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THE WEAVERS

By Gilbert Parker

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CHAPTER XXVIII

NAHOUM TURNS THE SCREW

Laughing to himself, Higli Pasha sat with the stem of a narghileh in his mouth. His big shoulders kept time to the quivering of his fat stomach. He was sitting in a small court-yard of Nahoum Pasha's palace, waiting for its owner to appear. Meanwhile he exercised a hilarious patience. The years had changed him little since he had been sent on that expedition against the southern tribes which followed hard on David's appointment to office. As David had expected, few of the traitorous officers returned. Diaz had ignominiously died of the bite of a tarantula before a blow had been struck, but Higli had gratefully received a slight wound in the first encounter, which enabled him to beat a safe retreat to Cairo. He alone of the chief of the old conspirators was left. Achmet was still at the Place of Lepers, and the old nest of traitors was scattered for ever.

Only Nahoum and Higli were left, and between these two there had never been partnership or understanding. Nahoum was not the man to trust to confederates, and Higli Pasha was too contemptible a coadjutor. Nahoum had faith in no one save Mizraim the Chief Eunuch, but Mizraim alone was better than a thousand; and he was secret--and terrible. Yet Higli had a conviction that Nahoum's alliance with David was a sham, and that David would pay the price of misplaced confidence one day. More than once when David's plans had had a set-back, Higli had contrived a meeting with Nahoum, to judge for himself the true position.

For his visit to-day he had invented a reason--a matter of finance; but his real reason was concealed behind the malevolent merriment by which he was now seized. So absorbed was he that he did not heed the approach of another visitor down an angle of the court-yard. He was roused by a voice.

"Well, what's tickling you so, pasha?"

The voice was drawling, and quite gentle; but at the sound of it, Higli's laugh stopped short, and the muscles of his face contracted. If there was one man of whom he had a wholesome fear--why, he could not tell--it was this round-faced, abrupt, imperturbable American, Claridge Pasha's right-hand man. Legends of resourcefulness and bravery had gathered round his name. "Who's been stroking your chin with a feather, pasha?" he continued, his eye piercing the other like a gimlet.

"It was an amusing tale I heard at Assiout, effendi," was Higli's abashed and surly reply.

"Oh, at Assiout!" rejoined Lacey. "Yes, they tell funny stories at Assiout. And when were you at Assiout, pasha?"

"Two days ago, effendi."

"And so you thought you'd tell the funny little story to Nahoum as quick as could be, eh? He likes funny stories, same as you--damn, nice, funny little stories, eh?"

There was something chilly in Lacey's voice now, which Higli did not like; something much too menacing and contemptuous for a mere man-of-all-work to the Inglesi. Higli bridled up, his eyes glared sulkily.

"It is but my own business if I laugh or if I curse, effendi," he replied, his hand shaking a little on the stem of the narghileh.

"Precisely, my diaphanous polyandrist; but it isn't quite your own affair what you laugh at--not if I know it!"

"Does the effendi think I was laughing at him?"

"The effendi thinks not. The effendi knows that the descendant of a hundred tigers was laughing at the funny little story, of how the two cotton-mills that Claridge Pasha built were burned down all in one night, and one of his steamers sent down the cataract at Assouan. A knock-down blow for Claridge Pasha, eh? That's all you thought of, wasn't it? And it doesn't matter to you that the cotton-mills made thousands better off, and started new industries in Egypt. No, it only matters to you that Claridge Pasha loses half his fortune, and that you think his feet are in the quicksands, and 'll be sucked in, to make an Egyptian holiday. Anything to discredit him here, eh? I'm not sure what else you know; but I'll find out, my noble pasha, and if you've had your hand in it--but no, you ain't game-cock enough for that! But if you were, if you had a hand in the making of your funny little story, there's a nutcracker that 'd break the shell of that joke--"

He turned round quickly, seeing a shadow and hearing a movement. Nahoum was but a few feet away. There was a bland smile on his face, a look of innocence in his magnificent blue eye. As he met Lacey's look, the smile left his lips, a grave sympathy appeared to possess them, and he spoke

softly:

"I know the thing that burns thy heart, effendi, to whom be the flowers of hope and the fruits of merit. It is even so, a great blow has fallen. Two hours since I heard. I went at once to see Claridge Pasha, but found him not. Does he know, think you?" he added sadly.

"May your heart never be harder than it is, pasha, and when I left the Saadat an hour ago, he did not know. His messenger hadn't a steamer like Higli Pasha there. But he was coming to see you; and that's why I'm here. I've been brushing the flies off this sore on the hump of Egypt while waiting." He glanced with disdain at Higli.

A smile rose like liquid in the eye of Nahoum and subsided, then he turned to Higli inquiringly.

"I have come on business, Excellency; the railway to Rosetta, and--"

"To-morrow--or the next day," responded Nahoum irritably, and turned again to Lacey.

As Higli's huge frame disappeared through a gateway, Nahoum motioned Lacey to a divan, and summoned a slave for cooling drinks. Lacey's eyes now watched him with an innocence nearly as childlike as his own. Lacey well knew that here was a foe worthy of the best steel. That he was a foe, and a malignant foe, he had no doubt whatever; he had settled the point in his mind long ago; and two letters he had received from Lady Eglington, in which she had said in so many words, "Watch Nahoum!" had made him vigilant and intuitive. He knew, meanwhile, that he was following the trail of a master-hunter who covered up his tracks. Lacey was as certain as though he had the book of Nahoum's mind open in his hand, that David's work had been torn down again--and this time with dire effect--by this Armenian, whom David trusted like a brother. But the black doors that closed on the truth on every side only made him more determined to unlock them; and, when he faltered as to his own powers, he trusted Mahommed Hassan, whose devotion to David had given him eyes that pierced dark places.

"Surely the God of Israel has smitten Claridge Pasha sorely. My heart will mourn to look upon his face. The day is insulting in its brightness," continued Nahoum with a sigh, his eyes bent upon Lacey, dejection in his shoulders.

Lacey started. "The God of Israel!" How blasphemous it sounded from the lips of Nahoum, Oriental of Orientals, Christian though he was also!

"I think, perhaps, you'll get over it, pasha. Man is born to trouble, and you've got a lot of courage. I guess you could see other people bear a pile of suffering, and never flinch."

Nahoum appeared not to notice the gibe. "It is a land of suffering, effendi," he sighed, "and one sees what one sees."

"Have you any idea, any real sensible idea, how those cotton-mills got afire?" Lacey's eyes were fixed on Nahoum's face.

The other met his gaze calmly. "Who can tell! An accident, perhaps, or--"

"Or some one set the mills on fire in several places at once--they say the buildings flamed out in every corner; and it was the only time in a month they hadn't been running night and day. Funny, isn't it?"

"It looks like the work of an enemy, effendi." Nahoum shook his head gravely. "A fortune destroyed in an hour, as it were. But we shall get the dog. We shall find him. There is no hole deep enough to hide him from us."

"Well, I wouldn't go looking in holes for him, pasha.

"He isn't any cave-dweller, that incendiary; he's an artist--no palace is too unlikely for him. No, I wouldn't go poking in mud-huts to find him."

"Thou dost not think that Higli Pasha--" Nahoum seemed startled out of equanimity by the thought. Lacey eyed him meditatively, and said reflectively: "Say, you're an artist, pasha. You are a guesser of the first rank. But I'd guess again. Higli Pasha would have done it, if it had ever occurred to him; and he'd had the pluck. But it didn't, and he hadn't. What I can't understand is that the artist that did it should have done it before Claridge Pasha left for the Soudan. Here we were just about to start; and if we'd got away south, the job would have done more harm, and the Saadat would have been out of the way. No, I can't understand why the firebug didn't let us get clean away; for if the Saadat stays here, he'll be where he can stop the underground mining."

Nahoum's self-control did not desert him, though he fully realised that this man suspected him. On the surface Lacey was right. It would have seemed better to let David go, and destroy his work afterwards, but he had been moved by other considerations, and his design was deep. His own emissaries were in the Soudan, announcing David's determination to abolish slavery, secretly stirring up feeling against him, preparing for the final blow to be delivered, when he went again among the southern tribes. He had waited and waited, and now the time was come. Had he, Nahoum, not agreed with David that the time had come for the slave-trade to go? Had he not encouraged him to take this bold step, in the sure belief that it would overwhelm him, and bring him an ignominious death, embittered by total failure of all he had tried to do?

For years he had secretly loosened the foundations of David's work, and the triumph of Oriental duplicity over Western civilisation and integrity was sweet in his mouth. And now there was reason to believe that, at last, Kaid was turning against the Inglesi. Everything would come at once. If all that he had planned was successful, even this man before him should aid in his master's destruction.

"If it was all done by an enemy," he said, in answer to Lacey, at last,

"would it all be reasoned out like that? Is hatred so logical? Dost thou think Claridge Pasha will not go now? The troops are ready at Wady-Halfa, everything is in order; the last load of equipment has gone. Will not Claridge Pasha find the money somehow? I will do what I can. My heart is moved to aid him."

"Yes, you'd do what you could, pasha," Lacey rejoined enigmatically, "but whether it would set the Saadat on his expedition or not is a question. But I guess, after all, he's got to go. He willed it so. People may try to stop him, and they may tear down what he does, but he does at last what he starts to do, and no one can prevent him--not any one. Yes, he's going on this expedition; and he'll have the money, too." There was a strange, abstracted look in his face, as though he saw something which held him fascinated.

Presently, as if with an effort, he rose to his feet, took the red fez from his head, and fanned himself with it for a moment. "Don't you forget it, pasha; the Saadat will win. He can't be beaten, not in a thousand years. Here he comes."

Nahoum got to his feet, as David came quickly through the small gateway of the court-yard, his head erect, his lips smiling, his eyes sweeping the place. He came forward briskly to them. It was plain he had not heard the evil news.

"Peace be to thee, Saadat, and may thy life be fenced about with safety!" said Nahoum.

David laid a hand on Lacey's arm and squeezed it, smiling at him with such friendship that Lacey's eyes moistened, and he turned his head away.

There was a quiet elation in David's look. "We are ready at last," he said, looking from one to the other. "Well, well," he added, almost boyishly, "has thee nothing to say, Nahoum?"

Nahoum turned his head away as though overcome. David's face grew instantly grave. He turned to Lacey. Never before had he seen Lacey's face with a look like this. He grasped Lacey's arm. "What is it?" he asked quietly. "What does thee want to say to me?"

But Lacey could not speak, and David turned again to Nahoum. "What is there to say to me?" he asked. "Something has happened--what is it? . . . Come, many things have happened before. This can be no worse. Do thee speak," he urged gently.

"Saadat," said Nahoum, as though under the stress of feeling, "the cotton-mills at Tashah and Mini are gone--burned to the ground."

For a moment David looked at him without sight in his eyes, and his face grew very pale. "Excellency, all in one night, the besom of destruction was abroad," he heard Nahoum say, as though from great depths below him. He slowly turned his head to look at Lacey. "Is this true?" he asked at last in an unsteady voice. Lacey could not speak, but inclined his head.

David's figure seemed to shrink for a moment, his face had a withered look, and his head fell forward in a mood of terrible dejection.

"Saadat! Oh, my God, Saadat, don't take it so!" said Lacey brokenly, and stepped between David and Nahoum. He could not bear that the stricken face and figure should be seen by Nahoum, whom he believed to be secretly gloating. "Saadat," he said brokenly, "God has always been with you; He hasn't forgotten you now.

"The work of years," David murmured, and seemed not to hear.

"When God permits, shall man despair?" interposed Nahoum, in a voice that lingered on the words. Nahoum accomplished what Lacey had failed to do. His voice had pierced to some remote corner in David's nature, and roused him. Was it that doubt, suspicion, had been wakened at last? Was some sensitive nerve touched, that this Oriental should offer Christian comfort to him in his need--to him who had seen the greater light? Or was it that some unreality in the words struck a note which excited a new and subconscious understanding? Perhaps it was a little of all three. He did not stop to inquire. In crises such as that through which he was passing, the mind and body act without reason, rather by the primal instinct, the certain call of the things that were before reason was.

"God is with the patient," continued Nahoum; and Lacey set his teeth to bear this insult to all things. But Nahoum accomplished what he had not anticipated. David straightened himself up, and clasped his hands behind him. By a supreme effort of the will he controlled himself, and the colour came back faintly to his face. "God's will be done," he said, and looked Nahoum calmly in the eyes. "It was no accident," he added with conviction. "It was an enemy of Egypt." Suddenly the thing rushed over him again, going through his veins like a poisonous ether, and clamping his heart as with iron. "All to do over again!" he said brokenly, and again he caught Lacey's arm.

With an uncontrollable impulse Lacey took David's hand in his own warm, human grasp.

"Once I thought I lost everything in Mexico, Saadat, and I understand what you feel. But all wasn't lost in Mexico, as I found at last, and I got something, too, that I didn't put in. Say, let us go from here. God is backing you, Saadat. Isn't it all right--same as ever?"

David was himself again. "Thee is a good man," he said, and through the sadness of his eyes there stole a smile. "Let us go," he said. Then he added in a businesslike way: "To-morrow at seven, Nahoum. There is much to do."

He turned towards the gate with Lacey, where the horses waited. Mahommed Hassan met them as they prepared to mount. He handed David a letter. It was from Faith, and contained the news of Luke Claridge's death. Everything had come at once. He stumbled into the saddle with a moan.

"At last I have drawn blood," said Nahoum to himself with grim satisfaction, as they disappeared. "It is the beginning of the end. It will crush him-I saw it in his eyes. God of Israel, I shall rule again in Egypt!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE RECOIL

It was a great day in the Muslim year. The Mahmal, or Sacred Carpet, was leaving Cairo on its long pilgrimage of thirty-seven days to Mecca and Mahomet's tomb. Great guns boomed from the Citadel, as the gorgeous procession, forming itself beneath the Mokattam Hills, began its slow march to where, seated in the shade of an ornate pavilion, Prince Kaid awaited its approach to pay devout homage. Thousands looked down at the scene from the ramparts of the Citadel, from the overhanging cliffs, and from the tops of the houses that hung on the ledges of rock rising abruptly from the level ground, to which the last of the famed Mamelukes leaped to their destruction.

