

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.<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> whose daughter Fazilat was about ten years old. This Fazilat had a natural pro-

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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;<sup>1</sup> 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

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

in accordance with your wishes, it is in your power to remove her. But do not cast imputations unjustly upon the school: Tell me, now, How many days was Fazilat reading at the Má-i ji's<sup>1</sup> school?

Safihan said: 'I put her there when the moon of Miránji<sup>2</sup> was young. She read all through Madár, and continued reading through Khwája Mu-inuddín. She is with you from the beginning of Rajab.'<sup>3</sup>

'Well,' said Asghari, 'how far had she read at the Má-i ji's?'

'During the three months,' said Safihan, 'she read the whole of "*And the good women*,"<sup>4</sup> and half of "*God does not love the utterance of evil words*."<sup>5</sup>

Asghari said: 'One portion and a half in three months; that is half a portion a month. Your daughter came here in Rajab, and now it is the new moon of the blank month<sup>6</sup>—that is four months. She has just finished the whole of "*And I do not justify myself*"—that is to say, she has read altogether seven and a half portions, and her account now stands at about one portion a month—double what it was at the Má-i ji's school. And when Fazilat came here, she could not even draw a straight line with ink;<sup>7</sup> now she writes her name, and considering her age, she does not make the letters so badly. She did not know how to count up to twenty properly, and now she can multiply by fifteen. And in sewing, she could not hem a border straight. Look at her handiwork now. Here, Aqila! just bring me the work-basket: Show her some of Fazilat's stitching in that coat; and while you are about it, bring some of Fazilat's fancy work, edgings, fringes, flowers, embroidery, lace-work,<sup>7</sup> anything you can find.'

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Má-ee jee: the word means 'mother.'

<sup>2</sup> She names the three months Rabiussáni, Jumádalála, and Jumádalukhrá by the *saints* whose holidays occur in them.

<sup>3</sup> Pronounce Rujjub.

<sup>4</sup> The words between inverted commas are the opening sentences of 'portions' of the Qur-án, of which there are thirty.

<sup>5</sup> *I.e.*, without a saint's day. The month Shawwal.

<sup>6</sup> The first step in learning to write Persian is to practise drawing a horizontal line from right to left the whole space of the board which serves as a copy-book.

<sup>7</sup> Twelve different kinds of fancy work are enumerated, for which it would be impossible to find exact equivalents in English.

Fazilat said: 'Mistress, may not I go and fetch them?'

Fazilat ran off, and came back laden with her productions. Safihan, who had got ten answers for every one of her doubts, was dumfounded.

Asghari said: 'Speak out, sister. You have some idea of justice. What else did you think your daughter would learn in four months' time?'

Poor Safihan was as much abashed as if pails of cold water had fallen on her. She did not dare look the mistress in the face. All this time Mahmúda's interesting story had been interrupted by her sudden advent. All the girls began looking at her with big reproachful eyes. She said: 'Mistress, what did I know of *this*? Fazilat stays here all day long; she comes home so late, there is only time for her to get her supper and go to bed. I never have a chance of asking her anything. On the few occasions when I have happened to come here I have found her, sometimes playing with dolls, sometimes playing at cooking, and sometimes listening to stories. That gave me the impression that she was wasting her time in play and nonsense. Forgive me the words which just now escaped my mouth.'

Asghari said: 'Certainly. Your anxiety was not unnatural. But it is in these very amusements that I teach the girls things of real use. In their games of cooking the children learn the way of preparing every kind of dish. They get to know the proportion of spices, to judge the amount of salt, and to test things by their flavour and odour. Eh, Fazilat! yesterday was Friday—tell me, what amount of *zarda*<sup>1</sup> did all of you girls cook together? Let us hear how it was prepared, and what the account came to.'

Fazilat said: 'The accounts were all written down by Mahmúda began in her book. But, as your honour told me, I paid particular attention to the receipt for preparing it, and I have it well in my mind. There was one seer of rice. First of all we soaked it in the large pan. I think we sent for half a pice worth

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce Zurrda. It means a dish of rice coloured yellow (in rich houses with saffron).

of hársinghár<sup>1</sup> stalks, but a pice worth came. We put them to boil in about a seer and a half of water. When they came to the boil, and the colour had gone out of them, we strained them out, and threw the rice, after draining off the water, into the liquor. When the rice was half soft, and just a grain of hardness remained in it, we spread it out on a cloth, so that all the moisture might evaporate. Then we took two chitacks<sup>2</sup> of ghee and made it frizzle in a degchi with a seasoning of cloves, and emptied the rice into it. Then we poured over the whole an equal weight with the rice of coarse sugar, and just as much water, by guess, as would soften whatever was left hard in the rice. Then we frizzled in some ghee one chitack of raisins, and when they were well swollen, threw them into the rice; and afterwards we made it all hot with live coals above and beneath the cooking-pot.<sup>3</sup>

Asghari said: 'The ingredients are all right, but when I saw the rice it had got caked. I fancy that, when you spread it out on the cloth, you did not douche it with cold water.'

Then Asghari turned to Safihan and said: 'Well, sister, did your daughter cook the *zarda* properly? That is all by favour of the dolls' feasts. And now, Mahmúda dear, let us hear the accounts of your *zarda*.'

Mahmúda went and fetched her account-book, and said: 'Mistress, rice, at six seers the rupee, one seer of it, two annas and three-quarters. The hársinghár-stalks and cloves together, one pice. Ghee, at two seers the rupee—we ordered three chitacks; two were used with the cloves for the seasoning, and one at the finish in frizzling the raisins—altogether one anna and a half for ghee. Sugar, at four seers the rupee, one seer, four annas. Raisins, one pice. Charcoal, two annas.<sup>3</sup> The total came to ten

<sup>1</sup> The *Nyctanthes arbor tristis*, an unsightly shrub which produces in the night lovely flowers that are shaken off by the wind at dawn. The petals are white and the corolla a deep orange colour. The latter is used for dying, and instead of saffron for colouring rice.

<sup>2</sup> There are sixteen chitacks in a seer, so that a chitack is about two ounces.

<sup>3</sup> This last item is not in the original as published, but has been added to make the total correct. Some item must have been omitted when the work was in the press.—TRANSLATOR.

annas and three pice. Ten girls shared the expense. I gave an anna and three-quarters, and—Fazílat one, Aqíla two, Husnára three, Ummatullah four, Aliya five, Sulma six, Ummunnabin seven, the two sisters Shakíla and Jamíla nine—each of them one anna.'

Asghari said: 'Mahmúda, you let yourself be cheated.'

Mahmúda reflected, and then said: 'Yes, mistress, there were some cowries over from the rice; that wretched banya pocketed them. Dear me! if the stalks and the cloves had been included for that, we should have saved one pice. Run, Diyánat, and recover the cowries from the banya.'

Asghari said: 'Eh! eh! what are you about? A matter of cowries, and it happened two days ago! Say nothing about it now. It's a punishment for your mistake, to put up with a little loss like that.'

Asghari now addressed Husnára, and said: 'Now we know how the *zarda* was made, and what it cost. Tell me, what did you all do with a whole seer of *zarda* after it was cooked.'

