspect. In all directions mules were driving in from the pastures to their appointed burthens; the din of their bells, the shouting of muleteers, the voices of commanding officers, the neighing of horses, and the exciting sounds of the *nokara khaneh*, the Persian military music, joined to the intense activity of every individual, working as it were for his life, under the very eye of a king and master who allowed no negligence of duty, all produced a scene wearing a character entirely its own. Not a tent at length was seen, saving a small crimson pavilion of beautiful form and

dimensions, which the king himself occupied until the moment of his departure.

There he sat, exulting in a vein of malignant joy, at the surprise and terror which he was about to strike into the hearts of those who had had the temerity to enter with him into a contest, which he was determined to push to the last extremity, and which every one felt must end in their extermination. At the same time, he was too sagacious not to take every measure of precaution in order to ensure his success, as if he were about to attack forces of the first magnitude. What he principally had to guard against was treachery; he felt that a poignard or poison, might be as fatal to him as to the meanest hind, and that in a desultory war such as this was likely to prove, in a closely wooded country, his person could not be as secure as if he were acting upon the bare unsheltered surface of the rugged Irân. He knew how open his countrymen were to bribery, and though he could trust them in war with a foreign enemy, still he did not feel quite so secure in a conflict with his own people.

He had returned Shir Khan's messenger, ordering that officer to advance and clear the Teng Shemshir bûr, were it occupied by the enemy, and at the same time informed him of the immediate advance of the army. His last order upon leaving Firouzabad was to the Ked Khoda of that place, enjoining him to forward the prince Fatteh Ali with all haste as soon as he should appear returning from Shiraz.

CHAPTER V.

To forbear to pluck your enemy's beard when in your hand, is virtue more than human.

PERSIAN ETHICS.

ALI, after leaving the humpback, returned to his master without impediment, and delivered the letter of which he was the bearer to Zaul Khan. There was so much internal evidence of truth in its contents, that both father and son at once were of opinion to act upon the information it contained. The traitor gave an account of the number of troops to be employed, of the names of their commanders, and of the artillery. He stated when it was likely that the Shah would begin his operations, and shewed how easy it would be to advance even to the

royal camp without opposition, and take possession of the passes before the royal troops could reach them.

The circumstance which most engaged the attention of Zaul, was the account given of the three pieces of heavy ordnance on their way, for the purpose of battering their walls and gates. With cavalry and infantry he was confident that it would be easy to cope, but guns were monsters which inspired such extreme dread throughout the country, that their reputation alone was tantamount to a defeat. He felt that a royal firman, backed by a *Mûshtehed's fetvah*, and enforced by cannon balls, were engines which his personal influence or ability could never overcome; therefore he determined, and Zohrab agreed with him in opinion, that all their endeavours must be directed to the destruction of the said guns, before they approached the city. Consequently an immediate advance was determined, and Zohrab was entrusted with the command of the vanguard, in conjunction with the old Turcoman

chief, the Blind Lion, whose age and experience might be a check upon the impetuosity of the youth, and who was celebrated for his intimate knowledge of the country. It was settled that Zaul should take the command in the city, and not move further from his post than was necessary for its security, whilst Zohrab was entrusted with the operations without the walls. The determination with which father and son had tacitly inspired each other, of never submitting to the tyrant, under any terms short of independence for themselves and their friends, was a feeling which at the moment of parting, presented many frightful forebodings to their respective imaginations, and which required all the fortitude of the one, and all the self-command of the other, to keep under proper control. Our young hero had equipped himself as if he were about to attend a wedding. A magnificent Turcoman horse, the finest which the pastures of the plains of Kipchak could boast, stood ready caparisoned for him at the gate of the paternal mansion. It was

a tall bay steed, with black feet, and hoofs like flint, black mane flowing down its arched neck, with a small head, eyes like an antelope, and pointed ears. It boasted an Arab sire, from the Nejd, and the most celebrated mare of the black tents was its dam. He looked himself like the famous Afrasiab in person. He wore a glittering breastplate of steel inlaid with gold, whilst a helmet, from which floated two small feathers, was fastened to his brow with a crimson shawl, the ends of which fell in folds over his back. A sword of beautiful shape, though of unadorned scabbard, celebrated throughout Khorassan, and an heir-loom in his family, having, it is said, been the favourite weapon of the great Timoor, hung at his side; a pair of pistols in his girdle, and a Turcoman spear in his hand, completed his equipment; and never had so gallant a youth put foot into the stirrup, since those days when Rustum slew his devils, and Afrasiab, to use the language of Ferdûsi, covered Persia with the deep shades of night. His immediate attendant was the faithful

Ali, who now mounted upon a powerful horse, armed at all points, with the addition of his master's carbine slung at his side, was seen joyfully awaiting the signal to begin this his first campaign.

He had taken a long and affecting farewell of his mother—Mariam had mingled her cries with those of the other servants upon witnessing his departure—and he was now told by the astrologers that the fortunate hour was come—when, turning towards his father, he asked his blessing and forgiveness. Their hearts beat in unison when mentally they prayed to heaven for each other's security; and as a tear dropped from his father's eye upon his cheek, fearful of betraying weakness before the surrounding spectators, the noble youth with one bound seized his horse's main, vaulted into the saddle, and with a heart overflowing with love for his parents, with apprehensions for their safety, and with a fixed resolve to die in their behalf, he pushed forward at a rapid pace, followed by the warriors whom he was destined to lead.

Proceeding towards the Shah's position, Zohrab found the information of the humpback true; for he met with no impediment, until he reached the Teng Shemshir bûr. He, with his friend the Blind Lion, carefully examined this defile, and finding that it could be defended by a small body against forces to almost any amount, selected such of his men as were best adapted to the service, stationed them in the most fitting position, and placed them under the orders of one of his steadiest officers. Then he himself, with a chosen few, pushed on to reconnoitre the Shah's camp at Firouzabad, always keeping in view the one principal object of destroying the three pieces of artillery, and remarking the various spots where, owing to the difficult nature of the country through which they must necessarily pass, an attack upon them might be made with most success.

It was Zohrab in company with the Blind Lion, attended by Ali, who first discovered the advance of Shir Khan, and consequently they thought it prudent to make their retreat to the

defile, where, according to every probability, the first essay of their mutual prowess would take place. They had made a sufficiently accurate survey of the approaching force, to be aware that it was intended as a vanguard of the army, and strong enough to endeavour to force the defile, and consequently, that it was necessary to take immediate measures to meet the attack.

A day and night passed away before the parties came within sight of each other. Shir Khan had been apprised that the Teng was already strongly occupied; for his reconoitering officer had been received by a shot from one of the Asterabadi fusileers, and such an account had he brought of the effective manner in which they had fortified themselves, by making a succession of trenches across the mouth of the defile, that the Khan thought it was necessary to wait for a body of infantry on its way to join him, ere he ventured on an attack. He had recovered the apprehension of incurring the Shah's displeasure, by the letter from the Vizir, informing him of the advance of the army, and he was once again

re-instated in full possession of his vanity and self-approbation.

"See those cows of Turcomans," said he to those around him; "there they sit, so heavy, so stupid, that although they know the Shah with his army is coming against them, they will not stir. That they stir not for Shir Khan, so be it, although he has once made them eat dirt; yet, perhaps they like it, and may come again. The unclean beast, 'tis said, returns to garbage with more relish than to any other food. *Inshallah!* they will know that Shir Khan is not like other men; that when he comes it is not to put the finger of delay into the mouth of astonishment! We will see by what account they reckon."

His impatience to perform some feat worthy of the Shah's approbation was such, that he determined immediately to attack the entrance of the defile. Zohrab, who from a height saw that there was a stir and a gathering among the enemy, prepared to receive them; and when they came on he placed himself in the trench,

and by his presence inspired such confidence in the Tuffenkchis, who unawed by the dense body of invaders remained firm, firing their matchlock guns with so much steadiness, that no horseman was rash enough to advance the lengths to which his commander wished to impel him. And when at length the infantry came to the aid of Shir Khan, nothing was produced save a continued and ineffective discharge of musketry.

At length the near approach of the Shah in person was announced. Troops, cavalry, and infantry poured in in every direction, and all the pomp and circumstance of war became manifest. Shir Khan lost no time in presenting himself to the monarch, and met him when he was still on the road. He dismounted, and stood by the road side; when, the King being near, he approached and kissed his stirrup; whilst in anxiety to learn how matters stood, the impatient Shah curbed his steed and spoke thus—"Has nothing been done? Are the dogs' fathers still there?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said Shir Khan,

your slave has attacked them both with cavalry and infantry; and, *mashallah!* Gholams and Tuffenchis have done what lions would not dare to do, your slave heading them; but the destiny which supports the ass supports them. They will not go."

"Increase the troops, and let a general *yurish*, a charge, be made. We will also go, by the grace of Allah! and let us see whose destiny will prevail."

Immediate orders were issued accordingly; and every cavalier present, aided by every Tuffenkchi, were called upon to add to the assembled mass.

In the meanwhile, Zohrab had not been inactive, and calling the Blind Lion to him said, "By the blood of the Guklan, and by the beard of Zaul Khan, let every man who has a heart be in readiness. There is nothing like a first impression. Should we beat off the Shah and his troops, we may hold our heads up for the rest of the campaign; and my father, my home, and my country may be inspired with confidence; let us be firm of heart, and Allah be with us! Upon this they made the

best disposal of their forces they were able, stationed small bodies where it was likely the enemy might attempt to take the defile from above, and then threw themselves into the foremost trench, to direct and animate the troops in the first onset.

The rush that ensued from the Persians was awful, and in every way calculated to appal a passive enemy. The yells of *ya Allah* and *ya Ali*,* which issued from every mouth as the mass advanced, rang in the air, and resounded in repeated echoes through the close and intricate windings of the defile, which might have made those who were strangers to the place suppose that the enemy were already within its sides. But protected by the mounds of the trench, the usual tenacity of orientals fighting behind fortifications did not desert the Asterabadis and Turcomans on this occasion. They directed their fire with a cool and uner-

* It is suggested, whether the word *yell* may not have its origin in the mussulman war cry—*ya allah*, or *y' Allah*.

ring aim—many Persians fell—others who had received an impulse too great to be immediately checked, were borne forward with violence to the very foot of the trench, or even carried over it, and taken prisoners; but the result was a total failure; the mass turned about and fled; whilst a brisk fire hastened their steps. No efforts, even those of the Shah, who had thrown himself amongst them, could rally them. His quick eye saw that it would be useless to renew the attack with his present force, and that artillery alone could dislodge the enemy. Accordingly he dispatched a messenger with peremptory orders to the commander of the guns, to advance without loss of time, and if he found impediments of road, to enforce a *levée en masse* of the peasantry, in order that the guns might be conveyed without intermission of day or night on men's backs.

This was effected, and the three pieces of artillery, to the delight of the army, were shortly after heard rolling over the unpractised roads. The sounds were heard by Zohrab also, whose

vigilance was like that of the hawk perched on a rock of observation, and they were sounds which told him that further resistance was vain. He knew the moral effect which even the neighbourhood of such like instruments of war would produce upon his troops; and that they would not oppose for a moment the *Atesh Khané*, the fire house of the Shah, esteeming it a monster even more destructive than the *Divi Sefid*, the White Devil, that fabulous monster of their woods. Accordingly, he determined to withdraw his troops during the night, being persuaded that the consequences of a retreat in good order were less disastrous than those of a defeat, and its consequent disorder. With every precaution he effected his object in so quiet a manner that no one in the enemy's quarters had the least suspicion of the movement. He moreover lighted fires, and stuck a few caps on such parts of the trench which might meet the eye of the enemy, by which means he lulled every suspicion of his retreat.

The placing of these deceptive caps was a

source of great amusement to the old Turcoman chief, the Blind Lion; for he was aware that Shir Khan, his former *mehmander*, commanded the advance, and being accustomed to connect ridicule with his image, so entirely had his effeminate finery and affected manners been despised by himself and his countrymen, that he hoped to see him duped by this trick. And he was not deceived, for still desirous of exhibiting his prowess before the whole army, the arrogant Persian gained permission of the Shah to make one more essay to take the trench by storm, in order that the cannon should not have the sole merit of success.

Daylight had dawned—the sun was preparing to rise—the caps were seen—the whole of the army were made aware of the feat about to be performed, and the Shah was mounted to encourage the enterprise by his presence. Shir Khan, at the head of five hundred picked Gholams, was early in the field. With his eyes directed towards the deserted trenches, and apostrophizing the unconscious caps, he said,

"Now we will see, ye men with burnt fathers! before whom ye stand; Shir Khan, after all, is something in the world." Upon which, sword in hand, he impelled his horse forward, followed by his troops; and hoping, from the early hour of the day, that the enemy was not prepared for their reception, he charged with impetuosity to the very foot of the mound, when meeting with no resistance, he and his men continued their mad career over it, and at that identical moment the sun's first rays glancing upon the spot, to their rage and shame they found themselves opposed to about a dozen of empty caps.

The feelings of the Khan may perhaps be imagined from the character which we have endeavoured to give of him—he could scarcely look up for vexation. Had no vain boasting escaped from his mouth ere he undertook the attack, nothing would have been said; it was boldly intended, and boldly performed; but the result was highly relished by those who were envious of the favours conferred upon him by the Shah, and there was no end to the sarcasms

and taunts which rang through the army at his expense. "*Mashallah!*" said one, "he performed that feat bravely, not like other men!" "*Belli*, yes," said another, if his head has remained without a cap he has found plenty to pick and choose from." "After all," said the chief executioner, the most notorious coward in the army, "why does the Shah send such a *foozool*,* such a *chowrowchi*,† on his forlorn hopes, when he has such servants as I in his pay?"

The Shah himself was greatly amused at the result of Shir Khan's act of self devotion, and could not forbear chuckling and sneering over its result; but at the same time he was delighted at his own sagacity in calling up the artillery, which merely, by the fear they inspired, had cleared all obstacles, and opened the way of the defile to his army. He had too much tact to damp the ardour of one who was really brave by unnecessary taunts, yet still he could not resist saying, when he came before him to

* An over officious person. † A boaster. A talker overmuch.

give an account of his morning's operation, "*Mashallah*, Shir Khan, your face has been made white by a black cap."

"Let the king condescend to employ his slave again," said the Khan, "and, please Allah! he will lay plenty of such caps at the foot of the throne, with this difference, that they will have heads in them!"

"*Inshallah, inshallah!*" exclaimed the Shah, and orders were immediately given him to pursue the enemy with all haste, whilst the whole army made preparations to follow.

Zohrab, in withdrawing his troops from the defence of the defile, had come to the conclusion, that it would be impossible to make any stand against the king's army, either in the mountains or on the causeway, if the artillery were again brought forward to clear the way. The next stronghold would be found in passes through certain rocks, of such angular and precipitate forms, looking like trunks and chests, that the name of *Sandûk*, or trunk, was given to the whole mountain.

There was no other descent on this side, from the table land of Persia to the low countries of Mazanderan and Asterabad and the level of the Caspian, and both the armies, offensive and defensive, were obliged to adopt it, with this difference, that the latter had all the advantage of local knowledge, whilst the former was left entirely at the mercy of guides. The descent of the Sandûk was not confined to one pass alone, but to a succession, formed by rocks kept so slippery by the never ceasing fogs and rains of the forests, that it was difficult, even for practised mountaineers, to keep their footing. Their horses and mules, although slipping at every step, from long habit knew how to dispose of their feet in the treacherous rocks; but to strangers it became a service of danger, particularly to the spirited horses of Persia, and therefore the rider in his own defence was obliged to dismount and lead his horse. If such were the difficulties for man and beast, they were almost insuperable for artillery; and it was in the contemplation of those difficulties

that Zohrab determined to seize a fitting opportunity, when the guns would be embarrassed in one of the most dangerous passes, to make a desperate effort to effect their destruction. He therefore proposed a scheme to his companion the Blind Lion, to dispose of their troops in ambush, allow the main body of the Shah's troops to pass, then to await the arrival of the artillery, which generally followed in the rear. and at a concerted signal to rush forth and destroy them. The old Turcoman was delighted at the sagacity of his young commander, and as this sort of hide and seek warfare was the mode of fighting to which he and his men were most accustomed, it met with his fullest approbation. At the same time they determined to leave sufficient men in the defiles by way of blinds, in order to exhibit occasional resistance and retreat. Upon this they took up a position in a secluded dell, where they caused their men to dismount, enjoining a strict silence, which they were in the habit of observing, whilst their steeds ready saddled were permitted to graze until the signal was given.

In due time, Shir Khan and his advance appeared and passed on, meeting with such well disguised resistance as to call forth his bravery, and such well conducted retreats as to keep up in freshness and vigour all the luxuriance of his vanity. "Did not I say," he would frequently repeat to his officers in attendance, "that the name of Shir Khan is after all something in Asterabad, and that there is no mother-defiled dog among them who will dare to stop his way. Sandûk, Sandûk! indeed. They talk of their Sandûk mountain as if it were like the Talisman Hill near Kom, which no one can pass with impunity. *Bah, bah,* Shir Khan laughs at the beard of all the fathers of talismans! He goes over mountains, not like other men; he has his own mode of going over mountains!" This was said as his horse and those of his followers were floundering over the rocks, whilst occasional shots from the Asterabad fusileers would stop their career, and blanch their cheeks with apprehension. He was delighted to find himself supported by the main body of the

army, which followed in one long disjointed file, which Zohrab hoped he might be able effectually to stop, at a still distant pass, even after the destruction of the guns.

With intense anxiety did our hero keep post upon an overhanging rock, where, though unseen himself, he could distinctly see all that passed, his principal attendant being the young and faithful Ali, who followed his steps with all the watchfulness of a spaniel. Every officer, almost every man in the king's army were known to them in person, and according to the post which they held in the line, they could form some pretty accurate conclusion how much of the army had actually filed off, and how long an interval might still elapse ere the moment for action would arrive. Their personal feelings were strongly excited, as they saw those appear who awoke in their breasts sentiments either of affection or disapprobation. They had seen the chief executioner go by, and then indeed a thousand recollections arose which gave Zohrab many a bitter pang, and which caused Ali

to look up into his master's face and grasp his gun, as if he would say, "Shall I repay him by a shot, for his atrocious conduct to you?" He saw no responsive look, and therefore remained quiet; but shortly after, when the Shah in person appeared, whose quick and suspicious eye peering through every crevice, inspecting every tree, and examining every angle, lest it might conceal a hidden enemy; whose malignant countenance apparently established into inflexibility, preparatory to the vengeance which he was about to take upon the city and people of his abhorrence, the animated youth at this sight could no longer refrain from eagerly exclaiming: "There he is—shall I kill him?" at the same time suiting the action to the word, and levelling his musket at his victim. "Hold," cried Zohrab, equally strongly excited by the temptation, "be quiet, his time is not yet come. Allah forgive him — let us not be murderers—let him pass, Ali—down, down,—or he sees us."

The moment of vengeance elapsed, and one

of serious meditation succeeded. Zohrab was lost in a thousand reflections upon the sight of the being whose life he had just spared. His own persecutor, the murderer of his Amima, the invader of his country, the announced murderer of himself, his father, mother, and family; the proclaimed shedder of the blood of thousands of innocent people. All this had gone by, and he had refrained from taking vengeance into his own hand. The Mussulman youth felt that such destinies were to be wielded by the hand of an allwise Providence, and not placed at the disposal of a weak and erring mortal such as himself. His thoughts took another direction, when he saw the iniquitous Humpback appear, with whom he would willingly have conferred, in futherance of future plans for the protection of his country; but he was more afraid of his searching and suspicious eye than that of any other individual in the army, and therefore effectually screened himself and his attendant by the projection of the rock.

The army had now disappeared, and not long after succeeded indications of the approach of the artillery, by the arrival of bodies of peasantry to prepare the road. No labour however, but that of thousands, and that for a long continuance, could overcome such rocks as those which intersected their paths, and therefore the ponderous instruments could only proceed by the united efforts of the peasants who carried them, and if so, their destruction was certain. At length the moment arrived. Zohrab's heart beat audibly as the sounds of the approaching artillery caught his ear. "Ali," said he, "steal through the grass, seek out the Blind Lion, tell him to prepare his men, let them come on with every possible precaution to yonder thicket, the shouting of the peasantry will drown our noise; and when he hears me fire, let him advance and lay on, in the name of the Prophet!"

This was no sooner said than done. Zohrab had secured a band of fusileers, with their matchlocks in readiness, and these he called

to him. When the guns were in sight, and the peasants who bore them were tottering under the burthen, slipping over the wet rocks, and not very well protected by armed men, he ordered a discharge to be fired over their heads. The suddenness of the attack took them so exceedingly by surprise, that unanimously they let their burthens drop, and without once looking behind they gave way to their fears and fled. Immediately Zohrab and his matchlock men, followed up the Blind Lion and his cavalry, fell upon the Persian officers in charge of the artillery, and put them to flight.

They then immediately proceeded to spike the guns, a work of no great difficulty; and kindling a fire, they soon had the satisfaction of seeing the carriages, and the accompanying tumbrils, on fire, whilst tremendous explosions of gunpowder rang through the woods, and announced the catastrophe but too soon and too intelligibly to the ears of the deceived and indignant Shah.