Now to Prince Kaid's ears there came from hundreds of hoarse throats the cry: "Allah! Allah! May thy journey be with safety to Arafat!" mingling with the harsh music of the fifes and drums.

Kaid looked upon the scene with drawn face and lowering brows. His retinue watched him with alarm. A whisper had passed that, two nights before, the Effendina had sent in haste for a famous Italian physician lately come to Cairo, and that since his visit Kaid had been sullen and depressed. It was also the gossip of the bazaars that he had suddenly shown favour to those of the Royal House and to other reactionaries, who had been enemies to the influence of Claridge Pasha.

This rumour had been followed by an official proclamation that no Europeans or Christians would be admitted to the ceremony of the Sacred Carpet.

Thus it was that Kaid looked out on a vast multitude of Muslims, in which not one European face showed, and from lip to lip there passed the word, "Harrik--Harrik--remember Harrik! Kaid turns from the infidel!"

They crowded near the great pavilion--as near as the mounted Nubians would permit--to see Kaid's face; while he, with eyes wandering over the vast assemblage, was lost in dark reflections. For a year he had struggled against a growing conviction that some obscure disease was sapping his strength. He had hid it from every one, until, at last, distress and pain had overcome him. The verdict of the Italian expert was that possible, but by no means certain, cure might come from an operation which must be delayed for a month or more.

Suddenly, the world had grown unfamiliar to him; he saw it from afar; but

his subconscious self involuntarily registered impressions, and he moved mechanically through the ceremonies and duties of the immediate present. Thrown back upon himself, to fight his own fight, with the instinct of primary life his mind involuntarily drew for refuge to the habits and predispositions of youth; and for two days he had shut himself away from the activities with which David and Nahoum were associated. Being deeply engaged with the details of the expedition to the Soudan, David had not gone to the Palace; and he was unaware of the turn which things had taken.

Three times, with slow and stately steps, the procession wound in a circle in the great square, before it approached the pavilion where the Effendina sat, the splendid camels carrying the embroidered tent wherein the Carpet rested, and that which bore the Emir of the pilgrims, moving gracefully like ships at sea. Naked swordsmen, with upright and shining blades, were followed by men on camels bearing kettle-drums. After them came Arab riders with fresh green branches fastened to the saddles like plumes, while others carried flags and banners emblazoned with texts and symbols. Troops of horsemen in white woollen cloaks, sheikhs and Bedouins with flowing robes and huge turbans, religious chiefs of the great sects, imperturbable and statuesque, were in strange contrast to the shouting dervishes and camel-drivers and eager pilgrims.

At last the great camel with its sacred burden stopped in front of Kaid for his prayer and blessing. As he held the tassels, lifted the gold-fringed curtain, and invoked Allah's blessing, a half-naked sheikh ran forward, and, raising his hand high above his head, cried shrilly: "Kaid, Kaid, hearken!"

Rough hands caught him away, but Kaid commanded them to desist; and the man called a blessing on him; and cried aloud:

"Listen, O Kaid, son of the stars and the light of day. God hath exalted thee. Thou art the Egyptian of all the Egyptians. In thy hand is power. But thou art mortal even as I. Behold, O Kaid, in the hour that I was born thou wast born, I in the dust without thy Palace wall, thou amid the splendid things. But thy star is my star. Behold, as God ordains, the Tree of Life was shaken on the night when all men pray and cry aloud to God--even the Night of the Falling Leaves. And I watched the falling leaves; and I saw my leaf, and it was withered, but only a little withered, and so I live yet a little. But I looked for thy leaf, thou who wert born in that moment when I waked to the world. I looked long, but I found no leaf, neither green nor withered. But I looked again upon my leaf, and then I saw that thy name now was also upon my leaf, and that it was neither green nor withered; but was a leaf that drooped as when an evil wind has passed and drunk its life. Listen, O Kaid! Upon the tomb of Mahomet I will set my lips, and it may be that the leaf of my life will come fresh and green again. But thou--wilt thou not come also to the lord Mahomet's tomb? Or"--he paused and raised his voice--"or wilt thou stay and lay thy lips upon the cross of the infidel? Wilt thou--"

He could say no more, for Kaid's face now darkened with anger. He made a gesture, and, in an instant, the man was gagged and bound, while a sullen

silence fell upon the crowd. Kaid suddenly became aware of this change of feeling, and looked round him. Presently his old prudence and subtlety came back, his face cleared a little, and he called aloud, "Unloose the man, and let him come to me." An instant after, the man was on his knees, silent before him.

"What is thy name?" Kaid asked.

"Kaid Ibrahim, Effendina," was the reply.

"Thou hast misinterpreted thy dream, Kaid Ibrahim," answered the Effendina. "The drooping leaf was token of the danger in which thy life should be, and my name upon thy leaf was token that I should save thee from death. Behold, I save thee. Inshallah, go in peace! There is no God but God, and the Cross is the sign of a false prophet. Thou art mad. God give thee a new mind. Go."

The man was presently lost in the sweltering, half-frenzied crowd; but he had done his work, and his words rang in the ears of Kaid as he rode away.

A few hours afterwards, bitter and rebellious, murmuring to himself, Kaid sat in a darkened room of his Nile Palace beyond the city. So few years on the throne, so young, so much on which to lay the hand of pleasure, so many millions to command; and yet the slave at his door had a surer hold on life and all its joys and lures than he, Prince Kaid, ruler of Egypt! There was on him that barbaric despair which has taken dreadful toll of life for the decree of destiny. Across the record of this day, as across the history of many an Eastern and pagan tyrant, was written: "He would not die alone." That the world should go on when he was gone, that men should buy and sell and laugh and drink, and flaunt it in the sun, while he, Prince Kaid, would be done with it all.

He was roused by the rustling of a robe. Before him stood the Arab physician, Sharif Bey, who had been in his father's house and his own for a lifetime. It was many a year since his ministrations to Kaid had ceased; but he had remained on in the Palace, doing service to those who received him, and--it was said by the evil-tongued--granting certificates of death out of harmony with dark facts, a sinister and useful figure. His beard was white, his face was friendly, almost benevolent, but his eyes had a light caught from no celestial flame.

His look was confident now, as his eyes bent on Kaid. He had lived long, he had seen much, he had heard of the peril that had been foreshadowed by the infidel physician; and, by a sure instinct, he knew that his own opportunity had come. He knew that Kaid would snatch at any offered comfort, would cherish any alleviating lie, would steal back from science and civilisation and the modern palace to the superstition of the fellah's hut. Were not all men alike when the neboot of Fate struck them down into the terrible loneliness of doom, numbing their minds? Luck would be with him that offered first succour in that dark hour. Sharif had come at the right moment for Sharif.

Kaid looked at him with dull yet anxious eyes. "Did I not command that none should enter?" he asked presently in a thick voice.

"Am I not thy physician, Effendina, to whom be the undying years? When the Effendina is sick, shall I not heal? Have I not waited like a dog at thy door these many years, till that time would come when none could heal thee save Sharif?"

"What canst thou give me?"

"What the infidel physician gave thee not--I can give thee hope. Hast thou done well, oh, Effendina, to turn from thine own people? Did not thine own father, and did not Mehemet Ali, live to a good age? Who were their physicians? My father and I, and my father's father, and his father's father."

"Thou canst cure me altogether?" asked Kaid hesitatingly.

"Wilt thou not have faith in one of thine own race? Will the infidel love thee as do we, who are thy children and thy brothers, who are to thee as a nail driven in the wall, not to be moved? Thou shalt live--Inshallah, thou shalt have healing and length of days!"

He paused at a gesture from Kaid, for a slave had entered and stood waiting.

"What dost thou here? Wert thou not commanded?" asked Kaid.

"Effendina, Claridge Pasha is waiting," was the reply.

Kaid frowned, hesitated; then, with a sudden resolve, made a gesture of dismissal to Sharif Bey, and nodded David's admittance to the slave.

As David entered, he passed Sharif Bey, and something in the look on the Arab physician's face--a secret malignancy and triumph--struck him strangely. And now a fresh anxiety and apprehension rose in his mind as he glanced at Kaid. The eye was heavy and gloomy, the face was clouded, the lips once so ready to smile at him were sullen and smileless now. David stood still, waiting.

"I did not expect thee till to-morrow, Saadat," said Kaid moodily at last.

"The business is urgent?" "Effendina," said David, with every nerve at tension, yet with outward self-control, "I have to report--" He paused, agitated; then, in a firm voice, he told of the disaster which had befallen the cotton-mills and the steamer.

As David spoke, Kaid's face grew darker, his fingers fumbled vaguely with the linen of the loose white robe he wore. When the tale was finished he sat for a moment apparently stunned by the news, then he burst out fiercely:

"Bismillah, am I to hear only black words to-day? Hast thou naught to say but this--the fortune of Egypt burned to ashes!"

David held back the quick retort that came to his tongue.

"Half my fortune is in the ashes," he answered with dignity. "The rest came from savings never made before by this Government. Is the work less worthy in thy sight, Effendina, because it has been destroyed? Would thy life be less great and useful because a blow took thee from behind?"

Kaid's face turned black. David had bruised an open wound.

"What is my life to thee--what is thy work to me?"

"Thy life is dear to Egypt, Effendina," urged David soothingly, "and my labour for Egypt has been pleasant in thine eyes till now."

"Egypt cannot be saved against her will," was the moody response. "What has come of the Western hand upon the Eastern plough?" His face grew blacker; his heart was feeding on itself.

"Thou, the friend of Egypt, hast come of it, Effendina."

"Harrik was right, Harrik was right," Kaid answered, with stubborn gloom and anger. "Better to die in our own way, if we must die, than live in the way of another. Thou wouldst make of Egypt another England; thou wouldst civilise the Soudan--bismillah, it is folly!"

"That is not the way Mehemet Ali thought, nor Ibrahim. Nor dost thou think so, Effendina," David answered gravely. "A dark spirit is on thee. Wouldst thou have me understand that what we have done together, thou and I, was ill done, that the old bad days were better?"

"Go back to thine own land," was the surly answer. "Nation after nation ravaged Egypt, sowed their legions here, but the Egyptian has lived them down. The faces of the fellaheen are the faces of Thotmes and Seti. Go back. Egypt will travel her own path. We are of the East; we are Muslim. What is right to you is wrong to us. Ye would make us over--give us cotton beds and wooden floors and fine flour of the mill, and cleanse the cholera-hut with disinfectants, but are these things all? How many of your civilised millions would die for their prophet Christ? Yet all Egypt would rise up from the mud-floor, the dourha-field and the mud-hut, and would come out to die for Mahomet and Allah--ay, as Harrik knew, as Harrik knew! Ye steal into corners, and hide behind the curtains of your beds to pray; we pray where the hour of prayer finds us --in the street, in the market-place, where the house is building, the horse being shod, or the money-changers are. Ye hear the call of civilisation, but we heap the Muezzin--"

He stopped, and searched mechanically for his watch. "It is the hour the Muezzin calls," said David gently. "It is almost sunset. Shall I open the windows that the call may come to us?" he added.

While Kaid stared at him, his breast heaving with passion, David went to a window and opened the shutters wide.

The Palace faced the Nile, which showed like a tortuous band of blue and silver a mile or so away. Nothing lay between but the brown sand, and here and there a handful of dark figures gliding towards the river, or a little train of camels making for the bare grey hills from the ghassas which had given them their desert loads. The course of the Nile was marked by a wide fringe of palms showing blue and purple, friendly and ancient and solitary. Beyond the river and the palms lay the grey-brown desert, faintly touched with red. So clear was the sweet evening air that the irregular surface of the desert showed for a score of miles as plainly as though it were but a step away. Hummocks of sand--tombs and fallen monuments gave a feeling as of forgotten and buried peoples; and the two vast pyramids of Sakkarah stood up in the plaintive glow of the evening skies, majestic and solemn, faithful to the dissolved and absorbed races who had built them. Curtains of mauve and saffron-red were hung behind them, and through a break of cloud fringing the horizon a yellow glow poured, to touch the tips of the pyramids with poignant splendour. But farther over to the right, where Cairo lay, there hung a bluish mist, palpable and delicate, out of which emerged the vast pyramids of Cheops; and beside it the smiling inscrutable Sphinx faced the changeless centuries. Beyond the pyramids the mist deepened into a vast deep cloud of blue and purple, which seemed the end to some mystic highway untravelled by the sons of men.

Suddenly there swept over David a wave of feeling such as had passed over Kaid, though of a different nature. Those who had built the pyramids were gone, Cheops and Thotmes and Amenhotep and Chefron and the rest. There had been reformers in those lost races; one age had sought to better the last, one man had toiled to save--yet there only remained offensive bundles of mummied flesh and bone and a handful of relics in tombs fifty centuries old. Was it all, then, futile? Did it matter, then, whether one man laboured or a race aspired?

Only for a moment these thoughts passed through his mind; and then, as the glow through the broken cloud on the opposite horizon suddenly faded, and veils of melancholy fell over the desert and the river and the palms, there rose a call, sweetly shrill, undoubtingly insistent. Sunset had come, and, with it, the Muezzin's call to prayer from the minaret of a mosque hard by.

David was conscious of a movement behind him--that Kaid was praying with hands uplifted; and out on the sands between the window and the river he saw kneeling figures here and there, saw the camel-drivers halt their trains, and face the East with hands uplifted. The call went on--"La ilaha illa-Allah !"

It called David, too. The force and searching energy and fire in it stole through his veins, and drove from him the sense of futility and despondency which had so deeply added to his trouble. There was something for him, too, in that which held infatuated the minds of so many millions.