Husnára replied: 'We put a pyramid of it on each of two middle-sized dishes, and sent them to the mosque for the poor, and with the rest we filled thirteen little plates. There are twenty-five girls in the school; one plateful was allowed for every two, but the thirteenth plate I had by myself.'

'What?' asked Asghari; 'did you take a double share?'

Husnára said: 'No, not that. I had a half-plateful. Ask any of them.'

Asghari said: 'And how did it happen that you were outside of the family?'

Husnára was silent.

Ummatullah said: 'Mistress, she is too proud to eat with all of us.'

Husnára said: 'No, mistress; it has not anything to do with pride. I came last of all the girls to the tablecloth; that is why I was left by myself. Let your honor ask Mahmúda begam.'

<sup>1</sup> There are 16 annas in the rupee. One-sixth of 16 annas is 2½, not, as Mahmúda calculated, 2¾. She should have received the change in cowries for ¼th of an anna, about equal to ¼rd of a farthing.

Ummatullah said: 'Why, just now, not so very long ago, you quarrelled with me over drinking the water I had left, did not you?'

'Do you call that quarrelling?' said Husnára. 'All I said was that you ought to take only so much water as you wished to drink. It is bad manners to leave water in a glass after drinking part of it.'

Asghari next inquired of Mahmúda: 'That book which I gave you—"A Variety of Dainty Dishes"—have you tried all the dishes in it by cooking them—or not yet?'

Mahmúda took a little time to think, and then said: 'To the best of my belief, I have had all of them cooked, and some several times over. All the elder girls know how to make the usual everyday dishes; and, besides that, there have been cooked more than once all the different kinds of pulao,<sup>1</sup> rissoles, pastry, fritters—sweet and savoury—cakes, and puddings and sweet-meats; and all the girls have seen them being cooked, and have lent a hand in the cooking. And as for that, your honor knows that in our school doll-feasts are only the name. Whatever we cook is fit to be served up to a well-to-do family. And—I forgot—Husnára has a fondness for making chutnies and preserves. Excepting her, these are things which the other girls do not know much about.'

After this Asghari said to Safihan: 'Sister, you will have understood by this time the use of dolls' feasts as they are practised here. It is very late now, and some of the children's homes are a good way off. If you will come to-morrow, we will let you inspect the dolls; and if you stay till the evening, I will get the girls to let you hear their stories.'

Everyone then dispersed. Safihan, as she was going off, put her hands together, and said: 'For mercy's sake, mistress, forgive me my mistake!'

<sup>1</sup> Eleven different kinds of pulao are enumerated, and fourteen other dishes are named for which exact equivalents in English cannot be given.

## CHAPTER XXII

ON the next day, when Safihan arrived, Asghari showed her specimens of the girls' embroidery, and the gold stripings they had braided, the gold knobs they had twisted, the borderings and flowers they had made, and the clothes, both men's and women's, which they had cut out and sewn together, all of which excited in Safihan, when she saw them, the utmost astonishment. After that, Asghari showed her the girls' doll-houses.

In these houses there were all the appurtenances of a household. Carpets, cushions, spittoons, basins, ewers, trunks, curtains, sunshades, ceiling-cloths, punkhas, mosquito-curtains, beds, all kinds of cooking vessels, and quite an array of ornaments, and everything properly arranged in its own place. And the dolls were dressed up exactly as if there were an assemblage of guests in a house celebrating some festival. When Safihan had done looking at the dolls' houses, Asghari said to her: 'Of all the children's amusements, I think most highly of their dolls. By their means the girls acquire a knowledge of sewing, and stitching, and cutting out clothes, and of housekeeping, and of all kinds of ceremonial functions, such as the sixth day,<sup>1</sup> the taste of rice, the weaning, the first reading,<sup>2</sup> the first fast-keeping, the betrothal, the feasts and holidays, the creams and cakes of the Muharram, the Hindu festivals, the weddings, and all the ceremonies which occur before and after a wedding. Sister Safihan, it is but a few days since your daughter began coming here, but the girls who have been with me for some time—such as, well, Ummunnabin,<sup>3</sup> who is sitting here, or my sister-in-law Mahmúda, or Husnára—I say it in all humility: if the management of some big, well-appointed household were committed to them at once, they could discharge it as well as the most practised and experienced woman could do.

<sup>1</sup> When the *mother* first receives the congratulations of the friends admitted to see her.

<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere called the Bismillah.

<sup>3</sup> Pronounce Oommoonnubbeen.

It is not only their reading which I insist upon ; I try to make them *useful* for the business of the world, which will fall upon their heads before many days are over.'

After this speech Asghari called Husnára, and said : 'Sister, your dolls' house is very finely appointed. I notice only one thing amiss—your dolls do not seem to possess any coloured costumes. Perhaps you have not learnt the art of dying.'

Husnára said : 'Oh yes ; Mahmúda begam has taught me many ways of dying. It was my own fancy not to dye their clothes.'

Asghari said : 'Well, tell us some colours.'

Husnára said : 'Mistress, colours for the rainy season : red, orange, pomegranate-blossom, peach-blossom, melon colour, rice-green, maroon ; and for the winter : marigold colour, yellow ochre, crimson, grass green, dusky brown, purple, black, dark blue, rose colour, saffron, slate colour, light brown ; and for the hot weather : light green, steel colour, *campak*-colour, cotton-flower colour, almond colour, camphor white, milk white, poppy-seed colour, *falsa*-colour, sandal wood colour, and bright red. And there are plenty of other colours beside these. I have only mentioned those which are usually worn.'

'Come, now,' inquired Asghari, 'you have enumerated the names of a great variety of colours ; are we to understand that you know how to produce all of them in dying ?'

Husnára said : 'I have only mentioned those that I myself know how to dye.'

'Well,' said Asghari, 'tell us how you dye melon colour.'

Husnára said : 'You must get half a yard of *káht qand*,<sup>1</sup> of good deep colour, and, having boiled it well in water, you put in some alum and mix with it. The alum will make the colour of the *qand* come out, and then you can dye your cloth.'

'And suppose there is no *qand* procurable ?' said Asghari.

Husnára said : 'Then if you boil up the flowers of the *dhák-tree*<sup>2</sup> and mix ground alum with them you will get melon colour, but light, more like cotton-flower colour ; you cannot die melon

<sup>1</sup> A coarse dyed cotton cloth imported from Turkey.

<sup>2</sup> *Butea frondosa*.

colour well without *qand*, and if, instead of *qand*, you get the colour out of woollen stuff, you have such a dye as you may thank Heaven for. But nowadays magenta has come so much into fashion that it beats all the other dyes ; not only for clothes—the *gotas*<sup>1</sup> for the Muharram are coloured with magenta, and very well coloured. My elder sister sent us some *zarda* she had cooked coloured with magenta ; it was better than saffron.'

Asghari Khánam asked with amazement : 'Why, Husnára, surely you never ate that rice, coloured with magenta !'

Husnára said : 'I did not eat any ; but why, mistress, is there any harm in it ?'