No scheme ever so entirely succeeded. The

destruction of those engines, which must inevitably have caused the destruction of his city, and with it of his home and family, infused a joy into the heart of the gallant and sagacious Zohrab, which amply made up for the anxieties he had endured.

There was a descent distinct from the Sandûk pass, but so singularly intricate and difficult, that none of the natives, excepting upon urgent occasions, undertook to go through it. To this, Zohrab directed his troops, determining to hasten onwards, in order to head the Shah's army, and impede its further progress.

When the king heard the explosions of the tumbrils, the truth of what had taken place immediately flashed across his mind. First one explosion was heard, then a second, then a third. The whole army seemed paralysed by the noise, which reverberated through the woods in prolonged echoes, and made the disaster appear doubly terrible. Impressed with the extraordinary powers of Zaul Khan, they conceived that he had set to work some in-

fernal agency, and that the fabulous beings with which vulgar report had peopled the forests, were already beginning the work of destruction. Too soon, however, was the truth confirmed, by the report of a horseman who had escaped from the disaster. The account which he gave of the attack, and the destruction which ensued, made his hearers believe that it was effected by supernatural beings, who of a sudden appeared and in profound silence seemed to be animated with one spirit, knowing what steps to pursue, as if spiking guns, burning gun-carriages, and blowing up tumbrils, were their daily occupation; and who, after they had completed the mischief, disappeared as if by magic.

The Shah's anger was entirely roused by this blow; the more so as he felt that he had not taken those precautions for the safety of his artillery, which his knowledge of the country he had to pass through, and of the people he had to contend with, ought to have suggested. He would have wreaked his vengeance upon their

commander, but he was reckoned amongst the slain, having fallen bravely in defending his trust. He suspected that so well concerted a plan of surprise could not have been conducted without some treachery among his own officers; he became distrustful of every one—symptoms of his dangerous and uncontrollable passion were apparent—and those who knew him well, began to fear that the most disastrous and tragic fate awaited Asterabad and its inhabitants.

But far from being dispirited, his determination only rose with the defeat. He immediately despatched orders to Tehran, to forward more guns and a reinforcement of troops—he sent a summons to the city to surrender before his approach, or else the general massacre so often threatened would be enforced.

He succeeded in gaining possession of the mountain passes, to the level of the flat country, by pushing forward a succession of troops; and as there was no defile of sufficient strength to impede the march of the army,

the utmost which Zohrab could do was to harass its progress by every means of annoyance in his power. The Shah himself took up a position upon an overhanging ledge of rock, situated at some distance upon the declivity of the mountain, which commanded a magnificent and extensive view, giving him at one glance the extent of the conquest which it was his object to achieve. The dense forest scenery of the mountain was darkly shaded by a constantly clouded atmosphere; and as heavy outlines of the larger trees receded from him, they gradually subsided into one compact mass of foliage, only broken here and there by the elevation of some giant tree of the forest above the rest. At a great distance, just perceptible, could be traced the cupolas of Asterabad; beyond, in the indentations of the low coast, might be defined its small harbour, whilst the broad sheet of the Caspian sea, bounded by a line of horizon as unvaried as the ocean, presented the same image of sublimity to the eye. Far to the

eastward, the immense plains of Kipchak blended their evanescent tints with the sky, and untenanted by cities and fixed habitations, spoke to the imagination of those wandering and pastoral tribes which, like the patriarchs of old, lived upon their flocks and herds, and in whose simple manners might be learnt all that philosophy could teach of the primitive destiny of man. These were the Turcoman tribes, who were divided and sub-divided into small communities without number, and which extended themselves far to the confines of Tartary.

The contemplation of such scenes would perhaps have softened the heart of any mortal but the Shah; but he could think of nothing save what was suggested to his mind by his own vile passions. Instead of reflecting how greatly he might be the benefactor of his fellow-creatures, he could only devise schemes for promoting their misery or destruction. Like the sanguinary condor, who, from some rocky eminence, is ever on the watch for prey, glancing his animate and ferocious eye in search of a

victim—his powerful talons longing to tear—his beak to destroy:—so sat this bloody Shah—thirsting for blood—and only thinking the time too short ere he counted the slain that would be placed before him, as he sat at his sanguinary feast before the devoted Asterabad.

CHAPTER VI.

A despot, though he will slay his hundreds unjustly, will sometimes by mistake strike in the right place.

CONVERSATION WITH A TURK.

ZOHRAB's efforts to restrain the king's army from descending into the plain were fruitless; and he now saw that, without having recourse to some new stratagem, it would be in vain to give any check of consequence to their career. There was one spot in the jungle, only known to himself and his Turcoman companions in arms, so intricate in its ways, so surrounded by the thickest and almost impenetrable masses of vegetation, that when once within it, it became difficult to leave it; and he conceived the project of drawing the whole army within its mazes, and then attacking it at all points. To effect this, he

determined to have recourse again to the agency of the Humpback; he knew the resources of that man's invention, how plausibly he could show why the army should march one way in preference to another, and how easy it might be for him, possessing a constant avenue to the king's ear, to shape his decisions to his views, without himself appearing to be their promoter. Accordingly Zohrab lost no time in writing the proper letter, opening to the avaricious mind of the traitor, such views of future wealth, as well as whetting his appetite for it by a present taste, that he hoped some advantage might be reaped, although he did not allow himself to be too sanguine in his expectations, or his prudence to be set asleep by too eager an anticipation of success. Again he entrusted this mission to the faithful Ali, who accepted it with joy; for his judgment having acquired much solidity during the recent scenes in which he had been engaged, and directed as it had been by the master-mind of his chief, he felt sufficient confidence in himself, that he could perform his task

with success. Accordingly, he divested himself of the dress of a soldier, and adopted the simple costume of an Asterabadi woodsman, which consists of little more than a shirt and pair of drawers and a cap, besides the small hatchet which is inserted in his girdle. This dress, in the warm, close, and sluggish atmosphere of the borders of the Caspian, is enough for the wants of the common people, whose wan and anguish looks, speak at once the constant war they have to wage against climate.

He quttted his master, in the full hope of soon returning to him as successfully as he did from his first mission, and having carefully secured the letter within the folds of his cap, he dived into the forest, taking his direction towards the station occupied by the Shah. As he approached it, he heard the hum of his troops among the trees, the neighing of their horses, and the constant wranglings that are inseparable with any congregation of Persians. He approached them with caution; he prowled about, in order to discover how he could most easily approach the immediate resting place of the Shah, because

there he would be certain to find the humpback, and accordingly he determined to ascend higher on the mountain than the royal position, and having made his survey to act accordingly. He had acquired all the activity and sure-footedness of a mountain goat, from practice both in his earlier days as a hawksman's son, and in his later, as an Asterabadi woodman, therefore it did not require much effort to clamber over the rocky points, and to perch himself on some elevated spot, where he might observe what was going on below. Not far distant from the main position of the Shah, marked by his crimson travelling pavilion, he discovered a small white tent secluded among a thick mass of trees, which he supposed might belong to the Humpback, and thither he determined to direct his steps. With all proper caution, he picked his way through the wood, and little by little had approached sufficiently near to discern who its inhabitants might be. He waited for a considerable time, still no one appeared. There was a *meshek*, or water sack

suspended on its tripod, and some cooking utensils; at length at a short distance, on a projecting rock, though not much higher than the trees, he discovered, not the Humpback, nor a sentinel on guard, but a woman in a dark and unconspicuous veil.

The day was drawing to a close; Ali was perplexed what to do; he felt inclined to address the woman, who would inform him where the humpback was to be found, still he had misgivings that in so doing he might fall into difficulty; for women he knew were creatures of impulse, and a cry of alarm from a female voice, he knew might make itself heard from afar, and he might be seized. However, all things considered, he determined to approach her, whoever she might be, and endeavour to interest her in his behalf. This he did not venture to do at once and by surprise, but when within hearing distance, he began to exercise his axe upon the root of a tree, a habit natural to a Mazanderan peasant, and at the same time sang an air common to the Persians. These sounds at-

tracted the woman's attention, who turning towards him, in a tone of encouragement, asked him who he was, and whence he came?

Ali, pleased with his success, answered, "I am a poor lad, sent by a sick mother to seek a doctor. As ye be a true believer, tell me, where lives a certain *Goozoo*, who is said to perform marvellous cures?"

Zulma, for she it was, having approached the youth, with that quickness of apprehension for which she was famous, at first glance discovered that it was Ali himself, and without betraying the smallest emotion, the true object of his coming at once revealed itself to her mind. She did not allow him to perceive that she disbelieved his story. On the contrary, she encouraged him to think that she espoused his interests, and with dexterity led him on to give her his confidence, enchanting him by the softness of her voice, and the fascination of her manner. His youthful blood was in a ferment at a reception so flattering from one so charming, for although she studiously avoided

shewing her face, yet she so advantageously put forth all her arts, that she had secured his admiration before he knew whether he stood upon heaven or earth. Gradually she drew him from the rock, towards her tent; he willingly followed, still adhering to his first story of a sick mother. When they had reached it, he found another woman within the tent; a maiden whom Zulma had brought with her as her servant and guide.

"By your soul now," said she to Ali, "describe the ailments of your mother; for we, by the blessing of Allah, are skilled in medicine, and perhaps may stand in lieu of the *Goozoo*."

"As I am your slave," said the youth, "we also have women practitioners in our village, and my mother too knows much of simples, but it is not that we want; it is the skill of man, and of this man, who is said to be equal to *Galenus* himself."

"In truth," said Zulma, "he is all that and a great deal more. Although his back be

crooked, he has the straightest head of any man in Irân, and, as you have probably heard, can tell you what your mother requires, as well from this mountain, as if he were by her bedside; but I am his scholar; he has taught me his art, and when you speak to me, you speak to him. What do you want more?"

"I should want nothing more," said Ali, "if it depended upon your slave, and a talisman written by your hand would not only cure his body, but make his soul touch the skies; but, (he speaks with respect,) he fears that his mother the woman would not be so satisfied."

Zulma finding him too wary to be driven out of his story, burnt with curiosity to know what could be the object of his errand, certain in her mind that he was despatched by Zohrab. She determined to ascertain this, even should she be obliged to use force, denounce him to the Shah, and extract from him the object of his visit.

Then turning to Ali, she said, "It will be difficult to find the Goozoo, and should you go

among the troops you will be seized and ill-treated. Stay here, and I will send for him. Upon which she whispered a few words to her maid, who, wrapping herself up in her veil, left the tent, whilst Zulma continued to throw the net of her fascination over him. She led him on to talk of Asterabad, and he had begun to give some account of their mutual idol Zohrab, when three ferashes, the strongest and most powerful of their kind, rushed in and seized upon the unsuspecting Ali. To throw him down, to tie his hands behind his back, and to secure his person, was but the business of a few seconds; and when this was done Zulma said to him, with the same kind manner—"And so, Ali, your mother is sick, and you want a talisman. Boy, you may have deceived us once, but do not hope it a second time. Now tell me, what is your business with the Humpback? Speak the truth, and not a hair of your head shall be touched! Delay but for an instant, and you die!"

The perplexed youth was not sufficiently

well versed in the arts of deceit to have a story ready prepared for this exigency, and his presence of mind having forsaken him, he became lost in apprehension, and could think of nothing but of the anxieties which his master would feel. This was his first failure, and he felt it like a boy—he gave way to tears and despondency. But, notwithstanding this, the delivering up of the letter was the last of his thoughts, and he stoutly denied the possession of any such document. Zulma, however, was neither to be deceived by his words, nor softened by his lamentations. She ordered the ferashes to search their prisoner's person, and sure enough in the folds of his cap (a well-known hiding place in every Persian's person), they found Zohrab's letter. Ali, but for his bonds, would have seized upon and torn it into a thousand pieces, but Zulma's eagerness to gain possession of it, told him how hopeless would be his entreaties that it might be restored to him. She immediately opened and read it. One skilful in physiognomy ought

to have been there, to watch the workings of her features as she perused the interesting paper—to have witnessed her abhorrence at the treachery of the Humpback—her malignant joy at having him now so completely in her power—and her determination to give the reins to her feelings of revenge against him.

"*Mashallah!*" said she, in sarcastic exultation, "a wonderful good servant has the Shah in this imp without a saint. Thanks to him and thy master, young man! the Shah and his empire might be lost through their treachery. Let us go, in the name of Allah! before the Shah let us go—a moment's delay were sin. Bring forward your prisoner," said the energetic maiden to the ferashes, "I myself will go, happen what will. Better that one suffer than thousands should be in jeopardy." Upon this, covering herself with her veil, the importance of her errand surmounting all prejudices, she hastened onward with great resolution of manner and dignity of demeanour, followed by Ali and the ferashes.

The assembled camp were surprised at seeing a woman, considering how strict had been the orders against the appearance of females. Zulma had taken such precautions in the performance of her journeys, travelling at night, and hiding herself quite in the skirts of the encampments during the day, that none but her father, the Humpback, and a few others knew of her being in the camp. But now the urgency of the case impelled her forward; with her natural impetuosity, and her desire of acting differently from her sex in general, she bade defiance to reproach, and with a determined step made her way good to where the Shah himself was seated in person.

The sun was on the point of setting—the Shah was about to make his evening devotions, and a solemn silence reigned in the neighbourhood of his pavilion, when his ears caught the sounds of conflicting voices; among which, to his surprise, he thought he heard a woman's. He listened again, and still the same sounds struck his ear; but his doubts were soon satisfied, by perceiving a female rush forward, re-

sisting those of the attending officers who wished to stop her, and making straight to the Shah.

"What does this mean?" he roared out with a voice of thunder. "What means this woman?"

"As I am your slave," exclaimed Zulma, excited to the utmost by the step she had just taken, "I have a petition to the king of kings."

The attendants would have dragged her off; but the Shah, struck by her manner and appearance, and altogether by the singularity of the circumstance, ordered them to desist, and said, "Woman, do you know that it is death for you to be found here."

"As I am your sacrifice, of that your slave is aware," said the undaunted maiden. "Kill me, but first hear. The Shah's life is in danger."

"How?" said the king, in utter surprise.

"Yes, yes," said Zulma: "may Allah destroy me if I lie! Here, here is a letter which will explain all."

The Shah held out his hand to receive it,

upon which hastening forward she delivered it, although against every etiquette, and then kissed his knee and the hem of his garment.

These actions were not displeasing to the Shah, for when she approached him she artfully dropped her veil, and in so doing had exhibited to his view those beaming and animated charms for which she was so celebrated. He was too much interested, however, in the contents of the letter, to think for the moment upon any thing else, and when he had read it the fire of rage and astonishment broke out upon his expressive features.

"Who and what are you, O woman?" said the king, "that you bring me this letter. Who is it from? Who is it to? Explain—my head goes round with perplexity."

Zulma having had time to collect her thoughts, and from the absence of danger to herself to take courage, thus spoke, "Your humble slave is Zulma, the daughter of Zerb Ali, your Majesty's chief executioner."

"Is it so indeed?" said the Shah; "you are that Zulma!"

"As I am your sacrifice, your slave is less than the least, and although the royal commands were issued for no women to follow the camp, yet what can your slave say? She is not like other women, she felt that she might be useful in attending the sick; and she came; she felt, if the humpback went, she might—"

"There is no harm done, Zulma," said the Shah, softened; "but what of the letter?"

"Let the Shah give ear to his slave, and he will know all. Whatever she asserts, she will prove; she trusts to her own veracity, and to the justice of the king of kings, and requires nothing more to be believed. She swears neither by the Shah's head, nor by her father's soul, for all she has to say is the truth."

"Speak on," said the king.

Your slave was at Firouzabad. Destiny had ordained one day, as she sat in the humpback's tent, that a youth with cautious step opened the door, whom she recognized to be Ali, a youth, servant to the hostage Zohrab Khan, both of whom your slave had frequently seen

in her father's house. Your slave immediately retired, but surprised at the appearance of this youth she lent an attentive ear to what passed. He said that he came from Asterabad, and that he had a letter for the Humpback: which he delivered and departed. The humpback and your slave are friends, and our thoughts are in common; your slave requested to know the contents of the letter: he refused. Your slave insisted again and again, and as often did he refuse; and whatever she might think of his conduct it remained a complete mystery to her until this very hour. She has now discovered all. The same youth Ali, by the blessing of Allah, has fallen into her hands. He refused to speak his errand, by force she seized the letter from him; Allah, Allah! can the king of kings doubt to whom the letter is addressed! Heaven preserve the Shah! Thanks to Allah, that your humble slave, who is the least of the less, should have been favored by *takdeer* in discovering this treachery."

Ali, between his two guardians, stood at a

small distance, the picture of woe, but still with sufficient self-possession to take a good survey of the scene before him, and to ascertain the chances in favour of his escape. His arms were pinioned behind his back, but his legs were free.

The Shah sat for some time wrapt in thought. At length he exclaimed, "Bring hither the youth, and send for the Humpback!" and looking upward to the summit of an enormous pine tree, which had been struck by lightning, he said, "and bid one of the executioner's gang be in readiness at hand with a rope." An awful fear ran through the bystanders as they heard these words, strongly enhanced by the wildness of the scenery around them. There sat the king, coiled up as it were in the folds of his power, like the dragon of the wilderness spreading terror around; above him reared the towering stem of the pine, scathed and blackened, overtopping all the trees of the forest, stretching out its burnt and withered branches in stiff and rigid outlines,

and presenting no bad emblem of the withered person of the Shah himself.

"And who are you," said the Shah to Ali: "what business have you here?"

"I am the son of the Shah's late chief huntsman," said the youth with confidence.

"*Ahi!*" said the Shah, apparently having heard enough from him, to wish for more information. "Let him stand back," said the king, in slow words, as if he had received an unexpected blow, still looking at the lad with a mixed expression of regret and anger. "And you, Zulma Begum," added he, "stand away also; we will speak to you afterwards. Where is the Humpback?" he roared out with a voice full of dangerous import.

He had not waited long ere the culprit appeared, making prostrations with his wonted ease, but rather perplexed at the suddenness of the call, and much more surprised at seeing the number of people collected at so unusual an hour.

"Stand forth!" said the Shah.

These words, uttered with a solemn voice, made the traitor's heart sink within him: and as he stood alone, and disengaged from the rest of the crowd, he made his lowest inclination.

"Hear the words of the king: listen to his question, and answer as you hope for salvation. There was once a dog; a dog, mangy, ill-savoured, and of broken fortunes; the refuse of its species; despised by men, avoided by other beasts; one man only in the world felt compassion for its sufferings; he took it in, fed it, cherished it, placed every confidence in it; made it the guardian of his house, and the companion of his hours. Long did this go on, disinterested kindness on the one hand, apparent undeviating fidelity on the other; when one day, for a piece of dainty meat, not a bit more dainty than what it got at home, did the ungrateful beast betray his benefactor's trust. What ought to be done to such a beast? speak, O man! speak."

The Humpback's fears were excited to such a degree that he could scarcely utter; he looked

with a supplicating face around, to see if he could discover a friendly countenance — the whole scene was that of ominous despair.

"Speak!" said the Shah in a voice of thunder.

"As I am your sacrifice," said the wretched man, "your slave knows nothing. He has fallen from the clouds. Whatever the Shah ordains is right."

"Art thou that dog," said the Shah; "speak, yes or no?"

"What does your slave know? He is less than a dog, or even the meanest reptile that crawls, before the face of the asylum of the universe; but, as Allah is in Heaven, as Mahomed the blessed is his prophet, and as Mohamed Shah is the shadow of God upon earth, your slave has done nought, save to pray daily for the happiness and prosperity of the sovereign of Irân."

"So is it?" said the Shah, with a most incredulous face.

"As I am less than the least, it is," answered the Humpback, stroking his beard and

face down into as open an expression as possible.

"What does this mean," said the Shah, holding the letter out to him?

The Humpback looked at it with astonishment, and having read it, delivered it back to the Shah, saying, "as I am your slave, its contents are totally unknown to me."

"But," said the Shah, "it begins by allusions to the affair of the guns—knowest thou aught of that? There is treachery in that."

"What guns! what treachery!" exclaimed the Humpback, with the greatest affectation of innocence. "Your slave knows nothing—kill him, take off his head; but he is as ignorant of this matter as the child unborn."

Just at this moment Zulma, who had been intensely attentive to the whole scene, no longer able to restrain her impatience, broke through all propriety, and pushing through the crowd, stood before the king, exclaiming to the culprit! "Thou knowest nothing, sayest thou, liar! Who saw thee receive a letter at Firouzabad through the hands of Ali? Was it not I? And is it not Ali who has also brought this?"

Upon this the Shah ordered the youth to be brought forward, and to the barber's dismay, there he stood indeed an unwilling spectator of this strange scene.