A moment later Kaid and he faced each other again. "Effendina," he said, "thou wilt not desert our work now?"

"Money--for this expedition? Thou hast it?" Kaid asked ironically.

"I have but little money, and it must go to rebuild the mills, Effendina. I must have it of thee."

"Let them remain in their ashes."

"But thousands will have no work."

"They had work before they were built, they will have work now they are gone."

"Effendina, I stayed in Egypt at thy request. The work is thy work. Wilt thou desert it?"

"The West lured me--by things that seemed. Now I know things as they are."

"They will lure thee again to-morrow," said David firmly, but with a weight on his spirit. His eyes sought and held Kaid's. "It is too late to go back; we must go forward or we shall lose the Soudan, and a Mahdi and his men will be in Cairo in ten years."

For an instant Kaid was startled. The old look of energy and purpose leaped up into his eye; but it faded quickly again. If, as the Italian physician more than hinted, his life hung by a thread, did it matter whether the barbarian came to Cairo? That was the business of those who came after. If Sharif was right, and his life was saved, there would be time enough to set things right.

"I will not pour water on the sands to make an ocean," he answered. "Will a ship sail on the Sahara? Bismillah, it is all a dream! Harrik was right. But dost thou think to do with me as thou didst with Harrik?" he sneered. "Is it in thy mind?"

David's patience broke down under the long provocation. "Know then, Effendina," he said angrily, "that I am not thy subject, nor one beholden to thee, nor thy slave. Upon terms well understood, I have laboured here. I have kept my obligations, and it is thy duty to keep thy obligations, though the hand of death were on thee. I know not what has poisoned thy mind, and driven thee from reason and from justice. I know that, Prince Pasha of Egypt as thou art, thou art as bound to me as any fellah that agrees to tend my door or row my boat. Thy compact with me is a compact with England, and it shall be kept, if thou art an honest man. Thou mayst find thousands in Egypt who will serve thee at any price, and bear thee in any mood. I have but one price. It is well known to thee. I will not be the target for thy black temper. This is not the middle ages; I am an Englishman, not a helot. The bond must be kept; thou shalt not play fast and loose. Money must be found; the

expedition must go. But if thy purpose is now Harrik's purpose, then Europe should know, and Egypt also should know. I have been thy right hand, Effendina; I will not be thy old shoe, to be cast aside at thy will."

In all the days of his life David had never flamed out as he did now. Passionate as his words were, his manner was strangely quiet, but his white and glistening face and his burning eyes showed how deep was his anger.

As he spoke, Kaid sank upon the divan. Never had he been challenged so. With his own people he had ever been used to cringing and abasement, and he had played the tyrant, and struck hard and cruelly, and he had been feared; but here, behind David's courteous attitude, there was a scathing arraignment of his conduct which took no count of consequence. In other circumstances his vanity would have shrunk under this whip of words, but his native reason and his quick humour would have justified David. In this black distemper possessing him, however, only outraged egotism prevailed. His hands clenched and unclenched, his lips were drawn back on his teeth in rage.

When David had finished, Kaid suddenly got to his feet and took a step forward with a malediction, but a faintness seized him and he staggered back. When he raised his head again David was gone.

CHAPTER XXX

LACEY MOVES

If there was one glistening bead of sweat on the bald pate of Lacey of Chicago there were a thousand; and the smile on his face was not less shining and unlimited. He burst into the rooms of the palace where David had residence, calling: "Oyez! Oyez! Saadat! Oh, Pasha of the Thousand Tails! Oyez! Oyez!"

Getting no answer, he began to perform a dance round the room, which in modern days is known as the negro cake-walk. It was not dignified, but it would have been less dignified still performed by any other living man of forty-five with a bald head and a waist-band ten inches too large. Round the room three times he went, and then he dropped on a divan. He gasped, and mopped his face and forehead, leaving a little island of moisture on the top of his head untouched. After a moment, he gained breath and settled down a little. Then he burst out:

"Are you coming to my party, O effendi?
There'll be high jinks, there'll be welcome, there'll be room;
For to-morrow we are pulling stakes for Shendy.
Are you coming to my party, O Nahoum?"

"Say, I guess that's pretty good on the spur of the moment," he wheezed,

and, taking his inseparable note book from his pocket, wrote the impromptu down. "I guess She'll like that-it rings spontaneous. She'll be tickled, tickled to death, when she knows what's behind it." He repeated it with gusto. "She'll dote on it," he added--the person to whom he referred being the sister of the American Consul, the little widow, "cute as she can be," of whom he had written to Hylda in the letter which had brought a crisis in her life. As he returned the note-book to his pocket a door opened. Mahommed Hassan slid forward into the room, and stood still, impassive and gloomy. Lacey beckoned, and said grotesquely:

"Come hither, come hither, my little daughter,
And do not tremble so!"

A sort of scornful patience was in Mahommed's look, but he came nearer and waited.

"Squat on the ground, and smile a smile of mirth, Mahommed," Lacey said riotously. "For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be Queen o' the May!"

Mahommed's face grew resentful. "O effendi, shall the camel-driver laugh when the camels are lost in the khamsin and the water-bottle is empty?"

"Certainly not, O son of the spreading palm; but this is not a desert, nor a gaudy caravan. This is a feast of all angels. This is the day when Nahoum the Nefarious is to be buckled up like a belt, and ridden in a ring. Where is the Saadat?"

"He is gone, effendi! Like a mist on the face of the running water, so was his face; like eyes that did not see, so was his look. 'Peace be to thee, Mahommed, thou art faithful as Zaida,' he said, and he mounted and rode into the desert. I ran after till he was come to the edge of the desert; but he sent me back, saying that I must wait for thee; and this word I was to say, that Prince Kaid had turned his face darkly from him, and that the finger of Sharif--"

"That fanatical old quack--Harrik's friend!"

--that the finger of Sharif was on his pulse; but the end of all was in the hands of God."

"Oh yes, exactly, the finger of Sharif on his pulse! The old story--the return to the mother's milk, throwing back to all the Pharaohs. Well, what then?" he added cheerfully, his smile breaking out again. "Where has he gone, our Saadat?"

"To Ebn Ezra Bey at the Coptic Monastery by the Etl Tree, where your prophet Christ slept when a child."

Lacey hummed to himself meditatively. "A sort of last powwow--Rome before the fall. Everything wrong, eh? Kaid turned fanatic, Nahoum on the tiles watching for the Saadat to fall, things trembling for want of

hard cash. That's it, isn't it, Mahommed?"

Mahommed nodded, but his look was now alert, and less sombre. He had caught at something vital and confident in Lacey's tone. He drew nearer, and listened closely.

"Well, now, my gentle gazelle, listen unto me," continued Lacey. He suddenly leaned forward, and spoke in subdued but rapid tones. "Say, Mahommed, once upon a time there was an American man, with a shock of red hair, and a nature like a spring-lock. He went down to Mexico, with a million or two of his own money got honestly by an undisputed will from an undisputed father--you don't understand that, but it doesn't matter--and with a few millions of other people's money, for to gamble in mines and railways and banks and steamship companies--all to do with Mexico what the Saadat has tried to do in Egypt with less money; but not for the love of Allah, same as him. This American was going to conquer like Cortez, but his name was Thomas Tilman Lacey, and he had a lot of gall. After years of earnest effort, he lost his hair and the millions of the Infatuated Conquistadores. And by-and-by he came to Cairo with a thimbleful of income, and began to live again. There was a civil war going on in his own country, but he thought that one out of forty millions would not be strictly missed. So he stayed in Egypt; and the tale of his days in Egypt, is it not written with a neboot of domwood in the book of Mahommed Hassan the scribe?"

He paused and beamed upon the watchful Mahommed, who, if he did not understand all that had been said, was in no difficulty as to the drift and meaning of the story.

"Aiwa, effendi," he urged impatiently. "It is a long ride to the Etl Tree, and the day is far spent."

"Inshallah, you shall hear, my turtle-dove! One day there came to Cairo, in great haste, a man from Mexico, looking for the foolish one called T. T. Lacey, bearing glad news. And the man from Mexico blew his trumpet, and straightway T. T. Lacey fell down dismayed. The trumpet said that a million once lost in Mexico was returned, with a small flock of other millions; for a mine, in which it was sunk, had burst forth with a stony stream of silver. And behold! Thomas Tilman Lacey, the despised waster of his patrimony and of other people's treasure, is now, O son of the fig-flower, richer than Kaid Pasha and all his eunuchs."

Suddenly Mahommed Hassan leaned forward, then backward, and, after the fashion of desert folk, gave a shrill, sweet ululation that seemed to fill the palace.

"Say, that's A1," Lacey said, when Mahommed's voice sank to a whisper of wild harmony. "Yes, you can lick my boots, my noble sheikh of Manfaloot," he added, as Mahommed caught his feet and bent his head upon them. "I wanted to do something like that myself. Kiss 'em, honey; it'll do you good."

After a moment, Mahommed drew back and squatted before him in an attitude

of peace and satisfaction. "The Saadat--you will help him? You will give him money?"

"Let's put it in this way, Mahommed: I'll invest in an expedition out of which I expect to get something worth while--concessions for mines and railways, et cetera." He winked a round, blue eye. "Business is business, and the way to get at the Saadat is to talk business; but you can make up your mind that,

"To-morrow, we are pulling stakes for Shendy!
Are you coming to my party, O Nahoum?"

"By the prophet Abraham, but the news is great news," said Mahommed with a grin. "But the Effendina?"

"Well, I'll try and square the Effendina," answered Lacey. "Perhaps the days of backsheesh aren't done in Egypt, after all."

"And Nahoum Pasha?" asked Mahommed, with a sinister look.

"Well, we'll try and square him, too, but in another way."

"The money, it is in Egypt?" queried Mahommed, whose idea was that money to be real must be seen. "Something that's as handy and as marketable," answered Lacey. "I can raise half a million to-morrow; and that will do a lot of what we want. How long will it take to ride to the monastery?"

Mahommed told him.

Lacey was about to leave the room, when he heard a voice outside. "Nahoum!" he said, and sat down again on the divan. "He has come to see the Saadat, I suppose; but it'll do him good to see me, perhaps. Open the sluices, Mahommed."

Yes, Nahoum would be glad to see the effendi, since Claridge Pasha was not in Cairo. When would Claridge Pasha return? If, then, the effendi expected to see the Saadat before his return to Cairo, perhaps he would convey a message. He could not urge his presence on the Saadat, since he had not been honoured with any communication since yesterday.

"Well, that's good-mannered, anyhow, pasha," said Lacey with cheerful nonchalance. "People don't always know when they're wanted or not wanted."

Nahoum looked at him guardedly, sighed and sat down. "Things have grown worse since yesterday," he said. "Prince Kaid received the news badly." He shook his head. "He has not the gift of perfect friendship. That is a Christian characteristic; the Muslim does not possess it. It was too strong to last, maybe--my poor beloved friend, the Saadat."

"Oh, it will last all right," rejoined Lacey coolly. "Prince Kaid has got a touch of jaundice, I guess. He knows a thing when he finds it, even if he hasn't the gift of 'perfect friendship,' same as Christians

like you and me. But even you and me don't push our perfections too far --I haven't noticed you going out of your way to do things for your 'poor beloved friend, the Saadat'."

"I have given him time, energy, experience--money."

Lacey nodded. "True. And I've often wondered why, when I've seen the things you didn't give and the things you took away."

Nahoum's eyes half closed. Lacey was getting to close quarters with suspicion and allusion; but it was not his cue to resent them yet.

"I had come now to offer him help; to advance him enough to carry through his expedition."

"Well, that sounds generous, but I guess he would get on without it, pasha. He would not want to be under any more obligations to you."

"He is without money. He must be helped."

"Just so."

"He cannot go to the treasury, and Prince Kaid has refused. Why should he decline help from his friend?" Suddenly Lacey changed his tactics. He had caught a look in Nahoum's eyes which gave him a new thought.

"Well, if you've any proposition, pasha, I'll take it to him. I'll be seeing him to-night."

"I can give him fifty thousand pounds."

"It isn't enough to save the situation, pasha."

"It will help him over the first zareba."

"Are there any conditions?" "There are no conditions, effendi." "And interest?"

"There would be no interest in money."

"Other considerations?"

"Yes, other considerations, effendi."

"If they were granted, would there be enough still in the stocking to help him over a second zareba--or a third, perhaps?"

"That would be possible, even likely, I think. Of course we speak in confidence, effendi."

"The confidence of the 'perfect friendship.'"

"There may be difficulty, because the Saadat is sensitive; but it is the only way to help him. I can get the money from but one source; and to

get it involves an agreement."

"You think his Excellency would not just jump at it--that it might hurt some of his prejudices, eh?"

"So, effendi."

"And me--where am I in it, pasha?"

"Thou hast great influence with his Excellency."

"I am his servant--I don't meddle with his prejudices, pasha."

"But if it were for his own good, to save his work here."

Lacey yawned almost ostentatiously. "I guess if he can't save it himself it can't be saved, not even when you reach out the hand of perfect friendship. You've been reaching out for a long time, pasha, and it didn't save the steamer or the cotton-mills; and it didn't save us when we were down by Sobat a while ago, and you sent Halim Bey to teach us to be patient. We got out of that nasty corner by sleight of hand, but not your sleight of hand, pasha. Your hand is a quick hand, but a sharp eye can see the trick, and then it's no good, not worth a button."

There was something savage behind Nahoum's eyes, but they did not show it; they blinked with earnest kindness and interest. The time would come when Lacey would go as his master should go, and the occasion was not far off now; but it must not be forced. Besides, was this fat, amorous-looking factotum of Claridge Pasha's as Spartan-minded as his master? Would he be superior to the lure of gold? He would see. He spoke seriously, with apparent solicitude.

"Thou dost not understand, effendi. Claridge Pasha must have money. Prestige is everything in Egypt, it is everything with Kaid. If Claridge Pasha rides on as though nothing has happened--and money is the only horse that can carry him--Kaid will not interfere, and his black mood may pass; but any halting now and the game is done."

