

but when I married—you'll excuse my saying so—I became your pupil. Religion was tabooed in your mother's family, and by degrees I forgot my early training. When a bride leaves her home her mother entrusts her to the bridegroom's family, with the words, 'I give you this maid to wait on you'; but besides this my mother said to yours, 'Take care of her. She has been piously brought up: pray you see that she does not neglect her religious duties.' So far from this, I was left to please myself, and follow the fashions of my new zenana; and though I was ashamed of myself at first, I soon became as irreligious as the rest. Afterwards, beyond a few odd prayers when any of the children were ill, and so forth, I abandoned the worship of God entirely. Please God, things shall be different now."

And then, glancing at her husband, who seemed loath to continue the conversation, Fahmeedah went below to send a *dooli** for her niece.

* A *dooli* is a covered litter, in which ladies are carried through the streets.

CHAPTER VI.

NUSSOOH'S INTERVIEW WITH ULLEEM, HIS SECOND SON.

THAT same afternoon, when he had returned from prayers, Nussooh asked for his second son, Ulleem. He had just come back from college, and when he had changed his dress he waited on his father.

"Well, my boy," said Nussooh, "I hear you are working hard for your examination."

"Yes, Sir; the half-yearly examination is coming on, and I have several books to revise; but I am sorry to say I can't work at home, for the people who come to see my elder brother make too much noise. I generally study at a friend's house."

Nussooh betrayed his annoyance, but let the matter pass; and presently said in a serious tone:

"And are you preparing for the great examination?"

"There is plenty of time for that," replied Ulleem; "I have to get over this one first."

"Is the time fixed, then?"

"Oh yes, it is always just before the Christmas vacation."

"Ulleem, you don't understand my question; I am thinking of the Great Day of Account. Is not that a great examination?"

"Indeed, Sir, it is. It is the hardest examination of all."

"And have you prepared for that, my son?"

"No, Sir, I have not thought of it."

"And why?" continued his questioner.

"I know no reason, except that one is apt to take such things easily." And then the boy added with some hesitation: "Perhaps, too, the absence of religion in my own family has been a cause of my neglect."

"That is true," replied his father; "and the fault is mine. I have purposely asked you these questions, that I may take the earliest opportunity of acknowledging my folly and forgetfulness as a father."

"Oh! father, the fault is my own. God gave me reason enough to understand that this life would not last for ever, and that it ought not to be passed in eating and drinking, like the lives of animals, without a thought of religious duties."

In some astonishment at his son's reply Nussooh remarked:

"I see that you are no stranger to the subject of religion, and yet I never took the pains to teach you. Surely they teach you nothing about religion at the college?"

"No, father. I read the Koran through like a parrot, when I was first at school; but the Persian books we read, so far from being religious, were immoral. About the time when I was reading the *Bahār-i-dānīsh* a Missionary used to preach in the bazar in Chandni Chauk,* and often gave away books to the bystanders. Indeed some of my school-fellows took them, and generally tore them up for kites or covers for their lesson books. I thought I would get one too; and one day I joined the crowd which was listening to the Missionary with this intention in my mind. The people were disputing with him and got very angry and impatient, whereas he had not a wrinkle on his forehead. Presently some boy called out an opprobrious epithet, and this turned the tide in the Missionary's favour, for when the bystanders wanted to chastise the boy he said, 'My friends, don't hurt him; the word he used may mean a "pearl," and perhaps that is what he meant!' I, as well as the rest, was charmed with the Missionary's ready forbearance; and his opponents soon afterwards went away with the remark that, whatever his religion was, he

* The name of the chief street in Dehli.

was a good man. When the crowd thinned at the conclusion of his discourse, he observed me lingering, and, divining my wish, asked if I wanted anything. I told him I should like to have a book, and, after I had chosen a nicely bound one from his box, he said I might have it if I could read it, adding that he would like to hear me read the book I was studying at school. The day's lesson was so full of nonsense and indecency that I hardly dared read it aloud before the crowd, but I managed to stammer through a few lines. He stopped me and said, very kindly and seriously, 'I am sorry I asked you to read that trash. If you will take my advice you will throw the book away. It is not only immoral, but contrary to the teaching of your creed as a Musalman.' And, curious to say, the bystanders agreed with him.

"When I got home I read the book which the Missionary gave me. It was the life of a holy man, written in easy Urdu; and I liked it very much. I learned for the first time something of my responsibilities as a human being, and the duty of sympathy with my fellows especially attracted my attention. Anyhow, I said good-bye to the *Bahār-i-dānīsh* from that day forward; and though my school-fellows and the Munshi himself came for me, I refused to go to school any more. At that time you were in the Deccan. As ill-luck would have it, I was out one day, and my elder brother spied the book. He wanted some paper to

make squibs for the *Shab-Barāt*,* and, when he saw what the book was, tore it up for the purpose. When I complained, he and his friends told me I had no business with such books, and asked if I meant to turn Christian. But it struck me, if Christians followed the teaching of that book, they could not be so bad as they were painted. However, some time after this I entered the Government College, and was engaged in other matters."

Nussooh, who had listened with great attention to this story, remarked :

"There is no doubt some opposition between the doctrines of Islam and Christianity, but then no two religions have so much in common. The Koran speaks well of Christianity and its professors, and their Gospel is held to be the word of God. The Musalman may lawfully eat and intermarry with the Christian, and the alienation which now characterises their relations is not sanctioned by the canon law. The best of our religious books could hardly have benefited you more than the Missionary's volume. But you said just now you had learned sympathy for others from its maxims. Tell me, have you ever put this teaching into practice?"