Asghari said : 'Why, my dear, there is arsenic in magenta. Mind what you do ! you should not put anything coloured with magenta on your tongue.'

Husnára said : 'In the Muharram I ate lots of *gotas* that had been coloured with it.'

Asghari said : 'What of that ? It only takes the least morsel of it to colour a large number of *gotas*. That is how you came to no harm. But for all that, remember that there is poison in it.'

Husnára said : 'Why, people eat maunds of magenta-coloured sweetmeats.'

Asghari said : 'They do very wrong. Any poison, if it reaches its own climax, is certain to have its effect.'

As the evening drew on the girls, after putting carefully away all their needlework and books, came and sat down together as usual to amuse themselves, and tell stories, and ask each other riddles. Asghari said to Safíhan : 'The stories we have here are not all about cock-sparrows and hen-sparrows. We have a capital story-book containing a great variety of excellent tales, and the author has conveyed some piece of instruction in every one of them. Moreover, the language of the book is extremely refined. The girls will now divert themselves with stories out of that book. They acquire a clear elocution by rehearsing stories, and become more and more practised in the art of expressing themselves correctly ; moreover, when I have leisure, I join with them, and go on putting questions to them in the middle of their stories, and

<sup>1</sup> Small cakes eaten during the Muharram.

they give me such answers as their reason suggests. If their answers are incorrect I explain the matter to them. And guessing riddles tends to increase their reasoning powers, and to sharpen their wits. But do you now sit down with them and look on. I have been summoned to-day by Aliya's mother. Her baby is not well, and she sent me very urgent messages to come to her. If I do not go she will take it ill of me, and besides, I could not bear myself, not to go.'

Safihan said: 'Yes, I too have heard that her little boy has not taken his milk for days, and she, poor thing! is in terrible anxiety. Dear, dear! God grant the poor little creature may survive! He is the child of many prayers. After ten years of longing God showed her this sign of His mercy. There has only been one boy since Aliya was born. Mistress, no doubt she has sent for you to find some cure for him?'

Asghari said: 'Curing is not in my province at all. But it so happened once before that the boy refused his milk; I told her of a few remedies, such as bezoar, bamboo manna, rose pollen, small cardamoms, cummin seed, cassia buds, purslain; it pleased God that the child did recover.'

Safihan said: 'Mistress, you are crammed full of every virtue!'

Asghari said: 'What virtue is there in that? At my mother's home they bestow a deal of thought upon the different medicines. When I was a child I used to clarify and make up whatever drugs came to the house, and paid some attention to it. In that way I have a few hearsay prescriptions by heart, and I have told them to anyone who was in need of them. Women, as a rule, are the people who *have* to prescribe for the ailments of children. But when such a crisis as this befalls them they take them to a hakim.'

Safihan said: 'Mistress, you have been so kind as to show me all the arrangements of your school; for Heaven's sake, put off going, just for a moment, so that I may see how the girls tell their stories, and how you manage to teach them as the stories are going on.'

Asghari said: 'Sister, I am already very late, but still, it is for your sake. Well, whose turn is it to-day of the girls?'

Mahmúda said: 'It is Ummatullah's turn; but why not make Fazilat recite?'

Asghari said: 'Very well, Fazilat, tell us some short story.'

Fazilat began to recite: 'There was a certain king——'

Asghari asked: 'Whom do they call "king"?''

Fazilat said: 'A man—like Bahádur Sháh was in Dehli.'

Asghari: 'Your description is such as anyone might understand, *if only* he was acquainted with Dehli and with Bahádur Sháh.'

Fazilat: 'They call a man "king" if he is a ruler.'

Asghari: 'Then the chief officers of the police are kings?'

Fazilat: 'No, *they* are not kings, they are the king's servants.'

Asghari: 'How? Is not the chief constable of the city a ruler?'

Fazilat: 'He is a ruler, but a king is ruler above all, and issues orders to all.'

Asghari: 'Who is our king?'

Fazilat: 'Since the English arrested Bahádur Sháh, and transported him, there is not any king.'

All the girls burst out laughing when they heard this.

Asghari said: 'Fazilat, you are very dull. You have said yourself that if anyone is the biggest ruler, and gives orders to all, he is king, and you are aware that the English arrested Bahádur Sháh and transported him; then have the English become king or not?'

Fazilat: 'Yes, they have become king. I suppose so.'

Asghari: 'Well, then, tell us who is our king.'

Fazilat: 'The English.'

Asghari: 'What, is "The English" the name of any particular person?'

Fazilat: 'No, there are hundreds and thousands of English.'

Asghari: 'Then are all the English kings?'

Fazilat: 'What else?'

When they heard this the girls laughed again.

Asghari beckoned to Husnára, and said: 'You give the answer.'

Husnára said: 'Mistress, our king is Queen Victoria.'

Asghari : ' A man or a woman ?'

Husnára : ' A woman.'

Asghari : ' Where does she live ?'

Husnára : ' In London.'

Asghari : ' Where is London ?'

Husnára : ' It is a very large city in the country of the English.'

Asghari : ' How far off is it ?'

Husnára : ' I read in a book that it is five thousand kos.'

Asghari : ' And how much is a kos ?'<sup>1</sup>

Husnára : ' Mistress, they call it three kos to the tomb of Nizámuddín.'<sup>2</sup>

Mahmúda laughed now, and said : ' A kos is one thousand seven hundred and sixty yards.'

Asghari asked Mahmúda : ' Do you remember that time when I went to the Qutb sáhib,<sup>3</sup> and you went with me, and saw there were stones sunk into the road at moderate distances, and there was something written on them—what kind of stones were those ?'

Mahmúda : ' I supposed that they were the stones to mark the koses, but the carriage went so fast that I could not steady my eyes to look at them ; I was not well able to read what was written on them.'

Asghari : ' Those were not kos stones ; they were mile-stones. A mile is the half of a kos, and there is a stone fixed at each mile, and there is written on it that from here to Dehli is so many miles, and to the Qutb so many.'

Asghari then turned to Husnára again, and asked : ' Yes, sister, and in which direction is London ?'

Husnára : ' It is in the north.'

Asghari : ' Is that country hot or cold ?'

Husnára : ' I do not know *that*.'

Mahmúda : ' It is very cold. The further north you go the less heat there is, and as you go south the heat becomes greater and greater.'

<sup>1</sup> Pronounce like the first four letters of 'coast.'

<sup>2</sup> A celebrated saint whose tomb is outside Dehli.

<sup>3</sup> The great minaret so called. Pronounce Kootub.

Safíhan : ' I say, mistress, is a *woman a king* ?'

Asghari : ' What is there to be astonished at in that ?'

Safíhan : ' Eh ! not to be astonished at ? What can she do if she is a woman ?'

Asghari : ' She does exactly the same things that men do who are kings. She governs the country ; she protects her subjects.'

Safíhan : ' What is a *woman* to do ? It will be the English who do it all. Probably they have made a woman king for the sake of the name.'

Asghari : ' All these English are the Queen's servants. Each has his own duty, and each has a separate amount of authority. All are bent on doing their special work to the best of their ability. And when it is *men* who are *kings*, even then their ministers and officials transact all the business.'