"And you want the game to go on right bad, don't you? Well, I guess you're right. Money is the only winner in this race. He's got to have money, sure. How much can you raise? Oh, yes, you told me! Well, I don't think it's enough; he's got to have three times that; and if he can't get it from the Government, or from Kaid, it's a bad lookout. What's the bargain you have in your mind?"

"That the slave-trade continue, effendi."

Lacey did not wink, but he had a shock of surprise. On the instant he saw the trap--for the Saadat and for himself.

"He would not do it--not for money, pasha."

"He would not be doing it for money. The time is not ripe for it, it is

too dangerous. There is a time for all things. If he will but wait!"

"I wouldn't like to be the man that'd name the thing to him. As you say, he's got his prejudices. They're stronger than in most men."

"It need not be named to him. Thou canst accept the money for him, and when thou art in the Soudan, and he is going to do it, thou canst prevent it."

"Tell him that I've taken the money and that he's used it, and he oughtn't to go back on the bargain I made for him? So that he'll be bound by what I did?"

"It is the best way, effendi."

"He'd be annoyed," said Lacey with a patient sigh.

"He has a great soul; but sometimes he forgets that expediency is the true policy."

"Yet he's done a lot of things without it. He's never failed in what he set out to do. What he's done has been kicked over, but he's done it all right, somehow, at last."

"He will not be able to do this, effendi, except with my help--and thine."

"He's had quite a lot of things almost finished, too," said Lacey reflectively, "and then a hand reached out in the dark and cut the wires --cut them when he was sleeping, and he didn't know; cut them when he was waking, and he wouldn't understand; cut them under his own eyes, and he wouldn't see; because the hand that cut them was the hand of the perfect friend."

He got slowly to his feet, as a cloud of colour drew over the face of Nahoum and his eyes darkened with astonishment and anger. Lacey put his hands in his pockets and waited till Nahoum also rose. Then he gathered the other's eyes to his, and said with drawling scorn:

"So, you thought I didn't understand! You thought I'd got a brain like a peanut, and wouldn't drop onto your game or the trap you've set. You'd advance money--got from the slave-dealers to prevent the slave-trade being stopped! If Claridge Pasha took it and used it, he could never stop the slave-trade. If I took it and used it for him on the same terms, he couldn't stop the slave-trade, though he might know no more about the bargain than a babe unborn. And if he didn't stand by the bargain I made, and did prohibit slave-dealing, nothing'd stop the tribes till they marched into Cairo. He's been safe so far, because they believed in him, and because he'd rather die a million deaths than go crooked. Say, I've been among the Dagos before--down in Mexico--and I'm onto you. I've been onto you for a good while; though there was nothing I could spot certain; but now I've got you, and I'll break the 'perfect friendship' or I'll eat my shirt. I'll--"

He paused, realising the crisis in which David was moving, and that perils were thick around their footsteps. But, even as he thought of them, he remembered David's own frank, fearless audacity in danger and difficulty, and he threw discretion to the winds. He flung his flag wide, and believed with a belief as daring as David's that all would be well.

"Well, what wilt thou do?" asked Nahoum with cool and deadly menace. "Thou wilt need to do it quickly, because, if it is a challenge, within forty-eight hours Claridge Pasha and thyself will be gone from Egypt--or I shall be in the Nile."

"I'll take my chances, pasha," answered Lacey, with equal coolness. "You think you'll win. It's not the first time I've had to tackle men like you--they've got the breed in Mexico. They beat me there, but I learned the game, and I've learned a lot from you, too. I never knew what your game was here. I only know that the Saadat saved your life, and got you started again with Kaid. I only know that you called yourself a Christian, and worked on him till he believed in you, and Hell might crackle round you, but he'd believe, till he saw your contract signed with the Devil--and then he'd think the signature forged. But he's got to know now. We are not going out of Egypt, though you may be going to the Nile; but we are going to the Soudan, and with Kaid's blessing, too. You've put up the bluff, and I take it. Be sure you've got Kaid solid, for, if you haven't, he'll be glad to know where you keep the money you got from the slave-dealers."

Nahoum shrugged his shoulders. "Who has seen the money? Where is the proof? Kaid would know my reasons. It is not the first time virtue has been tested in Egypt, or the first time that it has fallen."

In spite of himself Lacey laughed. "Say, that's worthy of a great Christian intellect. You are a bright particular star, pasha. I take it back--they'd learn a lot from you in Mexico. But the only trouble with lying is, that the demand becomes so great you can't keep all the cards in your head, and then the one you forget does you. The man that isn't lying has the pull in the long run. You are out against us, pasha, and we'll see how we stand in forty-eight hours. You have some cards up your sleeve, I suppose; but--well, I'm taking you on. I'm taking you on with a lot of joy, and some sorrow, too, for we might have pulled off a big thing together, you and Claridge Pasha, with me to hold the stirrups. Now it's got to be war. You've made it so. It's a pity, for when we grip there'll be a heavy fall."

"For a poor man thou hast a proud stomach."

"Well, I'll admit the stomach, pasha. It's proud; and it's strong, too; it's stood a lot in Egypt; it's standing a lot to-day."

"We'll ease the strain, perhaps," sneered Nahoum. He made a perfunctory salutation and walked briskly from the room.

Mahommed Hassan crept in, a malicious grin on his face. Danger and conflict were as meat and drink to him.

"Effendi, God hath given thee a wasp's sting to thy tongue. It is well. Nahoum Pasha hath Mizraim: the Saadat hath thee and me."

"There's the Effendina," said Lacey reflectively. "Thou saidst thou would 'square' him, effendi."

"I say a lot," answered Lacey rather ruefully. "Come, Mahommed, the Saadat first, and the sooner the better."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE STRUGGLE IN THE DESERT

"And His mercy is on them that fear Him throughout all generations."

On the clear, still evening air the words rang out over the desert, sonorous, imposing, peaceful. As the notes of the verse died away the answer came from other voices in deep, appealing antiphonal:

"He hath showed strength with His arm, He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts."

Beyond the limits of the monastery there was not a sign of life; neither beast nor bird, nor blade of grass, nor any green thing; only the perfect immemorial blue, and in the east a misty moon, striving in vain to offer light which the earth as yet rejected for the brooding radiance of the descending sun. But at the great door of the monastery there grew a stately palm, and near by an ancient acacia-tree; and beyond the stone chapel there was a garden of struggling shrubs and green things, with one rose-tree which scattered its pink leaves from year to year upon the loam, since no man gathered bud or blossom.

The triumphant call of the Magnificat, however beautiful, seemed strangely out of place in this lonely island in a sea of sand. It was the song of a bannered army, marching over the battle-field with conquering voices, and swords as yet unsheathed and red, carrying the spoils of conquest behind the laurelled captain of the host. The crumbling and ancient walls were surrounded by a moat which a stranger's foot crossed hardly from moon to moon, which the desert wayfarer sought rarely, since it was out of the track of caravans, and because food was scant in the refectory of this Coptic brotherhood. It was scarce five hours' ride from the Palace of the Prince Pasha: but it might have been a thousand miles away, so profoundly separate was it from the world of vital things and deeds of men.

As the chant rang out, confident, majestic, and serene, carried by voices of power and shrill sweetness, which only the desert can produce, it

might have seemed to any listener that this monastery was all that remained of some ancient kingdom of brimming, active cities, now lying beneath the obliterating sand, itself the monument and memorial of a breath of mercy of the Destroyer, the last refuge of a few surviving captains of a departed greatness. Hidden by the grey, massive walls, built as it were to resist the onset of a ravaging foe, the swelling voices might well have been those of some ancient order of valiant knights, whose banners hung above them, the 'riclame' of their deeds. But they were voices and voices only; for they who sang were as unkempt and forceless as the lonely wall which shut them in from the insistent soul of the desert.

Desolation? The desert was not desolate. Its face was bare and burning, it slaked no man's thirst, gave no man food, save where scattered oases were like the breasts of a vast mother eluding the aching lips of her parched children; but the soul of the desert was living and inspiring, beating with vitality. It was life that burned like flame. If the water-skin was dry and the date-bag empty it smothered and destroyed; but it was life; and to those who ventured into its embrace, obeying the conditions of the sharp adventure, it gave what neither sea, nor green plain, nor high mountain, nor verdant valley could give--a consuming sense of power, which found its way to the deepest recesses of being. Out upon the vast sea of sand, where the descending sun was spreading a note of incandescent colour, there floated the grateful words:

"He remembering His mercy hath holpen His servant Israel; as He promised to our forefathers, Abraham, and his seed for ever."

Then the antiphonal ceased; and together the voices of all within the place swelled out in the Gloria and the Amen, and seemed to pass away in ever-receding vibrations upon the desert, till it was lost in the comforting sunset.

As the last note died away, a voice from beneath the palm-tree near the door, deeper than any that had come from within, said reverently: "Ameen-Ameen !"

He who spoke was a man well over sixty years, with a grey beard, lofty benign forehead, and the eyes of a scholar and a dreamer. As he uttered the words of spiritual assent, alike to the Muslim and the Christian religion, he rose to his feet, showing the figure of a man of action, alert, well-knit, authoritative. Presently he turned towards the East and stretched a robe upon the ground, and with stately beauty of gesture he spread out his hands, standing for a moment in the attitude of aspiration. Then, kneeling, he touched his turbaned head to the ground three times, and as the sun drew down behind the sharp, bright line of sand that marked the horizon, he prayed devoutly and long. It was Ebn Ezra Bey.

Muslim though he was, he had visited this monastery many times, to study the ancient Christian books which lay in disordered heaps in an ill-kept chamber, books which predated the Hegira, and were as near to the life of the Early Church as the Scriptures themselves--or were so reputed.

Student and pious Muslim as he was, renowned at El Azhar and at every Muslim university in the Eastern world, he swore by the name of Christ as by that of Abraham, Isaac, and all the prophets, though to him Mahomet was the last expression of Heaven's will to mankind. At first received at the monastery with unconcealed aversion, and not without danger to himself, he had at last won to him the fanatical monks, who, in spirit, kept this ancient foundation as rigid to their faith as though it were in mediaeval times. And though their discipline was lax, and their daily duties orderless, this was Oriental rather than degenerate. Here Ebn Ezra had stayed for weeks at a time in the past, not without some religious scandal, long since forgotten.

His prayers ended, he rose up slowly, once more spread out his hands in ascription, and was about to enter the monastery, when, glancing towards the west, he saw a horseman approaching. An instinct told him who it was before he could clearly distinguish the figure, and his face lighted with a gentle and expectant smile. Then his look changed.

"He is in trouble," he murmured. "As it was with his uncle in Damascus, so will it be with him. Malaish, we are in the will of God!"

The hand that David laid in Ebn Ezra's was hot and nervous, the eyes that drank in the friendship of the face which had seen two Claridges emptying out their lives in the East were burning and famished by long fasting of the spirit, forced abstinence from the pleasures of success and fruition-haunting, desiring eyes, where flamed a spirit which consumed the body and the indomitable mind. The lips, however, had their old trick of smiling, though the smile which greeted Ebn Ezra Bey had a melancholy which touched the desert-worn, life-spent old Arab as he had not been touched since a smile, just like this, flashed up at him from the weather-stained, dying face of quaint Benn Claridge in a street of Damascus. The natural duplicity of the Oriental had been abashed and inactive before the simple and astounding honesty of these two Quaker folk.

He saw crisis written on every feature of the face before him. Yet the scanty meal they ate with the monks in the ancient room was enlivened by the eager yet quiet questioning of David, to whom the monks responded with more spirit than had been often seen in this arid retreat. The single torch which spluttered from the wall as they drank their coffee lighted up faces as strange, withdrawn, and unconsciously secretive as ever gathered to greet a guest. Dim tales had reached them of this Christian reformer and administrator, scraps of legend from stray camel-drivers, a letter from the Patriarch commanding them to pray blessings on his labours--who could tell what advantage might not come to the Coptic Church through him, a Christian! On the dull, torpid faces, light seemed struggling to live for a moment, as David talked. It was as though something in their meagre lives, which belonged to undeveloped feelings, was fighting for existence--a light struggling to break through murky veils of inexperience.

Later, in the still night, however--still, though air vibrated everywhere, as though the desert breathed an ether which was to fill

men's veins with that which quieted the fret and fever of life's disillusionings and forgeries and failures--David's speech with Ebn Ezra Bey was of a different sort. If, as it seems ever in the desert, an invisible host of beings, once mortal, now immortal, but suspensive and understanding, listened to the tale he unfolded, some glow of pity must have possessed them; for it was an Iliad of herculean struggle against absolute disaster, ending with the bitter news of his grandfather's death. It was the story of AEdipus overcome by events too strong for soul to bear. In return, as the stars wheeled on, and the moon stole to the zenith, majestic and slow, Ebn Ezra offered to his troubled friend only the philosophy of the predestinarian, mingled with the calm of the stoic. But something antagonistic to his own dejection, to the Muslim's fatalism, emerged from David's own altruism, to nerve him to hope and effort still. His unconquerable optimism rose determinedly to the surface, even as he summed up and related the forces working against him.

"They have all come at once," he said; "all the activities opposing me, just as though they had all been started long ago at different points, with a fixed course to run, and to meet and give me a fall in the hour when I could least resist. You call it Fate. I call it what it proves itself to be. But here it is a hub of danger and trouble, and the spokes of disaster are flying to it from all over the compass, to make the wheel that will grind me; and all the old troop of Palace intriguers and despoilers are waiting to heat the tire and fasten it on the machine of torture. Kaid has involved himself in loans which press, in foolish experiments in industry without due care; and now from ill-health and bad temper comes a reaction towards the old sinister rule, when the Prince shuts his eyes and his agents ruin and destroy. Three nations who have intrigued against my work see their chance, and are at Kaid's elbow. The fate of the Soudan is in the balance. It is all as the shake of a feather. I can save it if I go; but, just as I am ready, my mills burn down, my treasury dries up, Kaid turns his back on me, and the toil of years is swept away in a night. Thee sees it is terrible, friend?"

