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TARA: A MAHRATTA TALE
BY
CAPTAIN MEADOWS TAYLOR, M.R.I.A.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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TARA:
A MAHRATTA TALE.

CHAPTER I.

THE young Ashruf ran lightly along before the party, leading them, by narrow lanes and streets familiar to him, direct to the spot where the occurrences of the night had taken place; and under such guidance — for the boy's speed never flagged for a moment — Afzool Khan and his men arrived at the building where Fazil was waiting, almost ere the sun's rays were sparkling upon the tall minarets and domes of the city.

He had looked anxiously for their coming long ere dawn broke; for he had awakened as usual for the morning prayer, in which he was joined by the Duffadar and several other devout members of the guard; and since its conclusion he had been sitting on the step of the guard-room, or watching Bulwiah, who slept heavily but restlessly, and speculating on the reason of his young messenger's delay. Truly cheering was it; therefore, after hearing from a great distance the rapid advance of a body of horsemen borne on the still morning air, to see the well-known band of spearmen, led by the young Ashruf, turn the corner of the street, and immediately following them the tall

figure of his father, and with him perhaps fifty of the Paigah.

A few moments served to bring the party to the spot. As his father strove to alight rapidly, Fazil sprang to aid him with a joyful cry; and when the old Khan could disengage himself from his stirrup, a hearty embrace followed, to the no small wonder of a crowd of neighbours, whom the unexpected appearance of a well-known nobleman and his dashing escort had collected: and who could not understand the warm greeting and embrace between what appeared to be a Hindu beggar, still much besmeared with wood-ashes and paint, and so gallant a cavalier as Afzool Khan.

Led by Fazil into the apartment we have already mentioned, the Khan submitted to be seated upon a carpet; and the room being partially cleared, he proceeded to inquire into the circumstances of his son's detention, and of the fray of which Ashruf had informed him. Upon Bulwunt, the sound of the old Khan's voice acted like a charm. Weakened by loss of blood, he had fallen into a dreamy kind of doze rather than sleep, which the trampling of the horses, and exclamations from their riders as they arrived, had converted into an imaginary battle-field, on which he lay wounded and helpless; but when the well-known voice of his lord was no longer doubtful, he was aroused, and, raising himself feebly, earnestly requested his master to come to him to hear, as he thought them, his last words.

"He is not in fault, my lord," he said faintly, and pointing to Fazil. "They would have made out that he wounded me — may their tongues rot! He will

tell you all that happened, and how the enemy of my house, Tannajee Maloosray, has given me my death-blow."

"Not so, brave Bulwunt," said the Khan, cheerfully; "there is no fear of thee, methinks. Thou art weak, and thy sight fails thee; but keep a good heart, friend, thou wilt strike many a blow yet for Afzool Khan; a few days' rest, and this trouble will be forgotten."

"Has he told you all?" asked Bulwunt.

"Not yet, not, yet, friend; but I shall hear it ere long."

"Track him, track him, my lord," continued Bulwunt; "Maloosray cannot be gone far. He is even now in the city, at one of the Mutts or Serais. He could not escape if the gates were watched. He might even be found at ——"

But speech suddenly failed the poor fellow, and, exhausted with his effort, he sank back, fainting, on the pillow.

"What did he say, son?" asked the Khan, quickly; "what of Tannajee Maloosray? Him of Pertábgurh — the friend of Sivaji Bhósley?"

"Even so, father," replied Fazil. "I did not mention him, as there were so many listeners, and the matter was for your private ear; but, as Bulwunt has said it, no matter now. Would that we knew his haunts! Perhaps he knows, but he is too exhausted to speak."

"Tannajee Maloosray here! — in Beejapoor!" exclaimed the Khan, "and hath done this deed! O that we knew where the villain were hiding! Nevertheless, the gates shall be well guarded; that was a good thought of thine, Bulwunt. Ho, without there! one of

ye ride to each gate of the city — tell those on guard there, that Maloosray hath been seen within the city last night, and all that pass out are to be well looked to. Do ye hear?"

"Jo Hlookum,"* cried a number of the men who heard the order; and after a brief consultation together, single horsemen dashed away to the several places to which their errands tended.

"And now change thy dress, son;" continued his father; "this disguise is hardly seemly to thee. Here is a suit, and there will be water outside."

"If the Duffadar here have no objection," returned the young man. "You forget, father; I am his prisoner of my own free will."

"Chut, chut, boy! thou art no prisoner — be quick," cried the Khan.

"The saints forbid," interposed the Duffadar, "that any one of such exalted faith as the son of Afzool Khan should be ever suspected of being an infidel. When — —"

"There, there, Fazil! go!" interrupted the Khan, laughing; "I have no eyes for thee in that abomination; let us see thee in thy proper shape."

"Then follow me, father, into this apartment," replied Fazil; "I have that to say which will not bear witnesses — much that is marvellous."

"That I doubt not, son. I will follow when Bulwunt is cared for; I see they have brought up the palankeen."

So saying, the Khan tried to raise the wounded man, while he spoke cheerily to him. Again, at the sound of his lord's voice, the spirit of the retainer

* According to order — a respectful affirmative.

rallied, but it apparently hovered between life and death; for, after another faint attempt to speak, he fell back exhausted.

"It is of no use," muttered the Khan; "he will die, I fear, and we can ill spare him. Ho, without! bearers or spearmen! Come in some of ye. And look ye," he added, as several entered, "take up Bulwunt Rao, carefully, as he lies, by the corners of the blanket; put him into the palankeen, and take him home at your easiest pace. He is to be lodged in the private apartment of the Khilwut.* Get a bed from the house, and send for our physician directly, and the surgeon of the palace. . . . Now begone."

Carefully and gently the men raised him up, and bore him out. He groaned heavily as he reached the open air, yet it seemed to revive him, for he looked around. Some of his comrades who crowded round spoke cheerily to him, and he recognised them and smiled. He was at once placed in the litter, and the bearers, at a rapid but easy pace, proceeded homewards.

"I dare not have spoken to thee, my son," said the old Khan, when he had joined Fazil, who was busily engaged washing the ashes from his face, neck, and arms, "before those people, though I was burning to do so. So thou hast really discovered something by the night's adventure. This Tannajee, — what of him? Tell me quickly!"

"Alas! father," returned the young man, sadly, "I know so much, and of such weighty matters, that my soul trembles under them. I would almost that I had not gone out last night, or that other lips than

* Private apartments.

mine had to tell thee a tale of treachery and wrongdoing."

"Son! I see it in thy face. The Wuzeer!" exclaimed the Khan, starting.

"He is false, father — false," continued Fazil.

"Ah, I feared so; but speak, boy, how is it? Who told thee?" cried Afzool Khan, impatiently.

"I need not say more to confirm it than that the King knows it," returned Fazil; "and that he has papers now in his possession which leave no doubt of Khan Mahomed's treachery; Mirza Anwur Ali and the Shah took them last night, and paid for them."

"Ya Alla kureem!* and where was this? By the Prophet, tell me, Fazil! My soul eats your words! speak, boy, quickly."

Then Fazil rapidly sketched the scene of which the reader already knows the detail, while the old Khan listened in silent amazement, his forefinger between his teeth.

"Ya Khubeer-o!** and hath all this been so easily found out?" he exclaimed. "Ah, Khan Mahomed! often has your poor friend warned you; but in vain. Now you are lost, alas, alas! and for that insane ambition which would not be repressed."

"We must save him, father!" cried Fazil; "he must not perish. At the risk of my own life would I do aught possible to avert the danger which threatens him. What can we do? Implore the King to spare the ancient friend of his house? or write and warn

* O merciful God!

** O communicator of information! — one of the appellations of Divinity.

him? Ah, father, you are his most valued friend, and his son is as a brother to me! Speak; what can be done?"

"Alas, I know not yet, son," he replied, sadly; "but tell it again; all, Fazil — all that the King said. I will think it over. Wishing to save, we must not destroy."

Fazil again narrated what he had seen, and, as well as he could remember them, the contents of the letter which the Lalla had repeated. But the Khan thought long and deeply on the whole matter ere he could see his way to action. At last he said to his son —

"What I have determined upon ought to suit both parties. I will go instantly to the King, and try if his purpose as to the Wuzeer can be discovered. I must take the papers he gave me in any case. Do thou, Fazil, go to thy friend — it may be that he knows all; but, if not, he can be warned of the danger. Timely submission may alone avert it; but the peril is fearful."

"Alla is just, and it will be as He wills," returned his son, devoutly; "but we must not forget that Lalla; his presence may be of moment, and it were well he were cared for; his wound was a mere scratch, and he may be able to ride; let us send for him."

So a messenger was despatched to bring him, or to ascertain, at least, whether he could ride; as, if not, a litter would be provided. To the vexation of Fazil, however, and his father, the messenger returned saying, that a litter had already been sent by the Kótwal's orders, about the time of morning prayer, and he had been taken away to that officer.

"Jehándar Beg is faithful," said the old Khan. "He is as true to the King's salt as I am myself, else I should have feared the result; but who can hold the Lalla's tongue? — that is what I dread, Fazil."

"And he did not appear over-discreet either, father," replied Fazil; "however, the best thing we can do is to follow up the information, and go to the Kótwallée; it is my duty too, to see the worthy old Duffadar safe through the matter, for truly he did what he could."

"True, son," returned Afzool Khan; "and I will accompany thee. Jehándar Beg may not have forgotten some matters in which I have been able to befriend him now and then. No; that Lalla must not slip through our hands, Fazil."

By this time Ashruf had saddled his father's ambling pony, and stood waiting without, so the cavalcade was soon ready. The Khan's men were all mounted, and a few of the Duffadar's guard attended as escort to the Kullal, for whom his own pony had been provided, so that there was no delay; and as Fazil and his father stepped from the guard-room, the young man's appearance was the signal for a shout of congratulation from all, which being duly acknowledged, Fazil turned with a smile to the old Duffadar, and told him "his prisoners" were ready.

"If I can but assist ye, noble gentlemen," said the old man, respectfully, "in this matter, it will be a happy thing; and if my son —"

"Bismilla!" exclaimed Afzool Khan, mounting his horse, and interrupting him; "we are no evil-doers, to fear justice. Move forward!"

The building where the Kótwal's morning court was held, was at no very great distance, in the city

itself; the other court was within the fort, not far from the King's palace; and they proceeded to the former at a rapid pace. By-and-by, as they drew nearer the place of their destination, a horseman dashed on to give notice of the near approach of the Khan, in order that he might be met, and greeted in a manner due to his rank.

"What can bring Afzool Khan, the pious and true, here?" asked one of the under-officers on duty at the entrance guard-room of the outer court. "He is no brawler or intriguer?"

"Who knows, Meer Sahib," replied the person addressed. "In these days the world is turning topsy-turvy, and one has to see and believe strange things. There is already a report that the young Khan is in fault, and has wounded the man who was brought in a little while ago upon a bed, and killed another; for a body was found this morning near a temple beyond the fort. I was at the Bazar mosque at early prayer, and they said there it would be a bad business. What matter? Afzool Khan has plenty of cash, and a sharp fine will set all straight."

"I pray it may be no worse, friend," returned the first speaker; "but I have heard Jehándar Beg swear upon the holy book to spare no one if blood hath been shed; and here is one man dead and one wounded to be accounted for. A bad business, friend — a bad business; but we shall see. God grant it may not lead to that!" and he pointed to the corner of the court, where lay a hand in a pool of blood — a ghastly evidence of summary justice on a criminal but just performed. "But we shall see; the Khan is heavily

attended, and methinks it would be as well to let him alone."

"Ay, friend, he is one of the old stock, well tried and trusted; the peace of God and the Prophet be upon him and his; and that is a brave boy, 'tis a pity he should be in any trouble. Would we had more of them about the King! Truth is lie, and lie is truth, friend, in these days; and men whisper that Jehándar Beg is no friend to Afzool Khan, nor the Wužeer either, and they are of the same party, but we shall see. What will be, will be."

CHAPTER II.

ALMOST as they spoke, the Khan's retinue approached, and, preceded by its band of spearmen, some horsemen, and the party of the old Duffadar, swept round the corner of the adjoining street. Very conspicuous among the cavalcade were the figures of the father and son riding together; the Khan in his morning suit of heavy cloth-of-gold, which glittered richly in the sun; his son, plainly dressed in white muslin.

Fazil rode a led horse of his father's, which he sat with perfect confidence and control of the fiery animal; but his countenance expressed anxiety which he could not restrain. In truth, he felt, notwithstanding his assurance to his father, that if he were subjected to a strict examination, he should be ill able to account satisfactorily for the various events of the night without compromising others. In regard to Maloosray, he had one witness in the Kullal; and there was nothing to implicate him in the occurrence at the temple, in

case it should form subject of inquiry. No, he could not now recede.

As to the old Khan himself, no thought of fear disquieted him. He considered that he was only humouring a whim of his son's in accompanying him, that he might insure the Duffadar's being freed from blame. Suspicion of aught affecting the safety or honour of his house had never entered his mind; and he had ridden along gaily, causing his fine warhorse to caracole and bound, free from all thought of uneasiness, except what might result from the delay.

As the party entered the gate, they were met by several persons deputed to receive them, and returned the respectful and hearty greetings of the soldiery on duty, to whom they were well known. Dismounting at the end of the court, they passed through to the next, where already many suitors and complainants were assembled. There, too, on a bed which had been placed in a side-room, lay the Lalla, with a sheet drawn over him, which Fazil saw was stained with blood. The Lalla had covered his face; but the pink colour of his turban, and its peculiar tie, were not to be mistaken. So, passing all, and receiving and returning salutations, they entered the room of audience, where, surrounded by a few Mutsuddees, or scribes, sat the Kótwal* himself.

Jehándar Beg was a Persian by birth, a man of some learning and much cunning, but really intelligent. Those were times when the service of Indian princes was eagerly sought for by Persians, Turks, Affghans, and even Abyssinians; and adventurers often rose to

* Chief magistrate of a city, or superintendent of a bazar.

princely rank and honour in their service. Jehándar Beg was one of these. When young he had accompanied a relative to the Dekhan court, the prince of which was a Sheea — his own faith — and where, among others of his countrymen, the historian Mahomed Kasim Ferishta had been distinguished. He had risen steadily in the King's service, and proved himself brave in the field, as well as sagacious and trustworthy. Having attained to his present office, he was, in the main, respected, and was the dread of all night brawlers, sharpers, and thieves, whom he punished heavily; but he was fond of money, and it was whispered that, in grave offences, he had his private price. After all, what mattered that? Occasionally a great person was fined, or otherwise punished, and so men's mouths were stopped, and the Kótwal believed to be a great man.

Jehándar Beg's appearance was magnificent. He always wore the peaked lamb's-wool cap of Khorassan, and the Persian robe; and his rich brown complexion, and dark-brown curly beard, grave features, and large soft black eyes, combined to render his face a remarkable one, not easily forgotten. The expression seldom varied; nothing ever caused him to laugh in his court — rarely to smile — nor did he ever express anger. Happen what might, his habitual gravity never relaxed for a moment, and there was no man who could tell a lie, conceal a fact, or change an opinion — or, in the course of duty, order the torture, and look upon it, with such perfect imperturbability as he did.

His office was at once arduous and difficult, but he was not restricted in power. In cases of life and

death, perhaps, and if the criminal were of importance, reference might be made to the chief legal authority or to the King; but, as far as minor punishments were needed, the lopping off of an arm, a hand, or a foot: — torture and imprisonment, or the like, — no one questioned the Kótwal's acts. As chief magistrate of a city which contained a large proportion of lawless population, he often found it necessary to make sudden and severe examples in order to check disorder and crime: and, recently, the city had been agitated by conspirators: parties ran high; and duels and brawls, generally attended by fatal consequences, were frequent.

The old Duffadar was right when he told Fazil of the Kótwal's oath to punish severely the first brawler who should be apprehended, and he trembled for the consequences of the inquiry into the night's disturbances. Here were two men wounded, and, as far as he knew, another who had been taken off, or who had got away; and one dead body, found near the temple of Bhowani among the tamarind trees was fresh, though torn by wild animals, and the blood had been traced back to the temple wall, on the top of which some stones had been displaced.

Altogether, matters had an ugly appearance; and the old man could not help thinking that Fazil was concerned in both affairs. "May God be merciful to him," he said to himself, "for he is a brave youth, son of a gallant father; better a hundred battlefields, and a fair chance man to man, than the crooked ways of this court, and the merciless character of Jehándar Beg. Be wary, my lord," he whispered to Fazil, as, having made his obeisance and report, he was falling

back to get free of the advancing parties; "Jehándar Beg's looks are not pleasant this morning, and you need to be careful. I should not warn you without there were need; be careful in what you say, and I will guide you by my looks from time to time."

But Fazil had no fear. Unused to such scenes, he could only feel that his word would pass him free from all suspicion, and that his father's rank and good faith were above question.

To the old Khan, the Kótwal's greeting was one of respectful deference; and the seat of honour was assigned to him. To Fazil, however, he maintained a stiff reserve — so pointed, that the Khan could not but notice and remark upon it.

"That is my son," he said, after an awkward pause which no one apparently dared to break, "and I would have you acquainted with him, Meerza Sahib. Shookr Ulla!* he is not utterly unknown among the ranks of those who are true to the King in Beejapoor, though he is yet but a youth."

There was no reply, however, given to this speech, and the embarrassment of all grew more painful. The clerks and guards looked from one to another, and the old Khan to them in succession, with increasing indignation at their demeanour.

"By the Prophet!" he exclaimed at length, ironically, "ye seem marvellously engaged, gentlemen," as, on hearing him speak, every one looked away, or into the papers before them, "that a civil greeting does not obtain a civil answer. Your politeness, Meerza Sahib, is proverbial in the city; but it seems to have deserted you on this occasion, or is reserved for thieves

* Thanks to God!

and loose women. Come, my son — come; we intrude here. Jehándar Beg has his own private work to do no doubt, and does not need our company.”

“Hold!” cried the Kótwal; and, as he spoke, several of the armed attendants closed up the doorway with their long broad spears, while others without blew the matches of their guns. “Hold! Thou mayst go, Afzool Khan, for what may follow may grieve thy brave heart; but there is blood on thy son’s sword, and it must be inquired into. Young man, what is this they say against thee? A man killed in a drunken brawl in the worst quarter of the city? Was this to be expected from the son of Afzool Khan? Speak, and speak truly, before God and his Prophet.” The Meerza’s eyes flashed and dilated as he spoke; and as they rested upon the young man, who had not seated himself, they were met by a gaze as bold and fearless as his own.

“I am no brawler, Meerza Sahib,” he exclaimed, in reply. “Astagh-fur-oolla!* — nor drunkard either. Peace, father! sit quiet; let me answer for myself - I am not afraid,” he added, as the Khan attempted to rise, and was evidently provoked beyond endurance. “Ask the Duffadar who accompanied me, and the man in whose house it happened, whether I am to blame. Their statements will suffice.”

“There are two matters to answer for, Meah Sahib,” said the Kótwal. “Were you not in the dress of a Gosai last night, and another with you? Nay; no denial!”

“I have nothing to deny, Meerza Sahib,” returned

* God forbid! — an expression of abhorrence.

Fazil. "My father knew of it, and I went by his permission."

"Good. Now, Peer Sahib, what happened to you?" asked the Kótwal of another officer present.

"My lord, it was just before midnight," he replied, "when two men, Gosais brought a third person, who was slightly wounded, but complained much of his neck. He is a foreigner, for he speaks the Dehli language. They said he had been robbed, and told us to keep him safe till the morning, when they would come for him; and as the man was very helpless, we put him on a bed in the guard-room, and have brought him here. Again at dawn, some of the men were going towards the temple of Toolja Bhowani, when they saw the dead body of a man, with a deep wound in his back and a stab in his breast — a Hindu, for he had on a Bramhun's thread, so he may be a Rajpoot; but no one knew him. Several mohurs were picked up by him and others between this place and the temple: — the Mutsuddee has them — eleven, I think, — and there was blood all the way along. It was a desperate cut; and how the man could have run at all with those wounds, it is hard to say."

"He was murdered, then," thought Fazil; "would I had not struck him! yet there is one traitor and robber the less."

"And the man who was brought in, what of him?" asked the Kótwal.

"He moaned and groaned, my lord, worse than a woman; said he had been robbed at the temple; spoke of Pahar Singh who had wounded him, Maun Singh who had throttled him, then of the Shah's secretary — may his name be honoured! — and some ten thou-

sand rupees. In short, noble sir, we could make nothing of the matter, for he began to weep if we spoke to him, and told us to take him to the King without delay. So we brought him here, and he must speak for himself. It appeared to me like the dream of some opium-smoker," continued the speaker to those about him; "we could not understand it at all."

"Shouldst thou know the men who brought him?"

"Well, my lord, I can't say for certain," replied the officer, "but one of our people said they were not what they seemed; and he thought one was Bulwunt Rao, who is a Silladar of the noble Khan yonder, and who goes about bazars at night, sometimes; the other's face was tied up, and he did not speak."

"I was the other, Meerza Sahib," interposed Fazil, quietly.

"I thought as much," said the Kótwal, dryly. "Were they armed, Peer Sahib?"

"Yes, to be sure, my lord," he replied; "would any one go about in those quarters at night without being armed? Yes, they had sword and shield."

"Where are the weapons?"

"Here, my lord," replied the other Duffadar, who now interposed, "in my keeping; the young Khan gave them up to me. He has another sword now."

"Yes, there is blood on the blade, and here are cuts, fresh ones, on the shield," said Jehándar Beg, examining Fazil's weapons. "How, young sir, do you account for these?"

"I will reserve what I have to say; it is no use speaking now," returned Fazil, who had observed his old friend shake his head, and who again nodded approvingly.

"Bring in the wounded man," cried the Kótwal; and the bed on which our poor friend the Lalla lay, was carried in and set down; "we must confront the parties."

"Get up, good man," said an attendant Mutsuddee; "this is the Kótwal; make your reverence, and tell what happened to you."

"Ah, protect me, befriend me. I have been robbed and murdered I cannot get up I am a poor man and a stranger. Look at my blood," gasped the Lalla by turns to all about him.

"Who did it? and who art thou?" cried the Kótwal. "Where hast thou come from?"

Now it might be awkward for the Lalla to answer these questions. He knew he had a few gold coins left, enough to keep him for some time -- for he had been used to poverty, and could endure it -- if he could only get free. Any man with quick wits, could do something for himself in the city; and had he not done good service? These thoughts passed rapidly through his mind ere he spoke.

"Asylum of justice!" he said, in his most humble tones, "I don't know who did it, but I was robbed in the temple."

"Of ten thousand rupees? Speak truly."

"Ah no, sirs. What would a poor Khayet* like me do with ten thousand rupees? No, but of what I had in my humeana."**

"And Pahar Singh? they tell me he was mentioned by thee."

"Ah, noble sir, I am a stranger and a foreigner;

* *Khayet*—a caste of Hindus, usually clerks or merchants.

** A belt worn round the waist to carry money in.

what do I know about Pahar Singh, or anybody? I am very weak." added the Lalla, in a feeble voice; "will no one help me?" and he lay down, as well to escape further questioning, as to excite pity for his misfortunes.

"This will not serve thee, whoever thou art," returned the Kótwal; "answer truly, where art thou come from, and what took thee to that lonely temple at night?"

"My lord, I am a poor Khayet from the north, seeking service; and I fell among thieves who decoyed me thither and robbed me. See, they wounded me also, and tried to strangle me. What more can I say?"

"That is not enough, friend," resumed the Kótwal; "we must know how it happened, for others here appear concerned in the matter, and murder hath been done."

"Murder, my lord!" cried the Lalla, again raising himself; "there was no murder, though perhaps they thought they had killed me when they took what I had."

"Who, Lalla? be not afraid," said Jehándar Beg, soothingly.

"A seeming Jogi and another. They ran away, and left me senseless. Then two Gosais came and raised me up, and gave me water, and took me to the guard-room. May the gods recompense them, for they bound up my wound!"

"Two Gosais — ah, this may be some clue!" said the Kótwal; "this agrees with the other statement. Then thou art one of them, Meah Sahib?"

"I have already said so," replied Fazil; "and my retainer, Bulwunt Rao, was the other."

"What took you there?"

Fazil considered for a moment. What he had been witness of could not now be related, and he replied, "It was a matter, Meerza Sahib, in which I am not bound to answer you. If those it concerns are to hear of it, they shall know otherwise."

"Beware, young sir!" said the Kótwal, gravely; "there can be no secrets here."

"Nevertheless, I cannot answer. It is enough that I have told my father of it," returned Fazil.

"Yes, Jehándar Beg," said Afzool Khan, "he has said enough to prove he was no robber, and that ought to content you."

"Yet there was murder done, my friend," replied the official, quickly; "blood was on the wall of the court, and a corpse not far from it, and there is blood on this sword of your son's. He should clear himself of this horrible suspicion. But stay; there is the other affray to be accounted for, — that in the wine-shop — a drunken brawl, I fear."

"I am no brawler, Meerza Sahib, nor drunkard," exclaimed Fazil, indignantly. "The man is present in whose house it occurred; let him say what happened."

"Let him be brought forward, and let Fureed Duffadar state what happened," said the Kótwal, authoritatively. "Till then be silent, Meah."

CHAPTER III.

THE old Duffadar's account was clear and circumstantial, and the Kótwal listened attentively. When it was finished, the Kullal was called, and, prostrating himself, began by imploring protection, which was granted.

"It is a weighty matter, my lords," he said, "and needs much inquiry. May it please you to listen," he continued, after a pause, as if to collect his thoughts. "Your slave would represent that he heard a conversation between the young Khan there and a man whose name may hardly be mentioned in Beejapoor, Tannajee Maloosray."

"Maloosray!" echoed the Kótwal. "Protection of God! thou art not mad to say this? or drunk?"

"May I be your sacrifice!" continued the man, evidently observing that his words had made an impression, "I am not mad, and I have an oath against wine. I swear by the King's salt, that he spoke with Maloosray."

"And he was disguised like a Gosai, Fureed?" asked the Kótwal of the old Duffadar.

"Khodawund!* what did he tell you himself he was?" replied the man. "He changed his dress when his father came. Even now the ashes may be on his body."

"What said the young Khan to Maloosray?" asked the Kótwal of the Kullal. "Speak truly, or I will have thee flogged through the bazar, and all

* My lord!

thy property confiscated for irregular hours in thy shop."

This was what the man feared from the first. Had Fazil appeared in favour, he would have appealed to him for explanations in regard to the affray, for which he dreaded he should be punished; but Fazil seemed already unable to help himself, so he had determined to take his own course in the opposite direction.

"Why should I tell a lie?" he replied, holding up his hands humbly and with a gesture of supplication. "I swear by your feet it is true." Pointing to Fazil, he continued — "He said he knew Pahar Singh was at the temple, and they sent a man for him; and if he did not come, that they should meet again. Then Maloosray said something about Sivaji Bhôslay, and the Moguls, and the Shah Aurungzeeb, and armies, and there was another message to Pahar Singh. Then another man struck a blow at the Maloosray, and they fought, and I screamed out for the guard, and Maloosray ran off; but I secured him," and he pointed to Fazil.

"O base-born!" exclaimed Fazil, "thy mouth is full of lies ——"

"Hear him," interrupted the man; "he had me tied up till the blood nearly burst from my fingers, and made me promise not to reveal this. Behold, my lord, the marks of the cords, and how my arms are swelled. By my child's head it is true, noble sir; it is all true. How could I, a poor seller of ganja and bhung, have dreamed such things of Tannajee and Sivaji? Do not men tremble at their names? Search

the young Khan, he has papers which Maloosray gave him. I saw them myself ——”

“Alas, it is but too clear to me,” said the Kótwal, interrupting Afzool Khan, who was about to speak, “that there is deep treachery here. Deep plots are being laid, but this poor servant of God has a clue to one at least. Inshalla!* it will be sifted to the bottom. Enough of suspicion was there against you, young sir, on the other matter, but this is graver still. Yield, therefore, Afzool Khan, and you Meah; resistance is vain, and I would fain spare blood.”

As he spoke, the soldiers and attendants, who had gradually gathered round them, closed in so near that they could have been seized or overpowered at once, if the old Khan's sword had not been drawn by him the instant their movement was made. Now, as he stood prepared to meet any attack, his eyes flashing and his tall figure drawn up to its full height, no one ventured a step towards them, nor offered to seize his son who, on his part, made no attempt at resistance.

“Draw, Fazil, draw!” cried the Khan; “let us see which of these sons of vile mothers will first die. O that we had a score of our fellows with us, this insult would not have happened. Draw, boy! a few good strokes will see us clear of this gang of executioners, and there are enough men without to carry us through the city. Come on, in the name of God! Bismilla!”

Saying this, the old man advanced a step, while those before him, so sudden and determined was his movement, fell back as though they would have al-

* Please God!

lowed him egress. Fazil, however, saw his father's danger, not only from the chance of a sword-thrust or blow in the struggle which must ensue, and the certainty of an attempt at rescue by the men without if they heard of it, but in the disgrace and suspicion which would fall upon them if the inquiry were forcibly interrupted.

"Father, father!" he cried, passionately, "do not stir. I implore you, move not. You know how false this base charge is, and I beseech you not to let it be said that we feared to meet it, and evaded justice. Yes, let it be first done on this lying dog, who has misled Jehándar Beg. See, for one, I surrender myself and my weapons;" and, as he spoke, he threw his sword and dagger on the floor, which were eagerly secured by an attendant.

"Degenerate!" cried his father. "Dost thou fear death, boy? When did an Affghan ever surrender his weapons but with his life? Fie on thee for a coward, to hesitate to strike a blow for me!"

"Coward!" exclaimed the young man, sadly. "Father, you know not what you say. Why such bitter words? is this a time for contention?"

"Khan Sahib," said Jehándar Beg, who had risen with the others, and now advanced, "listen to your son's words of peace and reason. You are alone, and, though one or two might fall, there would be no escape. The blood of Afzool Khan, or his son, should not flow in a court of justice, but against the King's enemies. Put up your weapon, and wear it, Khan; and you, noble youth, yours. Appearances are against you both; and these plots have been so long hidden from us, that your poor servant, the slave of the King

— may his splendour increase! — has no alternative but to detain you till the pleasure of the Wuzeer is known.”

“Father, I beseech you to listen to reason — to advice kindly given and well meant,” cried Fazil; “consider what is at stake, and that the moment we have speech of the King there will be no fear.”

Afzool Khan looked from one to the other and around him irresolutely, and the tears rose to his eyes, and fell over in large drops. Any advance would have decided him to an act of desperation; but his son saw the struggle in his mind, and, throwing himself before him, grasped his feet.

“Father, save your honour,” he cried, earnestly; “save your life by my example. Shall it be said that Afzool Khan died a traitor, or that a breath of suspicion rested upon the truest, most loyal name in Beejapoor?”

A moment the old Khan hesitated, but his sword-point dropped, and he dashed his hand across his eyes impatiently. “My spirit chafes at the thought of restraint, Fazil,” he said; “yet for thy sake, boy, I submit. But I pray thee, Jehándar Beg, let thine errand to the Wuzeer be done swiftly, or, by the Prophet, there be those in my service who would reckon little of a rescue. Stay, I had better write; that will assure them more.”

A few lines were hastily written by Fazil, and sealed with the Khan’s private signet. One of the escort was called up, and the note given to him by Fazil himself, with an order to take the men home, and a caution to be discreet. The soldier looked about him incredulously.

"Do you remain of your own pleasure, my lord?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the Khan; "we have business here for to-day which cannot be deferred. Keep quiet all of ye; but be ready," he added, in an under-tone; "when I need ye I will send word."

"Very good," cried the man, in a loud voice, in order to cover the Khan's whisper, "very good; I understand; it shall be done."

"You had better withdraw to the private apartments, Khan," said the Kótwal, respectfully. "I know too well the honour of a Puttán to question you. Stay there till I return. Refreshment, too, shall be provided; and I pray you to consider this poor house as your own while you stay in it. The Wuzeer was at Almella yesterday, and is expected this evening."

Afzool Khan hesitated, but his son whispered, "We shall be better there, father, than amidst these curious gazers," and drew him along gently. He did not resist, but followed passively. "Stay, however," added Fazil to the Kótwal; "where is Fureed Duffadar? I would speak with him."

The man advanced a few steps. "I am here, my lord; what are your orders?"

"None from me," returned Fazil; "but look you, Meerza Sahib — for the sake of justice ask of this good man what that Kullal told us; for it is in the law that the word of a true believer is better than the oath of a Kafir. And, pardon me, Meerza, but my father and myself, in the name of the King, hold you responsible for the custody of that man. How came Maloosray into his shop, or to remain there while a King's guard was within ear-shot? Ah, liar," added

the young man, as the Kullal was advancing, with joined hands, and about to speak, "no more; thou hast told enough lies for the present; by-and-by there will be other questions. Beware of them!"

So saying, he passed with his father into the door which the Kótwal himself held open. It was a quiet, secluded place — a small apartment supported upon wooden pillars and arches, which opened into a court shaded with trees. Carpets and pillows were there in abundance, and the place was cool and neatly furnished.

"The papers, whatever they are, Meah, remain with you," said the Meerza. "Shall we examine them here privately?"

"They will be shown to the King only," said Fazil, dryly, "for they concern no one else; meanwhile I am responsible for them."

"Then I will leave ye, noble sirs," returned the other; "be pleased to rest yourselves."

"O for a moment's speech of the King!" cried the Khan, as they were alone. "Now it is too late, and Khan Mahomed is lost. Nay, son, 'tis a pretty court, and not unlike our own Khilwut; but I cannot breathe freely. Canst thou, Fazil? it chokes me."

"Fear not, father; all will be well, I trust," replied his son. "Unobserved, I gave a message to the lad Ashruf, who seems faithful, to be delivered to Kowas Khan. If he comes, all will be well, for he can warn his father. No harm can happen to us except from the Wuzeer, and he may —"

"He dare not," cried Afzool Khan — "he dare not think of us; he will have enough to do to save himself. If the Shah acts — acts firmly — as — as — I

would, son, were I in his place and were it my dearest friend — he should die. O Khan Mahomed! O friend!" exclaimed the old man bitterly, "how often have I remonstrated and implored, but you have not listened! He spoke me fair, Fazil, always, — see what was in his heart. But what is written, is written. Let it be; we cannot prevent it."

"Ameen, father! we can only do what is possible to save —"

"I tell thee, boy," resumed the Khan, interrupting him, "I doubt whether it would be meet in us to interfere with God's designs, and to help treachery to escape its deserts. The danger is too great to the King, and, next to God and the Prophet, he is to us dear and honoured. I tell thee, son, we had better not interfere; it may not be good for us."

"Nay, father," said Fazil, "so long as we speak friendly truth and warning, there can be no fear; and what is written in the Wuzeer's destiny will be fulfilled."

"Thou wilt see to that door with thy life, Nasir," whispered the Kótwal to one of his chief attendants, a burly Abyssinian slave. "See that no one passes out or in without my orders. If violence is attempted, strike, — dost thou hear, — to the death! Proud as Afzool Khan is, he may yet lower his head, perhaps with his life. And they have papers, which we must take, Nasir — forcibly, if we cannot otherwise get them: — ere the sun sets, too, or he passes hence."

"Are we strong enough to keep the Khan, my lord?" asked the man doubtfully.

"Ay, true; we need be stronger; send this ring," and he took off his signet, "to the Wuzeer's son. Say

we need five hundred men to reinforce the guard. Yes, we should otherwise be too weak, if those mad Affghans were to attempt a rescue. Return here when the messenger goes."

"On my head and eyes be it," replied the slave; "no one shall pass hence save over my dead body."

CHAPTER IV.

MALOOSRAY had too much at stake to risk aught by delay, and he and his companions fled from the back door of the house already described, screened by the rain and thick darkness, leaving, however, one of the scouts to inform their companion of what had happened, and with directions for both to join him at their place of concealment as quickly as possible. They proceeded at a rapid pace, leaving the suburb, and striking across the open plain, eastwards, in the direction of the small hamlet of Allapoor, bearing the wounded man with them. Heretofore, in his stealthy visits to the city, Maloosray had found shelter and concealment in a Mutt or monastery of Jogies,* who, in their annual pilgrimages, had become known to him, and assuming their garb, and even joining them in their morning perambulations in search of alms, he had been enabled to visit those persons in the city with whom his intrigues were being carried on. Now, however, the Jogies had warned him that their Mutt was no longer safe. Jehándar Beg had received information which led to several visits by his men at night; and

* A class of Hindu religious mendicants.

though not interfered with, or even aware of the reason of suspicion, the Jogies knew they were watched.

But they were true to his interests, and had prepared a place more secure, because without the walls, and more secluded, than their own Mutt, which was the resort of travellers and devotees from all parts of the country. This was the cloister of an old Hindu temple which stood by itself in an unfrequented part of the plain, and which, either by some act of desecration, or because of its inconvenient situation, had been long neglected. The cloister round it was, however, in good repair, and a little plastering with clay, and cleansing of the chamber from the accumulated dust of years, made the place comfortable enough; and one of the Jogies attended in turn, brought provisions, and acted as cook to the party.

It was easy from thence to reach the city unobserved. Not far distant was the small hamlet of Allapoor, yet sufficiently far to deter prying persons from coming to see who lived in the deserted temple; and if any one were observed, it was, to all appearance, only a Jogi. When, therefore, the Patel, or chief elder of the village of Allapoor, was told by the shepherd boys that some mendicants were repairing the cloister of the old temple and staying there, he bade no one interfere with them; and his good-will was by-and-by secured by an occasional present from time to time. No one suspected the place or its inhabitants; and few frequented the plain about it, which, being hard and stony, was uncultivated, as it still remains, and was used here and there for cemeteries; but the greater part was left to nature, and to flocks of hardy sheep and goats, which picked up a scanty subsistence.

It was not without some apprehension that Maloosray had first trusted himself to the new shelter; but in the course of several visits he had become accustomed to it, and found that he was at once freer and safer there, than in his old quarters inside the walls. The horses, too, were excellently provided for in the crypt of an adjoining Mahomedan tomb, which had never been finished, nor had any use been made of it. Below the foundation terrace was a spacious arched vault, above which the walls of the mausoleum had been partly carried; and the entrance was so overgrown with matted creepers and bushes, that it could not be seen unless examined very closely. Within, three horses, and as many stout ponies, found excellent shelter and concealment; and Maloosray's scouts -- who were, in fact, his retainers and escort -- lived with them and tended them.

To this place Maloosray proceeded as fast as the wet ground and the rough by-paths would permit -- supporting his companion when needful, and helping him over stony places. The wound was not dangerous, yet it had caused considerable loss of blood, and the hardy mountaineer was more weakened than he liked to admit. Once they emerged upon the plain, the temple was soon reached; and, after having the sword-cut dressed and bound up, the wounded man was left to his repose.

Maloosray's next care was for his horses, and he proceeded to the crypt. Safe now from observation, for it was long past midnight, the men there were busy with preparations for the morning meal -- for they could cook only at night. Two were grinding millet-flour in the hand-mill, which they always carried with

them; another was kneading dough in a wooden trough; a fourth shaping portions of it into cakes, which he patted between his hands into the desired form, and a fifth was baking them upon a large flat iron pan or girdle — which held several at the same time — and removing them to the side of the fire to harden, as fast as baked.

A goodly pile of bread had already accumulated; and in two earthen pots simmered messes of vegetables and split-peas, from which a strong, and not unsavoury, smell of onions and garlic proceeded. The fire, fed by dry sticks from time to time, lighted up the space around, resting upon the rough stone arches and heavy massive groins of the crypt; and upon the forms of several men lying asleep, wrapped in their strong cotton sheets or rough blankets, while others reclined lazily, talking occasionally to those employed. There were three horses — two lay asleep among the men, the other, a powerful silver-grey mare, was feeding, and looking round occasionally to the man baking bread, expecting, with a low whinny, her allowance of buttered cakes.

The scene was peculiar and striking: for the gloom of the vault was so deep, except around the fire itself, that every object seemed to stand out in sharp relief, as the light caught it. Just then, too, a brighter blaze than before rested upon the coat of the mare, and, shining on the soft glossy skin, caused the graceful outline of her form to project from the deep gloom behind it in a remarkable manner.

“What! awake, and no one guarding the door? Ah! would ye have the Kótwal’s men upon ye, my

sons?" cried Maloosray, entering unobserved. "Beware, all of ye, the risk is great."

"Master, we had the watch set," answered a man, standing up and making a clumsy salutation, while others started to their feet. "I only came in for a moment to see to the mare, for the rest were busy."

"Has she not slept?"

"O yes! She just now woke, got up, shook herself, and neighed. That was what brought me in; I thought she had no fodder, and that the others might be asleep."

"Then she is fresh for a journey, in case we have a rapid one, Ramjee?"

"Ay, master; you may be at Poona in three days if you will, or at Pertâbgurh either. She will do it."

Maloosray approached the animal; she stretched her head towards him with a low whinny, and rubbed her nose and eyes against him. "Yes, Rookminee," he said, caressing her, "thou wilt have sharp work, perhaps. Art ready, lass?"

There was another low whinny in reply, as she licked the hand held out to her. She at least understood the caress, and responded to it. He passed his hand over her sleek coat, which glistened like silver in the firelight, and down each leg, and taking up each hoof, narrowly examined every shoe and nail in it in succession.

"Ah! if you can find any fault there, master, you may do as you please with me," said Ramjee. "No; Balla at Jutt knows his trade too well to allow a nail to slack, and he knows, too, whose mare he is shoeing! What does he say? When Sivaji Bhôslay comes with a hundred thousand horse, then I will ride with him

on his raid to the south, and not a horse shall drop a shoe, be the journey ever so long."

"And he shall, Ramjee," cried Maloosray, laughing. "The fellow is a braggart, but he is useful."

"Ah! master, that was a rare meeting. Was it not curious that so many horses wanted shoeing that day? Well, so thought the royal horsemen stationed there; and they went about twisting up their mustaches, and swelling themselves out as you never saw, my lord. Many good fellows there were, 'who would not have cared for a chance with some of those gallants in the open plain. When are we to begin, master?"

"Ay, when?" echoed a number of the men, who ceased their occupation for a moment, or raised themselves on their elbows while the answer was given.

"Not yet, my sons, not yet; we bide our time. And now for work," answered Maloosray. "Go thou, Ramjee, to the Paigah of Afzool Khan early, and see if that dog Bulwunt Rao is dead. Well was it that I tied chains in my turban folds last night, else he had cloven me to the teeth. I have vowed a silver horse to the shrine of Khundôba* at Jeoori, for the deliverance."

"And was he slain, master, at last?"

"Nay, that is what I want to know," he replied. "But I had a fair blow at him, and I rarely miss. Go, and bring news quickly."

"Master," said Ramjee in a tone of entreaty, and reverentially touching Maloosray's feet, "I will go. Let there be no risks like this again. What would the Maharaja do without you, and what is there to be gained here that is worth such peril?"

* An incarnation of Siva, and favourite divinity with all Mahrattas.

"Ah, yes!" added another, "what if ten thousand such as we are were expended, it would be nothing were Tannajee safe. Only that two of us in the lane behind Rama's, misdirected a party of the King's men, ye had been beset, before and behind; and if the King had got hold of any of ye, the kites and crows of the 'Goruk Imlec' would have had full bellies by this evening."

"Well, it was not of my seeking," returned Maloos-ray; "for Bulwunt Rao was reported dead — killed in battle two years ago: so, at least, we heard. It was like fighting a spirit, my sons; and I missed my blows... Hark! who is that without? Netta? What news, brother?" he continued, as a slight, active-looking man entered hastily. "Didst thou find Pahar Singh, the old robber?"

"Maharaj!" returned the man, "there was no Pahar Singh. We found a fire burning in the verandah of the temple, and I took a lighted brand and looked about. All we could discover was a little fresh blood on the floor and three gold pieces among the ashes. But there was blood on the wall too, and we tracked it for a few paces, when the torch went out in the rain, so we went on and heard a man moaning in a nulla,* and some jackals were standing by him as we went up. Dost thou remember Maun Singh who is with Pahar Singh always? Well we could hardly see, so Limba went back for another brand, and brought it under his blanket, and then we saw the man's face. He was terribly wounded, and could not speak sensibly, but one or two names escaped him, one of which was Pahar Singh, and Limba knew his face."

* Watercourse or rivulet.

"Ye did not let him live, the foul traitor and liar?" cried Maloosray, excitedly. "O that it had been 'the Lion' himself! Ye did not let him live?"

"Master, he will speak no more, nor yet tell lies. I have made that sure enough," said Limba, approaching and touching the feet of Maloosray. "I knew him after what happened in the old Gosai's Mutt at Tooljapoor, and Moro Punt would have had me kill him then and the other too, only I could find no opportunity. They had some fifty^b horse with them, and were as shy as deer. Now I have settled that account."

"Good, my son," replied Maloosray; "but what had happened, Netta? Was there no further trace of them?"

"None, Maharaj; we were fairly puzzled. We returned, and staid in the temple by the fire, in hopes that Pahar Singh might come back; but it was no use. Then we went and listened behind the guard-house, and heard there was a man wounded in an affray — a 'Gosai' — and there was a barber dressing his wound."

"Then he did not die? I had hoped he did."

"Holy Mother! was this thy work, master, and all of us away?" cried several of the men.

"No; Ranoo remained with me," replied Maloosray, "and has got a scratch; but what of the man wounded? What think ye of Bulwunt Rao, my cousin, dead long since, as we thought, but come to life, Netta?"

"My curse on him! And he escaped you, 'Tanjee?"

"I am going to see if he be dead, brother," inter-

posed Ramjee; "the master's blows are not little ones."

"You see, friends, they — those two Gosais — as they appeared, must have met Pahar Singh, who directed them. I see it all now — the villain's attempt to decoy us into that trap by the temptation of news of the Wuzeer. Depend upon it, he has been bought over, and is not to be trusted; and he set them on our track."

"He never was," cried both the men; "he has only one king and one god — that is money," added Netta; "and he has gone where he could get it."

"Yes, friends, those men knew us," continued Maloosray; "and to my mind the place is no longer safe; so we had as well be ready. If they have given the alarm — and Bulwunt would do so if he had any sense — we shall have horsemen scouring the plains to-morrow, and that fine lad, Fazil Khan, at the head of them. So away, some of you; watch the gates; let the horses be kept saddled all day; and let them have bread as fast as they can eat it. I would go at once, Nettajee," he added to that person, taking him aside; "but the Wuzeer must be seen and spoken with first. He was at Ahnella yesterday, and will be in the city by the afternoon. Without having speech of him, I dare not show myself before the master; and the object of our journey would be incomplete. I think we may trust him."

"Alas! I fear not," replied Nettajee; "ye are too sanguine, you and the Maharaja. Khan Mahomed will not league with us; he leans to the Moguls, and calls us 'Kafirs of Hindus,' and kills cows wherever he can. I know it. Why do ye trust him, when he is faithless

to his own salt? Suppose he chose to turn round and hang up Tannajee Maloosray to the 'Goruk Imlee tree,' would not that keep him fair in his master's eyes, and blind them to his intrigues with the Padishah? Ah, brother, trust him not: one who will deceive the master who has raised him to what he is, will deceive you. A slave born, he will be one to the last; and he is not fit to strike in with free men like us! Leave him to the Moguls, to whom he will be a slave, as he was to Beejapoor: we have our own road between both. But come now to Ranoo: is he fit to travel?"

"He will be better after he has slept. We were owls, Nettajee, not to see through those flimsy disguises," returned Maloosray.

"Bulwunt Rao is better living than dead, brother; and we may yet bring him round," said Nettajee.

"I tell thee, O Netta," interrupted Tannajee, fiercely, and grinding his teeth as he spoke, "I would cut him down with my own hand at the feet of the Maharaja, rather than he should have speech of him. Never name him to me, else we may differ."

"Ah, that blow of his still rings in your head, Tannajee," replied the other, laughing. "But come; if you don't need sleep, I do. He sleeps," he continued, as they entered the cloister where the wounded man lay; "that is well; and I will do the same, Tannajee;" and so saying, he took down a sheet from a cord on which it was hanging, and, wrapping himself in it, lay down, and was soon snoring loudly.

But Maloosray could not sleep, and after a while, got up, and ascending the steps to the roof of the terrace, looked over the plain suspiciously. All, however, was still. To the east, lightning was playing about the

tops of the clouds in dim flickering flashes. Everywhere else the sky was clear, and the stars shone with great lustre. A few jackals howled in the distance, and their cry was answered successively in many directions. Then the drums and horns of the several guards at the gates and on the outer walls and bastions of the city, sounded deep and shrill one by one, and were taken up by those in the "Ark" or citadel of the palace, and so died away in the distance.

His eye followed the line of towers and battlements, and narrowly watched every light which might betoken a stir among the troops within; but there was none. The huge dome of the mausoleum of Mahmood Adil Shah, not long completed, stood out in a dark heavy mass against the clear sky; and beyond it the outlines of the Palace of the Seven Stories — the great Cavalier — and a confused mass of trees and buildings intermingled; nearer, too, the massive walls and arches of the tomb of the mother of the late king, then, as now, unfinished.

All was still. High up in the palace a light twinkled now and then faintly, on which Tannajee speculated dreamily. Was the King awake? the light was in his private apartments. What could he be doing so late in the night; for the drums and trumpets had sounded the third watch. O that he would join heartily with his master, and defy the Moguls! Would no one tell him this was his best policy? Better a thousand times to secure the fidelity of a large portion of his own subjects by timely concession, than to defy and coerce their chieftain. Now, too, though the Moguls had been once beaten off, it would not be so again. They were resting and gathering strength, and one by

one the independent kingdoms to the north had fallen before them.