* The "Night of Record" is the 15th of Shabān (8th month), on which the actions of mankind for the coming year are supposed to be registered. Mahomed enjoined his followers to keep awake, and the observance of this order is aided by the noise of fireworks.

"So far, Sir," modestly replied Ulleem, "that I never refuse assistance to my companions when they require it, even at the sacrifice of my own convenience. The last prize I got at College was in cash, and I spent it in relieving the poor people in our neighbourhood. Indeed, on one occasion my liberality got me into trouble."

"How was that?" asked his father.

"Last Eed mother made me a beautiful cap to wear. One day I was going to see my aunt, when I was attracted by a crowd in — Street. The Government peons were arresting a man for debt at the suit of a Bunniya. The man was a Pathan, poor but proud, and asked for time. The Bunniya was inexorable, and said with a taunt he would soon take down the Khan Sahib's honour. The latter rushed into his house in a fury for his sword, and would have slain the Bunniya on the spot, if his wife and children had not clung to his legs, and begged him to kill them first, as they could not live without him. The Khan was moved, and instead of falling on his creditor, began to consult with his wife how they could raise money to pay the debt. Alas! there was nothing in the house but an old griddle, a hand-mill, and a few worn-out cooking pots, and a pair of thin silver bangles on his wife's arms. The man took these things outside, and the Bunniya would not even look at them. He would have his five rupees, he said, with two more for interest,

and nothing else. The Khan's property was not worth the money, and then they bethought them of their little daughter's ear-rings. The child was about Humeedah's age, and cried so bitterly at the thought of losing her little ornaments, that I could bear it no longer. Tying a handkerchief round my head, I ran off to the bazar to sell my cap. I took the first offer—six rupees—and having another rupee in my pocket, slipped the money into the woman's hands. Her husband was being led away to prison, but the money came just in time, and he was released.

"The joy of the whole family was a sight to witness. The children danced and gambolled about their father. I should have gone off unnoticed, but that the woman suddenly remembered me, for she had hitherto not thought of thanking me. She looked at me with gratitude, and said to her children :

" 'There is our benefactor, an unknown stranger, an angel sent by God in our distress!'

"Surely money was never better spent. I shall not forget the scene. They made me come inside, and overwhelmed me with thanks and embraces; and when I said the money was a gift and not a loan, their effusiveness passed all bounds. My handkerchief fell off, and the woman saw in a moment how I had got the money. I thought I should never get away.

"I ran back home, and had no sooner turned into our alley than I met my elder brother. He stopped me, and,

pointing to my head, said I had sold my cap to get some sweetmeats. I refused to answer him. In the evening he and my mother had a quarrel. He wanted money, and she upbraided him for his extravagance; and at last a sudden thought struck him, and he said:

“‘It is not I who am extravagant: it is your clever second son there, who has sold his cap for a handful of sweeties!’

“My mother then turned on me, and all I could say was: ‘If he can prove it, you may punish me for a thief! I assure you, mother, I have neither lost my cap nor sold it for sweetmeats.’

“She saw there was a mystery, and pressed me no further. A week after, I accompanied her to my aunt’s to ask after Salihah, who was ill; and just as we got to the door my friend the Khan passed by, and greeted me with extreme courtesy and affection. My mother saw this from inside her *dooki*, and when we got into the house asked me who he was. I said that he was a Pathan who lived in ——— Street, remarking that it was the custom of some folk to make a great show of friendship for even a casual acquaintance. I suppose the Khan’s wife had found out who I was, and had told my aunt the story; for when we got home, my mother laughed, and said, ‘Ulleem, I have found you out!’ I laughed, and said no more.”

“A capital story,” said Nussooh. “You have shown the noblest sympathy and kindness for your fellows. But surely, my son, your own family has the first claim on your regard.”

“Yes, father: but they are in need of nothing which I can give them.”

“My boy, sympathy does not consist merely in giving money and making presents. The truest help is that which tends to the promotion of virtue and religion; and you know well how badly we are off for these. Ulleem, I have a favour to ask you. Will you help me to effect a change for the better? I know you have forsworn pleasure and dissipation for the sake of the coming examination; will you promise me to give up your cards and pigeons and quail-fighting for the future, and so set an example of self-denial to the rest?”

Ulleem murmured in reply, “You shall never find me an undutiful son. I know you speak for my good, and you shall be obeyed.”

“God bless you, my dear boy; you have earned a father’s gratitude.”

After a moment’s thought, he added: “Leave me now, and send your elder brother to me, if he is at home.”

Ulleem, whose penetration was beyond his years, at once asked his father if it was his intention to speak to him on the subject they had just discussed; because,

if so, he would advise his father to avoid oral communication for the present.

"You may be right," said his father; "but I have made up my mind to speak to him at once."

CHAPTER VII.

NUSSOOH SENDS FOR HIS ELDEST SON, KULLEEM.

ULLEEM found his brother in the men's apartments, and delivered his father's message.

The character of the eldest scion of the house, by name Kulleem, will have already dawned upon the reader. Among other peculiarities he was fond of reading and writing poetry, and had a quotation ready for every emergency. When Ulleem told him his father wished to see him, he remarked with a sneer:

"We seem to be highly favoured just now, as Sulleem will tell you. Sulleem! come here."

The boy had just peeped in, and, seeing his eldest brother, had drawn back. However, hearing him call, and taking courage from the presence of his other brother, he came into the room, and, anticipating the question he was sure to be asked, explained that he had had his hair cut off with his father's permission.