Ebn Ezra looked at him seriously and sadly for a moment, and then said: "Is it given one man to do all? If many men had done these things, then there had been one blow for each. Now all falls on thee, Saadat. Is it the will of God that one man should fling the lance, fire the cannon, dig the trenches, gather food for the army, drive the horses on to battle, and bury the dead? Canst thou do all?"

David's eyes brightened to the challenge. "There was the work to do, and there were not the many to do it. My hand was ready; the call came; I answered. I plunged into the river of work alone."

"Thou didst not know the strength of the currents, the eddies and the whirlpools, the hidden rocks--and the shore is far off, Saadat."

"It is not so far but that, if I could get breath to gather strength, I should reach the land in time. Money--ah, but enough for this expedition! That over, order, quiet yonder, my own chosen men as governors, and I could"--he pointed towards the southern horizon--"I could plant my foot in Cairo, and from the centre control the great

machinery--with Kaid's help; and God's help. A sixth of a million, and Kaid's hand behind me, and the boat would lunge free of the sand-banks and churn on, and churn on. . . . Friend," he added, with the winning insistence that few found it possible to resist, "if all be well, and we go thither, wilt thou become the governor-general yonder? With thee to rule justly where there is most need of justice, the end would be sure--if it be the will of God."

Ebn Ezra Bey sat for a moment looking into the worn, eager face, indistinct in the moonlight, then answered slowly: "I am seventy, and the years smite hard as they pass, and there or here, it little matters when I go, as I must go; and whether it be to bend the lance, or bear the flag before thee, or rule a Mudirieh, what does it matter! I will go with thee," he added hastily; "but it is better thou shouldst not go. Within the last three days I have news from the South. All that thou hast done there is in danger now. The word for revolt has passed from tribe to tribe. A tongue hath spoken, and a hand hath signalled "--his voice lowered--" and I think I know the tongue and the hand!" He paused; then, as David did not speak, continued: "Thou who art wise in most things, dost decline to seek for thy foe in him who eateth from the same dish with thee. Only when it is too late thou wilt defend thyself and all who keep faith with thee."

David's face clouded. "Nahoum, thou dost mean Nahoum? But thou dost not understand, and there is no proof."

"As a camel knows the coming storm while yet the sky is clear, by that which the eye does not see, so do I feel Nahoum. The evils thou hast suffered, Saadat, are from his hand, if from any hand in Egypt--"

Suddenly he leaned over and touched David's arm. "Saadat, it is of no avail. There is none in Egypt that desires good; thy task is too great. All men will deceive thee; if not now, yet in time. If Kaid favours thee once more, and if it is made possible for thee to go to the Soudan, yet I pray thee to stay here. Better be smitten here, where thou canst get help from thine own country, if need be, than yonder, where they but wait to spoil thy work and kill thee. Thou art young; wilt thou throw thy life away? Art thou not needed here as there? For me it is nothing, whether it be now or in a few benumbing years; but for thee--is there no one whom thou lovest so well that thou wouldst not shelter thy life to spare that life sorrow? Is there none that thou lovest so, and that will love thee to mortal sorrow, if thou goest without care to thy end too soon?"

As a warm wind suddenly sweeps across the cool air of a summer evening for an instant, suffocating and unnerving, so Ebn Ezra's last words swept across David's spirit. His breath came quicker, his eyes half closed. "Is there none that thou lovest so, and that will love thee to mortal sorrow, if--"

As a hand secretly and swiftly slips the lever that opens the sluice-gates of a dike, while the watchman turns away for a moment to look at the fields which the waters enrich and the homes of poor folk whom the

gates defend, so, in a moment, when off his guard, worn with watching and fending, as it were, Ebn Ezra had sprung the lever, and a flood of feeling swept over David, drowned him in its impulse and pent-up force.

"Is there none that thou lovest so--" Of what use had been all his struggle and his pain since that last day in Hamley--his dark fighting days in the desert with Lacey and Mahommed, and his handful of faithful followers, hemmed in by dangers, the sands swarming with Arabs who feathered now to his safety, now to his doom, and his heart had hungered for what he had denied it with a will that would not be conquered? Wasted by toil and fever and the tension of danger and the care of others dependent on him, he had also fought a foe which was ever at his elbow, ever whispered its comfort and seduction in his ear, the insidious and peace-giving, exalting opiate that had tided him over some black places, and then had sought for mastery of him when he was back again in the world of normal business and duty, where it appealed not as a medicine, but as a perilous luxury. And fighting this foe, which had a voice so soothing, and words like the sound of murmuring waters, and a cool and comforting hand that sought to lead him into gardens of stillness and passive being, where he could no more hear the clangour and vexing noises of a world that angered and agonised, there had also been the lure of another passion of the heart, which was too perilously dear to contemplate. Eyes that were beautiful, and their beauty was not for him; a spirit that was bright and glowing, but the brightness and the glow might not renew his days. It was hard to fight alone. Alone he was, for only to one may the doors within doors be opened--only to one so dear that all else is everlastingly distant may the true tale of the life beneath life be told. And it was not for him--nothing of this; not even the thought of it; for to think of it was to desire it, and to desire it was to reach out towards it; and to reach out towards it was the end of all. There had been moments of abandonment to the alluring dream, such as when he wrote the verses which Lacey had sent to Hylda from the desert; but they were few. Oft-repeated, they would have filled him with an agitated melancholy impossible to be borne in the life which must be his.

So it had been. The deeper into life and its labours and experiences he had gone, the greater had been his temptations, born of two passions, one of the body and its craving, the other of the heart and its desires: and he had fought on--towards the morning.

"Is there none that thou lovest so, and that will love thee to mortal sorrow, if thou goest without care to thy end too soon?" The desert, the dark monastery, the acacia tree, the ancient palm, the ruinous garden, disappeared. He only saw a face which smiled at him, as it had done 'by the brazier in the garden at Cairo, that night when she and Nahoum and himself and Mizraim had met in the room of his house by the Ezbekieh gardens, and she had gone out to her old life in England, and he had taken up the burden of the East--that long six years ago. His head dropped in his hands, and all that was beneath the Quaker life he had led so many years, packed under the crust of form and habit, and regulated thought, and controlled emotion, broke forth now, and had its way with him.

He turned away staggering and self-reproachful from the first question, only to face the other--"And that will love thee to mortal sorrow, if thou goest without care to thy end too soon." It was a thought he had never let himself dwell on for an instant in all the days since they had last met. He had driven it back to its covert, even before he could recognise its face. It was disloyal to her, an offence against all that she was, an affront to his manhood to let the thought have place in his mind even for one swift moment. She was Lord Eglington's wife--there could be no sharing of soul and mind and body and the exquisite devotion of a life too dear for thought. Nothing that she was to Eglington could be divided with another, not for an hour, not by one act of impulse; or else she must be less, she that might have been, if there had been no Eglington--

An exclamation broke from him, and, as one crying out in one's sleep wakes himself, so the sharp cry of his misery woke him from the trance of memory that had been upon him, and he slowly became conscious of Ebn Ezra standing before him. Their eyes met, and Ebn Ezra spoke:

"The will of Allah be thy will, Saadat. If it be to go to the Soudan, I am thine; if it be to stay, I am thy servant and thy brother. But whether it be life or death, thou must sleep, for the young are like water without sleep. Thou canst not live in strength nor die with fortitude without it. For the old, malaish, old age is between a sleeping and a waking! Come, Saadat! Forget not, thou must ride again to Cairo at dawn."

David got slowly to his feet and turned towards the monastery. The figure of a monk stood in the doorway with a torch to light him to his room.

He turned to Ebn Ezra again. "Does thee think that I have aught of his courage--my Uncle Benn? Thou knowest me--shall I face it out as did he?"

"Saadat," the old man answered, pointing, "yonder acacia, that was he, quick to grow and short to live; but thou art as this date-palm, which giveth food to the hungry, and liveth through generations. Peace be upon thee," he added at the doorway, as the torch flickered towards the room where David was to lie.

"And upon thee, peace!" answered David gently, and followed the smoky light to an inner chamber. The room in which David found himself was lofty and large, but was furnished with only a rough wooden bed, a rug, and a brazier. Left alone, he sat down on the edge of the bed, and, for a few moments, his mind strayed almost vaguely from one object to another. From two windows far up in the wall the moonlight streamed in, making bars of light aslant the darkness.

Not a sound broke the stillness. Yet, to his sensitive nerves, the air seemed tingling with sensation, stirring with unseen activities. Here the spirit of the desert seemed more insistent in its piercing vitality, because it was shut in by four stone walls.

Mechanically he took off his coat, and was about to fold and lay it on the rug beside the bed, when something hard in one of the pockets knocked against his knee. Searching, he found and drew forth a small bottle which, for many a month past, had lain in the drawer of a table where he had placed it on his return from the Soudan. It was an evil spirit which sent this tiny phial to his hand at a moment when he had paid out of the full treasury of his strength and will its accumulated deposit, leaving him with a balance on which no heavy draft could be made. His pulse quickened, then his body stiffened with the effort at self-control.

Who placed this evil elixir in his pocket? What any enemy of his work had done was nothing to what might be achieved by the secret foe, who had placed this anodyne within his reach at this the most critical moment of his life. He remembered the last time he had used it--in the desert: two days of forgetfulness to the world, when it all moved by him, the swarming Arabs, the train of camels, the loads of ivory, the slimy crocodile on the sandbanks, the vultures hovering above unburied carcasses, the kourbash descending on shining black shoulders, corrugating bare brown bodies into cloven skin and lacerated flesh, a fight between champions of two tribes who clasped and smote and struggled and rained blows, and, both mortally wounded, still writhed in last conflict upon the ground--and Mahommed Hassan ever at the tent door or by his side, towering, watchful, sullen to all faces without, smiling to his own, with dog-like look waiting for any motion of his hand or any word.... Ah, Mahommed Hassan, it was he! Mahommed had put this phial in his pocket. His bitter secret was not hidden from Mahommed. And this was an act of supreme devotion--to put at his hand the lulling, inspiring draught. Did this fellah servant know what it meant--the sin of it, the temptation, the terrible joy, the blessed quiet; and then, the agonising remorse, the withering self-hatred and torturing penitence? No, Mahommed only knew that when the Saadat was gone beyond his strength, when the sleepless nights and feverish days came in the past, in their great troubles, when men were dying and only the Saadat could save, that this cordial lifted him out of misery and storm into calm. Yet Mahommed must have divined that it was a thing against which his soul revolted, or he would have given it to him openly. In the heart and mind of the giant murderer, however, must have been the thought that now when trouble was upon his master again, trouble which might end all, this supreme destroyer of pain and dark memory and present misery, would give him the comfort he needed--and that he would take it.

If he had not seen it, this sudden craving would not have seized him for this eager beguiling, this soothing benevolence. Yet here it was in his hand; and even as it lay in his cold fingers--how cold they were, and his head how burning!--the desire for it surged up in him. And, as though the thing itself had the magical power to summon up his troubles, that it might offer the apathy and stimulus in one--even as it lured him, his dangers, his anxieties, the black uncertainties massed, multiplied and aggressive, rose before him, buffeted him, caught at his throat, dragged down his shoulders, clutched at his heart.

Now, with a cry of agony, he threw the phial on the ground, and, sinking

on the bed, buried his face in his hands and moaned, and fought for freedom from the cords tightening round him. It was for him to realise now how deep are the depths to which the human soul can sink, even while labouring to climb. Once more the sense of awful futility was on him: of wasted toil and blanched force, veins of energy drained of their blood, hope smitten in the way, and every dear dream shattered. Was it, then, all ended? Was his work indeed fallen, and all his love undone? Was his own redemption made impossible? He had offered up his life to this land to atone for a life taken when she--when she first looked up with eyes of gratitude, eyes that haunted him. Was it, then, unacceptable? Was it so that he must turn his back upon this long, heart-breaking but beloved work, this panacea for his soul, without which he could not pay the price of blood?

Go back to England--to Hamley where all had changed, where the old man he loved no longer ruled in the Red Mansion, where all that had been could be no more? Go to some other land, and there begin again another such a work? Were there not vast fields of human effort, effort such as his, where he could ease the sorrow of living by the joy of a divine altruism? Go back to Hamley? Ah, no, a million times, no! That life was dead, it was a cycle of years behind him. There could be no return. He was in a maelstrom of agony, his veins were afire, his lips were parched. He sprang from his bed, knelt down, and felt for the little phial he had flung aside. After a moment his hand caught it, clutched it. But, even at the crest of the wave of temptation, words that he had heard one night in Hamley, that last night of all, flashed into his mind--the words of old Luke Claridge's prayer, "And if a viper fasten on his hand, O Lord--"

Suddenly he paused. That scene in the old Meetinghouse swam before his eyes, got into his brain. He remembered the words of his own prayer, and how he had then retreated upon the Power that gave him power, for a draught of the one true tincture which braced the heart to throw itself upon the spears of trial. Now the trial had come, and that which was in him as deep as being, the habit of youth, the mother-fibre and predisposition, responded to the draught he had drunk then. As a body freed from the quivering, unrelenting grasp of an electric battery subsides into a cool quiet, so, through his veins seemed to pass an ether which stilled the tumult, the dark desire to drink the potion in his hand, and escape into that irresponsible, artificial world, where he had before loosened his hold on activity.

The phial slipped from his fingers to the floor. He sank upon the side of the bed, and, placing his hands on his knees, he whispered a few broken words that none on earth was meant to hear. Then he passed into a strange and moveless quiet of mind and body. Many a time in days gone by--far-off days--had he sat as he was doing now, feeling his mind pass into a soft, comforting quiet, absorbed in a sensation of existence, as it were between waking and sleeping, where doors opened to new experience and understanding, where the mind seemed to loose itself from the bonds of human necessity and find a freer air.