How long would this remain? — this, the most extensive, most valuable, and most heretical. Better far, then, to secure the Mahratta people, than to lose all by a double war with them, and with the Moguls. "Will no one tell the boy this," thought Maloosray. "We do not wish him evil; but the master must be free, and will be free. The people will assemble at the Dusséra, and the King can then have his choice between a lakh of Mahrattas and a lakh of Moguls, or both combined; and yet this old family should not pass away — it should not pass away at our hands."

But we need not follow his thoughts further: better to transport ourselves to that twinkling light high up in the Seven-storied Palace, and see who sit beside it, and hear what they say.

CHAPTER V.

THE Palace of the Seven Stories still exists as one of the most noble and picturesque ruins of the Fort of Beejapoor. Of the Seven Stories, only five are now traceable; the two upper have been destroyed, perhaps by lightning, or have fallen from decay and disrepair; and it is only in the third that the remains of the beautiful chamber still existent there convey an idea of the effect of the whole structure when it was perfect. Even this has been much damaged. The gilding of the walls, of the groins of the arches and fretted roof, and of its delicate arabesque borders, has all been

scraped off, and the fresco paintings are so destroyed by exposure, that but little exists to tell the history of the beautiful Bhagiruttee, the mistress of the monarch who built the palace for her.

Enough, however, remains to show what the general design and execution of the work were; enough to prove the exquisite taste which had directed its completion, and the skill and boldness of the architect who had raised the dizzy tower so high. Then, the spacious arches and oriel windows were filled by richly carved panels and shutters of teak wood, which admitted sufficient light and air; now, these are all gone, the windows are open, and the rain and sun and wind are rapidly causing decay and destruction of what remains. The upper stories are so broken that they cannot be ascended; but in the one of which we speak, the traveller will be tempted to sit a while looking over the masses of ruins beneath him: and over the still perfect walls of the citadel. Beyond, the undulating plain studded with mounds, shews lines of streets, with broken arches, minarets, and some still perfect mosques, mausoleums, and palaces, which have withstood the effects of time and the spoiler, and remain as proofs of the splendour which once prevailed.

At the period of our tale all these were perfect. The city spread away to the south and west, covering many miles of plain with those streets and houses of which the lines of mounds alone remain. They are interspersed with villages, which are probably portions of the old city, never entirely deserted, and to which the descendants of the population of those days have clung through all vicissitudes. To the east and north, after looking over the greater part of the citadel, the

eye followed the plain beyond — the proper esplanade of the fort — and the undulating rising ground to the north-east, from which the Mogul batteries had so recently poured a storm of shot upon the defences, yet happily with no effect.

The King's apartment opened to the west; and, like Afzool Khan about the same time, he sat courting the breeze, which played gently round the rich clustered mullions of the oriel window, and refreshed and soothed him. The storm had died away, and the night was clear and fresh; while, from the garden below, ascended the mingled perfume of champas, limes, tuberoses, jessamine of various kinds, and other sweet-scented flowers, which loaded the air almost to excess.

A silver lamp, on a tall silver stand, stood in a recess sheltered from the open casement, and its seven wicks burned brightly, illuminating the chamber, and by their strong light causing the gilded roof, arches, and groins, with all their delicate colouring of rose-colour, yellow, light-green, and blue enamel, to assume a soft harmony of effect — different from the light of day, yet perhaps more beautiful.

Furniture there was none; but in the space enclosed by the oriel window, there was spread a rich, soft, Persian carpet, which filled its area, on which, in the corner near where the young King was sitting, lay a thick quilted mattress of green satin brocaded with gold, and a large pillow of the same material, both covered with fine muslin. This had been the King's seat, and it was thickly strewn with papers — some Persian, some Mahratta — which, to all appearance, had been under examination, and he had evidently just left it and placed himself by the casement which

he had opened. He was alone, but, by the frequent glances towards the doorway, which was covered by a heavy curtain, some one seemed impatiently expected.

The events of the night had aroused unusual energy in the young King; nor, since his accession to the throne, had any occurrence excited him like the discovery of treason in the man he had, perhaps, most trusted — his prime minister, Khan Mahomed. It was so unprovoked, so undeserved. Early in life great ability and aptitude for business had been remarked in the Abyssinian slave, Rehán, by the late King; and he had risen, as favourites among Asiatic princes often do, rapidly to rank and wealth, with every honour which an attached and grateful prince could bestow upon him. Finally he had reached the rank of prime minister or Wuzeer, as we have already mentioned, and, amidst all the distractions and intrigues of faction, had succeeded in preserving his monarch's attachment.

In this position he was maintained by the young King on his accession to the throne, notwithstanding the insinuations of many that the Wuzeer was unfaithful. The King had not heeded these suspicions, nor, indeed, beyond mere rumour, was there anything which could lead to confirmation of them; and as the Wuzeer desired it as a proof of his fidelity, the Abyssinians under his command had been pushed on to the north to watch the Mogul armies; for it was better to submit to the turbulence of the Dekhan chieftains at the capital, who could be controlled by neutral forces like those of Afzool Khan, than to risk the possible misconduct of the others. Again, the Dekhanies could

not be trusted with the frontier; and the King, impressed with the fidelity of Khan Mahomed, had left him at his post.

At this period the Dekhanies and Abyssinians were rival factions in the state. The latter were more amenable to discipline than the former, who were descendants of those Mahomedan warriors — Toorks, Tartars, and Affghans — who, at the close of the thirteenth century, under Alla-oo-Deen, had invaded the south of India, and wrested the territory in which they had settled from the Mahrattas of Deogurh and the Canarese dynasty of Beejanuggur. They had founded, and maintained the dynasty of Gulburgah, against the attacks of powerful Hindu states, and, when they separated from it, had attached themselves to the founders of other dynasties, which rivalled, and, indeed, exceeded in splendour, the parent one.

Those who were in Beejapoor had joined Ibrahim Adil Shah, when he declared and established his independence of the Bahmani dynasty of Gulburgah, and they had risen to rank and wealth with the state. They had been led to victory by that monarch and his successors; they had conquered province after province from the infidels of the southern Hindu states, and they had at last finally subdued and overturned the ancient Hindu monarchy of Beejanuggur, which, for several generations, was their bitter enemy and rival. Was it wonderful that they at length became arrogant, and that to maintain an equipoise against them, another element, the Abyssinian, was admitted into this state? It is the old story in the history of the world of exclusive military power; the old play

which has always been played out when the characters are brought together.

There were proud names among these old Dekhan families, which still exist, Tartars and Toorks, who ill brooked the control of slaves like Abyssinians. They were free, and held themselves equal in rank to their own king—proud barons in fact, who seldom accepted administrative service, and were rarely fit for it; men “who could fight, but could not write,” as they boasted; turbulent, arrogant, quarrelsome among themselves, split into as many factions as they were families and tribes. The “Dagtorays,” “Alla-ool-Moolks,” “Bhylmees,” “Kalla Chuttrees,” “Saféd Poshis,” and a host of others, were faithful to their own state, while they were an unceasing source of anxiety, and often distress, to its administrators.

So long as the Mogul armies had threatened the capital, or there was employment daily in the field to meet a common danger, these tribes and their chiefs had found occupation against the common enemy, and had fought valiantly and successfully. The best cavalry of the Mogul army was no match for these fiery Dekhan cavaliers. Reckless of life, well mounted, each tribe and appellation vying with each other, whenever there was a chance in their broad plains, they had not neglected it, and were ever in advance of the more disciplined though slower moving bodies of Abyssinian horse and foot, whom they despised as slaves.

Between the extremes of party were those who, like Afzool Khan, belonged to neither, who held a common interest and faith in the dynasty they served, and whose arms had often been turned against Abys-

sinians, and against Dekhanics, whenever revolts or mutinies of either rendered it necessary.

Among these contending factions, and ever present rivalries, the course of the young King had been difficult and devious since his accession; but respect to his father's memory and experience, for he had been a wise prince, a successful administrator, and a valiant warrior in the field, had, in the end, induced him to continue the predominance of the Abyssinian element in council; and to allow the Dekhanics scope for their ambition in military commands and active service in distant provinces of the kingdom, retaining those only at the capital who would prove a counterpoise to the Abyssinians, in case of need. Influenced by personal esteem, and even affection, for the man who had been his father's most trusted counsellor and friend, he had retained Khan Mahomed in office, notwithstanding the evil reports of his Dekhan officers; and under these circumstances the distress, and even dismay of the young King at the discovery of the treachery, which had long existed, was hard to endure. It was his first bitter lesson in life, and there were few to fall back upon for advice or consolation.

In his extremity his thoughts had turned to Afzool Khan first, perhaps, of all: but again, his known intimacy with the Wuzeer; the report that the families would soon be united by the marriage of Khan Mahomed's son to the old Khan's daughter; the notorious friendship of the young men; and, above all, a certain reticence in Afzool Khan's expressions whenever the Wuzeer's character or actions were discussed — recurred to the King, and his thoughts turned from

Afzool Khan to others in succession, yet finding rest nowhere.

Of all his officers, on whom could he depend? Jehándar Beg, who should have been his executive in any arrest of the Wuzeer, was known to be his dependent; and thus speculating on each, he estimated bitterly how really weak he was in personal adherents.

At first all appeared to be decided in his favour, but gradually requests were made under one pretext or other, which disclosed the true objects of his courtiers, and the young King had sufficient discernment to estimate their professions at their full value. It was these experiences which threw him back upon himself, and upon the Wuzeer, who was, at least as he thought, moderate and unselfish. Moderate, certainly, to him; yet, at heart, more grasping and more treacherous than any.

There was no doubt of that now. Again and again had the King taken up the letter we have before read, and examined it closely, and had each time laid it down with increased conviction that it was genuine. There could be no doubt either as to the seal or the writing. Khan Mahomed's own hand was too peculiar to be imitated; yet he had doubted — still doubted. It is hard to admit conviction of guilt when one's affections are pleading innocence, but here it was not to be resisted; and, as most generally follows such conviction, those very affections were fast becoming the most unrelenting judges.

“Let them but confirm this,” said the King, aloud, as he looked out, and again turned to the papers, selected the letter, looked over it, and hastily put it down with a shiver. “Let them but confirm it, and

then — O, my father! wert thou here it would be the same, and your son will not flinch from the necessity, be it what it may."

CHAPTER VI.

As yet the King's thoughts had admitted nothing definitely; the blow had been too sudden, the provocation too great, for aught but a numbness of perception which checked conclusive determination; but this was passing away fast, and it was becoming still more apparent that, if Khan Mahomed's plan had succeeded, he must, if he survived it, be the dependent of his own slave and his father's. Were the other letters, which they had looked over hastily, true also? Men's tongues had before been busy with the Wuzcer's reputation, and now were so again — the same subject and the same man; and it was — "true, true!"

Unconsciously he had spoken aloud in his reverie, and the word seemed to come as if an echo of his own thought.

"Who spoke?" he cried, looking round — "Who spoke?" His very question seemed to make the silence more impressive; and, as he strained his eyes into the gloom of the chamber, there was no sound but the gentle sough of the night wind, laden with moisture, among the trees below and the open lattice-work of the windows. "The spirits of the dead are around me to-night," he continued to himself, shuddering. "Listen, O father! Listen, sweet mother! O Prophet of God, on whom be peace, assist and hear me! O thou fountain and dispenser of justice, make

me true and bold; make me, as I should be, thy agent among thy people. If I have been a child till now, forgive me — that is past. . . . He writes to the Emperor, that I am a boy! — that I am a boy! In-shalla! No! that is past!” As he spoke, the sound of voices below, and of footsteps ascending the narrow stair were distinctly audible, and he paused to listen. “It is they at last, and the Meerza has not delayed. Enter,” he cried, as the steps appeared to reach the landing-place and doorway — “enter, I am here.”

The heavy quilted curtain was pushed aside, and three persons advanced — one the Meerza or secretary we have before mentioned; the other two we have not yet seen; but they had been often employed as confidential advisers by the King, and he had now sent for them. When they returned from the temple, the King and his secretary had examined the papers they had obtained, with great care and anxiety, and they proved to be far more voluminous and important than even our friend the Lalla had imagined.

The dates of the letters extended over several years. Some, of later date, within the year, had evidently been sent secretly, for they were rolled up into the smallest possible compass, in lead, and so that they could be put into the mouth, or otherwise hidden; the handwriting was disguised, and several were written in cypher; but the most recent were not disguised at all, and the seals were perfect. The whole formed a series, and they had hastily put them together. Each letter confirmed the other, or seemed to do so, and yet, considering the issue at stake, neither cared to trust their own judgment; and the papers

needed confirmation, as well of their authenticity as of their reference to former occurrences and dates.

Of the Mahratta documents, however, they could form no opinion, as neither could read the character; but the secretary was familiar with the seal, and even the rude signature, of Sivaji Bhóslay; and these letters might throw some light on the subject of reputed intrigues with the Emperor, and prove a guide to future proceedings.

The two persons who had been summoned so hastily to the night council were, in the first place, Peer Dustageer Khaderi, a holy Syud, or descendant of the Prophet, of the purest lineage, and the head of a religious house or establishment of Durwaysh, or, as we familiarly call them, "Dervishes," which had been largely endowed by the State, and for whose ancestors, buried in the precincts of the shrine, miracles were now becoming ostensibly claimed. As a consequence, the holy influence of the "Peer" was decidedly on the increase; and as he had been chosen as religious instructor to the King, he was at that time his "Moorshid," or spiritual guide; and being a shrewd, well-educated person, possessed of deep local experience, and, from his position, able to obtain information of a trustworthy nature, he was frequently consulted. To give him due credit, the Peer had proved, on more than one occasion, to have rendered valuable service. Him, therefore, had the King named as the person best fitted to be intrusted with the secret they had obtained.

The other was an old Bramhun, who entered leaning upon a long stick with a gold head, yet not so as to evince weakness, and was as remarkable in his degree as the person whom he accompanied. Neelkunt

Rai Pansay, in the outset of his life a humble karkoon, or clerk, in the revenue department of the State, had served, in succession, three generations of its kings, and, at upwards of eighty years old, was still clear-headed, astute, and faithful. He had risen to the rank of "Peshear," or finance minister, by his valuable services in that department; and though an "infidel," as he was termed by the Peer, was beloved and respected, and consulted on occasions of more than ordinary solemnity or embarrassment, more particularly in regard to the affairs of his own people, the Hindus of the kingdom.

While the secretary advanced to the King, the others stood at the further end of the apartment. Neither knew why they had been summoned, and the hour of the night, the, to them, strange fact of being together in the most private apartment of the palace, and in the King's presence, caused them to look at each other wonderingly.

These were not persons who could ever unite in private friendship; for the Peer, a bigoted follower of Mahomed, and a holy saint to boot, was one of those who, as warriors of the faith, would have led armies against the infidels, and utterly exterminated them. That king of Gulburgah, Feroze Shah, was in his eyes a true Moslem, and now surely enjoying Paradise, who, in pursuance of his vow, had slain a hundred thousand of the infidels of Beejanuggur, and made pyramids of their heads at the gate of his city. If the kings of Beejapoor had been such it would have been well; but alas! in his eyes they were degenerate. Here was a proof: the infidel minister sent for to confer with him! the Syud! "Astaghfur-Ulla!" (God forbid it!)

gurgled in his throat, and he edged away and gathered up his garments with a gesture decidedly contemptuous.

This did not escape the old Bramhun's notice, but it was no time to resent it, for they were called forward. A word from the secretary had decided the King to have the Malhratta letters first examined. Aroused from his sleep, and in the presence of a Bramhun, the Syud was not likely to discuss any matter temperately with one; nor, indeed, in a subject in which Mahomedan honour was involved, was it politic, perhaps, to reveal particulars to a Hindu; but the fact or otherwise of Sivaji Bhoslay's attachment or treachery so affected the Wuzeer's position, that it could not be concealed from one who, whatever his faults of religious arrogance might be, was at least a firm friend of the young King and of his government.

"Salaam-o-alykoom! Khoosh amudeed! (you are welcome)," said the King, using the Persian salutation to the Syud, and rising as he advanced.

"Salaam-o-alyk!" returned the holy man, advancing, as was his wont, in a peculiar but characteristic manner; that is, he bent his head forward, so as to assume a stoop which might be supposed reverential, but which was, in fact, patronising in the extreme; stretching forth his arms in an attitude of benediction, and, having set his feet nearly at right angles, he shuffled with short steps towards the edge of the carpet on which was the King's seat. "My lord's health is sound, and his brain is clear?"

"I am well," returned the King; "be seated."

The Peer looked for a place as near the King as possible, and, with another wave of his hands, settled

himself upon his heels with two motions -- first, to drop on his knees, and second, to subside upon his heels, very much after the fashion of a camel when it is to be loaded. This done, he joined his hands together, and smiling blandly, again ventured to ask whether "My lord and prince were well."

"By your favour and the mercy of God," replied the King, "I am well."

"Ul-hund-ul-illa! (Praise be to God!) Shookr! shookr! (thanks, thanks!)" ejaculated the Peer devoutly, as he settled himself more comfortably; then, taking his rosary from his waist, began to tell his beads with great rapidity, as the old Bramhun, following to the edge of the carpet, and making a humble and reverential salutation, stood awaiting the King's pleasure.

"Be seated, Neelkunt Rai," said the King kindly; and as the old man stooped to the ground, supporting himself by his stick, the secretary compassionately put his hand under his arm, and let him down gently. The scowl from the Peer at this unwonted act of courtesy was lost upon the secretary, but not upon the old man himself; nor was his look of thanks to the person who had assisted him unremarked by the Syud. "I will watch them," he said, inwardly: "these two seem to understand each other."

CHAPTER VII.

THE King spoke first, breaking a silence which, though only lasting for a few moments, seemed interminably oppressive.

"I have called you, Neelkunt Rai," he said, "to examine and read to me some papers which have come into my possession. There is no one about me from whom I can expect more true fidelity than from you in a delicate matter. Give him the papers, Meerza; they are before you."

"May my lord's favour and condescension increase," returned the old man, bowing humbly. "I have never yet deceived the State, and am too old to begin; and as the grandson is now, so were the father and grandfather always towards me; true confidence is rarely disappointed."

The King sighed. "Alas," he said, "would it were so! Read and judge for yourself."

Neelkunt Rai took the papers, cast his eye over a few lines, put them down, fumbled in his pockets for his spectacles, which finally were found in a fold of his turban, put them on, and looked first at the end of the paper.

"The letters are from Sivaji Bhósley, my lord. Doubtless some renewal of his former excesses, and his usual apologies for them. Shall I read them?"

"If that were all, Neelkunt Rai, we could forgive them," replied the King; "but read; we may perhaps be in error about them, though truly our vassal grows in power, and heeds not warnings or advice."

"It is only a few months since he took the four forts," interposed the Meerza, "and the letters given to Afzool Khan mention that he is repairing and putting grain into them, and that Pertábghurh, where he lives, is now impregnable, and that —"

"Let him read, Meerza Sahib," said the Peer ironically: "one so high in the favour of the King should not be interrupted;" and he stroked his beard gently with one hand, while the beads of his rosary passed rapidly through the fingers of the other, and his lips repeated the particular invocation of the divinity which suited every bead. "Let him read; my lord is already listening."

Neelkunt Rai proceeded. He had been deceived by the address, which was that usually written to his own sovereign, and had read the letter through unsuspectingly; but as its purport became evident, it was clear, by his change of countenance, that this was no ordinary communication, and after a while he stopped suddenly!

"It is not fit for my lord to hear," he said excitedly. "This is treason!"

"Be not afraid, Neelkunt Rai, we would know the worst," replied the King.

"Yes, my lord should know who are true and who are false," added the Peer, pompously. "It is true wisdom!"

"As you will," returned the old man, bowing to the King, and not noticing the Peer; "your servant is not responsible for what is written, and you must be patient with it;" and he read and translated as he went on.

There could be no doubt that the treason was un-

masked and unconcealed. The wrongs of his father, wrote Sivaji, who for four years had been imprisoned in the dungeon of the citadel of Beejapoor, near the gate, called for revenge; the wrongs of the people suffering under endless local oppression and exaction, called for redress, which it was hopeless to expect at the hands of a boy, priest-ridden and under the domination of bigoted and ignorant ministers. The conclusion was characteristic of the writer. All he desired was confirmation of his ancestral rights, and permission to serve, with his forces, in the imperial interest.

Letter after letter was read, all much to the same purpose; those of the latter dates being more particular, perhaps, than the former.

"Enough," cried the King at last, "we are weary of these details. What dost thou think, Neelkunt Rai?"

"My lord," said the old man, joining his hands, "mine are not the words of flattery; nor is my advice given without reason. I cannot control men's tongues, nor can I hinder the actions of such as Sivaji Bhósley; nor yet am I a soldier, to estimate whether his means are proportionate to the end he proposes to attain. If I may speak, I will do so truly, and as one who is near death now; but my lord must not be offended, else I am silent."

"Be careful, and do not transgress the bounds of propriety and respect," said the priest.

"Let him speak as he will, Syud," cried the King, hastily; "do not interrupt him. Fear not, Neelkunt Rai."

"I fear no one, because I have no reason to do so," returned the old man simply, and looking steadily at the priest. "What I have to say is this: the dis-

affection of Sivaji Bhóslay may spread, but it has not yet become dangerous. That it will be so, if not checked, there is no doubt, for the whole Mahratta people are with him; and there are many signs among them that he will be great —”

“That he will be great?” echoed the King.

“My lord,” interrupted the Syud, “I know all about that. Some of my disciples who live at a distance, have come to me from time to time lately, and told me of the damnable doings of the infidels; and how this Sivaji is supposed to have revelations from their gods; but they are but stones — they are but stones, and gold and silver. Now, what saith the blessed Prophet, on whom be peace, about such infidels?” . . .

“Spare us, good Syud,” returned the King, interrupting him gently, “we know the passages; but God hath seen fit to give our house subjects of this faith, and they are all our children — they — as well as the true believers. We can see no difference.”

“Astagh-fur-oolla! No difference!” cried the Syud. “Is it not written in the holy book, how they shall be burned in the fires of hell, and thou sayest there is no difference! Some one hath surely bewitched thee with sorcery, my son, and I will say exorcisms for thee — and —”

“Enough,” returned the King, coldly; “we have not time to waste in discussion on such matters now. Proceed, Neelkunt Rai.”

“The Syud is a holy man,” said the old minister, “and he and his house are venerated, and he should be merciful and considerate to all; but as he, too, hath heard the rumours in regard to Sivaji, my lord will believe them. And it would be well not to dis-

regard them entirely. A people's enthusiasm is not to be trifled with."

"There is but one cure for it, if they are infidels, and that is the sword," murmured the Syud. "What saith —"

"We cannot suffer these interruptions," interposed the King, haughtily.

"Peace, Meer Sahib," whispered the Meerza, laying his hand on the other's arm, as he was about to rise. "Peace, and be still. In what will come afterwards we have need of thee — much need; be still."

"My prince," said Neelkunt Rai, endeavouring to rise, "I have done what was needed, and beg leave to depart in peace. My King knows the worst. What his servant would advise will not now be listened to, were he even to speak."

"Say on," cried the King, interrupting him; "thou hast a right to speak. Say on; we will not prevent thee."

"But he will," returned the Karkoon, pointing to the Syud.

"If he speaks no irreverence against the people of the true faith, he may talk till morning," said the Syud, with a wave of the hand. "I shall be dumb and deaf."

"I have little to represent, my lord," replied the old man. "It is hard to say whether rebellion such as this, should be crushed or forgiven. If I should advise the former, can it be done? If the latter, I may be suspected of partiality. Ah my prince, if you gird up your loins to fight Sivaji, it will but be trying to grasp the wind; and your best troops will be taken into his mountains, leaving their places empty for the

Moguls to occupy, and that were a dangerous risk. No! send your royal 'Cowle'* to the Bhóslay — invite him here — ennoble him — treat him as your ancestors treated the Beyder chief of Suggur, and you will secure him. If a time of trial should ever come, which may the Gods avert, the old Bramhun's words and cautions for the adoption of a merciful policy will not be forgotten. May I depart?"

"Yes, you have permission to depart, Neelkunt Rai," said the King, interrupting the Syud, who was about to speak angrily. "It is even as we suspected in regard to those letters, and the Bhóslay's treachery to the State. We would ask one thing more: — what force hath Sivaji in reality?"

"My prince," returned the Bramhun, rising and leaning on his staff, "what shall I say? Have you no reports? Were not letters given to Afzool Khan to read? Ask him; he knows that country better than I do — far better. Ask the Syud what his disciples tell him."

"No, no; I will have your opinion," interrupted the King. "Speak! what do your people, the Bramhuns, say about it?"

"May I be forgiven, my lord, if it prove untrue. Yet I will speak as I hear," replied the old man. "My prince knows that I am not of this country, nor of this people; I have no interest in them except as Hindus; but you may be assured there is not a Mahratta breathing who will not follow Sivaji, and the divine call he is believed to have received. No man who can wield a sword or carry a gun, or who has a horse to ride, that will not go to the places of meeting when —

* Protection and Assurance

‘the fire is on the hills.’ How many there may be, the Gods only know! Lakhs! lakhs! who can count them? Beware of them, my prince, and secure their chief ere it be too late.”

“What has passed here is secret, Neelkunt Rai,” said the King. “Thou mayst go; we will send for thee again in this matter ere it be concluded,” and with a deep reverence to the King, and salutations to the others, the old man retreated a few paces backwards, then turned, and passed out of the chamber.

“Blessed be God and the Prophet!” exclaimed the Syud when he was gone. “The air was defiled by his breath! Ul-humd-ul-illa! a Kafir and a traitor, may he --”

“Peace, Meer Sahib,* we have dismissed him, and that is enough,” said the King. “Our father, on whose memory be peace, trusted him, and so did his father, — so also do we.”

“As my prince pleases,” returned the holy man, with a humble gesture, and checking the volley of curses he had prepared to hurl after the old Bramhun. “In this matter it seemed to me that his counsel was cowardly and dangerous. How say you, Meerza? Was Feroze Shah afraid of infidels when he and his true believers slew them by lakhs, and the pyramids of heads stood by the gates of Gulburgah? And is our prince less than he was, or are these Mahratta Kafirs more powerful than those of Beejanugger? Speak, man!”

“My opinion would be little worth,” said the secretary, “even did my lord desire it, and there are others more capable of judging of the power of this Mahratta

* Syuds are usually addressed as “Meer Sahib”

robber than I am. What you have to advise our master upon is another matter, Syud."

"Explain it to him, Meerza," said the King, sadly: "I am sick of treachery, which seems to be closing round me like a net on all sides."

"God and the Prophet forbid!" exclaimed both in a breath. "Treachery known, is soon disposed of. That which sits crouching in hidden places is alone to be dreaded," continued the Syud. "Ere I hear the detail, I have my fears."

"Nay, read thyself and judge," said the King. "Give him the letters, Meerza."

"I have compared the seals," said the secretary, "with those letters recently received by the King, and the writing also. Judge for yourself before you read."

The Syud obeyed. He examined and compared the seals, the superscription, and the paper of all, with much care and evident interest, as expressed in various ejaculations of wonder, and appeals to the divinity under various appellations suited to the circumstances, which may be spared. "No doubt, no doubt," he said, after the scrutiny had been concluded, "no doubt of these, nor of the superscription. They only confirm what hath long been in men's mouths, yet was undetected."

"Read," said the King. "Satisfy yourself."

CHAPTER VIII.

"It is finished, my lord," said the Syud, looking up, after an examination of the papers which had appeared interminable, and as he spoke, the cry of the Muezzin of the Royal Mosque arose in the invitation to morning prayer, sonorous and musical, "Alla ho Akbur! Alla ho Akbur!"⁺ "It is finished," he continued, "and it is the will of Alla that morning prayer should come with the last words. Come, my lord, let us do this service, and ask a blessing on our deliberation. Come to the terrace in the fresh morning air."

We need not follow them. As they returned and seated themselves again by the oriel window, the first blush of dawn was stealing over the sky, paling the stars, and the gentle breeze of morning rustled softly among the leaves of the gardens below. The ceremony he had performed, the ablution, and the air of the terrace outside to which they had adjourned, had refreshed the King after this weary night.

"Speak, Syud," he said, as they resumed their seats "What is it to be?"

"I need not, my lord," replied the Syud. "What Alla hath put into thy heart I now see in thine eyes, and so be it! Ameen!** ameen! ameen! It is his destiny. He is not fit to live; let him die, perjured and faithless as he is. My lord, he had sworn on the holy book to me to be true. He had touched my feet

⁺ "God is victorious," — the beginning of the Azân or call to prayers.

** Amen.

and my neck as witness to his oath. Yet see, since then, nay, within a few weeks, this letter — worst of all — was written. But O, my prince! there must be no mistake. Even at the last, let not the blood of a guiltless man be on our heads.”

The Syud’s resolution had wavered for a moment, but was rallied by the secretary as the King shook his head, but did not reply.

“Meer Sahib,” he said, “we have had the same doubts, my lord and I. Considering how we obtained the letters, can there be uncertainty?”

“God forbid!” replied the Syud — “God forbid! it is enough. I see in this revelation the hand of the All-wise, and we, his creatures, should not resist His destinies and His justice. We cannot do so even if we wished,” and he bowed his head reverently over his beads. “Hark! what is that?”

“Ulla dilâyâ to léonga! Ulla dilâyâ to léonga! (If God give I will take! If God give I will take)”* was suddenly shouted in an outer court of the palace by a powerful voice, and interrupted the priest for a moment.

“Listen!” he continued, grasping the Meerza’s arm. “What is that cry, so strange, and so early?”

“It is but one of the city beggars,” said the King, looking across to his secretary with a peculiar glance of intelligence, “who perhaps has not slept off his night’s potions. One of thine own disciples perhaps, Huzrut.”**

“I will go and listen,” said the secretary, rising;

* The cry or chant of a sect of Mahomedan beggars — Fakeers.

** Literally, prince — a title of respect.

and he proceeded to the terrace where the morning prayer had been performed.

“Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!” arose in clear deep tones, now unchecked by the heavy quilted curtain of the royal chamber. It was a common form of cry of fakeers or other beggars; but there was something in the rough tone of the voice which seemed to strike familiarly upon the Meerza’s ear.

“Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!”

The last cry was followed by a remonstrance from the soldiers below, who, belonging to the guard of the private apartments, had evidently stopped the intruder.

“Gently, O Syn,”* cried one; “what dost thou here so early? Do not bawl so loud, friend, else they will be awakened up yonder, and thou wilt be whipped and put in the stocks. Come and sit here, and rest thyself if thou wilt.”

“Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!” was the only reply.

“Nay, but thou canst not enter here, Syn. This is the private court of the Hareem, and thou must be silent,” continued the soldier

“Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!”

“The fellow is mad or drunk. Here, Jemadar,” cried another voice; “what is to be done with this Fakeer?”

“Who can this be?” thought the Meerza. “This is no common cry. I must see the worthy Syud out, and get speech of the crier.”

“Ulla dilâyâ —”

The Fakeer’s cry was broken off abruptly, and there was a noise as if of a scuffle below. Could it

* A respectful title for any Mahomedan fakeer.

be any one in the Wuzeer's interest, seeking for information, or perhaps with deadly intent. "Ho there!" cried the secretary; "what noise is that so early, disturbing the King?"

"Some drunken F'akeer, my lord," returned one of the guards, looking up, "who has intruded, God knows how."

"Keep him, and I will come down presently," answered the Meerzá, not waiting for the reply, but re-entering the chamber?"

"Some F'akeer, my lord," he continued to the King, but answering his look of intelligence, "whom I have ordered to be confined till the Darogah* of the palace can deal with him for his insolence."

"If he be one of my men come after me," said the Syud, "he shall be punished. And now, my lord, have I permission to depart? Delay not in this matter; and may God give you a safe deliverance from a traitor!"

"You may go, Meer Sahib," said the King; "and we thank you for this visit; but shall need you at noon."

"Your servant will be present without fail," returned the Syud, humbly. "Would that his power were equal to his devotion in the King's service!"

"Return directly," said the King, in a whisper to his secretary, as the holy man waddled slowly to the door. "I know who it is; bring him hither at once. Hast thou forgotten the Jogi of the temple?"

"Hither? that fearful man!"

"Yes, and at once — any excuse — say he does exorcism — anything."

* Superintendent.

The secretary hesitated.

"At once," continued the King, positively, "and without fail. I feared him not then, when I was in his power and helpless, neither do I now. Go, take this with thee," and he slipped his signet ring into the Meerza's hand.

"I will have him searched at any rate," thought the Meerza, as he descended the narrow stair. "Take care, Meer Sahib, the light is uncertain. Ah, here we are. Who is that, Abdulla, that was crying out?" he said to a eunuch, who, with others, kept guard at the foot of the stairs.

"I know not, my lord. He is some drunken Fakeer, no doubt; and they have tied him up, I hear."

"He may be wanted above," whispered the Meerza. "Let him follow me, and without notice or hindrance. Some exorcism is needed — you understand — within ——"

The man stared, and only bowed assent over his crossed arms. "Who dared question royal secrets?"

"Coming, Meer Sahib; I only looked for my shoes," cried the Meerza to his companion, who had advanced a few paces.

Hearing the secretary's voice, several persons emerged from the guard-room, holding the Fakeer tightly. His face was distinctly seen in the morning light, and there could be no mistake.

"He is not one of my children," said the Syud, blandly, looking at the man, and seating himself in his palankeen, which had been brought up; "some drunken brawler, no doubt, who deserves a whipping.

Send him to the Kótwal, my sons. I am departing, Meerza Sahib."

"Khoda Hafiz! (God be with you?)" returned the secretary. "At noon, you remember!"

"Of course, Meerza Sahib, the royal commands are on my head and eyes. Go on, my sons," and the bearers shuffled along at their usual pace.

"Shookr Oolla! (thank God!)" ejaculated the secretary, who had doubts of the priest, as he had of most others. "Who art thou, fellow?" he added to the prisoner.

"Bid them loose me," said Pahar Singh, for it was he, "and I will tell thee. Hast thou forgotten so quickly?"

"My lord," said one of the soldiers, "let us turn him out into the town."

"How he got in here," added another, "no one knows; yet he is not drunk, and he has done no harm beyond bawling and struggling. He has the strength of a fiend."

"Loose him, my friends; he is an exorcist, and there has been some trouble within," replied the secretary. "I must take him into the presence. He has no arms? Behold the royal seal."

"I have the amulet which shall restore health to the sick," growled the pretended Fakeer; "it is sorely needed, and time presses. The planetary conjunction is passing."

"Come, Syn; I will lead thee in," said the secretary, taking his hand.

"He has no weapons — we searched him well; but he will answer no questions," said several men, speaking together.

"Ah, my friends," replied the secretary, gravely, "those who cast out evil spirits are not to be questioned. Come, Syn, follow me."

The men shrugged their shoulders incredulously. What could it mean? To all except the Meerza the entry of such a character to the private apartments at any hour would have been impossible — but now, and under the King's seal? How had he entered the citadel? The guard at the gate had not seen him pass; and this mystery, with the fact of his having been expected, furnished plentiful cause of speculation to those who had seized him.

CHAPTER IX.

"WHAT is it?" asked the Meerza anxiously, as they passed into the inner court. "Why has thou come, Pahar Singh, thus early?"

"Is he above — Ali Adil Shah?" asked the robber; "what I have to say is for him alone. And thou hast recognised me, O Meerza?"

"He is," replied the Meerza; "follow me, and be silent. I will tell him. Yes, I knew thee, and he trusts thee."

The eunuchs of the lower guard bowed their heads on their folded arms as the two men passed and ascended the stair together. When they reached the terrace, the Meerza stepped on and drew aside the curtain.

"He is come, my lord," he said in a low tone — "he — the robber."

"I thought so," replied the King; "bring him in."

As Pahar Singh entered, the light of the lamp shone full on him, and revealed a haggard anxious face; his large eyes were gleaming wildly from among the heavy masses of his matted hair, now hanging about his shoulders; but the disguise as a Mahomedan mendicant was as complete as that of the Hindu Jogi had been. He made no lowly reverence, but advanced boldly — defiantly, as it were — to the edge of the carpet, and the King involuntarily grasped the hilt of the short sword lying beside him.

“The King might kill me,” said the man, observing the action; “a word, and the head of Pahar Singh is struck from his body by those eunuchs yonder. There is no escape hence — is it not so? Yet I have trusted thee, O King, and do not fear thee, even as thou didst not fear me. I am here, true to thy salt; and what I have to tell thee is as true as I am.”

“Fear not,” said the King, “and speak freely; thou art safe here.”

“Does he know all?” asked the robber, pointing to the Meerza.

“All, friend. Was he not with me, and are not these the letters?” returned the King. “Else — —”

“I believe thee, Adil Khan,” said Pahar Singh. “Now, listen: time is short, and much has to be done ere thou art safe.”

The King started. “Safe?” he cried.

“Ay, safe, my lord. Khan Mahomed was at Almella yesterday, and is on his way hither now. He will be here about the third watch of the day, or sooner. What brings him, think you?” said Pahar Singh, rapidly.

“I sent him a letter of assurance, and he believes it,” said the King.

“Believes it, King? He?” exclaimed the man derisively. “He? Thou art but a simple boy to think so. No, he has understood it rightly, and in reply has brought some hundreds of my men with him. What for? — it is in thine eyes to ask — what for? I will tell thee. Ah! thy heart tells thee now: there is no need for me to speak.”

“Then his designs are evil, friend,” said the King, with a slight shudder.

“King! without that letter he was not to be trusted. After he received it, he knew his fate,” returned Pahar Singh. “We - - I - - have an evil reputation, they say; and he believed I would do anything for money. He sent an express messenger for me from Nuldroog. I had come here with those letters, but my son went. Money was offered to him; rank - - an estate — whatever he pleased. Money? yea, much money. A lakh of rupees — more. Why? thou already knowest. Yes — to kill thee, O Adil Khan, thou wert not to live over to-day. My son pleaded fatigue and my absence — time also to collect the men. That is why Khan Mahomed did not arrive yesterday. That is why he is at Almella now. My son is shrewd and wise — he secured all he could of the Wuzeer’s money; and then — ah, blessed boy! — he rode on to meet me last night. Ha, ha! they thought he had gone to Itga to hurry on the men; but he is a good youth — he knew what to do. A gallant horse is that which that Lalla left with us; thy life was on its feet, O Prince! and my boy was in sore temptation. So he reached me last night, just as I had gained my hiding-place, of

which he knew. Ah, I was sick at heart, for my brother was dead ——”

“Dead!” cried the secretary; “God forbid! he was with thee, and well.”

“Ay, dead, Meerza,” continued Pahar Singh. “Yes, murdered — perish the cowardly hand that struck the blow in the dark. We were attacked by robbers, who had watched us, and he was struck down in the fight. I went for assistance to carry him, and when I returned he was dead, and a knife-wound in his heart. Enough, master,” continued Pahar Singh, dashing his hand roughly across his eyes. “He died in thy service. Enough for him.”

“And then?” asked the King.

“My son had consented to do the work; and that slave, the Wuzeer, believed him. The boy told me he pretended to hate the King, and that there was a death feud between our house and thine, Adil Khan — was it not good? Oh, he is a clever youth that. It was he who got those letters, too; and now he has received money from the slave. Enough! Speak, O King. Is the slave to be delivered into thy hand alive, or wilt thou give him to me — to me, Pahar Singh? Dost thou doubt me? I ask no money — no reward from thee. Thy house — thy very life — is in peril: Pahar Singh can save both, and ask nothing but to be held true to his master’s salt. Nay, do not interrupt me,” he continued, waving his hand, while he wiped away the foam which, in his excitement, had gathered on his lips. “Think, Adil Khan, was thy royal house ever so threatened before? Hath not the Wuzeer prepared the enemy to make his last swoop upon thee, even as a falcon on a hare; and wert thou dead, with

no son for to rally men around him, and Khan Mahomed holding the power, — could thy kingdom be preserved? Are the Moguls idle? Is Sivaji Bhóslay indifferent? Above all, could thy royal armies have saved thee had I been a traitor?"

"Come hither," cried Adil Shah, from whose eyes the tears were welling fast as he thought upon his defenceless state, the deep treachery which had been meditated, and the rough earnest devotion of this strange man. "Come hither: let me put my hand on thy head."

Pahar Singh advanced. The squalid mendicant covered with rags — to all appearance what he seemed, so complete was the disguise — trod boldly upon the royal bed of satin and velvet; but he bowed his head to meet the hand which the King extended and laid upon it gently.

"As thou wilt, true servant," said the King, "for there is a stern and fearful necessity to be encountered. Whatever reward thou mayst claim hereafter is freely bestowed upon thee — all thou hast ever done against me or my people is forgiven. Take that slave for thine own if thou wilt, to deal with as it seemeth good to thee."

"Remember," cried Pahar Singh, seizing the King's hand and detaining it upon his head, "these words cannot be revoked. Whatever happens, I do but thy bidding, O King; and, only for the need for thee to know it, I had done the same even though I had not seen thee. Now I go, whither ye cannot trace me, but ye will hear of me ere the day is past."

"Go," replied the King. "I have no fear of thee or of thine acts. Alla and the Prophet direct and

keep thee, O true friend, whom he hath sent me in my need. Go!"

"Only be careful," continued the man, withdrawing the King's hand from his head, kissing it reverently, and then releasing it — "only be careful! Stir not beyond the fort till the news comes to thee. The guards on the gates and within are of the true party, and thou art safe with them. Care not for revolt; the Wuzcer brings no men with him but my own. My son prevented those he brought from coming on, and they returned to Nuldroog from Almella. None of his party here dare stir. Yet, if there be any movement, send for Afzool Khan and his son Fazil; they are my bitter enemies, but they are true to thee. Nay, more, the Wuzcer's son is not with his father in this matter, and is true to thee, O King, because of the young Fazil. And now I go. Send me beyond the gate, for I must not depart as I came."

"I am ready to go," said the secretary. "They were marvelling at thy sudden appearance. How was it?"

"I may tell thee some time or other," returned Pahar Singh, smiling; "but come, it is almost day. Yet, ere I depart, my lord, I would kiss thy feet. The reverence I once paid thy father, the noble Sultan Mahmoud, I would pay to thee." And so saying, he prostrated himself, embracing the King's feet, and kissing them respectfully.

"Would thou wert a true believer, and thou wouldst be as a brother. Oh that I could reward thee adequately," said the King, with much emotion.

"I am better as I am — free," returned Pahar Singh. "When I have earned reward, Adil Khan, I

may ask it if I live; and if I die, remember there was one true heart among thy people, and protect my Gopal — my son. Let us not speak of reward; there is nothing now between us but true faith, as thou art witness, O Meerza, and that faith was never yet given for gold."

So saying, he turned and passed rapidly through the curtain, followed by the secretary.

Was there any doubt in the young King's mind now? None; all was clear. There was no thought of mercy — none of receding from determination. There could be no question of Pahar Singh's story, else why had he, outlaw and robber as he was, trusted himself in the very palace. There was no appearance about that strange man which could lead to a suspicion of deceit, and his grim devotion in this emergency affected the King deeply. Even if Pahar Singh failed, the course was clear. The Wuzeer must be confronted with the silent witnesses of his treachery; and in Afzool Khan and a score of other trusty adherents, the King felt he had ample protection.

No; it was no deception. After a short interval of silence, the Fakeer's cry, "Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!" again arose more sonorously, more confidently than before, and the King, stepping out on the terrace, listened, speculating how far the man might be gone on his deadly errand, and what would come of it, so absorbedly, that the secretary's footsteps, as he ascended the stair, were not heard, and the King started as he spoke once more.

"He is gone, my lord, on his work. I saw him pass beyond the gate."

"Did he say aught?"

“Nothing — he did not speak again. As he passed out of the court he shouted his cry, and continued it, walking rapidly till he was beyond the bridge of the ditch. Many of the men saluted him, and some offered alms, but he answered no one, and, still shouting, pressed on so quickly that I could hardly follow. When I last saw him, he had turned by the ‘Goruk Imlee’ tree, and was running fast; and so God speed him!”

“Ameen!” sighed the King. “Thou must not leave me to-day, Anwur Alee. Order a Durbar at noon, and there will we await the end. He or I, Meerza, whichever God wills; but it shall not be said of Adil Khan that he shrank from his fate in his zenana. Go; sleep there on my cushions for a while; we both need rest,” and by another doorway, the King passed to the inner apartments.

CHAPTER X.

THE day wore on; and it may be imagined that the anxieties of the lady Lurlee and the fair Zyna were not diminished by the continued absence of the Khan and his son. As the former had left his wife, he had requested her to have a “Kichéri”* of a particular kind, with kabobs, prepared for him when he arrived. “He should be hungry,” he said, “after his ride so early, and Fazil too. It was a soldier’s dish, and would put him in mind of old days in the field, and — Lurlee could dress it so capitally.” We may remember a slight bandying of words between

* Split-peas and rice boiled together.

the Khan and his lady before he went out; and he had ordered this dish as a propitiatory meal at her hands, for he knew by experience that the result would be satisfactory: the little acerbity would disappear, and the planets, perhaps, would be forgotten.

Nothing could have been devised more soothing to the Lady Lurlee's temper — nothing more certain of dispelling any clouds of dissatisfaction or disappointment — than this appeal to her affections through her kitchen. Even in these intellectual days, a similar result is not unfrequently attainable; proving that the motives and springs of poor human nature, and its tempers, show but little difference at the time of our history and among ourselves; and did we permit ourselves to moralise after the fashion of the day, we might possibly deliver a pretty lecture upon the subject.

But — and we may as well avow it once for all — we feel ourselves bound to relate our story without any moralising digressions whatever, further than what may form part of its action; and therefore we will not follow the changes of the lady's mind, from its first expectant and interested condition after the mixing of the materials by her own fair hands (for on such occasions she suffered no one to interfere), to the setting them on the fire to be done exactly as her lord wished. With the Khan's loving order, had come a flood of pleasant memories to her — of old camp days, hard fights too, in which her lord — safe, generally victorious, and restored to her prayers — found his wife busy with some favourite dish; and they loved each other, in a homely fashion, better for the cooking and the eating of it.

Now, as the lady sat over her private brazier, on which were her own silver cooking-vessels, the Khan's special gift, she told Zyna of many an old time and scene — of many a narrow escape — many a rough march which she had shared with the old soldier, and done her part in binding up his wounds if he were hurt, or cooking for him if he were hungry.

“Your mother was not of our rough Dekhani sort, daughter,” she said; “people tell me she never went out with the army: she was a weak, fragile thing, I have heard, but very beautiful. Peace be with her, for thy father loved her much, and hath never loved me as her. But no children have come, Zyna — no children, that is it,” — and the lady sighed, and perhaps tears gathered in her eyes, for she wiped them hastily with the corner of her muslin scarf. “Well, it is God's will, daughter; and though I could never understand it properly, there was something wrong in the horoscope which they cast when I was betrothed. You see, Zyna, my planet was then Mars, which represented water — no, it was fire; — no, that's a male planet, and so it must have been Earth. Yes, I think it was — Earth; and then he was Venus — no, that could not be either; it must have been Saturn, and that's for air. So you see, fire and air — no, let me see — air and water? no. What did I tell thee, Zyna? Was it Earth?”

“I do not understand it, mother; how can I tell?” said Zyna demurely.

“But you are not listening, girl; ah, wait till your own time comes. I'll warrant you anxious and curious enough to know whether you are fire or earth, or air or water; and whether he is air, or water, or whatever

he may be. Now about myself. You see I was fire; no, I am wrong. 'Humul,' 'Sowr,' 'Jowza,'"* continued the lady Lurlee, telling off all the signs of the zodiac, in Arabic, upon the ends of her fingers, and then the planets in succession, "'Mars,' 'Venus,' 'Mercury;'" and now look, Zyna, if the house of the Lion is on this middle finger, and the planet Mercury comes to it, you see Mercury is in conjunction with — with the Crab. Did not I say the Crab, child? Now attend, else I shall lose all my reckoning. 'Humul,' 'Sowr' — —"

"Alas, mother, but I do not understand it, and I can never remember the names of the planets or their houses, — indeed I cannot," said Zyna, piteously. "But ah, mother, look, it is burning!"

And so it was. In her astrological involvement, Lurlee Khánum had forgotten the kichéri, which, as the bottom of the pan became too hot, sent up a most unsavoury odour, and brown smoke issued from under the lid.

"God forgive me my neglect, daughter," exclaimed the lady, sorrowfully, as she examined the pan: "it is surely quite spoiled, and thy father is so particular. The least idea of burnt kichéri, is enough to set him mad, and I could not look at him for a day or more. And he will be expecting this to be all ready. "Protection of the Prophet!" exclaimed the lady suddenly, "there he is. What shall I do? — what shall I do?"

That which had startled Lurlee, was the arrival of the Khan's escort, and the beating of their kettle-drums in the outer court; and as she listened, and

* Aries, Taurus, Gemini.

stood up, ladle in hand, expecting her lord's entrance, she was perhaps relieved by the appearance of Goolab who, as the general out-door scout, brought tidings from the court-yard of occurrences of all kinds.

"They are not coming, lady," said the nurse. "They are gone to the Kótwal's, and will stay there. That's the news brought by Peer Khan, and a host of them. And there's Bulwunt Rao as good as dead; and he's to be put into the private apartments, and the King's doctor is to be sent for; and I must go and see to a bed for him, and a soft mattress, and pillows and sheets; and then they'll all be spoilt with his blood. His blood, indeed!"