Still the Humpback, who by this time had recovered the use of his senses, seeing no positive proof alleged against him, again stoutly denied being in any manner a party concerned in the letter. During this examination he appeared uneasy in his person; and against all etiquette, which enjoins a respectful position and a steady attitude, his hands were continually wandering towards that part of his dress where a small pocket is placed, and where secret papers are usually carried. This uneasiness became more conspicuous at seeing Ali, when the Shah, whose suspicions were easily roused, said to the ferashes, "Search him! whatever is found in his pockets bring to our presence."

Upon hearing this, the poor wretch broke out into a cold sweat, his knees knocked under him, and he could say nothing, but "*cheezi nist*,"

there is nothing. However, in the very pocket, where he had first deposited it, there was found among other papers the original note which he had received from Zohrab.

No sooner had the Shah read it, than without saying another word, and with an ominous fierceness of manner, he pointed upwards to the withered pine-tree, and straightway an executioner's officer was seen ascending with a rope to throw over its highest branch, whilst others seized with ruthless hand upon the condemned traitor.

One must have heard them to conceive the piercing cries that issued from that small body. As soon as he perceived the fate that awaited him, he gave utterance to the most heart-rending lamentations. He threw himself upon the ground before the Shah, in attitudes the most abject; he begged for life, as if it were sweeter to him than to any one else; he entreated Zulma, the ferashes, Ali, any one and every one around, to intercede for him; in short, so miserable a spectacle of human woe and human weakness

was scarcely ever seen. But all would not do. When every thing was ready, and the rope about his neck, at a signal from the king, the ill-fated man was drawn up with the rapidity of lightning to the highest branch, and there he swung to and fro, a future feast to the vultures, and an intended beacon to the enemy, warning him not to trust for the future to a traitor's interference.

The whole scene was full of awe, and as the blast swept through the forest glades, and agitated the tops of the highest trees, the withered branches of the pine tree creaked, and as it were moaned over the forsaken corpse which they bore. The uplifted faces of the assembled crowd, looking their last at the well-known form of the creature who not an hour before had been their dread; the stern figure of the King, and the silence which reigned, altogether produced a solemn and impressive effect.

The Shah then said, "Where is the youth Ali?" A feeling of commiseration arose in the breasts of the king's servants, at the fate which

was likely to await him, for he was known to them, and an universal favourite; but, to the astonishment and dismay of the two ferashes into whose charge he had been placed, on looking round, instead of a human creature as they expected, they only found a shirt. It seems that the intelligent youth had not for a moment forgotten his own situation during the interest produced by the execution of the humpback, and taking advantage of the fixed attention of his guardians, with great dexterity he unloosed the bandage which confined his wrists, slipped out of his shirt, and standing as they did on the brink of a precipice, he stole down it with the greatest caution, and plunging at once into the thick wood which surrounded them, he escaped, and at the moment unnoticed.

The Shah overlooked the negligence of the ferashes, for it had not been his intention to put the boy to death; but they escaped miraculously, and therefore received the congratulations of their friends. On any other occasion death must have been their fate; but in the

centre of the woods, suspicious of all, and fearful of too much raising a feeling of disgust in his attendants against himself, he for the present smothered his anger, and dismissed those who had assembled. But Zulma still stood before him.

CHAPTER VII.

Then all was well until a traitor came, when all went ill.

PERSIAN HISTORY, passim.

THE Shah, as we have before observed, was struck with the beauty of Zulma. Instead of taking offence at her disobedience of his commands, that circumstance alone, accompanied by the boldness and decision of conduct which she had just exhibited, placed a character before him which in his mind's eye he conceived never could exist amongst Persian women, and elevated her in his estimation. This probably would never have been the case, had he not ascertained that she was possessed of great beauty, that passport to the heart, and

which even in his breast engendered a kindly feeling towards her. Although he scarcely was ever known to change a determination once made, yet he liked to be governed in small things, and was pleased to have some one about him with whom he might relax his mind by light conversation. Amima had been to him a friend of so superior a character, that he vainly hoped again to possess one like her. Her image occasionally haunted him, and then pangs of remorse and horror would dart through his heart which made him a wretch indeed. Having lost her, he had thrown himself more than commonly into the hands of the Humpback, who was gradually acquiring a great influence over him, until the catastrophe which we have just related took place; and now, in the energetic and apparently open character of Zulma, he hoped to have discovered one who might fill the place of both. Therefore, after the dismissal of his attendants, he called her to him, and spoke thus: "Zulma!" he said, "the Shah is eminently pleased with your conduct this day. You have probably prevented the destruction of his army,

and eventually saved his life. He is thankful to you. Ask something of him, and he will grant it—by the head of the king he will grant it!"

Zulma was overjoyed to hear these words, for they were the forerunners of that eminence among women which in her scheme of ambition she had promised herself to attain. Accordingly she knelt down, and kissing the ground, whilst she again exposed her face to the king's gaze, she said, "Your slave is as the dust of the earth before the king of kings. What can she desire when she stands in his presence? What more can she desire than to be allowed to stand before him, and enjoy the protection of his shadow?"

"So be it," said the Shah, "let Zulma for the future walk with her head erect; let her sit on the musnud of honour; let her wear the jika and the kalaat of the king's approbation;" upon which, having dismissed her, he sent for her father, to whom he communicated his wishes, and ordered him to provide her such tents, servants, and equipages as were worthy of a royal banou.

Nothing could exceed the exultation of both

father and daughter at the extraordinary turn which had thus suddenly taken place in their fortunes, and it will be understood how rapidly the influence of the ardent and designing Zulma spread itself over the minds and actions of the Shah, by the quick operation of its first efforts. The dastardly executioner was too happy, as it may be imagined, to seize the opportunity of remaining behind in the rapid military operations about to take place, in order to superintend the formation of his daughter's establishment.

On the very next morning the army proceeded on its descent into the plain; for the Shah had received the welcome intelligence from the active Shir Khan, that he had secured every defile, and obtained full possession of the country to the commencement of the great causeway, which opened an easy avenue to the very gates of Asterabad. Accordingly, large bodies both of infantry and cavalry were seen making their way after the irregular manner of Asiatics, awakening the solitude of the woods by their shouts, and full

of renewed spirits at the hope of soon seeing an end of their fatigue by the possession of the city. In such immense tracts of woodland any deviation from the main body of the army was dangerous, inasmuch as Zohrab's troops infested its flanks, and with persevering activity and boldness did not lose an opportunity of seizing stragglers and making prisoners. Consequently the line of march was as well kept as if the steadiest discipline marshalled their ranks.

The Shah having reached the causeway, took up his station on an open spot in the forest, and called a meeting of his officers, in order to deliberate upon the most effectual mode of attacking the city. It was a question of considerable difficulty, considering its position. The jungle nearly enclosed it on every side, therefore, although troops might approach the walls almost unperceived, yet unless assisted by guns, such help could be of little avail; for to attempt to scale the walls without a breach, was a feat to which no Persian troops could be brought, and to make a breach was

itself unknown in the tactics of Persia. The gates were the principal objects of attack, and that of Tehran being the most easy of access on the causeway, it was upon that point that the Shah and his captains agreed to commence operations.

Shir Khan had returned from the advanced posts to wait upon the Shah, and he attended the council in addition to the general of the cavalry, to the commander of the *tuffenkchis* and guards, and the chief of the camel artillery. The Vizir was also present, as well as the chief executioner.

"You, who are acquainted with the fortifications of the Tehran gate," said the Shah to Shir Khan, "speak. Which will be the best mode of attacking it?"

"As I am your sacrifice," answered the Khan, the dogs' fathers have mounted a gun upon it: of that the king of kings must not lose sight, because, whatever such a man as I might do, with that gun staring me in the face of what use would my sword be?"

"The grave of the gun's father be defiled," said the king. "It fires once, and then the kizzilbash laughs at it. The gun is nothing. The hand to the sword, and then forward. When once we get to the first gate our numbers will force it down."

"By the head of the Shah," said Ismael Khan, "give your slave order to attack it forthwith with the Gholams, and my soul is your sacrifice if we don't get into the town at the first onset."

"What is cavalry compared to my *tuffenkchis*," said the commander of infantry; "first we clear the walls with our matchlocks, and then we make a *yurish;* and having destroyed the gates we enter. Then in the name of Allah, we will slay on, till the Shah cries stop."

"*Mashallah!*" said the old Zamburekchi bashi, "as I am an old servant and your sacrifice, are my *zambureks* nothing, that I am to be left with a finger in my mouth? The enemy have got one gun—*mashallah!* we have got a hun-

dred! My camels make our castle, and our guns fire as true as, praise be to God! the eye of the king of kings."

"After all," said the Vizir with solemn deliberation, having waited till all had spoken, "as I am your slave, every man's way may be good, but by the salt of the king let us see whether mine be not the best. The centre of the universe will see that his *takdeer*, destiny, will have the upper hand, and that without sword, without artillery, a certain *Skirazi* will come and invite him to walk into the city, in spite of every effort and every resistance which the rebels may make."

"*Inshallah, inshallah!*" was exclaimed by the Shah, and repeated by every one present, when the Vizir said, "The king knows best what is to be done, but let your slave suggest the necessity of first sending a summons to the rebels to surrender; perhaps, by the blessing of the prophet, wisdom may have entered their souls, and they may be crying Amān, Amān, longing to rub their foreheads in the dust, and to seize the king's skirt."

"Well spoken, by the king's head," exclaimed the Shah; "quickly let a summons be made. Let the *jarchi bashi*, the herald in chief, proceed to the city, and in the name of the king order it to surrender, or to stand the consequences. Shir Khan," addressing himself to that officer, "go you also—they know you—and make our resolves fully and clearly known to the rebels. Pardon, if they surrender; a general massacre if they resist."

"By my eyes," said Shir Khan, "by the condescension of the king of kings, they will at length know Shir Khan better than they do our Holy Prophet."

Upon this he departed, taking with him the herald accompanied by the brilliant cortege which attends that officer, and very soon after they were on their road to the Tehran gate of Asterabad. Leaving him for the present we return for a while to Zohrab.

Ail having made a successful escape from his guardians, crawled with difficulty through almost impenetrable masses of wood and thicket to escape the king's troops, and at length succeeded

in rejoining his master, who on the other hand had been waiting for him with the greatest anxiety.

The plight in which he appeared spoke his ill success, and Zohrab at once saw that there was nothing left for him but to make such a disposition of his troops as might best annoy the invading army, and then rejoin his father in the city. Having given proper directions to the Blind Lion, he speedily returned to Asterabad, accompanied by Ali. The meeting of the father and son bore the same character as their leave-taking; their energies were the same, their determination of resistance unchanged, and although they had not succeeded in impeding the advance of the Shah, still as he came unattended by artillery, their hopes of ultimate success were great.

Aware how near the invading army had approached, they were prepared at any moment for an attack. Zaul and his son had taken up their head quarters at the Tehran gate of the city, and had loaded the great gun to its very

muzzle, with a determination to discharge its contents into the centre of the first body of troops which appeared. They were about so to do, as soon as they perceived Shir Khan and the heralds approaching; but when it was ascertained that they were not a hostile body, they waited for their arrival. When Zaul once again saw Shir Khan, he could scarcely refrain from making merry at his expense, considering the different manners and the various characters in which he made his appearance at that very gate.

"*Mashallah!*" he exclaimed upon seeing him, "your place has long been empty. My eyes are enlightened at the sight of you. Old friends ought not to meet in this manner; but for this once Zaul Khan must shut the gates of hospitality, and refuse the hand of welcome."

Shir Khan, who in truth entertained some latent hope that he might be the means of averting the certain destruction which awaited Zaul, his family and city, called upon him in the most serious manner to reflect upon what he was about to decide. He said, "I am your

friend—*wallah billah*—this is no jest. You do not know what the Shah is; he is the father of all misfortune. Let me adjure you, by the soul of Zohrab Khan, to surrender yourself to the Shah's mercy! except in that, you have no hope. After all is he not king of Persia?"

Zaul would not allow himself to be influenced by Shir Khan's words, notwithstanding he was certain that there was truth in his professions of friendship, and that being in the main a man of good heart, and in this instance of fair intentions, he really wished him well. He reposed such confidence in the excellence of his cause, in the staunch support which he would receive from his friends and troops, and in the precautions which he had taken for the defence of his city, that to surrender was the last of his thoughts; and this determination he freely announced to the heralds. "Go," said he, "say we are ready to open our gates, provided we be secure of our independence; but short of that, we will resist until we have no strength left to wield a sword.

Shir Khan continued to exert himself for a long time in his endeavours to dissuade Zaul Khan and his son from their purpose, but unsuccessfully; when losing all patience he said to them, "God take you into his holy keeping. If blood there must be, let it be upon your heads. I wash my hands of it. All I could do, I have done." Upon that he and his party turned their horses' heads in the direction of the king's camp, feeling that the next communication which took place between them would be through the medium of the destructive engines of war.

As soon as they had delivered their message to the Shah, he ordered that the first attack should be made on the Tehran gate, so early in the morning that it would be difficult for the enemy to make any certain use of their piece of artillery. It was intended to be a simultaneous attack, of horse and foot; a party of men with axes were to cross the ditch, and attempt to batter down the gate, whilst infantry in small bodies disposed here and there, as the

ground and wood might protect them, were ordered to keep the walls clear by an incessant discharge of musketry. At the very moment that his decision had been made, a general alarm of an attack was heard in every part of the royal camp—the day was closing, and the noise and confusion which ensued exceeded all description. The indefatigable Zohrab had determined to make one desperate effort without the walls, ere he allowed himself to be enclosed within them, and having collected all the cavalry and infantry which he could muster, he threw himself unawares upon the enemy with the intention of making his way good to the Shah's tent, and seizing his person. Nothing was better planned and more gallantly executed; but with that precaution against surprise which always marked the Shah's generalship, he was on horseback upon the very first alarm, and heading his Gholams met the invaders with so determined a resistance, that with every effort of Zohrab's bravery and skill he was obliged to cede to numbers, and return whence he came.

The military operations of Asiatics must not be judged by the standard of Europeans: their attacks are desultory and furious upon the first onset, whilst their retreats are as rapid as the advance has been impetuous. The troops being without discipline, consequently no place is fixed for each individual; the soldier, unsupported by his neighbour, feels that he in his own person is as it were opposed to the whole body of the enemy, and that he must depend upon his own personal prowess for any result that may be produced. Consequently, it is frequently seen that most heroic feats of individual bravery are performed, whilst the army in the mass has behaved in every way disgracefully.

Zohrab retreated to the city, fully expecting the morning attack, and he was not mistaken. He and his father remained in a state of watchfulness upon the towers of the Tehran gate during the whole night, taking rest by turns, determined upon the first approach of the enemy to put the whole city upon the defensive. An hour before the dawn Zohrab's ear

was struck by sounds unusual to the silence of the woods; they consisted of an undefined rustling, like the first approaches of wind, and gradually as they became more distinct it was plain that the expected attack was at hand. Instantly every one was at his post, and ready to act upon the first signal. The moon had just set, and there was no appearance of the dawn, consequently darkness obscured the face of nature.

The advance of the Shah's army was now distinctly heard, though not seen; the awful and mingled sounds of men in array against their fellow-creatures produced that uncertainty as to the results of the contest which called forth every energy. Zaul Khan and his son, Mustafa, and the other chiefs, were collected in a body, Zaul himself holding the match of his trusty piece of artillery, ready to discharge it at the most fitting opportunity. At length part of the advance was seen, and by degrees a denser mass, accompanied by the clang of arms, and the shouts of chieftains showed how powerful

was the body of assailants. Judging by the conformation of the road they could not be far distant. The first streaks of morn began to illumine the east, and lightly gleamed over the body, bristling with spears and streaming penons.

At that moment Zaul stood forward, pointed the gun, and then invoking Allah and his prophet, with a steady hand and eye he advanced the match, and an explosion took place such as had not been heard in Asterabad by its oldest inhabitant. Its effects were instantaneous. Before the smoke had cleared away, the invading mass had almost entirely vanished, whilst the varied sounds which struck the ear might be assimilated to those which take place at the sinking of some great ship in the deep. Shouts of alarm, cries of pain, lamentations, all were mixed up with the reverberating echoes of the explosion in the woods, and produced as great feelings of joy in Asterabad as they did of dismay in the royal army. At this moment, Zohrab, mounted on his powerful steed, was

seen in the greatest activity collecting a chosen body of horsemen around him, himself conspicuous in the crowd. Beaming with animation, he ordered the gates to be thrown open, and placing himself at their head, he darted off at full speed in pursuit of the retreating army. The vigour of their pursuit greatly increased the rapidity of the Shah's flight, and for a moment it was thought that the defeat was conclusive, and had emancipated Asterabad of its enemy; but those who judged thus, little knew the man they had to deal with. The Shah had not, 'tis true, anticipated such a reverse—but he was not unprepared, and not at all disheartened. Having retreated to a sufficient distance to rally his troops, he came to a halt, in order to devise some more effectual measure for a future attack. A few days passed over ere his army had recovered their defeat, whilst hope and confidence animated the city. However, a circumstance took place which soon altered the face of things.

It was in the dead of night, when the Shah,

whose slumbers were usually disturbed, thought he heard men's voices close to his tent speaking in suppressed whispers. He immediately exclaimed, "Who is there! As you would live, speak!" A voice which he recognised to be the Vizir's, said, "As I am your sacrifice, it is your slave Hajji Ibrahim; let the Shah be tranquil, for his *takdeer* is at work in his service."

"What has happened?" said the Shah in a low voice, for he soon discovered how urgent secrecy was.

By the glimmer of a small lantern, whose dim flame scarcely threw light upon the objects around, appeared the Vizir, and with him a man dressed as a Mazanderan peasant, all torn and disfigured, indicating that he had forced his way through brake and bramble. His appearance bespoke the most abject of mortals, whilst in his features there was a smile of self-confidence, which said that he felt secure of meeting with a good reception.

"Who is this?" said the Shah, his gaunt

figure rising from under his Cashmere quilt, the dim light so indistinctly revealing the form of his figure, that he might, both in voice and aspect, have been taken for some corpse rising from the tomb.

"It is he of Shiraz," said the Vizir, "of whom your slave has already spoken. He brings us intelligence from the city, and offers to lead the Shah's troops to certain possession of it."

"How!" said the king, much delighted, whilst a flash of suspicion crossed his mind. "But is this a trick of that dog's son, Zaul, or are we to put trust in our good destiny?"

Upon this, Mirza Shireen Ali, for it was he, threw himself upon his knees before the king, and began to take a series of oaths, usual upon similar occasions, of his truth, his devotedness, and made liberal proffers of his head and life, in case he were found deceitful. "But," said he, "not a moment is to be lost. Order a strong detachment of your best troops to follow me, and I will lay down my life, if, ere to-morrow's dawn, they are not in full possession of the

Resht gate of the city." He then stated how he had succeeded, through the co-operation of certain of the priesthood, to insure a strong party for the Shah within the city, and that, at an appointed signal from without, the said gate would be opened, and a free entrance given to himself and followers.

Upon this the Shah immediately sent for his faithful Shir Khan, and confided to him the care of this expedition. In giving him his final orders, in a low tone of voice, he said, "I have one thing more to say; place that Shirazi with a burnt father between two decided fellows, and give them orders to cut him down, should you perceive the least sign of treachery; and now Allah be with you!"

The time was calculated when this detachment ought to reach its destination, and it was determined that a renewed attack should be made on the Tehran gate in order to create a diversion. Zaul and Zohrab, from excess of fatigue, had relaxed from their watchfulness, and, during the ensuing night, had

retired to rest, fully convinced that, owing to the recent defeat, it would be impossible for the Shah to get his troops sufficiently into order to renew his attack, at least for several days. They looked upon the Tehran gate so entirely as the point upon which the succeeding attacks would be directed, that although they had stationed a sufficient force at the other gates of the city, still they had not paid that attention to their security which they afterwards found they ought to have done.

The day had not yet dawned; stillness reigned throughout the city, and the slumbers of the commanders had not been yet disturbed, when one in the greatest haste was seen rushing towards the governor's head quarters, and pushing his way through every impediment, made his way good to where Zaul Khan was asleep. It was the old Osman, who has come to the reader's notice on several former occasions, and who now in the greatest fright awoke his chief with these words: "Oh, my Aga, my master, arise, arise! There is a movement at the Resht gate which your servant does not like. There

are troops coming from without, and there has been a struggle within. In the name of Allah! come quickly." Zaul was instantly on the alert. Zohrab was there too. Both were immediately on their road to the prescribed spot, followed by as many men as they could collect on the urgency of the moment; but ere they had proceeded one hundred yards through the city, they were met by soldiers running away in dismay, who asserted that the gate had been treacherously opened, and that the enemy were entering in full force. At that moment a cry was heard from the sentinels on the towers of the Tehran gate, that the enemy was approaching, and soon after, the report of the great gun was heard, a sound which spread terror and dismay through every breast. Zaul and his son were perplexed what course to pursue. In hasty consultation they agreed thus: "Be our rallying point the gate of the Ark or Citadel. I," said Zaul, "will return to the Tehran Gate; you, Zohrab, try to resist the enemy, should they really have made their entrance good; but if you fail retreat into the Ark."