Now, as he sat as still as the stone in the walls around him, he was

conscious of a vision forming itself before his eyes. At first it was indefinite, vague, without clear form, but at last it became a room dimly outlined, delicately veiled, as it were. Then it seemed, not that the mist cleared, but that his eyes became stronger, and saw through the delicate haze; and now the room became wholly, concretely visible.

It was the room in which he had said good-bye to Hylde. As he gazed like one entranced, he saw a figure rise from a couch, pale, agitated, and beautiful, and come forward, as it were, towards him. But suddenly the mist closed in again upon the scene, a depth of darkness passed his eyes, and he heard a voice say: "Speak--speak to me!"

He heard her voice as distinctly as though she were beside him--as, indeed, she had stood before him but an instant ago.

Getting slowly to his feet, into the night he sent an answer to the call.

Would she hear? She had said long ago that she would speak to him so. Perhaps she had tried before. But now at last he had heard and answered. Had she heard? Time might tell--if ever they met again. But how good, and quiet, and serene was the night!

He composed himself to sleep, but, as he lay waiting for that coverlet of forgetfulness to be drawn over him, he heard the sound of bells soft and clear. Just such bells he had heard upon the common at Hamley. Was it, then, the outcome of his vision--a sweet hallucination? He leaned upon his elbow and listened.

CHAPTER XXXII

FORTY STRIPES SAVE ONE

The bells that rang were not the bells of Hamley; they were part of no vision or hallucination, and they drew David out of his chamber into the night. A little group of three stood sharply silhouetted against the moonlight, and towering above them was the spare, commanding form of Ebn Ezra Bey. Three camels crouched near, and beside them stood a Nubian lad singing to himself the song of the camel-driver:

"Fleet is thy foot: thou shalt rest by the Etl tree;
Water shalt thou drink from the blue-deep well;
Allah send His gard'ner with the green bersim,
For thy comfort, fleet one, by the Etl tree.
As the stars fly, have thy footsteps flown
Deep is the well, drink, and be still once more;
Till the pursuing winds panting have found thee
And, defeated, sink still beside thee--
By the well and the Etl tree."

For a moment David stood in the doorway listening to the low song of the

camel-driver. Then he came forward. As he did so, one of the two who stood with Ebn Ezra moved towards the monastery door slowly. It was a monk with a face which, even in this dim light, showed a deathly weariness. The eyes looked straight before him, as though they saw nothing of the world, only a goal to make, an object to be accomplished. The look of the face went to David's heart--the kinship of pain was theirs.

"Peace be to thee," David said gently, as the other passed him.

There was an instant's pause, and then the monk faced him with fingers uplifted. "The grace of God be upon thee, David," he said, and his eyes, drawn back from the world where they had been exploring, met the other's keenly. Then he wheeled and entered the monastery.

"The grace of God be upon thee, David!" How strange it sounded, this Christian blessing in response to his own Oriental greeting, out in this Eastern waste. His own name, too. It was as though he had been transported to the ancient world where "Brethren" were so few that they called each other by their "Christian" names--even as they did in Hamley to-day. In Hamley to-day! He closed his eyes, a tremor running through his body; and then, with an effort which stilled him to peace again, he moved forward, and was greeted by Ebn Ezra, from whom the third member of the little group had now drawn apart nearer to the acacia-tree, and was seated on a rock that jutted from the sand. "What is it?" David asked.

"Wouldst thou not sleep, Saadat? Sleep is more to thee now than aught thou mayst hear from any man. To all thou art kind save thyself."

"I have rested," David answered, with a measured calmness, revealing to his friend the change which had come since they parted an hour before. They seated themselves under the palm-tree, and were silent for a moment, then Ebn Ezra said:

"These come from the Place of Lepers."

David started slightly. "Zaida?" he asked, with a sigh of pity.

"The monk who passed thee but now goes every year to the Place of Lepers with the caravan, for a brother of this order stays yonder with the afflicted, seeing no more the faces of this world which he has left behind. Afar off from each other they stand--as far as eye can see--and after the manner of their faith they pray to Allah, and he who has just left us finds a paper fastened with a stone upon the sand at a certain place where he waits. He touches it not, but reads it as it lies, and, having read, heaps sand upon it. And the message which the paper gives is for me."

"For thee? Hast thou there one who--"

"There was one, my father's son, though we were of different mothers; and in other days, so many years ago, he did great wrong to me, and not to me alone,"--the grey head bowed in sorrow--"but to one dearer to me than

life. I hated him, and would have slain him, but the mind of Allah is not the mind of man; and he escaped me. Then he was stricken with leprosy, and was carried to the place from whence no leper returns. At first my heart rejoiced; then, at last, I forgave him, Saadat--was he not my father's son, and was the woman not gone to the bosom of Allah, where is peace? So I forgave and sorrowed for him--who shall say what miseries are those which, minute to minute, day after day, and year upon year, repeat themselves, till it is an endless flaying of the body and burning of the soul! Every year I send a message to him, and every year now this Christian monk--there is no Sheikh-el-Islam yonder--brings back the written message which he finds in the sand."

"And thee has had a message to-night?"

"The last that may come--God be praised, he goeth to his long home. It was written in his last hour. There was no hope; he is gone. And so, one more reason showeth why I should go where thou goest, Saadat."

Casting his eyes toward the figure by the acacia-tree, his face clouded and he pondered anxiously, looking at David the while. Twice he essayed to speak, but paused.

David's eyes followed his look. "What is it? Who is he--yonder?"

The other rose to his feet. "Come and see, Saadat," he replied. "Seeing, thou wilt know what to do."

"Zaida--is it of Zaida?" David asked.

"The man will answer for himself, Saadat." Coming within a few feet of the figure crouched upon the rock, Ebn Ezra paused and stretched out a hand. "A moment, Saadat. Dost thou not see, dost thou not recognise him?"

David intently studied the figure, which seemed unconscious of their presence. The shoulders were stooping and relaxed as though from great fatigue, but David could see that the figure was that of a tall man. The head was averted, but a rough beard covered the face, and, in the light of the fire, one hand that clutched it showed long and skinny and yellow and cruel. The hand fascinated David's eyes. Where had he seen it? It flashed upon him--a hand clutching a robe, in a frenzy of fear, in the court-yard of the blue tiles, in Kaid's Palace--Achmet the Ropemaker! He drew back a step.

"Achmet," he said in a low voice. The figure stirred, the hand dropped from the beard and clutched the knee; but the head was not raised, and the body remained crouching and listless.

"He escaped?" David said, turning to Ebn Ezra Bey.

"I know not by what means--a camel-driver bribed, perhaps, and a camel left behind for him. After the caravan had travelled a day's journey he joined it. None knew what to do. He was not a leper, and he was armed."

"Leave him with me," said David.

Ebn Ezra hesitated. "He is armed; he was thy foe--"

"I am armed also," David answered enigmatically, and indicated by a gesture that he wished to be left alone. Ebn Ezra drew away towards the palm-tree, and stood at this distance watching anxiously, for he knew what dark passions seize upon the Oriental--and Achmet had many things for which to take vengeance.

David stood for a moment, pondering, his eyes upon the deserter. "God greet thee as thou goest, and His goodness befriend thee," he said evenly. There was silence, and no movement. "Rise and speak," he added sternly. "Dost thou not hear? Rise, Achmet Pasha!"

Achmet Pasha! The head of the desolate wretch lifted, the eyes glared at David for an instant, as though to see whether he was being mocked, and then the spare figure stretched itself, and the outcast stood up. The old lank straightness was gone, the shoulders were bent, the head was thrust forward, as though the long habit of looking into dark places had bowed it out of all manhood.

"May grass spring under thy footstep, Saadat," he said, in a thick voice, and salaamed awkwardly--he had been so long absent from life's formularies.

"What dost thou here, pasha?" asked David formally. "Thy sentence had no limit."

"I could not die there," said the hollow voice, and the head sank farther forward. "Year after year I lived there, but I could not die among them. I was no leper; I am no leper. My penalty was my penalty, and I paid it to the full, piastre by piastre of my body and my mind. It was not one death, it was death every hour, every day I stayed. I had no mind. I could not think. Mummy-cloths were round my brain; but the fire burned underneath and would not die. There was the desert, but my limbs were like rushes. I had no will, and I could not flee. I was chained to the evil place. If I stayed it was death, if I went it was death."

"Thou art armed now," said David suggestively. Achmet laid a hand fiercely upon a dagger under his robe. "I hid it. I was afraid. I could not die--my hand was like a withered leaf; it could not strike; my heart poured out like water. Once I struck a leper, that he might strike and kill me; but he lay upon the ground and wept, for all his anger, which had been great, died in him at last. There was none other given to anger there. The leper has neither anger, nor mirth, nor violence, nor peace. It is all the black silent shame--and I was no leper."

"Why didst thou come? What is there but death for thee here, or anywhere thou goest! Kaid's arm will find thee; a thousand hands wait to strike thee."

"I could not die there--Dost thou think that I repent?" he added with sudden fierceness. "Is it that which would make me repent? Was I worse than thousands of others? I have come out to die--to fight and die. Aiwa, I have come to thee, whom I hated, because thou canst give me death as I desire it. My mother was an Arab slave from Senaar, and she was got by war, and all her people. War and fighting were their portion--as they ate, as they drank and slept. In the black years behind me among the Unclean, there was naught to fight--could one fight the dead, and the agony of death, and the poison of the agony! Life, it is done for me--am I not accursed? But to die fighting--ay, fighting for Egypt, since it must be, and fighting for thee, since it must be; to strike, and strike, and strike, and earn death! Must the dog, because he is a dog, die in the slime? Shall he not be driven from the village to die in the clean sand? Saadat, who will see in me Achmet Pasha, who did with Egypt what he willed, and was swept away by the besom in thy hand? Is there in me aught of that Achmet that any should know?"

"None would know thee for that Achmet," answered David.

"I know, it matters not how--at last a letter found me, and the way of escape--that thou goest again to the Soudan. There will be fighting there--"

"Not by my will," interrupted David.

"Then by the will of Sheitan the accursed; but there will be fighting--am I not an Arab, do I not know? Thou hast not conquered yet. Bid me go where thou wilt, do what thou wilt, so that I may be among the fighters, and in the battle forget what I have seen. Since I am unclean, and am denied the bosom of Allah, shall I not go as a warrior to Hell, where men will fear me? Speak, Saadat, canst thou deny me this?"

Nothing of repentance, so far as he knew, moved the dark soul; but, like some evil spirit, he would choose the way to his own doom, the place and the manner of it: a sullen, cruel, evil being, unyielding in his evil, unmoved by remorse--so far as he knew. Yet he would die fighting, and for Egypt "and for thee, if it must be so. To strike, to strike, to strike, and earn death!" What Achmet did not see, David saw, the glimmer of light breaking through the cloud of shame and evil and doom. Yonder in the Soudan more problems than one would be solved, more lives than one be put to the extreme test. He did not answer Achmet's question yet. "Zaida--?" he said in a low voice. The pathos of her doom had been a dark memory.

Achmet's voice dropped lower as he answered. "She lived till the day her sister died. I never saw her face; but I was sent to bear each day to her door the food she ate and a balass of water; and I did according to my sentence. Yet I heard her voice. And once, at last, the day she died, she spoke to me, and said from inside the hut: 'Thy work is done, Achmet. Go in peace.' And that night she lay down on her sister's grave, and in the morning she was found dead upon it."

David's eyes were blinded with tears. "It was too long," he said at

last, as though to himself.

"That day," continued Achmet, "there fell ill with leprosy the Christian priest from this place who had served in that black service so long; and then a fire leapt up in me. Zaida was gone--I had brought food and a balass of water to her door those many times; there was naught to do, since she was gone--"

Suddenly David took a step nearer to him and looked into the sullen and drooping eyes. "Thou shalt go with me, Achmet. I will do this unlawful act for thee. At daybreak I will give thee orders. Thou shalt join me far from here--if I go to the Soudan," he added, with a sudden remembrance of his position; and he turned away slowly.

After a moment, with muttered words, Achmet sank down upon the stone again, drew a cake of dourha from his inner robe, and began to eat.

The camel-boy had lighted a fire, and he sat beside it warming his hands at the blaze and still singing to himself:

"The bed of my love I will sprinkle with attar of roses,
The face of my love I will touch with the balm
With the balm of the tree from the farthermost wood,
From the wood without end, in the world without end.
My love holds the cup to my lips, and I drink of the cup,
And the attar of roses I sprinkle will soothe like the evening dew,
And the balm will be healing and sleep, and the cup I will drink,
I will drink of the cup my love holds to my lips--"

David stood listening. What power was there in desert life that could make this poor camel-driver, at the end of a long day of weariness and toil and little food and drink, sing a song of content and cheerfulness? The little needed, the little granted, and no thought beyond--save the vision of one who waited in the hut by the onion-field. He gathered himself together and tuned his mind to the scene through which he had just passed, and then to the interview he would have with Kaid on the morrow. A few hours ago he had seen no way out of it all--he had had no real hope that Kaid would turn to him again; but the last two hours had changed all that. Hope was alive in him. He had fought a desperate fight with himself, and he had conquered. Then had come Achmet, unrepentant, degraded still, but with the spirit of Something glowing-- Achmet to die for a cause, driven by that Something deep beneath the degradation and the crime. He had hope, and, as the camel-driver's voice died away, and he lay down with a sheep-skin over him and went instantly to sleep, David drew to the fire and sat down beside it. Presently Ebn Ezra came to urge him to go to bed, but he would not. He had slept, he said; he had slept and rested, and the night was good--he would wait. Then the other brought rugs and blankets, and gave David some, and lay down beside the fire, and watched and waited for he knew not what. Ever and ever his eyes were on David, and far back under the acacia-tree Achmet slept as he had not slept since his doom fell on him.