"A blister on thy tongue, O prating woman!" cried Lurlee. My lord taken to the Kótwal's? *My* lord! O Zyna! O girl! what is the world come to? Thy father taken to that man of blood, Jehándar Beg; and those cowards, the Püègah, have come here without him? O girl? — what is it? speak, hast thou no sense?"

Indeed, Zyna had very little; the mention of that dreaded name, the certainty that if her father could have returned he would, and the fact of Bulwunt Rao being dangerously wounded, all combined to terrify, and Lurlee herself was no calmer.

"Was there no message, Goolab?" asked Zyna.

"O yes; that the Khan remains at the Kótwal's, and will eat his breakfast there. He has business, and will stay. That is all, and that Meah Sahib is well."

"That is all!" exclaimed Lurlee. "That is all! To have my lord in the Kótwallee, and that dish of kichéri dressed in vain! O woman of little grace that

I am! why did I deserve this? what have I done? what have I done?"

"But it was spoiled, mother," said Zyna innocently; "do not care about it. Only thank God they are safe. O, I vow a F'ateha —"

"Not care, child? and would it not have been the same had it been, as it was, dressed like food for the Peris? would it not have been the same? Would he have come to eat it? he, thy father? Why order it? why affront me by leaving it here to be spoiled? why did he not come long ago? This is not as it used to be of old. O, Afzool Khan! am I less than dirt in thine eyes; am I—I—I—"

Now, the lady Lurlee, like all other Mahomedan ladies, only mentioned her husband's name on very solemn occasions, or when excitement got the better of discretion; and here was an instance of it. She sat down upon the stool before her brazier, and, after rocking herself to and fro for a while, burst into an uncontrollable fit of sobbing. It was difficult to say, perhaps, what had most particularly affected her; but undoubtedly the burning of the kichéri was at the bottom of all. It had been so good. Then she knew how his face would have expanded under its influence as he ate; it would have reminded him of some old scene, whose history would have come out between the mouth-fuls — he might even have caressed her. Ah, all was now gone — her trouble, her expectation of a loving greeting, all gone; and the sense of neglect and indifference under which she habitually existed, had for the time taken its place. But gradually the sobbing was soothed, and Lurlee, laying her head against Zyna's bosom, seemed lost in thought.

"There must be unfavourable conjunctions among the planets to-day, depend upon it, daughter," she said at length, rousing herself, and drying her eyes, "else all this would not have happened. Now, let me look steadily into it: perhaps we may learn something for our guidance."

"Look!" continued the lady after a pause, and a brief examination of an astrological table, which she usually carried about her, "look here. Ah, graceless and unfortunate that I am, I should have foreseen all that has happened, and he should never have gone out at all. Why, here is Saturn in the ascendant till the first watch of the day, and then follows the Sun, and that's what spoils my cooking. Let me see — Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer," she continued, counting the signs of the zodiac, as before, on her fingers, "Aries, Taurus — why, God be merciful! here follows Mars, and he's an executioner — and they are in the Kótwallee — the Prophet's mercy be on them! Yet, stay, Mars will last for only three hours; then comes, let me see — Mars, Jupiter, Mercury, Moon — no, Venus, Jupiter, Moon. Yes, I am right now, girl. That means messenger, and Venus is propitious. Ah, yes, don't you see it all, Zyna? Don't you understand? Look, first the Moon, that's we ourselves, as messengers; and then Venus will save them, if we can get past Mars. Of course it is quite plain. Don't you see?"

"Alas, no, mother! I do not," said Zyna, innocently. "I see figures and numbers, and angles and signs, but it is hopeless to ask me about them. You are a wise woman, and this is a marvellous science. Surely, and please God, you are right."

“O, I see exactly what to do; and it is well I can pick out a path among these mysteries,” cried Lurlee, brightening, “or we had all been lost long ago. But we will eat first; I am sure some of the kichéri is good, and at any rate there are the kabobs, and Jameela will have bread. Come and eat, daughter, it will support thee; come, we have much to do ere noon. I see now, and when thou hast eaten I will tell thee. Jameela! O Jameela!” she cried to the cook, who, when her mistress came to usurp her functions, discreetly kept out of the way. “Jameela, bring some bread and some pickle; we must eat now.”

“But you have the kichéri,” said the dame. “Surely it is not burnt,” she continued, sniffing into the pan with a cook’s experienced nose.

“Begone, graceless!” cried Lurlee, who well knew the old woman was rejoicing in her heart over her discomfiture; “begone and get the bread.”

“There is none but the men’s bread, and it is coarse enough, for the meal was not sifted,” returned Jameela. “When *you* take to cooking, of course I am not expected to be mindful of other light bread, and such things; but —”

“Begone, and do as you are bid,” cried her mistress, sharply. A look from Zyna also, deprecating further discussion, was understood at once by the old dame.

“I will bring the best of it, Khanum,” she said, “and there is some quite hot; but I can bake a few of your own ‘phoolkas,’* if you like; they will be good with the kabobs . . . which seem savoury,” she con-

* *Phoolka* — a kind of scone, very light, and puffed out, as the name expresses.

tinued, craning over to look into the pot on the fire, and sniffing into it.

"Where is Goolab? Ah yes, do so, Jameela, and bring them quickly," replied her mistress; "thou art a jewel."

"I will send her, lady," said the cook, departing; "and I would bring the men's bread, only it is not fit for the likes of ye."

"Now, what is to be done?" asked Zyna. O mother, thou seemest to understand everything, and art confident, and I am distracted with apprehension. O my father! O my brother! God keep you safe. I vow lights at Peer Sahib's tomb, and to feed a hundred Fakeers there to-morrow, if they be safe!"

"We must go to the palace, and inquire why thy father is detained," replied Lurlee decisively. "Ah, Goolab, where wert thou? But never mind," she continued, as the dame entered. "Lay out clothes for us; we must go to the palace; and bid some one go and say we pray to see the Bégum Sahiba, and order the palankeens and an escort to be ready. Inshalla! daughter, we will see what this evil-minded and base-born Kótwal can do."

"And the jewels, Khanum?" asked Goolab.

"Ah! I had forgotten. Well, a few."

"No, mother, no!" cried Zyna, "not so. With our hearts heavy and sad, it surely is no time to put on jewels. Let us rather go with sober garments, and prostrate ourselves before the Peer's shrine on our way."

"I tell thee the Peer cannot help us," returned the dame tartly; "it is the stars and the Bégum. When they are safe, then do thy Fatcha if thou wilt. Come here,

cat, for we have much to do. Ah! Jameela bee;" for Lurlee always added the respectful addition of *bee*, for lady, when she was in good humour, to her cook, who now entered with a tray of hot bread and delicate phoolkas, and a white cloth over her arm: "thou hast been quick, friend."

It must be confessed that the lady Lurlee's appetite, sharpened perhaps by her unusual fast and the process of her own cookery, did ample justice to the meal. Her confidence in the stars sustained her far better than Zyna's faith in her saint — that is, if one might judge by the resolute and satisfied features of the elder face as it bent over its plate, eating heartily, and the distressed, anxious, and tearful expression of the younger, endeavouring almost vainly to eat at all. It was of no avail that Lurlee encouraged her daughter, and even picked out tempting morsels from the kabobs, and set them before her, with the hottest of the phoolkas, as they were sent in short relays from the kitchen.

"Ah, daughter! he would have enjoyed this," said Lurlee, as she washed her hands over the ewer brought her at the conclusion of the meal, and sighed in a manner which plainly signified her regret not to be able to eat more. "Yes, the kabob was good, but thou hast scarcely tasted it; a trifle more pepper would have been better, perhaps; yet it was good. And now, girl, I am ready to face the Kótwal or the Bé-gum, or — the peace of God be on him — Adil Shah himself. Inshalla! we will see who dares to detain my lord when I, Lurlee Khanum, have cooked his breakfast."

CHAPTER XI.

ENOUGH had transpired in the examination of Afzool Khan and his son, to satisfy Jehándar Beg that the young man and his father had attained knowledge of some secret relating to the conspiracies in progress, which they were reserving to tell the King; and we should be doing that very astute officer injustice, if we did not at once admit that he believed the secret known to them, or at least to Fazil, concerned the Wuzeer very deeply. Why the King's secretary had been mentioned he could not imagine. Did he know it also? Certainly it was important to find out everything that could be discovered, previous to the Wuzeer's arrival; and he purposed himself to go to his house, and have speech of him, before he should attend the Durbar, and appear before the King to inform him of the detention of Afzool Khan and his son, and of the events connected with them.

But Jehándar Beg, as police minister of that large city, had other sources of information; and whatever occurred at night was reported to him by his spies before the true business of the day commenced. Had not Afzool Khan come direct to the court, it is most probable that Jehándar Beg would have heard some account of Fazil Khan's night adventure before he appeared at all. As it was, there had been a reversion of events; and we must now follow the magistrate briefly, in his reception of the spies whom he summoned, directly the door of the court had closed upon the Khan and his son.

The room in which these persons were received, was one which could be entered from the large hall of audience: but there was a door also by the back passage which led from a street behind, and persons could come and go unobserved. There was nothing in this chamber — which indeed was very small — but a large pillow and a carpet, on which the Kótwal's sword-dagger, a heavy-bladed Persian or Afghan knife, and writing materials, were placed. As he sat down and clapped his hands, a door opposite was opened by a slave without, and a Bramhun, as was evident by his dress and the caste marks on his forehead, was admitted.

“Be seated,” said Jehándar Beg. “Have you anything for me to-day, Pundit?”

“Yes,” answered the Bramhun, taking a pair of spectacles from a fold in his turban, and placing them across his nose, and then producing some papers from a pocket within his dress; “these have just arrived by a special messenger from Moro Trimmul at Tooljapoor;” and he handed to the Kótwal several letters sealed with the private Mahratta seal of Sivaji Bhóslay, which Jehándar Beg examined closely; then, apparently satisfied, he made a Persian memorandum on the corner of each, with the date of receipt, very methodically, and put them into the side-pocket of his robe.

“And,” continued the Bramhun, looking over his letter as the Kótwal had finished, “Moro Trimmul writes that his sister has been married to a Shastree at Tooljapoor, and that he has not been idle; but he cannot induce Pahar Singh to visit him or accept terms, and he is afraid to go to Itga himself; so it

were better your worship advised our master to treat with him."

"Very good; I will mention it," returned the Kótwal; "but has Moro Trimmul been to Nuldroog to see the Wuzeer? It is not far."

"No, my lord; he was afraid to go unless a 'Cowle' were sent to him."

"Curious that, O Pundit!" added Jehándar Beg, with a sneer; "he is not scrupulous in general, I think."

"No, not in general, perhaps," replied the man; "but in this case he is -- he is -- not sure."

"Not sure? Well, I suppose he is certain of my being able to apprehend him, and make him so, on the Goruk Imlee tree."

"My lord is all-powerful; but Moro is careful -- as much so as Sivaji Bhósley or Tannajee Maloosray," returned the Pundit, dryly.

"Ah yes; no doubt, friend; he thinks himself so," replied Jehándar Beg, with a sneer; "but what of Tannajee himself? I heard just now that he is here, and was seen last night."

"Tannajee is everywhere," returned the man, smiling, "or some one else for him. If my lord requires him, he may be found at Wye: he would not trust himself in Beejapoor, I think; yet ----"

"Why not, Pundit?"

"My lord can best answer that. Like Moro Trimmul, he is better at a distance till the time comes. He does not like 'those trees' of my lord's."

For once the Kótwal was at fault. It was necessary to gain over the Mahratta interest, else the intrigue with the Emperor were abortive; but it was

clear none of the Mahratta agents would trust the Wuzceer's party, without more assurance of its success than at present appeared likely; and the Kótwal felt this keenly. He might threaten, imprison, or even torture, but he could not penetrate beyond the surface.

"Tannajee was in the Kullal's bazar last night," said Jehándar Beg after a pause, "and had a narrow escape. He ought not to place himself in such peril."

"Indeed! I have said before there are Maloosrays everywhere," returned the Bramhuu dryly; "I know what has been told you, my lord; but," he added, smiling, "I suppose you don't believe it?"

"That is as may be proved hereafter. We shall know more by-and-by — to-day, perhaps," replied Jehándar Beg.

The man shrugged his shoulders. "Does my lord wish me to stay?" he asked.

"Not particularly. The master comes this afternoon, and may wish to see you."

"Certainly, I will attend; but about Maloosray? If he comes I will tell you," continued the Pundit, laughing; "but do not listen, my lord, to idle stories; Maloosray is everywhere, and in that is his safety. May I go?"

"Yes, go;" and the man, making a respectful salute, departed.

The Pundit was a clever agent, deeply devoted, like all his countrymen, to the Mahratta interest, apparently serving the Wuzceer's party through Jehándar Beg, yet at the same time revealing only what was advisable to be known, and gaining all the information he could. He had already seen Maloosray,

and went direct to Jehándar Beg, on purpose to mislead him, in which he perfectly succeeded.

The Kótwal sat and mused a while on what had been told him. He believed the Bramhun about Maloosray. "And Pahar Singh would not join them? That is all he knows," said Jehándar Beg to himself. "My lord writes that he is sure of the robber, and brings some of his men with him. What can that be for?" He felt as though he had not been quite trusted; still the Wužeer was coming that day, and would tell all. He could not perhaps write.

So another spy was admitted, evidently one of the royal eunuchs. He sat down where the Bramhun had been seated, and for a time was silent.

"Well," said Jehándar Beg, "is thy brain heavy with drink, Mahmood, or with secrets? Or is there bad news? Why art thou silent?"

"Good or bad, I know not, my lord," replied the man; "but it is at least curious, and you may understand it. I do not."

"Indeed! — say on, friend," returned the Kótwal, settling himself into an attitude of attention.

"My lord the secretary," said the man calmly, "was out late last night. He went to a temple somewhere, and there was another with him. He then returned to the palace, and the Peer Zadah and Neelkunt Rai were sent for and admitted. They sat till nearly dawn, when a Fakeer came, and was taken up to the Palace of the Seven Stories by the secretary."

Jehándar Beg took his beard in his hand, rubbed and stroked it, and mused for several minutes. "Anything more?" he asked.

"Some money was taken," added the man. "That

is all I know, except that a Durbar is ordered after the mid-day prayer."

These tidings, strange as they seemed to be, troubled Jehándar Beg sorely. He had not been told of the Durbar. What could have happened? "Thou must go and find out who was with the secretary," he said.

"If I might speak," said the spy timidly, looking about him — "I think it was —" and he advanced and whispered in the Kótwal's ear — "the King himself."

"The King? Impossible; he never left the palace," returned the Kótwal, aloud. "I know that he did not. The King? —"

"My lord cannot be mistaken," replied the spy, deferentially. "Nevertheless, I heard it —"

"Quite impossible! He could not have gone without my knowing of it, Mahmood; nor dare he venture out without being attended. Who were with the secretary?"

"Bundagee Sahib, and five others only; and the man who went with the secretary entered the private apartments with him when they returned. This I saw, for I was watching."

"Thou shouldst have gone into the court with them," said the Kótwal. "What neglect is this?"

"I was going, but the guard stopped me," said the spy, as if ashamed. "They knew me, and turned me out of the fort-gate. What could I do? Since the last time I was drunk, they will not admit me."

"And the Fakeer?"

"I heard him calling inside, 'Ulla dilâyâ to léonga;'

and when he got outside he ran, still shouting, towards the Goruk Imlee trees, and I lost sight of him."

"Then who told you he went into the palace?"

"Oh, the men on guard said one of the ladies had seen demons, and that the Syn had been sent for, to say incantations over her."

"Very likely," said the Kótwal, calmly. "Now go and bring me the news I want. Was it the King who went with the Meerza, or his own son? Find this out for me, and return directly."

"Jo hookum!"* returned the spy, "your slave will do his best," and he departed.

We need not follow Jehándar Beg in his other private audiences. He had many spies over many people.

If he had not been delayed by these communications and his own meditations upon them, and had gone to his prisoners at once, it is possible perhaps, that the Khan and his son might have been taken by surprise; but they had been warned, and were prepared for him.

The lad Ashruf, who has been already mentioned, had been present during the first examination. No one noticed him; but he was shrewd and observant. He had asked his father whether he should run and bring down the whole force of Afzool Khan's Paigah to rescue the Khan; and perhaps the boy would have enjoyed a share in the mêlee which would undoubtedly have followed; but his father, while checking him angrily for the thought, bid him be on the watch, and should there be any danger, to give information of it. So the lad had remained in the Kuchéri, and

* As you order.

was not noticed among the soldiers who lounged about there. As the Kótwal entered his private room, and was known to be generally occupied for some time, the various clerks and scribes took advantage of his absence, and had for the most part gone out; a few only remained, who seemed absorbed in their business. So, gradually, the lad edged himself close to the private door, which, as sometimes happens in Indian houses, did not close completely, on account of the hinges being outside the door-post. The lad could not see, but he could hear if he placed his ear, carelessly, to all appearance, against the place where the door joined the door-frame, and in this attitude he was not disturbed. Being questioned by a soldier, he answered lazily, that he was ordered to wait for his father's return; and apparently was settling quietly to sleep, leaning against the wall.

Ashruf had no idea at first of the results of the position in which he had placed himself; but a few words awakened his attention perfectly. To hear better also, he feigned to be sleepy, drew a part of his scarf over his face, and lay down; and by this means he could see under the door sufficiently to observe who came.

The Bramhun's communication did not interest him much; but as soon as the eunuch was seated, whom he knew to be in disgrace for habitual intemperance, he felt sure that his tidings would relate to the palace, and he listened more carefully than ever. Very little escaped him. He could not hear the eunuch's whisper, but the Kótwal had repeated the name of the King aloud — that was enough. It was necessary, at least, that the young Khan should know of it, and directly the

eunuch had been dismissed, the lad got up and looked about.

It is frequently the case that, in houses of one floor only, like this, a staircase leads from the principal room to the roof; and in the corner, not far from the door we have mentioned, was one of this description. Ashruf watched his opportunity, and when no one was observing him, slipped gently behind the wall at the entrance of the steps, and ascended them quickly. He had remarked the direction of the court where Afzool Khan and his son were detained, and, creeping on his hands and knees to the edge of the terrace, looked into it.

At first he did not see them, because they were sitting upon the same side under one of the arches; but a soft cry of "Huzrut! Huzrut!" ("My prince! my prince!") in a voice very like a woman's, and a small piece of plaster thrown into the court, induced Fazil to get up and attend to the signal, whatever it might be. Looking up, he saw the lad's face peeping through an aperture in the open stucco-work of the parapet, and in a few moments had heard what he had to tell. It was important, because putting them on their guard against further questioning, which could only have one object, their continued detention; and thoughtful, because proving a faithful interest, which Fazil trusted to reward. It confirmed also, suspicions of the connection between the Wuzeer and the Kótwal.

"Can I do anything more, noble sir?" asked the boy, when his little story was done; "be quick, else I may be seen and flogged."

"Yes, two things," replied Fazil; "first, run to Kowas Khan, the Wuzeer's son; bid him come to me

here well attended, but with no appearance of force; and then go to the Lurlee Khanum, at our house, with those papers" — and he threw what he had to him — "and tell her we shall not be at home early, as we to have attend the King's Durbar, and that we are well. She is to keep the papers till we come."

They saw the boy's face disappear, and heard him crawling back over the terrace. Fortunately he had not been observed, and he gained the bottom of the steps safely, and passed out among the soldiers, unchallenged, on his double mission.

But while he is running at a steady, unvarying trot, not staying even to take breath, we must follow what the Kótwal had to say to the old Khan and his son, which may be of importance in the elucidation of this history.

"Fear not, my father," said Fazil to him, as voices were heard at the door, "fear not, all will be well. The boy will do as he was told; and without alarm or force of any kind we shall be soon free. But speak not, let me talk; you are to know nothing, but that you went to fetch me when I sent for you last night."

CHAPTER XII.

"LADY," said Goolab, again entering suddenly, "there is a boy in the court who says he must have instant speech of you. He will tell no one what he has to say, except that he has come from the master."

"A boy, Goolab? how old is he? can I see him? Quick, woman, my veil — anything to cover me," exclaimed Lurlee.

"Take this, mother," said Zyna, unfastening her scarf; "what need of concealment with a boy? I will go aside. Admit him, Goolab; he may have news of them."

The lad entered and prostrated himself before the Khanum. "Take these papers," he said. "My lord the Khan hath sent them; you are to keep them, and no one is to see them. He and his son are well and safe, and will go to the King in the afternoon."

"Prophet of God, what is this?" cried Lurlee. "Mahratta, too? Well, no one shall take them from me;" and, so saying, she stuffed them into that most convenient and unapproachable of all lady's hiding-places, her bodice.

"I am going, lady," said the lad, who had observed the action; "they are safe with thee now."

"Not before thou hast eaten, boy. There is some kichéri ready" — he will not mind its being burnt, she thought — "thou must be hungry."

Ashruf was, to say the truth, hungry enough; but he resisted temptation. "No lady, let me go," he said; "I have another errand for my lord. May your house prosper."

"Thou art right," returned Lurlee, as he saluted her and departed. "Go; God speed thee; thou art a good lad. And now, Zyna, let us attire ourselves in fitting garments, and go to the palace, for time presses, and it is already past noon."

This, however, promised to be no easy task; and if Lurlee Khanum had had time to consult her tables in a fitting manner, the colour and particular kind of garment which would suit that period of the day, and in which the wearer would be lucky or unlucky, must have been decided. Goolab, too, and the other women, to whom the idea of the ladies going to the palace could be no other than an occasion for the display of the utmost magnificence, had laid out costly dresses of cloth of gold, brocade, muslin, satin; and a petticoat of gorgeous purple Italian velvet, trimmed with broad silver ribbon, with purple flowers upon it, a recent acquisition to the wardrobe, was especially tempting.

"Pardon me, Khanum," said Kurreem-bee, the "Mogulancee," or household dressmaker and mistress of the robes, "but on an occasion of this kind, and when a petition is to be made, we should know something of the mood her highness the Bégum is in, and the garments should agree with it. Yellow or red, with gold or silver, might excite bile — blue or purple would create phlegm; and when my lady Chand-bee, the wife of Jānee Sahib Dāgtoray, went to visit —"

"Now, in the Prophet's name, cease, Kurreem-bee!" cried Lurlee, interrupting her; "are we not in haste? and thou standest prating about Chand-bee, who never could dress herself except like a public dancing-girl. Peace, I say. Give me the green satin petticoat laced

with silver, and the plain white scarf with gold flowers; these, with a shawl, will be enough."

Meanwhile Goolab and some other women-servants had made their preparations. The old dame was aware that her red satin petticoat, one of the Khanum's presents, would be much in her way, flapping about her legs as she ran by the litter; and as the ladies were settling themselves in their seats, she tucked it up, forming it, as it were, into a very efficient pair of baggy breeches, reaching to her knees, which could be shaken out when she arrived at the palace: and at the same time tied her clean muslin scarf about her waist and shoulders, in such a manner as to display a considerable amount of rotundity in directions otherwise perhaps not remarkable.

"Ah, you may laugh, impudence," she cried, aiming a blow at a fine sturdy lad, who, with others bearing spears, had just entered the court — "you may laugh, but that's the way to run;" and she kicked out first one leg, then the other, by way of proving whether the petticoat arrangements were firm. "I have run ten cose a-day when my lord was in the field, and carried my lady's Hooka into the bargain. Peace, impudent knaves!" she continued to the men, as the laugh against her became more general when the bearers entered. "Take up the palankeen and let us go. Bismilla!"

There was no time for further colloquy, for the men, who had been turned out of the court while the ladies took their seats, now took up the palankeens: and the band of spearmen, arranging themselves in front, were joined in the outer court by a strong body of the Khan's horsemen, and the little procession

quickly traversed the city, and arrived at its destination. There the litters, being carried into the women's court of the Palace of the Seven Stories, were set down at the foot of the stairs leading to the apartments in which the King had held his night council.

Goolab, having shaken out her petticoat, and put into her ears and about her neck, the gold ornaments she carried with her, appeared once more in her proper character: and received the salutations of the royal Mamas,^b who were to conduct the ladies to the chamber of audience.

We have before described this apartment; and the broad daylight, which poured through the now open casements, fully displayed its richness and beauty. Soft quilted cloths had been laid over the floor, and white muslin sheets tacked to them, covered the whole. Large pillows had been placed round the walls; and in the deep bays and oriel windows, numerous groups of ladies and their children were sitting conversing together merrily, and spread, as it were, upon every available space except the centre, which was kept clear.

Lurlee Khanum was not prepared for the display of rich dresses which had to be encountered, but assured by the kind tones in which she was welcomed by the Queen, sailed up to her with measured steps, causing her ample satin garment to swing in heavy folds from left to right, and back again, after the most impressive and courtly fashion.

Fyz-ool-Nissa, the King's wife, was as yet a girl, not, indeed, much older than Zyna herself. She could

* Women attendants, who do outdoor work, go messages, &c.

not be called beautiful, but there was a frank pleasant expression in her fair countenance which was irresistibly pleasing. The delicate hands and arms, sparkling with jewels, were all that could be seen of her person, buried as it was amidst the cloud of drapery which shrouded her as she sat on the King's seat in the oriel, and seemed an earnest of its grace; as also, indeed, her small graceful head and neck, which were loaded with costly pearl ornaments.

"The wife and daughter of the noble Afzool Khan are always welcome," said the Bégum, in her low sweet voice. "Come and sit here by me; 'tis a fair sight to see all the gallant people assembling, and they say it will be a great Durbar. And this is Zyna-bee? Ah, girl, they have often told me thou wert fair, but — Well I had better not say it. Come here, child, I am thy mother too; they tell me I have many children," she said, laughing. "O, so many!"

"May God fill your lap with them, may they climb about you, and may you live a hundred years to see them!" said Lurlee, earnestly.

"And here is one already," said the Bégum, seating Zyna beside her. "Ah, girl, we will have such a marriage for thee soon —"

As Zyna bowed down blushing, Lurlee seized the opportunity of pressing her suit.

"Lady," she said, putting up her hands in a respectful attitude, "thine ear for a moment. I had a petition —"

"Ah, Khanum!" returned Fyz-ool Nissa, with a look of disappointment; "I had marked this day for rejoicing; for the heavy cloud which has hung over my head so long is gone, and thou hast brought me a

petition, and I hate them. I never get matters arranged as I like, and am vexed — To-morrow, lady?"

"Only for my husband would I speak," replied Lurlee, firmly. "He and his son were decoyed to the Kótwallée early to-day, and they cannot get to the King. It must not be that Afzool Khan is counted a laggard. O lady —!" and here Lurlee, unable to contain herself longer, burst into tears.

Fyz-ool Nissa looked to Zyna, and saw a confirmation of Lurlee's tale in her face — in those great eyes brimful of tears, and quivering lips.

"Hush!" said the Bégum, "this must not be known. O that there were any one to write!"

"I — I can write," said Zyna, timidly.

"Thou, girl? well done! Now," she continued, as an attendant brought a writing-case, "write what thou wilt, but be quick."

It was soon done. A few words, but enough for the purpose.

"Canst thou sign it, lady?" asked Zyna.

"Yes, child, 'tis all they could ever teach me," replied the Bégum, laughing; "and here is my seal, too. Ah! thou art a little clerk."

"Her father makes her write his letters," said Lurlee, apologetically, as the Bégum clapped her hands, and an old eunuch, who had been standing at the foot of the room, advanced.

"This must go to my lord instantly," said the Queen; "some one thou canst count on must take it, Daood, for me."

"Myself," he replied; "no other can do this errand. Fear not, lady," he continued earnestly to Lurlee, "thy

noble lord hath friends he knows not of, and it is needful he should be in the Durbar to-day. Inshalla! thou wilt soon see him? Is any of the Paigah here to-day?"

"Yes," returned Lurlee, joyfully, "more than fifty men; they will be with the troops without."

"I will return presently," said the man, bowing over his crossed arms; "and if ye will watch your men ye will see whether the errand be done or not."

So the ladies sat and looked out. Bright flashed the sun's rays from spear and sword, morion and gauntlet, matchlock and shield, of the troops gathering before the hall where the King sat: while the gay turbans, vests of cloth-of-gold, satins and brocades, glowed in the bright sunlight like a bed of gorgeous flowers.

"There are ten thousand brave hearts throbbing for my lord!" cried the young Queen, clapping her hands. "Look, lady! O Alla, such an array of armed men is fearful, yet beautiful!"

"Ameen!" said Lurlee, earnestly. "A thousand times ten thousand are at his call, if he will only lead them! Why shouldst thou fear, lady? I have ridden with my lord in the battle and felt no fear. But look! a thousand thanks and blessings be upon thee! Yes, they go, Rheim Khan and all the spearmen. Dost thou not see them, Zyna?"

"Yes, to bring my father and Fazil," cried Zyna, in her turn clapping her hands exultingly. "Yes, they will repay thee, O my queen — my mother; they will repay thee with their lives."

"Nay, no tears now, girl," said Fyz-ool Nissa gaily.

“Look out over the cavaliers yonder, and wait patiently. Inshalla! your people will return speedily.”

So they sat, silently now, praying inwardly for their safety, though the time seemed terribly long, as they looked over the gathering masses of men: over the gardens, mosques, and palaces of the nobility: and over the country beyond, where, in the quivering noonday light, and now fervid heat, the blue distance seemed melting into the sky.

CHAPTER XIII.

JEHÁNDAR BEG felt that the communications he had heard, might have somewhat disarranged his appearance, and he would not for the world be suspected by Afzool Khan of agitation of any kind; his ample beard must not be disordered, nor a hair of his eyebrows crooked. A glance in a small mirror, which hung in the anteroom, proved that the barber's skill was necessary, and he sent for his own servant. What other hand, indeed, could be allowed to meddle with that glorious beard, or to regulate the orthodox breadth of the mustache and eyebrows? Who understood the proper darkening of the spot in the centre of the forehead, as if it were always being rubbed against the ground in perpetual prayer, like Habeeb Múhtur, the chief of his craft? and finally, who so admirable a chronicler of all domestic scandal, in which Beejapoor was at least as prolific as other cities of similar size and peculiarity of social morals.

So Habeeb, having been summoned, found his master sitting alone where we last left him, reclining

against his pillow in the small room before described, and saw, at a glance, that his spirit was troubled.

Having made his obeisance, which was not acknowledged, or barely so, the barber at once set to work, removing the conical lambskin cap which Jehándar Beg always wore, and subjecting the whole scalp to a series of manipulations which were inexpressibly soothing. How lightly moved the practised fingers along lines of muscles and nerves! How carefully was every stray hair put back into its proper place, or deftly eradicated with the sharp tweezers. Then, as the momentous matters of eyebrows, mustache, and beard, were severally approached, and where the Kótwal's rough hand had rubbed his chin, pushed up the mustache, or disturbed the eyebrows --- till every hair seemed battling with his neighbour or bristling in anger - - all was soon reduced to order, and the cap replaced. Jehándar Beg felt a refreshing coolness pervade his head, the nervous excitement was removed, and a calmness supervened which he required for what he had to do.

Yes, a master in his art! Habeeb had made a masterly performance; and yet so quickly! -- long enough, however, for those much-coveted papers to be taken far from his master's chance of possession to a place of safety.

"Shookr, Shookr, Habeeb!" (Thanks, thanks!) said the Kótwal at length. "Hast thou any news, friend?"

What was the barber to say? News? yes, plenty! There was no lack of that, such as his master relished; but would it be welcome?

"There was a grand entertainment at the Nawab Alla-ool-Moolk's last night, and some new singers from

the Carnatic were there. My lord should hear one of them. She is very lovely," he replied cautiously.

"Except the blessed Mary, and Fátma, and Ayésha — on whose names be peace! — I wish all women were in the burning pit," said Jehándar Beg savagely, and his hand approached his beard.

"Khóda na khasta bashud!" (God forbid!), exclaimed Habceeb, staying it. "God forbid my lord should touch what has been done! Even in that exclamation a hundred hairs have started up. May his slave ask what has discomposed the fountain of justice this morning?"

"There was some one ill in the palace last night, and a Fakeer was sent for, who shouted 'Alla diláyâ to léonga.' Who was that man? and who was ill?" asked Jehándar Beg, not heeding the question.

"My lord, no one was ill that I know of. About the Fakeer I will ascertain, if possible," replied the barber. "I can tell my lord one thing, however: the Shah — may his splendour increase — went out, even as the Kaleefa, of honoured memory, of whom we read — Haroun bin-al Rasheed — was in the habit of doing, to see after his subjects for himself, to hear with his own ears; and, if people say the truth, there is enough for him to hear, if he chose to inquire."

The men understood each other perfectly, and exchanged glances.

"People will talk, friend," said the Kótwal; "but where did he go? if thou'rt sure he went."

"Nay, that is more than your poor slave knows. They say he took the young Fazil Khan with him, or else the Wuzeer's son. Sure he went? yes, my lord,

quite sure," said the man, emphatically. "I was in the citadel, and saw him go out."

"Ay, indeed! Boy's tricks, boy's tricks, Habeeb; yet that Fazil Khan was accounted a steady youth: but he is in trouble about last night."

"Ah, master! we have all been like him once," said the barber, chuckling. "I suppose it was one of the new dancers ——"

"Except that we did no murder, friend," returned the Kótwal, interrupting him.

"Is my lord *very* particular about a noble slaying a thief, or a night brawler?" asked the barber.

"Oh, no! and it will be settled. And now you may go, Habeeb — find out who was visited last night; perhaps . . . no matter . . . and thou shalt have thy mouth filled, after our Persian fashion, with gold zecchins and sugar-candy. There are a couple in earnest of more."

"May the sun of your splendour increase in brightness, master!" returned the man, taking the money, and retreating backwards till he gained the door. "I will inquire ——"

"And now for this boy and his rough father," said Jehándar Beg, speaking to himself, as the door closed on the barber; "if they could be gained? Well, I must see. If not — we cannot allow them to live; they are too powerful." And he rose and went into the outer hall.

"And no one has passed here, Jaffur?" said Jehándar Beg to the Nubian slave, who, with some others, watched the door of the court where Afzool Khan was confined.

"No one, my lord, except the servants with their meal."

"Did they speak to him?"

"Not a word, my lord; I listened carefully."

"Have the Khan and his son been speaking to each other?"

"Yes, frequently; but as they have moved to the other side of the court, which is now in shadow, I cannot hear them. My lord is going in? Should we not attend? They are armed."

"I am not afraid, Jaffur; put up thy weapon. Keep the door ajar, but do not enter, and, on your life, let no one listen. Do ye hear, all of ye!"

"Jo hookum!" (as you order), cried all together, dispersing as the Kótwal entered.

Afzool Khan and his son were sitting, as Jaffur had described, in the opposite corner of the court from the door; for the sun was now shining with a painful glare of heat into that side by which the Kótwal entered, while, opposite, the cool verandah was rendered more refreshing from the shadow of a large champa tree, which fell over the building and enclosure where they were. They rose courteously as the Kótwal advanced, and, saluting him gravely, yet without any expression of impatience at detention, requested him to be seated.

It was no part of Jehándar Beg's policy to attempt to bully. If he could find out what the affair of the night had really been, or obtain a clue to the truth of that which had been alleged of the King; in short, anything which might serve as a guide to action, or as means of warning to the Wuzeer, it would be enough.

“I trust my honoured guests have been fittingly attended to?” he asked, as he subsided on his heels at a respectful distance from the old Khan, joining his hands after the most deferential and elegant of Persian customs. “I trust the repast was served hot. My lords must excuse my absence, and my being taken unawares. Had I expected the honour of their company, then, indeed, Zoolficar’s skill should have been put forth”

“The kabobs and kichéri were excellent, Meerza Sahib,” replied Afzool Khan, politely. “I was to have had the same at my own house; and there were other dishes, too. Verily, your cook must be a treasure; there is not such another in the city.”

“My lord, a poor slave, who followed me from my own dear country, and has remained here with me. Yes, he has a pretty skill in the art, and . . . but you have yet to know what he can do . . . If I might send him one day ---”

“Shookr, shookr! (thanks), Meerza Sahib. Yes, we will see about it. Inshalla! inshalla!” replied the Khan, cheerily, “an excellent idea - and come yourself.”

The Kótwal thought he had made a favourable impression. “After all, there was nothing in the murder matter that you need care about, Meah Sahib,” he continued blandly, to Fazil Khan. “Pardon me if I was rude this morning, but when we are at business, you know, there can be no distinction of persons.”

“None,” said Fazil, gravely; “but who was the man found dead? You said one had been killed.”

“Oh, only a Katir Hindu; some son of a burnt

father, who is gone to burn with him," laughed the Kótwal. "I don't know; the body is not yet claimed. By the way, Meah, it was strange enough that you should have been just in time to save that Lalla."

"Ah, yes; what has become of him?" asked Fazil innocently. "You promised he should be seen to."

"And I have done as I promised, Meah. Habeeb has dressed the wound, which is but a scratch, and the man has eaten heartily; perhaps he was not much hurt, after all."

"Perhaps not," said Fazil, significantly, "but it was well he fell into good hands."

"Yes," returned the Kótwal, musingly, "was it not strange what he told the Duffadar about Pahar Singh and the Shah's secretary? I have heard that my lord, the Meerza, was out last night late, and at a temple. Could it have been there?"

"To meet Pahar Singh? I should hardly say it was likely," returned Fazil.

"Nay, more, that the Asylum of the Faith --- the King himself --- was there also. At least --- at least ---"

Fazil saw Jehándar Beg was not sure. It was a mere guess, for which there was perhaps suspicion, but he laughed aloud, and replied, "A good joke, Meerza Sahib; perhaps they say I was with him!"

"Well," returned the Kótwal, wagging his head, "the fact is, they do; and perhaps you were, my young friend. Let me see; his highness is about your own age. When I was as old, I remember the Shah, with some others of us, used to have frolics now and then in the bazars of Isfahan. Ah, Meah, there were ---"

Fazil made a gesture, as if his father, who was sitting bold upright, with his eyes shut, might not like to hear the remainder.

"Yes," continued the Kótwal, "if ye did go, what matter?"

"I have before said that Bulwunt Rao was my companion, not the King; and the rest you know of," interrupted the young Khan.

"Not all, Meah; but we are out of court now, and I am quite sure of my young friend's good faith to let me know anything that concerns the state interests, the King, or the Wuzeer; and so, Meah Sahib, if we could examine those papers together ——"

"Ah, yes! the papers, Meerza, you would not understand them — they were Mahratta."

"But we could find a Karkoon to read them, and you are known to speak that language, Meah?"

"True, Meerza Sahib, I do; but the papers are not here ——"

"Not here, sir!" cried Jehándar Beg, with an ominous scowl passing over his face, at which Afzool Khan involuntarily allowed his hand to steal to his sword hilt, as it lay on the ground. "Not here?"

"Not here," echoed Fazil demurely, dropping his eyes.

"But they were here when you came this morning?"

"Certainly they were; and one of our people took them home for me."

"Yet you promised they should be forthcoming whenever I required them? Beware, Fazil Khan, how you entangle yourself in this matter," returned the Kótwal, sternly.

"I do not think I made any promise, Meerza Sahib," replied Fazil; "'tis you who must be mistaken, pardon me for saying so. I said they concerned the King, our lord and master, and would be shown to him only: and in Durbar to-day they will be presented to him. You will be there, of course?"

"By Alla!" exclaimed the Kótwal; "but if ---"

At the oath the old Khan fairly took his sword in his left hand, and placed it across his knees, while he looked grimly at his host; and Fazil saw the upper portion of his father's mustache, where it touched his cheek, quivering with suppressed rage.

Jehándar Beg checked himself, and said, deferentially, "Forgive the oath, Khan Sahib, and you know enough of Persians to excuse it. It would have been pleasant, as fellow-servants of the King, to have shared your confidence. As it is denied, I yield the point; and you are welcome to all the credit of the service you will do my Lord. But what say you, gentlemen, to assisting me to re-examine that Khayet who is detained without; you acknowledge, Meah Sahib, at least, that he was rescued by you — perhaps from death?"

"You have a strange memory, Kótwal Sahib, to-day," said Fazil, smiling. "I never said I rescued him, I think. Send for the man; no doubt you will hear all you wish from him, and will believe him. I do not appear to be very credible to you to-day."

CHAPTER XIV.

As the Kótwal rose to go to the door, the old Khan whispered to his son, "We can seize him, Fazil, if needs be, and put a dagger into him. The man is not fit to live. He is even now plotting something; I know it, trust him not, my son."

"If needs be, father, I am ready; but no violence yet," replied Fazil; "wait till the Wuzeer's son is announced."

"The man has been sent for," said Jehandar Beg, returning to his seat, "and will be here presently." He had given his own directions to the guard outside to stand by the door, yet no nearer than was needful for precaution.

The Lalla was not long detained. Almost as Jehandar Beg had seated himself -- this time a little nearer to Fazil -- he opened the door, which was closed after him, and advanced towards the party in a courtly but respectful manner. Fazil hardly recognised the man, so completely had rest and good clothes improved him. His face was clean shaved, his mustache and hair were trimmed and oiled. His small turban tied neatly in the Nustalik fashion of the imperial court, which was strange at Beejapoor. The clothes he wore, though somewhat too large, were yet clean white muslin: and a handsome Persian shawl over his shoulders, proved that his personal comfort had been well attended to under Jehandar Beg's orders.

"I trust you are better now," said Fazil to the

Lalla, kindly, as, after his very courtly advance, in which he bowed his head very low, turned out his toes very wide, and put his elbows as far behind him as possible, he sat down much after the manner of Jehándar Beg, on the left hand of the Kótwal.

"My lord's house will prosper for his kindness to a poor stranger," said the Lalla. "What more delightful to exercise, what more grateful to God, than hospitality?" and he quoted a verse from the poet Saadi on the subject, which he followed by another and another.

"Enough, friend," said Jehándar Beg, laughing. "No need to prove your scholarly attainments, they are not needed at present. Now, we all bid you not to fear; but tell us, in plain terms, what happened before this brave young gentleman rescued you last night."

The Lalla was not very clear as to what course he was to take; he, too, was watching his game.

"My lord, noble sirs, they were Gosais who found me in the temple, and ye are Moslem gentlemen, or nobles."

"Very true," said Fazil. "Now, look at me carefully, and try if you cannot remember me as one who lifted you up after you had been robbed."

"Ah, yes, noble sir, now I do remember," cried the Lalla; "I owe my life to you, sir, my life. When I screamed, you must have heard me. I pray you, let me kiss your feet."

The action was an ordinary one of gratitude, yet enough to admit of Fazil's passing a well-known signal of silence to the man as he removed his hands, while the old Khan cried grimly —

"Make your reverence to your God, if you have one, not to my son. Is he an idol, that you bow down to him?"

"I mean no offence; pardon me, my lord," said the Lalla, humbly. "I was only - - -"

The opening of the door interrupted the Lalla's speech, which would have been very flowery and hyperbolic.

An attendant entered and spoke to the Kótwal. "My lord, Kowas Khan has arrived; is he to be admitted?"

"Tell him I kiss his hands; I am engaged with these worthy gentlemen," returned Jehándar Beg, looking round; "and pray ask him to excuse me for a short time. If he would like a hooka, or coffee, or sherbet, let him have all he desires."

"And his attendants?"

"Let any of proper rank sit with him, the rest can remain in the outer court."

"Very good, my lord," said the servant, and he shut the door.

During this interruption, a very pretty piece of pantomime had been executed between the eyes of Fazil and the Lalla. It would have been more complete, perhaps, could Fazil have used his hands also, but he dare not. As it was, however, the Lalla seemed to understand all that was required; and the delightfully comprehensive manner in which he half shut his eyes, bowed his head, and smiled blandly though almost imperceptibly, would have been fit example for any diplomatist. Nothing could be seen by the Kótwal, for, in order to speak to the servant, it had been requisite for him to lean behind the Lalla's back.

Jehándar Beg lost two points by his movement; one we have seen, the other was a more serious one. For as he moved, the letters which had been given to him by Moro Trimmul's agent, and which he had put into a side-pocket of his dress, protruded a little as he reached over, and, when he settled himself again, remained projecting half out of that receptacle. He was not aware of it, but they attracted Fazil's immediate attention. These he must have at any risk — for he had seen the seal of the rebel Rajah on them — and he again roused his father by the short cough they had agreed upon.

“Now, Lallajee, tell us all. You see you are among friends; but we are hungry for fruit — flowers do not satisfy us,” said Jehándar Beg, jocosely rubbing his hands, and speaking in Persian, his own language.

“My lords, what can I say?” returned the Lalla simply. “I am what you see, a poor scholar. Dehli is full of such, and we are starving. Every one said, ‘Go to the King of the Dekhan; he is wise, he is generous, he is accomplished; he is a patron of literature.’ So your poor servant prepared two copies of verses; one in Sanscrit, in which the third letter of every line is the same, ‘T ——’

“Mashalla!” said Jehándar Beg, laughing. “Te-tum — te te, te-ta-te to, Te ta-hah! Like that, Lallajee? O yes; our Bramhuns here make odes, in which all the words ending skri, pri, dri; or else msh, kshsh, rshsh-dshush. One would think all the mud in the Dekhan was squelching under their feet; but go on.”

“My lord is pleased to be witty,” returned the Lalla, with a bland smile, turning towards his host and

joining hands. "Then I had a Persian ode. It was nothing — nothing — a poor thing altogether; only, if my lords wish, I could repeat it. Methinks there was some elegance about it, if nothing else."

"God forbid!" returned the Kótwal, echoed by Fazil and the Khan; "Go on."

"Well, my lords, as you wish," continued the Lalla. "Some other day I may be more fortunate; and, with your permission, I will resume my history."

"I had saved a few gold pieces, and I had enough to keep my family for a year. I left them in my house, and I have gradually made my way hither by Ahmednugger and Sholapoor. That is all."

"Go on," said Fazil. "How didst thou get here from Sholapoor?"

"I came with some Gosais, as they appeared to be, who met me at a village, Al—, Al—. I forget — just after you cross the river Bheema."

"Almella," suggested the Khan, interrupting him.

"Yes, that was it. They said they knew of a comfortable lodging in a temple or a mutt; but if we arrived late we must be content with whatever shelter we could get. I do not know, sirs, whether they purposely delayed me by the way — for, indeed, the roads were very muddy; but we arrived after sunset, and they took me to a temple of Bhowani, in a grove. So long as it was light the place did not look amiss for temporary shelter; but when it grew dark, and the wind began to moan in the trees, I thought, sirs, that the men's looks changed, and — and I began to tremble, yet unable to help myself — as one lies bound sometimes in a dream.

"What could your slave do, sirs? At length they

talked together in an unknown tongue, and all fell upon me, strangled me, and took what money I had, and my clothes, and I knew no more till this valiant gentleman and some one else roused me and took me to a guard-house, where I was well cared for."

"Why do you tell lies?" said the Kótwal, who, though unable to make objection to the very probable story which the Lalla had invented, felt conscious there was no truth in it. "Ah, man with a burnt father, tell the truth; we are no enemies of thine! Do not eat dirt at our hands! Why did the Shah's secretary visit thee at the temple? Speak; it shall be well for thee. We are all friends of his Majesty's here."

A very slight compression of Fazil's under lip was sufficient guide for the Lalla. "The King's secretary? God defend us!" cried the Lalla, innocently; "what should I have to do with the secretary? Ah, sirs, why this oppression of a poor slave like me - a stranger without friends? Did you see the secretary when you came to rescue me, noble sir?"

"Not I, indeed; thou wast lying among the ashes, senseless enough. All we heard was a scream, which sounded like one in distress, and we entered the court," said Fazil, simply.

The Kótwal looked from one to the other, but he could find out no sign of intelligence. He was fairly puzzled.

"Then why that respectable Duffadar's account of what you said to him in the guard-house?" cried Jehándar Beg, jerking himself suddenly round so as to confront the Lalla, while he seconded the movement by an emphatic blow on the floor. "What about Pahar Singh?"

As he did so, his sleeve caught one of the letters projecting from his pocket, which flew into the centre of the group. Fazil picked it up, and returned it with a polite bow, but not before he had distinctly seen the seal of the Rajah Sivaji Bhósley upon it, and the memorandum in the corner, which Jehándar Beg had written for the Wuzeer, and marked private. Jehándar Beg's confusion on receiving the letter could not be concealed, and Fazil felt that, having seen what was not intended for him, he was in greater danger than before.

"What about Pahar Singh?" echoed the Lalla, who had observed the confused expression of Jehándar Beg's countenance, and seen also what he was quite familiar with, the rebel Rajah's seal. "My lord, your servant heard a great deal of him, as he came here through the country. Everybody, from Ahmednugger to Sholapoor, spoke of Pahar Singh, and warned me of Pahar Singh, but the Gosais did not appear to fear him, and said he never touched companies of travelling beggars. I remember now," continued the Lalla dreamily, "I think some one asked me whether Pahar Singh had robbed me. Perhaps I said yes, I don't know; I might have said anything, good sirs, for I was like one in a hideous dream; and this robber, everybody appeared to know: — in the bazars, in temples, mutts, serais — Pahar Singh, Pahar Singh — nothing but Pahar Singh all the way. I heard enough of him."

"Thou liest, Lalla. I have warned thee once, and again warn thee — beware of the torture;" cried Jehándar Beg savagely, and from between his closed teeth; "a word and ——"

“Jehándar Beg,” said Afzool Khan, interrupting, “you and I are old friends, and I am your guest, so also is this man. Good or evil of him I know not, neither do I care; but torture shall not be used; and so far as I know or have seen, he says nothing but the truth. We are helpless enough here, my son and I, but we will not allow him to be touched with any of your vile instruments. Question him otherwise as you please, it is your duty.”