Safíhan : ' I cannot bring myself to believe that a woman by nature can do king's work.'

Asghari : ' Have you never heard of the Begam of Bhopál ?'

Safíhan : ' Heard of her ! of course I have. My own father-in-law is in service in Bhopál.'

Asghari : ' Well, then, you may look at it in this way. Bhopál is a tiny little country, and Queen Victoria rules over a large Empire. Just as the Begam of Bhopál administers her little territory, so does Queen Victoria direct the affairs of her great Empire. Bhopál is a small state ; the officials are few, and they draw small salaries. Queen Victoria's Government is one of very lofty rank, with huge establishments, and lakhs of officials drawing high pay.'

Safíhan : ' Say, has the Queen any husband ?'

Asghari : ' Yes, but against death there is none whose strength may prevail. God has set a blot even upon the moon. It is some years now since the Queen became a widow.'

Safíhan : ' Has the Queen any children ?'

Asghari : ' Yes, God preserve them ! heirs of all kinds—sons and grandsons, and daughters' daughters.'

Safíhan : ' Say, why does the Queen not come to this country ?'

Asghari : ' She has a large territory there too. She has not leisure from her duties there. But the Queen's son is coming

here shortly.<sup>1</sup> Great preparations are being made. So I saw in the papers.'

Safiha: 'Say, what can the Queen know about this place, living thousands of kos away?'

Asghari: 'She knows every little thing. Why not? Day and night news is travelling to her by post and by the telegraph. Thousands of newspapers go to Europe.'

Safiha: 'How could I manage to see the Queen?'

Asghari: 'How can I tell? But at all events you can see her portrait.'

Safiha: 'Well, if I could only see *that!*'

Asghari: 'Sister, are you saying this to make me laugh? Have you never seen a rupee?'

Safiha: 'Of course I have.'

Asghari: 'The lady's face which appears on that is the Queen's likeness. It is on all the postage stamps. But I possess another very excellent portrait of the Queen. Some Englishman gave it to my father, and he sent it to me. Mahmúda, would you just bring me my box?'

Asghari took the picture out of her box, and showed it, and all the children gazed with the utmost delight upon the portrait of *The Queen*.

Safiha: 'What a lovely picture! There is the Queen standing like life.'

Asghari: 'Yes, indeed. This portrait is an exact likeness of the Queen. Put it by the side of the coin, and look—what a difference! This likeness is not made by hand. There is a sort of looking-glass upon which they put some preparation, and then hold it opposite. All of itself the reflection, just as it is, is taken off upon it.'

Safiha: 'Husnára said that London was five thousand kos off. To go from here to there must take travellers several years.'

Asghari: 'No, they reach it in a month easily across the sea.'

Safiha: 'Dear, dear! do you have to go by sea? What hearts these English people have! Are they not afraid of the

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the Duke of Edinburgh's visit.

sea? Why, it makes all my hair stand on end to hear the name of the sea.'

Asghari: 'What is there to be frightened at? You go comfortably on board a ship, and there is a fine beautiful flying-car ready-made for you.'

Safiha: 'Oh, mistress, the wretched danger there is of drowning! I tell you, it only happened last year—my mother-in-law's sister went to Mecca with the Nawáb Qutbuddin Khán. She departed in such an evil hour that she never had the good luck to return.'

Asghari: 'Yes, it depends on circumstances. Now and again it does happen that a ship founders. And if, God forbid! they foundered every day, no one would think of travelling by sea. But now the sea routes are more frequented even than the land routes. Thousands and lakhs of ships are constantly going and coming. The English, and their wives, and their children, and all the English goods—everything comes here by sea.'

Safiha: 'What talk is there of English women? They are altogether a different kind of women. How are *we* to take after them? They gad about outside the house. I hear they send their little tiny children to Europe, and their hearts are not distressed. Goodness knows what kind of mothers they are; whence they derive comfort for their souls. But there you are—they go about out of doors, and they have hearts of iron; what is the sea to *them*? It would be nothing difficult for them to fly in the air.'

Asghari: 'When you talk of their gadding abroad you must remember that in their country the custom of the purdah does not exist. In the Mutiny time our family took refuge in a village<sup>1</sup> where there was no custom of the purdah; all the young married girls went about outside the house. But—I lived there four whole months, and I observed such a modesty and propriety of demeanour among those women—going about as they did, as I would that God might grant to us women of the purdah. And why should you infer from their sending their children to Europe that they have no love for them? True, the love which these women have is tempered with reason. It is not a mad fondness

<sup>1</sup> Probably a Ját village.



like that of mothers here, who prevent their children from reading, and deny them the chance of acquiring any accomplishments. You may call that love, but in reality they are sowing thorns for their children to reap. They allow their children to grow up ill-disciplined, and bring discredit upon the very name of love.'

When the discussion had reached this point there was silence on all sides, and Fazilat again commenced repeating her story. 'The king had no son; his only child was a daughter. Giving heed to the fact that after him his daughter would be sole heir to the kingdom, he had her well instructed in reading and writing; he took pains to teach her the laws and regulations under which the country was governed, and he entrusted to *her* the business of the State in his own lifetime—'

Fazilat had only got so far when Asghari said: 'Sister, you are rattling on with your story at a great rate, and I have a whole heap of questions to ask you in my mind; but—I am helpless. The daylight is drawing to a close, and it is absolutely necessary for me to go to Aliya's house. It is against the rule to visit a sick person at anyone's house after daylight. I cannot stay a minute longer, but you girls may go on with your stories by yourselves.' And then she said to Safihan: 'God bless you, sister, I am going. You may sit here as long as you like now, or come here again tomorrow. The same thing goes on here every day.'

Accordingly Asghari Khánam set off on her visit to Aliya's house. Safihan was so enraptured that she stayed on sitting with the girls until a watch of the night had gone. After Asghari Khánam's departure Mahmúda and Husnára raised many an interesting discussion as the story proceeded.

From this narrative you may gain a very fair notion of the discipline which prevailed in Asghari's school, and of her methods of instruction. It goes without saying that Asghari was very fond of Husnára, though still more so of her own sister-in-law Mahmúda. So admirably was Husnára taught by her that in two years' time she commenced the study of Persian, and conducted all her correspondence herself in the vernacular. Nothing was left now of her old peevishness and pugnacity. She had become a very gentle, studious, accomplished, and lovable daughter:

And through Asghari's good offices it pleased God to restore the home of Jamálára, which had been lost to her so many years. All of that story will be written in another book, but the gist of it here is that the Hakímji's whole family, old and young alike, were ready to kiss the dust off Asghari's feet. Sultána begam devised a thousand plans for remunerating her, but this handmaid of God refused to take any gratuity. When Husnára's marriage was about to take place the elder Hakím sáhib brought Maulavi Muhammad Fázil's pressure to bear on her, and gave her a pair of jewelled bracelets valued at a thousand rupees. In doing this he said: 'Listen to me, my dear: you are the same to me as one of my granddaughters; I do not make you this present as a governess, but because I regard you as a child of my own.' On his side the Maulavi sáhib reassured her, and at last Asghari accepted the bracelets.

