

was written out on stamped paper then and there, and four respectable citizens attested it.

Then the Maulavi sáhib said to Azmat : ' Your honor will now be pleased to take your departure in peace. For a disloyal, treacherous, deceitful woman like you there is no room in *my* house.'

Asghari said : ' She possesses one other quality besides disloyalty ; shall I tell you what that is ? She spent her time in devising schemes for sowing mischief in the household. Eh, Azmat, do you remember about the *karhá-i* which Mahmúda's brother expressed a wish for, and you went and delivered a lying message from me that " the bride says she has a headache " ? Speak out now, and tell us *when* did you mention any wish of his to me, and *when* did I make the excuse of a headache ?'

Azmat said : ' Lady, you were reading the Qur-án on the roof. I went up to tell you, but when I saw you reading, I came back again.'

' And the story of the headache,' said Asghari, ' was your own invention ?'

Azmat said : ' What I thought was this—you had been reading the Qur-án from the early morning to that time ; was it likely you would bother your head about cooking ?'

Asghari said : ' Well, then, how do you explain your saying that I was going to the hills ? Did I ever take *you* into my confidence ? Did you ever hear me *speak* of such a thing ?'

To this question Azmat could make no reply. Then Asghari produced the notification, and threw it down in front of the Maulavi sáhib, saying : ' Just look at that ; my lady Azmat here is capable of *this kind* of thing. She herself tore off the notification from the gate of the Mohulla, and she herself posted it up on this house ; and then she herself went running all the way to my dear mother to tell her about it.'

While Asghari went on recounting these facts the Maulavi sáhib's countenance grew redder and redder. On the other side of the room Tamásha Khánam was grinding her teeth. The Maulavi said : ' It is not enough to turn you out. You are a thoroughly wicked woman.' And having said this, he shouted

to his servant, and said : ' Bahádur ! take this unclean creature to the police-station, and, stay—I will write all her story in a note at once.'

But Asghari said to the Maulavi sáhib : ' It is enough ; she has reached her own punishment. Spare her from the police.' And she made a sign to Azmat to take herself off. Indeed she went with her as far as the outer door.

So after all her pranks was Mámá Azmat turned out of this house. When she got home her daughter fell upon her like a fury, crying out : ' Did I not say to you : " Don't, mother, don't go in for robbing on this scale. If a hundred days last for the thief, one day is sure to come for the merchant ; take care lest one day you be caught ?" Whose words did you care for ? The right thing has happened. As you did so you have received. But don't make *my* name evil now in my husband's home. Go away wherever your God may lead you. There is no work for you in my house. As for the jewels, I have submitted to Providence ; if it be written in my fate they will come to me again.'

CHAPTER XVI

IN this manner, after many prayers, Asghari succeeded in routing her enemy, and freed the whole family from an incubus. When Azmat's case had been decided, Asghari asked permission a second time to go to her father, which being gladly accorded, she took leave, and arrived at her mother's house. There she stayed for a whole week : and everything in which she desired her father's advice was discussed by her in full. Her father asked, ' Has Azmat been got rid of ?'

Asghari said : ' By your honor's gracious favour everything has turned out well. If my elder brother had not gone to Lahore my father-in-law would never have come, nor would this account of years have been settled, nor would Azmat have been dismissed.'

The Khán sáhib asked : ' And how will the management of the house go on now ?'

Asghari said : ' As soon as the Mámá was ousted I came here. But there will not be any difficulty now in the management. It was only Azmat who caused the trouble. Now I will look after everything myself.'

The Khán sáhib asked : ' What other plans have you started there ?'

Asghari said : ' As yet I have not given my attention to anything. From the very beginning I was encountered with the difficulty about Azmat. I hope now to look into every matter and set things in order ; and, please God, I will keep your honor informed of whatever happens by letter.'

The Khán sáhib had made Asghari a monthly allowance after her marriage of ten rupees. He now inquired whether he should give her any money before his departure in case she should be in difficulty about the household expenses. Asghari replied : ' Those ten rupees are really more than I require ; in fact, up to date I have them all in hand, and if I took more, what should I do with them ? If any need should arise I will ask your honor myself.'

After this Asghari took leave of her father, and came back. When she arrived at her mother-in-law's house she found her mother-in-law busy blowing up the kitchen fire, and asked in amazement : ' Dear, dear ! has not a new Mámá been engaged yet ?'

Her mother-in-law said : ' As far as that goes several women have come for the place, but when I heard the wages they asked I had not the courage to engage any of them. Azmat was a bad woman, but she served us for twenty-five years at eight annas¹ a month. Now, whatever Mámá comes here, I find she will not take less than two rupees and her food. I put it off till you should come back.'

Asghari said : ' There is a Mámá whom I have in my eye, but she too asks high wages—Kifáyat Nisá's younger sister, Diyánat Nisá.² She can cook, and do needlework, and all that ; and Kifáyat Nisá once told me that she was ready to go into service if she could find a good situation.'

¹ In those days equal to one shilling, but now about eightpence.

² Diyánat means ' Probity.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother asked : ' What wages will she take ?'

Asghari replied : ' She said she wanted three rupees a month and her food. But with a little talking over she will probably be content with two.'