The tone of the old Khan’s voice, habitually stern, seemed more so than usual to Jehándar Beg. Should he resent it and call in his men? It was the thought of a moment. He would have done this, but that he knew the Wuzeer’s son sat without; he, at least, was faithful to Fazil, and might not object to prove his devotion to the old Khan, in the hope of its doing service in his suit for Zyna.

“Khan Sahib — —” returned Jehándar Beg, putting up his joined hands.

He could not finish the sentence. Fazil, on pretence of arranging his shawl about his shoulders, threw it with a sudden gesture over the Kótwal’s head, and closed it behind, throwing Jehándar Beg on his face, while, at the same instant, a dagger flashed from the old Khan’s waistband, and was held by him close to the Kótwal’s heart, and so that the point actually pricked the skin.

“Take out those letters, Lalla, from his pocket. In the name of the Prophet — if one sound escape him, father — strike deep and hard. Here is another traitor as bad as him we know of. There, hold his legs, Lalla. Wah, wah! thou art a noble fellow; fear not, friend — we are not like the Jogi. There, that will do; and

well was it done," continued Fazil, as the Lalla rapidly passed an end of his own scarf round the Kótwal's arms, and tied it in a knot behind his back; "he is safe now. Where is his ring? give it to me, quick."

"Beware, Jehándar Beg," growled Afzool Khan, who leant over the prostrate man without altering his position, as the Lalla loosed the ring, "I do not want to kill thee, good fellow; but, by Alla, if thou strivest ever so little, this knife will go through thee. I am no friend to traitors, as thou well knowest; so keep quiet."

It was a bold stroke; but in such emergencies desperate efforts are generally the most successful. Fazil took the Kótwal's signet-ring, and went to the door. The slave Jaffur looked at it for an instant, bowed his head, and crossed his arms; while Fazil, looking round the hall, beckoned to his friend, who, attended by some twenty of his followers, sat upon the dais.

Kowas Khan arose instantly, and with him the men, who made their salutations, and advanced towards the door. The slaves believed that the Wuzeer's son had been sent for, and stood aside to let him pass; and as the young men embraced in the doorway, Fazil whispered to his friend to disarm them, and hold the door. A pressure of the hand was the sure reply.

"I will return with my shawl," said Kowas Khan aloud, going back towards his seat, "and I will follow you directly."

A moment afterwards Fazil and the Khan heard a few low cries, a struggle, and a slight clash of arms. The surprise had been complete. The slaves were

disarmed, thrust into the Wuzcer's private room, and the doors closed.

"Fear not, noble friends," cried the cheery voice of the Wuzcer's son, as he stood in the doorway, "ye are safe, and no one is hurt. I have five hundred men of my own body-guard in the courts, on foot and horseback; and, Inshalla! we can hold the Kótwallee against an army. May I come?"

"Ul-humd-ul-illa!"* cried the Khan and his son together, "hazar shookr, hazar shookr! — (A thousand thanks!) O holy 'Geesoo Duraz!' I vow to thee a thousand lights, and a chain of gold for the canopy of thy blessed sepulchre," continued the Khan, devoutly.

"Come, friend and brother," said Fazil; "come here and see what treachery doth in the most trusted places — nay, fear us not, Jehándar Beg," he continued; "we are not arbiters in your destiny — it rests in higher hands than ours. Father, take away the knife from his heart."

"I don't know that I ought," said the old Khan, grimly. "I shall keep it ready, and near thee, Jehándar Beg. I trust thee not, my friend."

"You are more lucky than I am," returned the Kótwal sadly. "When a man's fate deserts him, he need not struggle — he is helpless," and he quoted a verse from the Gulistan to that effect.

"Shabash! a scholarly quotation," said the Lalla gravely. "And now, gentlemen, if ye will trust a poor mutsuddec, who has some experience, we will examine this worthy gentleman's pockets; and if he has any

* To God be praise!

private writing-cases, something might be found in them also."

"Peace, Lalla!" cried Fazil, sternly; "what we do concerns thee not. But thou hast been faithful and intelligent, and we will see thee rewarded."

What was found in the search will presently appear; meanwhile, we need to see how those assembled with the King, in his royal court, were employed.

CHAPTER XV.

The great Hall of Audience in the Citadel was only used on state occasions of ceremony. It formed part of the oldest division of the royal residence, and was built, as report had it, after a model in Turkey or Persia, in both of which countries the founder of the dynasty, Ibrahim Adil Shah, had resided. But as no such model is known to exist, it is more probable that one of the Turkish architects whom he had invited to his camp, and to whose Europeanised skill and taste most of the noble Saracenic Gothic buildings of the city owed their origin, had designed and executed the whole under the direction of his munificent patron.

The "Ark," or Citadel of Beejapoor, is a fortress in itself, and the area is surrounded by a beautiful stone wall, having heavy bastions at intervals, and a *fausse braye*, also with bastions; both being protected by a broad wet ditch. The main entrance is by a causeway, defended by a gateway, flanked by bastions of great strength. The whole of the interior was laid out in palaces, under various denominations, and public

buildings, such as the courts of civil and criminal justice, the treasury, the military and revenue record offices, and the like, and the great Hall of Audience, which now concerns us.

A broad road from the second gateway led nearly through the centre of the Citadel, as you entered, to the Máidán, or plain of exercise. The Palace of the Seven Stories, and the buildings connected with it, lay on the left hand, and the "Sáyget Mahal," or Palace of Assembly, with other heavy blocks of building, public and private, to the right. All these palaces, at the time of which we write, were interspersed with courts and gardens; but the space before the great Hall, called the Máidán or Plain, was kept exclusively for the assembly inspection or exercise of royal troops on particular occasions, and also as the waiting-place of the "Sowarces," or retinues, which attended those who visited the palace on ordinary business.

The hall itself was a very noble building. It stood upon a low basement, beneath which were crypts, probably used for archives, or magazines; and was entered by flights of steps, which led into corridors at each side. The front was entirely open, consisting of one immense Gothic arch, ninety-two feet in span, and of proportionate height, and of two narrow lancet-shaped arches of corresponding height, one on each side, which opened on the side corridors.

The interior consisted of one immense room, unbroken to the roof; but upon its south side, and partially also east and west, there were projections built upon cloisters, which contained rooms and galleries; especially to the south, where there was a closed latticed balcony, where the ladies of the court might

sit and look on at ceremonies of reception or rejoicing, and where the King might receive the petitions or salutations of the people without inconvenience. Above these galleries and balconies was another storey, with open turrets at the corners, and suites of apartments above. As the building stands now, a mere shell, bereft of roof and floors, and with all, except its noble arches and cloisters, crumbling gradually to decay, it is a noble and impressive structure, and enough remains to estimate what it must have been when perfect.

A busy and interesting scene it was, even to those concerned. As each "sowarce"* arrived at the entrance steps, it was met by a number of "chobdars," and mirdhas, or attendants, bearing massive gold and silver sticks, or clubs covered with chased silver or gold; dressed exclusively in white muslin, wearing small circular turbans, flattened out at the sides, muslin tunics, tight to the waist, and descending thence in thickly-gathered robes to the feet, which gave them the appearance of petticoats. These men attended officers of higher rank, who were, in fact, chamberlains, and whose duty it was to conduct the various visitors to the presence of the King, to proclaim aloud their titles, and to marshal them to their seats. Without, the royal Abyssinian and Dekhani guards prevented violence among their retainers.

Once the broad corridor at either side was reached by the visitors there was no further interruption; and though the war of struggle, gibe, and quarrel, peculiar to such an assembly, came hoarsely, and with a stifled sound through the arches into the hall: — within,

* Retinue.

there was a decorous, if not, indeed, a solemn and impressive silence. Men spoke to each other hardly above their breath; and the soft murmur arising from thousands of such half whispers ascended and seemed to float tremblingly among the balconies, and up to the lofty roof of the building.

The King had early taken his seat. The musnud, or royal throne, was under the centre of the balcony before-mentioned, upon a dais, raised a step above the general floor of the hall. There was no decoration visible upon it; and it consisted of a wide cushion and pillows, covered with white muslin, supported at the back and sides by a railing of wood, covered with plates of gold which, indeed, appeared as if of solid gold. On the right hand of the King, who was dressed in simple white muslin, with a single gold ornament in his turban, sat the Peer Bundagee Sahib, the religious instructor we have before mentioned; and at the back of the rail the secretary, with two young nobles, whose hereditary office it was to wave over the King the jewelled Mórchas, or fans of peacock feathers.

Farther again behind, among the arches, closing up the entrance to the cloisters, and leaning against the pillars, were servants bearing the King's weapons, the Aftálgeeree, or sun-shades, the royal umbrellas, and the private guard of slaves, mostly Nubian eunuchs.

Like the Monarch's seat, the whole of the floor was covered by quilted cotton carpets, over which white muslin was spread; so that, with the exception of here and there a coloured scarf or waistbelt, and an occasional turban ornament, the whole of the

persons seated wore the same character of dress as the King, with little variation. In some respects the assembly had a monotonous appearance; but on the other hand, the effect was chaste and solemn, and agreed with the plain undecorated character of the building.

The privileged attendants, however, who were allowed entrance with their masters, and who stood in files behind them against the wall, were dressed in the brightest and gayest colours which could be devised. Here were tunics of satin and cloth-of-gold, brocaded turbans and scarfs of the richest materials, mingled together in the greatest profusion; and this brilliant array, in which all hues seemed to blend with a strangely gorgeous harmony, formed a powerful background in relief of the white dresses, and white coverings of the floor.

Then beyond, the eye followed the graceful outline of the vast arch against a deep blue sky, flecked with light clouds. Below, it rested upon the plain, where, in the quivering heat, which gave a tremulous movement to the atmosphere, stood the serried masses of royal troops and sowarees, caparisoned elephants and led horses, litters and their bearers — all in the glowing colours which we have already seen from the Queen's balcony; and with bright arms and armour, which flashed and glinted in a thousand sparkles as the wearers moved.

The secretary and the Peer, had noted carefully and jealously, the names of the several nobles and sirdars as they were announced by the mirdhas in attendance — presented their customary nuzzurs or offerings, according to their rank, and were conducted to their

places; and every now and then one or other whispered to the King, as neutral or suspected persons passed, or when the appearance of a well-known loyal friend gave assurance of support. Still Afzool Khan's place was vacant, and that of the Wuzeer. It was true, the latter could not yet be expected, but his son might at least be present; and the double absence cast a gloom over the King's face, which he could barely conceal.

"I had counted upon Afzool Khan and his son Fazil," said the King, mournfully, to the Peer, "but you see they have not come. We might not expect Kowas Khan without his father; but I had thought Afzool Khan among the truest of my people — what think ye?"

The Peer could give but little consolation. He, too, had expected the Khan, and had had no doubts of his fidelity; so also the secretary; but his unaccountable absence disturbed them both.

Just then the Lady Lurlee's escort, entering the open space, wheeled up among other troops, and the leader, Raheem Khan, dashed at speed to the foot of the basement, made his reverence to the King, and followed his men to the position they had taken up.

"Ah," cried the Peer, joyfully, to the King, "those are Afzool Khan's 'sowarce;' the old Khan and his son are not far off now, Shookr-Oolla;" and he looked anxiously to the side entrance, in the hope of seeing him advance with his son from the archway in the corridor. Others came on, but neither appeared.

“What hinders Afzool Khan?” said the secretary to the Peer after a while; “who is detaining him?”

“Send and inquire,” said the King.

“Go,” said the Peer to a Mirdha in attendance, “and see if Afzool Khan be in the corridor; if not, go to his officer and inquire where he is, — not as if our Prince had asked, but from me.” The King, to whom the man looked for orders, nodded assent, and he departed and returned speedily.

“I examined both corridors, and he was not in either, Huzrut,” he said so the holy man, “so I went to Raheem Khan, who tells me he has come with the Khanum;” and here his voice dropped almost to a whisper, “that Afzool Khan hath been at the Kótwal’s, at Jehándar Beg’s, since morning, and it is particular business, as both he and his son have been in private consultation with him since sunrise.”

The King had leaned over the rail to hear the detail, but he had not noticed the first part of the message; and as the man receded among the attendants behind, looked from one to the other of his friends, but could gather no consolation from their faces.

“It is but too true, my lord,” said the Secretary sadly; “we need not expect them; for the Wuzeer’s son, with a heavy body of horse and foot, has just gone to the Kótwallee — he was seen with them not long ago passing the fort gate. Jehándar Beg is not come, and it is clear to me that they have garrisoned the Kótwallee, and will defend it till the Wuzeer arrives, when they will declare revolt. Sending a party here is but a blind.”

“And who are here to check it?” asked the King, apprehensively.

"Many, my lord," replied the Peer earnestly; "all the Dekhanies are my disciples, and I will answer for them to a man. All the artillery are with them. Fear not."

The King looked inquiringly to his secretary.

"Yes, my Prince," he said, "fear not; we cannot wait for them; nothing good ever came of vacillation or expediency. Bismilla! shall I order silence?"

"Bismilla-ir-rahman-ir-raheem!"^{*} exclaimed the King devoutly, looking up. "I am ready. Order silence," he said to one of the mirdhas.

"Khámôsh! silence!" cried the man in a loud, deep voice, which rang through the hall, and sounded strangely, interrupting the loose murmuring chat which had prevailed before -- "Khámôsh!"

"Khámôsh!" was reiterated by all the mirdhas and chobdars stationed about the hall, and by the attendants behind, and was taken up by those in the corridors, spreading to the crowd without, and to the troops -- "Khámôsh!"

The silence that ensued was almost oppressive. In the hall itself, after the men had once more settled themselves into their seats, there was not a sound or murmur. The struggles and jibes without ceased, and even the troops were still, save where a neigh, or the rattle of caparisons, as horses tossed their heads or champed their bits, broke the stillness; or an elephant, clashing his bells, and being admonished by his driver, lifted his trunk, and gave a short scream.

It was the Secretary's office to open the business of the day, and just as he was about to speak, the chief of the eunuchs entered, bearing the Queen's

* In the name of God the clement and merciful!

billet, and kneeling down behind the rail, while he spoke aside, covering his mouth, said to the King hastily —

“It is a matter of life or death. If Afzool Khan hath any favour in your eyes, O King, save him! there may be time.”

“This is some trick on thee, Daood,” said the King sneeringly; “we know where he is, and how employed. He is ours no longer, and hath left us of his own free will.”

“His wife and daughter are with the Begum Sahiba. Read that and you will know why,” answered the man firmly.

“Can it be true?” asked the King of the Peer, opening the note. “Ya Khubeer, O!”* he continued, after a pause: “This is wonderful! wonderful! O friends! and yet we had suspected our noble friend. But he is true; see, here is our royal signet to this; no doubt, no doubt.”

“What is it?” cried both the Peer and the Secretary in a breath, seeing the King much excited.

“Afzool Khan and his son are imprisoned at the Kôtwallee, and prevented from attending. They must be brought instantly.”

“Imprisoned?” cried both together.

“Yes, friends,” continued the King; “there is treachery in this, for Jehândar Beg and the Wuzeer are one, it is clear now, and we must act at once. Ismail Khan,” continued he firmly, to an officer who stood behind him clothed in a shirt of mail, “go thou with two hundred of the royal guard, and some of the

* The afforder of information — one of the ninety-nine attributes of God; an invocation.

mirdhas, bring Jehándar Beg to the presence, and with him Afzool Khan and his son."

"I beg to petition," said the eunuch, "that some of Afzool Khan's Paigah are here, who came with their mistress; they might as well go, if I might send them."

"Of course," replied the King, "why not send the whole Paigah?"

"Excellent," said the Peer; "take what are here with thee, Ismail Khan, at once, and send for the rest. Raheem Khan will not fail thee."

"I am gone, my lord, and will take him with me; he is my son-in-law."

"Ah, I had forgotten. Go; fear not; bring them safely and quickly, friend, for we have much need of their presence."

"Ya Ulla Kureem!"* said the Peer devoutly, looking up, "this is thy doing. O, dear old friend! thou art not gone from among us as we had feared. Bismilla, let us proceed! first with these letters of Sivaji's, then with the rest. Afzool Khan will be here by that time, and the people will rise to his call as a man. Inshalla! your poor servant, too, will do his best. Let silence be called again."

It was necessary: for the entrance of the eunuch, the delivery of the note, followed as they were by the withdrawal of Afzool Khan's men, and some of the royal guard, had excited no little curiosity in the assembly. Afzool Khan's absence had been regretted by some, rejoiced in by others, but noticed by all; and now that his men were sent away, the speculations that ensued were various as to the cause; and while

* O merciful God.

some feared disclosures, others already rejoiced in the prospect of his possible disgrace.

“Khámôsh!” again was cried by the same voice, which rung clearly above the buzz of conversation, and was taken up as before — “Khámôsh — silence!”

CHAPTER XVI.

“O NOBLES, and well-wishers of the State!” cried the Secretary, in a strong, manly voice, “it is not mere ceremony for which ye have been called together this day; and it is not that the present urgent matters might not be disposed of by the Shah — may his splendour increase; — but in affairs of such moment, he would have the advice and assistance of older men, and of those who, for years past, have given their faith and their blood freely for the kingdom, and for his family; and surely nothing need be done in private, when ye, O Moslems! can be witnesses before God and the Prophet.

“Lo, friends in the faith! he hath called ye together because of those grievous rumours of treachery which prevail: and because of intrigues which have sown distrust between man and man in this city. Of these, two have been revealed to him by means little short of a miracle, and yet so true, that a child may understand them. Hear, then, what my lord the King will say to ye — listen!”

A low murmur arose through the assembly as men spoke in short, eager whispers to each other. Who was to be accused? To whom did these introductory remarks refer in particular? Many a secret traitor

then sitting there, trembled upon his seat. Were he denounced, he felt there would be no alternative between detection and almost instant death, and there were not a few who repeated to themselves the dying confession of faith. If it was to be, it was to be; there was no escape now.

The King spoke from his seat, and though his voice was of a gentler character than his Secretary's, its silvery ringing tones were even more distinctly heard.

"O friends and subjects!" he said, "many words are hardly needful when the understanding is to have clear scope for action, and I desire all to consider what will be now put before ye. As God hath appointed me His deputy on earth to govern this kingdom, so I am answerable to Him for it, and for you, my people. This I clearly admit. If it be glorious, are ye not so? If it be tranquil, are ye not safe? If it be humbled, are ye not humbled likewise? Is any one weary of our service, let him leave it, but for the rest, let us be united: let it not be said by our enemies that we could be seduced and divided, or that our foolish quarrels are worse than the petty jealousies of the women of a divided house. O noble Dekhanies, put enmity and treachery from among ye: is it come to this, that they exist? Listen."

The King paused, and seemed to be searching under his cushions, while the sounds of his last words, rising to the vaulted roof, trembled in a sweet faint murmur, and died away among its fretted recesses; and as yet the rapt silence of the assembly was unbroken.

"A man," he continued, holding up a mass of papers to the view of all -- "one whom we had vene-

rated as a father — into whose hands we were given by our father on his deathbed — has been false. False to me, that is nothing, — false to the kingdom and to you, that is more, — false to his oath to an orphan as I am, and to God, that is most of all. Here is his writing, here are his seals, — look at them. These letters to the Padishah Alungeer began ere that bad man were a king, and have been continued within a month; and by them we read now, that him we speak of would have given away our kingdom, but would have reserved his share. And yet, O Khan Mahomed! if we wrong thee in this, we will do thee justice before God and this assembly.”

“Justice, justice!” echoed a thousand voices: “put out the treason!” while many rose excitedly to their feet and were pulled down again by their neighbours.

“Wait,” continued the King. “Let him be heard in his own behalf when he arrives; do not prejudge him. If these are untrue, there is no honour we possess or can confer, that shall not be his. If true, let the just Alla judge him before ye all.”

“Ameen, ameen!” cried the Peer devoutly. “Ameen, ameen!” was echoed by the assembly, in a hoarse roar, which filled the hall. Again there was silence.

“The next is a more simple matter,” continued the King, with increased confidence. “Ye all know of Sivaji Bhóslay. How often his father rebelled, and was punished, and again forgiven by our father. How often the son hath been guilty of crimes. All these would have been forgiven. As a wise father corrects, while he bears with and forgives the errors of a wilful son, — so should we have forgiven also; but for treachery. Look, friends, here, in the same packet with

those we have just mentioned, are these letters from Sivaji to the Padishah. We who have fed this wolf, are his enemies; those who have hunted him, are his friends. Here are lists of forts which will be taken and held for the Moguls, of districts to pay for armies, of men who will join with their local levies. Between them they will share the Dekhan, and Sivaji will be the imperial Vice-regent!

"Did ye hear, friends?" he continued, after a pause. "Do ye desire to serve under the infidel? I am young, I have no experience. I am a humble worm before God; but I am the son of one who led ye to victory. I am one who has been nursed in war, and will lead ye again! Choose, then, between them and the King of your ancient dynasty. If I have a place in your hearts, bid me stay; if not, a Durwaysh's robe and staff are mine, and at the blessed shrine of the Prophet I will abjure the world and die. I will trouble ye no more. No, no more — me, or mine."

For an instant the same sweet trembling murmur of the King's voice arose to the roof — but for an instant only. As if with one accord, a shout of "Deen! Deen! for the faith! for the faith! we will die for you!" — rang through the building, as men, no longer able to control their emotions, started to their feet and shouted the war-cry of Islam. Those who were without had observed the emotion in the hall, but had not been aware of its cause. Now, however, the familiar battle-shout fell on willing ears, and was returned, from the thousands gathered there, with an enthusiasm which knew no bounds. "Deen! Deen!" accompanied by the battle-cries of the various nobles and chiefs whose escorts were drawn up together.

Just then, and as the excitement within and without had somewhat subsided, a strong body of horse, known to all as belonging to Afzool Khan, swept round the corner of the building with its standard unfurled, and its kettle-drums beating loudly. Among the serried mass of horsemen could be seen a palankeen closely muffled and jealously guarded, immediately behind which, rode the brave old Khan and his son Fazil, with several of his officers. It was evident to all that the litter contained a person of consequence; and many from within the hall looked around anxiously, as Afzool Khan, his son, and several others with him, dismounted and placed themselves beside it. Could the Wuzeer have returned? If so, he was already a prisoner, and there was no hope. If not, whom could it be? The King had been about to address the assembly again, but he paused and turned to those behind him.

"Ah," he cried exultingly, "Alla hath heard our prayers, and here are our noble friends. I vow thank-offerings to ye, O Sofee Surmust!* O Geesoo Duraz! by thy hands, Peer Sahib, as thou wilt!"

"I said the planets assured me that my lord should destroy his enemies to-day," said the Peer, wiping his eyes, for his love for Afzool Khan was great, and he had feared seduction. "Shookr 'oolla! Shookr oolla! Hazarha-Shookr! thousands of thanks do we offer at thy throne, O merciful! and here he comes, Soobhán Ulla! Soobhán Ulla!"

Afzool Khan was well known, and a hearty shout had greeted him as he dismounted, looked proudly about him, and returned the salutations of his friends

* A celebrated Mahomedan saint of the Dekhan, whose tomb is at Suggur.

and the soldiery. The palankeen was, by his orders, taken up the steps into the corridor; and, room being cleared for it by the sticks and maces of the chobdars, it was carried on, the Khan and his son accompanying it, through the entrance-hall and into the centre of the assembly before the throne, where, in spite of the remonstrances of the chamberlains, it was set down. Then the Khan, disengaging his sword from his belt, and bidding Fazil do the same, they advanced to the foot of the musnud, and enveloping the hilts in their scarfs, presented them as "Nuzzurs" or offerings to the King, making, at the same time, their customary obeisances.

"Pardon for this boldness, my Prince," said the Khan; "but as the merciful Alla delivered us strangely out of his hands who is there, we thought we had better bring him 'to the presence' at once."

"Who?" asked the King excitedly. "The Wuzeer? Khan Mahomed?"

"No, my lord," returned the Khan, "but Jehándar Beg."

"God be praised thou art safe, Khan," returned the King, putting out his hand and resting it upon the Khan's head, "and thou also, Fazil. Now, we have no fear."

"Ah, old friend!" cried the Peer, the tears fairly running down his cheeks while he pointed to the King; "he hath been so brave, so brave: my boy — so eloquent. Stones would have cried out at his words. Didst thou not hear the shouting?"

"Surely," returned the Khan; "but 'tis hardly a welcome sound in these days unless one knows the reason, so we hurried on. Eloquent! I knew he would

be so. Brave! Ay, or he is no descendant of his royal race. May I open the litter, my lord?" he asked of the King.

"Bismilla! open it," he replied; and some of the attendants hastily untied the knots by which the cover had been fastened over the top. As the last fold was removed, the figure of Jehándar Beg sitting upright, his arms and hands swathed carefully in a shawl, and his eyes bound with a handkerchief, was displayed to all. The bandage was removed, and he looked wildly about him.

Jehándar Beg saw his position at once. He was no coward, and he perceived that all chance of life had passed away. The Wuzeer was not there, and Afzool Khan, stooping into the litter, took up the case containing Jehándar Beg's most secret papers and presented them to the King. "May I be loosed?" said the Kôtwal to the Khan. "My fate is in the King's hands."

"Surely," replied the King; "we fear him not, nor any enemy," he continued, looking round. "May God deliver them into our hands, even as he hath this traitor."

"Ameen! Ameen!" cried a tumult of voices, followed by the loud Khámôsh of the criers.

Afzool Khan spoke so as to be heard by all. We need not follow his recital, for the particulars have been already related; but the words were drunk in with avidity by the assembly. He disclosed no man's name; the papers would speak for themselves.

One by one they were read, Persian and Mahratta in turn, clearly and distinctly; while, by the King's command, several of them were taken round by mut-

suceeds to the principal nobles and sirdars, that the seals might be examined.

This necessarily occupied some time, during which the litter, having been removed to the door, Jehándar Beg stood in the centre, as yet boldly if not defiantly. Could the Wuzeer only arrive — and he was expected momentarily — all would be changed. Before him the King, bold as he seemed now, would quail; those friends in the assembly, who had already exchanged glances with him, would at once rise. There might be bloodshed, and of the result he had no doubt: it had been calculated beforehand, and was certain. Much depended on a mysterious arrangement of the Wuzeer's, which he suspected; but to the particulars of which he had not been admitted. Need he deny the papers? He dare not. They were facts which could neither be denied nor evaded.

“Unhappy, godless man,” cried the King, when several had been read, and others were being examined, “are these true? Dost thou admit them? Hast thou eaten my salt and found it so bitter, that that of others seemed sweeter to thee? Speak, Jehándar Beg! are these true? are they thine own?”

Upon his reply hung many a life had he chosen to denounce those present; but with all his bad faith, there was no meanness in the man.

“The letters, my prince, are true; as they are addressed. I have no more to say. Whatever my fate is to be, let it come; I am ready to meet it,” returned the Kótwal, firmly.

“And these for Khan Mahomed? The writing in the corner is yours, and the date of receipt is to-day.”

"It is my writing; why should I tell a lie," returned Jehándar Beg sullenly; "but I know not the contents."

"Enough," replied the King; "my friends, we would do no injustice. Let us await the Wuzeer's arrival — it cannot be long now — and hear the result from his own lips."

CHAPTER XVII.

"MY LORD, my prince," whispered the officer of the royal guard, stepping behind the rail in an agitated manner, "be careful of yourself; there is disturbance without; we will close round you; come away. The Wuzeer — the Wuzeer is — is — dead — killed, they say — at the outer gate as he entered. Withdraw with us — quick," said the man excitedly; "the news is spreading fast."

"Who hath done this?" cried the King, starting to his feet, and seizing his sword and shield, which, according to custom, lay before him. "The Wuzeer is dead, they say. Is there aught to fear? I move not, Afzool Khan, come what may. If I am to die, let it be here, on my father's judgment-seat. Will ye bear me company?"

"To death, to death!" exclaimed Afzool Khan. "Who dare harm you? Ho! Alla-ool-Moolks, Bhylmees, Dâgtorays, all true men present, — rally round the King," shouted the Khan. "Deen, deen!" and his familiar battle-cry, "Futtch-i-Nubbee!"* rang high above the hoarse murmur which had arisen among the as-

* Victory to the Prophet.

sembly. Now, however, those mentioned by the Khan sprang to their feet by scores, and their example was followed by hundreds. "Deen, Deen!" was shouted with increased enthusiasm.

"Here is one who brings particulars," said the Secretary, as an officer was led in, who prostrated himself before the King.

"My lord, the Wuzeer is dead," said the man, sobbing bitterly. "They murdered him at the gate. Those who did it went off across the plain, but they were men who had ridden with him. I was upon the bastion over the gate with a few others, and we saw them come rapidly along the road from Allapoor. I knew my lord's piebald horse, and his elephant was following at a little distance. We watched him till he was near the gate; there were only a few of us. There was no one present but a sentinel and one or two others, and a Kullunder Fakeer had spread his carpet just within the walls, and was crying, 'Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!' as passengers threw their cowrees to him. We were descending the steps to present our Nuzzurs,* when several of the men behind dragged the Wuzeer from his horse, and others on foot, who had been running with him, killed him with a hundred wounds ere he could cry out. What could we do, my lord? Ere we could mount the bastion again the whole had dispersed. We fired on them, but it was no use."

"And what became of the Fakeer?" asked the King, looking towards the Secretary.

"My Prince, he staid with the body, and shut the eyes," replied the man. "Then, as the Wuzeer's elephant arrived, he told the driver to take up the dead,

* Gifts presented to superiors.

and we saw him go towards the mosque, crying, as before, 'Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!' Hark!" he continued, "there he is."

"Ulla dilâyâ to léonga! Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!" The cry came nearer and nearer, never changing or faltering in its cadence or time — heard above all other noises and confusion within and without — "Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!" — up the steps, along the great corridor, into the hall, where every one made way before the brawny form and excited looks of the crier — who paused not, nor yet looked right or left, till he reached the dais. Afzool Khan and Fazil would have stopped him, but he strode on.

"Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!" he cried, looking at the King without saluting him. "Khan Mahomed is dead, from a hundred wounds. As I closed his eyes I saw this on the ground; it had fallen from him, so I have brought it;" and flinging a case, containing papers, to the King, he turned away without salutation; shouting the old cry with his right arm bare, and stretched high above his head, he strode out of the hall, continuing it as he passed out of the building through the attendants and troops, and so away.

"Among these papers," said the Secretary, whispering to the King, "are many which, if now disclosed, might make men desperate; they are better kept secret."

"I am weary of them all," cried the King impatiently; "look at the judgment of God; we should own it reverently."

"Zoolm! Zoolm!" (injustice!) cried a knot of men who had collected at one side of the hall, and had risen from their seats. "Is murder to be done, and

pass unchallenged?" Their tone was fierce and defiant, and boded no good.

"Peace, O friends!" cried Afzool Khan, stretching out his hands to them. "Is this a time for strife? who can say by whose hands he died? Yet better dead, than for this guilt to be proved before all, by these witnesses — his own hand and seals. O friends, brothers in the faith! there is the throne we have to defend, and we should count it holy martyrdom to die before it. We are ready; will ye be tardy?"

"Deen, Deen! listen to Afzool Khan! Futtelh-i-Nubbee!" (victory to the Prophet) the Khan's battle-cry, was shouted with deafening clamour. "Death to the unbelievers!"

"Silence, friends!" cried the Peer, as there was a short cessation of the shouting; "listen to me. One traitor is dead, but are we less than men that we permit Sivaji Bhóslay, his accomplice, to defile our beards? Deen, Deen! cry to God for victory. Deen, Deen!" he continued, rising and raising his voice to a shrill scream, as he stretched out his arms, "the Prophet hears us, and Ali, and the holy martyrs, and so will ye be martyrs and enjoy paradise if ye die."

Again, again his cry was raised, the fanatical cry of Islam, which no Moslem can hear without emotion; and grave men hitherto unmoved, roused with the rest to frantic enthusiasm by the holy man's words, threw themselves on each other's necks and wept aloud.

"And now, friends," continued the King, when he could be heard, "let him who would punish Sivaji Bhóslay for a thousand crimes and treacheries, take up the gage I place here. In the name of God and the Prophet, let who will take it, I accept him;" and so

saying he motioned to an attendant, who, bringing forward a salver covered with a brocaded cloth, set it down on the edge of the dais before the King, and uncovered it.

On the salver lay a single Birra of Pân,* covered with gold leaf, one of those which, on the conclusion of the ceremony, would be distributed by thousands. Who would take it up?

“Are ye laggards, my friends, in pursuit of honour? I thought yonder gage would be a mark for men to strive for; are ye laggards, O faithful?” cried the Peer.

The mass — for every one had risen to his feet — swayed to and fro with emotion, but no one advanced; and out of it issued the hoarse ominous murmur that had several times arisen, and which, in the absence of any decisive action, caused involuntary apprehension.

At this moment Afzool Khan stepped boldly forward, and taking up the gage, pressed it to his forehead, eyes, and lips, then, saluting the King, held it high above his head for all to see.

“My Prince, it is mine,” he said, “if it be permitted, and if these my friends will join me.”

“Ye have heard,” said the King, turning to the assembly, “I accept him.”

It was the crowning point of the ceremony, and the people, no longer withheld by court etiquette, swayed forward to the foot of the dais with tumultuous shouts of joy. Those without only knew that war had been proclaimed, and their cries mingled hoarsely with the rest.

“It is well this should cease, my lord,” said the

* Betel-leaf twisted up with spices, for eating.

Secretary. "Men's hearts are hot, and enough hath been done to-day."

"Good," replied the King, "let the criers proclaim the Burkhast,* and that there will be preaching in the Jumma Mosque daily, at noon, till the army advances."

"Be that my care," said the Peer, "and their hearts shall be kept hot, I promise you."

It was done. Attendants went round with trays of Pân, reserving Utr and other sweet essences for those privileged to receive them. The King sat to the last, and the great Hall was gradually emptied, save of the royal guards, — Afzool Khan and his son, — Alla ool Moolk, and other nobles, who had been desired to remain. The Kótwal's fate was yet in suspense.

"Bring forward Jehándar Beg," cried the King to the officer of the guard; and the prisoner was again conducted to the front of the dais, around which the nobles were now grouped. He saw no hope in those stern, pitiless faces.

"See what that case of papers contains, Meerza Sahib," said the King; "there should be no mistake in this matter."

"There is no need," said the Kótwal, sullenly to the King. "If you had died to-day, those who brought me here would ere now have been headless corpses. I will answer no more questions. Do with me as you will; except in prayer, my lips open no more."

"Take him away to death," said the King. "A kingdom that never punishes is too weak to exist."

Jehándar Beg was led away through the private cloisters. His head had fallen upon his bosom; but

* Dismissal.

those who saw it never forgot the fire which seemed to flash from his large eyes, and the scowl of deadly hate which he cast upon all around him as he walked firmly on.

"We may now separate," said the King. "Forgive me, O friends, who have as yet known me only as a boy playing about your knees, if I have acted weakly in this first rough lesson of life. O noble Khan, there are those who wait thee with tears of joy. What can I say for this service you have done? This sword is known to you, wear it for the sake of Adil Khan. And do thou, Fazil Khan, take these, the first marks of honour thou hast won; but, Inshalla! not the last;" and removing the costly jewel from his turban, and a heavy necklace of pearls from his neck, he invested the young man with them with his own hands.

"I have but one boon to ask, my Prince," said Fazil, "it is for my friend, the Wuzeer's son. I will answer for him with my life, that he was as true as I am. May I console him?"

"Take this to him," said the King, removing a gold ring from his wrist; "tell him that from Adil Shah he need fear nothing."

"Altogether," said our friend the Lalla, who had accompanied the Khan and Fazil, "these Dekhanies have some method in their rudeness; but, after all, they are mad, — quite mad. Such ebullitions of temper could not have been allowed in the Padshah's court. Mobaruk, mobaruk bād,* Khan Sahib," he cried, heartily yet respectfully, to Afzool Khan and Fazil, as they were passing out and receiving the warm greetings of their friends, — and of all, high and low, who

* Congratulation.

could reach them, — “let your poor servant be honoured by his congratulation being accepted.”

“Ah, friend, art thou there?” replied the Khan. “Well, thou must be seen to; come to my house and we will arrange something for thee.”

“May it please my lord to make me news-writer to his army,” cried the Lalla, joining his hands. “My style, Inshalla! — is —”

“Well,” said Afzool Khan, interrupting him good-humouredly. “Son, wilt thou have him?”

“I agree, father,” said Fazil, smiling, “if he will serve under one who may, after all, be only a Gosai.”

“I am my lord’s slave to death. I am but a poor Khayet, but I can be of use to a discerning patron,” returned the Lalla.

“Come, son,” said the Khan, “let us see whether Kowas Khan be returned. The King’s message should be delivered ere we proceed home. Methinks he and all his people would be safer with us for a few days, until men’s minds are calmer.”

We will not follow the Khan on his benevolent errand; nor can we detail how much mustard and coriander seed were burned with frankincense before them to avert evil when they reached home: nor yet how often Goolab, and the other women-servants, and even the lady Lurlee herself, cracked their knuckles over them, till they would crack no more. One thing, however, was certain: the worthy lady was more than ever assured that she had read the planets aright, and, if she had not done so, a great evil would have befallen the family.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOMEWHAT later in the day, a few groups of men were assembled near those majestic Adansonian trees, which still stand by the wayside between the Citadel and the outer gate of the fort of Beejapoor. The sun's rays fell slanting through their dense foliage, and cast broad shadows upon the bright green sward, which with the trees themselves, glowed in the evening light. The wind had fallen, and not a leaf stirred in the oppressive sultry calm which prevailed.

On one side, upon a piece of faded carpet, torn and ragged, sat a Fakcer, to all appearance, with long matted hair streaming over his shoulders to his waist, and over his face also, so as partly to conceal it. Some coarse rags hung loosely about him, but he wore the tall felt cap of the Kullunders, and their quilted robe thrown over his shoulders. He sat upon his heels, leaning upon a bright steel rod with prongs at the end, which might serve either for support or defence, and spoke to no one; but now and again a low cry of "Ulla dilâyâ to léonga," was rather muttered than cried aloud. A few copper coins and cowrees, which had been thrown to him by passers-by, lay on the carpet.

At a little distance from him were two parties of armed men — some Mussulmans, some Hindus — standing, lounging on the grass, and speaking carelessly together. One of these, from his dress and air, seemed to be of more pretension than the rest, and might be the Jemadar, or sub-officer of the party, and

was attended by two men armed with "Puttas," long, broad Toledo blades, set in steel gauntlets inlaid with silver, which hung at their backs, the hilts projecting over their shoulders. These men were both short, with round backs, and very powerful frames; and, from this brief description, our previous acquaintance with them under the Banian Tree will be remembered.

"Perhaps they have pardoned him, after all, and let him go," said Rama. "The King is young, and soft as a woman; and what will the uncle yonder say to that, I wonder?"

"Impossible," replied Lukshmun; "I was behind the guards all the time, and heard Jehándar Beg ordered for execution under the Goruk Imlee. No, the King was as firm as our uncle when — Look! what is that? Can it be they?"

As he spoke, a small procession was seen approaching; a litter tied up, as though a lady were within; a few footmen ran beside it, and a few horsemen rode before and behind. Unobtrusive in character, its movements were nevertheless followed with the greatest interest by the men we have mentioned, and even the Fakcer looked aside to watch it.

At first it seemed to be proceeding by the road in the direction of the outer gate; but as it arrived opposite the trees, the leading horsemen turned suddenly across the sward and halted under them, followed by the bearers, who at once hastily put down the litter and retired apart. The leader of the party drew up his own men at a little distance, while the footmen were directed to remove the cover of the litter. As they did so, the person within, who was pinioned, put his feet out of it and stood up.

"Where is Hoosein, the executioner," cried the officer; "he was ordered to be here; and this is no time for delay. Have any of ye seen him?" he asked of the people around.

Some one answered, "He is not here;" and another cried carelessly, "Hoosein does not like doing service for his own master;" and a third called out sneeringly, "You will find him drunk in the bazar by this time; go and look there."

"God forbid," said the officer, impatiently; "go, some of you, and see if he be coming in any direction;" and several of the horsemen dashed off at full speed.

"Enough, sir," said Jehándar Beg, sadly; "a keen sword is all that is needed; and ye are soldiers. Loose my hands, I pray ye, that I may say my last prayer before I die. . . . Peace for a while, Syn," he continued to the Fakeer, whose chant had increased to a solemn wail; "here is something for thee. See thou to my grave, and to the Fatchas after death. This will be enough, perhaps," he continued, with a sad smile, throwing some gold coins to the man, which lighted upon his carpet, but were not noticed.

"Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!" was the only reply; but the tone, which had been raised as Jehándar Beg appeared, now subsided into a low murmur.

"Let it be here," said Jehándar Beg, stepping forward to a piece of smooth turf under one of the huge branches. "Will any one lend me a scarf? Stay, this will do," he continued, loosing his own shawl from his waist, "when I am dead, give it to the Durwêsh yonder." Then he spread it out on the ground, and knelt down upon it, with his face towards Mecca,

settling the cap upon his head, smoothing his long curly beard, and the glossy brown curls which fell upon his neck. "There is no use asking for water for ablution," he muttered, "this will suffice;" and taking up a little dry earth, he rubbed his hands with it, allowing the dust to fall over his elbows.

Jehándar Beg looked once more around ere he began his prayer; above, to the stately trees, and their heavy foliage, among which a flock of noisy parrots were fluttering from branch to branch, and screaming loudly; over the green sward, to the King's fort and palaces, on which, and upon the noble dome of the mausoleum of Mahmood Adil Shah, his first benefactor and patron, the mellow light of evening rested in a golden radiance, and away over trees, gardens, and minarets, all glowing in the same soft beauty; then upon the group around him, for a few chance passengers, seeing what was to happen, had gathered round the spot.

A shiver seemed to pass through him as he closed his eyes slowly. Not of fear, for the man, a Fatalist by creed and habit, was meeting his doom stoically as a brave Moslem can do; but a thought had crossed him which would not be put back — a vision of love and peace — of his girl wife in her rosy beauty, and of her fair boy, far away, at his own village and home, in the blue mountains of Khorassan — and of a fond aged mother who lived with them. This season they were to have come to him. Who now would tell them of his fate?

"A word, Jemadar," he said to the officer. "Bid that Fakeer come hither."

"Thou wilt do it," he said, as the man rose and

advanced, "for the sake of the gold. Give this ring to Afzool Khan — my worst enemy in life, and yet the truest man in Beejapoor — and these papers; he will know what to write to my — my — to my house. And now, friends, peace, and the peace of God and the love of the Prophet be with ye! When I have said the prayer, I would die."

It was finished, but as yet no executioner had arrived. Jelándar Beg sat resting upon his heels, his eyes closed, while his beads passed rapidly through his fingers as his lips moved in prayer.

"We cannot delay," cried the Jemadar to those around, "will none of ye strike a blow for the King? Here is the warrant, and here is a bag of money for any who will earn it."

"Go thou, Rama," said Lukshmun, nudging his brother, "thou art a surer hand with the 'Putta' than I am; but if thou wilt not, I will try mine on that rascal, who hath strung up many a better fellow than himself on these trees. Hast thou forgotten what he did to our people?"

"Yes," added Gopal Singh; "go, Rama, and end this play. See thou do it well, and they will give thee the money. Go!"

"If the uncle wills it," said Rama, hitching forward his long weapon, as he looked for a moment to the Fakeer, who bowed his head, imperceptibly to others, yet intelligibly to them, as he repeated his cry. "Yes, I will do it," and drawing the broad blade, on which the sun's rays flashed brightly, he felt its edge, then put his hand into the gauntlet which reached to his elbow, and fastened the straps over his wrist and arm carefully. He now advanced lightly, with circling

steps, flourishing the heavy weapon, as though it had been a stick, round and round his head; yet, with every sweep, it was clear that he was measuring his distance more carefully. Another moment — a bright flash in the air — a whistling sound as the sword clove it — and the head of Jehándar Beg rolled to the ground, the lips still moving with the prayer which he had not finished, while the trunk fell forward quivering.

“The second to-day,” said Rama, muttering to himself, as he wiped his sword on the sward. “Enough, enough!”

“Soobhan Ulla!”* exclaimed the Jemadar. “A brave stroke. Thou shouldst be chief executioner thyself, friend.”

“That is my brother, noble sir,” said Lukshmun, interrupting the speaker, “and he does not like being spoken to after he has cut off a man’s head. Give me the money, Jemadar Sahib, and let us begone; you see he is cleaning his sword; he might dirty it again if he were vexed.”

“Take it, friend,” returned the officer, “and away with ye, for yonder is Hoossein Jullâd** coming, and ye may perchance quarrel over it. Begone!”

“Bid him and his party watch here till I bring men to bury the dead,” said the seeming Fakeer, who had again risen and advanced, and who, having removed the bloody shawl, was rolling it up. “Watch with them, even though it should be night. This gold will suffice for all, and I will return.” So saying, he stalked away rapidly in the direction of the fort, while his strange cry changed — “Ulla dilâyâ to leea, Ulla

* Praise the Lord!

** Executioner.

dilâyâ to leea!" (God gave and I took, God gave and I took!)

"Sir, here are the executioner's men, and they will watch; we need not stay," said one of the soldiers to their officer. "Let us go."

The litter was taken up, the soldiers moved rapidly away, and there remained only the watchers and two women, wrapped closely in heavy sheets, who had not been previously noticed, and who sat cowering behind one of the giant trunks, sobbing bitterly. Perhaps —; but no matter now.

The sun was sinking fast, and its rays fell upon a pool of blood, glistening, as it dried among the blades of the close sward, — upon a ghastly head, its face turned upwards to the sky, — and a headless trunk beside it, from which the crimson stream was still oozing. Above, on the high bare branches, sat foul birds and ravens, which had already scented the blood, and whose hoarse croaks mingled with the heavy rustle of the wings of vultures, assembling for a night feast; — no unusual matter, perhaps, in that place.

"A Fakeer says he must see you, my lord," said Goolab to Afzool Khan, as he sat quietly in his accustomed seat after the evening prayer. "He is in the court at the door, and will take no denial. He will not go away, but cursed frightfully when we said you were tired, and were resting in private."

"A Fakeer, Goolab! Do you know him?"

"All he says, master, is, 'Ulla dilâyâ to leea,'" replied the woman, "and he declared he would cut himself with a knife and throw his blood upon us if we did not tell you. Hark! there is a shout."

"Ulla dilâyâ to leea!"

The Khan did not delay. "I know him, Goolab," he said. "Go, and say I come."

"Bid every one depart hence," said the man as Afzool Khan approached him, attended by several servants. "What I have to say to thee brooks no listeners. There," he continued, when all had gone; and flinging down the bloody scarf at the Khan's feet, "look, it is his blood who would have been true, but for him who went to hell before him. Here is his last request to thee, Afzool Khan, for he trusted thee only, of all this city. Take them, I have done his last bidding."

"His seal and these papers, Syn. More treason, perhaps. Did he say ought of them?" said the Khan.

"Only that they belonged to his house, and I should give them to you; and he died like a brave man as he was."

"Yes, as he was, Syn," echoed the Khan sadly — "as he was. And thou hast buried him? Else —"

"I have cared for that; it doth not concern thee, Khan."

"And who art thou, Syn? We have met before to-day."

"Ay, Khan, and before that often. Am I safe with thee? Put thy hand on my head; nay, fear not a poor servant of God, and I will tell thee who I am."

"Surely, friend," replied Afzool Khan, putting out his hand upon the high felt cap, "fear not."

"Not there, not there; on my head," cried the man, grasping the Khan's hand, and kissing it while he removed the cap; "on my head, on my head. Ask Ali Adil Shah of me, and remember — Pahar Singh."

“Pahar Singh!” exclaimed the Khan, starting back.

“Hush, fear not; I have been pardoned, and the Shah’s hand hath been before thine on this head; fear not, I will be true to thee, for thou art faithful to him. Thy hand once more, Khan, freely and truly upon my head.”

“Go, friend,” said Afzool Khan, placing it as he desired; “go, I doubt thee not, for I have heard what happened last night; go in peace. Whatever thou canst do for the Shah will not be forgotten.”

“There is yet one more work to-day ere I sleep, Khan — one more, and I go to do it. God be with you.”

As he departed, the men on guard would have stopped him, but again the old cry arose, and in his assumed character no one molested him, as the shout, rising and falling on the air, died away in the far distance.

Afzool Khan took up the bloody scarf and gave it to an attendant. “Let it be washed, and kept till I ask for it,” he said. Not long afterwards some Persian merchants were returning to their country, and they bore the last requests of the unhappy Jehándar Beg, with such monies as could be saved out of his property, to his family.

That evening the crypt under the old tomb was again empty. Maloosray’s scouts had brought him the news of Bulwunt Rao having survived his wound; and of the occurrences in the Durbar of the King, of which he had been advised by the Bramhun we have seen in communication with Jehándar Beg. [Watching from the terrace of the temple, he had seen the Wuzceer’s

arrival at Allapoor; followed his course across the plain; and guessed, by the confusion and shots at the gate, and the dispersion of the horsemen with him, that something extraordinary had taken place, the particulars of which, and of the subsequent execution of Jehándar Beg, were related by his scouts. Under the presence of Pahar Singh, therefore, Becjapoor was no longer safe; and as night closed, the whole party, unobserved, left their hiding-place to its usual tenants, the jackals and hyenas of the plain.

CHAPTER XIX.