## CHAPTER XXIII

I now enter upon a new phase of my story. We have seen Asghari busily occupied with her school. But Muhammad Kámil all this time was getting bored merely for want of employment. One day he broached the subject to Asghari, and said: 'I am weary to death of this kind of life; if you approve I would like to go to the hills, to the Tahsildár sáhib, and look out for some Government appointment under his auspices.'

Asghari took a little time to reflect, and then said: 'Certainly, it is most important that you should get some appointment, for you see yourself what narrow means we have to keep the house with. My dear father-in-law is now an old man, and it would only be right for him to stay at home, and for you to be earning some money, and doing your duty by him. Besides that, Mahmúda is growing to be a big girl. I am looking forward to her betrothal, and it is my wish that she should marry into a family of very high rank. Indeed, I have a scheme for her in my head. Please God, her betrothal shall be arranged before another year is over. But for that we shall require a host of preparations, and up to now there is not a thing ready of any kind. Your dear

brother—to begin with, he has left the family roof; but anyhow, his salary is so small that he can barely make both ends meet—what can he give to others? There is no help for it that I can see, except that you should take service. Still, I do not like the idea of your going to the hills. Of course my father will do his utmost for you, and it is not unlikely that some good post would be found for you pretty quickly, but to hold an appointment by clinging to the support of someone else is not the correct thing. A man's earnings, no matter how small, should be those of his own right arm. Although my father is not a stranger, and in the chain of relationship his hand is loftier than you, so that there is no harm—I don't say in *accepting*—there is none in asking—his assistance; still, may God preserve you from being under an obligation to *any* one! That makes the eyes downcast for ever. Suppose that *he* has never said a word about it, there are a hundred others in the family (God keep it!) who won't say anything to your face perhaps, but will certainly talk behind your back—"Ah, there goes the man who got his appointment through his father-in-law!"

Muhammad Kámil said: 'What shall I do, then? Shall I go to Lahore?'

Said Asghari: 'What is there at Lahore? The Chief's own fortune is ruined. It is a marvel how he can give your father, with all his regard for his past services, as much even as fifty rupees a month. There is no room at his court for a new-comer.'

'Well,' said Muhammad Kámil, 'there are plenty of other courts.'

'Since the English rule was established,' said Asghari, 'all the native chiefs are much in the same state of decay. Although they all keep up something of their former grandeur, and a few representatives of the old days are to be found still clinging on to them, yet, after all, what is it but dust? Their salaries are in arrear for years.'

'Well,' said Muhammad Kámil, 'something must be done. What is it?'

'Look out for some appointment under the English Government,' was Asghari's reply.

Muhammad Kámil said: 'Those appointments are not to be

had without interest and favour. Why, there are thousands of men, far better than I, who are wandering about in despair, and no one asks after them.'

'Yes,' said Asghari, 'that is true enough. But when a man once determines upon any course of action he must leave the issue to God, and not admit a thought of despondency into his mind. Granted there are thousands of men wandering about vainly in search of employment, still, the men who do hold government appointments are men just like yourself, and one thing, which is equal to a hundred, is this, that men get them by decree of Providence. Very able men are longing for work, and are left in the lurch, and yet, if it be God's will to give—it is no question of interest or ability—He breaks through the roof and gives. People send for them to their homes, and confer appointments upon them.'

'Then,' said Muhammad Kámil, 'the upshot of it is that I should stay at home and do nothing?'

'No, indeed,' said Asghari, 'that is not my meaning at all. A man must use his own endeavours, necessarily, as far as he can do anything of himself.'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'But that is just the difficulty. What sort of efforts am I to make?'

Asghari said: 'Get acquainted with the officials here. Make friends with as many of them as you can. By their means you will be kept informed of any appointment that is going, and with their help you may obtain access to one of the Hákim.'<sup>1</sup>

Muhammad Kámil acted on this advice, and began to cultivate the acquaintance of the different officials. Gradually he was to be found calling upon such personages as the Tahsildár and Sar-rishtadár. From his paying court to them it became known to everyone that he too was a candidate for Government employ; and at length Banda Ali Beg, who was a deposition writer in the Kachahri,<sup>2</sup> one day said to him: 'Young gentleman, if you are

<sup>1</sup> Hákim, 'a man in power,' was the term usually applied to *European* officials at the date of the story.

<sup>2</sup> Otherwise written 'Cutcherry.' The word means an office of any kind, but is especially used of the Courts of Law.

seeking Government employment, come to Kachahri every day with me. Be an apprentice for a time, and acquire some practical knowledge of the work; let the Hákims get to know your face. In that way something or other will turn up one of these days.'

Muhammad Kámil began to attend Kachahri, and to assist Banda Ali Beg with his work. In time he came to submit the papers requiring signature to the European officers, who began to know him by sight. During this time he was allowed to act more than once as a substitute for one or other of the lower grade officials. If any of these were obliged to take leave he would name Muhammad Kámil as his substitute, and give him one-half or one-third of his pay. Till one day it so happened that a diary writer on ten rupees a month went away on three months' leave, and at the end of the three months sent in his resignation. Maulavi Muhammad Kámil was appointed permanently to the post.

In his conversations with Asghari, whenever the subject of his appointment cropped up, Muhammad Kámil always spoke of it with contempt. 'What a trumpery service!' he would say, 'grinding all day long, and ten rupees a month! No takings on the sly; no hope of future promotion. I shall give it up.'

These and such-like vagaries Asghari would invariably reprove. 'You show a terrible amount of ingratitude,' she would say; 'have you forgotten those days when it was not your good fortune to be even an apprentice? Or, now that you have made so good a start, do you begin to misprize it? Is ten rupees a month so little? and you living comfortably at home! Look at your elder brother, who held on for years in a merchant's office on ten rupees a month. And if you are so discontented with your post, what kind of work, save the mark, will they get out of you? The end of it will be that the place will give *you* up. Besides, it is from small beginnings in this way that big pay comes. My father was a copyist at first on eight rupees a month. Now, by God's grace, he is a Tahsildár, and if it please God he will get higher promotion still. As for takings on the sly, don't hanker after such a source of income even in your dreams. Ill-gotten gains bring no prosperity. A man *can* have nothing beyond what has been allotted to him by God. Why, then, should he suffer his own integrity of

purpose to be capsized? If there is more to come to him than what he is getting now, God can provide it for him of that which is lawful.'

In short, it was Asghari's task to keep Muhammad Kámil up to the mark, and this went on until one day the English officer under whom Muhammad Kámil worked was transferred to Siyálkot. This gentleman had shown Muhammad Kámil much kindness. On the evening of the day when the news was first made known at Kachahri, Muhammad Kámil came home in a lamentable state of depression.

Asghari asked him: 'Is all well? why are you so sad to-day?'

Muhammad Kámil answered: 'What am I to say? James sáhib has been transferred to Siyálkot. He was the one man who treated me kindly. Now I shall have no more pleasure in attending Kachahri.'