Zaul found that the officer on the Tehran gate having, in the greatest alarm, without skill or coolness, fired the gun, its contents had been thrown away, without producing the least effect, and consequently the enemy had advanced to the very brink of the ditch, had crossed it, and were in the very act of battering down the gate. The brave chieftain at once found himself totally abandoned by his troops and officers, who by general consent were making the best of their way to the citadel. Thither the baffled Zaul also bent his way, despair in his breast, but resolute of purpose; and he had scarcely reached its entrance, ere he saw his son effecting a retreat before a mob of assailants, who appeared to have been joined by a great concourse of the townspeople. They met at the gate of their last stronghold, and their feelings in so doing were indeed of a nature which would have depressed bolder hearts than theirs.

"Zohrab, my child! my friend!" said the broken man, as he dashed a tear from his eye, "thy father survives not this day."

"Oh my father!" said the afflicted youth, "thy son will die with thee; but what becomes of my mother?"

"Go, Zohrab," said Zaul, with resolution in his accent, "go into the harem, prepare her for the worst, and take every precaution for securing her retreat through the wicket gate into the Turcoman country. Having done that, return unto me. Thy father will never see his house more: he dies here."

"Perhaps we may still receive succour from without," said Zohrab doubtingly; "the distant tribes of Turcomans are marching to our succour."

"Vain hope," said Zaul; "who will come to our help, when they know our castles are gone? No, Zohrab, we fight to-day, and to-day only? But this I command you, as your father, and listen to his last words—Throw not your life away; be ye your mother's protector; live for her. Swear this upon this sword, and upon the holy Kóran which binds my arm."

"I swear, if I live," said Zohrab, "never to

abandon her; but I will never abandon thee, O my father!"

The struggle that took place between these two noble-hearted men was worthy of the finest age of heroism. Already had shouts from the multitude attested the entrance of the Shah's troops, and the first sounds of the enemy's attack upon the gate of the Ark were beginning to be heard, when Zohrab hastened to put his father's orders into effect, and to prepare his mother for the miseries which were about to overwhelm them. He traversed the well-known course of his father's palace with an aching heart, and as he met some of the old domestics on his way, it almost burst with anguish at the fate which was awaiting them. He entered the harem with a look which was indeed portentous of the ill-fated message he was about to communicate. The horrid and tumultuous sounds which struck their ears, had warned its inmates that all was not right, and the moment they saw Zohrab their fears increased to a certainty. Without waiting for explanations, they raised loud cries and lamentations, whilst Zohrab's mother, rush-

ing into his arms, read in his woe-stricken countenance all he would disclose.

"Where is your father?" said she; "my son, tell me. Am I a widow? Oh Zohrab, tell me, tell me!"

"Heaven forbid, my mother!" said he, "he lives and is well; but our affairs have taken an unfortunate turn. Treachery has opened our gates to the enemy, and the Shah is at hand. You must be gone. You must away to the Turcomans, so says my father. Make instant preparations."

"How Zohrab, and without him? Never, never! We live or we die together."

"He will defend us to the last," said Zohrab, "and when all hope is gone, then we will make good our retreat through the secret gate. Delay not—make every preparation—take as little as you can with you, and be ready for flight at a moment's notice."

To this the sapient matron consented; but when her wishes were made known to the women slaves, and to Mariam, the distress that ensued was beyond her power of control. So

fearful was Zohrab of being softened by them, that leaving the harem in haste, he rushed back to his father, who by this time had ascended the summit of one of the towers which flanked the gate of the Ark, and accompanied by his most devoted followers, was taking a survey of the heart-rending scene before him, and contemplating, with a steady and determined mind, the fate that he saw would inevitably be his. The *maidan* or square was now entirely occupied by the king's troops under the command of Shir Khan; and although they had not lost time in making a demonstration to force the gates of the citadel, still it was evident they were only waiting the arrival of the Shah in person, before they put the finishing hand to their conquest. Already, however, the work of pillage and devastation had begun; every where the unresisting inhabitants were flying from before the furious soldiery, and cries of distress and misery were heard issuing from every quarter. Soon after a rush of brilliantly equipped cavaliers, the Gholamhai Shah, or royal body guard, so renowned in Persian courts, announced the

speedy arrival of the Shah, and he was seen slowly proceeding through the avenues of the city, with cautious and suspicious eye looking right and left, like the tiger surrounded by objects of prey, but uncertain upon which to make his first spring, A small tent had been hastily pitched for him, and carpets spread, and there he alighted amidst the shouts of sycophants and the greetings of servile mollahs. The anxious crowd opened in a half circle before him, his officers of state stood around, and like the suspended exhibitions on a theatre, it appeared as if the actors were only waiting his commands to begin again. At length, Shir Khan was seen dismounting from his horse to make his obeisance to the monarch, and pointing towards the gate of the Ark, was evidently asking the king's permission to commence the attack.

All this was passing under the immediate eye of Zaul, and every moment he was more convinced that Asterabad was lost to him and his family for ever, and that further resistance would be as useless as unavailing. But still he was resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible.

"My son," said Zaul, as he turned to Zohrab, "let me embrace thee once more — for this is our last meeting. Do not let thy father's corpse fall into the hands of his enemy—protect thy mother; and after the great Allah and his holy prophet—honour thyself."

Zohrab heard these words with the tenderness and devotion of a son, and with the dignity of a man and a hero. "We are in God's hands," he said, "to whatever he ordains, let us bend our heads in submission." Upon this they mutually drew their swords; and repeating the *bismillah* with the fervour and determination of martyrs, they gave each other a long and lingering embrace.

CHAPTER VIII.

——— "Then on my bending back
The welcome load of my dear father take."

DRYDEN'S VIRGIL.

AFTER the defeat of the royal army at the attack of the Tehran gate, the Shah had solemnly sworn on the Koran and by his own head, that he would deliver up the city for three successive days to the pillage of his troops; and that he would not be satisfied unless at the end of that time twenty mauns of human eyes were placed before him. Humanity shudders at this recital, but true it is that in Persia, now as in ancient times, the extraction of eyes was always a punishment resorted to when death was not inflicted. Noses and ears were also frequently commanded to be brought before the conqueror, upon sacking a city; eyes almost always. When he entered the city, this terrible mandate was spread abroad, and it may be ima-

gined that those who had been instrumental in opening the gate to his troops, now, but too late, perceived their mistake, and recollected with anguish the prophetic words of their magnanimous governor. The Shah's hatred of Zaul and his family had risen in proportion to the resistance which he had encountered. His haughty spirit could not look back upon what he had suffered—his mortification at Tehran, the loss of his guns, and more than all, the overthrow which he had so recently received—without feeling a thirst for vengeance, which nothing but their blood could assuage, and he determined never to sheathe his sword until dead or alive he had both father and son in his possession.

Plunder had commenced ere the Shah entered the city, but he did not give his final sanction to the ensuing violence until, as we have already related, he dismounted from his horse and seated himself in his tent. There, surrounded by his principal officers, by the traitor Mirza Shireen Ali, and the mollahs of the city, his face beaming with ferocious malignity, he pronounced the awful sentence of the

katl-i-aum, or general massacre, and to give it an appearance of lawful and religious severity, he caused a firman for that purpose to be issued, sanctioned by a *fetvah* of the *Mashtehed* of Persia. Moreover, by way of giving greater weight to his commands, or of more completely reviling his fallen foe, he commanded the Asterabad *Ullemah*, or priesthood, also to apply their seals of approbation to this document of mockery.

Then might be heard the uplifted voices of a whole city in malediction of the tyrant. The sounds of forcible entrance into houses, the cries of their inhabitants, the mother bereft of her children, children of their parents; all the accumulated horrors of a licentious soldiery, not only uncontrolled but ordained, were let loose upon the unoffending people, and scenes so horrible took place, that we willingly draw a veil over them, lest the feelings, as well as the incredulity of our readers should be excited.*

It was more immediately upon those who

* See the History of the siege of Kerman, in Malcolm's History of Persia, 8vo. vol. ii. p. 124.

had taken refuge in the citadel, where the very essence of his enemies would be, that the Shah was burning to let loose the myrmidons of his revenge. The advance of Shir Khan, at the head of his detachment, after he had entered the Resht gate, had been so rapid, that Zaul and Zohrab had found it impossible to break down the bridge which led into the Ark, and thus the ditch round the fort became useless as a defence. They had in vain attempted to dislodge those of their opponents, who had taken possession of both bridge and ditch, and it was evident that as soon as a decided and general attack could be made upon the gates, they must fall. The efforts which they made, by showering down missiles in order to clear the bridge preparatory to a sally, were remarked by the Shah, and he saw that no decided step could be taken to destroy the gate, until the towers and parapets above were cleared; accordingly, he ordered a detachment of his best Khorassan marksmen to ascend the roof of a mosque which commanded the tower, and thence to fire unceasingly upon those who occupied them.

Zaul's quick eye soon saw this movement, and he also posted some men to meet the Tuffenkchis by corresponding vollies, as soon as they should appear at their prescribed post. Standing near his son, they were conspicuous figures both from below and from the mosque. Although he was evidently acting under an impression of his approaching fate, his coolness and presence of mind never forsook him. With hand extended, he was on the point of ordering a discharge of musketry, when a ball, a ball as if impelled by destiny, struck him so palpably in the heart, that he fell into the arms of his son, closed his eyes from that moment, and never spake more. At this sight a sound of savage exultation was heard from the assembled assailants. The Shah himself saw it, and straightway calling for his horse mounted, and riding forward he roared out, "Now to the gates—down with them. A hundred tomauns for the head of Zaul, and five hundred for Zohrab alive." The effect was instantaneous. Every one rushed to the spot; the battery of the gates was renewed, and very soon

after their downfall was heard with an awful crash.

Zohrab had been abandoned by all save his faithful Ali, for no sooner had those in the Ark remarked how nigh was their destruction at hand, than all sought safety in flight, some in one direction and some in another. He seemed now to have acquired a supernatural vigour and strength. Shot fell thick around him; he heeded them not. He bent over the body of his father with reverential awe. He endeavoured at first to staunch the blood which fell from the wound, but when he saw how hopeless any attempt to restore life would be, he only thought upon his father's last injunctions not to let his body fall a prey to the enemy; and when the crash of the falling gates struck his ears, aided and followed by Ali, he caught his lifeless parent in his arms, and passing the body over his left shoulder, leaving his right hand free to wield his sword, he descended the turret stairs, and entered upon the court leading to the gates of the harem.

He had scarcely reached the end of the first court, when he heard a body of the assailants behind him. The headmost of the throng having caught sight of him tottering under his burthen, immediately a chase of life and death took place in pursuit of him. New life impelled the hard pressed youth, the spirit of his slaughtered father seemed to infuse itself within him, he ran with a swiftness more than human. Ali had preceded him to secure the opening of the harem gates. One among the assailants, more active than the rest, most excited by the hopes of securing the prescribed prize, was close upon him—a race, such as had never been seen between men, was running—cupidity on one side, filial love on the other; the audacious soldier was about seizing upon the almost exhausted Zohrab, when our hero suddenly stopped, turned, and ere his pursuer could recover himself, uplifting his unerring scimitar, he dealt him such a blow, that it cleft him in twain, and by this act materially stopped the progress of others, who were following upon the same track.

Zohrab then succeeded in entering, and immediately closed the gates of his present security upon the tide of rushing and ruthless foes.

Panting and faint from exhaustion, he carefully laid down his precious burthen—but what pen can describe the scene which followed. There was the body of the slain father extended on the ground, whilst the son, pale with fatigue, covered over with the blood of his parent, looked like another corpse—then came the distracted widow — the half-crazed mother, followed by the other women, who, upon seeing the body of their beloved master, uttered such screams, such heart-rending cries, that the assailants without suspended their violence, and respected the bitterness of the woe which struck their ears from within.

However, much time was not given to the woe-stricken family for the indulgence of their grief. The sounds of forcible entrance soon made themselves manifest, and roused Zohrab into action. At once regaining possession of his presence of mind, he hushed every cry by his

commanding tone and manner. Tenderly embracing his mother, he urged her immediate departure by the secret gate, which leading at once into the jungle, she would there meet with an escort of Turcoman horse, who would convey her and suite without delay to a place of safety. He confided her to the protection of Ali. Having carefully wrapt his father's body in a sheet, it was first conveyed down the stair-case, leading through a small turret to the postern, and then, having insisted upon the unhesitating departure of every one, he promised his mother that he would only stay long enough to defend the harem, until she was too distant for pursuit, and then would not fail to join her in person.

Mirza Shireen Ali, the traitor, who well knew the avenues of the citadel as those of the harem, had been amongst the foremost to enter therein, hoping that by seizing Zohrab, he might secure the price which the Shah had set upon his person; accordingly, when he had seen him chased within the gates of the harem, he

ascended the walls by a certain ruined inlet, whence he could observe the secret gate, from which he was sure Zaul's family, conducted by Zohrab, would endeavour to escape. He reached that point just as the disconsolate widow, conducting her husband's corpse, had succeeded in gaining the opposite side of the city ditch—but he saw not Zohrab; his exultation was great when he found that the prize might still be his, for evidently he was yet within the harem, and he immediately decided that if he could but close the postern, that object would be secured. He pointed out that circumstance to one of the townspeople, who had followed him in the hope also of securing the prize. By a steep and crooked path they descended, and heaping up stones effectually closed the gate. This was no sooner done, than Mirza Shireen returned to the attack carrying on upon the gates of the harem, raising the hopes of the assailants by assuring them that their prey was still within, for that he had ascertained his family alone had left it.

By this time the Shah in person had arrived, when a renewed attack began, and with so much vigour, that the gates began to give way. Zohrab now thought it right to secure his escape. Sole tenant of a dwelling in which he had first drawn breath, he looked around him for the last time with feelings of gloom, whilst enemies were beating at the gate seeking his blood; and unwilling to quit a spot so dear to him, he lingered and looked, and looked again, when at length the falling gates told him it was time to retreat. Confident that none but himself was acquainted with the avenues leading to the postern, he leisurely took his way thither, whilst he heard the enemy in full possession of his paternal mansion.

But to his surprise he heard a rush of footsteps exactly in the direction in which he was himself proceeding:—he hastened onward—still he was followed. Every intricacy seemed to be as well known to his followers as to himself, and when he had reached the entrance of the small turret he turned about, and to his surprise he

saw Mirza Shireen followed by a large body of soldiery. At once he determined to sell his life as dearly as possible, but still retreated down the stairs, narrow and confined as they were, in the hope that having once gained the door, by his superior activity he might easily escape from his pursuers. He perceived the head of the column of his pursuers at the top just as he had reached the bottom. To his surprise the gate, which but so short a time since had been left open by his mother was closed; he rushed on to open it, and to his still greater surprise he found it strongly fastened. Then, indeed, despair seized him, and he felt that he had but a short time to live. Again and again he lent his whole strength to the gate, but it was not in the power of man to stir it. He looked up, and saw that his antagonists still lingered at the top of the stairs, evidently afraid to approach him. One was urging on the other. The lion was at bay, and not a dog had the courage to face him. At length, the voice of the sycophant and traitor Mirza Shireen, was heard,

saying—"Zohrab Khan, as you love life—as you would not die—hear the words of a friend. *Wallah billah*, I say true! Lay down your sword, and receive the Shah's pardon—I am your surety."

"Dog and traitor," exclaimed Zohrab, "hold thy treacherous tongue. Open a path for me, or by the word of a desperate man I will cleave thy soul in twain." Then making one more desperate effort to see whether he could not force the door, and finding it vain, he fiercely grasped his sword afresh, and shewed symptoms of making an attack upon the cowards above. He was about making good his threat, when a voice which once heard never could be mistaken—the voice of the Shah himself was distinguished above the rest, urging the lingering soldiers to the attack of the solitary Zohrab. There was now a compact crowd on the head of the stairs, still with Mirza Shireen and his hypocrite face in front. "Sons of burnt fathers," roared the Shah, "are ye afraid of one man? Seize, but do not kill him!" A

movement of attack was manifest, still no one would venture to be the first. At length Zohrab, with despair in his heart and resolution in his countenance, rushed blindly upward, sword in hand, and fearlessly attacked the whole collected mob. The first who fell a sacrifice to his fury was the traitor, who at one blow paid the forfeit of his wickedness. Upon this the crowd retreated. The Shah's voice was again heard. At length his assailants, finding it impossible to seize him alive, devised the effectual mode of overwhelming him with large masses of masonry. Heavy blocks were impelled down the stairs, until at length a ponderous stone coming in contact with his temple, he fell stunned, and immediately the dastardly crew fastened upon his every limb; and thus entirely overpowered, he hopelessly became their prisoner.

He was dragged with exulting shouts through the passages leading to the narrow staircase, advantage having been taken of his state of insensibility to tie his arms and hands strongly

behind his back. Despoiled of his sword, and reeling onward, partly from faintness and from intensity of pain, he was thus dragged before the king. The aspects which these two individuals presented were indeed as different as they could be. The one surrounded by power, flushed with conquest, thirsting for revenge; the other, alone and helpless, and though pale and disfigured by the contest which he had sustained, covered with blood and mutilated by wounds, still bore a dignified and undaunted presence, and though a vile and ignominious death was impending, still neither by word or look did he betray the smallest submission to the tyrant.

The Shah returned to his pavilion in the maidan until the palace in the ark should be in readiness for his reception, and there, surrounded by his principal officers, he received his fallen prisoner.

"You are again in our power," said the Shah; "but no longer a hostage;—by the blessing of the Prophet that day has gone by! Look upon that sun which now shineth, and well—for 'tis thy last."

"Kill me now," said Zohrab; "then I shall die without being grateful to thee for any thing."

"Strike the wretch on the mouth, should he speak again," said the Shah, his wrath rising at the sight of the independent bearing of his prisoner.

"I have but one word more to say," said Zohrab, "before, *inshallah* I leave this life: stop the blood which is now spilling;—order thy ruthless soldiers to sheath their swords, and spare the people who are innocent;—let Zohrab be their atoning sacrifice. If they have erred, 'tis by our example;—if they have resisted thee, 'tis by our ordinance. If thou hast a heart, let my words reach it; and if thou hast a soul, let the fear of a future life and future retribution overtake it."

"Dog," said the Shah, "wilt thou preach to me? Can the cur approach the lion otherwise than by licking his feet."

"Dog," sayest thou?" retorted Zohrab; "dog, and father of dogs art thou thyself, tyrant and

murderer! Do thy worst upon me—I revile thee."

The vivid paleness of rage became sensibly visible in the countenance of the Shah, as the words of the prisoner struck his ear. He would instantly have given way to his wrath, and ordered immediate execution, but he saw through Zohrab's real wish of instant death, and would not indulge him. He ordered him away from his presence, saying—"Thy moment is not yet come—our revenge is not yet complete—thy end shall be as public and as ignominious as thy life has been rebellious. Bear him off, and hear:—let his confinement be so strict, that the Shah will be jealous if even a ray of light visits him."

Upon this order, the executioner's gang seized upon their victim, and in the face of the wonderstruck crowd, who bowed their heads in submission to the Shah's power in proportion to the fallen state in which they saw his enemy, they dragged him off with every species of contumely towards that mansion, of which,

but the day before, he had been the lord and master. They then lodged him in certain under ground chambers, originally intended for prisoners, but which, during the mild rule of Zaul Khan, had seldom known the presence of a prisoner. There they left him, condemned to the fate of a common malefactor, giving him the bare ground for a bed, with the mere sustenance of bread and water, whilst heavy chains incumbered his body.

In the meanwhile the work of devastation was proceeding with unabated fury throughout the city. Frequently would those who surrounded the Shah, watch the expression of his face, hoping it would exhibit some symptoms of remorse, in order that they might throw in a word of intercession, but hitherto in vain. Once Sadek ventured to say, as increasing supplies of eyes were brought in by the executioners, "As I am your sacrifice, your slave has made the calculation, and the number is complete. God grant it may be so!"

"Ill born that you are!" said the unfeeling

tyrant, "if it be not complete, thy eyes shall add to the number. Why wilt thou stay the hand of justice?"

After this no one dared open their lips; but with despair in their hearts, they stood in silence before him, whilst ever and anon, as some sounds of lamentation more than usually doleful and clamorous struck his ear, they imagined that in a more thoughtful mood he began to feel the workings of humanity in his breast. A wretch of an executioner, a savage of most ferocious aspect, his arms bared to the shoulders, his hands crimson with blood, and his beard clotted with foam, had just brought in a tray covered with eyes, and placed them before the Shah. There he stood, in an attitude of exultation, expecting the usual donation. The Shah, contemplating the horrid objects for some time, at length drew his small riding whip from his girdle, and with the handle thereof began to count them, telling them off by pairs, and in doing this, he broke out into the following soliloquy: "O Allah! is it in truth right

and just to continue thus to send thy wrath upon an offending and rebellious people!" Upon this the Grand Vizir, whose heart could no longer withstand its impulse for intercession, stepped forward, fell upon his knees, and touching his forehead to the ground, exclaimed. "*Ahi*, my king and master, God loves compassion. Blessed are they, sayeth our holy Koran, who love mercy and enforce it; let thy slave intercede for the poor wretches, who have no other fault than being inhabitants of this city."