' If we are to give two rupees a month and food,' said Muhammad Kámil's mother, ' there is Chuniya's mother (I mean Chuniya the daughter of Bhondu the sutler) begging for the place, and she lives across the way.'

Asghari said : ' I would not take Chuniya's mother even at four annas a month.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said : ' Eh, why not ?'

Asghari said : ' It is not good to have a woman living close by. Your eyes are off her for a minute, and she can pick up whatever she fancies, and take it home and be back again in no time. And with the houses so near to each other Chuniya's mother will be always going home, and will very likely stay there all night.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said : ' Bakhshu's wife has often spoken to me on behalf of her daughter Zulfan, and Zulfan lives in Saiyid Firúz's cottages.'

Asghari asked : ' Is it that Zulfan who always dresses so finely ?'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said : ' Yes ; does she dress so very finely ? She is lately married ; she has rather a taste for good clothing.'

Asghari said : ' That kind of person is not the sort to engage.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said : ' Zulfan's mother is willing to take service herself.'

Asghari said : ' She has a kite's tail sticking to her always in the shape of her little daughter, who does not leave hold of her mother for a minute. In that way we shall be said to have one servant, but at meals there will be two.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother said : ' There is not anyone else that I can think of.'

' Look here,' said Asghari, ' I will send for that Diyánat Nisá.'

' And what about the wages ?' said Muhammad Kámil's mother.

Asghari said : ' To get an honest servant for small wages is impossible. It would suit us to give three instead of two rupees

to people of this kind ; but I do not fancy giving a woman like Azmat even eight annas a month to let the house be robbed by her. That saying is true enough : "Dear for a good reason, cheap for a bad cause." "

The meal for that day was cooked by the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law together. When it was over Asghari took Mahmúda with her, and went up on to the roof. As long as the Maulavi sáhib was in the house Asghari curtailed her habit of coming down from the roof considerably ; moreover, she impressed it upon Mahmúda that she was not to be always running downstairs. Mahmúda was but a little girl ; she asked her sister-in-law : "Dearest, why not ?"

Asghari replied : "People do not go running about as they like in the presence of their elders."

After dinner there began to be a quarrel between the Maulavi sáhib and his wife over the accounts of the housekeeping. His wife complained that he sent her far too small a sum for expenses ; that upon *her*, living at home, fell all the arrangements for weddings, the obligations to the family connections, journeys to and fro, keeping up the feasts, and what not. The Maulavi sáhib declared that twenty rupees a month was not too small a sum, that his wife had not the gift of good management, and that was the reason why such an unhappy state of things prevailed in the house. In the middle of it all the Maulavi shouted out for Mahmúda, and when she came, he said : "Call your sister-in-law here."

When Asghari heard of her being summoned, she was amazed, and thought to herself : "Why do they send for me now ?" She asked Mahmúda : "What is going on ?"

Mahmúda said : "There is a quarrel going on."

When Asghari went in the Maulavi sáhib said : "You tell me, sonnie, who will do the housekeeping now ?"

Asghari said : "My dear mother will do it just as she always has done."

The Maulavi sáhib said : "I have seen what comes of *her* doing it. Fancy a house getting twenty rupees a month, and a state like this ! not a single cooking-pot fit to use, and nothing respect-

able. If one wants a teaspoonful of sherbet at any time, God willing, you won't find the means of getting it in this house."

Asghari said : "What fault of the mother's is there in that ? That wretched Azmat ruined the house."

The Maulavi sáhib said : "Azmat would have had no power if *she* had had the sense to govern it. Azmat was a servant, not the mistress of the family."

Asghari said : "When a woman of her age, and of twenty-five years' service in a house, girds up her loins to rob it, who can discover her frauds ? One cannot suspect an old servant of that kind."

"But after all," said the Maulavi sáhib, "you *did* suspect her, did you not ?"

Asghari said : "I suspect her ? It was her evil genius which prompted her when she started that story about the lawsuit, and so stirred up a nest of sleeping hornets."

Here the mother-in-law intervened : "Out of fifty rupees you keep thirty for your own single self, and here, for the whole family, only twenty !"

The Maulavi sáhib said : "There is no comparison between the expenses of living at home and abroad ! You have counted me as a single person ; what about the servants, the travelling equipments, the house, the clothes ?"

His wife said : "You get your travelling expenses and house from the chief."

The Maulavi sáhib said : "I get a *horse*, but I have to supply the corn and grass for feeding it out of my own purse ; the groom is four rupees a month. And the house has to be kept in repair ; then I have to keep up a position befitting the chief's court, and money going and coming—a thousand worries. It is a wonder to me how I get on at all."

Asghari addressed her mother-in-law, and said : "Mother dear, what is the use of quarrelling about the twenty rupees ? A thousand thanks for what we do get. If God will send a blessing upon the dear father's earnings, that is worth thousands."

Her mother-in-law said : "Daughter, the house cannot be kept going on twenty rupees by *me*."

Asghari restrained her mother-in-law by a look, and said to the Maulavi sáhib : ' Your honor, if it please you, give two rupees less even than you have been giving ; but whatever you are pleased to give, let it arrive punctually month by month. When at the right moment there is not a farthing forthcoming, one is obliged to borrow, and through borrowing whatever vestige of good luck remains to a family is blown away.'