For some time Asghari kept silence. By-and-by she said: 'No doubt James sáhib's transfer is a thing to be grieved at, but not to such an extent as you are carrying your grief. Someone else will come in his place, and whoever it is God will put mercy into his heart also. It is not for man to place his confidence in man.'

Presently Asghari asked: 'When will James sáhib leave?'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'He is to start by dawk garry to-morrow evening.'

Asghari said: 'You have not been to his bungalow, have you?'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'What is the use of going there now?'

'Well,' said Asghari, 'you *are* a queer man! This is just the very time to go. If nothing else comes of it he will give you some letter or certificate before he goes.'

'All right,' said Muhammad Kámil, 'I will go to-morrow morning.'

## CHAPTER XXIV

MUHAMMAD KÁMIL dressed himself betimes in the morning, and took his way to Mr. James's bungalow. Mr. James said to him: 'Muhammad Kámil, I am going to Siyálkot now. I liked you very much. If you care to go, come to Siyálkot with me. I will give you a place there; or, if not, I will give you fifteen rupees a month out of my own pocket.'

Muhammad Kámil thought for a while, and said: 'I will present myself again to your highness, and bring my answer.' But first I must ask my mother.'

Accordingly, when Muhammad Kámil came home again, he reported: 'James sáhib wants to take me with him.' His mother, when she heard these words, raised an outcry, and Asghari too was aghast. After a time Muhammad Kámil asked them: 'Well, ladies, what answer shall I take back to him?'

His mother said: 'What, *now*? why should you take any answer at all? Will he be waiting there for you? or has he sent any constable after you?'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'No, madam, but I gave him a promise. He will say to himself: "What selfish people these Hindustanis are! he told me a lie when I was going away."'

His mother said: 'Well, go and tell the sáhib that your going away with him is impossible.'

Muhammad Kámil asked Asghari: 'And you, lady, what is your advice?'

Asghari said: 'Advice is one thing, and the heart's desire is another. My heart's desire is that you should stay here. You are the only person left to look after the family, and, whatever people may say, there should be some man in a house. But if you ask my *advice*, it is right for you to go. When a Hákim unasked himself invites you to go with him, it is certain that he will treat you handsomely when he reaches his destination.'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'What! a journey of two or three hundred kos for the sake of five rupees extra! I have no par-

ticular desire to go. It is the old proverb: "Half at home, not all abroad."'

Asghari said: 'Of course, the decision rests with you. But a chance of this kind has been sent you by Providence; it won't come again. And who is there who does not go away from home? My father—your father—why, they have spent most of their lives in foreign places. And five rupees is what we hear now; later on you will see how many the five are. Anyhow, if you don't go, you must not let people see you any more in low spirits at getting ten rupees.'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'I had better send in my resignation here, then, at once. But suppose after all nothing has turned up there. I shall have been a loser in both places.'

'In the first place,' said Asghari, 'it is against all common sense to suppose that nothing will turn up there. A great Hákim like James sáhib—and he wants to give you employment, and yet cannot see his way to it. That is beyond my comprehension. And why send in your resignation? Take leave for a month or two.'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'Yes, of course, leave is sanctioned at a moment's notice.'

Asghari said: 'What difficulty will there be about its being sanctioned? You have only to speak to James sáhib; he will write a letter.'

In short, Asghari put the yoke on Muhammad Kámil by force, and made him inclined to go. She gave him out of her own money fifty rupees in cash, and got half a dozen new suits of clothes made up for him. And she engaged Diyánat's son Rafiq to accompany him. Maulavi Muhammad Kámil went off in state to Siyálkot.

On her part Asghari wrote an account of all this in a letter to Maulavi Muhammad Fázil, and she added the following words: 'On his way to Siyálkot, James sáhib is sure to pass through Lahore. If it can be managed that your honor should meet him there, and get the Chief too to say a word of recommendation, it will be of great advantage.'

The Maulavi sáhib looked out for Mr. James, and since the

Chief possessed some villages in the Siyálkot district, he sent an official letter of welcome, and arranged that Mr. James should break his journey for one night at the Chief's villa residence. After dinner, when the Chief and Mr. James were sitting together engaged in conversation, the Maulavi sáhib addressed Mr. James, and said: 'The people of Dehli are in great sorrow at being deprived of your honor's presence. Although your honor remained there as Hákim for two years only, your justice and your consideration for the feelings of the better classes had given great satisfaction to all the residents. A son of your humble servant was in attendance there upon your honor. His letters kept us informed of every circumstance.'

'What!' asked the sáhib, 'was one of your honor's sons in my Kachahri?'

The Maulavi sáhib replied: 'Muhammad Kámil.'

'Why, he is coming with me,' said the sáhib. 'Is he your son?'

'Your honor's slave,' said the Maulavi.

Here the Chief took up the cue, and said to Mr. James: 'The Maulavi sáhib is a very old servant of my state, and his advancement is in every way an object of my sincere desire, but, as your honor is aware, I have no resources left. Hence, if your honor should be pleased to befriend his son, you will be laying myself under an obligation.'

Mr. James was already well disposed towards Muhammad Kámil. The Chief's intervention was so well timed that it sank deep into his mind. Muhammad Kámil had now acquired all these claims upon his notice: first, he was young; secondly, of good birth; thirdly, recommended by the Chief; fourthly, attached to the sáhib's own person; and, fifthly, a man of ability. On the very first day that Mr. James took his seat in Kachahri he appointed Muhammad Kámil to be Ná-ib Sarrishtadár<sup>1</sup> on fifty rupees a month, and he wrote in a letter to Maulavi Muhammad Fázil sáhib: 'At present I have given your son an appointment of fifty rupees a month, but before long I hope

<sup>1</sup> Ná-ib means 'deputy.' A Sarrishtadár is the head of the whole vernacular department in an office.

to promote him; your honor will kindly inform the Chief of this.'

The Maulavi sáhib duly sent a letter of thanks couched in suitable terms; and Muhammad Kámil—the man who not so long ago had been begging for an apprenticeship; who had been glad to work as a substitute for petty officials; who became a diary writer on ten rupees, and was induced only by Asghari's persuasions to accompany Mr. James to Siyálkot on a promise of fifteen—that same Muhammad Kámil was now installed at a minute's notice into a post of fifty rupees a month. Even his mother, though she had been so disheartened at the outset, was radiant with delight when she heard of the fifty rupees. The prosperity in the house was fourfold. Asghari's management, and sixty rupees coming in instead of the former twenty—what more could they ask for? As it happened, however, within that very year Muhammad Kámil became Sarrishtadár.<sup>1</sup> Alas! up to the date of his getting *that* appointment he kept his head; his remittances to the family arrived regularly; his letters followed quickly one after another. But—after all, he was a young man, and he was living under no restraint but his own; evil company beset him, and he went astray. There began to be a falling off in his letters. Asghari, who had plenty of common-sense, perceived that there was something wrong somewhere. For many days she considered anxiously what plan she could devise; at last she came to the conclusion that there was no other course for her to take but to go to him herself.