As night fell, and as Maloosray knew all the Mahomedans would be engaged in their evening prayer, his little party emerged from the crypt, and took their way westward across the plain, avoiding the suburbs, and threading the narrow lanes among the fields, which on all sides skirted the city. One by one his followers and scouts had been despatched in advance to meet them at certain places; and a spot known to all, where the great northern and western roads diverged, was fixed upon as a final place of rendezvous. Thither, also, had been despatched the wounded man, Ranojee, who, unable to ride far at a time, was to proceed by easy stages with the scouts and other servants to Jutt, the chieftain of which town was a sincere adherent to their cause.

Maloosray himself, taking Nettajee, and the chief scout Ramjee with two others, to serve as grooms, had determined to visit Tooljapoor before he returned to his master. There were many active partisans of

weight in the Bâlâ Ghaut; what had they determined upon, and what was his old friend Jeswunt Rao Bhós-lay of Sindphul doing? It was impossible to write, and as long as personal communication can be insured, Mahrattas never write letters. It was above all things necessary that Moro Trimmul and Jeswunt Rao must have the first news of the Wuzeer's death; and except it were reported by royal express to the camp at Nuldroog, it could hardly be known at Tooljapoor next day. It was a long ride, certainly, but it was possible to reach Tooljapoor, and to secure Moro Trimmul's safety, in case it should be threatened.

The occurrences at Beejapoor had been very unexpected by Maloosray. At first sight they appeared to be a sore discouragement to the plans which had been almost matured; and for some time he rode in silence, brooding over the catastrophe we have recorded. He could not account for it. To all appearance the King and the Wuzeer had been on excellent terms, and Jehándar Beg their confidant; yet in one day both had been destroyed, and the party of Afzool Khan had suddenly become the leading one in the State. Was he ambitious, he might be prime minister. In his heart Maloosray acknowledged his fitness for the post. No other person would command the allegiance of the army, with whom Khan Mahomed had not been popular. "It will unite in the Khan, and we shall have enough to do to escape it," he thought; "but the young tree will bend to the storm when the old one will break, and we may find opportunity to strengthen ourselves, while we do not weaken the royal house."

Now the moon shone out brightly. There had been

no rain since the storm of the previous night. The day had been hot and sultry; but as the night fell, a delicious breeze, soft and cool, had succeeded the calm of the evening, and the road was sufficiently dry to be travelled without inconvenience. Maloosray's noble mare seemed to feel, with her master, the invigorating effects of freedom of action, — and her light and springy movements, which conveyed to the rider an involuntary assurance of activity and endurance, excited within him a more hopeful spirit than that with which he had quitted the city. Now and again, as they passed some muddy rivulet, or stony portion of the road, a word of encouragement or caution from her rider would be answered by a low whinny, which was followed by a loving caress of her arched neck, and thus a perfect accordance seemed to be established between them.

“Shall we reach the river before daylight, Sidda?” said Maloosray to his guide; “and can we get the boat? Will it be on this side?”

“The boatmen are all friends of mine, master,” replied the man, “and will cross me at any village or at any time; fear not, I will say I have dispatches, and they believe in this ‘stick that I am on the royal service. No one will dare to stop one of the royal Hurkaras * with this as his warrant;” and as he spoke he flourished the weapon — a short stout staff, gaily lackered in rings of red, yellow, and black, with a heavy tuft of black cotton yarn at the end, from whence projected a formidable four-sided lance about a foot long, the point of which was carefully sharpened — lightly round his head.

* Foot messengers, famous for going great distances.

They rode on, keeping the main track; now and again passing villages, where they were saluted by a chorus of barks and howls from the village dogs; again traversing long intervals between others, where the occasional piping of sleepless plovers, the wailing cries of ever-wakeful restless lapwings, and an occasional burst of howls and screams from packs of wandering jackals, — were the only sounds which fell on their ears in those solitudes.

They met no one at that hour, but they did not pass the villages, lying upon the road, unremarked. Here a shrill challenge was blown upon the horn as they passed a gate; there a drum was beaten, and other indications given of the village watch being on the alert, or a shot was fired from a bastion or watch-tower, the bullet of which sung harmlessly above their heads into the air. They were rough times those, when men ploughed with their fire-arms slung at their backs, and when the village cattle, while grazing, had to be guarded by parties of matchlock men against the raids of more powerful neighbours.

The moon set soon after midnight, and the wind again arose, sighing as it swept across the broad plains in fitful gusts, or rustling among the tall fields of grain which bordered the road. Light clouds, too, were rising from the westward and hurrying across the face of the sky, partly obscured the stars, and caused additional gloom. Under other guidance Maloosray would have felt uncertain of the path; but the Hurkara never diverted from the track, or slackened his pace; and the party passed on unnoticed, at the greatest speed that the light and the road would admit of, without distressing their horses.

As they ascended one of the long undulating eminences, which are the characterising features of the country, and which commanded a view for some miles around, Maloosray's attention was attracted by a light which, emerging from behind some grain fields from another direction, was advancing rapidly towards them, and apparently would cross the road a little in advance of them. It was evidently a torch, possibly that of some travellers; yet it moved too swiftly and regularly for men on foot; and to the keen practised ear of Maloosray himself, as well as of his followers, the tread of a body of horse was heard, while the slight occasional sparkles from weapons, and the dull red glow of matches, were soon distinctly visible.

Could they have been followed? Had any one remarked their departure from the city? The little party halted at once, and drew up out of the track of the road to escape observation, and watched the movement of the light before them with beating hearts. Nor were they long in suspense. After disappearing for a moment in a hollow, the light appeared again upon the road itself, and the body of horse, which might be fifty or more, drew up across their way and halted.

Who could they be? Certain it was that the party was now posted there to waylay some one who was expected, and the information they were acting upon was apparently as sure as their movements were methodical. Not a neigh escaped their horses, nor was there any commotion apparently among the men. The place chosen was admirably adapted for a surprise. The road, as we have said, led up a slight ascent or spur of an undulation, the sides of which broke into small but rough ravines and watercourses intermixed

with large loose boulders of basalt, difficult to be traversed on horseback even by day, and quite impassable by night. These features were the same on both sides; and the spur itself was a narrow neck, which widened, as the plain above stretched out, into one of the usual broad expanses of waste and cultivated lands.

"They have come by Hórtce," said the Hurkara in a whisper -- "the village there in the hollow -- and are waiting for some one. Master, dost thou fear them? -- they will hardly molest travellers such as we are. Shall we go on?"

It was a difficult point to decide. There was certainly no way of avoiding them and yet keeping the road.

"Go, Ramjee," said Maloosray to his scout; "go and see who they are. Be careful! my mind misgives me about them."

"Master," replied the man, "this ground is higher than theirs, and if they put out the light they will see thee against the sky. Retire a little lower, and Eukôba and I will find it all out for you."

Maloosray saw the intelligence of the advice, and acted promptly upon it, while the two men, well accustomed to such proceedings, crept warily along under cover of bushes and inequalities of the ground, till they entered a tall field of grain, in which they could move without chance of observation up to the very party itself, and from which they looked with safety upon the horsemen.

As they had supposed, the body was drawn up across the road. One flank overlapped the cornfield, on the path by which they had come; the other rested

upon a declivity where the same path descended to the westward. It was clear that the position could not be turned without great risk, and it was impossible to say whether the path to Hórtee might not be guarded also.

In front of the party, and near a man who held a torch which he replenished with oil from time to time, were two persons mounted on powerful horses, whose wet coats and panting flanks showed that they had been ridden at a rapid rate; and it was also evident from the condition of the rest, splashed with mud and with similar evidences of fatigue, that, whatever might be the object, speed had not been spared in its pursuit.

"They cannot pass this unobserved," said the elder of the two, "and there can be no suspicion that we are on this road. Ah, there is no such trap, boy, in the country, not a rat could get by it. Well, we have not been idle; first Khan Mahomed, second the Kótwal, and now Maloosray and his friend Nettajee."

"You have not got them yet," thought Ramjee, "and Tannajee is not game for you, old fox. But for him, my dagger would have made acquaintance with you that day in the Gosai's Mutt at Tooljapoor. Ah! who could have told him of us?"

"I think, uncle, we had as well put out the torch," said a man, coming forward, riding a tall grey mare. "Tannajee is not a moth to fly into a candle."

"Good, Lukshmun," said the chief; "put it out."

"I think we were wrong, father," said the other leader; "a few men would have surrounded that den under the tomb, and no one could have escaped."

"True; but you would not have taken Tannajee

alive, and here he will be helpless. No, it is better as it is; and he shall sit under the Goruk Imlees, and die like Jehándar Beg, before me."

"And Rama shall help him on his way to the gods, master, if you like," said Lukshmun. "He says he is quite ready, and he got the Putta sharpened again."

"Silence!" said the chief, as the light was extinguished, "not a word must be spoken now, nor a horse stir. Be careful, all of ye."

The scouts had seen and heard enough. The rustling of the high corn-stalks and their leaves, under the breeze, prevented their return through them being heard, and in a few moments they had rejoined Maloosray, who, with Nettajee, had descended the brow of the ascent for a few paces, and could not be seen from above.

"Master," whispered the scout, "'tis the Old Lion, Pahar Singh, and his cub, Gopal, and their men. I saw one of the hunchbacks, too, with them."

"Ha! the Old Lion thinks to have a feast to-day, Nettajee," said Maloosray, "but the man is yet to be born who will take Tannajee alive. And what did he say, Ramjee?"

"He said you should be taken alive, and that you should sit under the Goruk Imlees, and have your head cut off, like Jehándar Beg, by Rama the hunchback."

"Ah," said Tannajee, "he should not have brought a torch with him, Netta, else it was not ill-contrived. By the Holy Mother, there had been small chance for us had we got among them. And now, what is to be done?"

"We must go back. Beyond the rivulet and the date grove yonder, is a path which leads to Boorga, and so to Churchan, if my lord does not care for a few coss more," said the Hurkara; "and, after all, it is as near as any other road to Mundroop."

"Good," said Tannajee, "let us be quick, they may advance."

So they moved carefully down the descent, beyond which was a small rivulet bordered by thin datetrees and other brushwood. "See," said Netta, as they crossed the small stream, "we are but just in time: there they are!" and as Tannajee looked up, he saw several figures projected in outline against the sky, one of whom was pointing to the road leading to Beejapoor.

"I thought the old Lion had been more wary," he said, "than to show himself in that manner; but he may cool his heart now; he had better have made for the ferry!"

It had, however, been a narrow escape, and one for which Tannajee vowed to feed a hundred Bramlhuns at Tooljapoor; but the danger was past, and after a somewhat rough track for a short distance westward, the guide struck confidently into a broader road, which, like the preceding, led northwards, and, as the day dawned, the river-bank at the ferry beyond Churchan was safely reached. The guide's staff of office proved irresistible. In a few moments they were seated in one of the large circular coracle baskets of wicker-work, covered with hide, which serve as ferry-boats; and with the two mares swimming in front, and guided by the men who held them, and the skilful paddles of

three lusty rowers, the party crossed the stream, and were beyond danger of pursuit.

CHAPTER XX.

IN his last letter to Beejapoor, Moro Trimmul had directed his agent there to inform Maloosray that, at the day of which we write, there would be recitations in the temple, and, under cloak of this, that most of the heads of the Mahratta families were to assemble; it would, therefore, be advisable if he could meet them. It was partly on this account, but most particularly because of the murder of Khan Mahomed, that Tannajee had left the city so abruptly, and ridden through the night without a check.

Nor did Tannajee and his companion take rest anywhere during the day following, except for such refreshment as was absolutely necessary. They avoided all large towns and villages; and, as Tannajee knew the country perfectly by day, he guided his friend by cross paths, frequently through fields and waste lands, till, as the evening fell, they drew up before the gate of Sindphul, the village below the pass of Tooljapoor, which we have before had occasion to mention.

The owner, a distant relative of the Rajah Sivaji, by name Jeswunt Rao Rhóslay, was an intimate friend of Maloosray's, and a true and influential ally of the general cause in those districts. Maloosray's sudden arrival surprised him little, for in consequence of what Moro Trimmul had written, he had been expected; and, after a short conference, Maloosray urged that the news he had brought should be communicated to Moro

Trimmul and those assembled with as little delay as possible, and in this Jeswunt Rao concurred.

So, after a slight rest and hearty meal, which both needed, the stout ponies, provided by their host, were announced to be ready in the courtyard of the house, and, accompanied by half-a-score of stout sword-and-buckler men, with matchlocks and lighted matches, they rode out of the village gate.

The active ponies, though well accustomed to the rough mountain-road, had paused for a moment to take breath on the level spot from whence the buildings could be seen below — the glare of light, spreading up both sides of the dell, revealing crag and rough wood, with the gilded pinnacles of the temple glittering brightly through the smoke of torches and of incense; but their impatient riders again urged them up the rocky ascent with all the speed they were capable of exciting. At the town gate there was no hindrance, for Jeswunt Rao was well known; so they were admitted without difficulty, and, leaving the animals at a house which belonged to him, adjoining the main street, the party proceeded at once in the direction of the temple.

It was no easy matter, however, to get there. As they approached the gate at the head of the steps descending into the ravine, and on the steps themselves, the crowds were almost impassable, but good-humour prevailed, and, after some struggles, the lower court and the great assembly were safely reached.

It was a remarkable sight. The court itself was crowded with spectators so closely packed that to move was impossible. They were sitting upon the paved floor in rows facing the centre, where an open

space had been provided for the priests, and an avenue left for their communication with the shrine. Around this the most distinguished of the guests had been placed; and Maloosray observed with satisfaction, that many influential persons whom he desired to see, were present. So far, his visit could not have been better timed.

All round the court were huge cressets of iron, fixed into brackets in the walls and arches of the court. These were filled with cotton-seed which, fed with oil from time to time, threw a broad glare upon the people, and lighted up not only the temple and its quaint and fanciful ornaments, but the buildings around, — and above, the crags and precipices, with the houses hanging to them.

There was not a spot unoccupied; even the ledges and projections of the high pyramidal roof and spires of the temple were crowded, while the terraces of the vestibule and cloisters around, reserved for the ladies of the Hindu gentry of the neighbourhood, and of the chief visitors and priests, glowed with the gay colours of their garments, which stood out against the dark background of the mountain-side.

As the party advanced through the crowd, Moro Trimmul, who was among the Bramhun reciters, saw the tall figure of Maloosray behind that of Jeswunt Rao of Sindphul, who was struggling manfully with the crowd, and advanced hastily to greet him. He had hardly expected so prompt a compliance with his request, but was rejoiced that it had been made. He greeted Maloosray and Palkur heartily, and led them to the reserved space, where, recognised by many

present, and speedily made known to others, they received a hearty welcome, and took their seats.

A few words whispered, sufficed to explain to Moro Trimmul the situation of affairs at Beejapoor, and the necessity for immediate action.

"We must dismiss the assembly earlier than usual," he said, in reply to Maloosray's anxious question as to how long the ceremonies would be continued, "and I will hasten what remains. Do not heed me; I have to take my part now, and as the assembly rises I will rejoin you."

Thus saying, Moro Trimmul passed into the dark vestibule of the temple, and was divesting himself of his upper garments and turban, when, from a pillar behind, the girl Gunga came towards him.

"I have been searching for thee," she said; "they wanted thee. Where hast thou been so long?"

"No matter where," he said gloomily. "Thou couldst have found me without, if needful. What hast thou done?"

"Nothing," she replied. "I cannot get speech of her, and the rest will not join me; they are afraid."

"So art thou, Gunga," he replied; "afraid, afraid of a girl? Ah, coward and liar!"

"Thou art afraid thyself, Moro Trimmul," she retorted. "Go! take her away. There she stands, no one will prevent thee; there, by the door — alone."

Moro Trimmul stepped from behind the pillar, still keeping within the gloom, and looked forward. Before the blaze of the shrine, and the lamps without it, stood Tara, in the act of bearing garlands of flowers to the altar. A number of them were hanging upon her left

arm, while, with her right hand extended, she was delivering some to the priest.

As she stood at the door, in the full glare of the lamps within, the light fell upon her rich crimson silk drapery, its heavy borders and ends of flowered gold, and the massive gold band which confined it round her waist; while the attitude she had involuntarily assumed, as she turned towards the shrine, showed the graceful outlines of her figure to peculiar advantage. She had wreathed a long garland of white flowers into her hair, which fell about her neck and bosom; and another was twisted round her brows, so as to form a coronet. It was a fanciful but simple and beautiful decoration, which suited the character of her small graceful head, and added to the charm of her attire.

Moro Trimmul watched her intently as she delivered the garlands to the old priest; then, as if a service had been done, she advanced to the centre of the doorway, and, making a low reverence, stepped aside and stood erect, looking into the vestibule in expectation, as it were, of further devotees. Moro Trimmul could see the sweet mouth parted in a smile, the pearly teeth glistening within the rosy lips, and the soft eyes flashing as the strong side light fell upon them. Beyond her the deep gloom of the recesses of the temple could not be penetrated. So her figure stood out against it in a power of effective relief which was almost startling.

It was a strange contrast. Within, the dreaded image, richly attired and covered with priceless jewels, the tiara on its head, and the weird ruby eyes, now sparkling brightly, now changing and glowing fitfully amidst the clouds of incense which was burning before

it, and the black, stony, changeless features, seeming even to vary in expression with the passing effects of light and shadow. Without, Tara in her rich attire and glowing beauty, and that rapt expression in her countenance, which the excitement of the scene and the service of the "Holy Mother" had caused it to assume.

Moro Trimmul sighed. With all the fierce desire which burned within him, and which now gave him no rest night or day, there was mingled, curiously perhaps, a loving reverence for the girl, which, as yet, had restrained him both from violence and insult. It might be her character and position which had excited it, but rather, perhaps, her own innate purity and modesty of mind, and the charming simplicity of character, which he saw in daily exercise in her house, that controlled the fiery passions of his nature and his avowed unscrupulousness.

"If I were a man," sneered his companion, as she stood with him concealed behind the large pillar, "I should not be a coward when such a woman as that was burning at my heart. By the Gods, she is no woman, but an incarnation of beauty. Look at her now!"

"Peace, devil," cried the Bramhun in a hoarse whisper; "hast thou forgotten the gold, and thy promise by the Pâp-nâs?"

"No, I have not forgotten," said Gunga, "I have part of it here;" and she shook her foot, on which the gold anklets tinkled slightly; "and I want to change this silver thing round my waist for a zone like hers yonder. Ah, how it glows among the rich silk! But

thou art a coward, Moro Trimmul, else I had earned it long ago; and I could have helped thee."

"Go and speak to her, Gunga, and I will believe thee braver than I am," he replied tauntingly. "If she cannot be spoken with, how wilt thou earn the zone?"

The girl regarded him with a look of defiance, and, without reply, stepped forward into the light, advanced towards the shrine, making a slight reverence to the image, glided forwards, and stood opposite to Tara.

"Thou hast served many hours, sister," she said, in an assumed voice of kindness, "and must be weary; sit down within for a while, and I will do what is needed; 'tis my office," she continued, laughing, "as well as thine."

Moro Trimmul marked the involuntary shudder of aversion which spread over Tara's countenance, and the action of withdrawing the skirts of her garment between her ankles, which accompanied it. Then she spoke.

"I am not weary of the Mother's service; when I am I will come no more," she said gently. "Go away; I will not speak with thee or thy people, and that thou knowest full well; go."

"And why should I go?" cried Gunga, excitedly; "am I not a Moorlee like thyself, and have I not served the Mother longer than thee? To be sure, I am neither a Bramhun nor a widow to be nice as thou art; yet I bid thee go, and let me have my turn: thou hast had more than thy share of money already to-day."

"It is all in the shrine before the Mother," said Tara, shrinking from the bold glances and excited manner of the girl. "I have taken none of it: I need it not."

"That does not matter," said Gunga; "I will have my turn now. Go away; thou art not wanted. Those that will not dance before the Mother are not worthy to serve her. Go, else some of us will push thee out."

"Me!" cried Tara, drawing up her slight figure proudly, her eyes flashing, and her features quivering with indignation, — "me! you dare not; you are impure, and the Mother loathes you: touch me, and she will strike you dead!"

Gunga shrunk from the trial; and others of her sisterhood, who had stood apart ready to advance, slunk again into the gloom behind the pillars. Gunga looked round as if for countenance, but no one seemed disposed to join her, while the old priest at the altar, who had caught the sound of voices, came to the door, and, seeing Gunga, waved her off.

"Away with ye, and the like of ye!" he cried. "Outside do as ye please; here ye are an offence. Away! let her stay;" and he pointed to Tara. "Do not molest her."

"There is some spell about thee, Tara, which shuts my mouth; beware!" muttered Gunga, retreating; "it may not always be so."

"Bear me witness," said Tara to the old priest, "she is threatening me."

"Ah, daughter," he replied smiling, "fear not such as she; the Mother is good to thee; and they cannot harm thee so long as thou art holy and pure."

“I did tell not thee to quarrel with her,” said Moro Trimmul angrily, seizing Gunga’s arm as she approached, and dragging her within the shadow of the pillar. “Art thou mad, or has any one given thee drink, Gunga?”

“I spoke to her kindly, which is more than thou darest to do,” retorted the girl sharply. “What answer did I get? Pure? Why should she be pure? I tell thee there is a spell about her neck—I saw it glittering among the flowers—which put me back: I could not speak. Yes, Moro Trimmul, if it be only to put that spell under my foot, and crush it with her throat, I will do it; yes, I will earn the gold; let her see to herself.”

“Good,” he replied; “then I can trust thee. Come to me to-morrow and fail not.” And then, naked to the waist, with his soft glossy hair falling over his shoulders, and his fine figure displayed to the best advantage, Moro Trimmul passed out, and took his place among the reciters.

Gunga’s eyes followed him. “Drink!” she muttered; “drink! he said that. Well, better drink than this madness, which is worse.” And, sitting down, leaning against a pillar, she hid her face in her garment, and sobbed bitterly.

Just then, one of the ordinary processions round the temple formed opposite the shrine. Priests, bearing offerings of flowers and lighted lamps, holy water and incense, preceded by musicians, and chanting a hymn, passed out into the court. Several of the temple girls were dancing before it; and Tara, led on by an excitement she could not control, had seized a pair of

cymbals, and began to clash them in the cadence of the hymn as the procession moved.

Three times round and round did the priests pass, and at the second Gunga joined it, dancing wildly and tossing her arms on high as she circled with the rest. Tara, however, remained among the priests, singing with them; yet, in the elastic grace of her step, as well as in the expression of her face, it was evident that she shared the fervour of the scene, and could not control herself, while her clear ringing voice mingled sweetly with the deeper-toned chant of the men!

Maloosray saw Tara, and watched the eyes of Moro Trimmul wandering from one girl to the other with an intense expression of passion. "Ah, my poor friend!" he said to himself, "that is the devil sitting at thy heart, and looking out of thine eyes! Alas! alas! who is she — that girl?" he asked of Jeswunt Rao, who sat by him.

"She is our new Moorlee," replied the man; "is she not beautiful? — But listen to Moro Trimmul."

CHAPTER XXI.

NEVER had the Bramhun's art been so effectively exercised by him before. In the recitation of passages from the Ramayun his voice, high and sonorous, pervading every portion of the court, delivered the appeals to war, the description of the demigod's forces, and portions of the battles, with a power which was listened to with breathless interest; while the pleadings of Secta, the beloved wife, and her passionate confessions of love, were accompanied by tender actions, and tones as low and sweet as a woman's. Now rolled forth the majestic Sanscrit verse in its measured numbers, and again it was changed to the sweet Mahratta vernacular that all could understand. At every interval the applause of the whole assembly arose in hoarse murmurs and loud clapping of hands, while many wept passionately.

No one would have moved till morning, but there was yet much to do; and, as Moro Trimmul sat down, Vyas Shastree ordered the distribution of wreaths of flowers to the chief guests, which announced the close of recitation for the night. Now, therefore, the main body of the people got up and began to separate, and in a short time only those were left who had been specially requested to stay. Now, too, the cressets, no longer fed with oil, went out one by one; and the deep gloom of night was fast spreading over the courts and buildings around.

"Will you not remain, Shastree," said Moro Trimmul, "to speak with these people?"

"No," he said; "no; there is no one to go home with the women. I thought you would accompany them."

"It will be late," he replied gloomily; "no, I cannot come to-night."

"Your declamation was noble, Moro Trimmul," said the Shastree; "I had never heard the passages so spoken. Who taught you this style?"

"That is the way our master likes them said. No one taught me," he replied; "and if you could hear the whole in one of his assemblies in the deep forest, you would feel that you were a Malratta."

"So I am — so I am," returned the Shastree quickly; "do you doubt it?"

"Not your faith, Vyas Shastree," replied Moro Trimmul, "only your energy. But go; I will come early to-morrow;" and, turning away, he entered the vestibule and joined Maloosray and others who awaited him. Guards of men, he saw, had been placed at each of the porches, so that no one could enter but those privileged.

A solitary lamp flickered on the altar where the image still rested, and cast a feeble and uncertain light into that portion of the vestibule which was immediately before it, and where Maloosray, Moro Trimmul, and the rest now seated themselves. Otherwise the spacious area was altogether in deep gloom, a portion only of its massive stone pillars catching rays of light, and seeming like giants standing around in solemn array.

We need hardly, perhaps, follow Maloosray in his narrative, which was listened to with breathless interest by his hearers. He had never as yet come among

them, but his name and feats were well known through many a rough ballad both of love and war. There he sat, face to face with them; his large soft eyes flashing with excitement, and adding force to the few but burning words he spoke. Tannajee was no novice in the art of reading men's hearts; and among the mountains and valleys where he lived, there were already thousands of the best youth of the country at his command.

"Now," he said finally, "ye have heard all. We are before the Holy Mother, who comes to our Prince in his dreams, and tells him what to do; she who will scatter these impure cow-slaying Moslems like sheep before the wolf. O Holy Mother," he continued, rising and bowing with joined hands in adoration to the image, "here are thy children; bless them, make them bold and true; they will swear not to hang back when 'the fire is on the hills,' and when they can strike for thy honour. Hear thou the oath, and accept it!"

As he paused and looked round there was at first a low murmur of acquiescence. Then they who had been sitting started to their feet, and as many as could reach it rushed to the threshold of the sanctum and touched it reverently: — those who could not, stretched out their arms towards it over each other's heads, while wild cries of "Jey Kalee!" "Jey Toolja Mata!" "Bome, Bome!" We swear, we swear! rang through the vestibule, and were taken up by those without,

"Now, let us write the names," cried Maloosray, when the excitement had in some degree subsided; "sit down again friends, and if there be a scribe among ye let him come forward."

The Putwari, or hereditary clerk of the temple, was there, with his writing materials tied up in a bundle, and he sat down and took them out.

"Light one of the large lamps," said Moro Trimmul to an inferior priest, "and set it in the midst; we are not afraid of our faces before the Mother."

As the wicks were lighted, one by one, the assembly seemed to dilate. Light after light flickered, but grew stronger. "A true omen," cried Maloosray, with fervour; "that is as we shall be, my friends. Light after light will appear to ye from afar; each may waver for a while, but when 'the fire is on the hills' ye will see all plainly. Be silent now, and let us write."

It was, indeed, a strange and impressive scene. In the midst sat Maloosray, and Moro Trimmul, with the scribe; around, the heads of local families, Nimbalkurs, Bhóslays, Sípdias, Ghoreparays, and a host of others, each anxious to be named in the record, and leaning forward to catch the eye of the scribe. Beyond them -- some kneeling, others standing -- was a crowd of eager faces, all bearing the same expression of excitement -- one behind another on every side -- while the light fell upon their bronzed features and glistening eyes, till those in the background were scarcely distinguishable.

One by one -- chiefs, gentry, yeomen -- gave in their names and complements of men, and page after page was filled by the record till no more remained.

"It is done, friends," said Maloosray rising, as the Putwari had added up the totals, and signed his name as the scribe; "there are more than fifteen thousand men recorded. Enough for the time, and more here-

after. By-and-by, when 'the fire is on the hills,' ye will be welcome; till then, separate and be quiet, else Afzool Khan will come upon you, and we can give you no help. We will abide the storm and let it pass over us, and so must you all."

As he spoke the last words, those who had been sitting rose, and all in turn saluting Maloosray, the meeting broke up. The retainers of the respective leaders gathered round their masters, and the several parties followed each other out of the temple precincts.

"I shall depart before daylight, Moro Trimmul," said Maloosray, as they proceeded to the postern which led to the bottom of the ravine, below which their ponies and attendants awaited their coming; "wilt thou follow?"

"I have more to do here, 'Tannajee," he replied; "but after the Now Râtree I will come. I must watch Afzool Khan and Pahar Singh."

"Take care they do not watch thee," returned Maloosray. "Yet I fear not for thy enemies; of them thou art careful. I fear for thee, because of that girl who played the cymbals. She is the devil that I see sitting at thy heart, and looking out of thine eyes. I watched thee as they followed her. It were well for thee to come now, even now; come!"

"Impossible," returned the Branhun, turning away. "Go!"

"As thou wilt, friend," returned Maloosray. "Words were always useless with thee; but be wary."

Moro Trimmul watched the party as they descended the steps to the tamarind-trees below. He saw them mount and ride off, the torches with them

throwing a ruddy glare upon the crags and brushwood above the path, — and his heart bade him follow; but as one of the temple watchers was about to close and bar the door, he turned aside. All in the building was dark and deserted now. The image had been taken from the altar, and put into its silken bed for the night, and a faint lamp occupied its place. A few attendants flitted hastily here and there across the dark courts and still darker vestibule, anxious to get away, and the watchers only were all that would soon remain.

“Maharaj! — Moro!” said a female voice in a low whisper, as he passed between the pillars of the temple, “stop!”

Moro Trimmul knew the voice. “Why art thou so late here, Gunga?” he said hastily. “Begone!”

“I feared you were angry with me,” said the girl, putting her hand on his arm. “You would not look at me as I danced, only at her. I could not go till I had spoken with you. Ah, you are not angry with me? Lo! I will do your bidding though my heart break and I die. Sit here, beloved, and speak to me; come,” and she tried to draw him to her gently.

“Thou art one of the devils that are pulling me into hell!” cried the Bramhun fiercely; and, pushing her violently from him, he rushed wildly across the court.

Gunga fell back heavily against the pillar nearest to her, and as she recovered herself, the pain of the fall obliged her to sit down, involuntarily leaning against it. She drew her hand with a gesture of weariness across her face and brow, then looked to see

if there were blood upon it. "Hath it come to this?" she said bitterly; "hath it come to this — and for her? Ah me for her!"

The girl had listened unobserved, in a dark niche near the shrine, to what had transpired at the meeting, and her first thought now was revenge, sure and deadly. A word from her, and the Mahomedan officer in charge of the town would seize Moro Trimmul, and imprison him in Nuldroog. As the thought occurred to her she rose, and, hastily traversing the court, began to mount the steps which led up the ravine; but her heart failed, and ere she had ascended a few of them she wavered, sat down, and wept bitterly.

"They would kill him," she said, "and he must not die. No; I was wrong, and he will forgive me; and to-morrow I will go to him as he desired." Hers was a callous heart: but it had softened to her lover, and refused to do him harm.

Time or country, what matter? How often is the history of woman's love and man's passion like this! how often does such erring love frame excuse for bitter wrong, endured from him who, — of all the world, — should least inflict it!

CHAPTER XXII.

A FEW days had elapsed, and it was a quiet afternoon in the Pundit's dwelling. The household work had long been done; the visit to the temple and the noonday worship were over. Vyas Shastree had remained there in discussion with other Bramhuns; Radha, complaining of a headache, had fallen asleep; Tara had read all that her father had appointed her to study during the day, and was waiting his return to have certain passages explained to her before she proceeded with her task.

The house was perfectly still, and from the town no sound reached them, for the heat without was great, and until evening there would be comparatively few persons astir. It was calm, and large white clouds were sailing slowly over an intensely blue sky, gathering into masses pile upon pile, of dazzling brightness, as the sun's rays fell upon them. The heat and peculiar state of the atmosphere caused the outlines of buildings and of the mountains to waver; and wherever the eye rested on any object, the air between seemed to quiver with a tremulous motion.

Hot as it was, Tara had not been deterred from her self-imposed duty. Throwing a heavy folded sheet over her shoulders and head, she had accompanied her father to the noonday service; nor, since the occasion when she took upon herself the office of the priesthood, and devoted herself to the duties of the shrine, had she on any pretence missed or evaded the necessary attendance.

At first, perhaps, it was a severe trial. The licence, accorded by general custom to the attendant priestesses, was to her abhorrent; and, on the other hand, Tara's unapproachable purity had given offence to them. While Gunga, therefore, and two or three others, proposed the prohibition of Tara's service, the rest, fearing the consequences, and having a real respect and love for the girl whom they had watched from her childhood, refused to interfere with her. Tara did them no harm they said, and her father could punish all, were any annoyance given to his daughter.

It is probable that matters might have continued in this state for some time longer, but for the scene we have already recorded, and the increasing jealousy of Gunga, expression of which could hardly be repressed by her; and on the day we now write of, the girl's behaviour had been studiously offensive to Tara until rebuked by the attendant Bramhuns, when she retired sulkily.

More insulting than that, however, was Moro Trimul's manner to herself; and for the first time Tara had felt what she long dreaded, - the shame, as it were, of her vocation - the unavoidable exposure to any libertine glance which might fall on her; but she had rallied herself at the shrine, and secure in the protection of the "Mother" she adored, had persevered in her duty without interruption.

There was, as we have said, perfect stillness in the house, only broken by the dull monotonous whirr of the spinning-wheels, as her own and her mother's flew swiftly round, with which the buzz of flies in the verandah and court seemed to harmonise. Her mother appeared particularly intent upon spinning some re

markably fine yarn; and, as the thread had broken on several occasions when Tara had spoken to her, and she had complained of it, both had fallen into a silence, which had not been interrupted. Gradually, then, the small troubles which had gathered about Tara returned to her recollection; and, as is generally the case on such occasions, began, in spite of herself, to increase in proportions.

Tara's was not, however, a suspicious nature, and she had soon struck out a course for herself in regard to the sisterhood. "It is the money they want, not me: if I save it all, and give it to the Putwari to divide amongst them daily, it will surely be enough," she thought; and this she determined to do. In regard, however, to Moro Trimmul, it was very different. "Why did he look at her as he had done that day?"

Then her thoughts reverted to the time when she had first remarked him in the temple, a solitary stranger worshipper, to whom her father had spoken kindly. Her memory followed clearly his gradual steps to intimacy; but there was nothing she could charge him with, as an approach to familiarity in their intercourse. Through all the licence of the marriage time — through all her visits to his aunt and sister — there had been no violation of propriety; on the contrary an habitual and respectful avoidance of her — or, at most, a distant and courteous salutation. Why should it have altered?

But since the night on which Gunga had spoken to her, and Moro Trimmul had made his famous declamation of the scene in the Ramayun, there had been a change. He either avoided her altogether, or his

eyes dropped furtively as she passed, or met hers, as they had done that day, in a glance new to her, and inexpressibly offensive. Tara shuddered as she remembered it, and the action broke the thread she was spinning. She did not resume her work, and her hands fell listlessly on her lap as her foot ceased its motion. For a time her eyes wandered vacantly among her flowers, about which some gay butterflies were flitting and chasing each other in the bright sunlight; but suddenly a large dragonfly, which had been hovering over them, darted at one and carried it off; and as she started forward, gazing intently after it, a bird chased the insect, caught it, and flew away.

Perhaps the sudden cessation of the whirr of Tara's wheel had attracted her mother's attention; for after a while, as it was not resumed, she looked up. "What dost thou see?" she asked, anxiously; for ever since the day on which Tara said the Goddess appeared to her, Anunda had been anxious, she hardly knew why: but she dreaded a return of that strange and violent excitement. "What dost thou see, beloved?"

Tara did not apparently hear the question, or did not notice it. Her hands, which had been involuntarily extended, fell upon her lap listlessly as before; but she turned towards her mother. "How long does he remain, mother?" she asked abruptly.

"He! who, daughter?" returned Anunda.

"Radha's brother," replied the girl, as a shiver seemed to pass through her; "Radha said he would go after the marriage, yet he delays. Why, mother, — why does he not go?"

"Nay, and how should I know?" replied Anunda. "What is he to me? All I wanted was Radha, and

we have got her; and he may go or come as he pleases. Thy father told me he had business here with the Nimbalkur and others till the Now Râtree was over, and he assists in the recitations. More I know not. Why dost thou ask? What is he to thee, Tara?"

"Nothing, mother; but so long? — will he stay so long?"

"Radha told me yesterday he must soon rejoin his people in the west, and leave her; and she was crying about it. Does that content thee, Tara?"

"I would he were gone, mother," said Tara, rising from her low stool, kneeling, and throwing her arms about Anunda as she sat on a similar one, while she hid her face in her dress. "Cannot he go sooner? — cannot Radha send him away?"

"Why, daughter? why? — Ah! he hath not spoken to thee, child; he dare not! Tell me," she continued, in a more agitated tone, as her daughter clung almost convulsively to her, "what is this? Why dost thou fear him? Thou — thou dost not? . . . thou canst not —"

"No, no, mother," cried the girl quickly, guessing her mother's thoughts, and looking up innocently; "fear not. I am not a Moorlee to love; . . . fear not! But ah, mother, I dread him! I will not go to the temple while he is there. I . . . I dare not — I dare not go. May the Holy Mother forgive me for neglect; but when he departs, I will serve her night and day."

"Thou art very beautiful, my child," said her mother, smoothing back the glossy hair, and stroking the soft cheek which lay passively in her lap. "Ah, thou

art very beautiful; and I fear such as he! Yes, if it be as thou sayst, it were better, indeed, to live secluded for a while. I will tell thy father, and he will understand it."

"Yes, he will surely understand," said Tara absently; "but ah, mother, was not that an omen? I thought it was, and I came to thee."

"What omen, Tara? I saw nothing, child."

"A thought came into my mind, mother," she said sadly, "that I was the butterfly sporting among the flowers, and he the fierce glistening insect that darted upon it and bore it away. But then, mother, the bird came and took both. Why was that?"

"Thou art not well, Tara," replied her mother, not understanding her, for she had not noticed the occurrence, and, seeing her shiver, thought her feverish. "Thou art not well; lie in my arms for a while and the cold will pass away. O Holy Mother!" she cried aloud, as Tara, sobbing convulsively, hid her face in her bosom, "let not evil come to this child — thine and mine. O, be good to her, as thou hast taken her!"

"Would that it were so," said the girl, after a while, and still sobbing. "I would go, mother, if she would take me. What use am I in life? It would be bitter to leave the house and all of ye, but I should be with her. Did she not promise this when she touched my hair? Ah, yes; and she will not forget it."

"Hush, child; let this fancy pass from thee. Sleep, now, here. I will sing thee the old song. Nay, thou shalt not leave me! There is room at thy mother's

heart, and strength still in her arms, to hold thee safely."

As Tara laid herself softly down in the old place, and her mother, rocking herself to and fro, sang the low sweet lullaby of childhood, — the girl's sobbing gradually stopped, and a gentle sleep fell upon her. Anunda watched the change anxiously. At first her brow was contracted, as if with pain, and a broken sob came now and again with her breathing; but gradually the head fell back on her arm, the sweet mouth opened slightly, and tears, which had had no vent before, welled gently from under the closed eyelids as the features relaxed into a smile.

"Yes," thought Anunda, as she bent over her child, while her own tears fell hot and fast, "the Mother is with her now, and she is again happy."

"What hath happened?" asked Radha soon afterwards, as, refreshed by her sleep, she rose, and came gently towards the low spinning-chair on which Anunda still sat. "Is she ill?"

"Hush!" returned Anunda, in a whisper. "If we can lay her down I will tell thee, but we must not wake her. I think . . . I think the Mother hath been with her again; but I will tell thee."

Radha hastily spread out a soft mattress and pillow close to the stool, and, raising Tara together, they laid her down upon it, as they would a child. Her mother patted her gently as she lay, and gradually the same sweet smile as at first again stole over her face.

"Look, she sees the Mother!" said Anunda reverently. "It is always so, and nothing can wake her till

the time is past. Ah, thou art happy now, my child, be it ever so with thee!"

"What did she say, sister?" asked Radha, as having thrown a light sheet over the sleeping girl, they sat down to watch her apart, lest the noise of the wheels — for Radha had taken Tara's and joined the broken thread — should awaken her. "What did the Goddess say?"

Anunda hesitated. As yet no difference had arisen between them, and Radha still looked up to her, more with the respect of a child for its mother than as a sister-wife would comport herself to her equal. Should she tell Radha all? It had occurred to her that he had imposed upon her some task which she hesitated to perform — that Radha had some impatience of her brother's presence. It might be a demand for money — it might be in relation to the political objects of his mission, of which Anunda had a deep dread, lest her husband should become an active party, and so be embroiled with the Mahomedan officers of the country. She considered for a moment: but Anunda's was no timid nature. She was not afraid of Radha; and with Tara's happiness at stake, she could risk no ceremony with the sister of him who had evidently caused more than a passing cloud.

"Radha," she said gently, "thou art more than a sister-wife to me. Nay, as a daughter I have trusted to thee the happiness which lay nearest my heart and hers; and I believe thee faithful to it, and that this home and all in it is growing precious to thee."

"To me? Ah, yes, O sister and mother, too! Radha is new to you all," she replied, "but will be true now,

very true, and will not fail! O mother, if you could know what it is to me to have a loving home!"

"Then Tara must not be injured — no evil must come to her," said Anunda, interrupting her.

"To Tara, mother? We are sisters, who will do her evil?"

"I fear thy brother, Radha -- not thee. Hath he said aught to thee?" returned Anunda.

"My brother! O, heed him not, he will soon go," returned Radha, her features expressing distress and agitation, and she already feared the worst.

"Ah, then, it is as I expected -- as she dreaded. Radha, this must not be. Hast thou any power over him?"

"None," said the girl, bursting into tears, for what she had most apprehended appeared to have reached her at last -- "none. He has been wilful always -- to me, to our father when he lived, and to all. Where he goes -- who are his companions -- what he does -- no one knows except our Prince whom he serves, and Tannajee -- who came so suddenly that night -- whom I showed to you. No, mother, I have no power and no influence. What does he care about me?"

"He must care," said the matron stoutly, "or he must care for me; and yet, for thy sake, I would not provoke him. But, O Radha! when thou hast had a child lying at thy heart -- drinking its life from thy breast -- climbing about thee -- thou wilt understand what a woman can dare for it -- what I could dare for Tara! Wilt thou speak to him, or shall I?"

Radha feared her brother. She did not know the extent to which his unscrupulous and profligate mind might carry him, but she had not forgotten his threats.

Though she felt assured that, with the protection her husband could afford her, she was now beyond all ordinary harm at his hands, she feared the consequences both to herself and Tara with which he had before threatened her, and she dreaded his violence. Could he have been mad enough to speak to Tara? Could he have sent any insulting message to her? Something must have occurred, and she felt too sick at heart to ask.

“Thou art silent, Radha,” continued Anunda; “why?”

“I love Tara; I love him too,” she said earnestly, the tears starting to her eyes. “Yes, I will speak to him, even though he should strike me. Mother, I can bear it from him. Can you send me to him? — now, now! — or send for him? If I am to go, let it be at once, for this is a matter in which I cannot hesitate. O dear mother!” she continued, rising and advancing, “I am a child yet to thee. Let me put my head on thy breast for once, and bless me there as thou wouldst Tara: bless me ere I go to him. No, not so, not so; but as Tara lay on thy breast, so would I too, for once.”

“Come, Radha!” cried Anunda. “O child, O sister-wife! come; henceforth between thee and me there is no veil. I had longed to draw it away, but thou hast done it now, and I am happy. Yes, henceforth ye are to me as one,” she continued, smoothing the soft cheek as it lay at her heart — “new and old, but alike.”

“Enough; now I am content,” cried the girl, rising and clapping her hands, “and there shall be no fear for Tara. Send some one with me and let me go; he should not come here.”

"No, Radha," said Anunda, calling a trusty woman-servant to accompany her, "not here. Go to him, and return soon."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Is my brother within? has he returned from the temple?" asked Radha of a man sitting in the porch of the house in which Moro Trimmul resided, and, though in another street, was only a few steps distant. "Is he come, Chimna?"

"Yes, lady, he is come," returned the man, who was an old retainer of the family, and had known her from infancy; "but if you take my advice, you will not go to him now; he has eaten nothing, and is in one of his rough angry moods. I did but speak to him as he entered, and got as many curses as will serve me for a month. Why not come another time?"

"Nay, Chimna, but it is an urgent matter, and I must now have speech of him," she replied. "Go, say I am come, and that he must admit me. Begone at once," she continued, seeing him hesitate, "else it will be worse for you."

"I had rather you went yourself," returned the man, "what if he should beat me? But no matter, I will go; perhaps I may not do you much more service, for he speaks of departing."

"Ah, indeed! When?" exclaimed Radha. "He is not ill?"

"Soon, perhaps," replied the man, putting his finger to the side of his nose, as a caution to secrecy, while he stepped across the court to the verandah, "very

soon, I think. No, he is not ill, only vexed with something."

Radha's heart beat fast in her bosom. O, if it were but true; and that her brother, alarmed or repentant, no matter which, were about to depart, it would solve all difficulties at once. That very day — to-morrow! It seemed hard to wish him gone; yet there would be peace to Tara and to her mother, which was endangered by his presence. Surely he would see her. Yes; Chimna was now descending the steps of the house, and beckoned to her with a smiling face, she crossed the court at once, followed by the servant.

"He is in the upper room," he said, "and bid thee come alone; perhaps he is not well, for he is lying down, and seems weary. No wonder he was in ill-humour with me, after that long disputation with the Nassuk Bramhun to-day in the temple, — some relation of the Shastree's, I believe, lady."

"Enough, Chimna; take care of my servant till I return," said Radha. "You can sit here; if I want you I will call;" and so saying she passed through a door into the inner court, and up the steps which led to the apartments above, which were steep and narrow. The door was closed at the top of them, and she knocked before she opened it. Her brother unfastened it inside. "Enter," he said quickly; "it is well thou art come, I was thinking how I could see thee, Radha. Sit down there," and he hastily arranged a few pillows and a travelling mattress for her, "and speak to me;" and at the same time threw himself heavily upon a low bed which was close to the seat he had contrived.

"O, I am weary, Radha," he continued, "very weary. I have no sleep, no rest; I cannot eat, and

there is a burning thirst ever with me. I shall die if this lasts long."

"Brother, you are ill," she replied; "this place does not agree with you. Why not go away for a time and change the air? Chimna says you have eaten nothing; why is this? With all there is to do for the master, this is no time to be ill. Is there nothing better for him than lingering here? Surely Tannajee brought news of him?"

"Ay, sister, and there is more," and he pointed to a heap of letters on the floor; "enough to make one tremble for the result of years of toil and strife with the men of Islam. Listen: Maloosray brought word of their preparations at Beejapoor, and they write that to-day or to-morrow Afzool Khan and his son Fazil, with all the forces at Nuldroog and Sholapoor, and many others, will begin a march upon Wye and Purtâbgurh. What can we do?"

"Is this Moro Trimmul, my brother, who is speaking?" said the girl, with some scorn in her tone, and drawing herself up. "I thought he, like Tannajee, and the master, could see no hindrance to the cause of the Holy Mother but death. He used to say so in — in — the old times," she added tenderly.

"The old times?" he echoed. "Yes, the old times, when thou hadst a royal lover, girl; not a drivelling book-worm!"

"Hush, Moro," returned Radha sharply; "no more of that. Thou hast buried it in the marriage, and he is kind to me. Why remember it?"

"Is it to be forgotten? Dost thou forget it, Radha? — then, when we brought thee back from him?"

"He never loved me," she returned; "he could not

love a mad child; he told me so when he gently put me away."

"Not for the mad child, but for the beautiful girl, would he care; he does care, Radha. O sister, why was this hateful marriage done, so far away from us?"

"Nay, brother, thou knowest best; but I am content — he is very kind to me; and they all love Radha now, even Anunda."

"Radha," said her brother, raising himself on his arms and looking at her intently, and till his eyes seemed to flash with a light glowing beneath them. "Radha, do not lie. If thou art my sister, thy heart is far away among the blue mountains and their deep forests, and with our Prince. If it be not so, the witchcraft of that house hath compassed thee with a spell as it has me."

"Witchcraft, brother? they do no witchcraft," she replied simply.

"By the Mother, they do," he cried; "feel my hands, feel my head, they are burning, and Tara has set me on fire."

"Moro, thou art ill; this is fever," returned his sister anxiously. "I was like this yesterday, and Anunda gave me some medicine, and I slept, and it passed away. Let me fetch some, or send the woman for it."

"No, no, Radha," he said hoarsely, "this is no fever; this is a spell on me, and I cannot break it. This is the spell Tara wears round her neck, Gunga told me of it. It would not let her speak; it draws me to her, and then puts me away till I burn. O sister, I burn all over, and at night when there is no one with me. — O it is terrible, terrible; and she comes

and mocks me, and holds out water and flowers, and then snatches them away. I tell thee she is a witch, a devil, and she has set me on fire. Bring her to me and I will tell her so."

"Brother, dear brother," said the girl, "you are ill, and there is no one to tend you. I will stay; why did you not send for me? why not tell me of this sooner? Now, I will not leave you, you must not be alone."