At last Ebn Ezra Bey also slept; but David was awake with the night and

the benevolent moon and the marching stars. The spirit of the desert was on him, filling him with its voiceless music. From the infinite stretches of sand to the south came the irresistible call of life, as soft as the leaves in a garden of roses, as deep as the sea. This world was still, yet there seemed a low, delicate humming, as of multitudinous looms at a distance so great that the ear but faintly caught it--the sound of the weavers of life and destiny and eternal love, the hands of the toilers of all the ages spinning and spinning on; and he was part of it, not abashed or dismayed because he was but one of the illimitable throng.

The hours wore on, but still he sat there, peace in all his heart, energy tingling softly through every vein, the wings of hope fluttering at his ear.

At length the morning came, and, from the west, with the rising sun, came a traveller swiftly, making for where he was. The sleepers stirred around him and waked and rose. The little camp became alive. As the traveller neared the fresh-made fire, David saw that it was Lacey. He went eagerly to meet him.

"Thee has news," he said. "I see it is so." He held Lacey's hand in his.

"Say, you are going on that expedition, Saadat. You wanted money. Will a quarter of a million do?" David's eyes caught fire.

From the monastery there came the voices of the monks:

"O be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness, and come before His presence with a song."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DARK INDENTURE

Nahoum had forgotten one very important thing: that what affected David as a Christian in Egypt would tell equally against himself. If, in his ill-health and dejection, Kaid drank deep of the cup of Mahomet, the red eyes of fanaticism would be turned upon the Armenian, as upon the European Christian. He had forgotten it for the moment, but when, coming into Kaid's Palace, a little knot of loiterers spat upon the ground and snarled, "Infidel--Nazarene!" with contempt and hatred, the significance of the position came home to him. He made his way to a far quarter of the Palace, thoughtfully weighing the circumstances, and was met by Mizraim.

Mizraim salaamed. "The height of thy renown be as the cedar of Lebanon, Excellency."

"May thy feet tread the corn of everlasting fortune, son of Mahomet."

They entered the room together. Nahoum looked at Mizraim curiously. He was not satisfied with what he saw. Mizraim's impassive face had little expression, but the eyes were furtively eager and sinister.

"Well, so it is, and if it is, what then?" asked Nahoum coolly.

"Ki di, so it is," answered Mizraim, and a ghastly smile came to his lips. This infidel pasha, Nahoum, had a mind that pierced to the meaning of words ere they were spoken. Mizraim's hand touched his forehead, his breast, his lips, and, clasping and unclasping his long, snakelike fingers, he began the story he had come to tell.

"The Inglesi, whom Allah confound, the Effendina hath blackened by a look, his words have smitten him in the vital parts--"

"Mizraim, thou dove, speak to the purpose!" Mizraim showed a dark pleasure at the interruption. Nahoum was impatient, anxious; that made the tale better worth telling.

"Sharif and the discontented ones who dare not act, like the vultures, they flee the living man, but swoop upon the corpse. The consuls of those countries who love not England or Claridge Pasha, and the holy men, and the Cadi, all scatter smouldering fires. There is a spirit in the Palace and beyond which is blowing fast to a great flame."

"Then, so it is, great one, and what bodes it?"

"It may kill the Inglesi; but it will also sweep thee from the fields of life where thou dost flourish."

"It is not against the foreigner, but against the Christian, Mizraim?"

"Thy tongue hath wisdom, Excellency."

"Thou art a Muslim--"

"Why do I warn thee? For service done to me; and because there is none other worth serving in Egypt. Behold, it is my destiny to rule others, to serve thee."

"Once more thy turban full of gold, Mizraim, if thou dost service now that hath meaning and is not a belching of wind and words. Thou hast a thing to say--say it, and see if Nahoum hath lost his wit, or hath a palsied arm."

"Then behold, pasha. Are not my spies in all the Palace? Is not my scourge heavier than the whip of the horned horse? Ki di, so it is. This I have found. Sharif hath, with others, made a plot which hath enough powder in it to shake Egypt, and toss thee from thy high place into the depths. There is a Christian--an Armenian, as it chances; but he was chosen because he was a Christian, and for that only. His name is

Rahib. He is a tent-maker. He had three sons. They did kill an effendi who had cheated them of their land. Two of them were hanged last week; the other, caught but a few days since, is to hang within three days. To-day Kaid goes to the Mosque of Mahmoud, as is the custom at this festival. The old man hath been persuaded to attempt the life of Kaid, upon condition that his son--his Benjamin--is set free. It will be but an attempt at Kaid's life, no more; but the cry will go forth that a Christian did the thing; and the Muslim flame will leap high."

"And the tent-maker?" asked Nahoum musingly, though he was turning over the tale in his mind, seeing behind it and its far consequences.

"Malaish, what does it matter! But he is to escape, and they are to hang another Christian in his stead for the attempt on Kaid. It hath no skill, but it would suffice. With the dervishes gone malboos, and the faithful drunk with piety--canst thou not see the issue, pasha? Blood will be shed."

"The Jews of Europe would be angry," said Nahoum grimly but evenly. "The loans have been many, and Kaid has given a lien by the new canal at Suez. The Jews will be angry," he repeated, "and for every drop of Christian blood shed there would be a lanced vein here. But that would not bring back Nahoum Pasha," he continued cynically. "Well, this is thy story, Mizraim; this is what they would do. Now what hast thou done to stop their doing?"

"Am I not a Muslim? Shall I give Sharif to the Nile?"

Nahoum smiled darkly. "There is a simpler way. Thy mind ever runs on the bowstring and the sword. These are great, but there is a greater. It is the mocking finger. At midnight, when Kaid goes to the Mosque Mahmoud, a finger will mock the plotters till they are buried in confusion. Thou knowest the governor of the prisons--has he not need of something? Hath he never sought favours of thee?"

"Bismillah, but a week ago!"

"Then, listen, thou shepherd of the sheep--"

He paused, as there came a tap at the door, and a slave entered hurriedly and addressed Nahoum. "The effendi, Ebn Ezra Bey, whom thou didst set me to watch, he hath entered the Palace, and asks for the Effendina."

Nahoum started, and his face clouded, but his eyes flashed fire. He tossed the slave a coin. "Thou hast done well. Where is he now?"

"He waits in the hall, where is the statue of Mehemet Ali and the lions."

"In an hour, Mizraim, thou shalt hear what I intend. Peace be to thee!"

"And on thee, peace!" answered Mizraim, as Nahoum passed from the room, and walked hastily towards the hall where he should find Ebn Ezra Bey. Nearing the spot, he brought his step to a deliberate slowness, and

appeared not to notice the stately Arab till almost upon him.

"Salaam, effendi," he said smoothly, yet with inquisition in his eye, with malice in his tone.

"Salaam, Excellency."

"Thou art come on the business of thy master?"

"Who is my master, Excellency?"

"Till yesterday it was Claridge Pasha. Hast thou then forsaken him in his trouble--the rat from the sinking ship?"

A flush passed over Ebn Ezra Bey's face, and his mouth opened with a gasp of anger. Oriental though he was, he was not as astute as this Armenian Christian, who was purposely insulting him, that he might, in a moment of heat, snatch from him the business he meant to lay before Kaid. Nahoum had not miscalculated.

"I have but one master, Excellency," Ebn Ezra answered quietly at last, "and I have served him straightly. Hast thou done likewise?"

"What is straight to thee might well be crooked to me, effendi."

"Thou art crooked as the finger of a paralytic."

"Yet I have worked in peace with Claridge Pasha for these years past, even until yesterday, when thou didst leave him to his fate."

"His ship will sail when thine is crumbling on the sands, and all thou art is like a forsaken cockatrice's nest."

"Is it this thou hast come to say to the Effendina?"

"What I have come to say to the Effendina is for the world to know after it hath reached his ears. I know thee, Nahoum Pasha. Thou art a traitor. Claridge Pasha would abolish slavery, and thou dost receive great sums of gold from the slave-dealers to prevent it."

"Is it this thou wilt tell Kaid?" Nahoum asked with a sneer. "And hast thou proofs?"

"Even this day they have come to my hands from the south."

"Yet I think the proofs thou hast will not avail; and I think that thou wilt not show them to Kaid. The gift of second thinking is a great gift. Thou must find greater reason for seeking the Effendina."

"That too shall be. Gold thou hadst to pay the wages of the soldiers of the south. Thou didst keep the gold and order the slave-hunt; and the soldiers of the Effendina have been paid in human flesh and blood--ten thousand slaves since Claridge Pasha left the Soudan, and three thousand

dead upon the desert sands, abandoned by those who hunted them when water grew scarce and food failed. To-day shall see thy fall."

At his first words Nahoum had felt a shock, from which his spirit reeled; but an inspiration came to him on the moment; and he listened with a saturnine coolness to the passionate words of the indignant figure towering above him. When Ebn Ezra had finished, he replied quietly:

"It is even as thou sayest, effendi. The soldiers were paid in slaves got in the slave-hunt; and I have gold from the slave-dealers. I needed it, for the hour is come when I must do more for Egypt than I have ever done."

With a gesture of contempt Ebn Ezra made to leave, seeing an official of the Palace in the distance. Nahoum stopped him. "But, one moment ere thou dost thrust thy hand into the cockatrice's den. Thou dost measure thyself against Nahoum? In patience and with care have I trained myself for the battle. The bulls of Bashan may roar, yet my feet are shod with safety. Thou wouldst go to Kaid and tell him thy affrighted tale. I tell thee, thou wilt not go. Thou hast reason yet, though thy blood is hot. Thou art to Claridge Pasha like a brother--as to his uncle before him, who furnished my father's palace with carpets. The carpets still soften the fall of my feet in my father's palace, as they did soften the fall of my brother's feet, the feet of Foorgat Bey."

He paused, looking at Ebn Ezra with quiet triumph, though his eyes had ever that smiling innocence which had won David in days gone by. He was turning his words over on the tongue with a relish born of long waiting.

"Come," he said presently--"come, and I will give thee reason why thou wilt not speak with Kaid to-day. This way, effendi."

He led the other into a little room hung about with rugs and tapestry, and, going to the wall, he touched a spring. "One moment here, effendi," he added quietly. The room was as it had been since David last stood within it.

"In this room, effendi," Nahoum said with cold deliberation, "Claridge Pasha killed my brother, Foorgat Bey."

Ebn Ezra fell back as though he had been struck. Swiftly Nahoum told him the whole truth--even to the picture of the brougham, and the rigid, upright figure passing through the night to Foorgat's palace, the gaunt Mizraim piloting the equipage of death.

"I have held my peace for my own reasons, effendi. Wilt thou then force me to speak? If thou dost still cherish Claridge Pasha, wilt thou see him ruined? Naught but ruin could follow the telling of the tale at this moment--his work, his life, all done. The scandal, the law, vengeance! But as it is now, Kaid may turn to him again; his work may yet go on--he has had the luck of angels, and Kaid is fickle. Who can tell?"

Abashed and overwhelmed, Ebn Ezra Bey looked at him keenly. "To tell of

Foorgat Bey would ruin thee also," he said. "That thou knowest. The trick--would Kaid forgive it? Claridge Pasha would not be ruined alone."

"Be it so. If thou goest to Kaid with thy story, I go to Egypt with mine. Choose."

Ebn Ezra turned to go. "The high God judge between him and thee," he said, and, with bowed head, left the Palace.

CHAPTER XXXIV

NAHOUM DROPS THE MASK

"CLARIDGE PASHA!"

At the sound of the words, announced in a loud voice, hundreds of heads were turned towards the entrance of the vast salon, resplendent with gilded mirrors, great candelabra and chandeliers, golden hangings, and divans glowing with robes of yellow silk.

It was the anniversary of Kaid's succession, and all entitled to come poured into the splendid chamber. The showy livery of the officials, the loose, spacious, gorgeous uniforms of the officers, with the curved jewelled scimitars and white turbans, the rich silk robes of the Ulema, robe over robe of coloured silk with flowing sleeves and sumptuous silken vests, the ample dignity of noble-looking Arabs in immense white turbans, the dark straight Stambouli coat of the officials, made a picture of striking variety and colour and interest.

About the centre of the room, laying palm to palm again and yet again, touching lips and forehead and breast, speaking with slow, leisurely, voices, were two Arab sheikhs from the far Soudan. One of these showed a singular interest in the movements of Nahoum Pasha as he entered the chamber, and an even greater interest in David when he was announced; but as David, in his journey up the chamber, must pass near him, he drew behind a little group of officials, who whispered to each other excitedly as David came on. More than once before this same Sheikh Abdullah had seen David, and once they had met, and had made a treaty of amity, and Abdullah had agreed to deal in slaves no more; and yet within three months had sent to Cairo two hundred of the best that could be found between Khartoum and Senaar. His business, of which Ebn Ezra Bey had due knowledge, had now been with Nahoum. The business of the other Arab, a noble-looking and wiry Bedouin from the South, had been with Ebn Ezra Bey, and each hid his business from his friend. Abdullah murmured to himself as David passed--a murmur of admiration and astonishment. He had heard of the disfavour in which the Inglesi was; but, as he looked at David's face with its quiet smile, the influence which he felt in the desert long ago came over him again.

"By Allah," he said aloud abstractedly, "it is a face that will not hide

when the khamsin blows! Who shall gainsay it? If he were not an infidel he would be a Mahdi."

To this his Bedouin friend replied: "As the depths of the pool at Ghebel Farik, so are his eyes. You shall dip deep and you shall not find the bottom. Bismillah, I would fight Kaid's Nubians, but not this infidel pasha!"

Never had David appeared to such advantage. The victory over himself the night before, the message of hope that had reached him at the monastery in the desert, the coming of Lacey, had given him a certain quiet masterfulness not reassuring to his foes.

As he entered the chamber but now, there flashed into his mind the scene six years ago when, an absolute stranger, he had stepped into this Eastern salon, and had heard his name called out to the great throng: "Claridge efendi!"