## CHAPTER XXV

ALTHOUGH Asghari had fully made up her mind that she would go to Siyálkot, she sent for Tamásha Khánam to take counsel with her, and told her all the circumstances. Tamásha Khánam said: 'Sister, has one of us gone mad? The idea of your leaving the city to go wandering about to Siyálkot!'

Asghari said: 'What have I to do with the city? My city is where *he* is with whom my life is bound up.'

<sup>1</sup> When his pay would be doubled.

'Dear, dear!' said Tamásha Khánam, 'and what will all the relations say? No one out of our family has ever gone away from home to this day.'

Asghari said: 'There is nothing for them to be shocked at. And, after all, what will they say? Why, "If she has gone to her husband, what harm has she done?" that's all. And if you talk about the family custom—well, in former days there was no dawk, nor railway, nor were the roads frequented with passengers; it was a very difficult matter for women to travel—that is why they did not move about. But now, what difficulty is there? I take my place in the dawk to-day, and, if God speed me, the day after to-morrow I am at Siyálkot. It is as though I went to Meerut.'

Tamásha Khánam asked: 'Has any letter come requesting you to go?'

'No,' said Asghari, 'no letter has come.'

Tamásha Khánam said: 'It is not proper for you to go without being asked.'

Asghari said: 'You look to what is proper and improper, and I tell you that if I do not go my *home* will be wrecked for my whole lifetime.'

Tamásha Khánam said: 'My dear sister, why do you abase yourself like this? What does *he* matter to *you*? God keep your school safe, you can provide food for ten mouths.'

Asghari said: 'My goodness, do you look at it in that light? Why, I founded the school merely for my own amusement; it was never my object to make money out of it. God knows, whether you will credit it or not—I have not spent a single pice of the school money upon myself to this day. Fifty rupees in cash, and twenty for clothes, I certainly did give to your cousin, when he was going to Siyálkot—no more, and *that* is entered as a loan; and for the rest, I have an account of every cowrie written down. Why, look you, are women's earnings any earnings at all? If families are to be reared upon women's earnings, why should there be men? Let my own hearth rest happy, and I would not trouble over ten such schools being ruined.'

Tamásha Khánam said: 'But how are you to travel now in

the middle of the rains? Wait for the cold weather, and then think about it when there is a clear sky.'

'Ah me!' said Asghari, 'it is the waiting that I dread. What can be done *now* by a little expostulation will never be accomplished hereafter by endless controversies.'

Tamásha Khánam said: 'Dear, dear! does not your heart ache, sister, at the thought of leaving your family?'

'Of course it aches,' said Asghari. 'Am not I a woman? But which is better—to fret for a while at present, or to be in purgatory for a whole lifetime?'

Tamásha Khánam said: 'Have you got permission from your mother-in-law?'

Asghari said: 'You think she is likely to give it? But my mother-in-law, poor dear! is a simple-minded soul. When I make her understand, I am certain she will not detain me.'

As a matter of course Asghari did explain to her mother-in-law what her intention was, and what causes had led up to it. The thing was quite reasonable; who could find anything to say against it? The date of Asghari's departure was fixed. She went one day and explained things briefly to her own mother, and took leave of her. As for the school, she instructed the girls that she was going away only for a couple of months, that Mahmúda was quite competent to go on teaching them, and that they might all continue to attend as usual.

In the course of paying her farewell visits she went to her sister's house. Muhammad Aqil asked her: 'Well, brother Tamízdár bahu, so you are going away; what are you going to do with the school when you go?'

Asghari replied: 'I bequeath the school and the house, both of them, to your honor's care.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'That is a fine thing to say. I have no connection with the house, nor any interest in the school. What can I do for either of them?'

Asghari said: 'It is in your honor's discretion to keep up the connection or not to keep it.'

'Such a speech as that,' said Muhammad Aqil, 'is not becoming to your lips, Tamízdár bahu. You know well enough what choice

I have in the matter. The home—I was made to abandon by your elder sister; and as for the school, it is a girls' school; if it were a school for boys I would willingly undertake to teach all of them.'

Asghari said: 'Why should not my elder sister, and your honor too, come home with me now, and live there? The dear mother is all alone.'

Muhammad Aqil said: 'You must talk over your *sister*.'

Asghari said: 'What need is there? My elder sister herself understands, and is reasonable. You are not comfortable here all by yourselves. There is no one to undertake the children or to look after the house. Sorrow and joy go hand in hand with everyone. It is not the right thing to keep aloof from your friends if it can be avoided. And those old stories are things of the past. Why should there be any discord in the family, and what is the sense of keeping up an old quarrel?'

Akbari had tasted quite enough of the pleasures of separate housekeeping by this time, and was only seeking some excuse for anyone to ask them back again to live with the family. She lost no time in expressing her assent, and Asghari took both of them back with her to the house. Muhammad Kámil's mother, who had been overwhelmed with grief at the thought of Asghari's leaving her, was comforted by the reflection that she still had another daughter-in-law to take her place. Mahmúda, indeed, was under great apprehension of what might happen, but Asghari cheered her up, and assured her that Akbari's temper was no longer what it used to be. At the same time she warned her elder sister that Mahmúda was now grown up, and that she must take care not to make any rude speeches to her. As for the school, she contented herself with explaining to Muhammad Aqil that Mahmúda would carry on all the instruction and such matters if he would only keep an eye on the external arrangements, and see that Mahmúda entered the accounts of the school fund regularly in the book.

The day came for Asghari to depart. She got into her dawk garry, and arrived at Siyálkot without any delay on the road. Muhammad Kámil was intensely astonished at her sudden arrival

He said to her: 'Is all well? You have not quarrelled with my mother, have you?'

Asghari said: 'For shame! What! is your dear mother upon an equality with me that I should presume to quarrel with her? Or during these four years have you ever seen me quarrel either with her or anyone else?'

Now Muhammad Kámil had quite let himself adrift at Siyálkot, and had fallen into the worst kind of society. A crowd of toadies had assembled round him in whose hands he was a perfect fool. Bribery was rife. He had no scruples left even against nautches and dissolute plays. His surroundings were luxurious, and his ordinary expenditure amounted to four times his pay. If this state of things had lasted a very little longer it must needs have excited Mr. James's suspicion, and in the end Muhammad Kámil's appointment would have been lost to him. Asghari arrived in the very nick of time. She at once set to work to stop up all the leaks, and she took him to task severely, saying: 'God has given you an appointment of a hundred rupees a month. Is this your way of thanksgiving that you cannot be contented even with that?'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'If a man gives me anything of his own free will what is the harm?'

Said Asghari: 'I extol the perfection of God!<sup>1</sup> Is *money* a thing that anyone will give away of his own free will without a reason? Why, men have such a craving for money nowadays that they take no care even for their own honour, but they will not lose hold of a rupee. A man may form a guess of that from his own practice when he considers how much he is by way of giving to anyone. It is only the compulsory religious almsgiving<sup>2</sup> which is still observed. Out of every hundred—once a year—the fortieth part—two and a half rupees—and giving that takes the breath away. Where have the people got any such Korah's<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, 'in that He has created a man capable of making so silly a use of the reason with which He endowed him.'