The Maulavi sáhib said : ' The rules for payment of salaries in these Hindustani Courts are very bad. Sometimes they are distributed after six months, sometimes you only get them after a whole year. That is the reason why one cannot regulate one's expenses. But before I go, I will tell Hazári Mal to give you twenty rupees every month regularly.'

Asghari inquired : ' Suppose the banker debits your honor for the advances, will he not require interest ?'

The Maulavi sáhib said : ' No, he will not take interest. He has a standing account with the Chief's estate ; an order shall be sent from there.'

Asghari said : ' Then that will be all right.'

Accordingly twenty rupees was fixed as the monthly allowance. But Muhammad Kámil's mother did not like the arrangement, and when they were alone together she complained to Asghari.

Asghari said : ' Please God ! I will manage the house upon twenty. Don't let your honor be alarmed about it. And, as a matter of fact, the Maulavi sáhib cannot keep up his position properly upon less than thirty rupees. In the profession of agent, in the first place, there is no chance of any extraneous receipts ;¹ and if there were, you would not expect the Maulavi sáhib to take them, would you ? Thus it is a case of " the slices counted, the soup measured." Suppose two or three rupees more did come for the house, and the Maulavi sáhib should live in discomfort himself, that would not be right.'

Her mother-in-law listened to this, and made no more ado. Asghari sent for Diyánat Nisá, and after some conversation, got her to agree to two rupees a month and her food ; and she cautioned her in these words : ' Mind that you are careful, Diyánat

¹ An euphemism for ' bribes.'

Nisá, and do not let anything happen which might force us to alter our good opinion of you. As your elder sister conducts herself in my home, so do you here.'

Diyánat Nisá said : ' Lady, may God send my death to me in that hour when I cast an eye upon what is not my own property ! If need be, I will ask you, and then eat ; but to taste even a pinch of salt without your order I hold abominable.'

CHAPTER XVII

On the day after the Eed, the Maulavi sáhib started on his journey to Lahore. Asghari at once laid in a stock of all the things that were necessary, and henceforth she continued regularly to lay in stocks of things at their proper season whenever she found they were cheap. Chilies, onions, coriander-seed, grain, different kinds of pulse, rice, sugar, firewood and other fuel, potatoes, yams, turnips, fenugreek, fennel-leaves, and what not, were all purchased in turn at the proper time. Including the Mámá, the household consisted of five persons. Twice a day a pound and a half of meat arrived, out of which Diyánat managed always to provide two varieties of fare. Sometimes she cooked half with vegetables, and half plain ; sometimes she made one half into *kabábs* ; and once a day *dál*, and every seventh day *puld-o*, and sweetened rice were standing dishes. Two or three kinds of chutney—some sweet, some flavoured with essence of mint, and some with vinegar—and several kinds of preserves, were made by Asghari at home and stored. And in addition to these she provided one bottle each of sherbet of pomegranate, syrup of lime-juice, sherbet of violets, sherbet of lilies, and sherbet of fálsa.¹ A supply of everything that was requisite was regularly kept up, and notwithstanding this abundance the expenditure in each month did not exceed fifteen rupees. Out of the five rupees which were left over there were gradually purchased two large platters, weighing five

¹ The fálsa is a shrub bearing a small purple berry, much esteemed for making cooling drinks. The botanical name is *Grewia Asiatica*.

and ten seers, a tray, some small spoons, two drinking-vessels, one complete tea-set, and so on. Also she had two boxes made, and two chests of drawers—one for the kitchen, and one for the store-closet—and two new beds were furnished. In a word, out of her twenty rupees, Asghari furbished up the house to such an extent that in outward appearance it assumed a look of considerable grandeur. Thrift and good order were introduced by her into everything.

In Azmat's time, three or four pice worth of goodies were fetched from the bázár every day for Mahmúda's sake, since there was never a crumb left over from the family meals. Now, at both meals three or four chupatties began to remain on the tablecloth, and for Mahmúda she would sometimes set by a couple of bits of egg apple, or she would let her have a pinch of coarse sugar, or she would give her a slice of preserved fruit. The daily sending to the bázár for sweets was stopped. Occasionally, for a treat, if Mahmúda had set her heart on anything, it was sent for.

For a whole lifetime no poor man had ever received from the family so much as a handful of meal, or half a chupattie. Now, after each of the two daily meals, two chupatties were given away to the poor. Whatever things there were in the house used formerly to be left lying about in wonderful misarrangement, like cabbage-leaves or radishes. Now everything was in the right place. If you ask for the bundles of clothes, they are all tied up and arranged in order, with the clothes neatly folded inside them. Every vessel in the closet where the grain is stored, and water kept, is carefully covered up.¹ The dishes, clean and bright, are put away in their proper places; those of china and those of copper apart. It was as if the house were a machine, with all its works in good order, and the key of the machine in Asghari's hands. Whenever she turned it, the machine began moving of itself.

As time went on, two rupees or four rupees began to be saved every month, and Asghari credited them to a separate account as a deposit on trust. The practice of borrowing had been forsworn

¹ The grain (including pulse) and also the water are stored in large earthenware jars placed in a row.

from the day when Asghari took the management of the house into her own hands. Not even by chance was a farthing's worth of goods ever got from the bázár on credit. Asghari used to write down all the accounts of the house in a book. When anything came to be nearly used up, and Diyánat Nisá reported, 'Lady, there is only enough ghee for two days more,' Asghari got out her book, and looked in it to see on what date what amount of ghee was purchased, and how much the daily consumption was. If the calculation did not tally she subjected Diyánat Nisá to a cross-examination. It was not possible that any wasteful expenditure should occur, or things be made away without being accounted for. Even the reckonings of the corn-grinder¹ and the washerwoman were duly entered in Asghari's book.