The perverseness of the Shah's mind, acting upon his hot and ardent nature, was like a parasitical plant, which is seen to entwine itself, cover over, and take possession of a large tree in the forests of tropical climates; for upon hearing the words of the Vizir, the savage monarch turned up his blood-seeking eyes, and instead of being moved by the humility of his minister, exclaimed sarcastically, "Art thou too throwing words in the air? Begone, look after thy mirzas and scribes, and leave the sword where it ought to be." Upon which Hajji Ibrahim

with dignity made his lowest obeisance, and left the presence a much less zealous and devoted servant than before he received this rebuke.

Among the great congregation of people who had surrounded the Shah's tent during the scene of Zohrab's condemnation, a woman closely veiled had been remarked, almost the only one who had ventured into a crowd at once so lawless and so submissive. This was Zulma; although her views had been so much raised by the position in which she had been placed by the Shah, that the tender feelings of love had almost been obliterated by those of ambition, yet when she again saw Zohrab, so great in his fall, so fitted to interest a woman's affection, and particularly such a creature of impulse as Zulma, all her former love for him returned, and her only wish now, was to free him from his bonds, and to fly with him to any spot, however remote, where she might enjoy his gratitude, and secure a return of her passion. She retreated to the dwelling which had been assigned her pensive and impatient. She determined first to try how far she might persuade the Shah to

save his life, and then, if she did not succeed, to devise other schemes for his release. Accordingly, at night, when after the fatigues and anxieties of the day, the king called her before him to solace himself by her conversation, she began by degrees to try her ground ere she ventured to make her request.

"The *takdeer* of the king of kings, after all," said she, "is something unheard of in the annals of our country. For who in truth was equal to Zohrab in heroism? still here he is kissing the feet of the Shah.

"You say true," said the Shah, who was never better pleased than when he was called a favourite of fortune. "Wisdom is something! but good luck is all in all!"

"And by the blessing of Allah!" said the designing maiden, "all anxiety for Asterabad and its rebellious subjects is now over. The Shah has only the one thought now of reaping the best fruits of his victory!"

"Yes!" said the king, "let them behave well in future, and he will raise their heads to the skies!"

"They will ever provide a fine race of warriors to the Shah, at least," said Zulma; "as for instance—if that ill-fated Zohrab had not been such a rebel and so *wajeb el catl*, so necessary to slay, what a leader of the king's troops would he not make?"

"In truth, yes," said the king, half angry at having been drawn into such a confession. "He would be a fine soldier any where, but he dreams of any thing but submission—he looks for dominion—such a thing must not live."

"His whole existence is now changed," said Zulma; "the air has escaped from his brain; without that unsainted father of his, who in truth was a misfortune, he will in future take to quiet as his last resource."

"The time has gone by," said the king, suspicious of his companion's views. "Had he done this whilst he was a hostage, well—but now, men will laugh if the Shah spares him. He dies—be it now, or be it in a short time hence—the thread of his destiny is spun out, and Irân will no longer possess her Zohrab."

Catching at this delay, which she had not

even anticipated, Zulma said every thing she could to promote it, hoping that some occurrence might, in the meanwhile, take place to save his life, and with that hope she retired for the night. During the short time she had enjoyed the king's countenance, she had succeeded in acquiring great influence over him. Whether that tincture of energy and violence, which was mixed up with all her thoughts and actions, was pleasing to him, set off, as it was, by great beauty, and directed frequently by much adroitness; or whether it is the nature of man, even the most wayward and the most self-willed, to cede to a counter-violence, proceeding, as it did in this instance, from an inferior and a dependent; true it is, that he permitted her to speak more openly to him than any other person, and reposing upon the obligations which were heaped upon herself and family, he ventured to refresh his mind by expressions of confidence, which manifested the trust he reposed in her fidelity.

He had long been expecting the arrival of his nephew and successor. He felt that their meet-

ing would be one of much difficulty; for how could he talk to him with proper temper upon the loss of his sister! He longed that Fatteh Ali might reach him at the present moment, when his feelings were awakened to their utmost pitch of excitement, for then he knew he could extricate himself by words of violence, and by commands which would impose silence even upon the most refractory. He knew the effect which a victorious king produced upon the minds of the Persian people, and foresaw that it would now be reflected back upon the mind of his young relative, whatever might be the frame of mind in which he would arrive. Besides, had he not the very man in his custody, on whose account his sister had met with her fate, and he felt upon that ground alone he would be able successfully to meet his nephew.

Upon this subject he had explained his mind to Zulma, and it had been the means of opening another source of ambition to her. She had frequently heard of the excellencies of the youthful Prince—of the beauty of his person, of the intelligence of his mind, of his dexterity

at all manly exercises; and when she gave full scope to her imagination, she could dream of the possibility of becoming the banou of his harem, and of swaying the counsels of a king of Persia, as she had formerly taken the lead in the chief executioner's household. Thus was her wayward and unsettled mind tossed between three ideas:—the first, that of becoming the actual arbitress of the fate of Persia, by her influence and control over its present sovereign; the second, of being united to the heir apparent of the throne, and thus becoming the wife of the most attractive of men—the most envied of women; and thirdly, taking advantage of her present situation, to save and secure the affections of him who alone really filled her thoughts, and who was in fact the one object of her adoration.

CHAPTER IX.

Ev'n he, this youth—though dimm'd and gone
Each star of hope that cheer'd him on—
His glories lost—his cause betray'd—
Irân, his dear-lov'd country, made
A land of carcases and slaves.

LALLA ROOKH.

As soon as the horrors of the *katl-i-aum* had subsided, the Shah left his tents and took possession of Zaul's palace. Although there is much prejudice among Persians against inhabiting the home of one who had met the death which Zaul had encountered (for even a son objects living in the same house in which his father died); yet in this instance, for certain political reasons, the Shah thought it right to overlook all difficulties. He wished to exhibit himself to the Asterabadis as their sovereign, and to sit in the place which they had been accustomed to revere as the seat

of their governor. He knew the effect which such an act would produce upon the minds of a people who bend the head to outward signs of power, and he was moreover anxious to let it be known among the Turcomans how totally the rule of their late ally had been supplanted, and that it was to himself for the future they must look for protection.

The whole building had been completely cleansed—the fountains were made to play—the royal carpets were spread, and at an hour authorised by the astrologers the Shah took his seat in the *dewan kkaneh* of the palace, which had held within its walls the great Shah Abbas, its original founder, and many of the succeeding princes of that line. Here he received the congratulations of his courtiers and warriors upon the occasion of his conquest, to which, real or commanded, were added those of the priesthood of Asterabad, who put up prayers for his prosperity.

Zulma, at the same time, was installed in the women's apartments of the palace. Had her ambition been less, her feelings might have been

greatly excited by the reflection that she now occupied the birth place of the man she so ardently admired—that here under the eyes of his parents, he had risen into manhood, and that his home, so dear to him, at a blow had been driven to the four winds of heaven. Her feelings, however, were intensely roused, when she was told that in certain *zeerzemeens*, underground cells, contiguous to her dwelling, the object of her love and solicitude himself was now in confinement. This intelligence induced a restlessness and a desire to see him, which no reasoning could conquer. In vain she apprehended the risks she might run of the Shah's displeasure in case she were discovered; nothing could stop her determination, and happen what might she resolved to visit him. It is true that she possessed no facility for so doing, and there was no likelihood that the step she was about to take would be known; for the prisoner had been given into the custody of her father; and every one of his servants, his deputy and all, were her devoted slaves, and indeed now doubly so, since she occupied her present eminent situation.

The females which composed her household were few, for she had neither had time nor opportunity to surround herself by those numerous officers usual to persons in her situation, therefore she feared no detection from their scrutiny. She managed so well that the man on guard over the prisoner should be peculiarly devoted to her will, who would give her an immediate entrance to his cell; she determined that very night, after her usual audience with the king, to seek the unfortunate Zohrab in his confinement.

It was past midnight, the whole city at rest, and not a sound heard, when covering herself closely with her veil, Zulma, at the small gate of the harem, waited for her conductor. He came at the prescribed time, and taking his way through a long avenue, which led into a court once occupied by the slaves of Zaul Khan's establishment, he descended into a low and vaulted chamber, which formed a sort of anteroom to the prison in which Zohrab was confined. Its walls were of great thickness, and there was a chill of damp and mould about

them, which gave the approach to the prison an air of utter wretchedness. She took the small lantern which her guide held in his hand, into her own, and as he unbarred the heavy door of the prison, she bade him remain without until her business with the prisoner should be at an end.

The greatest misery which Zohrab had experienced since he had been placed in confinement, was the delay allowed to take place ere he was deprived of life. When his thoughts turned upon himself, and he retraced in his mind the different paths through which his short life had travelled, his recollections presented nothing that could wound his spirit; but when he turned his recollections to the miseries that had overwhelmed his family, the recent and awful death of his father, and the exiled and destitute state of his mother, to which was added the bitter retrospect of his Amima's death, his heart gave way to the deepest anguish, and the vaulted roof of his prison rang with the occasional bursts of his grief.

It was one of these bursts that caught the ear of Zulma as she was about entering the prison. She paused in an attitude of attention ere she ventured to proceed. At length, holding the lamp over her eyes, in order to discover in the darkness where the wretched youth lay, she slowly opened the door and entered. Zohrab, who thought that his hour was come, soon turned his grief into joy as he caught the first glimpse of the light; but when he perceived a woman's form approaching, he began to think that it might be a vision of his brain, and starting from his stony bed with a wild and astonished air, his bright eyes looking through a countenance disfigured by neglect and worn by fatigue, he said in a tone of great seriousness—"In the name of Allah who are you?—what seek you?"

"Zohrab," said Zulma, struck with awe at the solemnity of the scene, "am I unknown to you? Is Zulma nothing in your eyes!"

"*Ahi*," said Zohrab, immediately regaining his self-possession; "what interest can one so prosperous find in one so wretched? Is the

Lady Zulma come to mock the misery of a fallen man?"

"*Astafarallah*," said Zulma, highly touched at seeing the miserable state of the once powerful Zohrab. "I am come," said she, "to offer you consolation. I am your friend;—there is much to hope if Zohrab will bow the heart of pride before the hand of power. Zulma can do much."

"Life is of too little value, lady, to one so wretched, that I should now give it up to slavery and ignominy. I have but one object left to desire, and that is the welfare of my mother. If you can help me to secure that, you will have the satisfaction of receiving the thanks and the gratitude of a dying man."

"Is there none else in the world," said Zulma, mortified at what she looked upon as a poor compliment to herself, "for whom you wish to live. Has the devotion of one who places herself at your feet no attractions for you—?"

"What words are these?" said Zohrab, roused by recollections of what it had been

the study of his life to suppress. All secrets, are vain now—death will soon wipe away from the mind of man the recollection of either the murdered Amima, or the to-be-murdered Zohrab. Had she been alive, then indeed would the wretch before you have kissed the dust of your feet to save him;—but she is gone. What joys can life promise him without her—no, lady, no,—leave me to die."

Zulma, stung to the quick by these words, would indeed have left him; and although she saw that it would be impossible to inspire him with love for her, yet there was that irresistible attraction in his person, heightened as it was by the magnanimity of his resignation under misfortune, that she could not resist lingering on in the hope of seeing him relent, and accept of the promise of life which she held out to him.

"Think no more of Amima," said she: "whatever has been, so let it be; the destinies of individuals are in the hands of God; but has not Zohrab a heart for two Amimas? When one day has shut in, and is covered by the

shades of night, does not the sun shine on a second?"

"Lady," said Zohrab, "you are talking to one who has already fixed his thoughts upon an hereafter, and who would rather seek it and its uncertainties, than all the deceitful pleasures of this world."

Zulma looked at him with astonishment. Her mind could never conceive that such heroism and disregard of the world could exist in any breast; and when she saw this man, in the prime of life, clinging to the hope of death as the one object of his wishes, she could only suppose that his mind had been struck by some talismanic charm, and that imbecility had taken the place of his once vigorous intellect.

She was about taking her departure, when Zohrab raised himself in his chains, and bending himself forward, said, "As you love Allah!—if you be a true believer and a woman!—let the entreaties of one who will shortly be no more, be heard in favour of his wretched, destitute mother!"

The imploring attitude in which he stood—

the feeling tone of his entreaty, restored all the tenderness of her feeling. She turned towards him with a rapture which lightened up her features into hope and extacy, and she would have shewn him to what a degree she loved, when she was met by a coldness that at once told her how vain were her hopes, and that the man before whom she stood could not feign a sentiment which he did not feel. She therefore retreated in confusion; her wrath rising in proportion to the greatness of her disappointment, and leaving the wretched Zohrab to his pride and his solitude, she returned whence she came.

Still upon reflection she hoped that, left to himself, his resolution might alter, and that he might think better of the advantages which she had held out to him. Therefore, she determined to continue her good offices in his favour with the Shah, and, at all events, to stop any pursuit of his mother that might have been ordered, hoping by such an act to secure at least an avenue to his gratitude. She arose the next morning full of these schemes, when she was in-

formed that the Prince Fatteh Ali had just arrived, and her informant added that to this moment he was totally ignorant of the death of his sister. This greatly turned the current of her thoughts, and she was not wrong in her conclusion that this circumstance must create some extraordinary sensation at court.

In fact, the youth, who my readers may recollect was introduced to their notice at the beginning of this our narrative, thoughtless, ardent, and amiable, is now to be brought before them as a formed man. His person, which before was slim and unformed, had acquired strength and squareness. His beard had gained sufficient consistency to become an ornament; and throughout his whole appearance there was a manliness of manner and speech, which spoke at once in his favour. The effect, which he produced by his presence at the Shah's court, acted like magic, or like the genial warmth of the sun vivifying a drooping vegetation, which had long languished under the effects of blight. Every one who looked upon him, felt their hearts expand at the idea, that he

was destined to be their future ruler, and suppressing the sigh which the horror of their present miseries prompted, could smile with inward hope that the day was not far distant when that iron hand of despotism, which now weighed so hard upon them, might be replaced by the softer touch of the mild prince they now beheld. The sort of tacit adulation which was paid him, was a test of the pleasure which his presence afforded; for it was involuntary and sincere. From the Vizir to the meanest camp-follower, he met with nothing but looks and expressions of welcome; and although they were to him the most flattering testimonies of public approbation which he could receive, yet he was aware how prudent it would be in him rather to avoid than to seek them, knowing the jealous and suspicious temper of his uncle.

The Grand Vizir, the venerable Hajji Ibrahim Khan, looked upon him as his own son. He had acted so entirely as he had wished in the government of the province of Fars, which by wisdom and moderation he had elevated

from a state of ruin to one of riches and prosperity, that he cherished him not only as his disciple in the science of government, but also as the promoter of the future glory and happiness of the kingdom at large. He received him with every mark of respect as his future sovereign, and with every testimony of affection as his obedient pupil. But, in so doing, he shuddered at the reflection how cruelly—how bitterly the finer feelings of this noble youth were about to be tortured, by the melancholy intelligence which sooner or later must be disclosed to him. He loved his sister Amima with the fondest love, a sentiment which orphans in their situation could only feel. He had left his government with regret, but that was counterbalanced by the joyful expectation of holding communication with his beloved sister. It is a custom in Persia, to withhold the news of death from the person most concerned (so much so as to become a business of life and death when it concerns princes and governors) as long as it is possible. Consequently, although

the melancholy supposed death of the Shah's niece and banou, was pretty generally known, particularly among men in office, still no one ever ventured to hint it to her brother, and all through his journey, to the very moment of its being disclosed to him at Asterabad, he had actually lived in the hope of meeting her at Tehran.

Sadek was another of those who testified the greatest pleasure at seeing the prince; for however anxious he might feel at the result of the disclosure which would be made to him, still he was so greatly attached to his person, having been from his earliest infancy accessary in bringing him up, that he could not repress his satisfaction at seeing him again. This, however, was greatly mitigated by his fear of the Shah; for, during his long servitude, he had been so constantly obliged to educate the very looks and fashion of his face to the whim and temper of the monarch, that a smile on Sadek's face was as rare an occurrence as a sight of the sun in a northern winter, and demonstrations of either pleasure or

pain were as little seen upon it, as wind blowing on the surface of a mirror.

The first desire of the prince, was to be admitted into the presence of his uncle. To the tyrant, the news of his arrival gave no pleasure; on the contrary, it excited his ill-humour. He had a sort of intuitive feeling how much he would lose in the comparison which would not fail being made between the king that was, and the king that was to be. Whenever his nephew's name was mentioned, it was accompanied by either actual expressions of approbation, or by such looks of good-will, that the Shah felt that a tacit comparison in the mind of the speaker was then making to his prejudice. The very beauty of his nephew's person and suavity of his manners were odious to the uncle, and it was esteemed the worst road to his good-will either to laud or to uphold him in any manner.

Upon his rising on that day, Sadek was the appointed person to apprize the Shah of the arrival of the prince; and fully aware how delicate was the task, considering in how ferocious

a mood his mind would be, he took care to be cautious, and not to let the sunshine which beamed in his breast break out upon his face, but to compose his features into a cast so wooden and unconcerned, that the Shah could not discover what was working within.

With that quickness of perception which was peculiar to him, the Shah having remarked that something had occurred, said to Sadek: "What news is there?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said his servant, "nothing. The Prince Fatteh Ali requests to kiss your feet."

To this, the Shah answered not a word, but continued the operations of the toilet apparently unconcerned. When he was dressed Sadek expected the order to admit the prince immediately into the presence; but he was surprised to hear the king say that he would receive him at the usual public selam at noon, a mark of such total unconcern, that Sadek supposed the king intended thereby to mark his displeasure at his tardy arrival. But the

truth was, that however unconcerned the tyrant might wish to appear, yet in fact a very different feeling actuated him. He dreaded to see his nephew,—he dreaded the explanations which he must make touching his sister's death, and he wished to see him first as an attendant at the public audience, rather than *tête-a-tête*, where the first enquiries which Fatteh Ali would make, would be concerning his sister. And on seeing him there he determined to do what Sadek had suspected, namely, to put a slight upon him.

At the usual hour, when all the courtiers, officers of state, warriors, and men of the law, each at their respective posts, were ready in attendance in the great court yard of the *dewan khaneh*, they perceived the Prince Fatteh Ali make his appearance, almost at the very moment that his uncle was taking his place upon the musnud. He stood respectfully without, and made his obeisance with the rest of those present. The Shah took no more notice of him than he did of any one else; but

he could not but be struck at the unequivocal marks of satisfaction which appeared in the faces and manner of all present, at seeing their future sovereign among them. The prince's own demeanour was in every way marked by good sense. He did not manifest any mortification at the mode of his reception, but took his station where he knew from his rank he was entitled to stand. At length, after the Shah had spoken the usual words of little import to the Grand Vizir, and had given certain directions concerning the police and administration of the city, he turned to the prince, and said, "What news do you bring from Fars? Your progress to our stirrup has been slow."

"By the blessing of Allah," said the prince, "every thing in Fars is well. Your slave travelled post, and his ill destiny has made him arrive too late to meet the Shah's wishes."

This open rebuke, although it hurt the feelings of the prince, did not produce the effect which his uncle expected, that of lowering him in public estimation. On the con-

trary the effect was reversed, for never was contrast between two individuals so unfavourable to the one, and so advantageous to the other, for in their persons they exhibited the extremes of beauty and deformity; in their minds, of arrogance and humility; in their manners, of harshness and amenity.

This scene passed off, but was duly commented upon throughout the camp and city, such an unanimous feeling of hatred having arisen against the Shah, strengthened by the possession of one who promised such happiness to the country, that but for the constant habit of fear which kept down rebellion, it is likely that Persia would at that moment have thrown off the yoke. One circumstance which strongly encouraged feelings of discontent, was the non-existence of the Humpback, whose activity as a spy throughout every department had made the people cautious of expressing their true sentiments, and whose intrigues had sown distrust between individuals of all ranks. His absence had opened men's hearts and minds,

and they now could confess to each other, how impatient they were of the tyranny which oppressed them.

The Shah, on the other hand, felt all he had lost by the death of his servant. Although he had installed Sadek in his office, yet he had not obtained in him what he possessed in the other. Instead of that sharpness of intellect, full of resources in furtherance of its purpose, and which came to conclusions almost by intuition, Sadek possessed but a slow apprehension, neither adapted to the character of a spy or a courtier. When once he had made up a resolution he was firm, nothing could subvert it; but much was required to move him, and although he ever espoused the interests of his master, and served him with fidelity, yet if called upon to be the instrument of injustice, he did not hesitate to resist.

The shock which the prince Fatteh Ali had received in the morning, was but trifling to the misery inflicted upon him during the course of this inauspicious day. The Shah, by his con-

duct at the selam, having prepared both his own and his nephew's mind for scenes of discord, determined to fill up the measure of his woe, by disclosing to him the whole of his misfortune. Accordingly, as the day drew to a close, just before the evening prayer, he called him to the *khelwet* or cabinet. He had prepared it with great attention to effect—he made a display of the implements and officers of punishment in the avenues leading to it. The chamber was dimly lighted, and one less stout-hearted than the prince would probably have sunk with apprehension. But conscious in his integrity, without suspicion, the youth proceeded to his uncle's presence, though but little prepared for the ensuing scene.