"Radha, I am not ill," he replied; "I need no tending. Was I ill yesterday, when I overcame the Bramhuns from Punderpoor in the discussion at night, and when I could have said the Ramayun by heart? Was I ill to-day when I strove with the Nassuk Bramhuns in logic? No, girl, I am not ill in body, only at heart. And when she comes to the temple, and goes round the shrine crowned with flowers, clashing the cymbals and singing hymns with the priests, then I see the charm on her bosom, and it sparkles; and I hear her ringing voice, and I grow mad, Radha — mad . . . and this fever comes on me, and I burn as they do in hell — as I do now. Look!" he cried in a shrill cry of pain, "look, she is there, mocking me now, and pushing me in . . . O Tara!" he continued in a plaintive voice, after a pause, stretching out his hands and shutting his eyes, as he turned away, "do not kill me, do not burn me; I kiss your feet, I worship you beloved! do not harm me!"

"What can I do? what can I do?" cried Radha, wringing her hands. "He will die. Ho, Chimna!"

"Silence, Radha; for your life call no one. I will strike you if you do," he said, raising his arm. "Look, she is gone! she was there — there, even now. I

turned away, for her eyes burned me; there was no love in them — none. She came and mocked me, and you are witness of it. Why did she come in the air? She is a spirit — a witch — and it is always thus. There — look! —”

Radha looked tremblingly where he pointed. It was impossible not to be infected with the terror and misery of his face and voice. The room had open arches of wood on one side, across which heavy curtains were drawn; but they were partially open, and, looking through them, all she saw was the terraces of the houses of the town gradually descending into the great ravine: the crags and precipices of its further side: with the trees, and gilded spires and pinnacles of the temple between. Beyond these, the rugged mountain and the plain below, hazy with quivering light, and melting into the sky.

“You see nothing, sister?” he said. “No, she is gone now.”

“No, Moro, there is nothing there but the town and the temple. O Holy Mother!” continued Radha, stretching out her hands to it, “save him; save my brother! I vow to thee —”

“Make no vows for me, Radha,” he said to her, sharply catching her arm; “she is my enemy; I know it. She loves Tara better than me; she will not give her to me. I asked her for Tara long ago, see what has come of it. I have done all the secret rites that her worship enjoins, but she is not content; she mocks me, and when I look at her eyes they glitter with malice. To-day she seemed to glower at me from among the smoke, and Tara was there offering flowers. They both mocked me. Yes, they are devils; but I

fear them no more, Radha. May her house be desolate, and her shrine desecrated."

"Hush, brother!" cried the girl, putting her hand before his mouth, to stop what she believed to be horrible and deadly blasphemy. "Hush! what if she heard you? O Mother, gentle Mother, forgive him this madness. I vow to thee —"

"You will make me curse you, Radha," he said, again grasping her arm violently. "Did I not tell you I would have no vows to her, liar and murderess as she is? Yes, I see it now. You, too, are one with them, and are come to mock me; and yet, Radha," he continued, looking at her tenderly, "was this good of you after all I have done for you? O, faithless!"

"Moro," returned Radha, weeping sorely, and sobbing so that she could hardly speak, "I am not faithless. I am true to you, even to death, my brother."

"Good," he said gravely; but again fixing his eyes upon her, so that she could hardly bear his intense gaze. "True? Ah yes, if all are false, Radha should be true — true to him and to me. Now, listen," he continued, slowly and impressively, "if thou art true, tell Tara I am in fear of her charm; bid her look kindly on me — bid her put it away from her breast. I will kiss her feet; I will daily measure with my body every step she takes round the shrine, so that she give me one kind look, — so that I see that love in her eyes which is burning in me day and night — day and night.

"But that is not all," he resumed, after a pause. "Am I mad? Dost thou think me so for this raving? By the gods, no! Only for her. Let her look to

herself. And I say to thee calmly, sister, thou must say all this to-night, else beware! Listen, I have but one desire in life, that is Tara — one object only to live for, that is Tara. I plead nothing, I say nothing, only that I am not mad.

“Now, listen again. You have much to live for — the pleasures of life, the enjoyments of wealth — honour as the wife of Vyas Shastree, — children to come, and your husband’s love, with your children’s; but remember, Radha, they are all in my hand. A word from me to him, and you are sunk lower than the Moorlees. All this joy will pass from you. He will cast you out, and I will not shelter you. You shall be worse than the vilest, and men shall mock you. By —” and he swore a horrible curse, “I will do this and more, Radha, if you refuse. Answer me, girl,” and he shook her violently and painfully in his passion.

“Moro!” cried his sister, gasping for breath, “listen. I said once before you might kill me if it pleased you, and I bared my breast to you. Now again, if you dare to look at it without shame, it is before you. But, listen to my words, I will do no treachery; no, brother, no treachery. I am of the same blood and the same spirit as yourself, and you well know I could be true and fearless once, and so may God and the Mother help me, I will be fearless now in a better cause. Yes, strike,” she continued, as, without speaking, he hastily raised himself, seized a naked dagger that was concealed under his pillow, and brandished it with one hand, while he pressed her down with his knee, and held her forcibly against the wall with the other. “Strike! your blow will be more merciful than your

words," and she shut her eyes, expecting the stroke, yet not flinching from it.

"Stay — hold!" cried a shrill woman's voice, as a hasty rustling of silken garments was heard for an instant between the door and the bed, and Moro Trimmul's hand was seized in a powerful grasp; "Wouldst thou do murder? Shame on thee, and she thy sister!"

"She is a devil, too, and mocked me," exclaimed the man moodily, but dashing the knife to the ground. "Who let thee in, Gunga? Go, I want thee not — away! tempt me no more, else I will strike!"

"Fear him not, lady," cried the girl, picking up the dagger hastily; "he dare not strike you now, else," — and her eyes flashed — "else, Moro Trimmul, thou shalt do no more evil: none to me, none to her. Beware! I have no fear, and no scruple; let her go safely, and I will stay with thee."

"Go, Radha," he said. "Go, sister —"

"I will not go, Moro Trimmul," cried his sister excitedly. "I was not afraid of you when that dagger's point was at my heart. For myself I am not afraid of your threats, or your words. What you can do to me, what you can say of me, I know not. Whatever it be, and this girl is witness, I fear it not. What men would say of the Pundit who wronged his sister — you know; and how they would revile and spit at you. Say it, sir, and I follow you through Dekhan, through Hind, till I die by your hand. If you make me shameless you shall be shameless with me; but this remember, I warn them all in the house of you, — I warn Tara of you, — and no harm shall come to her, for your honour is dearer to me, than mine to you."

“If thou hast any influence over him,” she continued to Guuga; “lead him aright. Thou mayest have saved him a great crime to-day, for there was blood in his eyes when he kneeled over me with the knife; but better I should have died than harm should have come to them through me. Lead him away from those evil thoughts, and Radha will be grateful to thee all her life, and may often help thee.”

“I love you, lady, and honour you,” said the girl, reverently touching Radha’s feet; “but in this matter I have no power, much as I desire to help you and him; nor, indeed, in any other now, — yet I will do what I can. He loved me once,” said the girl, bursting into tears, “before he knew Tara; but that is gone, for she has his love and cares not for it. Now he only curses me and beats me, yet I will not, I cannot leave him, lady. Forgive the poor Moorlee; but it is better for me to bear his wrath than for him to be left alone. Last night he was fearfully excited, and threatened my life, but I escaped. He grows worse towards evening; but fear not, I will not leave him.”

“I will come and watch with thee,” said Radha, in a whisper, for her brother had again thrown himself on the bed, and covered himself with a sheet, and she feared to excite him; “let me come?”

“It may not be, lady,” replied the girl. “If he kill me, what matter? who would miss the Moorlee, or grieve for her? But you, his sister, must not meet this peril; the Holy Mother has already saved you from one terrible danger, and fate is never to be dared twice. Only believe that one as devoted as yourself watches him, and one to whom life is of no account.

Go, do not speak to him now. This madness will pass away, and I will come and tell you of him."

"Is she gone, Gunga?" said Moro Trimmul to the girl, who, after Radha's departure, had sat down by the bed and was fanning him. "I hear no one speaking to you."

"Yes, I sent her away. I feared for her," she replied.

"It was well done, Gunga, else — else I might have killed her — Ay, girl," he resumed, after a pause, "I had killed her but for Tara. Why did she come and not stay? why did she take the knife from me?"

"Thou art always raving of that girl like a fool, Moro Trimmul," said Gunga impatiently. "It was I that saved thy sister, else there was blood in thine eyes, and a devil at thy heart; what if thou hadst struck her?"

"She and Tara are one," he said gloomily; "yes, they are one, and thou, too, wilt go to them. Go, Gunga, they will give thee money."

"May dirt fall on their money, and thine too," she replied sulkily. "I want none of it."

"Thou art insolent, girl."

"I am a fool, Moro Trimmul, to bear with thee," she retorted, without moving. The girl's quick perception showed her that any toleration of his bad humour would only increase it, and of life she was utterly reckless. What tie held her to the man who now seemed almost to loathe her, she knew not: a fascination, perhaps, which she could not resist.

He was long silent, again drew the sheet over him, and lay quietly; at length he removed it and sat up.

"Thou art not gone, Gunga?" he said; "why art thou here?"

"I know not," she returned, "except that I am a fool."

"Go," he continued, "they will be wanting thee in the temple."

"I am not going," she replied; "another will take my work. I will not leave thee now."

"Gunga," he resumed, after a moody silence, "is there peace between us?"

"Such peace as thou wilt have," she replied.

"And if I love thee again?"

"Pah!" she cried; "love! — it is a thing to spit upon now. Can love go from one to another, and return as it went? Can a garland of Champa flowers be worn all night, and keep their freshness and fragrance till the morning? Do not men fling them away as refuse?"

"Then, why come to me, girl? why follow me?"

"Thy heart tells thee already," she said, fixing her eyes full on him, "we have one thing only in common now. That girl — I told thee so at the Pápnâs that day, and I tell thee so again — when I trample that charm of hers under my feet, and her throat with it, I shall be content, and thou art safe. Yes, Moro Trimmul, but for hope of revenge on her, I would have killed thee when thy love went to her. But thou art a coward; I know it; thou wilt do nothing."

"Thou wilt not say so if I carry her off and put her to shame."

"Ah!" cried the girl, rising and standing over him, "is it so? I tell thee, Moro Trimmul, I will follow her and fawn on her like a dog — I will abase myself

before her — I will lick the dust from her feet, if that will help thee to do this.”

“Listen to what I say,” he continued, raising himself on his arm. “I am calm now — quite calm — I burn no longer. I was mad when she — when Radha — came. I thought I had a chance through her; but she defied me, and there is none.”

“Women know women best,” said the girl. “I told thee so long ago, but I was not believed.”

“I believe thee now,” he replied; “and we have only ourselves to rely upon. Ah, surely this is a strange calmness which has come over me. It is not before death, Gunga?”

“No, fear not,” returned Gunga. “Love is passing into revenge; I know what it is. Yes, thou wilt act now, Moro. Take her hence but for a day, and she is thine for ever, and will become a Moorlee like me — like the rest of us. Enough, Moro Trimmul. No other harm shalt thou do to her than this? Hast thou the spirit — the courage?”

“I will do it,” he said gloomily. “That is what I had determined on myself. When can it be done?”

“On the last night of the ceremonies,” she said; “I can get the key of the postern, and keep it open unobserved; and as Maloosray and others went that night, so canst thou take Tara; and I have friends among the Ramoosees,* who will help us. I am their priestess, and they dare not refuse me. Take us both; I must see her humiliation. O Shakti** powers!” she cried, stretching out her arms, “aid me in this. Ye are

* A tribe of low caste in the Dekhan, workers in leather, but notorious thieves and robbers.

** *Shakti* — a very ancient worship of inferior deities and demons, probably aboriginal, which underlies Hinduism.

more powerful than the Mother, and ye hate her. Art thou determined, Moro Trimmul?"

"I will not change," he said; "the illusion is past."

"Swear on my throat and feet, and I will believe thee."

"I swear," he replied, touching her neck.

"Now I will leave thee, Moro," said the girl. "I have no fear for thee; there will be no more delirium with new thoughts."

"I will follow thee to the temple," he replied; "go on before. I dare not stay here alone; she would come to me ——."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SOME days have passed at Beejapoor since we were last there, not idly, certainly. A large army had to be prepared for the field, and for a long, difficult, and perhaps hazardous service. The treasury was opened, and the arrears of all troops disbursed; for the men had to provide as well for their own wants as for those of their families during their absence. The condition of the artillery was looked to with particular care, and preparations made for rough roads and rougher service than other parts of the Dekhan afforded. Sivaji's mountains were high and steep, the jungle and forest next to impenetrable, yet Afzool Khan had taken up the "birra," the gage of service, and had determined to bring the rebel bound to the throne of his young King, there to receive death or pardon, as might be most fitting.

But the old Khan was no boaster. He had seen

something of that country when, as a younger man, he had governed those provinces; and in his tours through them had shared the hospitality of Shahji, the father of Sivaji, and had been guided by Sivaji himself through many a rough hunting expedition; he therefore remembered enough to adopt precautions in all respects, and, so far as lay in his power, they were made.

That was not a country for the operations of cavalry, and it was therefore more to the infantry and artillery that he trusted: and it would not be wise to weaken the royal forces in and about the capital too much, lest the Moguls should take advantage of it, and make incursions across the frontier, nay, even attack the capital itself.

His own Paègah, and troops that had been in quarters for the rainy season at his own town of Afzulpoor: — some of the Wuzeer's Abyssinian levies, which were at Nuldroog, — some bodies of the old Dekhany horse under Alla-ool-Moolk, the Dâgtorays and Bylmees, were particularly selected; and, with some of the best infantry, the army was complete.

Nothing could exceed the spirit and devotion of the troops. In the beautiful Jumma Mosque, where more than five thousand men assembled daily for prayer, the preaching of the Peer, and the other ecclesiastics of that noble edifice — which yet remains as perfect as it was at the period of this history — eloquently set forth the merits of the Jéhâd, or religious war, in the eyes of God and the Prophet; and the certainty of paradise and its houris, to all who, falling by sickness or in battle, would surely enjoy them. Nor was it in the Jumma Mosque only that

this fervour existed. In the royal palace precincts, the city mosques — at the tombs of the ancestors of the Kings — the beautiful Ibrahim Roza, and noble mausoleum of Sultan Mahmood, nothing was left undone by the preachers to make the war popular, and to blacken the character and motives of the rebels. Frequently, indeed, to such a pitch of excitement were men wrought, that it was difficult to restrain them from attacking Hindus indiscriminately in the streets, and, in the expressive language of the Peer, from “making a pyramid of a lakh of heads* before the palace gates.” But it was no part of the royal policy to allow such religious fury vent at the capital or by the way: suffice it that, at the end of a long and toilsome journey, which would be made light through religious fervour, there would be free licence to slay, and the raid of Afzool Khan would become memorable in the history of the kingdom.

As the camps of the different leaders, too, formed without the walls on that great plain which encompassed the city, bards and minstrels, in companies or singly, ballad-singers, and, above all, troops of dancing women, thronged to them; and day and night, audiences were formed, sometimes in the tents, sometimes in the open air, where the feats of Sivaji and Maloosray were sung in the native Mahratta or Canarese, with verses added for the occasion, urging the faithful to destroy them.

We may be sure that, if the old Khan and Fazil were active in the field, Lurlee and Zyna were no less so in the house. To Lurlee war was familiar. She had been long weary of a monotonous life in the city,

* One hundred thousand.

varied only by an occasional day's excursion to the royal palaces at Toorweh, the Ibrahim Roza, or to the Khan's own garden, which was without the walls; and she remembered vividly the time when, for months together, the Khan's tent, or a temporary lodging in a village, were her only home, moving hastily or leisurely, as the service required, from place to place, in her palankeen or on horseback, as might be.

Ah! she was young and active then, and with the sharing of a rough bivouac or hurried march, — scanty food, often cooked by herself, a horse-cloth to lie upon, and a shelter contrived with four spears and a sheet thrown over them — and hard fighting to boot, — were her pleasantest memories of the Khan's love and her own happiness. If she were not so young, the old spirit was at last roused; and, day by day, as the preparations went on, the good lady told Zyna of the old wild times, and excited her desire to share in the new expedition.

To Zyna's great joy her father had directed that the whole family was to move. Lurlee was indispensable to the Khan in the field, where indeed, her truest value was apparent; and Fazil could not be denied the command he had earned by his sagacity and valour. Who, then, could protect Zyna, even did he desire to leave her? True, the royal Begum had offered a home, and with it her love to the maiden; she should be her little secretary, and write the King's private letters to her father while he was absent. But it could not be: that loving heart would have pined without those whose daily converse had been its life for years, and the invitation was affectionately but respectfully declined.

We may, perhaps, also hint another reason, not more powerful, certainly, than the love of those nearest and dearest to her, but working with it, nevertheless, in no mean degree. Kowas Khan had not suffered by his father's treachery. It was not only that Afzool Khan and Fazil answered for him with their lives and honour; but it had become clear to the King, and to those who had examined the late Wuzeer's correspondence, that the son had been kept ignorant of his father's plans; so, when the period of mourning was past, Kowas Khan had been taken to the royal court by the Khan and his son, and invested with robes of honour. Of the King's participation in the secret of his father's murder Kowas Khan had no knowledge, and could have none. It was believed to have been committed in revenge by some discharged soldiers, and it were better that he died as he had done, than that his treacherous intention should have succeeded, or that the ignominy of a public execution should have followed its detection.

While, therefore, the young man was still residing at the Khan's house with his mother, and other younger members of the family, he renewed his proposals for Zyna, which were heartily seconded by her, and other female relatives. It was, however, no time for such affairs; and with a tacit consent that, when the campaign was over, there should be no more delay in the marriage, Kowas Khan contented himself with being told by Lurlee Khanum — when the worthy dame had retired behind a screen — that, after a strict investigation, she had come to the conclusion that his temperament was fire and Zyna's air, and that, in consequence, their union promised to be felicitous in the

highest degree; and that her friend the Moolla agreed with her.

Did our space admit of it, we would tell how friends on both sides met for the betrothal; and how, -- there being no time for more lengthened ceremonies, they stood up and interchanged packets of betel-leaf covered with gold and silver foil. How both sides swore that those they represented should never swerve from the contract; how the first, and hundred and tenth chapters of the Kôrân, were said devoutly by the Moolla and the assembly; and what good things were provided at night by Lurlee Khanum and her trusty cook Kurreema, for those who came to the quiet ceremony. Many were the complaints of Lurlee's female friends, and perhaps Zyna's also, that there was not greater rejoicing; but Afzool Khan made it known that, when the marriage did take place, there should be no stint: and so the neighbours were satisfied for the present, and consoled themselves with hope for the future.

Bulwunt's wounds had proved of less consequence than was supposed at first, and loss of blood had caused the weakness under which he suffered on the night of the scene in the temple. He was now able to move about, and even to ride, and in the ensuing campaign, in a country which he knew thoroughly, his local experience would be of great use. He was not, however, sanguine as to the result. As he expressed it, hunting Sivaji and Maloosray would be like chasing the wind; it would be heard and felt but never seen. Nevertheless they might be brought to terms, and hereafter become worthy servants of the royal house.

Everything, therefore, being prepared, and the

royal astrologers having fixed a fortunate day and hour for the commencement of the march, the whole of the troops were drawn out in battle-array on the plain north of the fort, and the young King bade the leaders God-speed. Descending from his elephant, he embraced the old Khan, his son, and other noblemen and gentlemen of note; and as the royal Nagáris, or kettle-drums, which had been directed to accompany the force, struck up a march, and were answered by those of every body of horse, infantry, and artillery on the field, — the troops at once proceeded to their several destinations, a few miles distant, shouting the war-cries of their several leaders.

It was necessary, however, for the Khan himself, with his son and Kowas Khan, to visit Nuldroog, where a great portion of the army lay, and whence some of it was to accompany him; for though the troops at Beejapoor, which had been under the late Wuzeer, had shown no signs of disaffection, those at the fort were suspected, and their loyalty must be put to the proof ere the army could proceed. Lurlee Khanum and Zyna, therefore, were despatched under guidance and escort of Bulwunt Rao and others, to Sholapoor, to await the Khan's arrival; and with a party of horse lightly equipped, his son Fazil, the Peer — who had declared his intention of witnessing in person the discomfiture of the infidels, and seeing to the religious exercises of the army during its march — and Kowas Khan, Afzool Khan proceeded by the direct road of his own town of Afzoolpoor to the royal fort.

We need not follow their journey, for the country affords nothing interesting or remarkable for description. After passing the town of Almella, they crossed

the Bheema, now falling rapidly and already fordable in some places for horsemen; and Afzoolpoor, lying near the further bank, was safely reached on the third day.

Here the Khan found employment for two days more: for he was in no hurry to leave his own town, and the various matters to which he found he had to attend. His own last resting-place, a lofty, handsome, square building, with a massive dome, and the mosque adjoining it, were all but completed, and their consecration was necessary. This was performed by the Peer, the Moollas of village mosques around, the Cazeer* of Nuldroog, and the representative of the saint Boorhan Sahib, who lived at the pretty village of Boorhanpoor, some miles to the north, where the saint's tomb had been erected. "It was well," said the old Khan, "to have the place ready; who could tell whether it might not be required soon?" Who could tell, indeed? and so the ceremonies were completed.

Nor would the hospitable representative of the Boorhanpoor saint allow the Khan's party to pass his village without entertainment. Parties of leaders of the troops at Nuldroog, now only a few miles distant, came to the festivities, and, in the meeting with them, all apprehensions were removed from the Khan's mind. Swearing on the holy book before the saint's shrine, they declared their fealty to the King, and their attachment to their young master, in terms which could not be mistaken.

* Law officer.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE Khan was to march early next morning for the fort, but his departure was delayed purposely to allow of the troops to send out parties to perform the ceremony of "Istikbal," or meeting; and, after again partaking of the good Durwaysh's hospitality, the party rode on without interruption.

The road from Boorhanpoor to Nuldroog leads up the pretty and fertile valley of the Boree river, which is skirted by low grassy hills for several miles. Then leaving the river, as the hills grow bolder, it rises gradually through passes among them, and, after several steep and stony ascents, gains a level plateau, from whence the fort and town are distinctly seen below.

Soon after leaving their post, the party began to meet others from the fort, dressed in their gayest and best costumes; and these, having made their salutes to the Khan, rode forward to the front, so that gradually the men in advance swelled to a considerable number, and had all the appearance of an independent body of cavalry. Out of this, wherever the ground afforded room, and was free from ruts and stones, men dashed at speed, wheeling and circling their horses, so that their movements appeared like those of a real skirmish.

When they reached the level plain on the summit of the plateau above the town, the Khan was met by the Killadar, or governor of the fort, the principal officers of the troops, the civil authorities, and others; some on horseback, others on gaily-caparisoned elephants

with clashing-bells. Both parties dismounting, and the leaders having embraced each other, — the officers presenting the hilts of their swords as Nuzzurs, or offerings to the Khan, — the procession, for it had now become one — moved on slowly in gorgeous array, amidst the firing of matchlocks and camel swivels and welcome guns from the fort; and the appearance of the Khan and his gallant son, as they rode together through the main street and bazar, dressed in rich cloth-of-gold, was a subject of general remark and approbation by all classes. 'The prospect of a campaign, always pleasant to the soldiers, especially under so renowned a leader as Afzool Khan, increased the general satisfaction of all concerned.

As they passed its first gate, the booming of cannon from the ramparts announced their arrival within the fort, and was answered by guns from the encampment on the heights to the west. Passing the ditch by a causeway, they entered the *fausse-braye* by a narrow passage, and thence ascending slightly to the main entrance, with its massive flanking bastions of black basalt, the interior was reached — at that time a busy place, crowded with houses and shops in some parts, but in others laid out in open gardens, and spaces where the troops could assemble.

A curious and picturesque spot in many respects is this fort. Built upon a tongue of basalt, which is precipitous on three sides, and of considerable height, it is joined to the level portion of the plateau to the west, on which the town stands, by a neck considerably narrower than the enciente; and on this side a double wall with bastions, and a deep dry ditch, form the defences. Round the edge of the precipices of the hill itself, is a

single wall of great strength, with large bastions at intervals; and the river Boree, lying deep in the valley below, washes the base of the hill on two sides, north and east.

To the north, to secure a constant supply of water to the fort, a stupendous dam of masonry has been thrown across the river upwards of seventy feet high, and of proportional thickness, by which the water is held up in the valley, so as to form a pretty lake of the same depth at the dam, which extends above the town. On the other side of this dam is another fort on a smaller knoll, which serves as a *tête-de-pont* to the dam, and completes the fortification.

To the old Khan the place was familiar. He had often taken turns of duty there to watch the frontier, but to Fazil and his friend it was new; and when ceremonies of reception and the introduction of Kowas Khan to the officers of his father's levies, now his own, were finished, the friends accepted the offer of the Killadar to examine the marvels of the place.

The wonderful dam, through the upper sluices of which the stream was precipitated into a deep pool at its foot, in two pretty cataracts; the suite of apartments in the body of the dam itself, over which the river rolled in flood, and fell in a sheet before its windows; and the noble Cavalier at the east end, from the top of which extensive views of the country on all sides were obtained, were duly admired. It was evening when the friends reached the summit of the Cavalier, and they sate there watching the glorious sunset, over town and fort and lake, in which the piles of gold and crimson clouds, broken with dark purple, with the

sombre masses of fort walls and bastions, and precipices on which they stood, were reflected in its deep waters.

It was not so easy to prepare the troops required there as at the capital; but the Khan was anxious that nothing should be wanting in their equipment, and a few days was required to complete preparations for the field. This delay enabled the chief officers of the country to arrive and pay their respects, and among others, Pahar Singh, no longer disguised, but in his proper character as one of the wardens of the frontier marches, attended and did service with a body of picked men, both horse and foot, which rivalled, if they did not surpass, the royal troops in completeness and splendour of appearance.

Very different were the chief and his nephew now, in comparison with the time when we last saw them; and in the noble figure, dressed in light chain armour and cloth-of-gold, riding a superb grey horse, and giving commands to his men, no one could have recognised the old ragged Fakeer and his cry of "Ulla dilâyâ to léonga," which still often rang in the ears of those who had heard it.

The building, which went by the name of the King's Palace, and which was kept for the use of royal officers of rank, or even for royalty itself, should the King have occasion to visit the fort, had been assigned to Afzool Khan and his retinue; and, after the transaction of daily business in one of the public halls of the fort, he retired, after evening prayer, to his apartments, finding relaxation in a game of chess with the priest, who was a stout opponent, or hearing or dictating his public correspondence.

It was the fourth evening after his arrival, after an unusually busy day; the priest was occupied with a sermon in the mosque, and the Khan had retired into one of the rooms of the house, which, being built into part of the fort wall, possessed a projecting oriel window, commanding a view of the whole of the east side of the fort, with its walls and rugged cliffs. By day these precipices did not appear extraordinarily remarkable; but when shrouded in the gloom of evening and night, with the river brawling beneath them in its rocky bed, their height and effect were indefinitely increased, and the murmur of the river below became delightfully soothing.

One corner of this oriel, furnished with cushions, had become the favourite resort of the Khan. Here he had been sitting alone and undisturbed, and occupied with despatches and other papers the whole of the evening; and he was about to retire to rest when an attendant entered, somewhat abruptly.

"I said I was not to be disturbed, Allee," he cried; "what dost thou want?"

"My lord, there is a man without, who says he has urgent business, and he must have speech of you alone. I said it was impossible; but he declared you would be angry with me if you knew he were denied, and that I was to say to you, 'Ulla dilâyâ to l'ônga,' and you would understand."

"Admit him, instantly," said the Khan, to his servant's astonishment. "Ha, Pahar Singh again! what new work has he now got here for us?"

Muffled closely in a sheet, with his sword under his arm, the chief approached the Khan, and bent

lowly before him. "Send that man away, and hear what I have to say," he said; "it is important."

Allee looked at the chief suspiciously, as though he were trusting his master to a dangerous character; but, at a reiteration of the order, he turned to depart.

"Take this weapon with you, friend," said the chief, laughing, "thou art afraid of it, perhaps; not so thy lord, — nor of me. Keep it for me, however, till I come out."

Allee took the sword. "I did not like the look of him," he said to another without, who belonged to the fort. "Who is he?"

"Dost thou not know Pahar Singh?" returned the man; "that is his famous sword Dévi, which has drunk many a man's blood; come, let us look at it. There will be something to do, surely, as he is with the Khan."

"I have but a few words to say, Afzool Khan," said Pahar Singh, as the servant retired; "and I can do a good service, if it please you, my lord, to join in it or aid it."

"If it be a service to the King's cause, why not?" said the Khan; "but none of thy blood feuds, Pahar Singh; thou canst not use the royal troops for thine own purposes."

"Nor do I need them, my lord," returned the chief, somewhat stiffly. "I have enough men of my own to answer for those matters; nay, indeed, for this also, if I have your permission; and only that my rascals are somewhat too free of hand to be trusted in a town at night, I had done it myself ere this."

"Thanks, friend, for thy caution," said the Khan,

smiling; "we shall know each other better by and by. But what is this scheme?"

"When I left you, Khan Sahib, the night of Jehándar Beg's execution," replied the chief, "I had knowledge that Tannajee Maloosray was in the city, and I knew where he was. My people watched every bazar and street during the day, and we had a strong party near the Goruk Imlee trees, thinking he might like to come and see an old friend for the last time; but he kept close, like a bear in his den, till night, and then stole away. My boy and some of my people wanted to catch him in this den; but I knew Tannajee could not be taken alive by mortal, and I wanted to see him sit like Jehándar Beg under the trees, and die like a man; so I took a body of my horse and rode after him towards Tooljapoor, where he was going. We occupied the pass at Hórtce. But he escaped us there, Khan; and hearing afterwards he had gone to Jutt, there appeared to be no use in following him, as he had twenty-five cose start of us. But I was a fool, my lord; and for once Tannajee outwitted me. He went on next day to Tooljapoor, how, I know not. He was seen there in the temple, and he left again that night, no one knows whither."

"To Tooljapoor in one day!" exclaimed the Khan, "no horse alive could do it."

"Ah, my lord, your high-fed beasts would not, but ours can; and Tannajee and his friend Netta Palkur have the best mares in the Dekhan. No matter; he escaped us."

"He was — he is — the very bone and sinew of this rebellion," said the Khan.

"True, as Sivaji Rajah is the spirit; but he left

some of the bones behind him at Tooljapoor," returned the chief, with a grim smile; "and I can pick them up for you, my lord, if you will either help me or let me do it alone as best I can; only remember, if the town is plundered, you know the cause, and I am not responsible for the blame."

"That you had better avoid, friend," said the Khan, "you are badly spoken of already. But the bones, good fellow, the bones! who or what are they?"

"Ah! I had forgotten them," continued Pahar Singh. "Well, there is Moro Trimmul, Maloosray's agent and shadow; as wily, and more mischievous. He is still at Tooljapoor, pretending to give recitations, — and they are very good, my lord, in their way, — and to serve at the temple; but I am not sure that one of the Moorlees is not at the bottom of it, and when a man gets into women's hands he is easily caught. Then there are all those who will assemble there. Have you remarked, my lord, that hardly one of the heads of the old Mahratta families have come to present their Nuzurs to you?"

"I have remarked it," returned the Khan, "but supposed they were afraid of some demand for forage, or horses, or money, and therefore kept clear of me."

"Not at all," returned the chief, "they have all sworn to aid Sivaji, and Maloosray took an account of their quotas of horse and foot with him to the Rajah."

"Then they met Maloosray?"

"They did, my lord, the night he came to the temple, and here are their names. There are other people, you see, who have ears and eyes besides Ma-

loosray; and only that your Näib* at Tooljapoor is an owl, he had seen this conspiracy long ago, while I was too busy to watch it. Better perhaps, he did not; we can do our work more securely. And now, do you wish to seize this gang of rebels or not? I advise you to do so, because they are strong, and, should there be any difficulties in the West, are capable of making a serious diversion, especially if Maloosray, or even this Bramhun, — who is more of a soldier than a priest, — get among them. These Nimbalkurs and Ghoreparays, my lord, quiet as they look, are heavily supported by the people; and if the Ramoosees rise with them, the country will be in a flame.”

“And how dost thou know all this, Pahar Singh?” asked the Khan. “I must have some warranty that it is true.”

“Some months ago, my lord,” he replied, “this very Moro Trimmul and others canvassed me as to joining Sivaji’s band, and offered me whatever terms I pleased to ask. I refused, for I was content as I was.”

“That means,” remarked the Khan dryly, “that thou wouldst have joined them if there had been anything to be got by it.”

“My lord is still incredulous;” returned the chief, and perhaps I deserve doubt till I have given him further proof. But I feel the King’s hand on my head still, and his pardon is more to me than promises, of Mahratta, or Mogul either.”

“Good!” said the Khan; “it is well said, and I believe thee. But about these rebels; are they still there? and how many may there be of them?”

* Agent — deputy.

"They are there, my lord," replied the chief. "I was in the temple last night disguised as a Byragee, with my nephew and four others: we heard the recitations from the Ramayun, which, to Hindus, are very much what the Peer Sahib is saying now in the mosque yonder, and said yesterday at the Edgah on the plain, when the whole force shouted 'Deen, deen!' and it sounded like thunder. Jey Rao Nimbalkur was there, and some of the Kallays —"

"How many?" said the Khan, impatiently interrupting him; "what care I for their teeth-breaking names?"

"Five hundred perhaps, including followers."

"And is this temple a strong place? Do we require guns?"

"Strong enough to defend if they knew you were coming," returned Pahar Singh, "but for the most part they will be unarmed and looking at the show. We need only cavalry to surround the town, and no one can escape us. No guns, my lord; they could not be taken up the mountain at night, and ours must be a surprise, else the temple will be dark as midnight."

"Ya Alla! ya Kabiz!" (destroyer of enemies), muttered the Khan to himself, "a rare trap for these Kafirs — let them die! Good," he continued; "it shall be done; but when? I should march to-morrow for Sholapoor."

"Do so, my lord, and halt at Tandoolwaree; 'tis half way. I will join you there with some of my people the day after to-morrow, and lead you by a pass in the hills which I know of at night, so that we can surround the place unobserved. Take some of your own men and Ibrahim Khan's Abyssinians; they

know no fear, and are more certain than the braggart, plundering Dekhanies, who are afraid of the Mother who sits in the glen, though they are Mussulmans."

"What Mother, friend?"

"Only she in the temple; we Hindus call her the 'Mother;' and she, my lord, must not be touched."

"No, no; nor her people, I will see to that," said the Khan.

"And the affair must be kept secret, Khan," he continued.

"It is known to thee and me, Pahar Singh, and to no one else; not even my son shall know of it till we march."

"Now let me depart," said the chief, "and the night after next I will come."

"God willing," replied the Khan, dismissing his strange visitor with a courteous salutation.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON her return home, Tara being still asleep, Radha could not conceal from Anunda the agitation which the scene with her brother had caused her. As she reached the inner apartments, she threw herself upon Anunda's neck, and the terror she felt at what she considered a narrow escape from death, found relief in a flood of tears. The particulars of that scene she dared not fully relate: but Anunda gathered enough from her to believe that Moro Trimmul had threatened, if not struck his sister, and that Tara's suspicions were but too deeply founded.

If Anunda had not felt assured of Tara's purity and devotion to the worship of the Goddess, in its spiritual sense only, she would have prevented, at all hazards perhaps, her assumption of service as a devotee. It was, she knew, one of the trials to which the girl would be subject so long as her beauty remained, that her public avocation would expose her to the gaze of all classes of people — the most persistent and dangerous libertines, perhaps, being priests of her own sect. But the act of Tara's profession of service was so sudden, so unlooked for, and had been carried out so immediately, that there was no time to consider the consequences.

Now, too, it was impossible to recede. Once she had vowed herself to the dread Goddess she dared not retract, nor could any attempt be made, as they believed, to withdraw her without danger. Many instances of such partial service and relinquishment of it, capricious or meditated, had come to her knowledge, which had been followed by sudden death, or, what was worse, loss of reason and raving madness.

"Well, therefore, might the sister-wives tremble at the consequences of transgression, even by temporary withdrawal of Tara's service. It was the first thing that Radha counselled; but, under the instances of punishment which she enumerated, Anunda declared it to be impossible. She could not — dare not — expose Tara to such risk, nor herself be the means of it; and, indeed, she was assured that Tara would never agree. Gradually, however, Anunda's naturally cheerful and sanguine spirit took courage.

"We cannot prevent men's eyes wandering to that sweet face," she said to Radha, as she gently waved

a fan over Tara, who still slept heavily, "no more than I can prevent them looking at me if they like, or thee, Radha; but we can protect her from insult and shame, and she is too pure to be approached or spoken to. No; he may look as he pleases, but he dare not speak to her: for thy sake, for the sake of his own honour and station as a priest, he dare not; and his looks she shall not fear — I will prevent them."

"Nevertheless," replied Radha, "let her not visit the temple for several days to come, or, if she goes, we will both accompany her. This will give her fresh assurance, and in a few days he will be gone."

Radha, however, knew her brother well — better than Anunda. She knew that, with any scheme against Tara in view, no matter what it might be, she was incapable of watching him so completely as to defeat his intentions; but she could at least be wary, and gain information of them, and a small purse of money with which Anunda supplied her, given to Chimna, gained her constant information of her brother's movements, such as she could not otherwise have obtained.

Moro Trimmul, however, to all appearance ceased to pursue Tara. For several days she did not visit the temple. She herself feared collision with him, and kept away. But gradually, a sense of neglect of her daily duty, the loss of the satisfaction which had resulted from it, and the dread of offending the terrible Being in whose exacting service she believed, — wrought on her mind so as to render inaction intolerable.

And, no wonder now. Her own small household tasks which had previously occupied her leisure hours,

had been resigned to Radha; the temple service required her presence for the greater part of the morning and afternoon; and her studies, and some needful rest, absorbed the remainder of the day. Now that she remained idle at home therefore, the time hung heavy on her hands, and she sighed for the occupation and excitement, which had become habitual to her; while the yearning to serve "the Mother" -- never to be absent from her -- grew stronger and stronger day by day, with a fascination she could not resist. Day by day those weird, glowing, eerie eyes seemed to follow her about, seek her in her sleep, and by turns threaten or entreat her.

"Mother," she said at last, and after a few days had passed in restless idleness at home, "I feel that my life here is not what it was. The Mother's eyes follow me, and she sits at my heart day and night. Why dost thou not come to me, Tara? she says; fear not, but come; no one dare harm thee, and I would have thee near me. This she whispers daily when my time of service comes, and I am here and not with her. O mother, I fear no longer; she gives me strength, and I will go. What can he do to me? The dread of him is gone from me."

"We will go with thee, daughter," replied Anunda, "and remain with thee daily. Before us, he dare neither look nor speak; and perhaps too, thy suspicions were misplaced."

"Perhaps," she replied; "and why should he do me wrong? I should be sorry if I had thought ill of him without a cause."

So they went. The first day Moro Trimmul was not there. On the second, they met him, and received

his distant and courteous salutation. He did not even come to speak to his sister, and turned away directly. Gunga was present on both occasions; and on the first day Tara was surprised, and perhaps somewhat gratified, by the manner in which she and some of her sisterhood met her; offered her garlands of flowers, even put them into her hands, and tied them like bracelets round her arms, and into her hair.

“You have been ill, sister,” said Gunga, deferentially and respectfully, “and we have done your work, and offered flowers for your recovery to the Mother. Ah,” she continued, “because we are poor, and not as you are, Tara, do not look coldly upon us; have we not one common Mother, and are we not sisters in her? So think of us, and we will be your slaves and fellow-servants; for she has loved you more than us, and sent you pure among us. We know, too, you are already changed to us, for we have received the daily offerings as you have kindly directed.”

Poor Tara, there was no guile in her loving heart which bred or fostered suspicion. What could she think but that those callous minds had relented towards her? and perhaps the very offerings which she had thoughtlessly made over to the attendant priests, had been the original cause of all their apparent enmity. Day after day the Moorlees' respect seemed to increase; and while her work was rendered lighter, her repugnance to acknowledge them as co-servitors seemed to lessen. With all indeed, except Gunga, the respect was sincere, and the deference unfeigned; but with her, intercourse seemed only to fan the flame of revenge burning at her heart: and while she repressed it with difficulty in public,

in private she yielded to it with all the unbridled rancour and jealousy of her nature.

Against Tara, therefore, these evil notions were now, for different reasons, in perpetual and active combination. It was no part of Moro Trimmul's plan to excite further suspicion. Brooding over fancied neglects and slights, as well as revenge for hoplessness of passion, had, as Gunga rightly guessed, mastered the softer feeling of admiration and love for the gentle object of them; and the desire of his life now was, to crush relentlessly and deface the purity which he could not appreciate. His sister, he believed, had kept his counsel, for she had made no further remonstrance; and the first occasion on which Tara came with her father only, and trusted herself to the companionship of the priestesses, was hailed by Gunga and the Bramhun as conducive to their success.

We can believe that the worthy Shastree himself was utterly unconscious of any element of disturbance in his quiet household. He was perfectly satisfied with his new wife, and was even growing to love her dearly. He was not demonstrative — very learned and studious men rarely are so, perhaps; but Radha, studied his disposition and his wants, and, without interfering with Anunda's prerogatives, was supplying them unobtrusively and lovingly; and he felt what he could not fail to appreciate — the action of another tender hand about his daily life.

With Moro Trimmul he continued on the best of terms — nay, his love and admiration of the man were much increased. These recitations in the temple, the disputations on logic and law, the evident knowledge which Moro possessed of the more secret rites and

mysteries of the Shasters and Tantras, increased the Shastree's respect. If Moro Trimmul would not come to the house as often as he wished, he was at least no stranger in the temple, and in the ceremonies now proceeding, he was of the greatest possible use. He now frequently spoke of his approaching departure, which only depended upon letters he should receive from his Prince: and it was an event which, on every account of private and public intercourse, Vyas Shastree was disposed to regret exceedingly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE night of the Amáwas, or that which immediately precedes the new moon, is necessarily the darkest of every month, and for several days previous to it the sky had been overcast, as it frequently is at the season we write of, though without rain. The ceremonies in the temple would be protracted till, according to the astronomical calculations, the old moon had passed away and the new one begun, which was some time after midnight. The concourse in the town was perhaps greater than usual. Several of the Mahratta chiefs were still there, each with a complement of followers; and others who lived within a day's journey, were arriving one by one, to attend the last series of recitations which would be given until the next full moon. It was understood, also, that this was the last night on which Moro Trimmul would officiate; and his picturesque style of declamation was more attractive than the measured and monotonous manner of the elder Pundits.

By the afternoon, therefore, the main bazar of Tooljapoor had become a very lively scene. The number of people already in the town was increased hourly by the arrival of visitors from the populous villages round about, and even from Darasew, Thair, Baimlec, and others within a day's ride; and as evening drew in, the passes leading to the town from below, and the roads, too, from the level country above, still showed parties, — some on horses, some on ponies, on foot, or on oxen, — pressing forward to be in time for the opening ceremonies, which would commence as the lamps were lighted.

Sweetmeat-sellers — parched rice — and chenna* friers, were driving a brisk trade in the bazars, and their booths were crowded with customers receiving their several quantities hot and hot, as they could be prepared. The night would be far advanced ere the whole of the ceremonies were concluded, and, once seated, no one could move. Many a careful dame, therefore, had tied up a bundle of sweet cakes before she left home and carried them on her arm; — others, with less foresight perhaps, were making provision for the night at the stalls we have mentioned; — while flower-sellers were threading garlands of jessamine and môtea blossoms, and, indeed, of many wild flowers from fields and hedges, in lack of other materials. Sellers of Pân leaves, tobacco and betell-nut — incense-sticks and pastiles — and oil for the lights of the shrine — were all as busy as a throng of eager purchasers could make them.

Among this crowd, the Shastree, with Anunda, Radha, and Tara, were making their way to the temple

* *Chenna* — a kind of pulse.

before the assembly should render the courts impassable. With the Shastree, who was walking before the women, was Moro Trimmul, who had dined at his house, and who was now on his way with him to the recitation. Chimna, two days before, had reported to Radha that her brother was about to leave. He had, the man said, purchased a palankeen and hired a set of bearers for it, and others had been sent on the road to Sattara, so as to form relays for a night's journey; and, except himself, and one or two who were to be mounted, the other servants were to follow. Indeed, intimation of his intended departure had been made that day privately to the Shastree and to his sister by Moro himself.

He was afraid of staying, he said. Afzool Khan had arrived at Nuldroog; the force there was about to march to Sholapoor, and thence westward. If he preceded it, he could travel unnoticed, otherwise it would be impossible to move at all in its rear, or to pass it without making a considerable and inconvenient detour. As danger threatened the Maharaja, he must be present to share it; and he would return as soon as the storm, which was about to burst, had blown over.

It was no more than all had expected and some had hoped for. So long as her brother's presence was a source of no actual uneasiness to Radha, she was thankful to see him, although she feared a renewal of his threats to her as regarded Tara; but since her last interview with him, she had been possessed with a dread which beset her night and day, either that he would do something desperate, as regarded Tara, or that, in revenge for her not having assisted his licen-

tious purpose, he would put his threat, as regarded herself, — whatever it might be, — in execution.

His proposed departure was, therefore, a positive relief, and, in making the communication to her, Moro Trimmul had carefully acted his part. He deplored the recent scene and his own violence. "Tara's love," he said, "was hopeless as it was criminal; and he thanked his sister for having saved his honour in regard to that misplaced affection. Girls who married could not always keep their relatives with them: better indeed it were so, and in her case particularly; for no doubt he had enemies, and were he denounced to Afzool Khan, he should have some difficulty in escaping."

Could any one have doubted all this, or suspected that any sinister motive lay below it? Impossible! It was the literal truth in most respects, and open to no breath of suspicion.

To Anunda, and especially to Tara, the event was one of positive rejoicing. The good matron had, as we have seen, no objection to Moro Trimmul until Tara's suspicion had been aroused; and, secure in the effect of her own precautions, she had become utterly indifferent whether he remained or not. But with Tara it was otherwise; his presence was the only check on her enjoyment of daily life. Were he gone for good, her services, her household love, would be freed from the incubus which had deadened her existence while he remained, and she would be saved from any apprehension for the future. On all these considerations therefore, the female members of the Shastree's family descended to the temple that night, with joyful and thankful hearts.

We know, however, partly what Moro Trimmul had determined upon, and how he had proposed to execute it. So far as she was concerned, the girl Gunga had never faltered in her plan. The only stipulation she made with Moro Trimmul was, that she should accompany him, — an arrangement to which he was very unwilling to consent. On this point, however, he found her utterly unrelenting. When she saw his desire to be rid of her, she declared that she would not only retire from the affair altogether, but would denounce him to the Shastree and to every Bramhun in Tooljapoor. She defied his threats; and he knew, by previous experience, that no words could turn her from any purpose which she had in view, and without her co-operation the execution of the plan was quite impossible. What she proposed to do he knew not, she would not tell him; but he had provided a stout horse for her which, with his servants and the litter, were to wait in the ravine below the temple. He did not fear pursuit. The Shastree kept no horse. He could not obtain the services of any horseman from the authorities at night. Who would care for the ravings of a Bramhun, whose daughter, a priestess of the temple, had eloped, as it would be considered, with her lover? True, Anunda might revenge herself on Radha, — but to that, the Shastree, for his own honour, would hardly consent.

So they descended the steps into the lower court of the temple together; and while Tara, her mother, and the Shastree entered the vestibule to make their salutation to the Goddess, Moro Trimmul excused himself on pretence of bringing his books, and went round to the back of the shrine, where, near the wishing-

stone,* he found Gunga and several of the priestesses sitting idly on the basement, basking, as it were, in the evening sun then setting. We have said it had been a gloomy day, even now the heavens were overcast: but towards the horizon the clouds were open, and a bright gleam of red light had broken through them and fell upon the temple and sides of the glen in striking brilliancy; while the rich dresses of the girls, and their heavy gold and silver ornaments, glistened and sparkled in the glowing colour.

Gunga had apparently been giving some description of her new gold anklets; for, as Moro Trimmul turned the corner, she had slid down from her seat, and was moving her feet so as to produce a faint clashing sound.

“One need not even put on the bells with these,” she cried to her friends, “listen how well they will sound to the music, and I shall dance to-night as the processions move round.”

As she spoke, the girl swayed round several times, half circling one way, then another, tossing her arms in the air in time with the steps in which she was moving her feet. There was something in the lithe grace of her figure which struck Moro Trimmul as a new charm, and he stopped to watch it for a few moments ere he was noticed. Perhaps the thought she was not observed, perhaps the certainty that she should that night triumph over her rival, had excited Gunga more than usual; for she had thrown into her movements a spirit and beauty, — a majesty of motion,

* A large stone placed on the rear basement of the temple. Votaries are directed to place a hand on each side of it, and make a wish. If it turn to the right, the wish will be granted; if to the left, otherwise.

— as it might be called, which was inexpressibly attractive.

“If thou dance like that to-night,” cried one of the girls, “thou wilt win back that lover of thine, Gunga. If he were mine I should not quarrel with him. Ah!” she screamed, “there he is: what if he has heard me!” and, sliding hastily from their seats, she, with the rest of her companions, fled round the corner of the building.

Gunga did not move, but covered her face with the end of her garment.¹

“If I had known,” she said —

“Thou wouldst not have danced so well,” he returned, interrupting her. “By Krishna! girl, not even the Gopîs* of Muttra danced more lovingly before him than thou didst then in those few turns. Dance like that to-night, and I shall not be able to resist thee.”

“It would be a pity to turn thee from Tara now,” she said, with scorn, “so I shall not dance at all. Art thou ready?”