CHAPTER XVIII

As soon as everything was in working order, and some method had been established in the house, Asghari turned her attention to other matters. Muhammad Kámil was *studying*, but in the desultory and half-hearted manner in which boys who are left to their own resources and their own devices are apt to study. His father, as we have seen, lived away from home; Muhammad Aqil, though he *was* the elder brother—still, the difference between the two was not more than two and a half years—at any rate, he did not exercise any control over him. Muhammad Kámil did his lessons morning and evening, but he also used to play with the boys of his own age at cards, or chess, or draughts. On several occasions, when he was engaged in some game, he would not come home till three full hours of the night had gone. Asghari knew all about this, but she was seeking for some opportunity that would enable her to speak about it in such a way as not to give offence.

One day, Muhammad Kámil came home very late at night, and

¹ The corn is purchased whole and ground in the house under strict supervision by women called in for the purpose.

(possibly he had been winning before he came) he was in good spirits. Directly he came in he asked for supper. Diyánat Nisá ran to warm up the sauce. Muhammad Kámil thought it was just being cooked, and asked: 'Mámá, is not your pot off the fire yet?'

Asghari said: 'It has been taken off and put on again several times already. You eat your meals at such unreasonable hours that the supper gets cold, and is perfectly ruined. Either make some arrangement to take your meals in good time, or else get your supper outside. At present your dear mother is put to inconvenience every day with our waiting for you.'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'Eh, do you people wait for me? I thought for certain you would have your own meals.'

Asghari said: 'When there are men in the house, what need is there for women to be gobbling up their meals?'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'That might do if it were a matter of a few days. But what is the use of insisting on it? Eat your own suppers in future.'

Asghari kept silence for the time. When they were on the roof, Muhammad Kámil himself began talking on the subject in the same way. Asghari said to him: 'It is an extraordinary thing that you cannot do anything which is contrary to your habits, and yet you wish us to act contrary to ours. Why don't you come home earlier?'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'One does not care to go out again after supper, and sleep does not come to me till late. I get stupid, stopping in the house without any occupation. That is why I come home late, on purpose, so that I may go to bed directly after supper.'

Asghari said: 'Occupation is a matter within one's own power. There are a thousand things to do if a man regulates his time properly. The one occupation of reading takes up plenty of time. I used to see my eldest brother at his books often until midnight, and if by chance he went to sleep he used to make a great lamentation. You do not work hard enough at your reading; that is why you get so bored at the want of occupation.'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'How much harder ought I to

work? I do my lessons both times. I learn by heart what is set me.'

Asghari said: 'I don't understand what it is that you do learn. That day when Azmat's accounts were going on, your dear father asked you some question about a sum, and you could not tell him. I felt quite ashamed.'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'Accounts are a different branch of study. I am reading Arabic; that has nothing to do with accounts.'

Asghari said: 'The object of learning things is that one's business with the outer world should never come to a standstill. My eldest brother has read a lot of Arabic and Persian, but he cannot get an appointment. My father tells him that until he learns how to keep accounts and do office work he need not expect to be employed. Now Ma-álandesh¹ is studying at college, and he knows more about keeping accounts than his elder brother. My father is delighted with him, and says that if he goes on reading at college for another two years, he will get him a place under Government.'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'They only take young fellows at college; I am past the age.'

Asghari said: 'You are not bound to enter the college. Are there not lots of private tutors in the city? Just give as much of your time to this as you now waste in gambling.'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'Why, come now, I am not gambling all day and night. It is only now and then that I sit down to it for an hour or so.'

Asghari said: 'Gambling is a habit like opium eating. It begins with a little, but goes on increasing until at length it becomes a second nature, and there is no getting rid of it. In the first place, these amusements are sinful; but, besides that, they hinder a man from acquiring any other proficiency. Men of worth and merit never gamble; it is the good-for-nothing people who

¹ There is a meaning in all these names. The father's name Dárandesh may be translated 'far seeing.' The elder brother's Khairandesh means 'looking to the good,' and Ma-álandesh may be translated as 'looking to the main chance.'

kill their time in this way. However much a man may rejoice at winning in these games, there is every bit as much grief in losing at them ; and just as the joy of winning is unreal, so is the grief at losing unreasonable. Often, too, when people go on playing together, gratuitous disputes arise between them. If you will take my advice, you will give up these games entirely. People do not say anything about it in your presence, but behind your back they have their jest. It was only the day before yesterday that a young fellow came in search of you ; the Mámá answered from inside that the young gentleman has gone out. The young fellow said to his companion : " Come along to Master¹ Husaini's house, we shall find him there in the crush over the chess." Your dear father's name stands high in the city ; people have great faith in him ; but going to such places gives a man a bad name ; and I have heard your father, too, lamenting over his bad fortune that neither of his two sons has grown up to be such as he would rejoice to see them. He said of Aqil that, though he had been given a good education, he had now forgotten what he learnt in the absorbing pursuit of his office work ; but he said of his younger son : " He has no leisure from play and sport." Indeed, some one or other had carried the information to my own dear father ; he spoke to me about it ; but I said : " It is all a lie. If anything of the kind went on I should be sure to know of it." "

This remonstrance of Asghari's had a very good effect upon Muhammad Kámil. He left off gambling altogether, and began to devote himself to his Arabic with much more zeal than formerly ; and he commenced learning to keep accounts, and other things, from one of the schoolmasters out of school hours. God has conferred a special blessing upon *time*. By spending his time according to rule, Muhammad Kámil before many days were over had made considerable progress in Arabic, and he had also read through and mastered several books on mathematics.