He addressed no one, but he bowed to the group of foreign consuls-general, looking them steadily in the eyes. He knew their devices and what had been going on of late, he was aware that his fall would mean a blow to British prestige, and the calmness of his gaze expressed a fortitude which had a disconcerting effect upon the group. The British Consul-General stood near by. David advanced to him, and, as he did so, the few who surrounded the Consul-General fell back. David held out his hand. Somewhat abashed and ill at ease, the Consul-General took it.

"Have you good news from Downing Street?" asked David quietly.

The Consul-General hesitated for an instant, and then said: "There is no help to be had for you or for what you are doing in that quarter." He lowered his voice. "I fear Lord Eglington does not favour you; and he controls the Foreign Minister. I am very sorry. I have done my best, but my colleagues, the other consuls, are busy--with Lord Eglington."

David turned his head away for an instant. Strange how that name sent a thrill through him, stirred his blood! He did not answer the Consul-General, and the latter continued:

"Is there any hope? Is the breach with Kaid complete?"

David smiled gravely. "We shall see presently. I have made no change in my plans on the basis of a breach."

At that moment he caught sight of Nahoum some distance away and moved towards him. Out of the corner of his eye Nahoum saw David coming, and edged away towards that point where Kaid would enter, and where the crowd was greater. As he did so Kaid appeared. A thrill went through the chamber. Contrary to his custom, he was dressed in the old native military dress of Mehemet Ali. At his side was a jewelled scimitar, and in his turban flashed a great diamond. In his hand he carried a snuff-box, covered with brilliants, and on his breast were glittering orders.

The eyes of the reactionaries flashed with sinister pleasure when they saw Kaid. This outward display of Orientalism could only be a reflex of the mind. It was the outer symbol of Kaid's return to the spirit of the old days, before the influence of the Inglesi came upon him. Every corrupt and intriguing mind had a palpitation of excitement.

In Nahoum the sight of Kaid produced mixed feelings. If, indeed, this display meant reaction towards an entourage purely Arab, Egyptian, and Muslim, then it was no good omen for his Christian self. He drew near, and placed himself where Kaid could see him. Kaid's manner was cheerful, but his face showed the effect of suffering, physical and mental. Presently there entered behind him Sharif Bey, whose appearance was the signal for a fresh demonstration. Now, indeed, there could be no doubt as to Kaid's reaction. Yet if Sharif had seen Mizraim's face evilly gloating near by he would have been less confident.

David was standing where Kaid must see him, but the Effendina gave no sign of recognition. This was so significant that the enemies of David rejoiced anew. The day of the Inglesi was over. Again and again did Kaid's eye wander over David's head.

David remained calm and watchful, neither avoiding nor yet seeking the circle in which Kaid moved. The spirit with which he had entered the room, however, remained with him, even when he saw Kaid summon to him some of the most fanatical members of the court circle, and engage them in talk for a moment. But as this attention grew more marked, a cloud slowly gathered in the far skies of his mind.

There was one person in the great assembly, however, who seemed to be unduly confident. It was an ample, perspiring person in evening dress, who now and again mopped a prematurely bald head, and who said to himself, as Kaid talked to the reactionaries:

"Say, Kald's overdoing it. He's putting potted chicken on the butter. But it's working all right-r-i-g-h-t. It's worth the backsheesh!"

At this moment Kaid fastened David with his look, and spoke in a tone so loud that people standing at some distance were startled.

"Claridge Pasha!"

In the hush that followed David stepped forward. "May the bounty of the years be thine, Saadat," Kaid said in a tone none could misunderstand.

"May no tree in thy orchard wither, Effendina," answered David in a firm voice.

Kaid beckoned him near, and again he spoke loudly: "I have proved thee, and found thee as gold tried seven times by the fire, Saadat. In the treasury of my heart shall I store thee up. Thou art going to the Soudan to finish the work Mehemet Ali began. I commend thee to Allah, and will bid thee farewell at sunrise--I and all who love Egypt."

There was a sinister smile on his lips, as his eyes wandered over the faces of the foreign consuls-general. The look he turned on the intriguers of the Palace was repellent; he reserved for Sharif a moody, threatening glance, and the desperate hakim shrank back confounded from it. His first impulse was to flee from the Palace and from Cairo; but he bethought himself of the assault to be made on Kaid by the tent-maker, as he passed to the mosque a few hours later, and he determined to await the issue of that event. Exchanging glances with confederates, he disappeared, as Kaid laid a hand on David's arm and drew him aside.

After viewing the great throng cynically for a moment Kaid said: "Tomorrow thou goest. A month hence the hakim's knife will find the thing that eats away my life. It may be they will destroy it and save me; if not, we shall meet no more."

David looked into his eyes. "Not in a month shall thy work be completed, Effendina. Thou shalt live. God and thy strong will shall make it so."

A light stole over the superstitious face. "No device or hatred, or plot, has prevailed against thee," Kaid said eagerly. "Thou hast defeated all--even when I turned against thee in the black blood of despair. Thou hast conquered me even as thou didst Harrik."

"Thou dost live," returned David drily. "Thou dost live for Egypt's sake, even as Harrik died for Egypt's sake, and as others shall die."

"Death hath tracked thee down how often! Yet with a wave of the hand thou hast blinded him, and his blow falls on the air. Thou art beset by a thousand dangers, yet thou comest safe through all. Thou art an honest man. For that I besought thee to stay with me. Never didst thou lie to me. Good luck hath followed thee. Kismet! Stay with me, and it may be I shall be safe also. This thought came to me in the night, and in the morning was my reward, for Lacey effendi came to me and said, even as I say now, that thou wilt bring me good luck; and even in that hour, by the mercy of God, a loan much needed was negotiated. Allah be praised!"

A glint of humour shot into David's eyes. Lacey--a loan--he read it all! Lacey had eased the Prince Pasha's immediate and pressing financial needs--and, "Allah be praised!" Poor human nature--backsheesh to a Prince regnant!

"Effendina," he said presently, "thou didst speak of Harrik. One there was who saved thee then--" "Zaida!" A change passed over Kaid's face. "Speak! Thou hast news of her? She is gone?" Briefly David told him how Zaida was found upon her sister's grave. Kaid's face was turned away as he listened.

"She spoke no word of me?" Kaid said at last. "To whom should she speak?" David asked gently. "But the amulet thou gavest her, set with one red jewel, it was clasped in her hand in death."

Suddenly Kaid's anger blazed. "Now shall Achmet die," he burst out. "His hands and feet shall be burnt off, and he shall be thrown to the

vultures."

"The Place of the Lepers is sacred even from thee, Effendina," answered David gravely. "Yet Achmet shall die even as Harrik died. He shall die for Egypt and for thee, Effendina."

Swiftly he drew the picture of Achmet at the monastery in the desert. "I have done the unlawful thing, Effendina," he said at last, "but thou wilt make it lawful. He hath died a thousand deaths--all save one."

"Be it so," answered Kaid gloomily, after a moment; then his face lighted with cynical pleasure as he scanned once more the faces of the crowd before him. At last his eyes fastened on Nahoum. He turned to David.

"Thou dost still desire Nahoum in his office?" he asked keenly.

A troubled look came into David's eyes, then it cleared away, and he said firmly: "For six years we have worked together, Effendina. I am surety for his loyalty to thee."

"And his loyalty to thee?"

A pained look crossed over David's face again, but he said with a will that fought all suspicion down: "The years bear witness."

Kaid shrugged his shoulders slightly. "The years have perjured themselves ere this. Yet, as thou sayest, Nahoum is a Christian," he added, with irony scarcely veiled.

Now he moved forward with David towards the waiting court. David searched the groups of faces for Nahoum in vain. There were things to be said to Nahoum before he left on the morrow, last suggestions to be given. Nahoum could not be seen.

Nahoum was gone, as were also Sharif and his confederates, and in the lofty Mosque of Mahmoud soft lights were hovering, while the Sheikh-el-Islam waited with Koran and scimitar for the ruler of Egypt to pray to God and salute the Lord Mahomet.

At the great gateway in the Street of the Tent Makers Kaid paused on his way to the Mosque Mahmoud. The Gate was studded with thousands of nails, which fastened to its massive timbers relics of the faithful, bits of silk and cloth, and hair and leather; and here from time immemorial a holy man had sat and prayed. At the gateway Kaid salaamed humbly, and spoke to the holy man, who, as he passed, raised his voice shrilly in an appeal to Allah, commending Kaid to mercy and everlasting favour. On every side eyes burned with religious zeal, and excited faces were turned towards the Effendina. At a certain point there were little groups of men with faces more set than excited. They had a look of suppressed expectancy. Kaid neared them, passed them, and, as he did so, they looked at each other in consternation. They were Sharif's confederates, fanatics carefully chosen. The attempt on Kaid's life should have been made opposite the spot where they stood. They craned their necks in

effort to find the Christian tent-maker, but in vain.

Suddenly they heard a cry, a loud voice calling. It was Rahib the tent-maker. He was beside Kaid's stirrups, but no weapon was in his hand; and his voice was calling blessings down on the Effendina's head for having pardoned and saved from death his one remaining son, the joy of his old age. In all the world there was no prince like Kaid, said the tent-maker; none so bountiful and merciful and beautiful in the eyes of men. God grant him everlasting days, the beloved friend of his people, just to all and greatly to be praised.

As the soldiers drove the old man away with kindly insistence--for Kaid had thrown him a handful of gold--Mizraim, the Chief Eunuch, laughed wickedly. As Nahoum had said, the greatest of all weapons was the mocking finger. He and Mizraim had had their way with the governor of the prisons, and the murderer had gone in safety, while the father stayed to bless Kaid. Rahib the tent-maker had fooled the plotters. They were mad in derision. They did not know that Kaid was as innocent as themselves of having pardoned the tent-maker's son. Their moment had passed; they could not overtake it; the match had spluttered and gone out at the fuel laid for the fire of fanaticism.

The morning of David's departure came. While yet it was dark he had risen, and had made his last preparations. When he came into the open air and mounted, it was not yet sunrise, and in that spectral early light, which is all Egypt's own, Cairo looked like some dream-city in a forgotten world. The Mokattam Hills were like vast dun barriers guarding and shutting in the ghostly place, and, high above all, the minarets of the huge mosque upon the lofty rocks were impalpable fingers pointing an endless flight. The very trees seemed so little real and substantial that they gave the eye the impression that they might rise and float away. The Nile was hung with mist, a trailing cloud unwound from the breast of the Nile-mother. At last the sun touched the minarets of the splendid mosque with shafts of light, and over at Ghizeh and Sakkarah the great pyramids, lifting their heads from the wall of rolling blue mist below, took the morning's crimson radiance with the dignity of four thousand years.

On the decks of the little steamer which was to carry them south David, Ebn Ezra, Lacey, and Mahommed waited. Presently Kaid came, accompanied by his faithful Nubians, their armour glowing in the first warm light of the rising sun, and crowds of people, who had suddenly emerged, ran shrilling to the waterside behind him.

Kaid's pale face had all last night's friendliness, as he bade David farewell with great honour, and commended him to the care of Allah; and the swords of the Nubians clashed against their breasts and on their shields in salaam.

But there was another farewell to make; and it was made as David's foot touched the deck of the steamer. Once again David looked at Nahoum as he had done six years ago, in the little room where they had made their bond together. There was the same straight look in Nahoum's eyes. Was he not

to be trusted? Was it not his own duty to trust? He clasped Nahoum's hand in farewell, and turned away. But as he gave the signal to start, and the vessel began to move, Nahoum came back. He leaned over the widening space and said in a low tone, as David again drew near:

"There is still an account which should be settled, Saadat. It has waited long; but God is with the patient. There is the account of Foorgat Bey."

The light fled from David's eyes and his heart stopped beating for a moment. When his eyes saw the shore again Nahoum was gone with Kaid.

GLOSSARY

Aiwa----Yes.

Allah hu Achbar----God is most Great.

Al'mah----Female professional singers, signifying "a learned female."

Ardab----A measure equivalent to five English bushels.

Backsheesh----Tip, douceur.

Balass----Earthen vessel for carrying water.

Bdsha----Pasha.

Bersim----Clover.

Bismillah----In the name of God.

Bowdb----A doorkeeper.

Dahabieh----A Nile houseboat with large lateen sails.

Darabukkeh----A drum made of a skin stretched over an earthenware funnel.

Dourha----Maize.

Effendina----Most noble.

El Azhar----The Arab University at Cairo.

Feddn----A measure of land representing about an acre.

Fellah----The Egyptian peasant.

Ghiassa----Small boat.

Hakim----Doctor.

Hasheesh----Leaves of hemp.

Inshallah----God willing.

Kdnoon----A musical instrument like a dulcimer.

Kavass----An orderly.

Kemengeh----A cocoanut fiddle.

Khamsin----A hot wind of Egypt and the Soudan.

Kourbash----A whip, often made of rhinoceros hide.

La ilaha illa-llah----There is no deity but God.

Malaish----No matter.

Malboos----Demented.

Mastaba----A bench.

Medjidie----A Turkish Order.

Mooshrabieh----Lattice window.

Moufettish----High Steward.

Mudir----The Governor of a

Mudirieh, or province.

Muezzin----The sheikh of the mosque who calls to prayer.

Narghileh----A Persian pipe.

Nebool----A quarter-staff.

Ramadan----The Mahomedan season of fasting.

Saadat-el-bdsha----Excellency Pasha.

Sdis----Groom.

Sakkia----The Persian water-wheel.

Salaam----Eastern salutation.

Sheikh-el-beled----Head of a village.

Tarboosh----A Turkish turban.

Ulema----Learned men.

Wakf----Mahomedan Court dealing with succession, etc.

Welee----A holy man or saint.

Yashmak----A veil for the lower part of the face.

Yelek----A long vest or smock.

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Cherish any alleviating lie

Triumph of Oriental duplicity over Western civilisation

When God permits, shall man despair?

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