

CHAPTER XII.

DAULATABAD.

DAULATABAD is a petty native state with a revenue of five or six lacs. At the time of Kulleem's visit a young and inexperienced prince, surrounded by flatterers and adventurers, was on the throne, and the place had become a miniature Lucknow. Kulleem looked forward to it as a Paradise. During the journey he had composed an ode in praise of the Prince; and when he had made himself comfortable in the Serai, all he had to do was to add an account of himself and his claims, and present himself at the palace doors.

Unfortunately for his plans, a revolution had just been effected. The British Resident had interfered to check the progress of disorder, the Prince had been deprived of independent authority, and the Government placed in the hands of a Committee of Management, with the Prince's uncle, a man of tried capacity and

influence, as President. The useless crowd of rakes and sycophants had been dismissed.

Kulleem, knowing nothing of all this, presently found himself in the presence of a council of grave and reverend Maulvis, instead of the gay revellers he had expected to receive him with open arms. The lines occurred to him: "*I went in search of temple and idol, and blundered into the Haram*"*; and his first idea was to beat a retreat. But he told himself that, after all, "*under the shadow of the mosque there should be a tavern,*" something in his own line might perhaps turn up; and, accordingly, approaching one of the Maulvis, he said with a bow: "I beg to pay my homage." At the word "homage," the venerable councillor regarded him with attention, and asked him in Arabic whence he came.

Kulleem did not understand a word, and when the question was explained to him, he answered that he came from Dehli. After a brief colloquy he was referred to the President and directed where to find him. Kulleem was again doomed to disappointment. Instead of being surrounded with grandeur and magnificence, the President was a common-looking person engaged in hearing law-suits; but, being courteously requested to take a seat, the visitor gradually came to understand his worth, as he witnessed his skill in argument and his powers of discernment. When the case

* The *haram* is the sacred enclosure of the *Kaaba* at Mecca.

he was engaged in hearing was disposed of, the President turned to Kulleem, and politely bade him say the reason of his visit.

"Your slave is in exile," replied Kulleem. "Having heard of the munificence of the Prince of this country, he is desirous of an interview."

"Munificence conditioned by moderation is a laudable quality," gravely observed the President; "the Prince's extravagance has emptied the treasury, and the English have interfered in the interests of the State."

"I am not looking for a treasury," was the flippant reply, and he quoted the lines: "*What wants the pearl but a drop of ocean, a bud but a drop of dew?*"

To hear a man, in defiance of etiquette, thus impudently quote poetry in such a presence amazed the listeners. But Kulleem's habit was inveterate. He thought so much of linguistic skill and repartee, that he had a verse of poetry ready for every occasion, and if he was found fault with, laughingly quoted in reply: "*My rôle is to roll out verse.*"

The President was too dignified to betray annoyance. He replied: "Expectations from the Prince are vain; but, if you are found capable, perhaps some employment may be found for you in the border police."

"I would rather take personal service under your Excellency; but, if that is not possible, I am willing to fight under the banner of the police, though the *pen* is the *pennon* for me."

"I am not likely to require your services," coldly replied the President, "but I shall be glad to hear what your qualifications are."

Kulleem rejoined—"As Galib says, '*I am an unrivalled poet.*'"

"Under the present administration, I fear, there is no berth for a gentleman of your profession."

"If there is no eloquence, what is there?" said Kulleem. '*Your kingdom is like a bride without her jewels.*' But surely, as Chief Minister, you can do what you please. '*After God, your Royal Highness!*' as they say."

The President here uttered an aside in Arabic—"God save us from the wiles of such a tongue," and replied aloud: "I am but an insignificant person, Regent of the State in name only."

"That is your want of spirit," said Kulleem, encouraged by the President's forbearance; and, he added, "As Zuhuri says, '*The head on the threshold, the feet in the sky.*' You want a poet to sing your praises, confirm your friends in their allegiance, and scare your foes."

"I had rather have my defects pointed out," rejoined the President. "I am sorry I cannot appreciate your talents, which are no doubt unrivalled; but, to tell you the truth, though my heart is full of evil, thank God there is no room in it for poetry!"

Kulleem could only marvel, and exclaim: "It is my

fate not to be appreciated. Pray let me have an appointment in the police."

The President replied: "As the Arabic proverb says, '*A good adviser should be honest.*' I cannot recommend you to take service in the police. Misgovernment has made the Thakoors on the borders rebellious and unmanageable. No revenue can be collected without bloodshed, and the police have hard work."

"What can I do? There is no help for it," said Kulleem in a tone of despair.

"What do you say to a clerkship in the Revenue Department on twenty rupees a month?"

Kulleem begged to be excused. Such work, he said, was only fit for shopkeepers. So far from being angry, the good President kindly advised him to go home and think about it, and so ended the discussion.

Kulleem withdrew to the Serai, satirical and indignant. But the pressure of necessity was schooling him, and he was aware that the President was awaiting a reply. Suddenly a happy thought occurred. He would dress up as a soldier, accoutre himself with weapons, stroke his moustaches, and present himself to the Committee of Management as an aspirant for military service. He did so, and they gave him a commission as Captain of Sowars there and then. He passed the next few months in the keenest enjoyment of his new and unexpected dignity. He was always prancing about the town with an escort of troopers; and, by way

of vexing his father, the Captain's letters to Dehli, giving an account of his success in life, were pretty frequent.

At length his turn came for active service. A turbulent and powerful chieftain had rebelled, and a force was despatched from Daulatabad for his coercion. The impetuous Kulleem was disabled in the first encounter by a shot which shattered his knee, and his leg was amputated. The shock was too much for his enfeebled constitution. Mortification threatened, and by the advice of the doctors, who thought that his only chance was a change to his native air, a *dak** was laid to Delhi; and in a few hours, more dead than alive, he was conveyed to his old home.

It is impossible to describe the anguish of Fahmeedah at the sight of her son thus laid helpless and insensible at her doors. Nussooh, too, was deeply moved; but the case was urgent, and Fahmeedah at last consented that he should be taken to his sister Naeemah's house, which happened to be next door to a clever surgeon's, so that he might have every care; and accordingly there he was taken, followed by his weeping relatives.

The mention of Naeemah's house reminds us that it is time to tell her story, after which we shall return to Kulleem, whose term of life was drawing to a close.

* The expression means that relays of bearers were stationed at the various stages to convey the *dooli* through to Dehli without halting.