"Come forward," said the Shah, as he entered, the Shah being seated in the corner of a small room, lighted up by only two long tapers in the midst, and covered with a cloak of a dark colour.

"You have no doubt heard wherefore we have called you to our presence," said he, in a

tone very different from what a nephew might expect from so near a relation.

"As I am your sacrifice," said the prince, "the reason has not been made known to me."

"Has no one by the road side hinted the reason of your recall."

"By the head of the king, no!" he answered. "Not till this very morning was your servant aware that he had incurred the Shah's displeasure. In the administration of his province he has followed every instruction which he has received, and, by the blessing of Allah! the plains which were before uninhabited are now flourishing; the Shah's *maliat*, or revenue, has increased, and owing to the royal wisdom men are happy at Shiraz. If the tardy arrival of your slave is the reason, by the salt of the king, and by the head of the Prophet, I swear that I never tarried longer on the road than to rest myself and horses; that I did not even abide a day at Ispahan, that I did not go to Tehran, where I might have heard some account of my sister, for whom alone I think life worth the keeping, and

that I came on in the greatest possible haste, as soon as I heard of the state of the war in Asterabad. What more can your servant say?"

The king sat in silence for some time, uncertain even to the last in what manner to break the horrid intelligence to his nephew. He was disappointed that he entertained not even a suspicion of Amima's death, and found that he had to undergo the whole misery of a first disclosure. At length, crushing every good feeling which in spite of himself would rise to the surface of his thoughts, he determined to have recourse to his constant refuge in all difficulties of conscience,—to assert the despot and the tyrant.

"The reason of your recall has no reference to the business of government," said the Shah; "upon that head we have nothing to say—but it is one which touches you still nearer. It is the conduct of your sister."

"Allah! Allah!" cried the astonished youth, "what can she have done?"

"Hear!" said the Shah, evidently much agitated, "I have treated you both as my children

—you as the heir to my throne—she as the head of my house, my companion, and my confidant. What did I ever keep secret from her? Did she not know my inmost thoughts? Did she not even lead me as a child? Was there a favour which I ever refused her? Had she not her will in every way? and in that most ill-fated event, when she met the unsainted Mazanderani youth, a proceeding which, according to the rules of Mahomedan life, would have carried her condemnation with it in any other harem—did I not forgive her freely, and bury every thing in oblivion?"

"As Mahomed is the prophet of Allah this is all new to me!" said the astounded Fatteh Ali.

"Give ear and have patience," said the king. "What will you say when I tell you, that notwithstanding this indulgence, in the very face of her duty to me, of her obedience to the injunctions of our holy prophet, she was convicted, (can I find words to say it,) she was convicted of receiving this very Mazanderani in her apartments!"

"That I declare," roared out the prince in a voice of thunder, "is false! Amima has refused to embrace me, her brother—would she debase herself with one she knew not?"

"Hold, young man," said the Shah, having been sufficiently roused by the violence of his nephew's manner; "hear me to the last."

"What have you done with her?" said the prince, with a tone in which contempt and tenderness were mingled. "Have ye murdered her!"

"As you value your own life be silent!" said the king, his passions kindling into a flame. "Your sister has paid the forfeit of her crime—she is no more!"

"Curses be on your head! murderer of your own blood!" said the indignant and grief-stricken youth, his words choking his utterance, and leaning against the wall from sudden weakness; "May the maledictions of an orphan fall upon your head! Slayer of my father and your brother, murderer of my sister, add my murder to the list of your crimes, and it will be well!" and without further thought concerning

the dreaded man before whom he stood, he turned his back upon him, and left his presence.

The Shah's excited passion by this time had broken out into one of the most violent paroxysms of a tyrant's fury—his face was convulsed—his frame shook with rage—words could not issue from his eager mouth. At length the last act of the prince's contempt, restored him to his full utterance, and roaring out in the voice of a demon to his attendant officers, he said, "Seize him! bind him! Sadek, as you value your life, go thrust that dog's son into utter darkness. By the head of the Shah, we will have revenge! After all, am I not a king?"

With the greatest reluctance, Sadek, accompanied by two ferashes, took the heart-broken prince into custody, at the same time showing him every respect in their power, whilst he followed without exhibiting the smallest resistance.

The Shah had not been in the least prepared for this result to the conference. He had never conceived it possible that his nephew possessed

sufficient strength of character to brave his power, and therefore he was in every way astonished; and when he recollected how popular he was among all ranks, how favourable had been the reception which he had met from his officers and courtiers, he began seriously to reflect that consequences of far greater import to himself than merely a young man's grief at the loss of his sister, might rise up against him, and make that power uncertain which he now wielded with so much uncontrol. He sat in long cogitation at this new feature which his affairs had taken, and the more he reflected upon what had just taken place, the more his passions were roused.

His jealousy, his envy, his indignation, and his desire for revenge, all by turns assailed his miserably-conducted feelings. His first impulse was to get rid of the youth immediately by open violence, reckless of the consequences; his more sober resolutions pointed to prudence and the absence of publicity. Long he thought, and long he remained undecided. At length he determined to delay, in order to ascertain what turn his nephew's feelings would assume after their first

ebullition had subsided, ere he came to any ultimate decision on his account. Upon his death he was resolved, but it was only upon how it could best be effected that he was uncertain.

CHAPTER X.

Neither slay the soul which God hath forbidden you to slay, unless for a just cause. KORAN.

THE wretched Fatteh Ali was inconsolable at the horrid intelligence which had so cruelly been communicated to him. The circumstance which principally afflicted him, was the imputation cast upon his sister's reputation. He had been bred up in the highest respect for the sanctity of the harem, and the honour of women. The love which he had always entertained for his sister, was entwined with such confidence in her purity, that by no stretch of his imagination could he conceive her guilty of the crimes of which his uncle had accused her. There was no one from whom he could seek consolation; he was debarred from communicating with any of those who professed

friendship for him, and in his forlorn situation, the only possible issue from his misfortunes, he saw was death. Sadek alone was allowed to attend upon him, for the Shah was anxious to know whether his nephew had relented, and he had given orders that every word and action should be reported to him. To him the prince freely imparted his feelings. Instead of retracting what he had said to the Shah, his tongue did not cease heaping curses upon his head; he did not refrain from calling him a fratricide; a destroyer of his own blood; a blot in the human race; a foul and base tyrant; and when his imagination would allow itself to think upon the agonies which he probably had inflicted upon his sister, he became furious, and was afflicted by the ravings and contortions of a maniac. Sadek's better nature longed to relieve the wretched youth from his misery, intimately acquainted as he was with every part of Amima's history, but he was so fearful lest any thing which he might say, should compromise his own safety with the Shah, that he determined at first to profess ignorance, asserting that every

thing had taken place within the walls of the harem, that the Khajeh Bashi having been put to death, the whole event was consigned to eternal secrecy.

But he felt it difficult totally to elude the prince's inquiries, who pressed him hard upon every point, first concerning Amima's acquaintance with Zohrab, next as to the possibility of his entering the harem, then upon the nature of the discovery, and lastly upon her death. To all this, Sadek at first pretended ignorance; but the prince knowing that Mariam was his sister's attendant, he would not let him rest until he had sifted every particular. At length the inflexibility of the man gave way before the urgent entreaties of the youth, and as far as he could with prudence he gave as detailed a narrative as possible of what had befallen her, in which he made a full exposition of her innocence.

To the admirers of genuine feeling, it would have afforded much delight to witness the conduct of the prince upon hearing this intelligence; a load appeared to have been

withdrawn from his breast; his features gradually brightened up; tears streamed from his eyes; and when he was assured, that though death had been her fate, yet that no imputation could be attached to her, he rushed to his informant, and almost embracing his knees, exclaimed "Blessings on you for this! you have raised a poor wretch from hell to heaven. Let death come now, and I shall die content. The sooner the odious tyrant strikes the better; go, go, tell him so! Tell him he is the murderer of innocence, and that I defy him to do me more harm, than to add my death to the catalogue of his crimes."

Sadek hastened to take advantage of this permission to go, for he felt that in a few minutes more he would have confessed every thing. The affecting situation of the prince had so worked upon his nature, rude and reserved as it was, that in order to give him the comfort which he so much required, he would have told him of his sister's safety; but had he done so, he knew the consequences would probably be

fatal to himself, as well as to those whom he had saved; he therefore determined to do all in his power to prevent the king from coming to extremities with his nephew, and for that purpose armed himself with more than usual patience, determined to bear with the king's wrath and ill-humour to the utmost; and more than all, he was resolved rather to sacrifice his own life, than again to be made the instrument of taking away that of one so innocent as the prince.

In the morning the Shah called him in attendance earlier than usual, desirous to know whether his nephew continued in the same mood as on the evening before. Sadek, anxious to screen him from violence, endeavoured to place his situation in the best possible point of view; he described the violence of his grief, showed how necessary it was to give him time to recover the severity of the blow, and assured the king that he himself would be guarantee that the prince would in time be as docile to his wishes as ever. This tempo-

rizing plan did not, however, meet the Shah's views; he never forgot injurious words, and he remembered too well all that had been said on the preceding evening, to pass so easily from wrath to forgiveness. Besides, he did not in the least relish the tone of apology and exculpation which Sadek had adopted in the prince's favour. All the jealousy of his nature was roused, because he thought in that tone he could read the feeling of the public. Suspicion alone of that nature would have been fatal to any one, but how much more to him who now stood forward in some measure as his rival!

He determined himself to ascertain the state of his nephew's mind, and therefore peremptorily ordered him to appear. The interview was almost a repetition of what passed on the preceding evening. Instead of expressing contrition for the expressions he had used, the prince, apprised as he had been of his sister's innocence, was now only more severe in his remarks upon the Shah's barbarity. The feelings

of horror which more or less had always filled his breast against his uncle, although he had hitherto repressed them, now broke out in full violence; and so entirely did he rouse the Shah's passions that, but for the despot's prudence, which in the midst of wrath he ever preserved, the prince would at that moment have paid the forfeit of his life. The Shah ordered him from his presence with all the instances of ignominy which attend a common malefactor, and for the present, contracting his rage within his own breast, he said nothing. However, he fully made up his mind rather to leave his throne without a successor, than to make the actual possession of it insecure, and death, in his mind, was the sealed fate of the unfortunate prince.

Again he sought the assistance of Sadek, for in him he hoped to possess an ever ready instrument of his vengeance. Seated in his own private apartment, he ordered every one to leave the room, excepting Sadek; and then, with that look of mystery and ominous import which he could put on upon sanguinary occasions, he said:

"Sadek, my liver is turned into blood—the king's name is trampled upon. This must not be—Fatteh Ali dies."

Sadek stood like one petrified, and kept a profound silence.

"Did you hear?" said the Shah, "from thee the Shah requires his blood."

Upon these words, this naturally impassive man fell rudely and boldly at the Shah's feet, and said, "Your slave is too great a lover of his Shah to commit such an act. Let the Shah kill him, but let him stay his hand from the blood of the innocent youth."

"*Ahi*, is it so,?" said the mortified and disappointed king. "Is a slave, a base reptile like thee, to tell us what we are to do. Begone, we thought better of thy fidelity. Go!"

Upon this Sadek slowly and respectfully taking his leave, the Shah was left totally alone, to chew the cud of his reflections; and bitter indeed they were, when he reflected that possibly he might be surrounded with disaffected servants. He determined himself to become a

closer observer of the times than he had yet been, and as the public selam was always a ceremony in which the good or bad feeling towards himself might be detected, he determined that very day to make some experiments upon the temper of his courtiers.

When he came to his musnud at the usual noontide, casting his eyes about him he was surprised to find the court most thinly attended, the principal officers present being the chief executioner, his deputy, the chief of the tent pitchers, and two or three of the priesthood of Asterabad. He enquired for the prime Vizir, and found that he was absent owing to sickness. The general of his body guard had been called to an out-post, an alarm having been given of some approaching Turcomans; the chief of the *tuffenkchis* was reviewing the troops; Shir Khan had fallen from his horse, and the *zamburekchi bashi* had been taken up in remodelling the corps under his charge. Several others were absent upon one pretext or another, and the ranks of his courtiers were filled up

by inferior officers, *ketkhodas* of the town and governors of villages. Casting his eyes about he perceived a poor wretch of a *ketkhoda*, who had been forced to appear, but who stood aloof, fearful of showing himself, because he wore neither *chakchurs*, the red cloth stockings, or a shawl to his cap. The Shah's rage was roused at being thus neglected, and when he perceived this man its whole violence broke out. Having been brought before him, he exclaimed: "Son of a dog! is it thus you dare to come before the Shah? Are we thus small, to eat the dirt of an ass? Another time you will learn to come into our presence with a befitting dress." Upon which the ferashes were ordered to administer the bastinado upon the soles of his feet, whilst the Shah, brooding over the insult, which he thought was intentional, was confirmed in his suspicions, and soon broke up the court, in order the better to reflect upon the steps to be taken.

When restored to the solitude of his chamber, his conclusions led him to the certainty that disaffection prevailed, and that unless he struck

some blow of consequence, his throne stood on the brink of a precipice. He pondered much upon Sadek's conduct; for he argued, that if a worm like him had ventured to turn upon him, example of resistance must have been set by others. Drawing forth from under the pillow where he sat the *calemdûn** usually deposited there, with a roll of paper, on a slip he entered a list of those whom he determined to destroy, at the head of which he inscribed the name of Sadek, adding his assistant the young Hussein, being determined to change those servants who were immediately about the person. He then inscribed others whose influence was prejudicial to him. Hajji Ibrahim, his vizir, he also added and then erased, as wishing still to acquire some further conviction of his disaffection. The prince's name was separate from the others.

Scarcely had he finished this when Sadek, according to custom, opened the door and stood before him. Taken unawares, he hastily put his note under the pillow, and in doing this

* A small painted case containing pens and ink.

exhibited a confusion, which struck Sadek as an act so uncommon, that suspicions rose in his mind that something affecting himself was passing in the Shah's mind. At that moment the chief executioner also entered, and stood before the king. Although under other circumstances he would probably have been received with some offensive expression, yet now the Shah saw him appear with pleasure, for he felt that that officer's assistance would be of the first consequence, and he determined to treat him with kindness in order to secure his co-operation. But aware how much he was controlled by his daughter Zulma, he thought proper to consult her, and accordingly ordered him immediately to announce to her that it was his intention to visit her on that very evening.

At about an hour before the evening prayer, he proceeded almost unattended to the harem. As soon as the king was seated, Zulma standing before him, he said,

"You and your father, Zulma, of all my servants, are those upon whom the Shah places

most dependance. Certain events have occurred in which we require all your devotion. We are not pleased with the services of some: it is necessary that they be put away."

Zulma, whose ambition was roused by this confidential tone, humbled herself in proportion as she expected to be elevated, and made repeated assertions of her devotion to the Shah's commands, and of her own as well as of her father's readiness to execute all he should ordain.

"First," said the Shah, "it will be necessary to dispose of the prisoner Zohrab. To-morrow we ordain that he be exposed and humiliated in the eyes of the city, and then he dies."

"As I am your sacrifice," said Zulma, a pang darting involuntarily through her whole frame at this disclosure, "did not the asylum of the world say that he would defer punishment until Tehran—"

"If you, too, Zulma," said the Shah, "his anger being roused at this contradiction; "if you thwart my wishes, the king's countenance will be turned from you for ever. Obey with-

out a word, and the highest honours are preparing for you and your father. Refuse—and ye sink never to rise again."

Zulma was silenced, and, flattered by a disclosure which gave fresh impulse to her ambition, she submitted to smother every other feeling, and to become the instrument of the Shah's wishes.

"Hear, then," said the king. "The Shah will order thy father to exhibit the prisoner Zohrab to the city to-morrow: his humiliation shall be proportioned to his arrogance. Let the whole gang of ferashes and executioners be in readiness. Let him be mounted on an ass with the tail in his hand. A crier shall go before, exclaiming—'This is he who would be a king.' Ferashes and executioners shall spit in his face and buffet him, and others shall be invited to do the same. He shall then be impaled—and Allah have mercy on his soul!"

This horrid sentence visibly worked upon Zulma's feelings, and her tongue was on the point of interceding for the wretched victim;

but in the mood she saw the king, she judged it wiser to refrain, and in silent acquiescence bowed her head before his orders.

"But," said the Shah, "ere this take place we have a more urgent call for thy obedience. Ere to-morrow's dawn another deed must be performed. Knowest thou Sadek?"

At this name, Zulma's whole attention was roused, for she was greatly jealous of the influence which Sadek exercised over the king, an influence which she never ceased devising some mode of lessening.

"Your slave knows full well who he is," said she; "whatever the Shah ordains she is ready to obey."

"Thy father must use all caution in approaching him, and the deed must be done with secrecy. He must suspect nothing—he must attend upon our person to-night as usual, and to-morrow morning, ere the sun is on the horizon, he must sleep in the grave. Prepare thy father with thy council, and let the Shah be satisfied that his confidence in thee has been well placed. To-morrow we shall disclose

more; but this is urgent, and any delay will bring upon thee the Shah's vengeance." Upon this he rose and departed, leaving the bewildered maiden in a state of such excitement, that she felt as if she herself had been elevated to the throne of Persia.

Whilst this was going on, Sadek had been greatly disturbed by suspicion and fear. The Shah's confusion at seeing him had struck his mind as so uncommon, that for a long while he sat in deep meditation, turning over the various causes which might have induced it. He saw that his own refusal to lend himself to the prince's death, had excited the king's anger, and as that was the first time in which he had ventured to disobey, it was to that circumstance he turned his whole thoughts. Full of conjecture, and anticipating the loss of the king's favour and of his situation near the person, he proceeded to the performance of his daily duty, that of preparing the king's carpet for evening prayer, with a heavy heart and a mind foreboding evil. He approached the spot which the king had so recently occupied, in

order to refashion the cushion against which he rested. In turning it over his eyes fell upon a slip of paper, the very slip which he had seen in the king's hand at the moment of his confusion, and which he had thrust under the cushion with so much haste. His natural curiosity would have led him to inspect it, had nothing intervened to make it an object of interest; but now he seized upon it with avidity. What was his surprise when the first word which struck his sight was his own name, written by the Shah's own hand. It stood at the head of a list, over which he quickly glanced; but so entirely was he taken up with his own name, that his eyes swam in his head from apprehension. Hussein's name, his fellow in office, stood immediately after his own. It soon recurred to him that upon a former occasion, when the Shah had discovered a conspiracy, with his own hand he had made out a list of those to be put to death, and that he had adhered to the sentence, which he had then passed, with a resolution as fixed as destiny. Sadek was a man of courage, of great per-

sonal strength, and resolute of purpose. His mind was soon made up. Having remained for some minutes in an attitude so fixed that no statue ever stood firmer, he at length rose with the whole plan formed in his mind. He determined to save his own life and to slay the king. He argued thus. "God has given to each of us one life—more to a king he hath not given, than to the smallest reptile of the desert;—why, then, should mine not be as valuable to me as the king's is to him? Allah has directed me to this paper as to a beacon to ensure my safety. Sadek shall not turn back from this, happen what may." But few are the instances in which a man comes to a resolution of such importance without the support and encouragement of an accomplice, and as he felt great friendship for his youthful assistant Hussein, he determined to save his life in making him share the enterprise.

He quitted the Shah's apartments, after having prepared every thing for his accustomed evening prayer, and having carefully

deposited the paper in the very spot in which he had found it. He then sought out Hussein, whose thoughts were taken up with any thing but the awful event which the more solemn Sadek held in contemplation. Luckily for the latter, nature had imprinted upon his features such unvarying sameness, that no one could discern that aught was working in his mind of more import than usual, and fortunate was it that such was the case; since, called upon as he would be to appear again before the king ere the perpetration of the deed, no suspicion would arise in the royal breast from the inspection of his looks.

"Come here, O boy," said Sadek to Hussein; "I have something to say which will drive all life from your head. Be serious and listen."

"If it be the report," now going about, said Hussein, "that Zohrab Khan, that unfortunate, is to be executed to-morrow, I have heard it."

"Zohrab Khan's death, indeed!" said Sadek;

"what are you speaking of? look a little nearer home, and you will discover—"

"What say ye—home! You cannot be speaking of our prince, whom Allah take into his keeping?" said Hussein.

"Nearer still," said Sadek.

"In the name of the Prophet, what?" answered the alarmed youth.

Sadek then took him by the arm, and in the most impressive manner related the whole circumstance of the paper found under the cushion, having prefaced his communication by a description of the scenes which had taken place—first, of his refusal to murder the prince, then of the Shah's confusion at his sudden appearance.

The cheeks of his youthful auditor were blanched with fear as he heard the narrative; but when he was told that his own name stood second on the proscribed list, his knees knocked under him, and his teeth chattered in his head. He could scarcely gather any courage from the nerve of his companion; for it never had entered his mind that so desperate an action as

killing a king could be conceived, much less executed, by a common thing called a man, and that man a slave. But when he witnessed the steady resolution of Sadek; when he heard his plan of attack, and saw how easily the deed might be done without danger to either, he slowly yielded his assent.

