

"I thought of coming to live with you," replied her cousin.

Salihah was silent.

"Oh!" sighed Naeemah, "the very idea takes away your breath. Never mind, I only said it to test your affection. I don't want to be under an obligation."

"What obligation? You are as much my mother's child as I am. Your aunt will be your host, not I. If you quarrel with your own mother, it does not follow that all the family will be your enemies."

"But aunt is not well off," said Naeemah. "If I go, how can she keep me?"

"She is not so poor but that she can afford to have you for a time," replied her cousin.

"My idea was to remain with you some little time, till these troubles have blown over, and then, if my mother sends for me, I can return home," suggested Naeemah.

Salihah assented, but said that she must ask her mother's leave before she left home, and made her promise not to go away without seeing her. Naeemah, full of the idea of getting away, was only too glad to promise anything, and even begged that the *doolies* might be ordered at once so as to be ready the first thing in the morning. She said she wanted to get away before it was light, as the baby was frightened in a *dooli*.

After this had been done, they went to sleep.

The stars were still shining when Salihah rose, according to custom, to perform her morning devotions. Her aunt was up for the same purpose, and she joined her. Later on Salihah told her aunt what had passed, and said that Naeemah wished to accompany her home. Fahmeedah, finding that it was Naeemah's own suggestion, raised no difficulty about her going for a week or so, and took it for granted, as did her niece, that she would see Naeemah to say good-bye. The *doolies* had come, and Salihah went to awake her cousin: but what was her astonishment to find that Naeemah, taking her baby with her, had already started? Unwilling to face her mother, or too proud to ask her forgiveness, she had slipped out unseen, while her cousin was engaged.

Fahmeedah was bitterly disappointed, but the *dooli* could not be recalled; and Salihah, bidding her aunt take heart, for all would eventually be right, started after her cousin.

CHAPTER IX.

NUSSOOH BURNS THE BOOKS AND PROPERTY OF
HIS ELDEST SON.

KULLEEM had disappeared, without a word to anyone, in the confusion of his cousin Salihah's arrival. When his mother returned to continue her conversation with him she noticed the house-door open, and, not finding him in the room, supposed he had gone out, but never suspected that he had gone for good.

Nussooh had passed the night in a tumult of conflicting emotions at his son's defiance of his authority, but, angry as he was, he resolved to make one more effort to win his confidence. He had met the *doolies* in the lane on his way back from early prayer at the mosque, and, when he reached home, he went into the men's apartments and inquired for Kulleem. None of the servants had seen him, and, aware of his son's lazy habits, he sat down to wait. To a man of his

character, waiting is intolerable. When his patience was exhausted, he summoned the domestics and charged them with being in league with their young master to keep him out of his father's way. In fact, he went so far as to threaten them with dismissal. They protested they had not been in the house all night; for their mistress had sent them home, and they had only just returned.

Hardly knowing what to believe, Nussooh went to his wife's sitting-room, where he was accustomed to receive the morning salutations of his family, and presently took an opportunity of asking his wife if Salihah had gone.

Fahmeedah told him all that had occurred, of Salihah's successful persuasion, the midnight repast, and Naeemah's sudden departure. All he said was that he thanked God they were rid of her.

When he proceeded to inquire for Kulleem, she was much perturbed, for her husband had evidently been looking for him, and replied: "I was sitting with him when your letter came, and I saw him read it; but just then Salihah arrived, and I was too much occupied to go back to him. However, when we all went to bed, I looked into the room again, and he was not there."

Nussooh at once realised the fact that his son had deserted the house, perhaps for good; and his first feeling, as in the case of Naeemah, was a sensation of relief, that one more weed was rooted out; but that his

feelings as a father were deeply moved appeared from his next words: "I ask you if it is my fault that he thus abandoned us."

Fahmeedah's patience had been much tried by her son's unkind words and heartlessness, and she said: "No; you have done your best, and have only treated him too kindly. Ulleem could do nothing with him, and I wearied myself with arguing with him. He did nothing but quote poetry, and would not even wait to finish the conversation. Well! each has his own destiny."

"Alas! that his perversity prevented his coming to me. I would have listened to him, and explained my motives and intentions," dejectedly replied Nussooh.

"Ulleem," he continued after an interval, "did you look among his things to see if there was a letter, or anything to explain the reasons of his departure?"

"I did not think of that," said Ulleem; "but I hardly fancy he could have written, for he must have gone away immediately after he received your letter. I will go and look."

His father accompanied him, curious to inspect his eldest son's surroundings.

Kulleem occupied two rooms, one of which the servants explained was his "Palace of Delight," and the other his "Place of Retirement." They went into the former first. The room was elegantly and luxuriously furnished. There was a carpet, and a creaseless

drugget of white cloth stretched over it; and a dais, with a costly rug and pillows, and a *hookah* and spitting-vases, conveniently placed. The chairs were of polished wood; and a *punkha*, with fringes of gold and silver lace, was suspended above. Chandeliers and globes of coloured glass hung from the ceiling, in imitation, as it were, of the orbs of heaven. The walls were adorned with pictures and verses from the poets, framed and glazed.

Nussooh gazed at this scene with astonishment, as a person in a trance, and sighed to think of his son's extravagance. His attention was next drawn to a couple of tables, on which were placed cards and dice, musical boxes and flower-jars, *itr* and *pan*;* and among other things there was a large handsomely bound volume, which Nussooh at once examined. It was an album containing portraits of the celebrities of his son's familiar world, singers and dancers, wrestlers and eunuchs, jesters and gamblers. He then looked at the pictures and verses on the walls, and found them little else but illustrations of vice and irreligion. He seized a carpet-weight in his indignation, and smashed them all to pieces, and, hurrying out the contents of the room *en masse*, had them burned in the court-yard.