<sup>2</sup> Called 'zakát,' the fortieth part of the year's profits, which every Musalman is bound to give in charity at the very least.

<sup>3</sup> Qárún, the Korah of the Bible (Num. xvi.), is supposed to have been a miser, with vast hoarded wealth.

treasure-chest brimming over with money that they should come and give it you without any object? It is when they see their affairs are going wrong—if they don't give something their case will be spoilt—then, in despair, they go and borrow money, or sell their wives' jewels, and give bribes.'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'I don't take the money myself. There is nothing to be afraid of.'

Said Asghari: 'In the first place, bribery never can be hushed up. But, apart from that, and if we take it for granted that it has escaped the notice of men, God, who sees all that is hidden, *He* has known of it. That His servants should heap up sins, and aggravate the indictment they must answer at the last day, argues a great fearlessness.'

By exhortations of this kind whenever she had a chance Asghari got Muhammad Kámil to repent of his evil ways. After she had been there some little time, she one day asked her husband: 'Who are those four men for whom meals are sent out of the house every day?'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'They are applicants for service. Poor fellows! they are strangers here. I told them they might live at my expense until they could get some appointment.'

'And has not any appointment been found for them yet?' asked Asghari.

Muhammad Kámil said: 'There are appointments, but not up to their social rank.'

Said Asghari: 'When their condition has come to this, that they are feeding themselves at another man's expense, what question is there left of their social standing? Let them do any work they can get, small or great.'

Muhammad Kámil said: 'God knows what you are saying! How can they do anything derogatory to their dignity?'

'What?' said Asghari; 'is there a loss of dignity in their taking a low-grade appointment, and no loss of dignity in sponging upon another person's earnings? If these people have not even that amount of self-respect, you may be sure that their other habits are perverted. It is not good to have them about you. Depend upon it, they, too, are taking whatever they can get in

*your* name. Tell them they must either accept some appointment, or be off.'

Muhammad Kámil replied: 'It would be a slur on my generosity if I were to send them away.'

Asghari said: 'When there is no generosity in them, why should *you* make a point of being generous? If we have more money than we want, there are plenty of poor people in the family who have a prior claim. What is the use of giving to strangers? and, above all, to such strangers as these? There is no necessity for you to dismiss them with harshness. You can make them understand in some way or other.'

Now, the real fact of the matter was that these very people were Muhammad Kámil's evil geniuses. By judicious management Asghari succeeded in having them turned out. Those of the servants who were ill-conducted were got rid of one by one. Asghari stayed there for a year and a half, and put everything inside and outside the house into proper order. By that time, Miyán Muslim's marriage was about to take place. A letter was sent to summon Asghari to the ceremony, and Tamásha Khánam wrote to her an urgent appeal. Since a great many days had passed, Asghari made up her mind to return to Dehli. But she thought to herself that it would never do to leave Muhammad Kámil solitary. She said to Muhammad Kámil: 'It is not the right thing for you to be alone at this distance from home. There certainly ought to be some member of the family with you; and, in my opinion, you might well send for your cousin on the mother's side, Muhammad Sálíh. He will learn office work with you here while he is continuing his studies, and possibly some place may be found for him.'

A letter was despatched to Amír begam, and while Asghari was still at Siyálkot Muhammad Sálíh arrived. This lad was worthy and amiable in the highest degree, and only two years junior to Muhammad Kámil. Asghari's mind was now set at rest, and having bid adieu to Siyálkot, she arrived at Lahore. Here she broke her journey for a whole week at the house of Maulavi Muhammad Fázil sáhib.

The Maulavi was now nearly sixty years old, and the business



of his agency involved great labour. What with attending the different courts of justice, and looking after the Chief's cases, every day without fail, and then visits morning and evening to the various officials—when the poor Maulavi sáhib came home at night he was quite worn out with fatigue. Asghari said to him: 'Father dear, your honor's age is not equal to all this toil now. The time has come for your honor to think about retiring into private life. I read in a book once that a man should divide his life into three portions—the first portion for his childhood, the second for the administration of his worldly affairs, and the third for rest and remembrance of God. Your honor surely might well come home now and live comfortably.'

The Maulavi sáhib said: 'In the first place, the Chief would never let me go. And in the second place, there must be someone, at any rate, who could do the work in my place.'

'If your honor pleads that your strength is failing,' said Asghari, 'very likely the Chief will give in. And is not my dear brother fully competent to do the work?'

The Maulavi said: 'What does he know about the ways of the courts, and of the Darbár?'

Asghari said: 'Send for him to come here for a time, and let him be with you; he will pick up all that when he sees how it is done. Why, he is a learned Arabic scholar. There are Hindus who begin doing Kachahri work after reading two or three books in Persian.'

Asghari's notion approved itself to the Maulavi sáhib, and shortly after she arrived in Dehli he summoned Muhammad Aqil to join him. After some little time Muhammad Aqil took the whole of his father's work upon his own shoulders, and greatly pleased the Chief by his diligence. Then the Maulavi sáhib said to the Chief: 'Now, if this boy may remain here in the service of your highness, it might please your highness to set *me* at liberty.'

"Not rarely the arbiters of homage  
Set free the retainer in his old age."<sup>1</sup>

The Chief was at heart a most liberal man. He allotted the Maulavi sáhib a pension of twenty rupees a month for his lifetime, and he appointed Muhammad Aqil as his successor on full pay.

<sup>1</sup> A quotation from the Gulistán of Saadi.

## CHAPTER XXVI

As soon as Asghari got back to Dehli, she resumed her plans for Mahmúda: Husnára was now at her old home on a visit from Jhajjar, and Jamálára had come from her father-in-law's house at the same time in order to meet her younger sister. You will remember that the whole of the Hakim's family were devoted to Asghari. As soon as they heard of her arrival, both sisters were in a hurry to call on her. All kinds of greetings went on. Jamálára said: 'Mistress, I cannot tell you how my heart was set upon meeting you. To be sure, Husnára is your pupil, but I owe you more than any of your pupils. It was you who restored my desolated home to me.'

Asghari said: 'What merit have I?'

'Come, now, mistress,' said Jamálára. 'At all events, I shall never forget your kindness as long as I live. But what can I do? You do not accept any service that we people can render you. Were it not for that, if we gave you our skins to make your shoes of, even then maybe what is due to you would not be paid.'

'In the first place,' said Asghari, 'it was not so very much that I was able to do; but if by virtue of your princely nature your honor has regarded any act of mine with approval, well, Begam sáhib, God has placed your honor in a position of unlimited power. To make poor people like us happy will be no great task to you.'

Husnára said: 'Eh, mistress! what words are these from your lips?'

'Listen to me, sister Husnára,' said Asghari. 'The relations of mistress and pupil between us are all over now. They lasted only while you were at school. Now (God keep you!) you are a married woman. And here are you, noble from your very birth, and at present the crowning jewel of a noble family; and there is she, the daughter and daughter-in-law of princes. At this moment there is not one other family of higher standing than you in the city. If anyone should reach *your* gate, and be denied, surely it is his *fate* that would be at fault.'