The hour of evening prayer was drawing nigh, and the moment of action was at hand. Sadek determined not to lose sight of Hussein for a moment, lest the timidity of youth might mar his scheme; and, above all, he was anxious to keep him from the presence of the king, certain, as he was, that he could not preserve a proper steadiness of countenance, so necessary in the critical position of their affairs.

The Shah, having returned from his visit to Zulma, received as usual the several officers of state with whom business was to be transacted, and when Sadek appeared in his proper place, in the usual discharge of his office, the king spoke to him with a kindness of tone so totally new, that at once every suspi-

cion was doubly confirmed, and he wanted no further proof to be certain that the king had signed his death-warrant. He was well versed in the treachery of his smile, and when kindness of tone and manner were superadded, nothing more was necessary to put him entirely on his guard.

The Shah, not seeing Hussein at his post, enquired where he was, when Sadek asserted that he had the heart-ache (the usual mode in Persia of saying one is ill), which only called forth more expressions of kindness, upon hearing which the rough Sadek could scarcely prevent his unexpressive eye from casting a glance of contempt at the false-tongued tyrant. And when the hour of prayer was come, the exclamations of holy fervour which came from the Shah, were so much louder and so much more emphatic than usual, that upon any other occasion Sadek might have concluded that the heart of the king had been touched by the miseries inflicted upon the now prostrate city, and that apparently one so pious was devising nothing but good.

The day drew to its close; the usual watch was set on the walls and turrets of the Ark, and nothing took place which could in the least have made Sadek suspect that his own death was in contemplation, excepting one circumstance. This was the sight of a man prowling near the room in which he slept —a man he knew, who was never employed by the chief executioner excepting on desperate occasions. He could give no very good account of himself when questioned by Sadek; but his appearance gave the finishing stroke to his determination, and armed his hand with a nerve that nothing could shake.

The king retired to bed at the usual hour. The room in which he passed the night was admirably adapted to encourage Sadek in his undertaking. It was situated in a court, surrounded by high walls, separate from the great mass of the palace, and rather difficult of approach, the court being entered by a small gate which was barred at night. Sadek and Hussein slept in a *cufsh khaneh*, a smaller inner room, whilst a lamp was kept burning

in the very room in which the king slept. The king could scarcely turn himself without being heard, and it was death if they disturbed his slumbers.

Whilst Sadek was performing the operation of taking off his garments, preparatory to bed, the king entered into conversation with him in a manner totally unusual; and with a kindness of tone, which perhaps might have softened any heart but Sadek's, said to him—

"You have heard the fate of that ill-advised Zohrab; to-morrow will put an end to all his vain projects of ambition, and his death will seal the fate of his rebellion."

"As I am your sacrifice, yes," said Sadek.

"What has become of thy sister, Sadek?" said the Shah. "We have lost sight of her."

"Your slave thinks that she fled to the Turcomans, with Zohrab Khan's mother," said Sadek.

"Ah! is it so?" said the Shah; "then it is well. We have ordered that that unfortunate woman should no longer be molested, and she may

be permitted to sit under the shadow of our throne: the Shah wars not with women. Let thy sister partake of our clemency," said the king.

"May the shadow of the asylum of the universe never be less," said Sadek, quite alive to this extension of the royal forgiveness, and almost forgetting the desperate deed he was about to perform. "Your slave kisses the hem of your garment."

"Who is that?" said the Shah, giving ear to a noise which he heard at the gate of the court. "Who goes there?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said Sadek, "Hussein, your slave, is barring the gate."

"Go tell him to unbar it; be it left open to night; 'tis possible that reports may be made to the Shah of the state of the public mind preparatory to to-morrow's execution."

"Your slave then will sleep across the Shah's threshold," said Sadek, suppressing a look of ferocity which had lighted up his features, and again repossessed by his full determination,

having heard this additional confirmation of the fate awarded him by his treacherous master.

"Do so," said the Shah. "Thou art a good servant: *inshallah!* the king will make thy face white to eternity, and thy head touch the skies."

"Your slave is grateful for all the Shah's kindness," said Sadek; "but whose dog is he, that the Shah should take notice of him?" Upon saying which he managed to place the king's dagger and sword, which were usually close to his bed head, at some distance, which the king perceiving, suspicion lighting up his animated eye, exclaimed,

"Why do ye place them there, man? Why do ye change their position?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said Sadek with infinite presence of mind, "when your slave sleeps upon your threshold, it is always the custom to change their position."

"Is it so?" said the king, apparently satisfied with the reason, and allowed the change to be made. Nothing more being required,

Sadek helped the king to his repose (the last before the grave !), and in taking his leave he fixed the lamp in a position favourable to his purpose, and took so accurate a survey of the relative situation of every object in the room, that he knew at once whither to direct his steps.

He then returned to Hussein, whose state of nervousness almost amounted to madness, so little prepared was he to be an actor in the tragedy. A small lamp burnt in their room, by the light of which Sadek, with a gloomy determination overspreading his features, inspected the fatal dagger, (a long Georgian *khanjar* made of highest tempered steel,) which was to seal the fate of the despot. Not daring to speak, scarcely to breathe, they communicated to each other by signs. They did not take off their clothes; both had prepared themselves for immediate flight as soon as the deed was over, and horses were ready saddled waiting for them at a moment's notice.

The hour of midnight, for which they had been watching with nervous expectation, at length was announced by the sentinels on the city

walls, and then indeed their courage was put to the test. Sadek's rose in proportion as Hussein's fell. The youth was scarcely alive, still he kept as steady a countenance as he could, and looked at his dagger. Sadek arose, and trimmed the waning lamp, his face exhibiting to the timid Hussein features full of stern resolution. "*Biah*, come! *wakt shoud!* It is his time," said Sadek.

"One minute," said Hussein, his heart totally failing him. At that moment they heard an audible sigh from the Shah. "In the name of the Prophet, what's that," said the youth.

"Come on," said Sadek fiercely, "otherwise thy heart shall feel this," brandishing his awful weapon in his face. He then led on, and slowly opening the door of the Shah's apartment, entered without making the least noise; but Hussein, in his excessive agitation, stumbled over the high threshold, and awoke the King.

"What's that?" exclaimed his shrill voice. "Who goes there?" After that he immediately rose, and seating himself upright in his bed he perceived Sadek.

"Sadek!" roared he, "what do you seek?" and at once perceiving his intention, he exclaimed, "Stop! or ye die,"

"Die yourself," said Sadek; "I come for thy blood ere thou takest mine."

"I 'll give you all you ask," said the king, groping about for his arms. "I am your king! all ye desire take."

"We want nothing but justice," said Sadek, "and this it is," upon which he aimed a deadly blow at the king, which he parried with his arm; the king then raised his voice, and seeking safety in flight around the room, he dodged his assassin with considerable dexterity. He had just seized his sword, when Sadek, watching his opportunity, plunged his dagger in the very inmost recesses of his heart. He fell, and as the stream of life flowed rapidly from the gaping wound, all he could articulate was, "I am the Shah—I—I—Shah—Shah—" And thus fell the scourge of Persia's fair kingdom, and of her soft and thoughtless sons.

At the sight of the breathless bloody corpse,

Hussein actually sunk on the ground with dismay, and covered his face with his hands; whilst Sadek scarcely giving himself time to cast a thought on the vicissitudes which had thus destroyed one who swayed over millions, sat doggedly to work to complete his task. He first sought for the fatal list in the pockets of the Shah, which he found; he then calmly severed the head from the body, wrapped it in a napkin, and pinned the list thereupon; then taking it up in one hand, whilst he covered himself over with a cloak, with the other he left the apartment. Hussein followed him almost mechanically, scarcely knowing what he did. When they had quitted the palace, which they did unsuspected, being known to belong to the Shah, Sadek said to Hussein, "Now open thy eyes, say thanks to Allah for saving thy life, take to thy steed, and as ye would serve thy preserver, ride as if life and death depended upon thy exertions to the black tents of the Yamoot. Seek out Zohrab's mother, Mariam, the young Ali, and tell them to speed hither-

wards with all haste. The Shah is dead, and Fatteh Ali reigns."

Hussein now fully restored to his senses did as he was ordered, and Sadek took his own road through the city.

CHAPTER XI.

He arose one morning, and lo! he found himself a king.
VICISSITUDES OF HUMAN LIFE.

THE road from the apartments of the Shah, where the bloody deed had been committed, to the entrance gate of the palace, lay immediately in front of the small court and chamber in which the prince Fatteh Ali was confined. Of this Sadek possessed the key, and was the sole guardian. Passing it, his heart smote him when he thought upon the wretched and disconsolate situation of the youth, and it struck him that he might announce to him the change in his fortunes now about to take place, in a manner which would not compromise himself, but shorten the torments of the prince.

He therefore stept aside, and slowly opening the gate, he proceeded without making the least noise to the very door of the apartment where the prince lay.

Fatteh Ali was wrapt in a sound sleep, slight groans ever and anon breaking from his wretched bosom, when of a sudden he heard these words—"Fatteh Ali—Fatteh Ali—the Shah dies—thy sister lives—render thanks to Allah!" He awoke in a tremor, and seating himself upright on his mattrass, he listened with all his ears, hoping to hear something more. He thought he heard a noise, and eagerly exclaimed—"Who goes there, in the name of the Prophet?" but nobody answered. The silence which ensued was as profound as the darkness, and after much anxious thought and expectation, he resigned himself to his pillow again, and with a deep sigh concluded that he had been tantalized by some passing dream.

Sadek, in the mean while, made his way good through the gates of the palace and the Ark, and straightway sought the habitation of the Grand Vizir. It was a house that had

belonged to one of the proscribed omrahs of the city, and as Sadek was well known to be the Shah's confidential servant, who frequently was the bearer of messages at all hours of the night, he was freely permitted to pass on to where the Vizir slept. Here also he slowly entered the room, and depositing the horrible burthen which he bore, the bloody head, just within the threshold, he as quietly withdrew. No observation was made by the attendants—the night had still much to run, and the city was wrapt up in as much repose, as if peace reigned and crime was unknown.

Having thus fulfilled the measure of his awful destiny, this man of desperate resolution, and though of crime, an avenger of his oppressed country, sought his steed, and taking his departure from the gates of the city, was soon lost in the darkness of the forest, never more to be seen among those who had long known him as their friend and companion.

At an earlier hour than usual, when the first glimmering of day was scarcely sufficient to pierce through the heavy curtain which covered

the outside of the window of the Grand Vizir's room, the minister opened his eyes. He, too, thought that some unusual noise had taken place while he slept, and strange visions had passed through his brain, an event unusual to one who was well known for the soundness of his intellect. It appeared to him that something about the folds of the curtain of his door was different to what he remembered before he composed himself to sleep, and looking lower he saw a substance which, owing to the darkness, he could not define; but his eyes remaining fixed upon it, little by little he thought that it resolved itself into some well-known shape—that it resembled a human head! Then, with more certainty, he was almost sure that he could trace the eyes, then the nose, then the mouth; but as the certainty increased he turned himself about, deriding his own credulity, and scouting the idea of so strange a vision. Again he looked and again he saw a head, and what is more, the features assumed an expression well known;

and ah! too horrible to think, he thought the Shah himself was staring at him. He covered himself over with the bedclothes, as if to shake off so hideous a vision, and remained thus for some time, determining within himself to forget it; but now that the day dawned bright, and that he again cast his eyes that way, who can describe his looks of surprise and horror—who give an idea of the terror which possessed him, when what he had imagined as a vision of the brain became a reality, and that the head which he imagined watching over the interests of the kingdom was a lifeless mass before him. He roared out to his attendants to appear, in a voice which to that hour they had never heard, and they rushed in to his assistance, expecting to have found him assailed by an assassin; but when their eyes caught a sight of the horrible and ghastly object, all their energies forsook them, and they stood as if they were paralyzed. Expressions of horror and amazement burst from both master and servants. "Who has done this?" cried one. "What ashes have fallen upon

our heads?" said another. "The Shah is dead!" whispered a third, a thrill of joy running through his frame at the same time. "Have the *dives* and *gins* been at work this night?" said the Vizir; "but see, see, what is that paper; perhaps some news may enlighten our brain." Upon that one of the servants picked it up with great caution, and gave it his master.

"As I live," said the Vizir, "it is in the Shah's own hand!"

When he had well examined it, and particularly when he saw whose name was affixed at the top of the list, the mystery was cleared up, and immediately he understood the whole transaction. Strictly keeping his own council, he carefully put the paper into his breast, and having enquired whether any one had entered the house that night, none present could answer the question; but upon enquiry it was known at the gate that Sadek had, and had made a pretext of business with the minister.

The Vizir enjoined secrecy to every one present, and instantly dressing himself, mounted his horse and proceeded to the palace. He found all the officers of the household at their posts, totally unconscious of the event, and although it was unusual to see the prime minister so early on foot, yet as their wayward master frequently transacted business at the most uncertain hours, they were in no manner surprised to see him, and freely admitted him. He had ordered the head to be brought after him, and accompanied only by its bearer, he fearfully entered the apartment in which the Shah had slept. We have dwelt too long upon horrors to aim at giving a description of the sight which struck the Vizir at his entrance. His was a mind deeply and impressively to reflect upon the vicissitudes of this world's vanities, as he gazed upon the corpse of his late sovereign, whom but the night before he had quitted enjoying the fullness of his power, as unsuspicious of the lot which awaited him, as were those whom he had himself doomed to a sudden and unprepared death.

The Vizir's first act was to take possession of the king's seals, which were carried in a small inner pocket, and then depositing the head near the body, he closed the doors, and directed a guard to be placed, until he should issue further orders. He then ordered a convocation of all the principal officers of state, of the chief priests and elders of the city, to meet in the great hall of audience of the palace, whilst he himself proceeded where the prince was held in confinement.

It was still early in the day, and Fatteh Ali had scarcely performed his morning devotions, when the Vizir entered the room. He was seated most dejectedly on the corner of his carpet, ruminating over what he religiously believed to have been a dream, and started with surprise at seeing who his visitor was, at so unusual an hour.

"How is this?" said he, "our eyes are enlightened! My fortunes are on the rise, that my master should visit his pupil thus early."

He was still more surprised when he saw the Vizir approach with the same degree of respect

that he observed to the Shah himself, and kneeling down at his feet touch the ground with his forehead.

"What mockery is this?" said the youth.

"May the hours of the king of kings be fortunate!" said the old man, affected even to tears, "Fatteh Ali Shah is now the sovereign of Irân. Thy uncle sleeps the sleep of the grave."

"Allah, Allah!" exclaimed the bewildered youth. "Is this still a dream, or am I indeed awake? What does this mean? Why come you thus to torture the unfortunate? If the king requires my life, take it—but do not add insult to my misery."

The Vizir then in a few words explained the catastrophe of his uncle's death, and in confirmation presented the paper containing the names of those, who but for this event would have been the victims of the tyrant's suspicions.

"Ah," said Fatteh Ali, his eye glancing over it, "in my uncle's own hand." He read it in silence, the colour forsaking his cheeks, as the various emotions which it excited filled his breast. He came to the name which had been

inserted and then erased. "As I live," said the youth to the Vizir, "here is your name,"—and at the very termination, standing rather apart from the others, with a peculiar stroke under it, he found his own. "Allah, Allah!" said he in a solemn ejaculation, "the destinies of thy creatures are in thy hands! Vain, O man! are thy resolves, when the God of our creation has issued his own almighty decrees! But for this, and Fatteh Ali were numbered with the dead; but for this, and the angel of death would have visited him, and the recording angels made up the account of his life. And thou too, good old man! the loss of my life would have been of little consequence compared with thine, who by thy wisdom maketh millions of thy fellow-creatures to prosper. We must put up our thanks to God for this deliverance, and let this awful lesson make us both humbler and better."

Nothing could be more impressive than the words and manner of this young prince, a worthy pupil of so excellent a minister, and he would long have indulged in the serious turn

of his thoughts, had not Hajji Ibrahim reminded him that it was necessary he should attend the convocation about to assemble, to whom an explanation of the sudden and awful event should be made, whilst he would be presented to them as their future sovereign.

It would be in vain to attempt to describe the various emotions which filled the breast of the young and ardent prince, as he left his place of confinement, and issued into the enjoyment of life, secure from the caprice of a tyrant, and possessor of one of the most brilliant thrones of Asia. The suddenness of the transition was almost too much for him to bear, and his mind staggered to and fro, with the same unsteadiness and confusion of vision, as that of a drunkard full of strong drink. But as he walked slowly onward of a sudden he stopped, and exclaimed, "But in the name of the prophet, one half only of my nightly vision has been accomplished, what has become of the other half? I was told that my sister lived." He then related to his companion how he had been awakened, and recited the very words, which

he now could swear had been uttered by a human voice. The Vizir suggested that the voice most probably was Sadek's, for the whole circumstances of that man's career favoured that suggestion. His devotedness to the Shah, and at the same time his love for the prince and his sister—his having been the supposed instrument of her death, as he had been that of their father's—his mysterious and reserved manner, and his honest and uncompromising severity of character—every thing led him to suppose as well to hope that he might have pretended to execute the Shah's commands, at the same time that he might have saved the victims from their extreme rigour—and with this he concluded that time alone would work out the mystery which hung over Amima's fate, and that nothing that could be done could at all hasten its disclosure. Indeed, he issued immediate orders, that an active search should be made for Sadek, as well as Hussein; but when it was ascertained that they had early left the gates of the city, mounted upon the choicest of the king's horses, he felt that any attempt to

overtake them would be in vain. But the hope, the lively and well founded hope, which now animated the prince, that his sister might be restored to him, gave such a buoyancy to his spirits, and so filled his heart with every sensation of joy and expectation, that he could scarcely give up his thoughts to the awful ceremony of taking upon him the reins of government which was awaiting him, and could think of nothing but becoming the protector and companion of his beloved Amima.

It was only at this moment that the image of the imprisoned and condemned Zohrab crossed the mind of the Grand Vizir. He would at that instant have run to throw open the gates of his prison, and to cast off his fetters; but it was necessary first to attend to his more urgent duty, and he promised himself the luxury of performing that act of justice, as soon as he should have secured to his pupil the lawful throne of his inheritance, and gladdened the hearts of the oppressed country, by substituting, for the tyrant and the blood-drinker, one who promised to heal all their wounds, and

to become their benefactor as he had become their king.

Already was the court of the great hall of audience filled, for an undefined report of the death of the Shah had early got abroad, and spread like the wind from one end of the city to the other; and already, in addition to the usual great officers of state, had the body of the Asterabad ullemah, headed by their chief priests, collected themselves. The musnud alone was vacant, and the Grand Vizir not at his post. Every eye was turned towards the door through which the tyrant usually entered, and the assembled crowd could scarcely believe that he was not again to appear, when the curtain being thrown up, instead of that terror-inspiring face, that hard countenance full of deadly import, appeared the graceful form of the young prince, full of youthful diffidence and modesty, attended by his aged and much revered minister. Every countenance brightened up; a low hum of joy and applause instinctively broke forth; when the prince came forward, and presented himself to their joyful welcomes. Instead of seat-

ing himself at once on the musnud, he took his place at a lower spot, whilst the Vizir stood before him.

The Grand Vizir then addressed the Nakeeb Shah, one of the nobles to whom the late king usually spoke on public days, and informed him, in a full and detailed manner, of the death of Aga Mohammed Shah, making no comments, but using the reverential form of words common to Oriental phraseology on such an occasion, and then stated that his nephew, Fatteh Ali, became his successor, both as the natural heir to the throne, as well as in virtue of the intention of the late king.

He then called upon the chief priest to ascend into the hall, in order to gird the sword of state on the king's person, as is usual on such occasions, until the ultimate and more solemn ceremony should be performed in the prescribed forms in the capital, by the *Mushtehed* of the kingdom. This was done with all the proper acclamations; and the astrologer of the court having announced that a favourable conjunction of the planets was then taking place, nothing more was neces-

sary to add to the universal joy. As soon as this ceremony was performed, and the king seated on the musnud, the *Fatteh* was chaunted forth in the usual manner by the finest voice at court, in which the titles of the new king were announced; and then public enthusiasm no longer being restrained, long and repeated shouts of joy resounded throughout the courts of the palace, and were re-echoed in succession from one end of the city to the other. And, indeed, what joy could be more sincere? The feeling was that of a reprieve from death—of the knocking off the chains of a prisoner, or of the return of an exile to the enjoyments of home and country. It was then that execration burst forth against the fallen king, that his name was branded with every odious epithet so prolific in the mouth and in the language of Persia, and that his successor's good qualities were extolled, as partaking of more than human excellence.