¹ 'Master' here means 'schoolmaster.'

CHAPTER XIX

WHILE Muhammad Kámil was employing his energies in this direction, Asghari had the opportunity of starting a new enterprise. In the mohulla in which their house was there resided a personage of very great importance—the Hakím Rúhullah Khán.¹ The Hakím sáhib himself was treasurer to the Mahárája in the state of Patiyála, but his family and children lived in the mohulla. What with the house, and the grounds, and the servants, and dependants, it was a vast establishment ; and the family was reckoned as one of the highest rank in the city. They had formed alliances with the best families, and were in the pick of society. The Hakím sáhib's younger brother, Fatihullah Khán, was for a long time manager-in-chief of the estate of the Ruler of Indore, but when Munshi Ammu Ján's power was in the ascendant in that State he thought it best under the circumstances to retire. He possessed, however, lakhs of rupees of his own, and was quite independent of service. He had purchased many thousands of rupees worth of property in the city, and the monthly rents which came in alone amounted to several hundreds. He lived in great state ; there was a guard of sepoya at the entrance to his house, and, inside and outside, some thirty or forty servants. Horses, elephants, pálkis, carriages, always ready, in case he should go out.

Fatihullah Khán had two daughters—Jamálára and Husnára. Jamálára had been married to the son of the Nawáb Isfandiyár Khán, but they got on so badly together that at last all intercourse between them was broken off. Not (God forbid it !) that there was any divorce ; but still, there was no longer any pretence of affection. Even the articles of the bride's trousseau² had

¹ The title of 'Hukeem,' which means 'Physician,' may have been hereditary, since there is a great tendency in India to address people by titles earned by their ancestors. Or it may be that each of the brothers had qualified himself to be a physician in order to give advice gratis to the poor, a species of charity which is by no means uncommon among wealthy Musalmans.

² These would include not only clothes and jewellery, but all the cooking apparatus and a great deal of the furniture of the bride's apartments.

been sent back to her. Husnára had been betrothed into the family of the Nawáb of Jhajjar. The Aunt on the mother's side of these two girls, Sháh Zamáni begam, lived in the mohulla in which Asghari's mother resided, and in that mohulla Asghari's ability was the subject of common talk. Sháh Zamáni, too, knew all about her, and had also seen her upon several occasions at weddings or other functions. Now it happened that Sháh-zamáni begam came to pay her younger sister, Husnára's mother, a visit.

It is in the order of this world that no human being is exempt from sorrow, and doubtless this has been so ordained by Providence, since if any person were happy in all respects he would not remember his God even in his moments of leisure, nor think of himself as only God's servant. Sháh Zamáni's sister Sultána begam had every worldly gratification at her command, yet she was a constant prey to feelings of mortification in regard to her daughters. On the one hand, here was Jamálára, after all the ceremonies of her marriage had been fully completed, sitting neglected at home. On the other hand, Husnára had developed such a trick of ill-temper that she was on bad terms with everyone living in the house. She had no reverence for her mother, nor respect for her elder sister, nor fear of her father. There was not a servant who had not some special complaint against her, not a maid who was not asking to be protected from her. Husnára had raised the whole household against herself.

When Sháh Zamáni arrived one would have supposed that Husnára, conscious of the fact that this was her mother's elder sister, would have sat quiet for half an hour or so. Not a bit of it. Sháh Zamáni had barely time to get out of her páiki, when she was assailed by a series of complaints one after another. Nargis came up with tears in her eyes, and said : ' Look, Begam sáhib, the young lady has torn my new dopatta to shreds.' Sosan raised a complaint : ' Begam sáhib, the young lady has left the mark of her teeth on my neck.' Guláb sobbed out : ' My ear is all red with blood.'¹ The nurse screamed : ' Look at *this* ! she

¹ Nargis (Narcissus), Sosan (Lily), and Guláb (Rose), are names of the female attendants.

has hit my poor little girl such a blow with a stick that there is a great weal on her arm.' And from the kitchen the Mámá sent up a cry : ' See, she is throwing handfuls and handfuls of ashes into the stewing-pans.'

Sháh Zamáni begam called out to her : ' Husná, come here !'

Recognising her Aunt's voice, Husnára did at last come forward, but without any greeting or obeisance. Her hands covered with ashes, and her feet all muddy—just as she was—she ran and seized hold of her Aunt.

Her Aunt said : ' Husná, you have grown very rude.'

Husnára said : ' This old hag Nargis has been telling tales, I suppose,' and so saying she got away from her Aunt's lap, and ran and pulled Nargis's hair. Her Aunt called out ' Oh ! oh !' repeatedly, but she listened to nothing.