The "Place of Retirement" was next examined. This was furnished in the same luxurious style; but what attracted Nussooh's immediate attention was a

* Otto of roses and betel, always offered to a visitor on his departure.

cabinet of books. There was a large collection of volumes; but whether Persian or Urdu, all were of the same kind, equally indecent and irreligious. Looking to the beauty of the binding, the excellence of the lithography, the fineness of the paper, the elegance of the style, and the propriety of the diction, Kulleem's books made a valuable library, but their contents were mischievous and degrading; and after Nussooh had examined them one by one, he resolved to commit them also to the flames. Fired with enthusiasm at these proceedings, Ulleem ran for his copies of *Atish* and *Sharar*,* and, though his father said he might keep them if he pleased, he cried "Bismillah!" and flung them into the burning heap with the remark that they were now *Atish* and *Sharar* indeed. The boy remembered his brother's treatment of the Missionary's gift, and thought the destruction of his library was a righteous retribution.

Nor was little Sulleem behindhand. He, too, brought a book to his father, and told the story of his possession of it as follows:

"One day a pedlar brought some books for sale, and my eldest brother purchased a great many, including the *Fisānah Ajāib*, *Gul Bakāoli*, *Arāish Mahfil*, *Masnavi Mir Hasan*, *The Jokes of Niāmat Khān Ali*, *Chirkōn's Odes*, *The Satires of Sauda*, *The Diwān of Jān Sāhib*, *The Bahārdānish*, &c., and,

* These are the poetical titles (*takhallus*) of two modern poets. The literal meaning of the words is "fire" and "sparks."

seeing me standing by, said he would buy a book for me too. He chose out two, this *Wāsokht*,* and a *Diwān* by *Nazir of Agra*, and recommended me to take the latter, as a really valuable work. When I looked at it, the first thing I saw was the piece called "Pickled Rats," and I would have nothing more to say to such stuff, and so he made me take the *Wāsokht* instead. Some time after Huzrat Bee's eldest grandson saw it in my wallet, and took me to task for having bad books in my possession. Since then I have put it aside, and have never looked at it."

It need hardly be said the *Wāsokht* was soon added to the bonfire.

The inspection of Kulleem's rooms revealed much to his father which his own selfish and secluded life had hitherto prevented him from knowing; and he understood now the character of his spendthrift son far more fully than if he had accepted the opportunity of a personal interview to express his objections to a religious life.

When Fahmeedah, ignorant of what had been going on, asked him if he had found a letter, he told her what was passing in his mind, and inquired if she had ever seen the "Palace of Delight" and the "Place of Retirement." She had no conception of his meaning, and, when her husband explained the terms, said she

* Anacreontic stanzas. A *diwān* is a collection of poems of which the rhymes end with the several letters of the alphabet in turn.

had never been in the men's apartments till last night at Ulleem's request. He satisfied her curiosity as to the contents of the rooms by telling her, in the words of Maulana Rüm, that they were as *foul as an infidel's tomb*"; but when he added that he had made a bonfire of the books and appurtenances, the common superstition of the ignorant about the sanctity of books asserted itself, and she said:

"Why did you burn them? People pick up even bits of paper with respect, and if they chance to stumble over a book they say 'God forbid,' and kiss it and raise it to their foreheads."

"That is only a foolish superstition," said her husband; "but all books whose contents are good are worthy of respect."

"Do books, then, contain bad things?" she asked in naïve astonishment.

"The books I found in Kulleem's room were full of infidelity and depravity. The publication of such books spreads wickedness on all sides. The art of poetry, for instance, as practised now, is mischievous beyond measure," observed Nussooh.

"I have seen poetry," she said, "but never saw anything wrong in it. Kulleem gets much praise for his compositions."

"Poetry is not bad in itself," rejoined he; "but now-a-days people use it for immoral purposes, or for satire, which is another name for slander, or for

fulsome flattery, which is falsehood, or for lampooning religious men and precepts, which is contrary to the laws of Islam."

"Well," she cried, "this is the first time I have heard that wickedness can be increased by education."

"Do you remember reading the *Gulistan* with me?" asked her husband.

"Yes, of course; it was soon after Humeedah was weaned."

"Do you remember, too, that before your lesson I used to ink over sentences here and there, and paste paper over whole pages? Well, all I can say is that what I cut out was unfit for you to read."

She said she supposed he had cut it out because it was too difficult.

Her husband proceeded: "And this is a book which is supposed to be moral and didactic! The work of a man whom few Mahomedans mention without using a title of reverence, as if he were a saint of God!"

The burning of the books, however, still weighed on Fahmeedah's mind; and she told her husband he might have left them where they were, or have sold them.

Nussooh rejoined: "I think it was last hot weather that a snake came out of one of the drains. What a fright you were all in, and how earnestly you begged it might be caught or killed! You never asked me to

leave it where it was, or send for a snake-charmer to buy it for a few pice! Yet these books are more poisonous than the snake, and to sell them would be as bad as to receive stolen goods."

CHAPTER X.

WHAT BEFELL KULLEEM.

KULLEEM, as we know, slipped out unperceived when his cousin Salihah arrived. He little thought he was leaving his home for ever. It was no new thing to him to run away from home; for, as a child, whenever anything was demanded of him which he did not like, he would run away to the bazar with all the servants in pursuit, or his mother would have to fetch him back in her *dooli*. Even now the fancy came to him that he might be followed, and he could hardly avoid looking back to listen; for with all his obstinacy he was a child in some things still. He was so vain of his reputation as a poet, that he was always expecting that some good appointment would be offered him by the Government; and as for the native states, he believed that the Chief of any one of them would receive him with open arms, and make him Prime Minister on the spot. A big elephant and a golden *howdah* were ready for him when-