The shouts of joy which accompanied the installation of the new Shah, were heard with astonishment and apprehension by Zul-

ma in the harem. She had scarcely closed her eyes during this celebrated night, so anxious had she been to put into execution the Shah's commands to superintend the death of Sadek, and she was waiting with the greatest impatience the return of the assassin to report the perpetration of the deed, when the noise of exultation struck her ears, and put her conjectures on the rack. "What can this mean," said she? "Joy in the courts of the Shah! this cannot be! Such things are unknown; something has taken place!" She could scarcely refrain from running herself to the scene of action, so totally at a loss was she to account for what struck her ears. At length a knocking at the harem gate was heard, and the murderous wretch, who had received her orders in furtherance of the Shah's commands, and whom she expected to appear brandishing the head of her rival, returned all aghast at the change which had taken place. She at first would not credit the intelligence; she would have driven him away as a liar—as a coward excusing his pu-

sillanimity; but her father soon confirmed all, and disclosed to her the destruction of every scheme of ambition which her too ardent imagination might have formed. She sat for some moments, uttering no other words than "The Shah is dead! the Shah is dead!" as if that one fact had never been placed among the possibilities of her future destinies, and then all her faculties appeared to be so stunned by disappointment, that she remained long absorbed in gloomy silence. Every dream, either of love or ambition, which had passed through her mind, seemed now so totally dissipated, and the realities of her situation appeared before her in such strong relief, that she could foresee nothing more brilliant for herself than resuming her former station of daughter of the chief executioner, the superintender of ferashes, and the chief person among men of violence. But, in the middle of all this despondency, a thought struck her, and she determined to act upon it instantly: she recollected that Zohrab was still a prisoner, that she still might have access to him, and that perhaps she

might yet secure a share in his affections, before she was again thrown back upon herself and her family. She accordingly hastened to put on her veil, and gave orders that the guardian of Zohrab's prison should attend her.

Some time elapsed ere this arrangement could take place, and she was about leaving the harem, when she was detained by observing a crowd of the royal servants and officers pursuing the very path which she intended to tread; and shortly after the young king himself, accompanied by the Grand Vizir, appeared surrounded by a brilliant cortège of courtiers, whose happy faces and easy carriage strongly spoke of the great change which had taken place. She retired within her apartments to ruminate over her miseries, whilst the procession passed on.

The ceremony of the temporary installation having terminated, the Grand Vizir did not lose a moment in bringing the situation of the prisoner Zohrab to the king's recollection, and requested his permission to go forthwith, and procure his release. Fatteh Ali, with all the warmth and enthusiasm of youth,

acceded to the proposal with unfeigned joy, and moreover expressed a wish that he too might have the pleasure of seeing his fetters knocked off. Zohrab in fact had from his earliest boyhood been the idol of his admiration. His feats of daring and hardihood, like those of the heroes in the *Shahnameh*, had excited his emulation, whilst his acts of generosity and mildness had exalted him into the character of one of the mussulman's most revered Imams. Frequently had his imagination been enchanted by the supposititious loves of this brave youth and his sister, and to such a degree, that he had indulged his poetic vein (for which, in common with his countrymen, he was famous) by writing the loves of Amima and Zohrab, in imitation of those of Ferhad and Shireen. When he heard how deeply they were enamoured with each other, far from feeling any resentment or jealousy, their misfortunes, and the checks which were opposed to their love, only gave him more materials for weaving the thread of his romance, and now that he was called upon to act as the arbiter of their future destinies, it may be con-

ceived with what delight he acceded to the Grand Vizir's proposal, and how eagerly he desired to become personally known to one who had so long held a share in his affections.

Zohrab, during the late events, had passed his time in dragging on a wretched existence, hourly expecting to be called upon to meet his fate. His fine features were scarcely to be recognized, his eyes, once so brilliant, were sunk and inanimate, his cheeks hollow, and his whole appearance was that of decay and desolation. He had perceived through one friendly chink in his cell, that another morning had dawned, and from what he had learned from his jailer had cheered himself with the hope that this day would see an end to his miseries. Upon the first approaches of the king's servants, hearing more voices than usual at the door of his prison, he concluded that his hour was at length come, and he redoubled those mental prayers for resignation to the divine will, which were usual to the habit of his mind, and by which he was enabled to meet the stroke which hung over him with fortitude. At length the gates were thrown open

with a crash, and at once a crowd, brilliantly arrayed, accompanied by all the insignias of royalty, broke upon his astonished senses. His eyes were so dazzled by the combined glare of torches and daylight, that he was obliged to cover them for some time ere he could distinguish a single object; but before he had regained his sight, his fetters were knocked off, and he felt his person at liberty. Instead of the hoarse voice of the jailer, inviting him as he expected to attend his own execution, the first words spoken were in a kind tone by the Grand Vizir. They were as soothing to his senses as the promise of absolution to the desponding sinner, or as the calm of an opiate upon the nerves of a sleepless patient; they gradually prepared him to hear those good tidings which were about to bring renovation to his whole being, and to raise him from the grave to life—from utter despair to renewed hope.

It would be in vain to attempt to describe the gradations of feeling which took place in the mind of Zohrab, until he was put into complete possession of the change which had

taken place in his fortunes. At first he could scarcely believe that he was to live, so fully had he prepared himself to die. But as he unravelled the consequences likely to ensue from the death of the Shah, and the accession of his successor, he began to place more value upon an existence to which he had become indifferent. When he was presented to Fatteh Ali, when he heard the kindness of his expressions towards him, and when he reflected that it was no other than the brother of his Amima who thus addressed him, and who sought his friendship, his heart softened even to tears, and became alive to all the noblest emotions of his nature. Still, that great incentive to cling to life, the object of that love which had filled all the avenues to his heart, was wanting, and he heard with indifference from the king's lips, confirmed by the Vizir, of the honours, the dignities, and the worldly advantages that were in store for him. They both looked with the greatest interest upon the broken youth, as they observed the melancholy which seemed to pervade his whole being, and although they remarked

that he strove to meet their kindness with corresponding alacrity and gratitude, still indifference to all that was said and promised preponderated. At length the sympathies of Fatteh Ali struck upon the right chord, and soon it occurred to him, that he might afford his new friend the same relief that he himself had enjoyed, by producing a corresponding hope in his breast. Ordering every one to retire, when he was left with Zohrab, he said, "I am quite aware of what is passing in your mind; mine was equally affected, but hear my tale, and let the same hope which fills me, rejoice you also." Upon that, he related what he had looked upon as a dream, but which he now could resolve into certainty, explaining the reasons why he was sure that it could have been none but Sadek who uttered the words which struck his ear. Zohrab immediately caught at the information with the same avidity that a drowning man buffetted by a torrent catches at a passing plank. His whole nature at once was changed. His eyes resumed their wonted brilliancy, smiles broke out on his haggard face, and as tears suf-

fused his eyes, he threw himself at the knees of his young sovereign, and embraced them with the most unbounded gratitude and tenderness. Then indeed there was that quick interchange of affection and sentiments between the two youths, which settled their future friendship, and as there was generated a similarity of hope in their hearts, so their sympathies went hand and hand, and nothing more was wanting to ensure their happiness than the fulfilment of that assertion which had been so strangely pronounced on the eventful morning of the Shah's death.

Zohrab, in the course of a short time, was restored to health and to his usual good looks. It was not long ere he enjoyed the delight of embracing his mother, of being restored to the services of his faithful Ali, and of communicating to Mariam the hopes of once more seeing her mistress. The young king, during the short time which it required to make preparations for leaving Asterabad to proceed to his capital, in co-operation with the Vizir and Zohrab, had done every thing in his power to

relieve the unfortunate inhabitants who had suffered by the late siege; and more particularly, had restored the house and fortunes of the fallen Zaul, giving back to his widow all his former possessions renovated and enriched, and making her every compensation, as far as worldly matters were concerned, for her recent losses.

Very soon after, the king, followed by Zohrab and his court and army, took their departure for Tehran, accompanied to a certain distance by the whole population of the city, who did not cease putting up prayers for the prosperity of their new king.

CONCLUSION.

"*Alham du lillah, tamam shûd*"—praise be to Allah, it is done!

THE PERSIAN'S GRACE.

WE must now return to the desert, where Amima and her aged father had dragged on their existence in the tamest uniformity, no greater variety having taken place in the tenor of their life than might be produced by the change of seasons. Habit had rendered tolerable to him, that which she could not but esteem the most horrid of exiles. Although she devoted herself entirely to him, attending upon his infirmities with assiduous care, and doing her utmost endeavours to soften his miseries, still she felt that she did not possess sufficient fortitude to look forward to an interminable exile in the desert, to passing her best years in a state of almost savage nature, the more so as her heart was fixed upon

the image of one who, if he knew of her present forlorn state, she was sure would undergo every danger and every sacrifice either to share it with her or to tear her from it; besides which, the possibility of being left entirely to herself in this desolate solitude, would haunt her imagination even to madness. She might be bereft of her father. To whom, then, could she turn for protection? Buried in oblivion as they seemed to be, they might be neglected and forgotten even by the man who had saved their lives, and then what would be her fate, left to the mercies of rude and half savage rayats? Week after week, and month after month, dragged on, and nothing occurred which could make her suppose that her existence was known to any one. She saw none but her father, the young Ali Murad and the old woman. She endeavoured to fortify herself with the consolations of religion, and in that her father was a great help and comfort. He could with pleasure give up life and its vanities, and even dreaded the idea of being restored to it; but this was not so easy for her, and excepting the one consolatory satisfaction of being of use and comfort to her father, she

frequently regretted the compassion which her preserver had exercised in her favour, and wished that she had been added to the many victims of her uncle's vengeance.

It was her custom, at the close of day, to ascend the mound under which was situated their hut, and after having offered up her evening prayer, there to watch the gradual descent of the sun into the extended and unbroken horizon, her eyes passing over that long region of wilderness which she had crossed with such rapidity on the night of her arrival. She constantly turned her eyes and her thoughts in that direction, frequently indulging in the fond hope that perchance some kind being, hearing of her situation, might find his way to her, and make her recollect that she still belonged to the community of man; she often mistook some reed that thrust its head more prominently into the air than another, for a living being, and watched it with all the ardour of intense hope and expectation.

Often and often as her hopes had been disappointed, still she continued to gaze. It was at the close of an oppresive day, when the sultry

south wind had blown with more than usual violence, accompanied by the most dispiriting howling, that Amima had taken post as usual on the hillock. The clouds threatened a stormy night, and long streaks of lightning were throwing uncertain gleams over the bleak wilderness, when her eyes of a sudden fixed themselves upon a small black spot on the very verge of the horizon. She had too long been deceived by the deceitful appearances of the reeds, to mistake this for one, and as she had studied their bearings and distances, she was certain on this occasion she could not be mistaken, particularly as she remarked that it changed its position, sometimes disappearing altogether, at others re-appearing, whilst it increased in size at every moment. At first she imagined it to be an illusion, for frequently had she gazed and gazed until she could bring herself to believe she could see a whole army approaching; but still the object was there, a dark spot, changing place and increasing in size. At length she became quite certain that it was some live thing. Was it a wild beast—or a stray horse—or a lost camel? She conjectured that it might be any thing, save

one of her own species. She did not venture to hope so much happiness. But still it approached, and there seemed intelligence in its action. It appeared to be making for the mound. At length, all doubt having vanished, the blood forsook her face, and trickled in cold channels through her veins, when her astonished and delighted eyes beheld distinctly a cavalier urging on his steed in a straight line to where she sat. Her step faltered as she rose to retreat, and her eyes were suffused by sudden dimness, until they were relieved by tears. As soon as she could walk, she hurried onwards to her home, and with great eagerness called to her father. "In the name of Allah," she said, "come, father, come!—a horseman speeds towards us from the west."

"How!" said the old man, with intense agitation; "is there one who knows how to find the broken Hussein?"

They had scarcely said these words, when the unusual sounds of horse's hoofs confirmed Amima's words, and were heard trampling towards the door of the hut. The youth, Ali Murad, rushed out to see who it might be, and soon

the stern and hollow voice of a stranger was heard.

"Where is the Khan?—Where is the lady Banou?" said the voice.

The boy led the stranger in. He was a tall figure, his dress greatly weatherworn and dusted, and he was armed at all points. The last gleams of day scarcely glanced into the dark room, and there was difficulty in distinguishing his features. The stranger's first impulse was to rush towards the old Khan, to seize his hand, kiss his knee, and then bow himself before Amima, exclaiming at the same time, "*Selam alekum*, peace be unto you!"

"That is Sadek's voice," said the blind prince, "as I live, that is the voice of an old servant."

"Allah preserve us," exclaimed Amima, as she looked upon him, "it is indeed Sadek! Welcome to you—welcome, Sadek Beg—long have we expected you—what news? Sit."

Her agitation strongly manifested itself as she spoke, tears trembling in her eyes, and the nervousness of tears giving agitation to her voice.

The feeling was communicated to the rough

man before her, and he could scarcely speak, from the variety of sensations which at once pervaded his breast. Assassin of his king, he became the saviour of the beings before him. He was voluntarily throwing himself into exile, when at the same time he restored them to the world, its delights, and its honours.

"The news I bring," said he, "is this: the Shah is dead—Fatteh Ali reigns—and Zohrab lives. I come to conduct thee to Tehran."

It would be impossible to describe the varied feelings which overwhelmed at once both father and daughter, upon hearing these words. She threw herself into his arms and sobbed aloud, whilst he pressed her to his heart, and in solemn and reverential tones invoked the awful name of his creator, the author and the disposer of all things. Long did it take to restore their minds to the control of reason. The old man, although he rejoiced for the safety of his daughter and son, shrunk from the new habits which he was called upon to adopt, whilst the lovely Amima blushed through all her frame, as her thoughts dwelt almost exclusively upon that one absorbing object of her heart, her lover, and rapidly ran over all the happiness in store for

her. They scarcely enquired how such strange events had come to pass, so totally were they engrossed with the results; and allowed some time to elapse ere they called upon Sadek to relate the different events that had occurred since he had last visited the desert. We must leave them for a while to exhaust their curiosity and make the preparations for their journey, in order to describe the entrance of the young king into his capital.

Long indeed was it since Tehran had seen so happy a day, or Persia been cheered by such happy prospects, as when Fatteh Ali Shah entered its gates. The arrangements made for his reception, were on the most magnificent scale. The whole country seemed with one consent to have put on a new dress, and as the court poet expressed it, "Nature had thrown off the sackcloth and ashes of oppression, to put on the kalaat of happiness." Every where men were seen congratulating each other, bandying their *muburek bads* from family to family. Every head that could turn a stanza was busy in making the "nightingale of the pen flutter about the new blown rose of royalty." Astrologers were taken up in drawing the horoscope of the

new king, predicting his greatness, and establishing his perfections. The priests composed new blessings for his special purpose, and new curses for his enemies—and from that day every one began to form some project for future years, in the hope of being able to put it into practice,—a satisfaction unknown during the reign of the late king, for it was looked upon as presumption and imprudence to lay a plan even for the next day.

Upon the morning of the young king's entrance into the city, the whole male population in new clothes turned out to meet him, many of the most zealous proceeding several parasangs on the road, to catch the first glimpse of his person, whilst the women in their white veils lined the walls. At intervals oxen were sacrificed on his road, and according to ancient custom their heads were thrown under his horses' feet. Sugar, that emblem of prosperity in a Persian's estimation, was spread on the road in profusion; a numerous band of wrestlers, wielders of clubs, of *lutis* or merry-andrews, and bear and monkey leaders, were in readiness to leap, dance, sing, and beat their drums in his honour; the longest *pai endax*

that had ever been spread, composed of the richest and most costly stuffs, reaching from the threshold of the city gate to the foot of the throne, was prepared for his horse to walk over; the most noisy *nokara* that had ever shaken the walls and stunned the people of Tehran, was seated in high places, ready to strike up the instant he appeared, and at night the blaze of illuminations was such as to put the heavens to the blush, and make the moon and stars hide their diminished heads.

When at length he did appear surrounded by his brilliant cortege, the shouts that rent the air, as the same poet said, "were reverberated in long and deep echoes at the bottom of every Persian heart, and passing from earth to Jehanum, were again repeated for a hundred years about the soul of the dead tyrant, forming as great a part of his punishment there, as they afforded pleasure to Persia."

Every one was struck with the beauty of the young Shah, of his grace, his inimitable attractive manner, and the felicity of his expressions, as he presented the emblematic sugar to each congratulating noble. All were happy to behold their favourite Grand Vizir among them

again. "But who," said they, "is the youth who rides on the right of the king? Who ever before saw so noble a countenance, so Rustam a form, and such charm of appearance? As soon as they knew him to be Zohrab, the great and celebrated Zohrab, all others were neglected to gaze upon him, and never had Tehran seen a sight in every way so agreeable—a young and beloved king, a wise Vizir to direct his councils, and an invincible warrior to guard his throne.

The cavalcade proceeded with great dignity, amidst the joyful cries and happy faces of the multitude. The king crossed the threshold of the city at the proper hour prescribed by the astrologer in chief, and seated himself upon the throne, amidst the roar of cannon, the din of the *nokara*, and the prayers of the assembled *ullemah*.

The next day was appointed for the formal investiture of the sword of state by the *mushtehed*, who had come expressly from Kom, his usual seat, for that purpose, as well as to bind on the armlets of royalty, and to present the crown.

The day came with all its solemnities. The great court, situated before the open hall, sup-

ported by columns, in which was placed the marble throne, was early crowded by the principal officers of state in their most brilliant brocades, arms, and jewels; every avenue to the palace was lined by troops; the *zambureh* camels, with their gaudiest trappings, were placed in long rows in the maidan; the elephants were astonishing the crowd, their rich *howdars* glittering with mirrors and trappings of cloth of gold. The whole city was gathered in and about the palace at noon; when the young king appeared staggering under the splendour of his dress, covered with jewels of such astonishing value that every other sovereign might blush for poverty. The *mushtehed*, an old man of dervish-like appearance, his white beard sweeping his breast, was brought forward, together with a brilliant sword, which he buckled on the side of the king, uttering a prayer for its success. The armlets, the celebrated *koh noor* and *deriah noor*, were then fastened on his arms, and the crown placed upon his head; and then, when fairly seated on his throne, the *Fatteh* was pronounced and the ceremony concluded by the din of artillery and the shouts of the multitude, which told the city and Persia

that they now possessed a king installed with every due formality.

During the ceremony, Zohrab, in the dress of a soldier, stood on one side of the throne, and the Grand Vizir on the other. The shouts of joy were still ringing through the air, when a sensation of stir and curiosity was felt throughout the assembled courtiers, by the appearance of an old blind man, leaning on a staff, slowly making his way through the crowd, conducted by a youth of lowly appearance, and followed by a female who, though closely veiled, exhibited the most beautiful and attractive form. This little group was allowed to proceed, headed by an officer of the household, who with a voice of authority ordered a passage to be cleared. It gradually made its way to the throne. The sensation it produced became stronger and stronger at every moment. Some of the older soldiers and attendants recognised the once famous Hussein Kûli Khan in the stranger, and ran to kiss the skirt of his garment. The cry of "Hussein Kûli Khan,—the king's father,—Aga Mahomed's brother!" rose little by little, and at length struck the ear of the Grand Vizir. The young king

soon caught the sounds; Zohrab's eye fell at once upon a form too strongly imprinted upon his memory ever to be forgotten; and almost with one consent they jointly hastened towards them. "My father, my father!" cried Fatteh Ali, and his brilliant and graceful figure was seen to rush forward, and fall upon the old man's neck, with all the extasy of filial love.

It would be in vain to describe what followed; for having now brought our hero and heroine together in this auspicious manner, who shall again venture to separate them? Never was happiness equal to theirs! The feelings of joy which overwhelmed Amima, when at the same moment she embraced her brother, saw her lover, and was protected by her father, are such as few heroines enjoy. Moreover, as soon as she returned to her rooms in the harem, she was greeted not only by her faithful Mariam, but by all the birds of her groves, which had so long been deprived of her presence.

The nuptials of Zohrab and Amima were soon after celebrated in a style of magnificence that had long been unknown in Persia; and we need not say that never was a couple so blessed or so happy.

We grieve, however, to throw a cloud over this picture of unmixed joy, by exhibiting the looks of woe, of disappointed ambition, and of concentrated rage, which appeared upon the countenance of the forgotten Zulma. She long had been smarting under the prospects of prosperity which cheered the rest of her countrymen. She foresaw that her reign was over; and such was now the universal joy and consequent absence of punishment, that she felt that neither her's nor her father's office would enjoy the same consideration which it did in the preceding reign, and that their employment was gone. She frequently turned her mind from one scheme of ambition to another; at length, finding that every other project failed, she determined on marrying Shir Khan, and there, it is said, she succeeded to her heart's content; for although he daily assured her that no man in the world was like him, and that he had a peculiar way of being different to every one else known only to himself, she did not cease as regularly to administer a daily dose of her slipper on his mouth, accompanied with variations by pulls at his curls and clutches on his beard.

Sadek having deposited his precious charges at the gate of Tehran, quitted Persia for ever, passed the rest of his life in his native village in Georgia, secretly cherished and befriended by the new king; whilst Hussein returned to a post about the person. A general pardon was pronounced to all who had been called offenders, or who for crimes real or imaginary had been confined by the late king, and the new rule began by a series of peaceful and quiet years, which have been perpetuated by a longer reign than Persia has almost ever known.

FINIS.

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