Sháh Zamáni turned to her sister, and said : ' Sister Sultána, for Heaven's sake get a governess for this child.'

Sultána begam said : ' My dear sister, what can I do ? I have been in search of a governess for months ; there is none to be had.'

Sháh Zamáni begam said : ' Oho, sister ! is the old proverb true of you also : " With the boy in her lap, *Lost child* ! cried all over the city " ? Why, in your own mohulla there is the young bride just come to Maulavi Muhammad Fázil's house—a governess who is one in a hundred thousand.'

Sultána said : ' I never heard about it till this moment. See, I will send someone at once.' And then she called for the superintendent of the household, and said : ' Máni ji, there is some Maulavi sáhib living in this mohulla ; my dear elder sister says that his youngest daughter-in-law is very highly educated. Look you, if she is willing to take service as a governess, go and bring her here. I am prepared to give her food and clothing, and ten rupees a month, with pocket-money for pawn and tobacco ; and when the girl shall have finished her first portion of the Qur-án, and shall have learnt good manners, I will give the governess something to gratify her independently of her salary.'

Máni ji went to the Maulavi sáhib's house. She was received by Muhammad Kámil's mother, and after the usual courtesies, she asked : ' My good madam, are you the Maulavi sáhib's wife ?'

Diyánat Nisá replied: 'Yes, this is the lady; come and sit down; where have you come from?'

Máni ji said: 'Where is your younger daughter-in-law?'

Muhammad Kámil's mother replied: 'On the roof.'

Máni ji asked: 'Shall I go up there to her?'

Diyánat Nisá said: 'Your honor will kindly tell us your address and station. The lady-bride will come here to receive you.'

Máni ji said: 'I am come from the Hakím sáhib's house.'

Muhammad Kámil's mother inquired after the health of each member of the Hakím's family individually, and then said to Mání: 'What is your business with Tamízdár Bahu?'

Máni ji said: 'When she comes I will tell her.'

It was now about the time for Tamízdár to come downstairs, for it was her habit to come down after saying her afternoon prayers, and she said her sunset and evening prayers, both of them, on the lower floor.

When Mání ji saw Asghari she had some scruples about saying anything to her on the matter of taking service as a governess. But in the course of conversation she mentioned that the Begam sáhib was anxious to get her daughter educated, that the Begam's elder sister had spoken to her about Asghari, and that the Begam had in consequence sent her to the house.

Asghari said: 'Pray make many salaams on my behalf to both of the Begam sáhibs, and say that I never grudge what little knowledge I possess to anyone. The only object of study is to enable a person to benefit others, and the elder Begam sáhib is aware, no doubt, that in my old home I taught many girls to read. It would please me greatly to teach the Begam sáhib's daughter, but—what can I do? The Begam sáhib will not send her daughter here, and it is impossible for me to go there.'

Máni ji, without actually mentioning the word *salary*, said in a low voice: 'The Begam sáhib is prepared to guarantee every kind of expense, even of pocket-money.'

Asghari said: 'That is all very good of her, and, moreover, it is quite in keeping with her high position. But we too—humble folk as we are, living under her shade—God does not leave us

without food and clothing. I am ready to perform any service for her as an unpurchased slave. And if she wishes for a paid governess there are plenty to be found in the city.'

After this Mání ji asked some questions about Asghari, and when she learnt that she was a Tahsildár's daughter, and that Maulavi Muhammad Fázil sáhib, too, held an appointment of fifty rupees a month, she felt abashed at the impropriety of her having hinted at her taking service. But while she listened to Asghari's conversation, Mání ji became enchanted with her. Although she had been in the way of seeing semi-regal establishments, the purity of Asghari's language struck her with astonishment. She began to apologize, saying: 'Madam, pray forgive me.'

Asghari said: 'Why do you drag me over the thorns like this? In the first place, to take service is nothing wrong—there is nothing sinful in it, and besides, when you were not acquainted with the facts, what harm was there in your asking?'

After a time Mání ji took her leave, and when she got back, she said: 'Begam sáhib! she is a governess—one out of a hundred thousand, no doubt of that. To look at her face is enough to humanize anyone, and to sit by her side is to acquire good breeding. One might learn wisdom from being under her shadow, and catch an air of refinement from breathing her atmosphere. But she is not one to take service. She is a Tahsildár's daughter, and daughter-in-law to the agent of the Chief of Lahore. They keep a woman-servant in the house. There is a fine cloth spread in the reception-room, and the seats are covered with embroidery and cushions. They are well-to-do people living in comfort. Bless you! how should she care to take service?'

Sháh Zamáni Begám said: 'She is quite right. You sent Mání there, Sultána dear, but I was certain myself that she would never take service.'

Máni ji said: 'But she is such a dear good woman that she is quite willing to teach for nothing.'

'What! and come here?' asked Sultána.

Máni ji said: 'Why, Begam sáhib, you cannot suppose that a person who has no need to take service should care to come here.'

Sultána said : 'How then ? Do you mean that the child should go there ?'

Sháh Zamáni said : 'Why, what harm is there in that ?' The house is only two steps off. And whatever makes you have such a poor idea of the Maulavi sáhib ? His mother was first cousin on the father's side to our Ali Naqi Khán.'

Sultána said : 'Ah ! then in one sense he belongs to our family.'