“Yes; I have taken leave of them, and prepared everything,” he replied. “Chimna will bring the horses and litter into the ravine, and wait near the steps for us. Thou hast the key?”

“Look,” she said, crossing to the door, which was only a few steps distant, and partly opening it, “it is already open, and the key is here in my boddice. We can lock it outside, and throw the key into the bushes. When I beckon to thee, come, for I will entice her

* The shepherdesses who, according to the legend, danced before the god Krishna.

here; but if thy heart then fail thee, Moro Pundit, beware —”

He had need in truth to do so; but there was no occasion for threats, they did but provoke him. “Enough,” he said, “we must not be seen together here. I will not fail thee.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JUST then, a company of well-equipped horsemen, in number about two hundred, rode into Afzool Khan's camp at Tandoowaree; and the same gleam of sun, which had broken through the clouds and shone on the temple at Tooljapoor, and upon Gunga as she danced, caught the tips of their long spears, — and sparkled upon matchlock barrels, the bright bosses of their shields, and the steel morion of the leader.

There was no regularity of dress or equipment among the horsemen, but the fine condition and spirit of their horses, and the manner in which they moved, proved them to be accustomed to act together, as the look of the men gave assurance of their being well tried in war. In their front was a man on a piebald horse, over which were slung two large kettledrums, which were occasionally beaten with a sonorous sound by the person who sat behind them: and two men, both round-shouldered, one of whom carried a small green standard, with a white figure of Hunoomán, the monkey-god, sewn upon it, rode beside him, one on each side. Pahar Singh was true to his word; and, entering the camp at a time when his arrival would create no particular observation, proceeded to some

vacant ground in a field on the west side of it, where drawing up his men, he bid them dismount, and, without unsaddling their horses, tether them and await his coming.

“What is the uncle about to-night?” said our old friend, Lukshmun, to the kettle-drummer, as the halt was made, “and why do we stop here? He told us we were to go on to Sholapoor, to prepare forage for the Khan’s army.”

The man laughed. “Ah, brother!” he said, “dost thou not yet understand the uncle’s ways? Now, to my perception, as he has come to the west of the camp, we shall have to go east. Home, perhaps, who knows? — the devil, — if this be one of his errands, — as it most likely is. Certain we have something to do out of the common way, else he would not have stayed apart all day nor picked the men and the mares; nor would he have brought you and Rama and the young master. Well, we shall soon see, for he has gone off to the Khan’s tents, where a Durbar appears to be going on.”

“Yes, he may be waiting for orders,” returned the hunchback. “May the Mother give him luck of them; — better luck than we had in that wild ride after Maloosray, when neither mud, nor stones, nor rivers, stopped us; and when we drew breath at the Hórtee pass, you could have heard the mares breathing and snorting a cose off! That was not the way to catch Maloosray! Yes, he had done too much that day; and the blood had got up into his eyes and head,” he continued, after a pause, and wagging his head wisely, “but he is cool now; what will he do?”

“Something,” said his companion; “what do we

care? Now, help me to get these kettles off the mare's back, Lukshmun, else I shall be whipped if he comes and finds them on. Ho, Rama, come and help, brother. What ails thee? art drunk?"

"May thy tongue rot," replied that worthy, dismounting from his mare; "who told thee I was drunk?"

"Well, then, art thou sober? if that please thee better," returned the man laughing. "But what ails thee? thou hast not spoken a word since we set out."

"No matter, my eyes are blinded with blood," returned Rama sulkily. "What we are to do to-night will be evil. I saw an omen I did not like before we set out, and three hares have crossed us since. Is that good? I tell thee I cannot see in that direction," and he pointed to the west, "for the blood that is in my eyes"

"The sun is bright enough, Rama," said Lukshmun laughing, "and the liquor was strong, brother. Thou wilt see better by-and-by, when the night falls."

"Peace, ill-born," cried Rama, aiming a blow at him with his spear-shaft; "only thou art my brother I had put it into thee."

"Ill or well born, we came of the same mother," retorted Lukshmun; "as for me, with this hunch on my back, by the Gods, thou sayest true. But go to sleep, my friend, and get the blood out of thine eyes; I like it not. He is generally right when he says this," continued Lukshmun to the kettle-drummer. "Yes, we shall have work to do, and some of us may have to sup with the Gods to-night. I pray it may not be Rama, for his wife is a devil; and as for his children — cubs of a wolf are easier to manage."

Leaving these worthies to discuss the probabilities of the night, which was also the theme of conversation among the men, we may follow Pahar Singh and his nephew to the Durbar tent; where, seated at its entrance, were Afzool Khan, his son, the Peer, and other officers of the force, enjoying, as it were, the cool breeze of evening; while reports were heard and read, papers signed, and orders given. Carpets had been spread for some: others sat on the bare ground, or on their saddle-cloths, removed for the purpose. All seemed merry, and the Khan's face was beaming with pleasure. He was, in truth, enjoying his old life, and his spirits had risen with it, with the hope, not only that Pahar Singh would not fail him, but in the capture of the chief malcontents of those provinces, that he should strike a deep blow at the root of the widespread Mahratta confederacy.

Pahar Singh and his nephew dismounted, and, advancing, offered the hilts of their swords to the Khan and those near him in succession, and while receiving and replying to their welcome, took their seats among the rest. "Our time will come, Gopal," said the chief; "wait patiently, they will send for us after the evening prayer."

He was right. As the sun set, the assembly broke up. Performing their ablutions, as a priest sang the *Azân*, or invitation to prayer, they again collected, marshalled by the Peer, who took his seat in front, looking towards Mecca. All present, joined by hundreds of others from the camp, knelt on the ground in ranks, and, obeying his movements, rose — bowed themselves — or kneeled, in unison — as the various changes of the Moslem liturgy required. When the

service was over, all, wishing each other peace, with the blessing of God and the Prophet, separated for the night.

"Come into my tent," said the Khan to Pahar Singh, "thou art welcome. What of the work?"

"I am ready," he said; "I have two hundred of my best people with me."

"And I am not behind thee; my people are ready also, and wait thy pleasure," replied the Khan.

"Who is this, father?" cried Fazil, who now entered, having remained to speak with some friends. Fazil had not recognised the Fakeer of the King's Durbar, nor the Jogi of the temple; but there was a vague impression on his mind that he had seen the face under other circumstances.

"Pahar Singh, son; dost thou not know him?" he replied.

"A brave youth, the worthy son of a brave sire, may not object to receive the offering of an old soldier," said the chief, putting out his sword-hilt to Fazil, who touched it courteously; "and he shall have his share of the work if he may, Khan Sahib."

"What work? what is this?" whispered Fazil to his father, and taking him a step aside. "Do not trust him — he is one of them — all men say so. He is not true."

"He is as true as I am," replied the Khan. "I have already proved him, and thou wilt know all by-and-by. He has received the King's pardon, and confirmation of all his possessions. Do not doubt him, for he can render important service."

"Enough, father," said Fazil aloud; and, turning to

Pahar Singh, "Where you go I will follow; but who will lead us?"

"I will lead one party, and my son here another. Come thou with me, Khan, and send thy son with mine," replied the chief promptly.

"Where are we to go?" asked Fazil.

"We cannot say till we are on the road," said the chief smiling. "'Thieves,' they say, 'have longer ears than asses.' I have one of my trumpeters here; and when it is time to move, a shrill blast will be blown: till then, eat and make your preparations, as I will mine;" and saluting them, Pahar Singh and his son walked to their horses, and, mounting them, rode away.

"And do we go with them alone, father?" asked Fazil, following the chief with his eyes, and in a tone of apprehension.

"No," said the Khan, "the order I gave for the Pæegah and the Abyssinian horse to march to-night to Sholapoor is for this service, and we shall lead them."

"Excellent," cried Fazil joyfully; "then I fear nothing; but who is this Pahar Singh? Surely I have seen him before."

"Certainly, in the Durbar at Nuldroog, when the deed of confirmation was given to him."

"I was not there, father: I heard of it."

"Ah, true! Well, then, dost thou remember the Kullundur Fakeer of the King's Durbar?"

"Protection of God!" cried Fazil; "ay, and the Jogi of the temple. Strange, I thought I had seen

those eagle eyes somewhere. I had not forgotten them. Now, father, I will go with him; but tell him not that I was at the temple. He might resent the death of his follower, and recede from us."

"An excellent caution, son; no, he shall never know it."

"What are the Abyssinians getting ready for?" asked the Peer, who came up at that moment. "Some secret service at Sholapoor, as Ibrahim Khan tells me? There is no mutiny, no disaffection, Khan?"

"It is a secret service, my friend," replied Afzool Khan smiling, "and Fazil and I are going with them; but there is no mutiny, or cause for any, and we do not go to Sholapoor."

"Where, then?" cried the Peer. "Let me come; nay, I will take no denial: whither thou goest I will follow."

"It were better not, Huzrut," replied the Khan; "it will be a rough ride, and perhaps some rough work at the end of it; nevertheless, as thou wilt. Come, sirs, we had need to eat first. Come, Bismilla!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"A DARK night, my lord," cried Pahar Singh, as the Khan and his son, accompanied by the Peer, rode up to a large fire which, kindled by dry thorns from the hedges, sent up a ruddy blaze high in the air as some loose fodder was thrown on it, displaying the tall form of the chief, as he stood there with his nephew and several others, "and ye are welcome; and here are the rest, too," he continued, as the foremost men of the body of cavalry crowded up, the strong light revealing the dark faces of the Abyssinians and the noble horses on which they were mounted. "Bismilla! as ye say, let us mount and depart."

"I have not kept you longer than I could help," said the Khan, "and the men are divided into bodies, as you directed, under their own leaders. With me are some of my people, and the noble Ibrahim Khan himself with his; and I will remain with you as you proposed. The rest of my men go with my son."

"When we get near the place, Khan," said Pahar Singh, "I will give directions. And now, beat the drum, Lukshmun, and do you and Rama look after the guides — you know the road; go on, and beat the drum occasionally to let us know where you are."

"I would it were daylight, father," said Fazil; "it will be no easy matter guiding all those men in the dark."

"Fear not, my lord," cried Pahar Singh, "we shall see better when we are away from those fires, which only blind us. The roads are dry, and your Beejapoor

horses don't fear stones. In three hours or more we shall be near the place, then a rest, and some arrangements; and after that you can give your own orders, and we, your servants, can execute them. Come, sirs, we can strike into the road at the end of the field by the trees."

"Shall we have no torch on this unsainted errand?" said the Peer, rather peevishly.

"Huzrut," said Pahar Singh, "this is hardly work for a man of God, and the roads are rough. No; we must manage with what light the sky gives us, for we have to deal with wary people, and 'twere a pity to take the Khan so long a night ride and show him no sport. If you are afraid the road will be too rough, do not come: but ride with the force tomorrow."

"Afraid!" cried the Peer contemptuously. "I, a servant of God, afraid! Astagh-fur-oolla! If there is any work to do, thou shalt see whether a priest cannot strike as hard a blow as a layman. The Khan can bear me witness that wherever he goes I am ever beside him."

"Pardon me," cried the chief laughing, "I will doubt no longer. I only fear that, in catching thieves, there may be less need for our swords than for contrivance to outwit them."

"And may not we know how, father," cried Fazil, riding to his father's side, as they reached the end of the field, "what this contrivance is, and where we go?"

"To Tooljapoor, my lord," replied Pahar Singh in a low voice, so as not to be heard by the Peer: "a nest of traitors is assembled there, and we need to take

them out of it. Keep together, now, I pray ye, gentlemen; I must ride before all for a short distance, and will rejoin ye by-and-by."

"Tooljapoor!" exclaimed the Peer, when Pahar Singh had disappeared, "a nest of idols and thieves, indeed. The haunt of a devil in the shape of an old woman, whom they all worship. I know her, with her red eyes; and when I have seen the idolatrous Kafirs bow down before her by thousands, I have longed for the sword of our lord the Prophet to be among them. 'Inshalla!' when —"

"Peace, Huzrut," said the Khan, in a soothing tone, interrupting him. "I have promised that the temple and the idol come to no harm, on condition of taking none who are there, and —"

"Well, well, Khan," returned the Peer impatiently. "I am not a Roostum, to slay all the unbelievers myself, or to overturn that abode of devils! Do as thou wilt, friend; do as thou wilt. I will not strike till thou dost — till I hear thy war-cry; after that — 'Futteh-i-Nubbi' (Victory to the Prophet) say I!"

"Ameen!" said the Khan dryly, "but I trust there will be no need of it. Come, Fazil, let us turn into the road and keep it, before the main body comes up. Listen," continued the Khan, as they rode on by an open pathway among the fields of tall corn. "His plan is for the town to be surrounded above, and a ravine below to be blocked up. He would give thee the latter work, son, as the people will try to escape thence."

"By the Prophet, an excellent plan," said the priest, — "no better could be devised. A few horsemen across the mouth of the glen will catch all that come out of

the temple like fish in a net. I know the place well. No one could get up the sides of that glen at night, — no, not one.”

“I would rather go with thee, father,” said the young man; “my place is with thee; surely any one could manage below, and if there be danger —”

“There will be no danger, son,” he returned: “these people will be caught in their own trap, worshipping their horrible idol, and will be unarmed. I shall keep outside the gates, and watch for the fugitives. Pahar Singh knows the men he wants, and will take his own people and some of the Abyssinians inside. If needs be, we can meet in the temple, but there must be no question in regard to this arrangement, which even the Peer ratifies.”

“Surely, my lord,” said the priest, “it is the fittest in all respects; and Pahar Singh, considering that he is a infidel and robber, seems a man of some propriety of manner, and is doing our lord the King good service.”

“Dost thou remember the cry, ‘Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!’ and the tall Kullundur who brought the Wuzeer’s papers to the Durbar?” asked the Khan; “that was Pahar Singh.”

“Ulla dilâyâ to léonga!” exclaimed the priest. “Yes, I remember. ‘Puna-i-Khóda!’ (protection of God) was that he? Then the night before there was the same cry in the fort as I left the King; could that have been he also? I thought it might have been some drunken Kullundur, as they said it was.”

“The night before Khan Mahomed was killed?” cried the Khan and Fazil in a breath.

"Yes, why do you ask?" returned the priest; "it was near morning."

"It was curious enough," said the Khan carelessly, "but those Kullundurs are very early; they like to be on foot when the women are grinding at their mills, to get a handful of flour."

"Yes, it was about that time," said the priest unsuspectingly, and the conversation dropped.

It was almost impossible to reunite again; for the road, which was pretty broad and free from stones at first, shrunk to a narrow path, through cornfields on each hand, and it was difficult for more than two to ride abreast with comfort; and sometimes, indeed, that even could not be managed. They passed several villages at irregular intervals, and proceeded without check or halt. Pahar Singh, for the most part, rode in front of his own troop; but returned occasionally to the Khan and his son, who, being between the advanced guard and the main body, were unimpeded by the crowding which elsewhere unavoidably existed.

Whether it was that their eyes had become more accustomed to the darkness, or that the gloom of the first part of the night had relaxed in some respect, it hardly signified; for, without betraying their presence at any distance, there was light enough to distinguish the path: and to follow, without much inconvenience, the men who preceded them. These were, as we know, ignorant of their destination: and most believed it might be Puraindah, or somewhere on the western frontier, where disturbance had occurred.

Those in advance, however, halted at length; and the rushing sound of the trampling of the heavy body of horse, which had continued through the night like

a dull hoarse roar behind, gradually grew fainter as the mass of men collected and stood still. The Khan and his son, with the Peer, were speculating as to whether that was to be the place of divergence, when Pahar Singh and his nephew rode up, and at once put an end to the doubt.

"We separate here," he said; "and this, Meah Sahib, is my son who will lead you; you will find him true and intelligent. Do not go to Sindphul," he added to Gopal Singh; "Lukshmun knows the high-road to Rutunjun by Uljapoor, and that will take you close under the pass between Sindphul and the town. Keep in the hollow near the river, and when you hear our shouts above, turn into the ravine, and get up as far as you can. We will give you time before we ourselves move into the temple."

A few words of farewell, as father and son dismounting, embraced each other; a commending of each other to God and the Prophet; and Fazil and his father separated.

The ground on which they had halted was level, and covered with thick corn-fields, which extended, almost unbroken on their left hand, to the south; but on their right, small watercourses and ravines rendered any passage between the road westward and the hills impossible. Where they stood, the hills were low, and a passage or gap in them to the right was pointed out by Pahar Singh as the direction of the main body: in front, they appeared to grow higher, and a bluff termination of one bay, which stood out, a dark gloomy mass against the sky, was pointed out by Pahar Singh to the Khan as near the town, and a light which

seemed at times to glow in the air about its brow, as the illumination of the town and the temple.

Ibrahim Khan, and several other officers of minor rank, had now joined the group, and in a few words Pahar Singh explained how they were to act. One body would turn to the right close to the town, and guard the roads towards Little Tooljapoor and Bóree; another party would spread to the left, on the plain which led to the top of the pass; the third, which would be commanded by Pahar Singh and Ibrahim Khan, would enter the town and seize the temple-gate, where there could be no egress for any one except through it, or the postern below. Up the precipices of the glen, and over the high walls of the temple, escape was impossible.

“Come, sirs,” said Pahar Singh, after a delay which, to the Khan, appeared intolerably long; “they are now near enough: follow me;” and, turning his horse up the pass, the men, taking the direction from those in advance, moved after them as fast as the stony nature of the ascent would allow.

It had been a rare night of enjoyment to the crowds assembled in the temple, and attracted by the unusual amount of entertainment, the town itself was nearly deserted by its Hindu inhabitants, who — men, women, and children of all ranks, classes, and ages — had betaken themselves to the lower court, which was as full as it could well be packed; the people sitting in rows, as we have described on a previous occasion, on the ground, or perched upon terraces, the roofs of houses, and upon that of the vestibule.

As the night wore on, and the assembly seemed in

no humour to separate, Anunda, foreseeing the confusion which would arise when the ceremonies should conclude with the last procession, had proposed to Tara, as she joined them for a while in their accustomed seat on the roof of the vestibule, to retire before the crush began; but Tara herself was in the highest spirits: she had no fear of Moro Trimmul; he had not so much as saluted her or seemed to notice her. Gunga and the other priestesses had exhibited a flattering deference, assisted her to bring garlands, and danced before her, as the processions passed round the shrine, singling her out as their object of respect — almost of adoration.

Few who had noticed Tara that night — and who did not? — ever forgot the triumphant looks and gestures of the seemingly inspired girl as she moved lightly and gracefully before the priests; or the sweet, thrilling voice, which seemed to rise high above the rest in the solemn hymns and chants of the ceremony. She felt secure in the protection of her father, and even of the other girls, who had besought her to stay till all was concluded; and the last service, more solemn and more meritorious than the preceding, would be at the sacred hour of the moon's change.

“Do thou and Radha go,” she said; “it will be well. I cannot leave anything unfinished, else the Mother will be angry, and I shall regret it. I will stay near the shrine, and return with my father.”

Anunda did not object, and she and Radha, congratulating themselves upon having left early enough to escape inconvenience, gained the gate of the temple unobserved, and made their way through the deserted streets without interruption. There was no one in the

house; all the women-servants were absent at the ceremony. The watchman who guarded the outer door of the house — one of the hereditary Ramoosees of the town — sat with two of his men in the porch, and, when the women came in, asked leave to go and see the last procession, which was readily granted; so they were left alone: but without apprehension.

From the terraced roof they looked out for some time, for the brilliant illumination lighted up the temple spires, and from the large oil-cressets, a heavy smoke arose which, floating above the temple and its glen, caught the glare below, and ascended high into the air; and so still was the town, that the measured cadence of the recitation could be heard, though not the words; while occasionally a burst of music or solemn hymn suddenly broke the silence, which was otherwise oppressive.

Radha heard her brother's voice when his turn came, and listening to it, wept silently. When should she see him again? — would absence cure the madness that now possessed him?

“Weep not, child,” said Anunda, throwing her arm around her, and guessing her thoughts; “it is well he goes. When he departs, thou wilt trust us the more, and be dearer unto us.”

CHAPTER XXX.

MEANWHILE the rites proceeded, and the recitations. Moro Trimmul was declaiming, with unusually excited gestures and eloquence, the impassioned passages which had been assigned to him, often interrupted by the cries of "Jey Kalee! Jey Toolja!" and the clapping of hands which proceeded from the people whenever a favourite sentiment or allusion to the glorious days of Hindu power occurred in the text. Before concluding his part, which was the last of the night's performance, he had withdrawn to the back of the temple, and beckoned to Gunga, and a brief colloquy passed between them.

There was no faltering in the purposes of either. Gunga had noticed the departure of Anunda and Radha with exultation which she could hardly conceal. She had gone to Tara after she resumed her position at the shrine, touched her feet, and thanked her for remaining. Other priestesses, too, had crowded round her, and, excited as they were, all united in determining that the last procession should be unusually remarkable.

"Sec," said Gunga, as she came to him, "all is ready. There is no one by the door inside; but try it, and ascertain who are outside. Be thou ready only, and trust to me for the rest. Nay, I will come with thee — look!"

The place was dark, for there was no illumination behind the temple, and by its mass a broad shadow was thrown on the recess in which the door was

situated. The girl stepped into it, followed by the Bramhun, and opened the door slightly. A number of dark forms were sitting without on a small terrace, from whence descended a flight of steps into the ravine. One rose. "Wagya!" she said in a low voice.

"I am here, lady," he replied; "is it time?"

"Not yet. When the next procession passes round the corner yonder, come out to look at it; you will not be noticed. Have you the blanket?"

"It is here," he said, holding one up; "and they are all ready yonder," and he pointed to the trees where there was a dull glow as of the embers of a small fire — "palankeen, horses and all."

"Be careful of her as you carry her out," she continued. "If she is hurt —"

The man laughed. "There is no fear," he said; "she will be carried daintily like a child, and cannot struggle in this."

"Good," she replied; "now be careful, and watch."

"Art thou satisfied?" she continued to Moro Trimul, who had remained behind the door.

"Yes; thou art true, Gunga. I am true also, and here is the zone; put it on, and let it shame hers," he replied, taking the ornament from underneath his waistcloth where he had concealed it.

"Ah!" she cried, taking it and clasping it round her waist, "thou art —"

"What is that?" he cried, interrupting her and catching her arm; "there is some disturbance without. What can it be? Listen!"

"I will look," she said; "stay thou here."

She turned the corner of the temple, but could proceed no farther. Every one had risen: and there

was a wild, struggling, heaving mass of people before her, from among which piercing shrieks of women and children mingled with hoarse cries of men, were rising fast in a dreadful clamour: while several shots, discharged in quick succession at the gate above, seemed to add to the general terror and confusion.

"They are fighting at the gate!" cried a man near her; and a cry of "The Toorks, the Toorks!" followed in agonising tones from the women.

Gunga did not hesitate. She, perhaps, of all that crowd, was the most collected. Darting to Moro Trimmul she said hastily, "Do not move — I will bring her;" and so passed round to the back of the temple. As she did so, she met Tara and several other girls, some screaming, others silent from terror, but evidently, making for the postern.

"My father! O Gunga, my father!" cried Tara piteously, "come with me, we will find him. Come; I have none but thee, Gunga, who dare seek him; come with me!"

"Yes," she said, "round this way; I saw him a moment ago. Come, we will get down the steps; I know the way up the mountain from below. Come!" cried Gunga with a shriek; and seeing that Tara hesitated, and that people were crowding through the vestibule into the dark portion of the court and hiding themselves among the cloisters, she caught her arm and dragged her forward.

Moro Trimmul saw the action, and, unnoticed in the confusion, seized Tara from behind and bore her to the postern. The girl's shrieks seemed to ring high above all others in that horrible tumult, but they were quickly stifled in the blanket thrown over her, while

she was borne rapidly down the steps by those stationed there, to whom Moro Trimmul resigned her.

"Thou canst not return, Moro," said Gunga, who had closed and locked the door unobserved and flung away the key; "let us fly for our lives. Hark! they are fighting within, and may follow us."

"O for my sword to strike in once for those poor friends!" cried Moro Trimmul with a groan. "They have been seeking me, and the rest will suffer. What art thou but liar and murderess, O Toolja! that thou dost not protect thy votaries? must they perish in thy very presence?"

"Hush, and come fast," cried Gunga, dragging him down the steps. "Fool, wilt thou die with the rest? Away! mount and ride for thy life; I will bring her after thee."

The Khan and his companions, as they had arranged, separated into three bodies as they reached the town; and as they filed off to the right and left in succession, the Khan, with the Peer and others, rode into the gate, and secured it. They had met no one outside the town; inside were a few of the royal soldiery on duty, who, themselves surprised, could have made no opposition, even had the Khan been an enemy.

Down the centre street, which was also empty, except of stragglers coming from the temple, the horsemen poured, now pressing on fast from the rear; and a body of them, dismounting in the centre of the town, rushed forward down the bazar to secure the entrance to the temple. Then some people, who were advancing, saw danger, and hastened to warn those in charge to

shut it, turning back with loud shouts, others coming on. A party of the Nimbalkur's men, who were in attendance with their chief's horses, and were around the entrance within, mounted the small bastions at the sides, while others shot the doors.

Those who reached them first were Pahar Singh and Ibrahim Khan, with some of the Abyssinians and other followers, mingled together, each striving to be foremost.

"Open the gate; we mean no harm," cried Pahar Singh in Mahratta; "we are on the King's service, and if you resist, your blood be on your own heads!"

"We will admit no one," cried a voice from the bastion. "Go! ye are robbers, and we will fire on ye."

"I say it again," returned the chief, "we are a thousand men, and I cannot save you if you hesitate. Open the gate!"

There was no reply, but several matchlocks were pointed from the parapet above, which was loopholed.

"Hast thou the axe, Rama?" asked the chief.

"It is here," said the man, drawing a heavy axe-head from his waist: and, coolly fitting a helve to it, lifted it above his head. "Shall I?"

"Strike!" cried Pahar Singh.

Several heavy blows fell on the gate, and a man called out from the bastion, "Desist, or we fire."

But Rama heeded no warning. Again two crashing blows, struck with his full force, had splintered some of the wood-work, and he had uplifted his arm for another, when one of the men at a lower loophole fired. Rama swayed to and fro for a moment, and, falling heavily to the ground, the blood gushed from his mouth in a torrent.

Pahar Singh did not speak, but he gnashed his teeth in fury. Rama, of all his inferior followers, was the one most devoted — and was brave to recklessness. The chief saw that the shot must have been deadly. He might have shared the same fate; but the men without, his own as well as the Abyssinians, returned the fire, and distracted the aim of those within.

“By —” and the oath was lost in the clamour — he cried, putting his sword between his teeth, seizing the axe, and striking at the door with his whole force, “ye shall die, sons of vile Mahratta mothers. Every one of ye shall howl in hell for that poor fellow.”

Blow after blow followed; and as the panel near the lock broke under them, a number of the chief's men and the Abyssinians rushed against the door, which gave way under their combined weight and force, and entrance was effected.

On the noise of the first shouts reaching them, the Khan, the priest, and others, rushed down the street, and arrived at the scene of action. The firing was increasing, and several of the Khan's followers and Abyssinians had fallen. Some were already dead, others wounded; and, wedged as they had been in a mass, every shot had told on them, while those who defended the gate could not be seen. Its being forced, however, changed the feature of the contest; and the Khan, who, in the heat of the excitement, forgot his caution and warning to the men, now shouted his battle-cry; while the priest, struggling in with the rest, cried to the men — “Bismilla! — in the name of God and the Prophet — slay, slay — ye true believers! Heed not death — ye will be martyrs! Let not the

Kaffirs live, who have killed the faithful. Send them to hell, to perish with their devil's idols. Kill! kill!"

With such cries, had men of Islam been hounded on by their priests before. Was he to be less? Here, in the very holiest of infidel temples, should the might of Islam be felt.

But, in truth, the men needed but little excitement; what was there before them was enough. Who did not remember that it was a Jéhâd, a war of the faith, which had been preached to them daily? Who did not remember that to slay infidels in war earned the blessing of the Prophet and paradise? So, with Pahar Singh leading them, his sword between his teeth, and striking down men right and left with every blow of his axe, the infuriated soldiery rushed in a body down the steps and into the large court below.

Who can describe the scene? Shrieking women and helpless men strove to fly before them, but in vain; and the bloody work of their enemies, as they pressed forward, hewing with their long sharp weapons at the unresisting masses was quick and deadly. Pahar Singh saw Nimbalkur and several other chiefs standing resolutely before the entrance to the shrine, sword in hand, awaiting the onset. "Yield," he cried, "your lives will be spared; why shed blood? Jey Rao, be wise, down with your sword;" — and for an instant the parties stood opposite to each other glaring defiance. But bloodshed was not yet to be stayed. Some of the infuriated Abyssinians again dashed into the mass of the people with a shout of "Deen, Deen!" striking indiscriminately at all before them, and the Mahratta chiefs were swept into the temple. As they were followed, Vyas Shastree, who, remembering his

old skill in weapons, and unable to control himself, had seized sword and shield and mixed with the rest, — struck at a huge negro who was foremost, and wounded him severely.

“Dog of a Kaffir,” cried the man, grinding his teeth, “get thee to hell!” and had not his arm caught that of a fellow-soldier who was near, depriving the cut of its force, Vyas Shastree had spoken no more. As it was, the blow descended upon his bare head, — he fell senseless among the crowd of dead and dying, — and those who entered the temple, trampled over him as one of the slain.

Pahar Singh’s object was to save the shrine if possible, but he felt himself helpless against the crowd of Moslems who, headed by the priest, now filled the vestibule, shouting their fanatic cry of “Deen, Deen!” Life was dear to him, dearer than the idol, for which, in truth, he had no particular veneration, though he had dread. “If thou canst not save thyself, Mother,” he muttered, “I am not going to die for thee,” and, stepping aside, the men of Islam pressed on.

The priest was among the foremost to enter the sanctum, where two old Bramhuns, cowering beside the altar, were instantly slain; and, seizing the necklaces of pearls and precious stones, he tore them away from the neck of the image, with one hand flinging them out among the people, while with the other he overthrew it, and, trampling it under foot, spat upon the face in scorn and contempt.

If the men in the temple courts, impelled by religious fury, showed no mercy, and, hunting unresisting men and women into dark corners, slew them indiscriminately till the areas were filled with dead and dying,

lying in heaps as they had fallen by the sword or had been trampled down; those who had remained outside were, in their turn, no more human. Under the cry of "Deen, Deen! — for the faith, for the faith!" more cruelty was perpetrated in Tooljapoor than it has ever since forgotten; and daylight revealed a scene of plunder, rapine, and destruction, such as may be conceived — but hardly described.

Anunda and Radha were safe at home, as we have already related; when, after an indistinct murmur, for which she could not account, the shots at the temple gate were suddenly heard; and, looking from the terrace, they saw the confusion in the court commence. Both were brave, but the terror of Anunda for her husband and Tara, was fast paralysing her senses.

"I will die here," she said; "take the wealth and jewels and leave me. Escape as thou canst, Radha; hide thyself, Moro will come and seek thee."

But Radha would not leave her; and, descending to the lower apartments, they sat cowering in their chamber, shivering at every sound, and, having extinguished the light, remained in utter darkness.

"Lady, lady!" cried a man's voice in the outer verandah; "where art thou?"

"It is Jánoo Näik,* the Ramoosee," said Anunda in a whisper. "God reward him for coming; he is true; Radha, let us go with him!"

"Lady, lady! the house is not safe! come, come," continued the man earnestly; "leave all — my people will guard it — only come. Your honour is more than wealth, and you can only save it by flight."

* Chiefs among Ramoosees are called Näik.

The terror of violence brought them forth. "Follow me," he said; "here are twenty men to guard the house — no one will molest them."

The women followed silently, sobbing as they went. The Ramoosee led them northwards out of the town to the edge of the great ravine, and descended a steep path, which they knew led to a spring in one of the broad steps or ledges of the mountain, near which was a recess in the rock familiar to both. "Stay here," he said; "no one can see you. I must return: here, I should only betray you."

"At least, take away our ornaments," said Anunda; "we dare not keep them. Keep them thyself, or hide them somewhere;" and the women hastily took off all they wore, and laid them on the ground before him.

Jánoo sat down on his hams, and counted them deliberately. "There are thirteen pieces, large and small, gold and silver together. Yes, they are safe with me. Now, take my blanket, though it be a Mang's;* sit in it till daylight. Ye can bathe afterwards and be clean. I will come early if I can, and take ye down the hills to Afsinga, or else send my son."

So saying, and without waiting for a reply, he left them, ascended the path rapidly, and disappeared over the ledge of the mountain; and the women remained, shivering with fright and cold, and listening in terror to the shots, which rose above the confused roar of screams and shouts proceeding from the town.

On the other side, in the ravine, the progress of the band who carried off Tara was but a short one.

* *Mang* — the lowest caste among Dekhan Hindus.

Struggling vainly with her captors, she found resistance hopeless. Borne in the arms of two men, others held her hands and feet; and over her one of the thick coarse blankets of the common people had been thrown, which prevented cry of any kind. Tara felt that the men were gentle with her, and in spite of her terror, she retained her senses completely. She was aware that she was taken down the steps, and hurried along rapidly at a run; then there was a pause, and she was thrown into — rather than placed in — a palankeen, the doors shut to violently, and kept closed. They were carrying her away. Who could it be but Moro Trimmul, that was to leave that night? Even now her father might hear her screams, and terror lent strength to her voice; but in vain — succour from him was indeed hopeless.

As may be supposed, nothing had prevented the progress of the party under Fazil and Gopal Singh; and the latter, a pleasant companion, had amused the young Khan with anecdotes of his uncle, and of their border life. He knew the ground perfectly, and they soon reached their destination; and while part of his men were drawn up between the rivulet and the pass, and some even ascended the pass itself, he conducted Fazil into the temple glen, which turned to the right out of the main ravine. At its mouth was some level ground, and the horsemen had just occupied it when the attack began above.

It would have been impossible for the bearers of Tara's litter to carry it over that rough path in the dark; and as she had been put into it, a torch was lighted, which was instantly seen by Fazil and Gopal Singh.

“Not a word from any one,” cried the latter; “some one is escaping. They cannot get away from us. Now, Meah, be careful.”

“Strike, if any one resists,” said Fazil to the men about him; “but, it is better to take them alive. Look, ’tis a litter — who can it be? Peace all of you; be silent!”

The gloom of night and some bushes concealed them, and the advancing party saw and suspected nothing. Moro Trimmul was riding in front, Gunga following him. The palankeen was behind with the Ramooses and servants around it on all sides. The baggage-ponies had already gone on before.

“Stop!” cried Fazil, as he laid hold of the Bramhun, and held his naked sword over him. “Who art thou? — nay, struggle or attempt to escape, and I will kill thee. — A Bramhun? Who art thou?”

Moro Pundit had had no time to dress himself for the journey. His clothes were in the palankeen. Naked to the waist, with his hair streaming about his shoulders, he had come as he had been reciting. He had no weapons, nor means of resistance; and, though a powerful man, was no match for Fazil, who held him like a vice.

“Moro Trimmul, by the Gods!” exclaimed Gopal Singh, who recognised him as the light from the torch fell upon him. “Ah, Maharaj!” he added, “you don’t know me, but I have seen you before.”

“Then we are indeed fortunate, friends,” said Fazil joyfully; “and who is in the litter?”

“My wife,” said the Bramhun sullenly; “do as ye will with me, but let her and the servants go on.”

“Then thou hast married only lately, Pundit?” said

Gopal Singh dryly; "thou hadst no wife three days ago. We had as well look at her, at all events, Meah, and prevent her screaming."

"Open the door! release me! release me!" cried Tara from within in piteous accents. "Let me go! let me go! Ah, sirs, for your mothers' honour, release me!"

"Art thou his wife?" asked Fazil, dismounting and opening the door of the palankeen; "if so, fear not, we have no war with women."

"Not so; I am not his wife," cried Tara hastily, disengaging herself from the litter, and throwing herself at Fazil's feet. "O sir, save me! Noble sir, by your mother's, by your sister's honour, save me from him; he would have carried me away. Nay, I will not rise till you tell me you will take me to my father. O return with me and rescue him, else he will be slain! Come, I will lead ye back; he is a priest of the temple!"

"It cannot be, girl," said Fazil, more disturbed by Tara's beauty, and more agitated than he cared to acknowledge to himself. "It cannot be till daylight, and no one will touch your father if he be a Bramhun; so sit in the litter and fear not. And thou art not his wife?" and he pointed to Moro Trimmul.

"O no, my lord," said the girl trembling; "you have been sent by the Holy Mother to deliver me, else he would have carried me away by force. Do not give me to him, I beseech you."

"Fear not," said Fazil; "no harm shall come to thee here. There is more in this matter than we can now find out, friends," he continued to those about

him; "but bind that Bramhun on his horse, and tie it to one of your own."

"Ah sir, I will do that beautifully," cried Lukshmun, "and with his own waistcloth too. But, friends, see that my wife does not run away, while I am busy for the master there — to my mind she is the handsomest of the two."

It was Gunga who, knowing the path, had turned from it when Moro Trimmul met Fazil, and, slipping from her horse, had tried to escape among the bushes; but the quick eye of Lukshmun had detected her, and he had seized and dragged her forward.

"May earth fall on thee, dog!" cried the girl, struggling with him, "foul hunchback as thou art, let me go."

"Not so," he said, "I know thee, Gunga. My lord, she is one of the Moorlees of the Mother up yonder; and are not all women taken in war, slaves?"

"Peace," cried Fazil; "sit quiet there, girl; move not, else I will have thee tied. Ah, that will do, friend," he continued, as Lukshmun finished his careful binding up of Moro Trimmul; "you have not hurt him?"

"Master," replied the man, wagging his head, "it is a plan of my own, and while he is helpless to move, he is in no pain. Is it not so, Maharaj? Now sit quiet on your horse, Punditjee, while I look after my wife; she has a noble gold belt, which she has promised me. Is it not so, O lotos-face?"

"My lord," said Gopal Singh interrupting, "the disturbance above grows worse — had we not as well send the women and others to the rear? If there is any rush this way, they may come to harm."

"A good thought, friend," replied Fazil.

"It is no use," said Gunga, "the door is locked, and the key was thrown away: no one can escape from thence by this road."

So they remained, while the tumult increased to a roar which filled the glen, above which shots were now and then heard; then fell to a dull murmur, and finally seemed to die away in the distant town. The temple lights became dim, and went out one by one, and the ravine grew dark. Then the stars shone out, and after a while dawn broke, and the mountain, and the rugged precipices of the glen and town above, were gradually revealed in the grey light.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A WEARY delay and suspense had been endured till the day broke. Tara had been told, in kind and respectful tones, by the young Khan, whose protection she had claimed, to rest in the palankeen, and he had considerately shut the door to prevent annoyance to her by his men. So she sat undisturbed, but listening to the fearful din from the town and temple, shuddering at every cry and shriek; and when all was at last silent, speculating upon the probable fate of her father, and of her mother and Radha, in a dreamy uncertainty, mingled with extreme terror.

What had happened? That the town had been surrounded by the King's troops there could be no doubt; yet why the violence? Who could the young leader of the party be, by whom she had been arrested, who spoke her own Mahratta tongue so softly and so

well? A strange thing, for he was evidently a Mahomedan of rank. He had looked so grand and beautiful as the torchlight flashed upon his bright steel morion and silvery coat of mail. She had never seen aught like him before. He might resemble the God Ramchunder, she thought, when he went to battle with the demon Rawun; and she shut her eyes at a vision at once so beautiful and so terrible. Her gentle mind was all confusion, mingled with dreadful and undefined anticipation of misery; yet one thing was clear, she had been saved by that noble youth from Moro Trimmul and Gunga's united design — saved from worse than death.

The torch carried with her palankeen had been extinguished in the surprise, but the torchbearer had been detained, and she could see him sitting near the litter pouring a drop or two of oil upon it now and then to keep it alight, yet without flaring. Once it did blaze up, and revealed for an instant the faces of the bearers sitting on their hams in a group, and the horsemen with Fazil in his bright armour standing around them; but all were strangers, else she would have spoken again — anything to divert her brooding thoughts and misery.

As the grey light of dawn increased she could see, through the small Venetian blinds of the litter, that the royal horsemen stood in groups at a short distance, all with their swords drawn. One party watched Moro Trimmul, who, tightly swathed in a cotton sheet so that he could not use his arms, sat upon his horse, which was tied to another. Gradually she could see his features, gloomy and stern; savage, indeed, as he writhed in the bandage which he was powerless to re-

move. Near him, on a strong pony, sat the girl Gunga, covered with a coarse white sheet, which had been thrown over her. A short stout man was holding her pony's head, and his own horse stood beside her. Around were the soldiers, all mounted, and apart from them their young leader, on a powerful white horse, which stood still, tossing its head, and champing its bit occasionally.

Past this figure, upon which her eyes rested wonderingly as the growing daylight revealed it more fully, she looked up to the glen, and temple, and town, where all was still — a silence she thought like death. The usual sounds of waking life, the music at the temple, which always played as daylight broke, the earliest morning hymns, and clash of cymbals, were all wanting. They were at the mouth of the glen in a small paddock, near an old temple; she knew the place perfectly, and many a time had wandered there with her mother, or, with other girls, in search of flowers, and pieces of frankincense from the ancient trees which grew among some ruined walls. If the service in the temple had not been interrupted, it would have been proceeding at this hour, and the sound would come clearly to the place where they were; but the stillness was not broken. The men about her occasionally conversed in low tones or in whispers, but were for the most part silent.

It was now light enough to move, and the young Khan, calling to the bearers, bade them take up the litter and proceed. They were about to do so, when Tara again renewed her piteous appeal to him.

"O do not take me away!" she cried, "O release me! I can find my way up the mountain. My father

was in the temple; my mother and all my people look for me. O noble sir, what am I to you? let me go; by your honour do not deceive me!"

"Not so, lady," said Fazil, stooping from his horse towards the litter. "It is not fit for thee to go alone after last night's disturbance; and there are rough folk up yonder, for whom I will not answer with one so fair as thou art. No one ever relied in my honour that was deceived. Still trust, lady, and I will see thee safe amongst thy people; fear not."

"O noble sir," said Tara sobbing, "I do trust, I will trust; but O, give me not to him yonder, who is bound. He would have carried me away, and dishonoured me. O sir, you have been my preserver from this danger, and I kiss your feet. My father is Vyas Shastree, the chief priest of the temple, and we are well known. Take me to him, or send for him, and he and my mother will bless you. O noble sir, deceive not a helpless girl!"

"Vyas Shastree!" cried Gopal Singh, who had overheard the latter part of Tara's passionate appeal; "then this, Meah Sahib, is his daughter Tara, the strange new Moorlee; so beautiful that they say she bewitches all men who see her. Art thou not she, O girl? art thou not Tara, the Moorlee? Speak truly."

"I am Tara," she replied, "but no Moorlee. I serve only in the temple."

"It is a lie," cried Gunga sharply; "she is a Moorlee, and one of us; do not believe her. Was she not dancing in the temple when the disturbance began? He carry her off, Meah Sahib?" she cried to Fazil Khan, pointing to Moro Trimmul. "I tell you we had all arranged to go together, and because she

is more dainty than I am, he got a palankeen for her."

"Peace, girl," cried Fazil; "be not shameless."

"O noble sir," exclaimed Tara, interrupting him, "heed her not; what matter what she says? only take me to my father, then you will know the truth. Indeed, indeed, I am no Moorlee like her; and forgive me for saying so much, but you are kind, and so I speak."

"Who is this girl?" said Fazil sternly to Moro Trimmul. "What art thou doing with her? Is she Vyas Shastree's daughter?"

"I give no answer; find out for yourself. Why do you ask of me?" replied Moro Trimmul sullenly. "Cut me to pieces, but you get no speech from me."

"It is no use, Meah, asking him," said Gopal Singh; "let us take her up into the town, and see after her people."

"Not yet," returned Fazil. "My father will most likely encamp at that village yonder, among the trees. Let these persons remain here, and we will go and see what they have been doing in the town. Stay thou here, Shêre Khan, with the men. See that no one disturbs this girl; keep the others apart, and wait for us by the trees yonder. Fear not," he continued to Tara; "I will bring news of thy people; keep close within the palankeen, and no one can harm thee;" and so saying, he turned his horse in the direction of the pass.

"Fear not, lady," said Shêre Khan, a fine old soldier, "he will be as good as his word. Ay, look after him; the bravest, gentlest, most faithful master that ever men served under. Yes, trust to his honour;

he will not deceive thee, he is too brave and too innocent for that."

For the time it was a sweet assurance to Tara, and one utterly unexpected; for Mussulmans — or Toorks, as the Mahrattas called them — had hitherto been terrible people in her imagination; but the dread for her father lying at her heart had as yet no relief, and her suspense and terror continued.

Leaving Tara with his party below, Fazil Khan, with Gopal Singh, and others, rode up the pass, as soon as the rugged path could be safely traversed. What had happened in the temple? It was clear there had been some fighting — that Fazil had expected from the Mahratta chiefs; they would hardly be taken without resistance, and there was an undefined dread lying at his heart, that if the fanatical spirit of the men had been aroused by the Peer, some evil might have been done to the Hindu people or to the temple. Again and again he regretted that that holy person had not been sent on to Sholapoor with the main body of the force, and blamed himself for not having foreseen mischief.

Fazil Khan by no means shared the grim detestation of Hindus as infidels, in which his father gloried; and he had been no willing listener to the denunciations poured out against them by the Peer and other preachers, in the sermons on the Jehâd or religious war, which had been preached at the capital and in camp. True, his father and the Peer, as well as others, resented the mingling, under the green banner of the Faith, of Mahratta infidels with Moslems; but Fazil knew them to be good and true soldiers; and his friendship for Bulwunt Rao, and experience of his

devotion, had changed the young Khan's feelings very materially. Perhaps, also, Bulwunt Rao's character had, in some respect, softened the Khan's dislike of "infidels," "Kaffirs," as he called them; but on occasions, the old fanatical spirit would break through all restraint, and urge him to deeds for which he had but little remorse. Too justly, therefore, Fazil feared this might have been such an occasion.

They gained the summit of the pass as the sun's rays, rising through lines of cloud which hung over the eastern horizon, spread like a rosy fan into the blue and yellow sky above, tinging the lower lines of cloud with tints of scarlet and gold, against which the dark purple masses of mountain stretching into the plain stood out in bold relief. About the space between the town and the edge of the mountain, some of the Abyssinian horsemen were distributed in groups; while further on were other bodies of men, some mounted, others leading their horses up and down. The Nagarchees, or kettle-drummers of each body, were beating the assembly vigorously, and single men were rapidly arriving from other quarters and joining their divisions. Fazil rode on with his companions, looking for somebody he knew, who might give him news of his father, when, from behind a mass of buildings which formed the corner of a street outside the town gate, a cavalcade approached, led by men of his own Paigah, and in the midst of which rode his father, the Peer, and Ibrahim Khan, the leader of the Abyssinians, accompanied by the tall, martial figure of Pahar Sirgh.

A hearty greeting ensued from all, and Fazil saw that his father and the Peer were flushed with excitement, while in the severe threatening aspect of

Pahar Singh, there was an expression which he could not define, which might be either habitual — the result of the night's fatigue, or something more — perhaps grief.

“Come on, my son,” cried the Khan cheerily; “we have ordered up provisions for the men, and can rest here in the Gosai's Mutt, before we ride on to Sholapoor, and get some kicheri cooked, which our friend Ibrahim Khan has promised to see after. Inshalla! we sent many a Kaffir to hell last night before his time,” he continued, twisting up his mustaches, “and Tooljapoor will long remember firing upon Afzool Khan's men and killing true believers! but we did not get that Bramhun of Sivaji's, — what was his name, Pahar Singh? — though he was there when we came, and that was a pity. M — M — M — —”

“Moro Trimmul,” said Pahar Singh interposing.

“Ay, that was it — thanks, friend; and what hast thou done, my son?”

“I have taken him! — that Moro whom ye sought,” returned Fazil, “with two women and their servants.”

“Now Alla be praised!” cried the Peer, “that he fell into thy hands, Meah, for that crowns our work; and alive?”

“Alive and unhurt, Huzrut.”

“Are you sure it is he?” asked Pahar Singh.

“There are as many Moro Trimmuls as there are Tannajee Maloosrays!”

“Your nephew says it is. He, and a humpbacked servant or retainer of yours, both knew him,” returned Fazil.

"Yes, uncle," cried Gopal Singh, who now joined the group, "it is the true man; but he is sullen, and will not speak. We have left him below, safely bound; Lukshmun is watching him as a dog watches a rat, and there are all the young Khan's men and ours with him."

"Go, bring him up," said Afzool Khan; "let us examine him, and take his statement."

"Good, my lord; my nephew will go for him, if a Hindu may be trusted," said Pahar Singh, as Fazil thought, with a sneer.

"Certainly," replied the Khan, "let him be brought."

"And the women, Meah?" asked Gopal Singh.

"Not yet," he replied; "let the Bramhun come first;" and the young man, turning his horse, galloped towards the pass.

"What women?" asked the Khan carelessly.

"Two who were with him," replied his son. "I will tell you of them afterwards."

The house they were going to was only a few yards distant; Ibrahim Khan rode on, saluting them as he passed, and they dismounted and entered. "Embrace me, son," said the Khan, before he seated himself, "and give thanks to God for the victory. Alla has been merciful, and has ——"

"Yes, he has permitted his servants to do vengeance on the infidels," said the Peer, interrupting Afzool Khan; "the idols of Satan have been overthrown, and their altar sprinkled with the blood of their infidel priests."

