

## CHAPTER XIII.

## NAEEMAH AND KULLEEM.

"The dog of the Seven Sleepers, lying at the feet of good men, became human."—*Sadi*.

It is worth while to reflect a moment on the character and circumstances of Naeemah and Kulleem. They had reached an age when the habits of life become a second nature. Both were married. Kulleem was separated from his wife, and Naeemah from her husband. But there was this difference; that, while Kulleem was hard and unyielding as steel, Naeemah was malleable as lead. He was a man and stern; she was a woman and soft-hearted. He could go into the world, and had hundreds of friends and acquaintances; she was behind the *purdah*, with no society but that of the ladies of the family and occasional visitors to the *zenana*. The minds of both of them were, so to speak, diseased; but his was the more dangerous ailment, for it was infectious and aggravated by the constant irrita-

tion of evil associations. Fearless and ingenious as he was, Kulleem's character was in many respects weak and puerile. He was a finished specimen of the *jeunesse dorée* of the period, who are like women in their love of finery and admiration, rise late and study themselves in the glass till noon, go to rest with their hair parted and plaited under a night-cap, and grieve over the disturbance of a curl-paper, much as Sir Isaac Newton grieved over the mischief done by his dog Diamond. When the barber comes they keep him at work till he can see no longer. When it is time to dress, first comes the cap, which is taken from the block and cautiously fitted on the head so as not to disarrange a hair. Then comes the anxious business of wriggling into sleeves and trousers; the cloth is so fine that it won't bear pulling; hand and foot declare they can't get into an ant-hole: "*How can a camel pass through a needle's eye!*" An hour's gentle persuasion, with the aid of tissue paper, and the garments are slithered on at last, a perfect fit, but so tight a squeeze that the arms are pinioned and the legs astraddle. The gentleman can hardly breathe, let alone cough or sneeze—as well be in the stocks at once! As the poet says: "*Don't ask what the conduct is with such surroundings.*"

Naeemah, on the other hand, like other ladies of her class, fond as she might be of dress and jewels, was like a carefully laid-up pearl, with no temptations to encounter from the outside world.

We left Naeemah *en route* to her aunt's house. When she alighted and had greeted her aunt she burst into tears. It is the habit of women in the country to weep on the arrival of a friend or guest, after an interval of absence, because they recall the grief of parting. But this is not the custom of the ladies of Dehli, who reserve their tears, as a rule, for family bereavements, and think it unlucky to weep when they receive or meet their friends. Naeemah's aunt was, therefore, surprised at her emotion, but she was aware of her niece's temper and guessed that some quarrel had occurred. She took her in her arms and said :

"Bless us, Naeemah! You the mother of a son, and weeping! What will the women say? Don't cry, my dear!"

"Mother has beaten me!" sobbed Naeemah.

"And what then? Why shouldn't she? Beating by a parent is correction for the child's good. I know your mother of old; I daren't cross her even now. But she corrected you for your good, I am sure. Why, look! your baby is laughing at you! How now, my little man! Tell your mammy not to cry!"

"Ug-goon," crowed the baby, jumping in its mother's arms.

"To be sure, you darling! Why, what a stout little fellow you are getting!"

Naeemah dried her tears at her aunt's cheery kindness, and began to recover her spirits. Her aunt

forebore to make any further inquiry; and when Salihah afterwards told her the circumstances of the quarrel, she was pleased that Naeemah had come to her, and said she would do her best to help her.

Good company is the best preceptor. Naeemah had much to contend against in her father's house. Religion had been no part of her surroundings, and she was ashamed to appear in a new character, and she was moreover just now smarting under a sense of injury. Religion was regarded as a matter of course in her aunt's household, and nobody forced it on her attention; and though she was contemptuous at first, she gradually came to contemplate what she saw around her with satisfaction. Her aunt's active superintendence of the household, the early rising, the morning devotions, the busy occupations of the day, impressed her with a sense of her own shortcomings; and before long she began to rise with the rest, and instead of being slovenly and dulled by too much sleep, became as cheerful and healthy as the rest, and as ready as they were to thank God for His daily mercies, and ask for His guidance and protection. She lost the peevish and fretful manner which made everyone's life a burden in her old home; and by and by her one idea was to effect a reconciliation between her mother and herself.

It happened that some four months after her departure from home there was a marriage at the house of Salihah's uncle, to which Naeemah was invited, partly

on account of her relationship to Salihah, and partly because the bridegroom was her own brother-in-law. Her conduct here was no longer that of the majority of the women, who spent the time in singing songs and gossip; and the change attracted the attention of the members of her husband's family who were present. He was a God-fearing man, and fond of his wife, though the difference between their habits and sentiments had raised a barrier between them, and had ended in the hostility of his family to her residence among them. They had no sooner reported her behaviour at the wedding than he returned home at once, and made preparations for her reception.

She met her mother, too, among the guests, and fell at her feet to ask forgiveness. Fahmeedah was overjoyed; and, when the festivities were over, she gratefully thanked her sister and niece for their loving care, and at last carried her daughter home. Their friends among the ladies of the Quarter were asked to meet her, and Naeemah acknowledged her wrong-doing before them all, placed her head upon her mother's feet, embraced Humeedah and kissed the scar upon her forehead, and joined her hands before Bedara.

Next day her husband came for her, and she was domiciled at last as a happy and respected wife in the family she had formerly found it impossible to live with.

It was two months from this time that her brother

Kulleem was brought to her in the condition we have described in the last chapter. Notwithstanding the care and skill of his physicians, his wounds refused to heal, and his prostration was such that he was only sensible at intervals, and talking was forbidden.

The day before he died his strength seemed suddenly to revive, and he even got up and enjoyed his food, and conversed with his relations. He gave them an account of his adventures at Daulatabad, and enquired about everything that had happened since his departure. This return of strength was, as he knew, the last effort of expiring nature. His last words were addressed to his mother, and he said:

"I have spent my life in disobedience to God and man; and, though there are thousands of such lives, I offer no excuse, and cannot hope to make amends. Yet I am not without consolation, for, in the first place, I die repentant; in the next place, I am among those who know the stages of the road I have to travel, and will follow me with their prayers and sympathy; and, lastly, my life may serve as a warning to others, and thus not utterly be useless. As they say, '*I took no heed myself, do you take heed.*' I have nothing left to wish for but my father's forgiveness."

So saying, Kulleem fainted away from the violence of his emotions. His pulse ceased to beat, and the pallor of death spread over his countenance. The women began to weep and lament, and Nussooh, hearing the

disturbance, came in to see the end. With tender hands he administered a few drops of cordial, laid his son's head towards Mecca, and recited the *Kalima*.\* Then, for the last time, Kulleem opened his eyes, and, gazing piteously in his father's face, joined his hands in resignation, and yielded up his soul to his Creator.

*"God pardon him! He was a fine fellow, with all his faults!"*

\* The confession of faith, in the words, "There is no God but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

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