Sháh Zamáni said : 'There you are. God forbid you should think him a mere common person ! In old days he was very well-to-do in the world ; it is since the Chief's fortunes declined that the poor fellow has become impoverished. Still, they have always kept a woman-servant in the house, and there are one or two retainers at the entrance.'

Sultána said : 'So be it, then. Husnára shall go there.'

CHAPTER XX

NEXT day the two sisters, Sháh Zamáni begam and Sultána begam, called at Asghari's house, and took Husnára with them. Although the appliances at Asghari's command were of a humble character, still, by reason of her tact and good management, she arranged for their reception so successfully that everything wanted was forthcoming without any fuss. Two kinds of attar,¹ a box of unguents in four compartments, some cardamoms, prepared betel-nut, and tea made their appearance with no interruption to the conversation. Some pawn leaves of excellent flavour were prepared. The two sisters said to Asghari : 'It would be such a kindness to us if you would give your mind to this girl's education.'

Asghari said : 'To begin with, it is not so very much that I have acquired myself, but what little I have acquired through the kindness of my elders, please God ! I will not spare myself in explaining to her to the best of my power.'

As they were about to take leave, Sultána begam offered to put a gold mohur into Asghari's hand.

¹ *I.e.*, 'Otto' of roses, and of some other flower.

Asghari said : 'I do not want this. Surely you do not suppose it possible that I should take any fee from your honor ?'

Sultána said : 'Heaven forfend ! I never presumed to offer you a fee. This is for sweets for the *Bismillah*.'

Asghari said : 'Ah, yes, it is the custom to distribute sweets for good luck at the beginning. But that won't come to a gold mohur. A pound or two of confectionaries will be ample for the children to sweeten their mouths with,' and so saying she made a sign to Diyánat, who fetched a large dish from the store closet, and filled it with comfits. Asghari herself recited the Fátíha over them, and gave some to Husnára, and then told Diyánat to take up the laden dish and distribute the rest among all the children.

Sultána said : 'My dear, you have put me to shame.'

Asghari said : 'What are we poor humble folk fit for ? But whatever there is in the house is all your honor's property. One thing indeed will be my giving if I teach Husnára begam, and may God bring about the day when I shall be made proud of it by your honor !'

After this interchange of complimentary phrases Sháh Zamáni begam and Sultána begam returned home, and left Husnára behind them in Asghari's charge. I shall have to make a separate book about the manner in which Asghari conducted Husnára's education ; if the whole of that story were written down here this book would be too large. But what I wish to say now is, that directly Husnára became Asghari's pupil Asghari was besieged by the whole mohulla. Every woman you see is taking her daughter to Asghari. But Asghari picked out those who were born of good parents, and found some pretext for putting off the others. She said she might any day be going to stay with her mother, and that schooling was of no good unless it were continuous. For all that, some twenty girls became regular attendants ; but it was against Asghari's principles to take pay from any girl. In fact, she was in the habit of spending a rupee or two upon them out of her own allowance. From morning till noon there was reading, and then two hours' leave was granted for dinner. After dinner there was writing, and for the last three hours of the daylight needlework.

The needlework was a source of profit. For it was not merely

sewing that was taught, but lace-making of every kind, and fine stitching, and all kinds of cutting out, and the making and stitching on of embroidery. At the commencement Asghari laid out ten rupees in getting together the necessary materials, but afterwards there began to be a surplus even after that expense. Whatever things the girls made Diyánat used to take privately to the bázár, and get them disposed of, and in this manner there gradually accrued quite a large sum to the credit of the school. Out of this fund clothes were made and books were purchased for those girls who were poor. A woman was retained as servant specially for the girls—to give them water, and to pull their punkah, and her wages, too, came out of the fund.

As for the girls, they used at one time to be frightened out of their wits at merely going near their governesses, but Asghari's pupils were enamoured of her. They began dropping in of their own accord, even before she had finished dressing, and stayed in a body till a watch of the night had passed, and would hardly go then. The reason of this was that Asghari had a genuine affection for all of them, and had devised such an excellent method of teaching that the children got educated in the course of conversation. There was nothing here of that sing-song drone like a spinning-wheel, which begins in the morning and is not over by sunset.¹ Asghari taught her pupils just as her father had taught herself, and hence the girls were not only the most diligent of pupils, but the most genial of companions. When any girl's marriage took place some little bit of jewellery was included among her wedding-presents at the cost of the school fund. If Asghari had desired to increase her numbers all the girls' schools in the city would have been deserted. Hundreds of women made overtures to her on behalf of their daughters, and girls, too, came running themselves from all quarters, for the simple reason that in other schools there is nothing but restraint all day long, and the harshness of the governesses, and the minimum of learning

¹ The ordinary method of instruction is for a monitor to read a few words of the prescribed book, which all the other children repeat together over and over again, till they get the cue for a few more words, and so on. The meaning of the words is never explained.