"Protection of God!" cried Fazil; "the temple has

not been harmed, nor its people, I trust? We had no war against priests, father."

"Not the temple, Meah — not the temple," returned the Peer; rubbing his hands together complacently. "It would take a good deal of gunpowder to blow it up, and we have none; but for the rest, the work was well done. Inshalla! they will not be able to renew their devil-worship; and when the King, on whom be peace, gives permission, I — I, Peer Syud Bundagee — will come and destroy this house of idols, and build a mosque upon it; and true believers will be feasted with cow's flesh slain within its precincts. Ul-humd-ul-illa, who hath given us the victory!"

"Father," said the young man gravely, "is it as he says?"

"Even so, my son, and thank God for it; and I have vowed to give a thousand rupees to the work, in memory of the victory," replied Afzool Khan.

Fazil turned away, sick at heart. What evil might not have been done? more, even, than his fears had anticipated.

"And thou hast no congratulation for thy father, Fazil?" asked the Khan, in a tone of disappointment.

"O father, a thousand that thou art safe through last night," cried Fazil, "and —"

"No rejoicing for victory over the infidels?" asked the priest, with a sneer. "Thou hast a rare sympathy with them, I know, Meah Sahib; is this seemly in a Mussulman?"

"Not with rebels, not with the King's enemies," returned Fazil quickly; "but I never warred against priests and women yet, nor did he. What hath been done, father?"

“Well, son,” replied the Khan, “they would not let us in after those Mahratta rebels, and Pahar Singh there broke down the door; meanwhile some of our men had been shot, for they fired first, and Huzrut there cried ‘Deen, deen!’ and we all rushed in pell-mell and cleared the court; that is all.” He said this apologetically, Fazil thought, and feared to tell the rest.

“Will you come with me, Pahar Singh?” said the young man; “you know the place; I would see it.”

“Yes, I will come,” said the chief rising, and sighing as he replied; “perhaps it could not be helped, and yet some things were done which will stir Hindu minds sorely throughout the country. Come, Meah Sahib; it is not a pleasant sight, but I will go with you.”

“Keep the prisoner till I return, father,” continued Fazil; “I would fain hear what he says for himself.”

“If thou wilt go, son, return quickly,” replied the Khan, “but I had rather thou didst not. What is the use of it; what is done is done;” and Fazil thought his father sighed.

“I would rather see the worst with my own eyes, father,” replied Fazil, “than hear lies from others. Come, sir,” he added to Pahar Singh, who waited for him, “I attend you.”

“He will be vexed at what he finds,” said the Khan when Fazil was gone; “and it will distress his young heart. He has never seen the like, and it requires older eyes, like thine and mine, Huzrut, to look on such sights unmoved.”

“Ay, true,” replied the Peer; “but one or two battle-fields will be enough to cure him, and methinks

he is over-tender to infidels. Well, we shall see what he advises about this Bramhun, for he is clear in council. The man ought to die."

"He will not care about the men," said the Khan musing abstractedly, "but about the women who are dead; and that loving heart of his mother's which she gave him, will be grieved. God knows I would not have had it so."

"Ameen!" said the Peer, "nor I, Khan. But they were only Kafirs after all, and did not Feróze Shah, of blessed memory, make a pile of infidels' heads before the gate of Gulburgah fort?"

Afzool Khan did not answer - - he appeared ill at ease: and the priest, taking his beads from his waist-band, settled himself on his heels, with his eyes shut, assuming an attitude of complacent meditation on things divine, as they passed rapidly through his fingers.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FAZIL and Pahar Singh went out together into the street. The latter led the way through the gate and along the main streets of the town to its centre, where a busy, motley scene now presented itself. The Amil, or local civil officer, was seated in his Cucherri, or hall of audience, surrounded by a crowd of people to whom he was giving orders for flour, grain, butter, sheep, forage, and the other countless necessities of the force which had so suddenly come upon him. They did not pause there, but turned down the main street leading to the temple, the gilded spires and other portions of

which appeared at the end of it, the craggy sides of the glen, and, beyond all, the precipices of the Ram Durra, which were veiled in the blue morning vapour.

Now there was no doubt of what had happened. The pavement of the bazar, worn smooth by the naked feet of thousands of pilgrims and devotees in centuries past, was stained with blood which, as they advanced, was still wet and slippery in many places. Already had the town scavengers begun to wash it away, and were pouring vessels of water on the flags and sweeping them with brooms. A few shops only, were open for the sale of flour, butter, and groceries, the owners of which sat within, with scared faces, evidently in the direst terror.

"They lay thick here," said Pahar Singh — the first words he had spoken, "but have been removed, and they are burying them yonder, outside, all together — infidels, as your father would say, and true believers. But stay, Meah Sahib, there is one of my poor fellows lying here in a shop. I thought him dead, but he is alive as yet; let us look at him. A poor fellow," he said, repressing a sob; "a poor hunchback, but he was like a dog to me — not a man. Perhaps he may know me now, or he may be dead; let us see."

Pahar Singh turned to the right into a small courtyard, in an open verandah of which several rough-looking men were sitting beside a body laid on the ground, and partly covered with a bloody sheet. They rose as the chief advanced, and saluted him.

"How is he now, Nursinga?" asked Pahar Singh; "will he live? Rama," he continued, bending over the man, whose eyes were evidently glazing fast, "Rama, dost thou know me — the master?"

The man looked vacantly around, hearing the words, smiled, and felt about with his hands, as if to clutch what it was denied him to see. Suddenly, and as the chief put his own hand into that which sought it, the dying eyes brightened, and met those of his master in a scared, wild gaze at first, but one which softened tenderly into a look of rapt affection. He tried to speak, but it was hopeless; to raise himself by drawing his master's hand to him, and clasping that he had in both his own — but in vain. The lips moved, and Pahar Singh bent his head down to listen. The bystanders could hear nothing; but Pahar Singh said in his ear loudly, "Yes, it shall all be done — all; fear not."

It was enough. Perhaps the man might have lingered a while if he had not been excited; but the old chief's words had suddenly rallied the flickering lamp of life. It had sparkled for a moment, and fell back, dull and smouldering, into the socket; the eyes again glazed, and the clasped hands relaxed their grasp, tried once more to recover it, failed, and fell powerless beside him, and the rugged bronzed features were fast growing into the strange majesty of Death.

"It is no use staying," said the chief, drawing away his hand to brush the tears from his eyes, "he will not know me again. Come, Meah; I, too, am growing a fool. See to him all of you. If his brother come, well and good; if not, bury him decently, and not with the rest."

"Have you any retainer who is loved and trusted as you would trust a faithful hound?" asked Pahar Singh, suddenly turning round as they were walking out of the court. "Ah! I forget, dogs are impure to you Mussulmans," he continued; "forgive me."

“Nay, no forgiveness is needed,” replied Fazil. “Yes, I have one as true and faithful to me as that poor fellow was to you.”

“What is he?” asked the chief abruptly — “Mus-
sulman or Hindu?”

“Hindu,” replied Fazil; “a Mahratta.”

“A Mahratta,” cried the chief; “one of the enemies of your race? I marvel, and yet am glad. Yes, be true to him and he will never deceive you; he will give his life for you. Only be true, as I have been to mine. ‘Two in a month,’ he muttered to himself; ‘one there, one here; my best and truest. What matter, Meah?’” he continued aloud; “sooner or later the message reaches us all. Mine might have come last night, yet I am here.”

Was this the old Jogi of the temple of Beejapoor? the sordid lover of gold, the pitiless robber and murderer? A strange contradiction in character as in acts; and now, sobbing as he walked out into the street, Fazil could see that tears were wet on his cheek, and glistened on the grizzled mustache where they had fallen.

“He was shot here,” said the chief, pausing at the gate, “while breaking it in with his axe, and the shot came from that loophole. When I got in, the man who fired it died with a blow where he sat, so thou wert avenged, my poor hound. But what use is it, Meah, now my slave is gone? Come; you have already seen enough of this misery, and what is below there is worse. Will you go on?”

“Yes, I will go,” returned Fazil. “I would know if one Vyas Shastree was slain, with others.”

“Vyas Shastree, Meah!” cried the chief. “Why, he was in the temple. I saw him. Ah, the poor Shastree, I hope not, for I knew him well -- a learned Pundit, sir; indeed come, search for him is at least an object.”

It was a terrible sight as they advanced. Why dwell on it? Many bodies had been removed, and all the wounded; but many still remained, men and women together, as yet unclaimed, and there was blood everywhere, glistening and drying in the sun. Near the temple porch were several bodies in a heap. Pahar Singh looked at them all narrowly, but the Shastree was not among them. One of the temple attendants was sitting in the vestibule, weeping in stupid grief; the chief shook him roughly, roused him, and he got up.

“Didst thou see Vyas Shastree?” he asked; “was he hurt last night?”

“He was killed,” said the man, “there,” and he pointed to the entrance. “He was fighting, and a negro killed him. Ere day broke, they took him up and carried him away.”

“Dead?” asked Fazil.

“Dead,” said the man, - - “quite dead; I helped to put him upon the litter they brought for him, and they have burned him by this time.”

“And his wife?” asked the chief, “Anunda Bye?”

“Seek her at her house,” said the man, turning away. “She was not here, nor Radha Bye either. His daughter Tara was here, but no one knows what became of her.”

It was enough. The Shastree was dead. Another man who advanced from behind the shrine said the

same, and Fazil need ask no more. He looked around — the place was slippery with blood, and dark, except for a dim lamp in the shrine. He looked in, — the altar was bloody, and the image, its rich clothes torn and dabbled in blood, lay beneath, on its back, as it had fallen. The dim ray of the lamp fell upon it, upon a few gold ornaments still about its neck and arms, and upon the weird ruby eyes, that seemed to him to glow with a fiendish expression of malice.

“Evil spirit,” he said turning away, “if thou art in being among the devils, thou art at least helpless to rise, or to avenge thyself — lie there for ever. Why does the blessed Alla suffer thy abomination!”

“Come away,” cried Pahar Singh to the young man. “Faugh! the place is evil; come — go not near the Mother, she may hurt thee.”

“Do you believe in her?” asked Fazil.

“I fear her,” was the reply; “she is very greedy and very terrible: she takes life for life, and more besides. Come — we will see after these women: I know the Shastree’s house.”

Life for life, and more besides! Those words came back with a strange vividness upon Fazil’s memory in after times. Then, they but excited a shudder of regret at the superstition which suggested them.

“O that I had come up here, instead of going below!” said Fazil to his companion. “Had I but known the place, I would have done so. O my father, why was this done?”

“It could not have been stayed, Meah. As they say in Persian, ‘Shooduni-Shooduni’ — what is to be, is to be,” returned Pahar Singh; “nay, for that matter, why did I bring your father and his men at all?”

Some of those pig-headed servants of Nimbalkur's began it by shutting the gate, and killing my poor Rama; and after the Peer Sahib's cry of 'Deen! deen!' you might as well have tried to stop the Beema in flood as the men. All I could do was to save Nimbalkur and others, while the Peer was pulling down the Mother from her altar, and spitting on her. Aha! holy priest! we shall see who is strongest, the Mother or thee. Bless God for it Meah, that thy father had nothing to do with that; and when the Peer proposed to send for cows to slay there, he would not have it done."

Fazil sighed. It was not that he feared the Goddess Mother, though of her power then, as now, there was an undefined dread among Mahomedans, and ceremonies of propitiation, and deprecation of evil, were often performed privately even among the most strict in religious matters; but he dreaded the effect on the Mahratta people at large. No one could know of the true reason of Afzool Khan's advance on the town; the plunder and desecration of the temple, would seem to all to have been the actual purpose; and the deed would produce a shudder of execration, he well knew, from one end of Maharashtra to the other.

Thus conversing, they reached the upper gate, where one of the men in attendance on the dying retainer met them. The tears on his face needed no speech to explain them. "He is dead," said the man; "he never spoke afterwards."

"My poor fellow!" exclaimed Pahar Singh. "Ah! Meah, the best swordsman, the best rider — hunchback as he was — the best at all his weapons of all that I

have; and the truest heart too, rough and faithful. Well, no matter now. Is Lukshmun there?" he continued.

"No, master, he is not. We have sent for him."

"Do not delay. Bury Rama at once. I do but accompany the young Khan; and then the horn will sound. Be quick."

They passed on, turning to the left, into a street which ascended to a higher level in the town. As they proceeded, evidences of plunder and violence were but too visible. Here a patch of blood on the pavement still wet — there portions of cloths, — brass and copper vessels dropped in flight, — doors broken in with axes, and the interior courts of such houses as were entered in dire confusion — women and men alike, weeping and wailing bitterly.

"This is the Shastree's house, Meah," said Pahar Singh; "enter and see."

There was no one in it. They went to the end of the courts, even to that in which was the temple and Tara's garden, all so trim and neat. The body of an Abyssinian was lying among the flowers, and another of a Mahratta near him. The sacred fire was still smouldering on the altar, and Pahar Singh reverently lifted some logs of wood, and put them on it. Here and there about the rooms were splashes of blood and marks of violence, but none of the room doors were open.

"Their property is safe, Meah," said the chief; "but who are alive, and who dead? There is no one here. Let us ask the neighbours."

They inquired of several. One man said that Janoo Näik and the town Ramoosees had defended

the house and beaten off plunderers; but they knew nothing of the women.

“Come,” said Pahar Singh to Fazil, “we lose time here. Let us seek Janoo Näik. I know him. He will be at the Culcherri, and will know;” and they went.

Janoo was found, but he had no idea of telling Pahar Singh the robber chief, and a good-looking Mahomedan, where he had hidden Anunda and Radha, who, now safely delivered from their night-watch on the ledge of the rock, had been guided by his son at early daylight over the hill to the village of Afsinga, where they were in safety. Janoo had returned to his post; and if Fazil and Pahar Singh had opened the kitchen door they would have found five of his men in it, who had watched them narrowly, and were on guard over the house.

To their united inquiries Janoo had but one answer, — the Abyssinians had attacked the house, carried off the women, and murdered them. “Alas, alas!” he said, pretending to weep bitterly, “they had not even Bramhuns’ rites. They were flung into the trench without, and buried with the rest. Alas, alas! and so beautiful as they were. Do ye doubt? Look, here are some ornaments of theirs which I am going to give to the Sirkar,” * and he showed a small bundle tied up in a bloody cloth, the contents of which chinked as he handled it.

“We can do nothing more, Meah,” said Pahar Singh.

“My lord, I ate their salt — why should I tell a lie?” he returned, with a real expression of sorrow.

* *Sirkar* — lit. Government; the representative of authority.

"Go and see if they be in their house." "They are after no good," thought Janoo; "and if I could only find Tara Bye, the Shastree would give me a gold kurra.* At any rate, I have prevented them asking more questions, I think."

"Poor girl," thought Fazil, "she is desolate indeed -- father, mother, all dead. Had they any relatives here?" he asked of the Ramoosee.

"None, my lord. The Shastree's elder wife came from Wye in the Concan, they say; and the last one, Moro Trimmul's sister, also from thence. Here there is no one; and I would not tell them if there were," he added to himself. "What do they want with them?"

"We had better go, Meah Sahib," said Pahar Singh. "I will but tell Boorhan-oo-deen the Näib to seal up the house of the Shastree, and guard it from plunder, and join thee at thy father's. Do not wait for me."

Fazil went on sadly. The state of the girl whom he had already rescued from violence, affected him deeply. So beautiful, so strangely beautiful to him, unaccustomed to see the higher classes of Hindu women. "O that Zyna was here," he thought. "She might be a sister to her, and soothe away that grief. Who can break to her what has happened?"

As Pahar Singh had predicted, Fazil found his father and the Peer in the act of dismissing the Mah-ratta sirdars, apparently with respect; for there was a silver bottle of uttar standing upon a salver, and a tray with betel leaves on it, on the floor, in the centre

* Ring for the arm.

of the room. Ibrahim Khan and several other officers were sitting around, and the priest had apparently relaxed from his devotional position. A servant took up the salver and tray as Fazil entered, and the chiefs prepared to rise at the signal, as did also the Khan.

"Have we leave to depart, Khan Sahib?" said an elderly man, with long white mustaches.

"Depart in peace," replied Afzool Khan. "I think you all understand now, that it happened inadvertently. 'Shooduni-Shooduni,' you know — what was to be, was to be; and what is done, is done. His Majesty shall hear favourably of your visit to me. Inshalla! he will be satisfied; and all intended fines and confiscations will be averted. Only for that Bramhun intriguer ye had been safe. Did the royal troops ever interfere with ye before? Mashalla no! Ull-humd-ul-illa. No! Astagh-fur-oolla! No! and never will again."

"And the bounty for restoration of the temple, Khan Sahib?" said the old chief inquiringly.

"Ahem! Good. I will see about it; yes, I have no doubt the King will be merciful. Go in peace," said the Khan decidedly; and, saluting them again, they passed out.

"You see they are satisfied, son," said the Khan quickly; "we have told them it could not have been helped, and they agree. Well, what didst thou see? Did Pahar Singh tell thee how they fired first?"

"He did, father; he told me all, and I have seen all. I pray the merciful Alla never to show me such a sight again. O father, how many houses are de-

solate and in misery which were happy homes last night before we came!"

"Ameen! my son," returned the Khan sighing: "yes, we all say so now. Do we not, Huzrut? But they fired first, and what was to be was to be!"

"And the idol was overthrown; that image of the devil's mother," cried the priest grimly. "Didst thou see that, Meah?"

"I did," said Fazil, "and rejoiced, though those devilish red eyes haunt me still."

"I spat on them, Meah, while they glared at me from the ground," said the Peer savagely; "and I, too, see them still, flashing through the priest's blood which gushed out upon them. But what fear, Meah, what fear? What sayeth the holy book, chapter twenty-second, 'Verily the idols which ye invoke, beside God, can never create even a single fly;' no, nor hurt one either, my son. Wherefore there is no fear - no fear; be comforted."

Fazil thought the priest shuddered as he shrugged his shoulders, and, shutting his eyes, settled himself once more on his heels, and began telling his beads with great devoutness. So a general silence fell among them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE silence was oppressive. The Khan was smoking, and the dull, monotonous gurgle of the hookah went on incessantly, almost irritating Fazil, and provoking him to speak again; but his father had shut his eyes, and puffed mechanically, emitting the smoke through his nostrils, and the priest was evidently absorbed in devotional contemplation. Any interruption would be welcome.

"They have brought up the prisoner," said Ibrahim Khan, a strangely silent man, but good soldier, who rarely spoke to any one. "He is now entering the court door; shall he be ordered in?"

"Ay!" said Afzool Khan, "let him be disposed of before our breakfast. That Kichéri, Khan Sahib!"

"Inshalla, it will soon be ready; I will go and see to it," he replied, and he got up and went out, as Gopal Singh, Lukshmun, and some others entered. Moro Pundit was bound as before, with a turban round his neck, the end of which was held by Lukshmun with one hand, while the other grasped a heavy naked sabre. The girl Gunga followed them.

Afzool Khan, the priest, and Fazil looked at the Bramhun from head to foot; but he did not quail, or betray any emotion whatever except that his broad chest was heaving under the bandage, and his hands, which just appeared below it, were tightly clenched.

"This is Moro Trimmul," said Gopal Singh; "we all know him. He used to lodge here with the Gosais,

and they are all here to speak to him. Is it not true, O Bawas?" he continued to some of the household who crowded in.

"It is he, my lord, sure enough," cried several of the Gosais in a breath; "it is Moro Trimmul, who lived here."

"Have ye got his papers?" asked the priest.

"They are most likely in the panniers and bags on the ponies," said Gopal Singh, "or in the palankeen. What matter? — here is the man himself."

"Ask him, my son, if he has aught to say. Ask him in his own tongue," said the Khan. "We would not destroy him unheard."

Fazil put the question.

"I did not intend to speak," said Moro Trimmul, "for I am in hands which know no mercy, and I need none. All who take work like mine are prepared to die at any hour. All I ask of ye is to let this girl go; she is a poor Moorlee who was faithful to me. Let her go, Khan Sahib, with the gold I gave her. As for me, as you have slain many innocent Bramhuns, I am not to be spared, for I have done all I needed, and my mission is ended."

"What hast thou done?" asked the priest.

"Thou art a priest of thy faith," answered the man, "I one of mine; what thou dost and wouldst do for thy faith, I would do and have been doing for mine. Does that content thee?"

"Enough!" cried the Khan, "he confesses. What shall we do with him?"

"Let him die, father," said Fazil solemnly. "He was contriving more evil than you know of, as his face

tells, — now look at it as I speak, — yes: and he would have done it too. Let him die.”

As Fazil spoke, a grey ashy paleness overspread the Bramhun's face, and a shudder passed through him; but he did not answer, and taking, as it were, a long inspiration, drew himself up to his full height, closing his fingers convulsively.

“Fazil,” asked his father, “dost thou say death, my son?”

“I do,” said Fazil, “in justice for this man's evil deeds, which have brought misery to hundreds, and will yet cause more.”

“Shabash,” cried the priest, “Ul-humd-ul-illa! there is good stuff in thee yet, Meah. What sayeth the holy book, chapter forty-seven? ‘When ye encounter the unbelievers, strike off their heads, until ye have made a great slaughter.’ Yes, let him die.”

Afzool Khan mused for a while. The priest's quotation was correct, and his own fanaticism confirmed it. Was he, however, so appalled by the recent destruction of innocent Hindu life, that he hesitated as to this one? or was it in regard to the fact that Moro Trimmul was a Bramhun, and the popular objection to putting such men to death being great, that he now hesitated? Both causes probably combined to influence him.

“I am not going to do it, Punditjee,” said Lukshmun to Moro Trimmul in a whisper, “because thou art a Bramhun; but there is no harm wishing thee as sharp a sword as this is. See!”

Moro Trimmul looked askance at the hunchback as he would have done at a reptile, and shrank instinctively from him. They saw his eye wander

along the edge of the bright blade from hilt to point; but though he shuddered perceptibly, he said nothing.

Afzool Khan took his chin and beard in his hand, leaned his elbow on his knee, looked furtively once or twice under his bushy eyebrows at the priest and Fazil in turn, but did not speak, and again resumed his position. The prisoner's large bright eyes were fixed on him with an intensely inquisitive and earnest expression; and drops of sweat gathered on his brow and temples; but though his life hung on a word, there was no fear visible, and Fazil could not repress admiration of the man's calm bearing and contempt of death.

"It cannot be, Huzrut, yet," said Afzool Khan at length; "we have much to learn from him, and, after all, son, he was but doing his duty truly and faithfully. If I had sent thee on such an errand, or the King had sent thee, wouldst thou not have done the same? Take him away, put irons on him. He must be sent to the King, and judged at Beejapoor."

"Where thou wilt die under the Goruk Imlec tree like Jehándar Beg," said Lukshmun. "Ah, yes, that was a clean stroke of Rama's; and they don't care for Bramhuns there."

At that moment Pahar Singh entered. "Yes, that is the man," he said, looking intently at the Bramhun. Then turning to his follower, "Go, Lukshmun," he said, "they seek thee. Rama is dead, and thou shouldst go and pour the water at his burial."

"Dead!" cried the man, starting back, and dropping the end of the turban. "Dead! O no, master, not Rama!"

"Go, and thou wilt see," said the chief, turning away.

Lukshmun spoke no word. They saw his broad chest heaving, and he gasped for breath. The shock was too sudden and great, and he fell senseless against the wall. In doing so the gold zone which he had hung over his arm rolled away.

"It is mine," said Gunga, picking it up, and clasping it about her waist. "He gave it me, ask him;" and she pointed to the Bramhun; "ask him; and that fellow would have stolen it. May I go?" she continued, addressing the Khan; "I am only a poor Moorlee of the temple? you do not need me."

"Surely," said the Khan, "we want no women. Go!" and she made a humble salutation to him, and turned aside.

"Is he, too, dead?" asked Pahar Singh, turning to Lukshmun. "They were twins, ye see, sirs," he said to the bystanders, "and his spirit may have gone after his brother's."

But it was not so. Lukshmun had fainted, and revived as water was poured down his throat and a man fanned him with a cloth. He looked about him dreamily; then some one raised him up, and led him away.

"And he?" asked Pahar Singh of the Khan, pointing to Moro Trimmul. "Is he to die? what will ye do with him, Khan Sahib?"

"Not yet; he will go to Beejapoor," returned the Khan, "and answer for his deeds to the King."

"It is just," replied the chief; "he has only done what a good servant should do. He tempted me for his master, as I could have tempted him —"

"That is just what I said," said the Khan interrupting.

"And he took no man's life," continued the chief, "and the law will spare his."

"The law," interrupted the priest scornfully, "the blessed law is not for infidels, save for their destruction. For what is written in chapter forty-seven —"

"Peace," cried the Khan, who dreaded a dispute between them, "let it pass. I have spared him. Take him away—keep him with the standard of the Paigah, and let no man or woman have speech of him; he can cook his own food."

They led Moro Trimmul away. He said nothing; but Fazil saw a smile of triumph, he thought, flash over his grave features. When they looked for the girl Gunga she had gone also, and was not to be seen. Fazil, too, had disappeared. As the Khan's breakfast was brought, the kicheri and kabobs he loved so well, he washed his hands, and waited awhile for Fazil's return; but able to contain himself no longer, drew near to the smoking dish, and crying Bismilla! he, the priest, and those present, after the necessary ablutions, plunged their hands into the pile of rice, and ate heartily.

Fazil could no longer restrain himself. He had promised the girl he had left below the pass, to get news of her people for her; and, taking advantage of Pahar Singh's entrance, and the confusion occasioned by Lukshmun's fall, had slipped out unobserved. It was but a short distance, his horse was still saddled, and he mounted and rode as rapidly as he could down the hill.

The men were where he had left them, under the

trees by the rivulet. Shêre Khan was on foot, standing by the palankeen, pointing to the road and to Fazil as he descended. Some of the men were on horseback, others lying in the shade holding their horses' bridles.

As he neared the palankeen, the old man slowly advanced, and Fazil could see there were tears on his furrowed cheek. He saluted the young Khan respectfully, and put his hand on his saddle-bow.

"I never saw grief like hers," he said, "nor such fear, nor misery, at your delay. 'Why did he go?' was all she could say at first -- and since I soothed her, she has cried the more -- 'Why doth he delay?' Once I persuaded her to go and wash her face at the river and drink water, and she did so, and was the better of it. And, O Meah! she is so beautiful! Even our rough men say she is a Peri, not a woman. Speak gently to her, Meah."

Fazil dismounted and walked on. A large space had been left about the palankeen, and no one had intruded upon Tara. Towards the rivulet the doors were open, and she was sitting on the edge of the litter, but with her feet on the ground without, and her face buried in her knees. She did not look up till the young man was close to her; then, with irrepressible emotion, she threw herself at his feet.

"O take me to them!" she cried piteously -- "take me to them! they are waiting for me, they are looking for their Tara! O sir, they will not rest, or eat, till they know I am safe. Let me go -- take me to them. Why am I detained? I have done no evil!"

"Rise," said Fazil, "rise -- I may not touch thee to raise thee up; but Alla has laid a heavy hand on

thee, and thou must listen to true words, though they bring thee such affliction as thou hast not known in thy young life."

Tara raised herself to her knees and looked up. O the misery of those great eyes in which were no tears — red, dry, and glistening: while the sweet features quivered under bewildering anticipations of what was to follow. Fazil could not bear to look on her, and turned away, "Would there were any one else to tell thee but me," he said, "it would be well."

"Speak," she replied calmly, "there is no deceit in your tongue — he whom you left with me says so; he told me you would not deceive me, and this suspense is terrible, do not prolong it — speak. I will listen."

"Nor will I," returned Fazil; "sit down as thou wast, and may God keep thy heart, as I tell thee of thy misery. Yesterday there were a father, a mother, another wife, and thyself, in a happy home. Now three are gone, and thou art here."

He saw her, as he spoke, clutching nervously at her throat which was heaving convulsively, and trying to swallow; and ere he could complete the sentence she had fallen sideways from her seat against the door of the litter, and lay there, powerless, for an instant. His habitual respect for women would have prevented his touching her, but she was so helpless that he raised her up, and, taking a pillow from the inside of the palankeen, placed it behind her, supporting it with his arm.

Gradually she seemed to recover a little. "Dead," she said gently, "all dead! O Holy Mother, why is

this? Why am I, not taken too?" and she shuddered, and cowered down, shrinking from him.

Fazil thought the truth might rouse her, and he was right. He dreaded her becoming insensible.

"Yes, so it has pleased God," he said. "Thy father was killed, fighting in the temple; and in the confusion afterwards, robbers attacked the house where your mother was and the other, and they also died."

"No — no, it could not be!" cried Tara, quickly and eagerly. "Janoo Näik would be there; he would fight for them and protect them."

"Janoo himself told me this: he told me he saw them dead — two women, very fair, the elder Anunda, and the younger wife, Radha Bye. Some of Janoo's people are killed in the house, and he could not save them. Thy father?" he continued, as he saw her lips apparently moving, though the word was not spoken. "Yes, two men, priests in the temple, Khundoo Bhopey and Rama Bhopey — I asked their names — who lifted him upon the litter in which he was carried away, said he was dead and already burned. What can I do with thee or for thee now?" he continued. "Speak, and I will do it, lady, truly and faithfully."

"Is it true?" she asked dreamily, and with a rough husky voice, and staring at him with those great scared eyes. "The Bhopeys would not tell lies."

"I swear it by the dead, it is true," replied Fazil. "I have neither rested nor eaten till I found out the truth. Had there been any one, even a servant, I would have sent for thee. Janoo told me there was no one belonging to thee in the town, no relatives; — and the Bramhuns are all fled. Men say they will not return to a polluted shrine, and Janoo Näik and

others said you had relatives at Wye, where we are going."

"Yes," she said calmly, and as if echoing his words, "there are relatives at Wye. Sukya Bye is there — and — no matter. Yes. I will go there — let me go.

"My mother and sister will be with us," added Fazil, "come to them. Zyna will be a sister to thee, and no harm shall come nigh thee. I would use no force — it must be of thine own free will; but the town yonder is filled with dead and dying, the temple is desolate, there is no one of thy people alive, and thou wouldst die of fear and sorrow. Come with us; Shère Khan will take care of thee, as of a daughter, till we reach my sister. I will not come nigh thee, but he will tell me of thee. O lady, I am not false! I am a stranger to thee; but Alla threw me in thy path, when else, dishonour was before thee. From that, at least, I saved thee, and thou knowest it."

"Who art thou?" she said gently; "yes, I was saved from worse than death — who saved me?"

"I, Fazil, the son of Afzool Khan of Beejapoor," he said.

"They say Pathans respect women's honour," she returned, rousing herself. "A poor orphan girl will not be without pity in your sight. Ah! sir, I am sorely bewildered now," she continued, beating helplessly with her hands on her lap. "I cannot think or speak, and my heart is dried up; but he told me — that old man — that you were true, and they loved you, all of them! — and so be kind to Tara, and do not deceive her; she will die soon, and go away, and will trouble you no more."

"By Alla! by my sister's honour! I will be true

to thee, O lady!" cried Fazil earnestly; "truer than thou canst now think. Enough; when thou art with Zyna thou wilt know all; till then thou wilt not see me. Call the bearers," he continued, to Shêre Khan; "take her on to camp, wherever it is; get guides from the next village yonder. Procure her food by the way, if she will eat. Here are twenty men with the litter; they will take thee into Sholapoor. Hark!" he continued to the men as they approached, "take this palankeen into Sholapoor at once, and ye shall have fifty rupees from Afzool Khan. Fear not, lady!" he said once more to Tara; "thou wilt be Shêre Khan's daughter till thou art with my sister." Then, mounting his horse, he rode rapidly up the pass.

Tara followed his figure with her eyes, and her heart went with them. He was so kind, so gracious, and so beautiful. She could not realise the fact of her sudden misery and desolation, and yet she could not doubt it. As he disappeared behind a turn in the road, the sense of that desolation became more acutely painful. But she had no time for thought. Shêre Khan rode up, bid her shut the doors of the litter, and told her he should not leave it; and a moment afterwards she felt it was taken up, and carried forward at a rapid pace, while the old soldier caracolled by her side, and the horsemen spread themselves around her, to screen, as well as to protect the conveyance in which she lay.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FAZIL KHAN rode rapidly up the pass, for he knew his father would await his coming ere he gave the final orders for the march. Truth to say, he was hungry enough, and a breakfast upon Ibrahim Khan's kicheri and kabobs would be very welcome. As he reached the top, a busy scene presented itself. Wherever he looked, little fires were lighted between three large stones, upon which the small cooking-pans used by the men, and carried in their saddle-bags, were placed; and the savoury smells which issued from them, and pervaded the air, proved that the stews and curries within were in very satisfactory progress, and were certainly very provocative of appetite. While one member of a small mess watched the pot, others were kneading dough, or patting out "chupatees" or unleavened cakes, with their hands, and baking them on their "towas" or iron plates. Hundreds of these operations were going on simultaneously in every direction; for the force had a long day's march before it to Sholapoor. There would be no midway halt, and men and horses must alike be fed. Everywhere, too, the merry laugh, the broad joke or banter incidental to camp life, resounded among the rude soldiery, and the cries of sellers of milk-curds, firewood, and fruit, mingled with them pleasantly.

Already was the scene of the night before forgotten.

The dead for the most part had been buried out of sight; and if grief and misery sat at the heart of many a household in the town — mourning for relations slain, or property plundered or destroyed, — in the camp without, no such feelings existed among the fierce and fanatical men. A grim satisfaction prevailed at having defiled one of the holiest shrines of the Dekhan, plundered its property, and slain its priests. To all, the night's events had been those of ordinary skirmish and excitement: forgotten with the next petty cares of life, and anticipation of new scenes of adventure, — and possibly of new plunder.

“Where hast thou been, Meah Sahib?” cried one of a knot of his own men, whom he met almost as he reached the plain above the pass. “The Khan Sahib has been searching for thee, and is anxious. Ah! when wilt thou learn caution, and take some of us at least with thee? Remember this is not Beejapoor, and the people are not in good humour after last night. Any fellow with a gun behind one of those rocks ——”

“Thanks, friend,” said Fazil, interrupting him. “I did but go to Shêre Khan and the rest of them below, and tell them to precede us; but thanks for the caution nevertheless. Now get ready soon, for I shall not be long away from ye,” and he cantered on to the town.

Giving directions for a led horse to be accoutred for him, in lieu of that which had carried him through the night, Fazil entered the Mutt where he had left his father, and found him girding himself for the journey.

“Where hast thou been, son? we could not wait;

but they have kept the kicheri hot for thee, and the kabobs are good; only they have too much pepper and garlic in them. The Khan's cookery is not refined, my son: not like thy mother's. Inshalla! she will have a famous dish ready for us this evening, for I am going to send on a camel. Hast thou any message?"

Fazil knew by his father's volubility that he was in good humour. The flurried, anxious expression of his face had departed, as well under the influence of a hearty breakfast as owing to the feeling that, under the circumstances, he had really done his best to smooth over the events of the night. It was unfortunate, certainly, that they had happened; but it could not be helped now. A donation from the King would soothe the Bramhuns. So he had again sent for the local Nāib, and charged him to assure all of his sympathy and sorrow. Afzool Khan had taken advantage of the Peer's absence to do this, for in his presence he would have feared to commit himself by expression of any consideration for infidels.

"I did but ride down the pass, father," replied Fazil, "to speak with Shère Khan, and send him on to camp. They will halt by-and-by, and refresh themselves. Yes, truly, something to eat will be welcome; therefore, sit down and rest. We have a long ride before us."

"The camel is ready," said the rider of it, entering. "What are your orders?"

"Write a line from me to thy mother, Fazil," said the Khan, "to say she is to have kicheri and kabobs ready for us, and that we have won a victory with

little loss. That will cheer her, and put her in mind of old days, and we shall have a glorious dish. Inshalla! we shall be hungry, son!"

Fazil wrote what was needed to Lurlee, and added, on separate paper, a few lines to Zyna, to take care of Tara on her arrival. There was no time to write her story, but she would hear particulars from Tara herself. "Take this at your best speed," he said to the man. "Give it into the hands of Goolab Daee,* and tell her it is for my sister only. You will overtake Shêre Khan by the way. Tell him to stop where he likes, refresh the men and horses, and push on. It is of moment that he should arrive before us, and he is already far beyond Sindphul."

"Good," replied the man; "your orders are on my head and eyes, and shall be done." In a few moments more, the clash of the bells of the animal he rode were heard as he started, and then died away in the distance.

What was best to be done? -- to tell his father of Tara's being sent on under escort of the men, or to leave explanation about her till they reached Sholapoor? Fazil thought over this as he ate, and he ate heartily what was brought, and did justice to it; while his father sat and looked on approvingly, or told his son of what had been done to assure the people, and what he would do, in spite of the Peer, to obtain a donation for the temple. Yes, it will be better to tell him, Fazil thought. He will not object, as he is in this complacent humour, and we are alone.

* Nurse.

"I had no opportunity of speaking, father, before, else I would have told you," he said, after he had washed his hands and sat down.

"What!" interrupted the Khan, who detected a tone of embarrassment in Fazil's voice — "what has happened? Didst thou lose any men? Who is dead?"

"No, no, father, we had no fighting," replied Fazil. "All I had to say was, that I sent the lady we took, with Shêre Khan. She had a palankeen, and the bearers said they would take her to Sholapoor at once. There were twenty of them, and it is only twelve coss."

"A lady, son! Who?" he answered in an indifferent tone.

"A Bramhun girl, father, of rank. She was escaping in a palankeen, and we took her, when we took Moro Pundit."

"Indeed! His wife perhaps?"

"No, father; she said not. She has nothing to do with him; but she was in such grief at her people being killed in the town, that I could only make out she had relatives at Wye, and I sent her on under Shêre Khan. As she was richly dressed, and had valuable jewels on her, I feared to send her back, and she was willing to go.

"Poor girl, poor girl," said the Khan sighing; "and she is young, you say. Alas, alas! to be so soon a widow!"

"Quite young, father — sixteen, perhaps — and very beautiful. O, so beautiful! I never saw one like her before."

"Wonderful!" returned the Khan. "Then she let thee see her? . . . Ah, Pahar Singh, well, so you are already prepared," he exclaimed, as the chief entered the room suddenly, and saluted them. "Have you eaten? Are your people ready? We go on to Sholapoor."

"I am come to bid you farewell, my lord," said the chief. "I have done my work with you for the present. My duty is not with the army, but on the marches; and I hear of a raid by the Golconda people which I must see to. My nephew Gopal Singh would fain have accompanied your son, but I cannot spare him. He is my only stay since — since . . . no matter. My men would be worse than useless to you, and you will not miss what I could send. Nevertheless, if —"

"No, no," said the Khan, who in truth had dreaded rather than desired Pahar Singh's company, and that of his lawless freebooters; "no, you are better here in your own country, and I have already weakened the force too much at Nuldroog to withdraw you."

"Then we may go, Khan?"

"Certainly; you are honourably dismissed with thanks, and mention will be made of you, when I write, as you deserve."

"I have only one thing to say, Khan Sahib, — and I pray you to pardon my saying it, — and that is, beware of Moro Pundit. Had I been a Mussulman like you, I had not spared him; but as you have done so, it is not for me, a Rajpoot, to be concerned in a Bramhun's death. He is faithful to his cause, and he cannot be true to you."

“He can do no harm, friend,” said the Khan laughing. “I fancy the Nimbalkur and others have had a good lesson, and will keep quiet; and, for the rest, as I am going to scotch the head of the snake, we need not fear if its tail writhes a little; it can do no harm: but I thank you for your caution nevertheless, and you will see to my people of Afzoolpoor and its villages?”

“Surely, Khan Sahib; be under no apprehension — nothing can molest them. Now, put your hand on my head once more, embrace me, and let me go.”

“Go,” said the Khan, rising and doing as he wished — “go; be careful, friend; remember the royal clemency, and be true.”

“Will you come with me for a moment, Meah?” said Pahar Singh, as he disengaged himself from the Khan’s embrace.

Fazil got up and followed him. As they emerged from the courtyard into the street, Fazil saw that Gopal Singh and others, ready and mounted, awaited their chief, and they saluted him courteously.

“Come hither, Lukshmun,” said the chief.

The man was well mounted, and advanced. Fazil saw that his cheeks were wet with tears, and his eyes red and swollen. Hideous as the face now was, there was a dignity of sorrow in it which was not unimpressive.

“Meah,” said the chief, “this is a foolish slave of mine, who implores me to send him with you; he wants no pay, — only food and clothes, and forage for his horse. He will be faithful to you in all danger

and trial, and knows no fear. When you return from the campaign, send him to me again. Do you accept him?"

"I do, Pahar Singh, and will be to him as you were, that I promise," replied Fazil.

"Then dismount and kiss the young Khan's feet," said the chief.

Lukshmun obeyed him, dismounted, and, prostrating himself before Fazil, embraced his knees. He then did the same to his master, lying at his feet, and sobbing bitterly.

"Get up, fool," said the chief kindly, drawing the back of his hand roughly across his eyes. "Go, thou art safer with him than with me. Go; take him, Meah," he continued, putting the man's hand into Fazil's, who raised him up. "Take him; he will be to you the faithful hound he was to me and my boy yonder: we can ill spare him, but, after what has happened, he is better away for a while. And now, sir, we part. Remember what I said to your father, and that while Mahrattas are weak they will be treacherous. I wish you well; in the words of your people, 'Khôda Hafiz.'"

So saying, the chief mounted, caused his spirited horse to execute several caracoles and plunges, and, with his nephew and followers, rode off rapidly to the plain beyond, where the shrill horn and deep drum of his troop were sounding the assembly.

"Had it been thus if you knew me, Pahar Singh?" thought Fazil, as the last of the rough troopers passed round the corner of the buildings to the plain beyond.

"Hardly, I think; but it is well as it is, and your goodwill is better than your spite." As he turned round he saw the hunchback beside him. The bridle of his horse was hooked within his left arm; his hands, joined together, were raised to his nose, and he had balanced himself on his left leg, with the sole of the right foot pressed against the calf of the left. His grotesque features were twisted into a curious expression, in which grief and joy struggled for mastery.

"Your name is Lukshmun?" said Fazil.

"My lord, it is; I am your slave now and for ever: -- till I die, if you permit me to serve you in my own way."

"And that is?"

"No matter now," said the creature; "you will find out. If I displease you, I will go away of my own accord and give no trouble; if I please you, let me be near you, and that is enough."

"How is this? You talk like a woman."

"Do you know anything of them, master?" replied the man. "Perhaps not; it takes a long life to know them, they say. Do I talk like a woman? Ah no, sir; to me you are the woman who has bewitched me, and I follow you blindly for the sake of the love I have for you, which sits in my heart."

"Since when, friend?" said Fazil laughing.

"Since last night, when you were kind to that poor Bramhun girl who owes her honour to you, and long before that, of which I will tell you another time. Can I do anything now?"

“Hast thou eaten?”

“Yes; and I have enough here to last me two days,” and he pointed to a bundle of cakes tied at his back. “I can give you one if you like, when you are hungry.”

“I do not want it — I have eaten,” said Fazil. “Can I trust thee already?”

“Oh, master!” cried the man piteously, as the tears started suddenly to his eyes. “Do not say that! I am a poor hunchback, who cannot say fine words, what is the use of my talking? If you mistrust me, bid me go. I will return to him who gave me — better that, than be doubted. Enough, shall I go?”

“No, stay,” continued Fazil; “I will trust thee. Tie thy horse there, and give him some fodder from the bundle yonder. . . . That is well. Now go to the Cucherri; say to the Näib, that Fazil Khan Meah wants the bundle of things given to him by Janoo Näik, and he is to give it.”

“And what if Janoo is there, master? he will not allow it.”

“That is why I do not go myself,” said Fazil; “but if there is any difficulty I will come. Show this as a token, and it will suffice,” and he took off his signet-ring.

“I will bring them without this, Meah, and yet I take it. Tell some one to mind the mare, else if she hears the horn she will break her rope;” and the man, throwing his coarse black blanket over him, shambled off at a quick pace towards the town. It was but a

short distance. Fazil waited there looking at his own horses which were picketed in the street. He had no desire to rejoin his father, who was quietly smoking within. Fortunately, too, the priest rode up; said he wanted a hookah, dismounted, and went into the Mutt. He would be company enough.

Fazil watched the street narrowly. Had he done right in sending Lukshmun — ought he not to have gone himself? He could yet go if there were refusal, but there might be no occasion. In a little time, less than he had supposed possible, he saw the hunchback coming up the street at a sharp run, and as he reached Fazil, he put into his hand a heavy bundle of what felt like ornaments of gold and silver, tied in a cloth which was spotted with blood.

“Shabash!” cried Fazil, “it was well contrived. How didst thou get them?”

“Janoo Naik is an ass, and the father of all the asses in Tooljapoor. I know him of old,” returned Lukshmun. “He was there sitting like a scared owl on the steps of the Cucherri. ‘Come and drink,’ says he to me. ‘I will,’ said I; ‘wait, I have a message from the master to deliver.’ Then I went in, and said to a karkoon, ‘Give me what Janoo gave just now, the people are come for it.’ He could not go in there, for he is a Mang. ‘Take them,’ says a karkoon, opening a box; ‘I don’t like to touch them, they are bloody.’ So I took them out, master, and here they are. As I passed Janoo, I gave him a rupee, and told him to go to the Kullal’s and get some drink ready, while I delivered my message — and he is gone. O the owl, the owl! he will be drunk by this time; but master, that

man is as true as steel, and put these in trust; they were not loot to him. Wilt thou sell them here? No, not here?"

"Sell them!" cried Fazil laughing; "no, surely — why?"

"O, the master never does — he always keeps the gold and silver, and buys them at his own valuation; but he gives us a share, nevertheless, and I shall miss mine of last night's work: — better, however, that the women have it."

"Ah! friend, I fear thou wilt have no such luck with me," returned the young man. "That is no loot, however; it will only go to its owner."

"Ah, Meah, I understand now," said the man quickly. "Yes, for her. Poor child! poor child! and when she sees the blood! — better throw that cloth away, and tie them up in a clean handkerchief."

"No," said Fazil, "keep it. It is evidence of the worst, and she needs to know it; but let us count them. Thirteen, you see, gold and silver; and look, there is blood on these anklets — let it stay. Yes, now I will trust thee."

Just then the Khan and the priest came out of the court, both accounted for the march.

"I was seeing to the horses, father," said Fazil, in anticipation of his father's remarks, "and questioning this gift of Pabar Singh's; look at him' — a strange being, is he not?"

Lukshmun advanced, prostrated himself, kissed the Khan's feet, but said nothing. The priest was acknowledged by a distant but respectful reverence

only, and the hunchback seemed to regard him with antipathy.

"Strange enough, son," said the Khan, looking at him from head to foot: "ask thy mother about his horoscope when we get to camp. He may be lucky after all — these hunchbacks often are so."

"My lord," said Lukshmun pleadingly, joining his hands, "all the Bramhuns like to try their hands on my nativity, and they all say I am lucky. For I am a twin, and they never could make out exactly which of the two was the eldest born; but they believed Rama was, who was always unlucky, and had a bad wife and worse children, and he was shot yesterday; so the bad luck and bad stars — sun and moon, and all — went with him; and now your slave is the luckiest of men, since he is the property of the noble Afzool Khan and his son Fazil. Surely the stars sent him."

"Thou hast a bold tongue," said the priest. "Peace, be silent."

"Ah, Maharaj!" returned the man, "holy men like you and the Bramhuns think too much upon divine glories, to mind what a poor fool like me says. I too know my prayers already, and shall become a Mussulman, when I have heard a few more of your reverence's sermons. O, they are wonderful! Bismilla — ir-rahman-ir-raheem! —"

"Come," said the Khan, "they are beating the Nagaras everywhere, and as all are ready, we need not delay." So, mounting their horses, which were being led about, they rode on to the plain where the

men were assembling fast, and closing in heavy masses upon their several standards. In a few minutes, the Paigah of Afsool Khan, Moro Pupdit being in the midst closely guarded, moved on down the pass, followed by the Abyssinian cavalry; and their bright steel morions, gay scarfs, trappings, and standards, gleamed in the blazing sunshine. Yet it was not hot enough to be oppressive: a fresh westerly wind had arisen, driving before it large masses of fleecy cloud, which, as they passed, threw broad chequers of light and shade over the plain, rustling among the tall ripe corn, which bowed before it in golden wavy ripples, and refreshing the men who, though few had slept, were as yet unconscious of fatigue under the excitement they had gone through.

The people of the town watched the long line, that, owing to the rough nature of the road, straggled down the pass, with thankful hearts for deliverance from further molestation; and as the last of the men disappeared behind a shoulder of the mountain, a faint shout of "Jey Kalee! Jey Toolja!" rose from a group of men, consisting of the Nimbalkur, and other chiefs who were assembling at his house. Others clustered about the edge of the table-land, and when they saw the long line emerge upon the plain beyond the groves and gardens of Sindphul, and heard the loud booming notes of the Nagaras growing fainter in the distance, many a heart breathed a prayer of thanks for deliverance, intermingled with defiance and deep curses on those from whose violence they had suffered.

In the temple a group of priests were sitting about the shrine weeping, and the image of the Goddess still

lay on its back, the ruby eyes flashing in the glare of the lamp: now lighted about it. No one, as yet, dared to touch it, without some preliminary ceremonies of deprecation of her wrath. Within, the blood had been washed away -- but without, in the court, it still lay in patches, blackening and cracking in the sun.

END OF VOL. II.

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