with the maximum of beating and taskwork. Suppose they have read all day in one of those—it is but a few words; from morning to evening the same dull repetition, and if any girl is silent for a minute, and the teacher's eye falls upon her—then woe betide her! But if you inquire what sort of tasks they perform—first of all, when they arrive in the morning, they sweep out the house, then they fold up the bedding of the mistress and of the master,¹ and of some ten or twelve little monitors of the school—nay, perhaps of the mistress's neighbours; and then four or five of them together will move out of the way the big heavy bedsteads, bad luck to them!² When that is over, some of the girls—whose ill-fate has come speedily—must sit down to their scripture lesson, and no sooner do the words fall from their lips than the teacher begins to flourish her wand. And some—who saw a good man's face when they first got up³—must do all the housework. One of them holds the schoolmistress's little boy; her elbow is breaking under his weight, but her neck is fiend-ridden by the dread of a beating, and so she walks up and down, beguiling the time. The cries of beaten children fall on her ears. What is throbbing inside her is her own trembling heart. She esteems her own affliction a relief from *that* torture. Another has begun burnishing yesterday's dirty cooking-pots. Already her joints are swelling, and her shoulders refuse their work; but her little sister is getting a beating, and is screaming out, 'Mercy, teacher, I am dying! Mercy, I am pledged to you! Mercy for God's sake! Mercy for the prophet's sake! Mercy! I am the monitor's handmaid. Oh! oh! mother, mother! sister, sister!' And the sister?—is here scrubbing pots as fast as she can to the tune of 'jhain jhain.'⁴ Then, when they are quit of these duties, the time has come for

¹ The mistress's husband is called 'master,' and their children 'monitors,' sarcastically.

² The bedsteads would have been moved into the open courtyard in the middle of the house for people to sleep on, and in the morning they would be set up on end in the verandas, so as to take up as little room as possible.

³ Which is held to confer good luck for the day.

⁴ The pots, which are of copper or brass, are burnished with a moist cloth covered with fine sand or ashes. Of necessity they have to be kept scrupulously clean. 'Jhain jhain' is an expression imitative of the noise made in burnishing.

the spices to be ground, for the meal to be kneaded, for the fire to be lit, for the meat to be browned. Then at mid-day, if you ask for the teacher—she is fast asleep, and little innocents are employed in fanning her, and in their hearts are praying to God that she may sleep so soundly as never to get up again.

That is the kind of misery which prevails in other schools.¹ But under Asghari's rule there was neither beating nor scolding. It was a great threat of hers if she said: 'Listen to me, sister, if you do not learn your lessons my school will get a bad name on your account. I shall send for your mother, and say to her: "Your daughter is not learning anything here: you had better place her with another governess."' No need to say more. The girl was in despair, and at the next lesson everything was on the tip of her tongue. Or suppose any girl did not remember her lesson correctly, it was said to her: 'Sister, you have not learnt your lesson to-day; this afternoon the other girls will do needle-work, and you reading.' That was quite enough to make her get her lesson by heart in no time.

The two monitors in the school were Mahmúda and Husnára. There was no sweeping the house, no folding up of bedclothes, no moving of bedsteads, no cleaning of dirty vessels, no carrying about of budding monitors. On the contrary, the girls had a servant of their own. It was a reign of love and peace, and only three things to work at—reading, writing, and sewing. The girls took the keenest pleasure in gaining the instruction they received.

CHAPTER XXI

By way of giving you some notion of the method of Asghari's teaching I insert here the following anecdote of the school.

There was a certain woman named Safiham,² whose daughter Fazilat was about ten years old. This Fazilat had a natural pro-

¹ This book was written more than thirty years ago, and probably has had as great an influence on public opinion in India as 'Nicholas Nickleby' had in England.

² Pronounce Sufeehun, with the accent on the second syllable. The word means 'ignorant.' Fazilat (Fuzeelut) means 'pre-eminence.'

pensity for reading and writing, and all sorts of needlework. Safiham, on the contrary, wanted Fazilat to do all the sweeping in the house, to wash the floors, and burnish the cooking vessels. Fazilat used to chafe at any work of this description. She would do it, certainly, when her mother expostulated with her, but even then in a perfunctory manner. One day, when Safiham had lost her temper with Fazilat, she took her off and placed her in Asghari's school, and said: 'Mistress, this daughter of mine is a useless girl. She flatly refuses to do anything that I tell her. Pray give her a training of such a kind that she may take an interest in doing her work in the house.'

When Asghari looked at the girl, she saw that she could make something of her; on the other hand, Fazilat had found in Asghari a governess after her own heart. She would come to the school at break of day, and not go home to her dinner till noon. Then, when she had finished eating her food, she would rush back again, and drink her water after she reached the school;¹ and however early she came in the afternoon, she would stay on till some time after nightfall.

Safiham used to call at the school occasionally to see after her, and it happened several times that she found her playing at dolls with the other girls; two or three times she found her cooking dolls' feasts. One day, some time after nightfall—Fazilat being late in coming home—Safiham went to fetch her. When she arrived at the school, what does she see but Mahmúda engaged in telling stories, and all the girls of the school sitting round her listening, and the mistress herself, too, sitting among the girls, and listening to the stories.

Then, indeed, the soul of Safiham took flame, and burnt itself to ashes. She called out: 'My word, madam! you are a fine schoolmistress, bringing these girls to ruin! All the times I have come to see Fazilat I have never once found her reading. Call this a school! It is a regular playing-house! That is why the girls are all so eager to come here!'

Asghari said: 'Sister, if your daughter is not being educated

¹ It is a common expression for speed in travelling to say that one has eaten at one place and drunk water at another.